



Mass Land Records

Presenter Bio:

Seema has 15 years experience as a software instructor and 4 years as a professional genealogist. Her known roots are deep in New England as well as England, Germany, and Sweden. She is a BU and ProGen graduate and is active in many genealogical societies.

Lecture Description:

Massachusetts Land Records are a **FREE** resource and date back to **1731!** Learn how to effectively search, collect, and print documents from MassLandRecords.com.

Syllabus Description:

These pages are intended as background information on MassLandRecords.com. I hope they decrease the amount of note taking required during the presentation.

Deeds are a powerful resource for genealogists.

More importantly, Massachusetts Land Records are a **FREE** resource and date back to **1731!**

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Registry of Deeds

- A Registry of Deeds is the place where all transactions of a Real Property nature are recorded so that the public is made aware of their existence.
- Massachusetts is divided into 21 Registry Districts
- What happens at the Registry?
 - The information on the document is abstracted into grantor and grantee indices.
 - The document is then scanned immediately.
 - The images are then compared with the original document for accuracy.
 - Within minutes it is available on our public access system that can be accessed through our computers or on our website, www.masslandrecords.com.
 - The original document is returned to the party that presented the document for recording.

For a list of which towns are in each registry:

<http://www.sec.state.maa.us/rod/rodgde/gdeidx.htm>

Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Nantucket, Norfolk, and Plymouth counties still maintain a county level of government and may charge for the Registry documents.



Terminology

- **Deed** – a written document by which the buyer obtains record title to real property
- **Discharge** - A document (usually one page) issued by the lender, with a title such as “Discharge of Mortgage” or “Satisfaction of Mortgage.”
- **Grantee** – person(s) buying the property
- **Grantor** – person(s) selling the property
- **Homestead** - a claim for homestead exemption with the state
- **Mortgage** - A temporary, conditional pledge of property to a creditor as security for performance of an obligation or repayment of a debt. You may need to find a ‘reversionary clause’ to determine the document is a mortgage.
- **Quitclaim Deed** – Owner states they did not encumbered any debts or liens against the title
- **Registered Land** – predominantly – all records for land whose ownership has been disputed in Land Court with regards to ownership or boundary lines
- **Straw Deed** – used due to law against transferring property to yourself – this conveys the property to a third party who then gives it right back, common for a man who owned property before marriage as a way to convey ownership to include his wife.
- **Title Reference** – statement of how the grantor became the owner of the property (reference to previous deed for same property). If missing, search the seller’s name in the grantee index.
- **Title Search** – a review of all records and report of the Searcher’s opinion as to the state of the record title issued.
- **Warranty Deed** – Owner warrants that there are no encumbered debts or liens against the title by them or their predecessors



Assistant Programs

- Adobe Reader
 - Acrobat Reader to open pdf files
- Decompression Program
 - Winzip
- Can be downloaded – usually free trial period
- To Print – use Internet Explorer Browser



Internet Searching

- How Do I Search?
 - Name – first initial is okay
- Try an Advanced Search – Filter by:
 - Grantor / Grantee
 - Document Type
 - Town
 - Date Range
- Change Your Search Criteria
 - Book Search
 - Unindexed Property Search
 - Property Search



Gather Documents

- Using “The Basket”
 - Similar to Shopping Cart – but *always* FREE
 - Fill it
 - Review it
 - Download it
- Gather Documents - continued
 - Filling Your Basket
 - Select what you want to save –
 - Details
 - Pages / Images
 - All
 - Click NEXT
 - Review Your Basket
 - Click on BASKET
 - List of documents you saved is on the left side of the screen
 - Download Your Basket
 - You will download the entire basket at once
 - Choose PDF or TIF format
 - PDF is a document file
 - TIF is a graphic file
 - Dialog box will confirm documents downloaded
 - Text in lower left indicates filename to look for on your hard drive



Print Documents

- Similar to Shopping Cart – but *always* FREE
- Select what you want to save –
 - Details
 - Pages / Images
 - All
 - Click NEXT
- Standard Print Options:
 - Printer
 - Copies
 - Pages
 - Paper Size



Special Searches

- Registered Land
 - Land Court was created in 1898
 - Involves about 10% of the land in Mass.
 - Property that has been disputed in court
 - Documents from court will be included along with all future transactions regarding that piece of property
- Plans
 - View the plot plan for real property
 - If a deed shows a “Lot #” as part of the conveyance, there is a good chance that the plan is recorded at the Registry of Deeds.

Some Reasons to include Deeds in your Genealogical Research:¹

Deeds, legal records for transferring land or property from one individual to another, are the most prevalent and widely used of the U.S. land records, and can provide a fairly reliable method of tracking ancestors when no other record can be found. Deeds are relatively easy to locate and often provide a wealth of information on the family members, social status, occupation, and neighbors of the named individuals.

Early land deeds are especially detailed and predate most other record sources, increasing the importance of land records the further back a researcher goes.

Why Land Deeds?

Land records are an especially powerful genealogical resource, especially when used in conjunction with other records, for breaching brick walls or in building a case where no one record provides a record of relationship. Deeds are an important genealogical resource because:

- U.S. land deeds often involve more people than other genealogical sources - providing a potential source for information on family members, neighbors, and even friends.
- Land deeds help to locate a person in a particular area at a particular time.
- Deeds can be used to distinguish two men with identical names by locating one or both on a particular piece of property.
- Deeds that transfer property by will or estate may name all children and their spouses.
- Deeds, in conjunction with tax lists, can often help to reconstruct an entire neighborhood - making it easier to find potential migration patterns

¹ Kimberly Powell, "Digging for Deeds - How to Trace Your Family Tree in U.S. Land Records," accessed electronically at About.com (http://genealogy.about.com/cs/land/a/land_deeds.htm : 24 April 2015).