

Online Courthouse Tour 2021-22  
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Courthouse documents are rich with genealogical information. These documents include a variety of records such as birth, civil matters, criminal, death, divorces, estates, marriage, land transactions, maps, name changes, and more. Many courthouses throughout the United States now have digital access to their early record collections as well as current information. These records can be accessed directly from the record keeper's website at no charge or for a small fee. In addition, courthouse records for some locations can be found at the *FamilySearch* website by browsing non-indexed collections. This session will highlight digitized record collections that are name searchable and also provide a step-by-step process for browsing *FamilySearch* collections.

1. Using Historic Indexes, Records

- a. Different types, depends on jurisdiction
  - Deeds, including Indentures
    - ex: Joint Tenancy, Warranty, etc
  - Mortgages, Deeds of Trust
    - secure a loan or Promissory Note
  - Court documents
    - property distribution, child support judgments
- b. Different styles, depends on jurisdiction
  - Grantor or Direct
  - Grantee or Indirect or Reverse
- c. Different formats
  - Handwritten
  - Chronological
  - Transcribed
  - Alphabetical sections

Example:

Transcribed  
 Cumberland  
 County, PA 1780 >

Grantee Index  
 to Deeds, p. 169

Alpha sub-  
 sections  
 within 'A'

GRANTEES		GRANTORS		Vol.	Book	Page	DATE OF INSTRUMENT			DATE OF RECORD			LOCATION, ETC.
SURNAME	GIVEN NAME						Month	Day	Year	Month	Day	Year	
Armstrong	Ann	William	Armstrong	1	G	314	July	9	1784	Dec.	7	1784	Middleton Tp.
Armstrong	Andw. Jr. et al	Mary	Moffit	1	I	305	Aug.	18	1789	July	6	1790	Middleton Tp.
Armstrong	Andrew	Thomas	Fuller-ton	1	I	353	Apr.	20	1796	Sep.	22	1796	Middleton Tp.
Arney's	Ann Trus.	William	Park et al	2	F	47	July	1	1848	Aug.	17	1854	Carlisle
Armstrong	Andrew W.	John	Armstrong	2	Q	280	Dec.	23	1864	Dec.	23	1864	New Kingston

2. Using Historic Indexes, Court

- a. Different types, depends on jurisdiction:
  - Civil, Common Pleas, Chancery, etc
    - Adoptions, Divorce, Lawsuits, Eminent Domain, Name Changes, etc
  - Criminal
    - Some jurisdictions included naturalization cases
  - Juvenile (Dependency, Delinquency, most do not survive, not considered permanent record)
  - Probate
    - Estates, Guardianships, Conservatorships

Using Historic Indexes, Court, continued

b. Example at *FamilySearch*, catalog search

- Find place, then find collection by category
- Example focus: Finding Aid, Arrangement
  - Allen County Indiana, Criminal Court
  - <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C9R8-F338?i=503&cat=2462927>

Note: The following examples show search criteria with underlined text.

3. Databases with Digital Images

a. Example Focus: Relationships, FAN

Cuyahoga County, Ohio, Recorder/Fiscal Officer

<https://recorder.cuyahogacounty.us/> > Search Database

Search Options:

- Date range
- Last name, first name
- Document type, optional

Search: Clark, 01/01/1810 - 12/31/1820

(document type optional)

Result: Margaret Clark et al to Nathan Perry, 2/230

- Names of grantors, may be related
- Name of deceased person and his children
- Reference to Court of Common Pleas
  - could write to court and obtain court papers
- Property description: street name, ½ acre
- Names of witnesses, may be relatives

The screenshot shows the search interface for the Cuyahoga County Fiscal Officer. It features a navigation menu with 'Home', 'Search Database', and 'Fiscal Office'. The search criteria section includes fields for document identification (AFN#, Book, Page), recording date (01/01/1810 to 12/31/1820), and party information (Last Name: clark, First Name: margaret). There are also dropdown menus for document types and sorting options, and a 'Begin Search' button.

b. Example Focus: Locality, Slave Era

Wake County, North Carolina Register of Deeds > Consolidated Real Property Index

<http://services.wakegov.com/booksweb/genextsearch.aspx>

Search: Deed, Grantor Smith Samuel, before 1840

Result: Samuel Smith to Benjamin Rogers, 1820, 3/334

<http://services.wakegov.com/booksweb/PDFView.aspx?DocID=108483019&RecordDate=04/12/1820>

Questions:

- Where did Samuel Smith live? Where did Benjamin Rogers live?
- What kind of property was involved?
- What was the amount of the sale?
- When was the document signed? When was the document registered?
- When was Celia born?
- Who was the witness?

Summary: Celia, born about 1798, was a slave of Samuel Smith who lived in Granville County, N.C. She was moved to Wake County, N.C., sometime before the 17<sup>th</sup> of July 1814 when Samuel sold her for \$300 to Benjamin Rogers of Wake County.

c. Example Focus: Inheritance, alternate name search

Jackson County, Missouri, Recorder of Deeds

<https://aumentumweb.jacksongov.org/RealEstate/SearchResults.aspx> > Online Public Record Portal

Search: Smith John, 01/01/1950 - 12/31/1970, Document Type Will

Result: > View Image, Will, 1/1/1965 [E] Smith John [+] from [R] Smith Suprola J

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### Jackson County, Missouri, continued

#### Questions:

- Was the document correctly indexed?
  - No, should be 'Suprela', found by searching the name of a child
- Are her children's whereabouts listed in the document?

#### d. Example Focus: Court record, adoption

Summit County, Ohio Clerk of Courts > Records Search <https://clerkweb.summitoh.net/welcome.asp>

Search Category: Naturalization (1850-1991), Clerk's local copy > search surname, name of country, year, etc

Result: Petition for Naturalization (by adoptive parents)

- Parents
  - Names and birth Information
- Child
  - Name and birth Information
  - Place of Adoption and entry into United States
  - New name

#### 4. *FamilySearch*, browseable collections; researchers must register for a free account, anyone can register

During the 1960/70s, many courthouse records were microfilmed by the LDS church. Recently, this microfilm was scanned and placed online at *FamilySearch* and the images can be accessed by 'browsing' through the collection. Due to the size of the collection, the information is not yet 'name searchable.' Indexing of the collection will be time consuming as the original information in most cases is handwritten and difficult to read.

#### Limitations:

- Not all jurisdictions were microfilmed
- Not all records were microfilmed
- Some jurisdictions require researchers to visit a Family History Center to view images (per agreement)

Method: Go to *FamilySearch* Catalog <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>, search by place

a. Example: South Carolina, Edgefield County > Land and Property

> Deeds, 1787-1866; index to deeds, 1787-1869 > Direct Index to Deeds 1787-1869

The following is a listing of what is available as digital images; it may show as 'locked' if user is not signed-in.

Step 1: Check the Index and find the Book and Page where the document can be found.

Note	Location	Collection/Shelf	Film	DGS	Form
Direct index to deeds 1787-1869	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23871	7856778	
Deeds, v. 1-5 1787-1791	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23872	7837384	
Deeds, v. 6-8 1791-1793	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23873	8140721	
Deeds, v. 9-11 1793-1795	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23874	8140722	
Deeds, v. 12-13 1795-1797	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23875	7856779	
Deeds, v. 14-16 1797-1799	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23876	7856780	
Deeds, v. 17-18 1799-1800	<a href="#">Family History Library</a>	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	23877	8140724	

Regarding the local recordkeepers' indexes:

Titled 'Direct' and 'Indirect' or 'Grantor' and 'Grantee' depending on the jurisdiction.

- Direct = grantors, sellers, sometimes defendants, etc.
- Indirect (or Reverse) = grantees, buyers, sometimes plaintiffs, etc.
- Some listed in alphabetical sections, chronologically entered as recorded/later years in sub-sections

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Edgefield County, South Carolina, continued

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/472168?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

> image 7: see heading of each page, shows where entries can be found according to beginning letters

Will open as thumbnail images, highlight a page and click the B&W icon to resize the image

- Names starting with 'Ab' can be found on page 1 of the index
- Names starting with 'Ad' can be found on page 2 of the index, etc

Search example: Adams Amos to James Adams

Grantors	Grantees	Years	page#	Book#
Addison, John	Samuel Marsh	14	1797	329 14
Adams, John	William Coy	16 1798	1799	364 16
do	Moses Hindley	16 1798	1799	372 16
Adams, Amos	James Adams	17	1799	51 17
Adams, Thomas	Stephen Mayes	19 1800	1801	17 19

Result:  
Document is at  
Book 17 page 51

Note: James Adams (Grantee) will be indexed in the Indirect Index so that all parties are indexed

Step 2: Go back to listing page (see p. 3) and click camera icon for Deeds, v. 17-18 1799-1800

- Again, will open as thumbnail images at Book 17. Notice there are 2 pages per image
- Estimate where the document is, highlight and click B&W icon to resize (may take a few attempts)
- View, download or print pages

Question: Who was Elizabeth?

b. Example, combined search, Williamson County, Texas

Go to *FamilySearch* catalog: <https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog>

- Search Place: Texas, Williamson
- Select: Land and Property

▼ United States, Texas, Williamson - Land and property ( 3 )

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Deeds of trust, 1880-1891; index, 1880-1826  
Author: Williamson County (Texas). County Clerk

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Deeds, 1848-1902; index, 1835-1904  
Author: Williamson County (Texas). County Clerk

From the list, select:

Deeds, 1848-1902, index, 1835-1904

*Not: the author is the County Clerk*

- View listing

Select: Direct Index v. A, 1835-1874

*Note: It is item 4*

- It opens at header card for Item #1
- Scroll through thumbnails and look for the card for Item 4

Item 1 ↓

Image 1 of 1118

At Item 4, click on the B&W icon to re-size

- Open the first index page 'A' and view

Note: alphabetical, listing is chronological

Search: On top line, the first entry is:

#19, Herman Aiken and wife to John F. Nicolas

- What is the year of transaction and Book and Page? 1847, 1/35 (make a note of information)
  - Find Vol. 1, then find page 35, transcribed (image 16)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-C37Y-J9XT-W?mode=g&cat=216747>

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Williamson County, Texas, combined search, continued

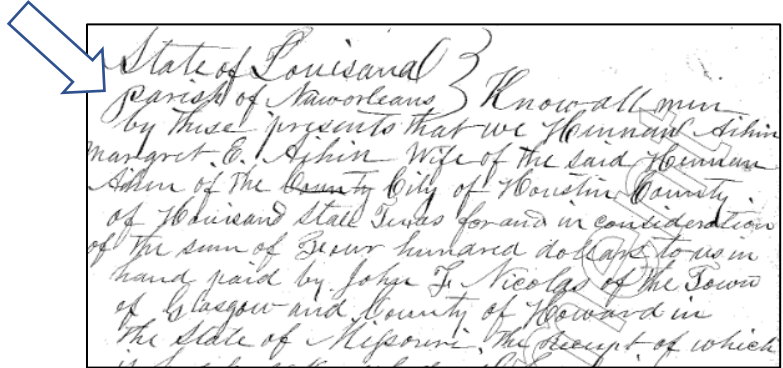
- Next, go to local recordkeeper website:  
Williamson County Clerk, Texas <https://www.wilco.org/County-Clerk> , database and images
- 'Official Public Record Search and Copies'
- Search screen: Enter Aiken Herman, notice the name appears in search window, click 'Search'

184700019DR • DEED • 02/03/1847 12:00 AM			
Book/Page	Grantor (2)	Grantee	Legal Description
B: DEED B: 1 P: 19	AIKEN HERMAN	NICOLAS JOHN F	640 AC AIKEN H GRANT MILAM DISTRICT

Click and view: 1/35 (handwritten)

Questions:

- Where did Herman and his wife live?
- Where did John F. Nicholas live?
- Where was document signed?
- Where was the property?



5. How to find the local recordkeeper website

- Online search, such as *Google*
- Search using quotes "name of county and state" with keyword for record type i.e. deeds
  - o Record types could also include probate, divorce, land records, or the word 'clerk'
- Look for official websites, url usually ends with .org, .gov, not .com
- At the website, look for options to search the records
  - o Website might be unique to the county ('home grown') or provided by a vendor

### More Examples

*FamilySearch* collections

Waldo County, Maine, Probate Court, a listing of records

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1385977?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Index to Dockets, vol. 1, example shows case file number

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-89XG-66T7?i=249&cat=1385977>

Next, using the case file number, browse the documents to find the file (may take a few attempts)

<https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q57-89XJ-TJTF?i=932&cat=1385977>

Jackson County, Mississippi, Chancery Clerk

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/255401?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Land and property records, 1854-1928; indexes, 1888-1893, 1895-1896

Marshall County, Oklahoma, County Clerk

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/1211541?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Land and property records, early 1900s-1921

Cumberland County, Pennsylvania, Recorder, Indexes to deeds and miscellaneous records, 1750-1954, Grantee Index, A-B, 1750 >, Film 21029 #07856890

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/206705?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

Charleston, South Carolina, Clerk, Probate Re... Bound Vols, 1671-1977, Index to wills, 1800-1927, Film 194625

<https://www.familysearch.org/search/catalog/340972?availability=Family%20History%20Library>

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### Local Recordkeepers

Maricopa County, Arizona, Recorder, database and images, 2 sections: historical 1871-1946, 1947-current

<https://recorder.maricopa.gov/reccdocdata/>

Sacramento County, California, Recorder (no images), 1849-current (2 databases)

<https://ccr.saccounty.net/DocumentRecording/Pages/Index.aspx>

Bernalillo County, New Mexico, Recorder (no images) marriage index from 1887, deeds etc from late 1900s

<https://eagleweb.bernco.gov/recorder/eagleweb/docSearch.jsp>

Clark County, Nevada (Las Vegas), Clerk, marriage search (no images, order from Clerk's office, not Recorder)

<https://clerk.clarkcountynv.gov/AcclaimWeb/Marriage/FindMyMarriageRecordSearch>

Hamilton County, Ohio (Cincinnati area), Probate Clerk Archives, early years digitized handwritten indexes, images include birth, death, guardianships, marriages, naturalization, probate; also databases for later years

<https://www.probatect.org/court-records/archive-categories>

County of Richmond, New York (Staten Island), County Clerk, database and images from about 1945

<https://www.richmondcountyclerk.com/Search/NameSearch>

Shelby County, Tennessee, Register of Deeds, database and images

<https://register.shelby.tn.us/> > Property Search

also Archives section [https://register.shelby.tn.us/?page\\_id=2968](https://register.shelby.tn.us/?page_id=2968) (court records)

Bexar County, Texas. County Clerk, database and images

<https://www.bexar.org/2950/Real-PropertyLand-Records> > Public Records Search > 1753-2021

See options: Land records, Marks and Brands, Marriage, Spanish Archives, etc

### Website Resources

*Family Tree Magazine*, Researching Courthouse Records In-Person and Online

<https://www.familytreemagazine.com/records/courthouse/guide-to-genealogy-research-in-courthouse-records/>

*Genealogy.com*, Court Records -- Finding Your Ancestors

[https://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/47\\_neill.html](https://www.genealogy.com/articles/research/47_neill.html)

*FamilySearch*, United States, Courthouse Research Resources

[https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United\\_States\\_Courthouse\\_Research\\_Resources\\_\(National\\_Institute\)](https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Courthouse_Research_Resources_(National_Institute))

Genealogy Gems by Lisa Louise Cooke, Courthouse Research Tips for Genealogists

<https://lialouisecooke.com/2018/06/06/courthouse-research-tips-genealogists/>

State Historical Society of Missouri, Using Court Records to Reveal Your Family History (video)

<https://shsmo.org/on-demand/basic-genealogy/part-7> (also see handout pdf)

### Books

Find in a local library at *WorldCat* or purchase online

By Christine Rose, CG<sup>®</sup>

- *Courthouse Research for Family Historians: Your Guide to Genealogical Treasures*
- *Courthouse Indexes Illustrated*