



# Digging for Land Records

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## **Reasons to Use**

1. Place in a specific geographic place & time.
2. Identify relationships - directly or indirectly.
3. Locate & visit where your ancestors lived.
4. Distinguish individuals with the same name.
5. Inform us where our subject came from or went to.
6. Provide indications about social economic status.

## **Major Legislation**

- Bounty Land 1776-1855
- 1785 Land Ordinance
- 1800 Credit Sales
- 1820 Cash Entry
- Homestead Act of 1862

## **Strategies**

- Use the BLM website to identify properties your ancestor obtained from the federal government.
- For State Land states: investigate holdings of state archives and state historical societies.
- Order land entry case files
  - National Archives and Records Administration at <https://www.eservices.archives.gov/orderonline/>
  - Hire a researcher:
    - <http://www.archives.gov/research/hire-help/>
    - <https://www.apgen.org>
- Use deed indexes to identify property subsequently bought and sold.
  - Public Records Online <http://publicrecords.netronline.com/>
  - FamilySearch.org has many county deed indexes. In the catalog, look under “Land and Property” in the county of interest.
- Look in both the grantor (seller) and grantee (buyer) indexes.
- Obtain copies of deeds through county recorder office (or other custodian) or FamilySearch/Family History Library.
- Account for all purchases and sales.
- Locate property on a map *and* identify neighbors.



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- Investigate neighbors and individuals named in deeds using
  - Census
  - Vital records
  - County histories
  - Land transactions
- Consider expanding search to include the FAN Club (friends/family, associates, neighbors).

## Land Platting Exercises

**Metes and Bounds:** Kimberly Powell at About.com has written an article “Land Platting Made Easy” that is a step by step exercise for learning to plat metes and bounds.

[http://genealogy.about.com/od/land\\_records/ss/land\\_platting.htm](http://genealogy.about.com/od/land_records/ss/land_platting.htm)

**Rectangular survey system:** Michelle Goodrum has an exercise in her book *Digging for Ancestors: An In-Depth Guide to Land Records*.

For a copy of a blank township grid go to <http://bit.ly/1fuPiZh>

## Resources in Print

Goodrum, Michelle Roos. *Digging for Ancestors: An In-Depth Guide to Land Records*. Utica, Ohio: The In-Depth Genealogist, 2013. Available electronically at:

<http://theindepthgenealogist.com/shop-idx/idx-products/>

Hatcher, Patricia Law. *Locating Your Roots: Discover Your Ancestors Using Land Records*. Cincinnati, Ohio: Betterway Books, 2003.

Hawkins, Kenneth, compiler. *Research in the Land Entry Files of the General Land Office*. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington D.C., 2009.

<https://www.archives.gov/publications/ref-info-papers/rip114.pdf>

Hone, E. Wade. *Land & Property Research in the United States*. Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1997.

Keener, John W., compiler. *Public Land Statutes of the United States*. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office: 1916.

United States, Bureau of Land Management. *The Homestead Law: A Brief Sketch in United States History*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1962. Downloadable at:

<http://archive.org/details/homesteadlawb00unit>

## Websites

- Arphax Publishing <http://www.arphax.com/>
- Bureau of Land Management General Land Office Records <http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>
- Public Land Survey System [http://nationalmap.gov/small\\_scale/a\\_plss.html](http://nationalmap.gov/small_scale/a_plss.html)
- HistoryGeo at <http://www.historygeo.com/>
- Federal Statutes can be viewed on Google Books at [www.books.google.com](http://www.books.google.com)



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## Definitions

**Base Line** The true east-west line (on a parallel of latitude) extending from an initial point in both directions. From this line are initiated other lines for the Cadastral Survey of the public lands, within the area covered by the principal meridian that runs through the same initial point.

**Lot** Fractional or odd-shaped tracts of land not generally describable by conventional aliquot parts. In a land description, for example, "Lot 12a of the north-west quarter" is denoted as "12aNW" in the aliquot parts field.

**Meridian** An imaginary north-south line.

**Metes and Bounds** A method of describing a parcel of land by citing the owners of abutting lands and describing the length of each course of a boundary as "*along*" some apparent line. In modern usage, a metes and bounds description includes the bearings and distances of each course.

**Military Warrant** From 1788 to 1855 the United States granted military bounty land warrants as a reward for military service. These patents were issued in various denominations and based upon the rank and length of service. They were often assigned to heirs or other individuals.

**Principal Meridian** The true north and south line extending from an initial point in both directions. Principal meridians are the first north-south lines (meridians) surveyed for an area and form the basis for measuring ranges east and west.

**Range** A row or tier of townships lying east or west of the principal meridian and numbered successively to the east and to the west from the principal meridian.

**Section** A regular tract of land, 1-mile square, containing 640 acres, within a township.

**Section Number** Identifies a section within a township. Sections are usually numbered 1 to 36.

**Township** It is a tract of land contained within the boundaries of the north-south range lines. Most measure approximately 6 miles on each side and contain approximately 23,040 acres.

**Township Direction** indicates which side (north or south) of the baseline the township is on.

**Township Number** Identified by its relation to a base line and a principal meridian. For example, "Township 5 North, Range 12 West" identifies a particular township that is 5 tiers up from the base line.

**Tract** Parcel of land that lies in more than one section or that cannot be identified completely as a part of a particular section, e.g., Tract 37. Note: Tracts within a township are numbered beginning with 37 to avoid confusion with section numbers.

**The above definitions and others may be found at the Bureau of Land Management website:**

**<http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/> in the Reference Center under Glossary.**



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## Township Grid

State: \_\_\_\_\_ County: \_\_\_\_\_ Meridian: \_\_\_\_\_

Twp: \_\_\_\_\_ Range: \_\_\_\_\_ Land Office: \_\_\_\_\_

6	5	4	3	2	1
7	8	9	10	11	12
18	17	16	15	14	13
19	20	21	22	23	24
30	29	28	27	26	25
31	32	33	34	35	36