



PERFORMING A DEED HISTORY

Background

Researching your home begins with learning who the previous owners were by compiling the deeds to the property. With this list of names, you can easily find out more about the owners and what they did while living at your address. In the State of Maryland, title insurance is mandatory, so when you “closed” on your house, you paid the title company a fee for them to do a title or deed search. To expedite your deed search, check with the title company you used and ask them for a copy of the deed search. If this is not available, you need to begin the very tedious task of sorting through these legal documents at the Land Records Office.

Land Records Office

Montgomery County land records are housed in the **Land Record Office, Room 218, Judiciary Center**, 50 Maryland Avenue, Rockville (240-777-9477), which is open from 8:30 to 4:30, Monday through Friday. Your research will be done via computer and books, with staff available for some minimal help. The records in this department go back as far as 1777. The Land Records Public Information Room is located in Room 218.

Researching the Land Records Office Online

You can also access digital land records via the Maryland Land Records website homepage: www.mdlandrec.net. The first time you visit this digital repository, you will need to apply for a login – and you will need a valid email address to complete this process. After you make a request at this site, you will be issued a password, usually within an hour if you apply on a normal business day. Access to this digital database is currently free.

Once you are able to login to the system, you can search land records by name, liber/folio, or tax account number. In addition, you can also search plats at the website www.plats.net. When the proxy server pop-up appears, use the following: User Name: **plato** and Password: **plato#**. The Maryland State Archives Help Desk can help if you have any questions. Call them at 410-260-6487.

Important Terms to Know

Grantee: The receiver of the property, a.k.a. the buyer.

Grantor: The party the grantee bought it from, a.k.a. the seller.

Liber: Book

Folio: Page

Being Clause: Your deed tells you the liber and folio of the previous deed.

Starting Your Search

Start with the name(s) of the present owner and the purchase date, and work backwards. Some houses are deeded in the wife's name, so that information is helpful to have. Your browser must be able to accept cookies and pop-ups and have Adobe installed to read .pdf files. If you use the Land Records Office instead of the website, allow a minimum of 2-3 hours for your research, and more time if you encounter difficulties.

To do your deed search, use a backward chain, from one grantor (seller) to the grantee (buyer). Through the Index to Grantees, seek the liber (book) and folio (page) where the deed can be found. That deed can then be copied via computer, microfilm, or copy machine. House research begins with compiling these deeds to the property, going backwards from the present owners and their date of purchase, to the earliest history available, including plats (large land parcels) that were subdivided and sold as lots. Make sure that you continue to search the deed for your house by matching block and lot number of the property, taking care that the information is consistent with the earlier deeds in case the lot has been subdivided. Often, the information on the deed itself refers you back to a prior owner and where to find that earlier deed. Ignore deeds of trust, which are mortgages.

Step-by-Step Directions for Performing a Deed Search Online

1. **Login to MDLandRec.Net** using your email and password. Note the "User Guide" link on the left-hand column of the webpage – a 33 page PDF that can help you if you get stuck.
2. **Click on Montgomery County** in the left hand column on the webpage.
3. **Click on Search Land Record Indices, 1777-1976.** Note the link: "How to use Montgomery County Land Record Indices" – a very helpful 4-page PDF.
4. **In the "Active Indices" section,** click on either the **Grantee (a.k.a., the buyer)** or the **Grantor (a.k.a., the seller)** to gain access to the index for the years 1777-1976.
5. **Using the GRANTEE (or buyer)** as an example, the next page is an index organized by the first initial of the grantee's last name and the first initial of their given name. For example, for Clift Richards, click on "R, given names A-Z, Corporations, pp. 110-1860" for the index from 1777-1927.
6. The next screen will be a table with the title **"To Locate Names in the Index."** There are directions at the top of the page (and on the PDF mentioned above). But using Clift Richards as an example, you find the first letter of his first name along the top horizontal line – this would be C. Then you have to a) remove the first letter of his last name, and then b) remove all the vowels in his last name. The result is CHRDS. Then you try to find the first two letters in CHRDS that appear in the left hand column of **"Key Letters."** The first (and only) letter in that column is R. The intersection of the "R" line with the "C" column yields the number "340."
7. **Type the number you found (in this example, it is 340)** in the upper right hand box that appears under these words: **"Jump to Index Page."** After you enter the number and press "Go," you will come to an index page that lists last names.
8. **Look for the last name you are searching for.** In this example, the name Richards appears on the list, followed by the number 2. This number means that the information is on the second page of the index. **Using the highlighted "PREVIOUS PAGE" or "NEXT PAGE" links** at the upper right of the page, navigate to the page you want. In this example, "page 2" is the next page, and the name Clift Richards appears about half-way down the page.

9. **Look for the transactions that are DEEDS, rather than trusts (or mortgages).** In this example, there are two entries for Clift Richards. The deed transfer is from Ada Rhodes to Clift R. Richards, dated May 3, 1895. On the two columns on the right side of the index, two numbers are shown for this Deed: 49 and 73. These refer to the **Book** and the **Page** of the Land Records Books.
10. **Type the Book and Page numbers into the Top Right Corner into the boxes in the YELLOW band at the very top of the page.** Then press Go.
11. **The next page will be a PDF of the actual deed as it was recorded in the Land Records Book.** You can use the Adobe PDF functions to enlarge or reduce the page – and to print or save a copy.
12. **Repeat the same process for the Grantor's name.** In this case, that would be Ada Rhodes. By doing a similar search for her name, you could determine when she bought the property and from whom.

Helpful Tips for Researching at BOTH at the Land Records Office and Online

- You may fill in gaps or dead ends by using equity/tax sales records or wills. Deeds for in-family transfer of title were not always recorded.
- At the Land Records Office, you may make copies of any papers or microfilm, but you will need to pay for copying.
- You can find many recent deeds, as well as plats, on the Land Office computers. Older deeds are located in the adjacent microfilm room; obtain the correct numbered reel, insert into the machine and copy. The earliest deeds are found in the large liber portfolios on the shelves.
- Some problems that will make your job difficult are estates, land divisions, lawyers, foreclosures, multiple sales to one buyer, etc. You can sometimes fill in gaps and dead ends with wills, tax sales records, etc. which are located elsewhere in the building or in other buildings.
- If your deed has no being clause (previous owner's deed's liber and folio) you have to run the previous owner back as grantor. Since you probably won't know when the previous owner bought the property, you have to guess the year by some trial and error as you go back through the books.
- Chevy Chase deeds go back to property deeds from the Chevy Chase Land Company, as far back as early 1890s. It is possible to go further back to the farms that the straw buyers bought for the Land Company before the development of Chevy Chase as the area's first street car suburb.