

Using Land Records, Assessment Rolls and Plat Maps to Track Your Ancestor

Land surveys prior to the Land Ordinance Act of 1785

- Described using "Metes and Bounds"
- A known landmark such as a tree or a rock is used for a place of beginning, compass measures the degrees, chain measure the distance (rods)

Land Surveys after the Land Ordinance Act of 1785

- Uses the "Rectangular System," that is, all its distances and bearings are measured from two lines which are at right angles to each other.
- The two lines, from which the measurements are made, are the Principal Meridians, which run North and South, and the Base Lines which run East and West
- Each Principal Meridian has its Base Line, and these two lines form the basis or foundation for the surveys or measurement of all the lands within the territory which they control.
- The Public Lands Survey divided public lands west of the original colonies into a grid of townships and sections.
- A township was a square six miles to a side and contained 36 one-square-mile (or 640 acre) sections.

Land records have their own genealogies

- Can't figure out how your ancestor got that piece of property?
- In the eastern states, original owners obtained a land patent & often named the property
- the property back and you will often find your ancestor's progenitors

Land Records can contain information that reveals :

- your ancestor's occupation
- family relationships: your ancestor's parents, children, siblings, nieces, nephews and more
- your ancestor's neighbors
- proximity to roads, trails, streams and rivers
- the number and condition of buildings, orchards, timber land etc.

County Assessment Rolls and City Lot Taxes

- 18th century county tax rolls show the name of the plot of land, number of acres, owner, and amount of taxes paid
- 19th and 20th century, county tax rolls show name of the owner and boundary descriptions
- City lot assessment/tax rolls show block #, owner, lot # and amount of taxes paid

City and County Plat Maps

- Show the property and the owner
- Show the adjacent property and owners

On-line map searches

- Ancestry.com card catalog has a Maps, Atlases and Gazetteer section in their Card Catalog
- Indexed county land ownership atlases list property owners' names, indicate township and county boundaries and can include photos of county officers, landholders, and some buildings and homes.
- England's Ordnance Survey began in 1791 in an effort to produce detailed maps of areas in southern England for military uses.
 - the Survey eventually mapped the entire country, and the maps were published between 1805 and 1874.
 - New surveys led to new maps published between 1876 and 1896.

Exploring your ancestor's land and tax assessment records and maps of the settlement area:

- Can help you place your ancestor in historical context
- Can help you learn more about them
- Can lead you to more sources
- Can help you unlock their past
- Can be a lot of fun!

Maricopa County (AZ) Land Owner Maps (1903 – 1929) available online:

<http://azmemory.azlibrary.gov/cdm/landingpage/collection/maricopamap>

Contact the State Archives

- archives@azlibrary.gov
- 602-926-3720
- <http://www.azlibrary.gov/arm>

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