

# Property Research in New England & the Midwest (plus New York)

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# What you can find

- Where they came from
  - Not always reliable, but can give a clue
- Who the wives were
  - Women usually couldn't own property within a marriage
  - Men usually couldn't sell property without the wife's consent
    - Can be on the same deed or a separate "release of dower" or "quit claim" deed
- Indication of personal wealth
  - How much did they own?
- Indication of literacy level
  - Did they sign the deed or use a mark?
- Wills
  - Sometimes filed with the deeds and not with probate records
- Other Family
  - Sometimes mentioned in the context of the deed

# Dividing the land – Original Distribution

- Patents or Grants
  - The original deed from the government or designated representative to an individual landowner or corporation of landowners
  - For New England & NY, except parts of Maine, the original grant was made by the colonial government or state
  - For the Midwest, plus parts of Maine, the original grant was made by the federal government
    - Or, ratified in the case of land occupied before 1790 (e.g. Chicago, Detroit)
  - Patents/grants are not always recorded in grantee/grantor indices
- Military Bounty Land
  - Property given to American Revolution veterans (and some 1812 vets) after the war was concluded by feds or states
    - Few vets settled on their land, they usually sold it to a speculator
  - Most bounty land was located in the Adirondacks of NY, in eastern OH, in ME, along the Miss. R. in IL

# Dividing the land – Deed Terminology I

- Metes & Bounds
  - Starting at the large tree bordering Mrs. Smith's property proceed NW 16 poles to the rock ...
  - Mete – measure or distance (usually in poles or rods: both equal 16.5 feet; chain = 66 feet)
  - Bound – limits or boundary point
  - Get out your protractor!

# Dividing the land – Deed Terminology II

- Rectangular System
  - In T 5 R 4 of Lenawee County, the W  $\frac{1}{2}$  of the NW  $\frac{1}{4}$  of section 7
  - Used in all federally dispersed land except some military bounty land
  - Starts from a base line and a base meridian
  - Divides land into counties (any number of townships), townships (six miles per side) and sections (1 mile square, 640 acres, 36 in a township)

# Dividing the land – Deed Terminology III

- City Lots
  - Subdivision or city set off from county land by system in use (metes & bounds or rectangular)
  - A plat is provided to document lot divisions within the set off area

# How to find a deed

- Know your political history for a region (e.g. county boundaries)
  - Gazetteers, state/county histories and tools like AniMap can help
    - Parts of some Michigan townships given to Ohio when MI became a state (Toledo strip)
    - ME deeds may be found in MA or possibly Canada, especially New Brunswick!
      - Upper Maine boundaries were not settled until after the War of 1812
      - Both MA & ME granted deeds in Maine between 1820 & 1853

# How to find a deed (cont.)

- Consult a reference book to see where the records might be found
  - CT, RI, VT – deeds are kept by the town(ship)
  - Midwest, NY, MA, ME, & NH – deeds are kept by the county
    - MA & ME have counties with more than one deed district
  - The older the record, the more exceptions there are
    - VT wasn't a separate entity until 1777
      - Prior deeds might be found in either NY or NH or may have been copied into VT county records
    - NY counties changed boundaries considerably
      - You can have an ancestor live in three counties without moving!
      - Most (but not all) deeds were transferred to the new jurisdiction
    - Disputed territories or ones with pre-existing settlements (e.g. French Michigan, Chicago) sometimes generated court records and congressional records (federal and state) for establishing proof of prior ownership
    - 17<sup>th</sup> & early 18<sup>th</sup> century deeds can sometimes be found in general town records

# Grantee/Grantor Indices

- Grantee – the buyer
- Grantor – the seller
- By doing a surname search can trace movement around a county and identify other family members
- See if the FHL has grantee/grantor indices on microfilm
- Most grantee/grantor indices are open to the general public at the record location
  - Some offices restrict access for genealogical purposes to not interfere with busy times
  - A few areas may not allow access or not use the grantee/grantor system
    - Wayne County, MI (Detroit) does not allow easy public access and fees are high; also deeds are filed by legal property description (having a street address is a major help) so general surname searches can not be performed (at least I haven't figured out a way)

# On the Web

- BLM Website
  - <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov>
  - Has federal land patents for Midwest in downloadable formats (gif, tif, pdf)
- US GenWeb
  - <http://www.usgenweb.com>
  - Some states or counties have posted some grantee/grantor indices or individual deed extracts
- State/County Government sites
  - County sites <http://www.co.nnn.ss.us> where nnn is the county name and ss is the state abbreviation
  - Addresses for records
  - Some starting to make some databases available to public via web (either really old/ pre-1900 or post-computerization/ frequently 1970s)

# Plat books

- Want to see exactly where your ancestor lived, especially in relation to others or so you can find the property today?
  - Plat books and Fire insurance maps can be invaluable aids
- From the late 1860s until about WWI several publishers were busy selling plat books
  - I even have one paperback from the 1960s
- Plat books were usually done for rural areas
- Plat books show not only property lines, streets, etc., but also where buildings were on the property and the name of the property owner.

# Fire Insurance Maps

- Fire insurance maps do for major cities what plat books do for farms
- Fire insurance maps began to be popular tools in the 1850s, declined after WWII, but some probably still produced today

# Miscellaneous

- Deeds prior to the late 1800s were often filed years after the original event (e.g. when it was necessary to sell the land or there was probate to be settled)
- Deeds were sometimes the only records saved during a courthouse fire or were recreated after such a fire (at least for the last property owner)

# Resources

- Land & Property Research in the United States, E. Wade Hone, Ancestry publishing
    - \$40. THE reference for what types of records (patents, deeds plus others) were generated and what they might contain. Maps of each state showing some county evolution, land office locations and the areas for which they were responsible. Excellent reference for how to find federal/state records (ancestry.com, amazon.com)
  - AniMap
    - \$72. Available several places, including direct from the author at <http://www.goldbug.com> (also ancestry.com)
  - Books by George K. Schweitzer – Massachusetts, New York, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois
    - \$10-15. Great overview of state history and county boundaries. Where to find any type of record and what records exist. (NY & OH available from amazon.com)
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# Resources (cont.)

- Historical Data Relating to Counties, Cities, and Towns in Massachusetts, Francis Galvin, NEHGS publisher
  - \$9. Detailed description of political boundary changes at the city or town(ship) level ([newenglandancestors.org](http://newenglandancestors.org))
- The Handybook for Genealogists, Everton Publishers
  - \$28. Weak on deed locations for New England. O.K. for Midwest and New York. Basic county creation data. ([everton.com](http://everton.com), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com))
- Genealogist's Handbook for New England Research, Marcia Melnyk, NEHGS publisher
  - County and town(ship)/city formation – not as detailed as Galvin
  - \$20. Best reference for record locations ([newenglandancestors.org](http://newenglandancestors.org), [amazon.com](http://amazon.com))

# Examples & Illustrations

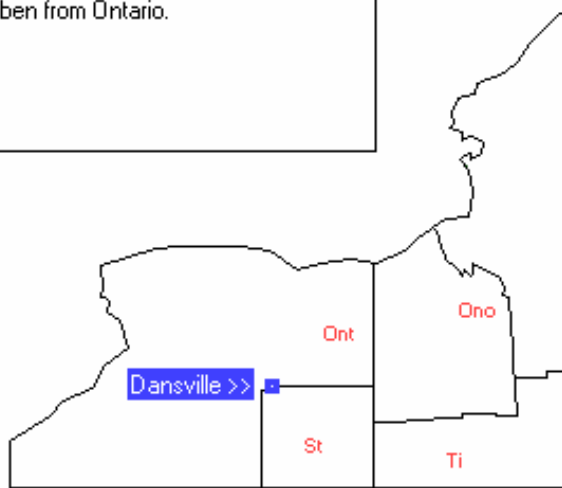
- Metes & Bounds
- Rectangular System
- Rectangular Deed
- City Lot Deed
- County Evolution
- Plat Book

# County Evolution

1796

NEW YORK

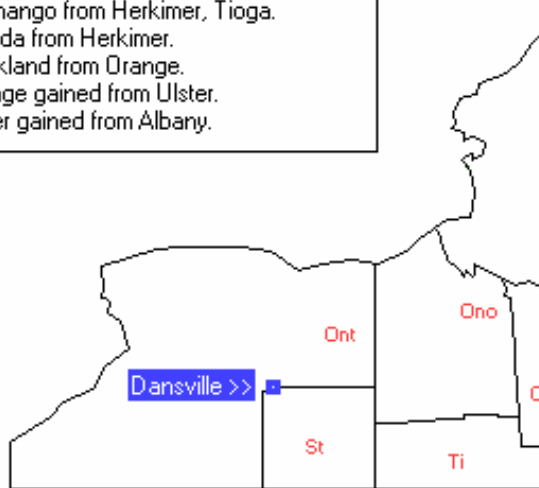
Steuben from Ontario.



1798

NEW YORK

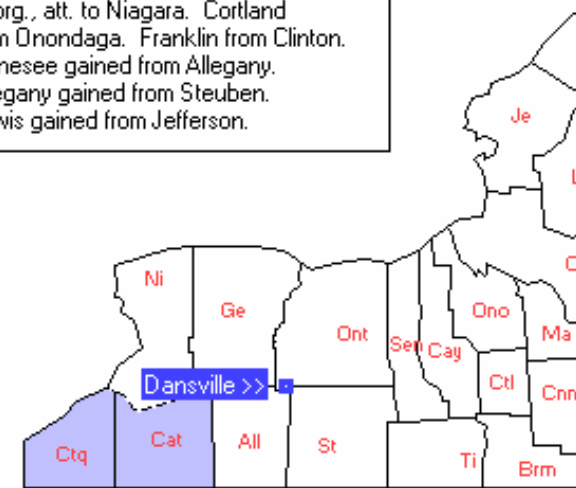
Chenango from Herkimer, Tioga.  
 Oneida from Herkimer.  
 Rockland from Orange.  
 Orange gained from Ulster.  
 Ulster gained from Albany.



1808

NEW YORK

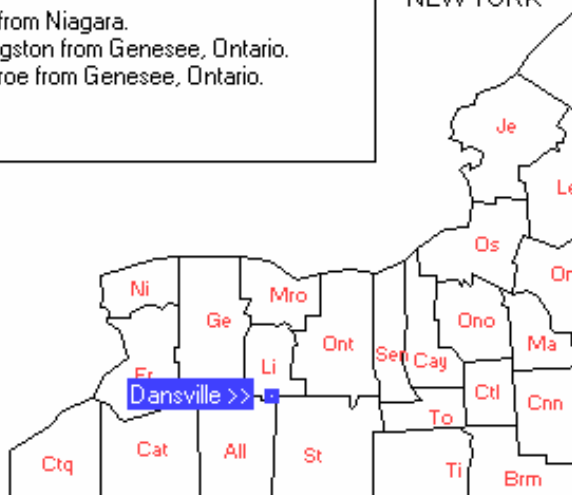
Niagara from Genesee.  
 Cattaraugus, Chautauqua from Genesee;  
 unorg., att. to Niagara. Cortland  
 from Onondaga. Franklin from Clinton.  
 Genesee gained from Allegany.  
 Allegany gained from Steuben.  
 Lewis gained from Jefferson.



1821

NEW YORK

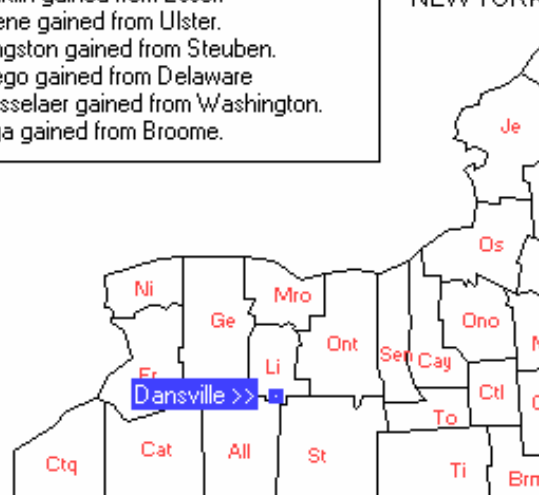
Erie from Niagara.  
 Livingston from Genesee, Ontario.  
 Monroe from Genesee, Ontario.



1822

NEW YORK

Clinton gained from Essex.  
 Franklin gained from Essex  
 Greene gained from Ulster.  
 Livingston gained from Steuben.  
 Otsego gained from Delaware  
 Rensselaer gained from Washington.  
 Tioga gained from Broome.



1857

NEW YORK

Livingston gained from Allegany.

