<u>**Land Records**</u>**: Land was *<u>first</u>* owned by the government (colony or state) before the government transferred it to individuals and these transactions are filed in the Pennsylvania State Archives in Harrisburg; *<u>after that</u>*, all land transfers occurred between individuals and were recorded in county courthouses**

❖ <u>Transfers between individuals (county records, not covered by Ancestor Tracks)</u>: Start by combing all the counties where your ancestors owned land. Check both the *Grantee Index* that indexes the buyer(s) of a tract of land and the *Grantor Index* that indexes the seller(s). After finding the deed, you will often find personal information regarding the parties to the sale: their occupation, place of residence, previous residence, names of their wives, perhaps a relationship with a deceased person, and sometimes the complete line of succession of the tract. You will always find an exact description of the land (and sometimes the neighbors), and nearly always names of witnesses. Don't forget that many county boundaries changed throughout the years, so you need to check the courthouses of the parent counties, too. Then work back to...

> Remember: There are *two* distinct sets of PA land records

❖ <u>Transfers from the government to individuals (state records, most available from Ancestor Tracks)</u>: Government land records document the *very first sales* of land tracts from the colony or state government entity or proprietor to private owners. Individuals found in these records typically are either the pioneers in the area, soldiers who received land in lieu of pay for their service, or are speculators who hoped to make a profit as land values increase. If you have researched in county courthouses where you *know* your forebears lived early in the county's existence, or if they sold land but there's no proof of purchase, be sure to check these records.

The Pennsylvania Land Acquisition Process – *First* Landowners

(1) <u>Application</u>: an individual applied for a piece of land in fairly general terms, often referencing a stream or a neighbor

(2) <u>Warrant</u>: When the Land Office received the **application**, they issued a **warrant**, or an order to have the desired tract surveyed. The applicant had to pay a fee for this warrant and became known as the *warrantee*. The loose warrant was copied into a ledger called a Warrant Register. All of the county Warrant Registers are online through at http://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Land-Records-Overview.aspx but each page is a separate file and must be clicked on individually. Or, if you want to access them anywhere and page through them, you can download all of the county Warrant Registers as .pdf files under "Statewide Resources" at (https://ancestortracks.com). These downloadable pdf files can be saved to your computer so that they are readily available at courthouses or historical societies where there is no internet connection. Archivists at the Pennsylvania State Archives actually use our pdf files rather than their own website because they find it faster for doing lookups.

> ❖ The Warrant Register for the relevant county is the most important resource for locating surveys and patents for the original tracts transferred from the colony or state to private owners. The last column of each entry gives the survey book and page number where the survey is recorded; images of these pages have been posted for free by the Pennsylvania State Archives at http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17-114CopiedSurveyBooks/r17-114MainInterfacePage.htm.

- ❖ Warrant Register entries are arranged by the first letter of a person's surname, and then entered in chronological order by warrant date. The name of the person who received the final patent for the tract is also shown, but these names are not indexed. You have to consult the Patent Register Indexes to look up tracts by the patentee's name if that's all you know.
- ❖ Don't forget that county boundaries changed over time and warrants were entered into the register of the county as it existed at the time the warrant was issued, so you may have to consult several county Warrant Registers as you go back in time. Your ancestor didn't move, but the county lines did.
- ❖ The Warrant Registers cover about 70% of the land transferred to private owners. See more information at https://ancestortracks.com/wp/home/land-acquisition/. Other ledgers:
  - o Depreciation Land Register – These were lands to compensate Revolutionary War soldiers who had received depreciated currency for their service that was worth virtually nothing. Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Butler, and Lawrence Counties (http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17-185DepreciationLands/r17-185MainInterface.htm).
  - o Donation Land Register - The Donation Land program was designed to keep men in service during the Revolutionary War by giving them a certificate for land. Rank determined size of the tracts (Butler, Clarion, Crawford, Erie, Lawrence, Mercer, Venango and Warren Counties): http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17DonationLandSeries/DonationLandMainInterface.htm
  - o West Side Applications (1766-1769) – A new application system for patents started in 1765, used for settling unwarranted land east of the Susquehanna River ("squatters' land"). The land was in York, Adams, Franklin, Fulton, Bedford, Blair, Huntingdon, Cumberland, Perry, Juniata, Snyder, Union, and the southern portions of Mifflin and Centre. http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17-40WestSideApps/r17-40MainInterface.htm
  - o New Purchase Applications (1769) – A huge swath of land was opened to settlement following the Treaty of Fort Stanwix of 1768. The tracts were in present-day Allegheny, Armstrong, Beaver, Washington, Greene, Fayette, Westmoreland, Indiana, Cambria, Somerset, Clearfield, Centre, Union, Lycoming, Northumberland, Montour, Columbia, Luzerne, Sullivan, Bradford, Wyoming, Susquehanna, Lackawanna, and Wayne Counties. The register has been posted online—access it through http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17-43NewPurchaseRegister/r17-43MainInterface.htm. Also available as downloadable pdf files from Ancestor Tracks under "Statewide Resources" at https://ancestortracks.com.

(3) Survey: The next step was to pay a fee for the survey and wait until a deputy surveyor could be assigned to do the work. The results of the survey were returned to the Land Office [this is a "return of survey"] with a precise description and map of the tract, nearly always including the names of the neighbors who owned the adjacent tracts. These loose surveys are on file at the Pennsylvania Archives in Harrisburg and have been copied into Survey Books. Since the next step in the process also required a fee, there was often a long lull before the patent was issued. In fact, very often the person who received the warrant to survey the tract and who paid for the survey was not the final patentee—perhaps he died and it passed to an heir, or he sold it or traded it for a rifle, or he didn't pay the quitrent and the warrant was "vacated" and reissued to someone else. The *Copied Survey Books* have been posted online at http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/bah/dam/rg/di/r17-114CopiedSurveyBooks/r17-114MainInterfacePage.htm. If you want a copy of the original survey, you may order it from the Pennsylvania Archives in Harrisburg. Surveys can tell you a great deal about your ancestors:

- ❖ Use the location to place your ancestors in historical and geographical context by using relevant county history books that personalize their lives. Make your ancestors come to life by studying the events and people surrounding them.
- ❖ When you pinpoint their tracts, try to find the tax records which document what they owned and show when their sons reached maturity and became taxable themselves.
- ❖ Try to find allied families. They often moved together.

- ❖ Study the neighbors. Often they intermarried with them, worshipped with them, fought with them, and stood as witnesses for them. At a minimum, the neighbors played a far greater role in their lives than our neighbors do today. Look up every survey that adjoins your ancestor's survey.
- ❖ Pay attention to what is on the reverse side of the survey.
- ❖ If you do not know either the name of the warrantee or patentee, but you *do* know the name of the tract, check the Tract Name Indexes which are available as downloadable pdf files under "Statewide Resources" at https://ancestortracks.com. These registers show the name of the patentee, date of the patent, size of the tract, name of the warrantee, date of the warrant, county where it was located at the time, and the volume, book, and page number where the patent is recorded.
- ❖ The most complete view of a neighborhood is on the Township Warrantee Maps. We have transcribed every fact entered on the Warrantee Maps for each township in Berks, Fayette, Greene, Washington, Westmoreland, Dauphin, and Lancaster Counties. We included a second map with superimposed atlas coordinates. We then added information from online surveys, Warrant and Patent Registers, and county histories. These atlases, as well as individual chapters, are available as pdf downloads under "County Atlases" at https://ancestortracks.com.

(4) Return of Survey: Surveyors returned their surveys in batches to the Land Office in preparation for issuing the final title or "patent." This was an internal process and no paperwork exists for this part of the process.

(5) Patent: The last step was to pay yet another fee to the colony or state. The *patent* is the official deed transferring ownership from the colony or state to the individual. He or she now became the *patentee* and all subsequent sales or transfers of these tracts are recorded at the county level. The patents were copied into ledgers called Patent Registers. Sometimes, many years passed between the 3 steps. The Patent Register Indexes have been placed online—access them through https://www.phmc.pa.gov/Archives/Research-Online/Pages/Land-Records-Overview.aspx. They are also available as downloadable pdf files under "Statewide Resources" at https://ancestortracks.com which, again, can be saved onto your hard drive and taken with you for use when no internet connection is available.

- ❖ Each ledger is grouped alphabetically by the first letter of surname, then roughly chronologically. They do not give the Survey Book and page number, but they do show the name of the warrantee and the date of the warrant so the Survey Book reference must be found by consulting the relevant Warrant Register once the name of the warrantee is known.
- ❖ Often the owner settled (or "squatted") illegally before the land was surveyed, then improved it by raising crops or building a cabin and claimed it under a preemption right after it was opened for settlement. In that case, a "warrant [order] to accept" a new (or previously vacated) survey was issued. Once the survey was completed and all fees were paid, the patent was issued.

For help with changing county lines:
- ❖ Year-by-year county lines: https://www.mapofus.org/pennsylvania/
- ❖ Atlas of Historical County Boundaries (more detailed): http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/downloads/states.html
- ❖ County formation chart by PHMC: https://ancestortracks.com/Formation_of_the_Counties.jpg

19th Century maps and atlases showing landowners: We took hundreds, perhaps thousands, of images from 19th century maps and atlases located in the Library of Congress and have posted them under "Free Tools for PA Researchers" at https://ancestortracks.com (scroll down to PA map and click on the county you're interested in). Use these maps in conjunction with published county histories which we've linked to on each county page. We've also added links to the county Township Warrantee Maps in the Pennsylvania State Archives, as well as other county map resources, where they exist.

We at Ancestor Tracks wish you the best of luck tracking your ancestors through their land tracts!