

The ABCs of Land Records

- **A** - An **abstract** is a summary of the document listing main points and deleting repetitive language. Always try to view the original record in its entirety.
- **B - Bounty land** – Shortly after the beginning of the Revolutionary War the Continental Congress promised land to those who would serve in the Continental Army. The acreage of land promised was on a sliding scale based on rank. For example, an enlisted man would receive 100 acres while a major general would get 1000 acres.

Some states also gave bounty land for service. These grants were usually more liberal than the Federal Government

Bounty land warrant (Federal) - The title to a specified amount of land was issued by the United States War Department upon presentation of evidence that the applicant had served in the Continental Line during the American Revolution. The exact site of the land was not specified. Any licensed surveyor was authorized to survey the land for the warrant holder. It was issued for the full amount of land allotted to the original grantee

- **C** - A **chain** is a lineal measure of land. One chain equals 100 links or 66 feet. It is sometimes called a "Gunter's chain" to distinguish it from an engineer's chain, which is 50 or 100 feet long.

The **chain carrier** is a surveyor's assistant. Some plats have a CC on the bottom with the chain carriers' names.

- **D - Right of dower** – a provision of law which entitles a married woman to receive a portion of her husband's estate for her and her children's support upon his death, if he dies without leaving a will. This is usually a life interest in his husband's estate.

Dower release – usually found at the end of a deed. The clerk questioned the wife, apart and separately from her husband, if she agrees to the sale and gives up all rights to that land.

- **E - Et al** – and others. Always read a land record with these words in the index. It usually means several persons are involved in the transaction. It may be one heir buying the land from the other heirs.

Et ux (et uxor) – and wife. The name of the wife is usually revealed in this record.

- **F - Freehold** – land holdings which could be bought, sold, bequeathed by will, or inherited according to law.

Freeholder – owner of enough property to vote, serve on a jury and hold public office.

- **G - Grantor- seller of property**
Grantee – buyer of property

The indexes may be a separate grantor index and grantee index. Sometimes both are included in the same index. These records are usually found in the courthouse. Most of the land record indexes have been microfilmed by the Family History Center.

- **H - Headright** – specific number of acres (usually 50 acres) for importing oneself or an immigrant into the state/province, pre 1860. Actual provisions varied from place to place.
This bounty often went to the ship captain, who may have sold these people into indenture for 7 years to cover the cost of passage. The laws regarding headright became more strict as time passed because of graft and corruption.

- **I - Indenture** – a contract in two or more copies binding one person to labor for another and learn a specified trade during a specific period of time

During the colonial period, indentures allowed immigrants to trade their labor as payment for travel costs, maintenance or training.

- **J - is for Jr./ Sr.** Be aware that **Junior/Senior** is not always a father-son relationship.

In earlier times the elder man of the same name in a community was noted with the title of Senior and the younger man as Junior, maybe no relationship.

- **K - A kilometer** is five-eighths of a mile.

- **L - Location, location, location** – as important in genealogy as in real estate.

Census records will place your ancestor in a location every ten years. It will give you the county, town or township.

Land records place your ancestor exactly in a location, especially in rectangular survey.

- **M - Metes and bounds** – property described by natural boundary markings such as waterways, trees marked, and rocks. It is measured chains, rods, perches, and links.

Metes and bounds usually named adjacent landholders.

Boundaries of the property often had a meandering line rather than straight lines.

- **N - Northwest Territory** – a large area of land on the frontier was designated as the Northwest Territory by Congress in 1787 because of interest in settling the frontier.

This territory included much of the land occupied today by Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Wisconsin.

- **O** - The **Ohio Company Purchase** was land lying along the Ohio River containing about a million and a half acres. It was purchased in 1787 from the federal government by the Ohio Company. This company was formed in Massachusetts for the purpose of settling Ohio lands which sold for at least one dollar per acre.

The Ohio Company's Third Purchase was called the Donation Tract, 1792

- **P - Processioning** - Every four years all landowners in a community would ride or walk the boundaries of their property. This custom came from England to Virginia as a means of avoiding disputes arising from poor surveys or loss of boundary markers such as trees.

Processioner – a type of a surveyor in the US and England. His job was to decide upon property boundaries to mark and describe in a processioner's book.

- Sometimes the notes of these events would be recorded in the minutes of the parish church.

- **Q - Quit rent** was an early type of annual property tax which was assessed by the Crown.

The Governor of each colony was responsible for distribution of the funds which were collected by the sheriff of each county.

Quit rent could be paid either in cash or in tobacco.

The use of quit rent was abolished during the Revolutionary War.

- **R - Rectangular survey** was a method of surveying in which territories were divided into numbered townships, each six miles square.

Each township was further divided into 36 numbered sections.

The land description in its entirety will read, for example: S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ S2 T8N R VIII E of the third Principal Meridian.

This record is usually read from the end back to the beginning.

- **S – Section** – 640 acres
- **T – Township** – 36 square miles, 36 sections, 36 miles square; a local governmental unit
- **U – United States Military Lands** In 1796 two and a half million acres of land east of the Scioto River in central Ohio were given to pay officers and soldiers of the Continental Army for their services in the Continental Army.
- **V - A vara** is a Spanish and Portuguese linear land measurement.
One vara = 31 to 34 inches
36 varas = approximately 100 feet
In Texas a vara is equal to 33.33 inches.

- **W** - A witness is a person who saw

1. an event occur
2. a document signed

A witness is a person who can swear that his description of what he saw is the truth.

In Virginia for many years 3 persons were required to witness a document when most states required only two signatures.

- **X** - When a person needed to sign a document and could not write his name, someone else would write his given name and surname. Then the signer would mark an "X," usually between the names. The second person would write "his/her mark." Usually, one of these words was above and the other below the "X."

- **Y - Yeoman** is a term found in earlier records.

- **Yeoman** refers chiefly to a free man owning his own farm

A yeoman is also:

an experienced man capable of keeping account of supplies and costs
a person who can be counted on to work diligently and effectively

- **Z** -