

Visualizing Metes and Bounds Property Descriptions on Google Maps and Google Earth

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Genealogy's Star

<http://genealogysstar.blogspot.com>

New online tools allow you to identify a parcel of property from historical records and then, using the legal description of the property, apply the boundaries to a map or satellite image of the actual location. There are also valuable online programs that help provide property boundaries.

There are two major methods of surveying and identifying parcels of land in the United States. The first is called the United States Public Land Survey System aka the PLSS or Rectangular Survey System and is used in all of the states other than the original colonies and Texas. The second is the older, but still used, system of Metes and Bounds.

To identify property surveyed in the US Public Land Survey System, I would refer you to the following websites.

- Google Earth -- <https://www.google.com/earth/>
- Newberry Atlas of Historical County Boundaries -- <http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/>
- Bureau of Land Management, General Land Office Records (BLM GLO) – <https://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/default.aspx>
- EarthPoint.us -- <http://earthpoint.us/>

The BLM General Land Office contains records of most of the land transaction through Warrants and Homestead. You can search for your ancestor using your ancestor's name, but be careful to try variations of the name.

I would also suggest looking at the following websites:

- Tutorial on the Public Land Survey System Descriptions -- <http://dnr.wi.gov/topic/forestmanagement/documents/plsstutorial.pdf>
- Montana Cadastral Mapping -- <http://svc.mt.gov/msl/mtcadastral/>
- Cadastral Maps -- <http://www.fao.org/docrep/006/v4860e/v4860e03.htm>
- Iowa Counties Historic Atlases -- <http://digital.lib.uiowa.edu/atlasses/>
- Michigan County Histories and Atlases -- <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/micounty/>
- U. S. Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860 – 1918 on Ancestry.com

If you want to get into more complex mapping, you can use the Plat Plotter -- <http://platplotter.appspot.com/> to plot metes and bounds maps.

For a more complete description of all of the methods of real property divisions see the following online publication:

Summary of Legal Descriptions from the Office for Coastal Management, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=5&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=0CDkQFjAE&url=http%3A%2F%2Fcoast.noaa.gov%2Fmbwg%2F_pdf%2Fproducts%2Fproperty_descriptions.PDF&ei=qINGVYX1JJLHogTkkoC4Bw&usg=AFQjCNEbnv1xCMHiB7aGCnn9EF4X2VtSGw&sig2=oPSqAYjYjuToAEeWrOLEQ

In contrast to the regularity of the Public Land Survey System introduced in the United States after the signing of the United States' Constitution, the older, historical method of land description is called "metes and bounds." The Public Land Survey system was applied to the land acquired by the United States after independence. The original colonies, including Georgia, Vermont and Maine, plus Texas, all originally used metes and bounds descriptions. These states are known as State Land States, because the publically owned land is owned by the states individually rather than the Federal Government.

The metes portion of the system refers to the boundary defined by the measurement of each straight run that is, the direction and distance. See [Wikipedia: Metes and bounds](#). The bounds portion of the description refers to the naming or fixing of the physical locations on the land. These can be precise geo-coordinate locations or merely physical objects such as trees, fence posts, rocks or buildings. See the [FamilySearch.org Research Wiki, Metes and Bounds](#). Here are the technical definitions of each type of description.

Bounds Descriptions - perimeter descriptions without a direction of travel.

Metes Descriptions - perimeter descriptions with a direction of travel described by a series of measurements.

Metes and Bounds Descriptions - Not included in the types described in this document. Perimeter descriptions with a direction of travel described by a series of measurements and calls to endpoints.

The important feature of the metes and bounds description of a property is the starting point or point of beginning at one of the corners. In order for the description to make sense, the starting point must be identified. This is the challenge. If the starting point or point of beginning cannot be determined the description is defective. The point of beginning must be a known point or marker or a certain course and distance from the known marker.

One of the additional problems with the older surveys is the loss of the waypoints. The physical objects used for the measurements may have long disappeared.

Fortunately, many of the old metes and bounds land descriptions have been re-surveyed using more modern methods. These older systems of land measurement are known as "Descriptions by Calls." They are also referred to as deed calls or running out the calls.

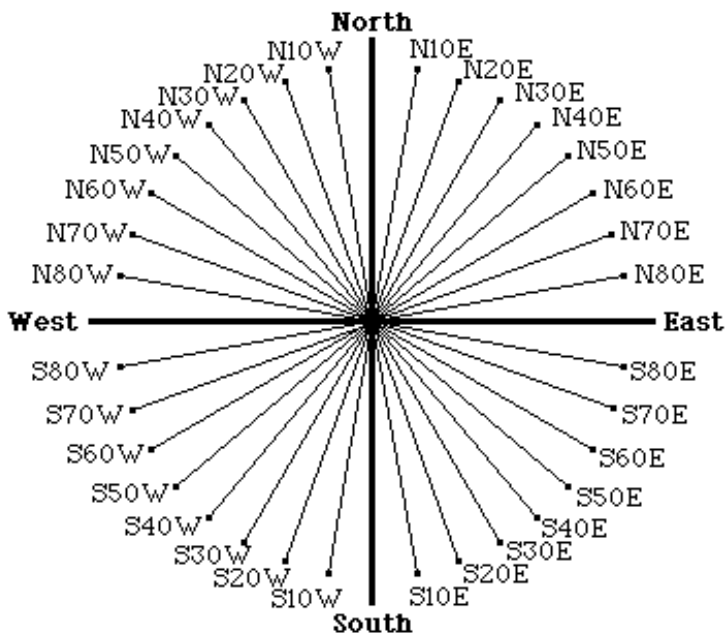
Massachusetts has some of the oldest land records in the United States and the availability of their property descriptions is representative of other state-land states. Here is a quote from the Massachusetts Assessor and Property Tax Records Directory (<http://publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/Massachusetts-Assessor-and-Property-Tax-Records.htm>). Most of these maps are based on the Lot and Block System of property description.

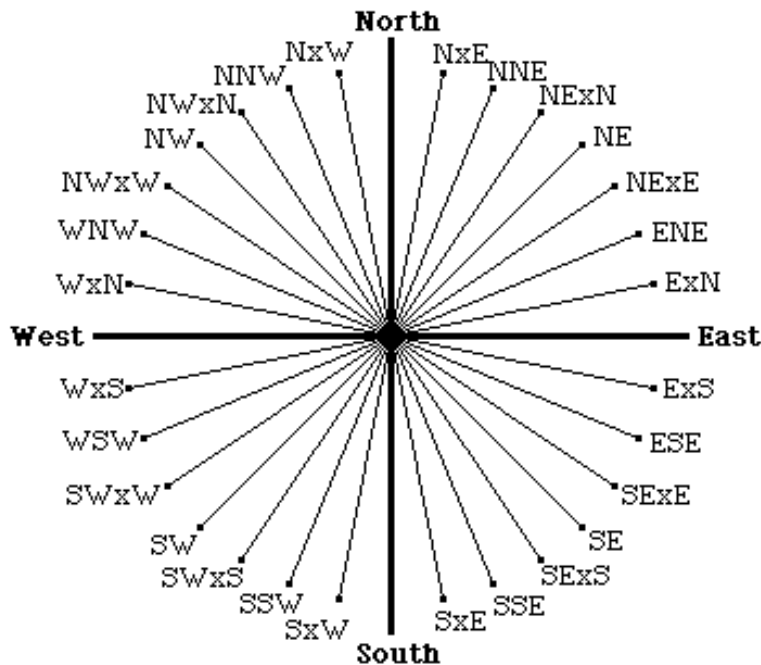
Massachusetts real and personal property tax records are managed by the Board of Assessors office in each township. Land and land improvements are considered real property while mobile property is classified as personal property.

Many Board of Assessors offices provide an online searchable database, whereby searches can be performed by parcel number, address, or map number. Some towns offer separate searches for real or personal property tax records.

For towns that are not online, requests must be made over the phone, in person or via written request.

Here are copies of the compass rose showing the directions with degrees and compass directions.





Here is an example of an older metes and bounds description.

ISAAC EAGLESTON of Stonington , County of New London, State of Connecticut, yeoman for love and good will I bear unto my son JOHN EAGLESTON and other good causes me there unto moving, give 5 acres in Hopkinton, Kings County, State of Rhode Island and Providence Plantation, bounded beginning at a walnut tree marked on four sides being the northwest corner of sd lot and from thence running eastwardly unto a stake with a heap of stones about it, thence southwardly unto the highway, thence by sd highway until it comes to a grey oak tree marked on four sides from thence runing northwardly unto first mentioned bound. Signed ISAAC EAGLESTON 12 Jan 1778. Witness ISAAC EAGLESTON 3rd, FRANCIS WEST, Justice of the Peace. Recorded 25 April 1778 ABEL TANNER, town clerk. (Hopkinton Deeds Vol. 3 p. 132 LDS film 0931562)

Here is a more current description:

Beginning at a point in the northerly line of said West Allenton Road, which point is located at the southwest corner of the land of John C. Northup, Sr., it being the southeast corner of the within conveyed tract; thence the line runs westerly one hundred ten (110) feet, bounded southerly by said West Allenton Road; thence northerly two hundred sixty six (266) feet, more or less, bounded westerly by land

of Frank D. Medbery and wife; thence easterly one hundred ten (110) feet to the northwest corner of land of John C. Northup, Sr., bounded northerly by land of Frank D Medbery and wife; thence southerly two hundred sixty six (266) feet to the West Allenton Road at point of beginning, bounded easterly by land of John C. Northup, Sr.

Plat Plotter http://platplotter.appspot.com/lib/pp_about.html - .VUa589NVhBc

Plat Plotter is a free, cloud based application that uses real estate deed metes-and-bounds to plot the property boundary on a digital map. Plat Plotter converts deed 'metes-and-bounds' into a Plat of Survey that can be viewed in Google Maps, imported into a mapping program like Google Earth, loaded into a GPS device, sent to a printing service and shared with others.

Data from above description:

Survey data:

Leg	N,S	D	M	S	E,W	Feet
1	N	13	0	0	W	266.00
2	S	76	0	0	W	110.00
3	S	13	0	0	E	266.00
4	N	76	0	0	E	110.00

41.546119, -71.473369

155 West Allenton Road, North Kensington, RI