

FRUIT OF THE EARTH



Using Deeds to
Uncover Your
Ancestors

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FIVE COMMON DEED TYPES

- ❖ Warranty Deed
- ❖ Deed of Trust
- ❖ Gift Deed
- ❖ Quitclaim Deed
- ❖ Partition Deed

But there are many other kinds of deeds, and there are other kinds of important records that were often recorded in deed books.

LAND IN THE CENSUS

Use the following columns in the census to find ancestors who owned land:

- ❖ 1850, 1860, 1870: column 8
- ❖ 1900: column 25, 26
- ❖ 1910: column 26, 27
- ❖ 1920, 30: column 7, 8
- ❖ 1930: column 7, 8
- ❖ 1940: column 4, 5

USEFUL DEED REFERENCES & TOOLS

- ❖ Christine Rose, *Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures*, 2nd edition (CR Publications, 2020).
- ❖ Patricia Law Hatcher, *Locating Your Roots: Discover Your Ancestors Using Land Records* (Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 2003).
- ❖ E. Wade Hone, *Land & Property Research in the United States* (Salt Lake City, Utah: Ancestry.com, 1997).
- ❖ Marylynn Salmon, *Women and the Law of Property in Early America* (Chapel Hill, N.C.: University of N.C. Press, 1986).
- ❖ Val D. Greenwood, *The Researcher's Guide to American Genealogy*, 4th edition (Baltimore, Maryland: Genealogical Publishing Company, 2017).
- ❖ Elizabeth Shown-Mills, *Evidence Explained: Citing History Sources from Artifacts to Cyberspace*, 4th edition (Baltimore, MD: Genealogical Publishing Co., 2024).
- ❖ National Genealogical Society Course: "Effective Use of Deeds" (\$) <https://www.ngsgenealogy.org/cgs/effective-use-of-deeds/>
- ❖ "Transcribing Source Materials," by the Board for Certification of Genealogists (BCG) <https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-transcribing-source-materials/>
- ❖ Transcript Freeware (free transcription software) <https://www.jacobboerema.nl/en/Freeware.htm>
- ❖ "Skillbuilding: Analyzing Deeds for Useful Clues," by BCG <https://bcgcertification.org/skillbuilding-analyzing-deeds-for-useful-clues/>
- ❖ "Retracing the Trails of Your Ancestors Using Land Records" by William Dollarhide <https://www.directlinesoftware.com/deeds.htm>
- ❖ Bureau of Land Management (for Federal Land) <https://glorerecords.blm.gov/reference/default.aspx>
- ❖ Federal/State Land Map [https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Land_and_Property#/media/File:Federal vs. State Land States.png](https://www.familysearch.org/en/wiki/United_States_Land_and_Property#/media/File:Federal_vs._State_Land_States.png)
- ❖ Reclaiming Kin downloadable PDF "Beginner's Guide to Deed Records" (\$) <https://reclaimingkin.com/product/beginners-guide-to-deed-records/>
- ❖ Reclaiming Kin downloadable blank tables (includes deeds) <https://reclaimingkin.com/product-category/genealogy-forms/>
- ❖ FamilySearch Labs Full-Text Deed Search: <https://www.familysearch.org/en/labs/>

DEED RESEARCH TIPS & TAKEAWAYS

- ❖ Be sure to copy the entire deed, including the page numbers and through to the end of the acknowledgements or proof.
- ❖ Search different spellings of surnames to find all the deeds.
- ❖ Include all the information needed for a proper source citation.
- ❖ Look for the presence of a dower release which generally indicates marriage.
- ❖ Find historical maps to use with deeds; these will mainly be found in the state archives, historical societies, and university collections. Some maps will show landowners.
- ❖ Create a deed table for each family's landholdings. Try to match tracts of land as they come into the family, and go out of the family.
- ❖ "Undivided interest" in deeds is often a clue that someone died intestate (without a will).
- ❖ The history of inherited land may or many not be explicitly stated in the deed.
- ❖ Deeds may not state how individuals are "heirs at law"; we will often need to uncover the exact relationship.
- ❖ Obtain any document that a deed references, such as court or other deed records.
- ❖ Scrutinize witnesses & neighbors recorded in deeds; they may turn out to be family members.
- ❖ Correlate deeds with other sources, especially agricultural censuses, probate, court, tax and vital records.
- ❖ Keep track of changing county boundary lines; you may need to search for deeds in a different county.
- ❖ Transcribe any important deeds.
- ❖ Deeds are especially useful in researching prospective enslavers. A gift deed, marriage contract, or mortgage might directly connect an enslaver to their human property.
- ❖ Don't neglect the social history that deeds reveal. There is good information about social clubs, lodges, churches, cemeteries, schools, businesses and other institutions.
- ❖ Search local newspapers, which often advertise deed and tax sales.
- ❖ Study genealogical case studies to learn how to utilize deeds.

WHY CAN'T I FIND THE DEED?

- ❖ The land was lost at a tax sale, or sold at a Sheriff's sale
- ❖ The county boundaries changed and the land is now in a different county
- ❖ The land was inherited, and often won't show up until the land is sold
- ❖ Grantor never bothered to register it at the courthouse
- ❖ The clerk failed to enter it into the deed books

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