

U.S. Land Records:

Our Ancestors Came for Land

Value of Land Records

- ❖ Establishes where a person was at a certain time
- ❖ Can establish a migration path
- ❖ Can establish the status of an individual
- ❖ Can contain relationship information
- ❖ Can help distinguish between individuals of the same name
- ❖ Obtainable when many other records have been destroyed

Ways That Land is Acquired

- ❖ Government bounty or grant—for service or in accordance with a Land Act (e.g., homestead)
- ❖ Purchase—from individual or government
- ❖ Gift
- ❖ Inheritance
- ❖ By operation of law (e.g., dower, curtesy)
- ❖ Adverse possession (e.g., squatters)

Different Land Distribution Systems

- ❖ Varied based on controlling governments (England, Spain, France, United States)
- ❖ Early distribution (state lands) – metes and bound measurement – original colonies plus their children (Kentucky and Tennessee); also some Texas land
- ❖ Public land system (all other states) – rectangular survey
- ❖ Ohio is unique – experimental area for different survey systems

Helpful Websites

- ❖ For general information about land records and links to individual states, see http://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Land_and_Property

- ❖ Often unindexed digital images of land records are available on FamilySearch. Follow this waypoint guide to find land records for areas of research: FamilySearch.org > Search > Catalog > [in place box, enter “United States, [state], [county] > Land and Property. Example: FamilySearch.org > Search > Catalog > United States, North Carolina, Granville > Land and Property. All records available through the Family History Library are shown. When you click on the record, its available format will be shown. If it shows a camera, it is available digitally. Clicking on the link will take you to the digital images.
- ❖ Use FamilySearch Full-Text Search (<https://www.familysearch.org/search/full-text>) to search “U.S. Land and Probate Records 1630-1975” collection
- ❖ The Texas General Land Office website has a search function for original land grants: <http://www.glo.texas.gov/history/archives/land-grants/index.cfm>
- ❖ Bureau of Land Management website has a search function for original land grants for public lands: <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/search/>
- ❖ Many states have a digital archives for land records, including maps. Try a Google search for the states you are interested in. For example, North Carolina has a digital archives at <http://archives.ncdcr.gov/Public/Digital-Collections-and-Publications>. Another site for North Carolina land grants is <http://www.nclandgrants.com/>.
- ❖ A must-see website is the David Rumsey Map Collection Database. See <http://www.davidrumsey.com/> for historical maps of various states.

Valuable Publications

- ❖ Hawkins, Kenneth, compiler. Research in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office. Reference Information Paper No. 114. Revised. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 2009. Also online at NARA, <http://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf>
- ❖ Price, Edward T. *Dividing the Land: Early American Beginnings of Our Private Property Mosaic*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995 (Sam Houston Library)
- ❖ Rose, Christine. *Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures*. San Jose, CA: CR Publications, 2004 (Huntsville Public Library)
- ❖ Series of publications on Private Land Claims in various states by Fern Ainsworth (available at Montgomery County Library)
- ❖ Gregory A. Boyd, J.D., Arphax Publishing Co., has published a series of books focused on public land states that contains various maps with original land grants overlayed on existing roads and towns. To see if a book of interest is available in your local library, go to <http://www.worldcat.org> and search “Gregory A. Boyd Arphax Publishing.”