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### Importance

- Residence
- Location of property
- Migrations
- Biographical information
  - Marital status
  - Occupation
  - Age estimate
- Vital record replacement
- Family Groups
- Relationships
  - Neighbors
  - Associates

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New York County, New York - 1716

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**Types**

- Deeds
- Mortgages
- Sheriff's Deed or Sale
- Leases
- Assignments
- Quitclaims
- Divisions/Partitions
- Power of Attorney

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**Deeds**

- Legal document that transfers the ownership of property from one party to another party
  - Also referred to as Warranty Deed
- Generally recorded on the county level
  - Town level: Connecticut, Vermont, Rhode Island

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### Process

1. Seller agrees to sell land to the buyer
2. Buyer pays the seller agreed upon amount
3. Deed is written
4. Seller takes deed to courthouse
5. Dower release (if necessary)
6. Clerk records deed
7. Deed given to buyer

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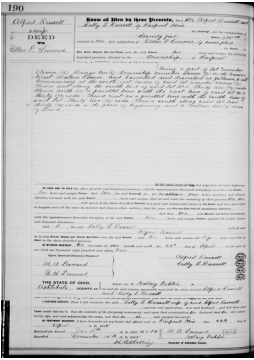
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10

### Format

- Seller and Buyer
- Payment
- Property description
- Legal language
- Dates
- Witnesses




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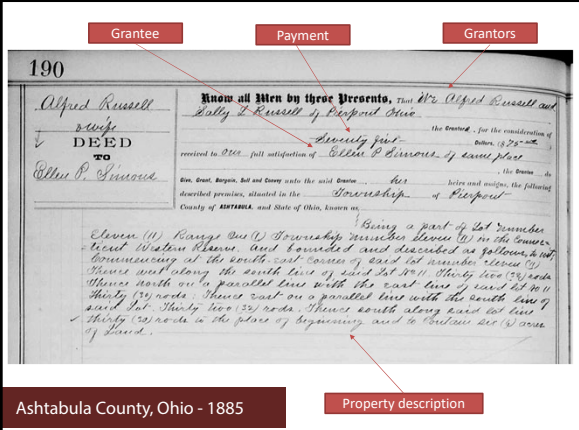
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11



Ashtabula County, Ohio - 1885

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**Mortgages**

- Money borrowed using land as security
- Mortgagor = Person who mortgages property
  - Borrower
  - Owner of property
- Mortgagee = Person who holds mortgage
  - Lender
- Generally recorded on county level

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**How can I tell if it's a mortgage?**

- Indicated in index
- Repayment information included within the deed
- Can be recorded in separate deed books
- Clerk often confirmed repayment in the left-hand column of deed

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Hancock Co., Illinois - 1876

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**Sheriff's Deed or Sale**

- Forced sale of property
  - Likely due to failure to pay taxes
  - Satisfy judgement against landowner
- Sheriff auctions off property
- Can be recorded under “Sheriff” in grantor index
- Deeds can sometimes be recorded in separate volumes
- Can also be recorded in court records

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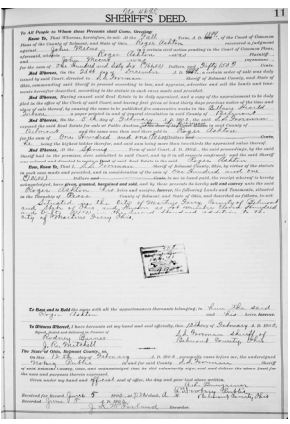
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- Roger Ashton purchased property for \$101
- Former owner John Mecus was in arrears for \$166
- Land located in Martin's Ferry



Belmont County, Ohio - 1900

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**Lease**

- Transfer of use and possession of property
  - Not title or ownership
- Specific time period and fee
- Leases varied in length

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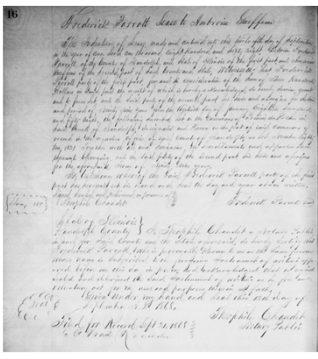
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- Frederick Parrott granted 99 year lease to Ambrose Greffeme
- Lease began 30 January 1858
- \$300 fee



Randolph County, Illinois - 1868

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### Assignments

- Transfer of interest or rights belonging to a document
  - Warrant or bounty land
  - Lease
- Individual to whom document is assigned is called Assignee
- Mortgage can be transferred along with interest

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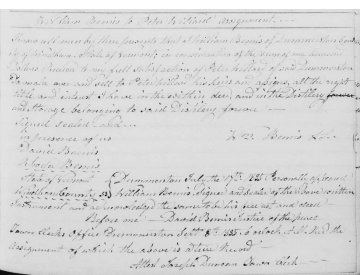
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23

- William Bemis transfers rights and interest he has in the property and the distillery to Peter Willard
- For the sum of \$100



Dummerston, Vermont - 1835

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**Quit Claim**

- Instrument that releases grantor's interest in the property
  - Does not guarantee that title is valid
- Often used when landowner dies intestate
  - Interest in property transferred to heirs
- Common amongst family-to-family transfers

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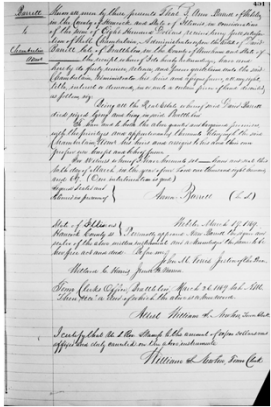
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- Ann Barret of Webster, Illinois quit claims her interest in property of David Barrett of Brattleboro, deceased
- Sold to Will Chamberlain, administrator of estate of David Barrett



Brattleboro, Vermont - 1869

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**Divisions and Partitions**

- Process in which a parcel divided between several owners
- Owners appear in court to request division
  - Appointed persons would examine property and determine if it could be divided equally
- Corresponding court records

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**Power of Attorney**

- Legal document authorizing an individual to act on behalf of another individual
- Did not require grantor or seller to be physically present
- Can give clues to origins and prior residences

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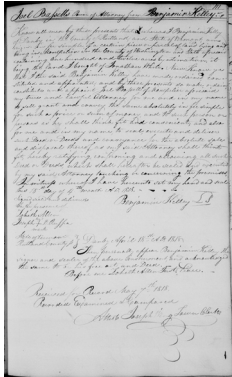
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- Benjamin Kelley appoints Joel Bassetts as Power of Attorney
- 112 acre parcel in Montpelier
- Grants power to sell land as he sees fit



Montpelier, Vermont - 1818

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**Dower Rights and Release**

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## Dower Right

- Lifetime interest in property allowed by law
- Allowed the widow to retain her rights in the property of deceased husband
- Also referred to as Widow's Thirds

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## Dower Release

- Wife agrees to the sale of land that included her dower rights
- Generally recorded following deed
- May be recorded as a separate transaction
- Can be recorded in separate volume
  - Sometimes with court records
- Not all states required Dower Release
  - Investigate inheritance laws of state to confirm

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Dower Release

Oneida County, New York - 1836

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**Other Records**

- Wills
- Manumissions
- Apprenticeships
- Bills of sale
- Agreements
- Bonds
- Contracts
- Affidavits
- Guardianships

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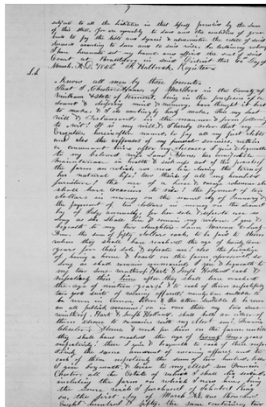
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- Will of Chester Adams
- Recorded within Marlboro, Vermont deeds
- No record of will found in Marlboro Probate District



Marlboro, Vermont - 1850

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**Tip**  
Examine county land records after your ancestor died

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### First Steps

1. Establish location and timeframe
  - i. Where did they live?
  - ii. When did they live there?
2. Understand jurisdiction
  - i. Parent or daughter county?
3. What is available?

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### Where and When

- Use census, tax, vital records, and maps to place your ancestor in a particular **place** at a particular **time**



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### Construct a Timeline

Residences of Lewis Smith		
Year	Source	Residence
1828	Birth Record of son, Manley Smith	East Thomaston, Maine
1833	Birth record of son, Elliott Smith	Thomaston, Maine
1840	US Federal Census	Thomaston, Maine
1850	US Federal Census	Worcester, Massachusetts
1860	US Federal Census	Worcester, Massachusetts

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### Jurisdiction

- Use guides and gazetteers to identify correct jurisdiction
- When was the county created?
  - FamilySearch Wiki
  - Atlas of Historical County Boundaries
    - <https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/>

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<https://digital.newberry.org/ahcb/>

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**Where are they located?**

- County land records
  - Located at Register of Deeds or County Court House
    - Corresponding websites
  - FamilySearch.org
  - Published abstracts and transcriptions

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**William Francis Galvin**  
Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Home | Contact | Directions

**Why Should I Refinance**  
And When Does It Pay to Do So?

The Secretary of the Commonwealth would like to welcome you to the Massachusetts Land Records website. This site provides you with quick access to find records across the State. The website registers use of the site, searching of particular documents, or general questions about Registry services, please contact the specific Registry of Deeds directly. For technical assistance with troubleshooting access to the site, contact us at the [REGISTRY@STATE.MA.GOV](mailto:REGISTRY@STATE.MA.GOV)

Barnstable

Massachusetts is divided into 27 "regional districts with the elected Register of Deeds responsible for each office. Documents recorded in the records of one office within the district are recorded at the Registry of Deeds. Recorder documents are assigned a sequentially identifying number (book, as the book and page number) and are then scanned into the registry's electronic system. The resulting images are available to search for and printed from public access terminals at the registry and at other offices in other parts of the state. In addition, all registered records are available electronically and may continue to produce record books containing document images on paper. For those public register documents are recorded in the "old" manner to assist customers in locating record documents, registers issue a searchable index that contains the names of all parties to a document and the property address. For more information, visit Secretary of the Commonwealth William Galvin's website [REGISTRY@STATE.MA.GOV](http://REGISTRY@STATE.MA.GOV) or the County home page of the Registry that interests you.

Masslandrecords.com

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**Indexes**

- Grantor – Seller's Index
  - Forward
  - Direct
- Grantee – Purchaser's Index
  - Reverse
  - Indirect

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## Understand the Index

- Different index systems utilized throughout the country
- Important to understand differences
- Examine first pages of index for clues
- United States Index Systems
  - [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Index\\_Systems](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Index_Systems)

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GENERAL INDEX.

Year	Page	Name	Address	Volume	Page	Year	Page	Name	Address	Volume	Page	Year	Page	Name	Address	Volume	Page
1817	10	John Smith	123 Main St	100	10	1817	10	John Smith	123 Main St	100	10	1817	10	John Smith	123 Main St	100	10
1818	20	Jane Doe	456 Elm St	200	20	1818	20	Jane Doe	456 Elm St	200	20	1818	20	Jane Doe	456 Elm St	200	20
1819	30	Robert Brown	789 Oak St	300	30	1819	30	Robert Brown	789 Oak St	300	30	1819	30	Robert Brown	789 Oak St	300	30
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1882	660																





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**What is Important?**

- Grantor
- Grantee
- Residences of Grantor and Grantee
- Volume and Page
- Location of the property
- Description of the property
- Abutters
- Acreage
- Witnesses
- Dates

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**Why is this important?**

- Important biographical information
- Witnesses and abutters could be family members or associates
- Places ancestor in time and place
- Understand how much property a person owned
- Efficient and accurate research

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Grantor	Grantee	Volume and Page	Abstract
Emma J. Feyler and Warren W. Feyler of Thomaston	Frederick B. Doe of Thomaston	Volume 59, Page 22	Parcel located in Thomaston abutting the property of Ezekiel Doe, Mrs. Coles, and Emma J. Feyler. The property totals 2 and a half acres. Deed written 31 August 1880 and recorded 19 January 1881. Witnessed by Ezekiel Doe.
G.F. Burgess of Camden	Eliza A. Jones of Camden	Volume 61, Page 290	Parcel located in Camden abutting the land formerly of Mrs. Frost now owned by Messrs. Carleton Norwood and Co. The property totaled 28 square rods. Deed was written 20 February 1882 and recorded 18 April 1882. Witnessed by G.L. Burgess

Knox County, Maine

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### Glossary

- *Black's Law Dictionary*  
– <https://thelawdictionary.org/>
- Genealogical Dictionary of Legal Terms  
– [https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogical Dictionary of Legal Terms](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/Genealogical_Dictionary_of_Legal_Terms)
- Patricia Law Hatcher, *Locating Your Roots: Discovering Your Ancestor in Land Records*, (Cincinnati: Betterway Books, 2003)

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62

## Locating Historic Parcels

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**Challenges**

- Antiquated language
  - Metes, bounds, rods, arpents, etc.
- Confusing language
- Property description does not reveal modern day landmarks




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**Strategies**

- Trace historic ownership of property
- What geographic features are mentioned in the deed?
- Examine deeds of abutters
  - What is mentioned in their property descriptions?
- Use historic maps, atlases, and local histories

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**Strategies**

- Work with local historical societies
  - Published histories
- Embrace technology
  - Geographic Information System (GIS)
- Stay organized
  - Research log
  - Abstract deeds

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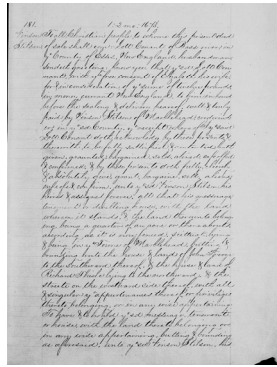
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66

- Vinson Stilson purchased land and dwelling house in Marblehead in 1673 from Lot Conant
- Abutted lands of John Trevy to the south, Richard Thisle to the north and the street to the west



Essex County Deeds, 3:601-2

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### Challenges

- Where in Marblehead?
- No modern-day landmarks
- No geographic landmarks
- How can I place this parcel?

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### Next Steps

- Examine deeds for Lot Conant
- Does Vinson Stilson sell this land?
  - Additional property description
- Search for early maps of Marblehead
- Examine published histories

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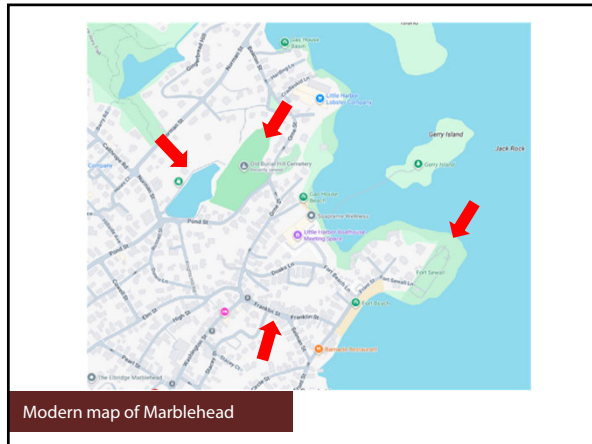
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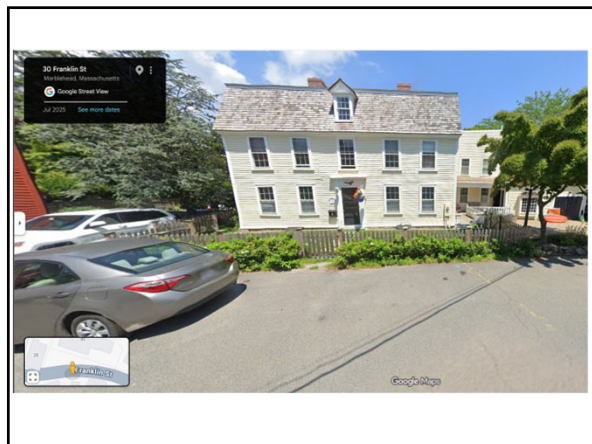
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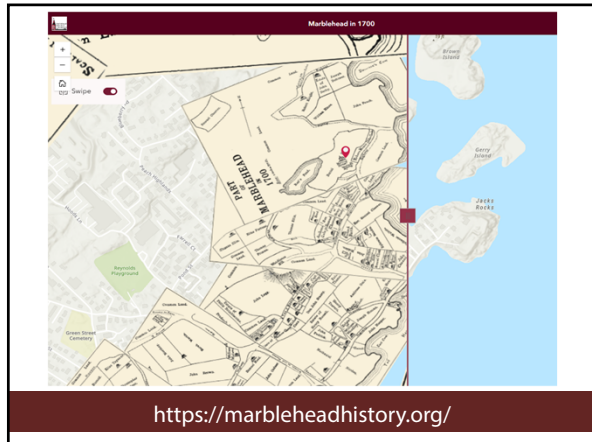
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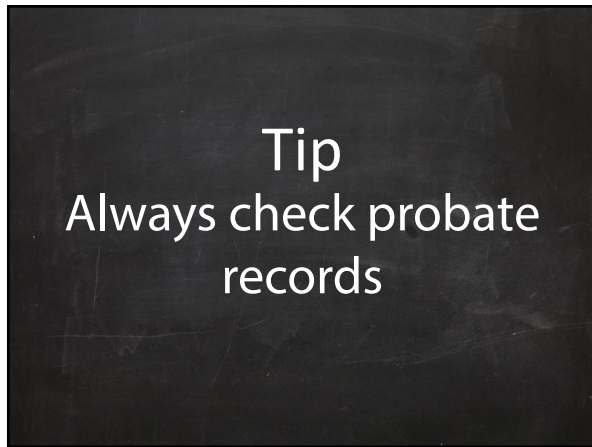
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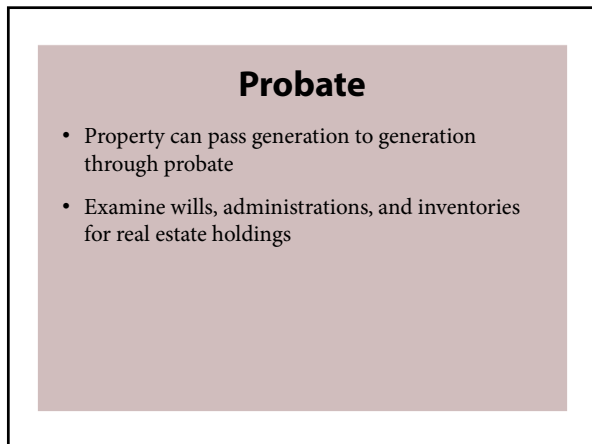
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**Maps**

- Library of Congress  
– [www.loc.gov/maps](http://www.loc.gov/maps)
- Norman P. Levanthal Map and Education Center  
– <https://collections.leventhalmap.org>
- David Rumsey Map Collection  
– [www.davidrumsey.com](http://www.davidrumsey.com)
- American Geographical Society  
– <https://collections.lib.uwm.edu/digital/collection/agdm/search/>

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**Maps**

- Harvard University Scanned Maps  
– <https://curiosity.lib.harvard.edu/scanned-maps>
- HistoryGeo.com  
– [Historygeo.com](http://Historygeo.com)
- University of California Berkeley Geodata  
– <https://geodata.lib.berkeley.edu/?utf8=%E2%9C%93&q=>

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**Conclusion**

- Always examine county land records
- Understand different index systems
- Fully abstract deeds to ensure efficient and accurate research
- Use diverse sources
- Stay organized!

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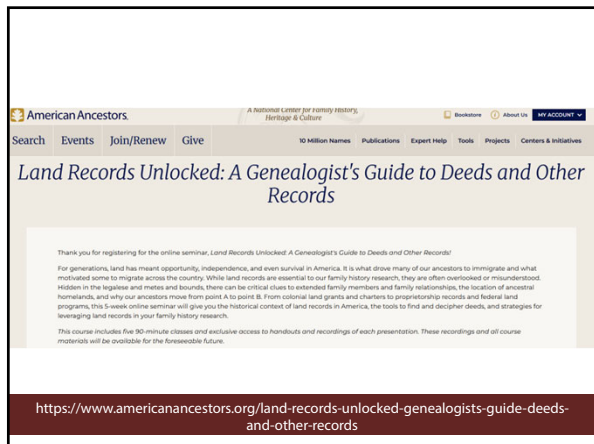
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