

Pennsylvania Research: Land Records

Land records are very useful to identify the location where your ancestor lived within a county. They may also be useful in making family connections in the absence of church or vital records. After searching census records and locating where in Pennsylvania your ancestor lived, search the county land records.

It is a good idea to search the county level first and work back in time. The first purchaser of a piece of property usually obtained his land from the proprietors or the colonial government. This involved a five step process:

- Application
- Warrant
- Survey
- Return of Survey
- Patent

An important guide to understanding Pennsylvania land distribution is Donna Bingham G. Munger's *Pennsylvania Land Records: A History and Guide for Research* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1991; FHL book 974.8 R2m)

Many Pennsylvania land records are now available online. A good land and property overview is found at:

https://wiki.familysearch.org/en/Pennsylvania_Land_and_Property

Pennsylvania had many boundary issues over the centuries. Their disputes were usually with Virginia, Connecticut and Maryland. Some early land records may be located in the archives of the state that had the dispute with Pennsylvania. For example, Virginia distributed land to inhabitants in southwestern Pennsylvania. Land records for individuals living in the area known as the District of West Augusta, may be found in Virginia or the Pennsylvania archives.

County boundaries constantly changed as colonists moved west. Some counties, when first created, were very large in land area. As time passed, these large areas were divided into smaller counties. It is possible an individual lived in three counties during their lifetime but never moved. Some resources to use for maps are:

- *"The Pennsylvania Line,"* by William and Shirley Iscrupe, FHL book 974.8 D27p. This publication contains maps of the county boundaries both past and present, names of townships and their dates of creation, names of

populated places during the turn of the 19th to 20th century, lists of streams, and their locations and other useful articles.

- Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission website.
http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/phmc_home/1426

From the home page click on “State Archives” which is listed on the left side of the page. The state archives section has a tab for land records near the top right of the page. The land records tab takes you to scanned land records which are viewable free on-line. Warrantee Township Maps are interesting reading and may help you identify where an ancestor lived.

Check FamilySearch Wiki website links for additional maps.

- Penn Pilot. <http://www.pennpilot.psu.edu/>
The site includes historical aerial photographs dating from 1937 to 1972. No genealogical information is included on the site but you can view the lay of the land as it changes over the years.

Munger, Donna Bingham G, *Pennsylvania Land Records: A History and Guide for Research* (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 1991; FHL book 974.8 R2m)