

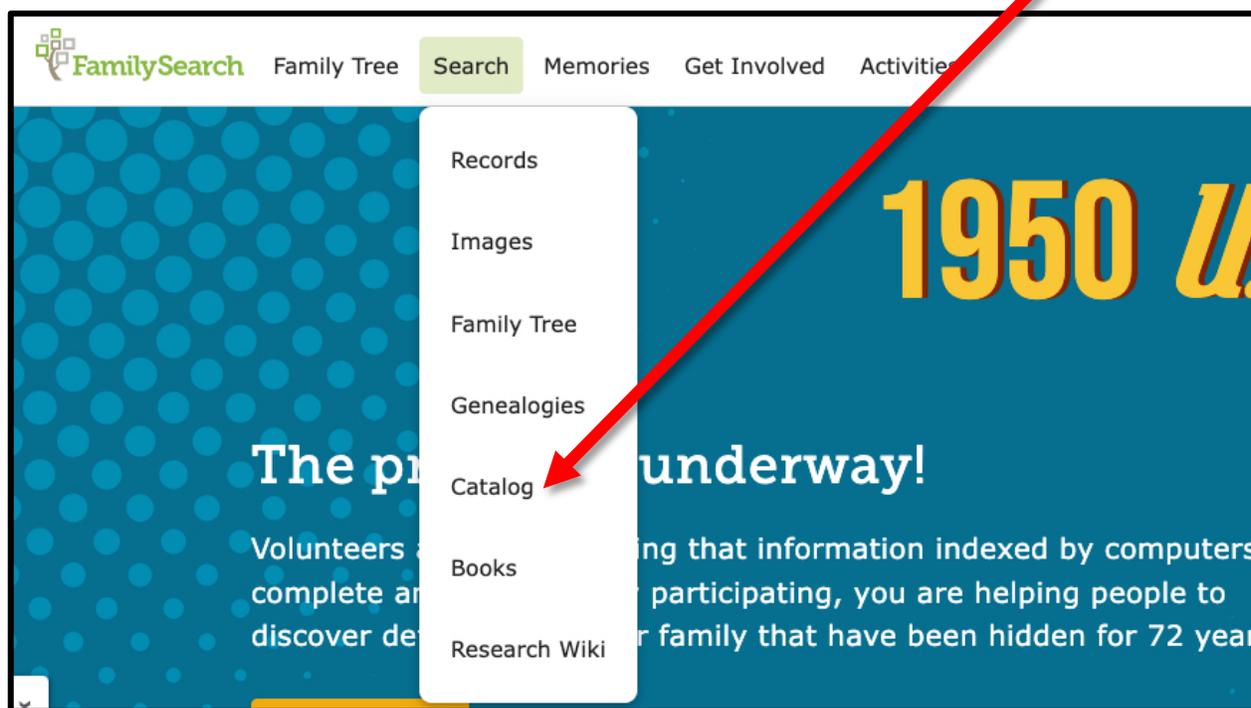
## How to Find Pennsylvania Deeds Online When They Aren't Indexed

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Many county Deed Books have been scanned by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS, formerly called Mormons) and are on microfilm in Salt Lake City. LDS has converted all of its microfilm collection to digital records and nearly all have been placed online for free use by the public at FamilySearch.org. However, most Deed Book images have not been indexed yet. This article is intended for researchers who would like to see, print, and download land records of their forebears but find no name index to the Deed Books on FamilySearch.<sup>1</sup> I'll use one of my ancestors, Daniel Koch, found in the of Westmoreland County, as an example.

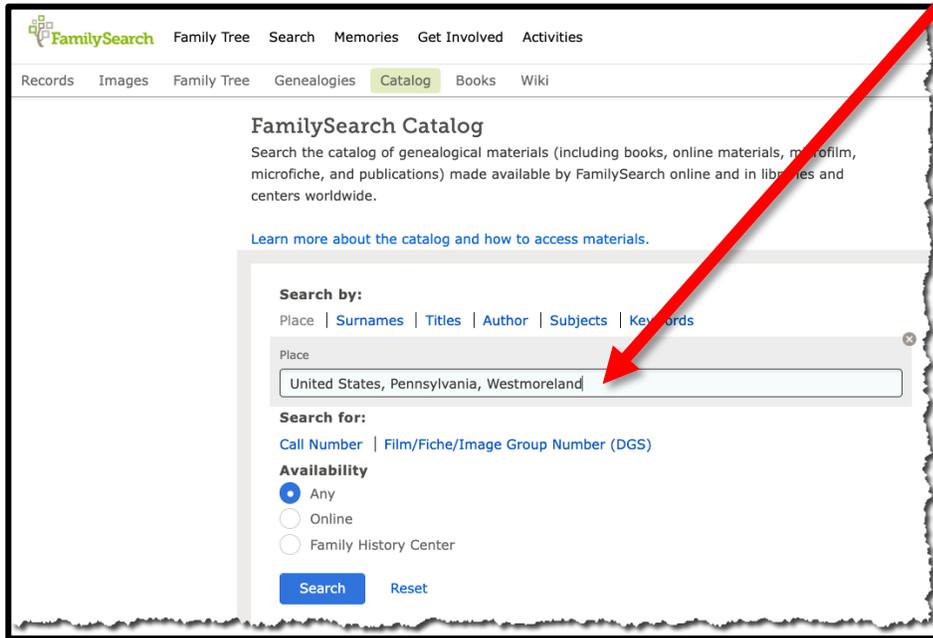
### FamilySearch

1. Log in to your FamilySearch account. If you don't have one, create one—it's free and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints will not try to recruit you.
2. Hover over "Search" to see the drop-down menu and then click on "Catalog."

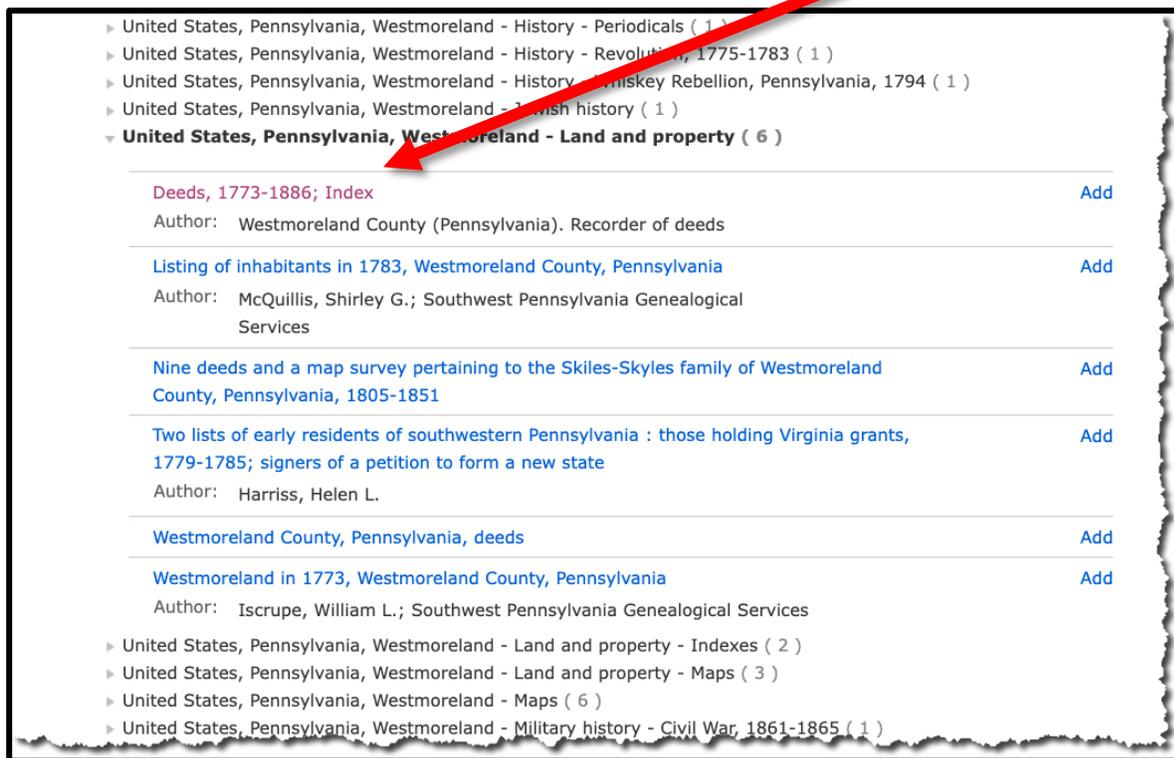


<sup>1</sup> Other Deed Books have been digitized for individual counties by commercial firms and you must pay to access many of them online. For example, you can search <https://pa.uslandrecords.com/palr2/PalrApp/index.jsp> for Allegheny, Fayette, Greene, Lycoming, Pike, Schuylkill, Union, Warren, and Wayne. See <https://www.publicrecords.onlinesearches.com/pennsylvania/property-records/deeds> for example. My *The Keystone: Essential Guide to Pennsylvania Historical County Records* has links to deeds and grantor/grantee indexes for every county.

3. Enter the county in the “Place” box. In this case, I’ll search for Westmoreland Co. Deed Books. When all records for Westmoreland appear, choose the down arrow for “Land and property”



4. There are 6 entries under “Land and Property.” Look for records created by the county’s Recorder of Deeds rather than an author. Click on “Deeds, 1773-1886; Index.” See the endnote on pp. 7-8 for instructions on using the Grantor/Grantee indexes.



In this case, both the Grantor Index and the Grantee Index (“**grantor**” is the seller and “**grantee**” is the buyer”) are available. Western Pennsylvania counties generally used the Russell Index which is very cumbersome—rather than being based on the first letter of the surname, is based on “key letters” (L, M, N, R, and T) that follow the initial letter of the surname!<sup>1</sup> For a great 20-minute video showing how to use it, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CV76vq7fbM&t=12s>; for an amusing article about the Russell Index, see <https://www.legalgenealogist.com/2020/09/23/not-my-fault/>.

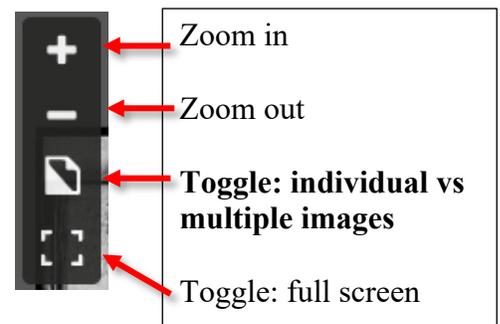
Since I already know that my Daniel Koch’s deed is recorded in Westmoreland Co. Deed Book 1, pg. 487, I don’t need to look him up in the index<sup>2</sup> so I’ll scroll down the “Land and Property” entries and look for Deed Book 1. Notice that it’s kind of lumped in the second entry for deeds: “Deeds, v. C (p. 100-442) – v. D, Jan 1788 – Feb 1792; v. 1, Sept 1791 – Mar 1794.” Note that the camera icon indicates the image is online; if you only see a microfilm icon, refresh the screen—that will usually do the trick and make the images spring to life. I do believe that FamilySearch has posted Deed Book images for all of Pennsylvania’s counties.

Grantee index, surname S	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	929105	8036037	📷
Grantee index, surname T-Z	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	929106	8036036	📷
Deeds, v. A - C (p. 1-109), 1773-1787	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	929165	8036032	📷
Deeds, v. C (p. 100-442) - v. D, Jan 1788 - Feb 1792; v. 1, Sept 1791 - Mar 1794	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	929166	8036031	📷
Deeds, v. 2 - 4 (p. 1-107), Mar 1794 - Sept 1798	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	929167	8085360	📷
Deeds, v. 4 (p. 105-end), Sept 1798 - Feb 1800	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film Item 1	929168	8085361	📷
Deeds, v. 5, May 1799 - July 1800	Family History Library	United States & Canada 2nd Floor Film	929107	8085306	📷

- After you click on the camera icon, you’ll see the small images of all the pages on the film, as well as two navigation tools you will need to use. The first one is to navigate to **specific page numbers**.



The second tool is to resize images on the microfilm. *The one you will probably use the most is the one that toggles between an individual vs. multiple images*



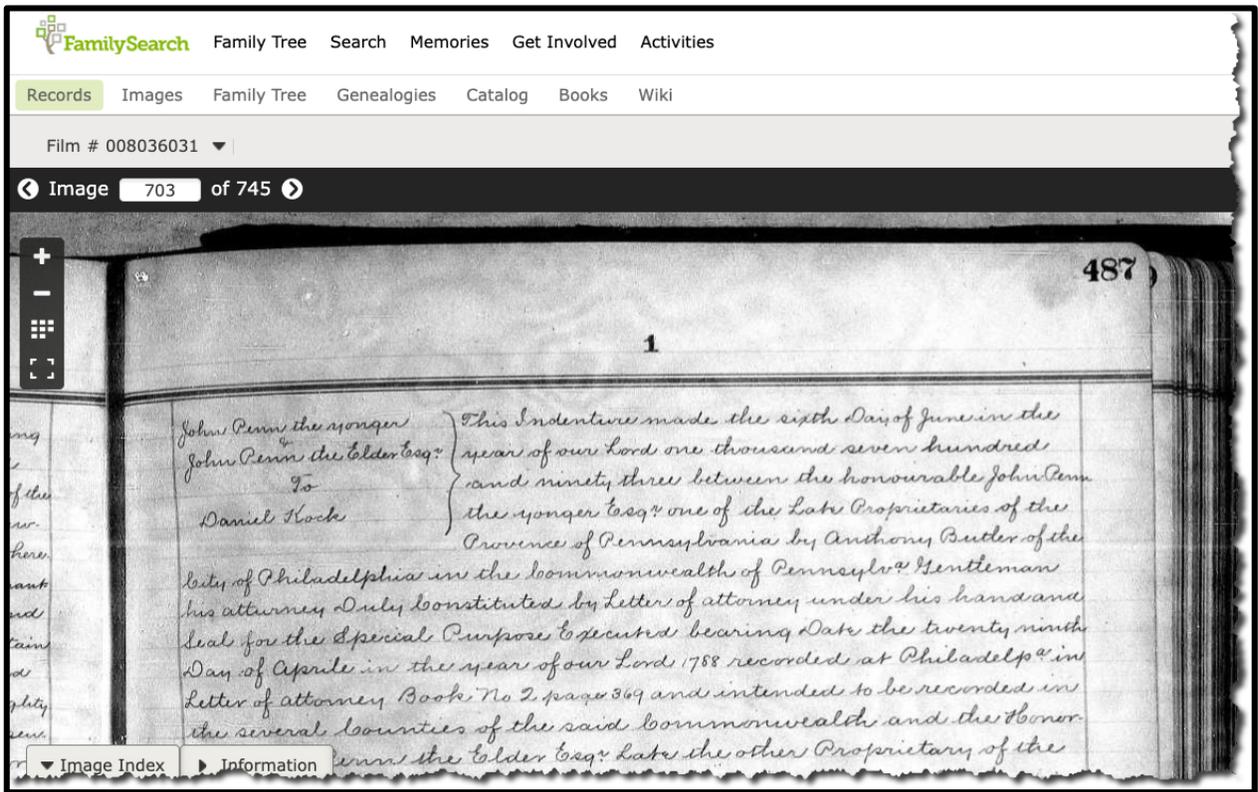
<sup>2</sup> This is from the book I wrote titled *Early Landowners of Pennsylvania: Atlas of Township Patent Maps of Westmoreland County*, page 273, available at <https://ancestortracks.com/wp/home/county-atlases/westmoreland-county/>. He patented (received final title) to Sewickley Manor Lot #7 on 6 January 1793 and that transaction was entered into Westmoreland Co. Deed Book 1, pg. 487.

6. Ok, first I want to get to Deed Book 1. Since the film title shows it contains Deed Book volume C, volume D, and volume 1, I will estimate that volume 1 starts about 2/3 of the way into the roll. That's about image 500 so I'll enter Image "500" of 745 and see where that takes me. This step requires patience because you will need to navigate back and forth until you find the image you want—but it pays off to find exactly what your ancestor bought, how much he (and sometimes she) paid, possibly his neighbors, etc.
  - a. I don't know exactly where Deed Book 1 starts, so I zoom out to make the images small. If I have estimated somewhat correctly, I should be able to see the image that starts the filming of Deed Book 1 (the image is distinctly different) and its relation to page 500 (highlighted in yellow).



- b. Now I can click on the first page of the Deed Book 1 film (which is on image 455 of 745) and zoom in to be sure I have the right book.
7. Daniel Koch's deed is recorded in Westmoreland Co. Deed Book 1, pg. 487, so I need to estimate where that is on the film. Keep in mind that each image contains two pages of the open Deed Book, the left page and the right page. Thus, to get to page 487, I need to divide that by 2 and then add my answer to image 455 which is the break where they began to microfilm Deed Book 1. Half of 487 is about 243. Adding 243 to 455 (the beginning of Vol. 1) gives me 698. Well, darn, image 698 is actually pages 476-477 of the Deed book. No worries, though! I can use the right arrow of the page number tool, clicking through the next few images until I see page 487 (image 703 of 745). There it is! "John Penn the yonger & John Penn the Elder, Esqs To Daniel Kock," and indenture (contract) made 6 June 1793.<sup>3</sup> To see the next pages (488-489) of the indenture, I can click the right arrow once.

<sup>3</sup> The Penns, of course, no longer owned land in Pennsylvania after the Revolutionary War repudiated England's hold on the former colony. If your ancestor's deeds references a sale from the Penns, you may find more on that transaction in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. For example, I found the following survey for Daniel Koch in a in the folder labeled "Cadwalader Papers – Maps," Flat File 12 (subtitled "Westmoreland County:

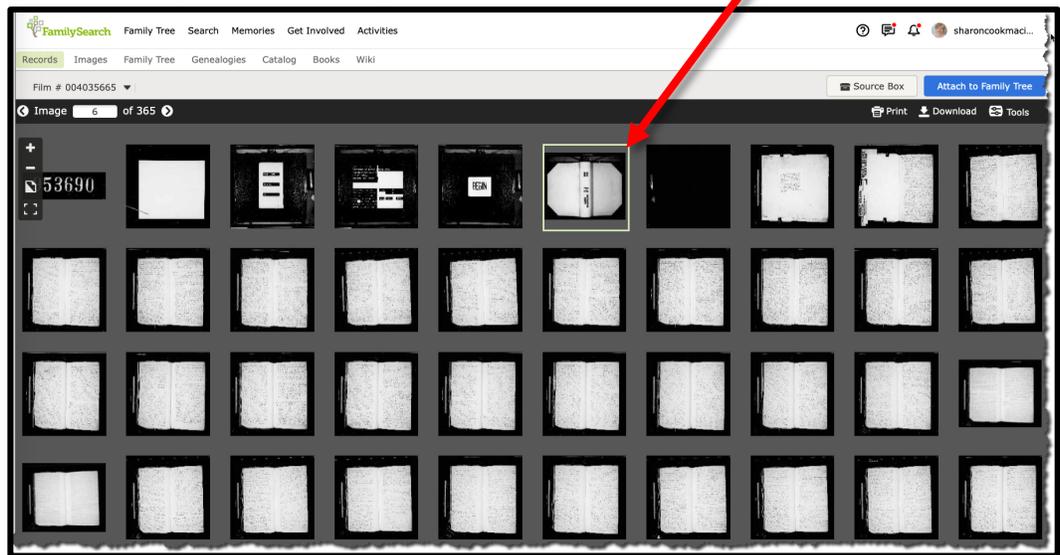


Sewickly Manor, 1790, 1769, 1794, n.d. [CC-D2-F7-2.3.4.5.6.7.]; Denmark Manor, 1784 [CC-D2-F7-1].” This was a November 1790 resurvey of Sewickly Manor lots that had been conveyed to new owners, so Daniel had apparently been on the tract since that time. (see the photo in the footnote continuation below)



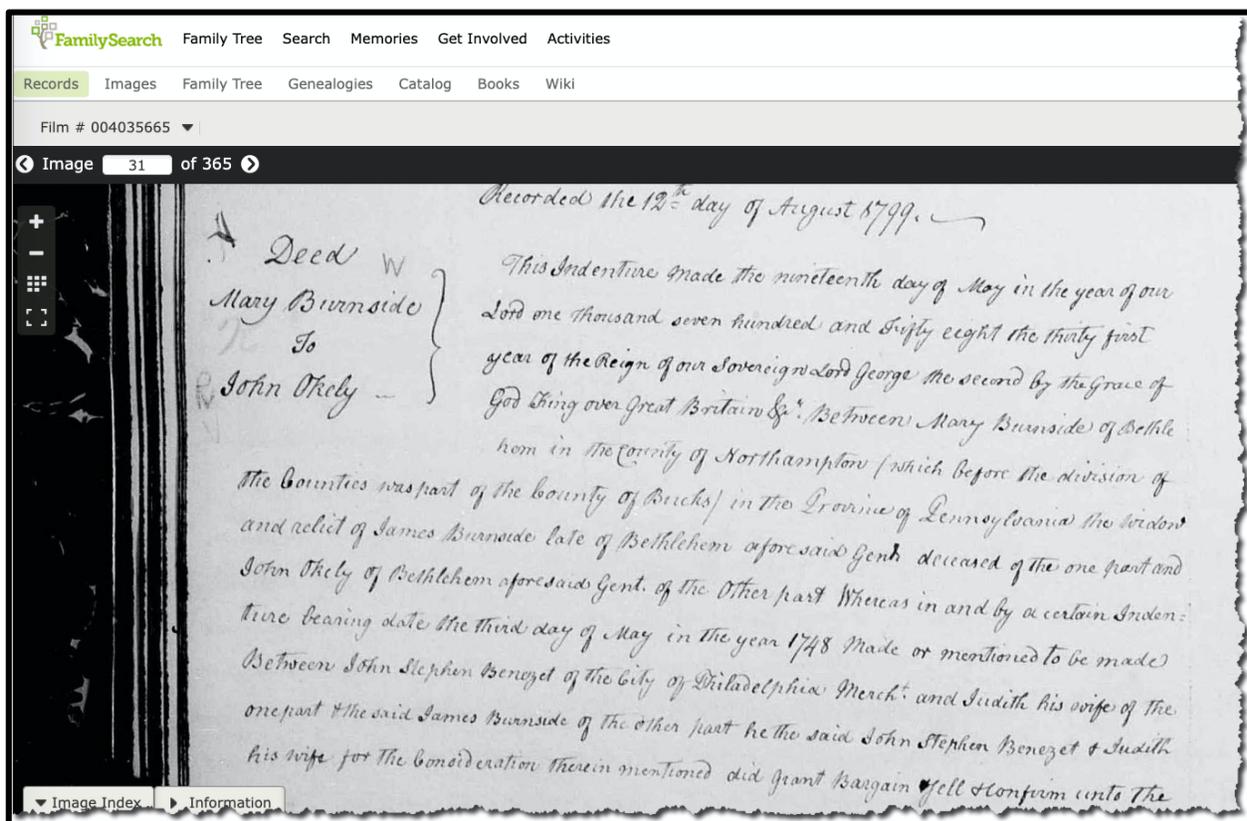
8. Let's look at another example, this time where the deed's date does not appear to match the Deed Book explanation and where a woman owned the parcel. Joel Hoffner's *Early Landowners: Forks of the Delaware, Northampton County, PA*, page 91 (available at <https://ancestortracks.com/wp/home/free-resources/northampton-county/>) shows that John Okely purchased a lot containing 300 acres from Mary Burnside, widow, that he had recorded on 19 May 1758 in Northampton Co. Deed Book F2, pg. 40. To help locate the tract, Hoffner has labeled it Tract #7 on the Bethlehem Township map labeled "SW" (for the Southwest quadrant of Bethlehem Township). We can see Hoffner's depiction of Mary Burnside's tract #7 on the "Bethlehem Township, Early Landowner Map SW Sector" map on pg. 89 of his publication, and we can Hoffner's overall map of Bethlehem Township on pg. 85 plus Google Maps to locate the Burnside tract where Route 378 makes a loop below Eaton Avenue. As it turns out, serendipitously and surprisingly to this author, a 6 ½ acre portion of the original tract is now known as Burnside Plantation and includes a restored [1748 farmhouse](#).

- a. To find the entry in Northampton Deed Book F2, go to the entry for Northampton County labeled "Deeds, 1752-1866; miscellaneous records, 1815-1866, and index, 1752-1926." Scroll down past the grantor and grantee indexes since you already know where it is and open "Deeds, v. F2, 1799-1802." You will see that this microfilm consists of only one book and 365 images. The cover of the Deed Book is clearly visible as image 6.



- b. The deed we are looking for is recorded on page 40. Since each image contains two pages, we'll estimate that the image number should be about 29 since it looks like the first page of the Deed Book is on page 9. We can enter "29" as the image number and see that image is of pages 36-37. Using the right arrow button, we soon find page 40 and "Deed Mary Burnside To John Okely" toward the bottom of the page.
- c. Even though the Deed Book indicates that deeds within the book should only cover 1799-1802, this deed was made on 19 May 1758. However, it was not recorded until 12 August 1799 which is why it's entered in this Deed Book. The

deed shows that Mary was the widow of James Burnside “late of Bethlehem,” gentleman, who purchased the land from John Stephen Benezet and his wife Judith Benezet of Philadelphia on 3 May 1748. The land, formerly in Bucks County “before the division of the Counties” was “situate on Menakasic Creek which falls into the Western Branch of the River Delaware.”



Conclusion: As you can see, locating a deed in an unindexed Deed Book can be done, but you have to be patient. The easiest way to find a deed is in a published source, a map, or online. If you can't find a reference to the book and page number, use the county's Grantor Index and the Grantee Index. The Deed Book reference will typically consist of a volume number or letter followed by the page number. Remember that a deed records a sale or transfer of property from one individual to another. Sometimes a piece of property is foreclosed on by the sheriff for lack of payment of taxes—these deeds may be recorded in separate books; other times an individual or bank or company forecloses on the property because the buyer has not paid the required payments.

Also, not all transfers of property are recorded in deeds. No law required these transactions to be recorded and each recordation required a fee. Many times a piece of property was passed down several times, usually among family members, without being recorded until it was to be sold outside the family.

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<sup>i</sup> Here's an example for using the Russell Index after watching the 20-minute video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4CV76vq7fbM&t=12s>. Let's say you found your John Heltman/Hiltman in the 1790 census of "More" township, Northampton County and you want to find his land transactions. Follow these instructions to find John in the Grantor Index:

- ❖ Log on to FamilySearch.org (you may have to create a free membership first).
- ❖ Click on "Search" > "Catalog" and search for Northampton County, Pennsylvania.
- ❖ Scroll down to "United States, Pennsylvania, Northampton – Land and property"
- ❖ Scroll down to "Deeds, 1752-1866; miscellaneous records, 1815-1866, and Index, 1752-1926."
- ❖ Search in the Grantor Index labeled "Grantor index, surname H, given names J-Z"
- ❖ On image 6 of 865, you will see under the key letters "LT" that "Heltman/Hiltman" is on section 913 of the index [ignore the first letter of his surname since you're already in the "H" Grantor Index and you will see that L and T occur in his name]
- ❖ You will have to experiment by entering a number in the "Image \_\_\_ of 865" at the top of the screen. There are actually 26 pages in section 913 and the image you are looking for is on the 25<sup>th</sup> page [image 43 of 865]. There is one entry for John Heltman in 1792 and several entries for similar names from 1821-1926. Since you know he was living in the county in 1790, the first entry (Deed Book H1, pg. 217) is the most interesting for you. Look through the deeds in chronological order to see if these are for the same man, taking note of any witnesses who might be related. Note that the 1792 sale to Daniel Kleckner (Deed Book H1, pg. 217, in 1792 seems to have been involved in a sheriff's transaction in 1843 (Sheriff Ledger 1 ½, pg. 599) but this is not online at this time and would need to be ordered from the Register of Deeds of Northampton County.
- ❖ Now find the deed. Go to "Deeds, v. G1-H1, 1789-1795." Since there are two Deed Books (G1 and H1) on this microfilm, you need to find the start of Deed Book H1 about halfway through the microfilm (it actually starts on image 353). Then experiment until you find page 217 (which is on image 467). Rather than a deed of land, this is a Bill of Sale of livestock, crops, and a feather bed. The document was dated 28 May 1792 and recorded 19 Nov 1792. This suggests he didn't own the land but lived on it (per the bed and crops he raised) and was perhaps leasing it. Since he himself (not an agent or heir) was selling his crops, he was probably moving.