Genealogy and Maps:
A Perfect Marriage for Tracking Ancestors
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Genealogists recreate their ancestors' lives by gathering myriad documents: census records, vital records, military accounts, deeds, tax lists, county and family histories, online databases, etc. We go to courthouses, historical societies, libraries, and conferences. But the stitching that holds all of the documented facts of a typical family into a coherent tapestry comes from consulting maps in all their forms. Since most genealogical records are filed by geographical area, you can't find an ancestor's records unless you know where he or she lived. Maps unveil how they traveled, with whom they intermarried, and how they lived their lives.

Brief Methodology:
- ❖ Use census records or written records (or even family memories) to place your ancestors in a general area. Pay attention to the 2-3 pages before and after their entries and note those surnames. Pay particular attention to at least the 10 neighbors on either side of them. If you can't find your ancestors in the next census, look up each of these neighbors to see where they were living and check that area for your ancestors. Friends and neighbors often migrated together in groups or followed each other to new locations. Look carefully in the new area as well as adjoining jurisdictions—your ancestor's name may have been misspelled or even reversed in the index and you'll only find it by going page-by-page in the census. Don't forget state censuses. Keep maps at hand to track their movements.

> **Remember:** Documents such as wills and deeds were recorded in the county as it existed *at that time*. Maps show earlier boundaries.

  - o Don't assume the family account is literally correct. Many people, when asked where they are from, will state a nearby town that people are likely to be familiar with. For example, I will often say I'm from the D.C. area but I don't actually live in the D.C. Use maps of the time period to see nearby town names.
  - o Remember that county (and even some state) boundaries changed over time. Records were filed in the county jurisdiction at the time the record was recorded. Use Newberry Library's *Atlas of Historical County Boundaries* (see below).
- ❖ Create a timeline that follows your family from generation to generation through time and place.

Types of maps that yield migration patterns, family relationships, other records:

19th-century maps and atlases	Land ownership maps (cadastral)
"Bird's eye" or panoramic maps	Military & battle maps
BLM maps	Plat/tract maps
Cemetery maps	Privately produced maps
Census maps	Railroad maps
City and town maps	Real estate insurance maps
Genealogy software maps	Topographic maps
Google maps and overlays	

Descriptions of selected resources and their uses:

- ❖ **Topographical and transportation maps** suggest migration patterns caused by physical barriers
    - ○ Canals: www.eriecanal.org/maps.html
    - ○ Overland trails: https://www.familysearch.org/wiki/en/US_Migration_Trails_and_Roads and Beverly Whitaker's excellent "Early American Roads and Trails" http://freepages.rootsweb.com/~gentutor/genealogy/trails.html
    - ○ https://www.mapofus.org/
- ❖ **19th-century maps and atlases showing landowners**: Use 19th-century maps in conjunction with the many county and city histories written around the centennial (1870s and 1880s). Even if your ancestors never appear in a published history, the events that happened in the township or county where they were living were very real to them, but you won't know how close your ancestors were to those events unless you locate them on maps. Watch for families who intermarried with yours and may have traveled with them. Locate the **nearest churches and cemeteries** on those maps because those are likely the churches they attended and the cemeteries they may be buried in.
    - ○ Ancestry ($) - Use the search engine at "U.S., Indexed County Land Ownership Maps, 1860-1918" at https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/1127/ and "U.S., Indexed Early Land Ownership and Township Plats, 1785-1898" at https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2179/.
    - ○ Ancestor Tracks (https://ancestortracks.com/wp/): For Pennsylvania research, see the myriad of free land ownership maps obtained from the Map Room of the Library of Congress posted on each of county page as well as the many resources listed in *The Keystone: Essential Guide to Pennsylvania Historical County Records*.
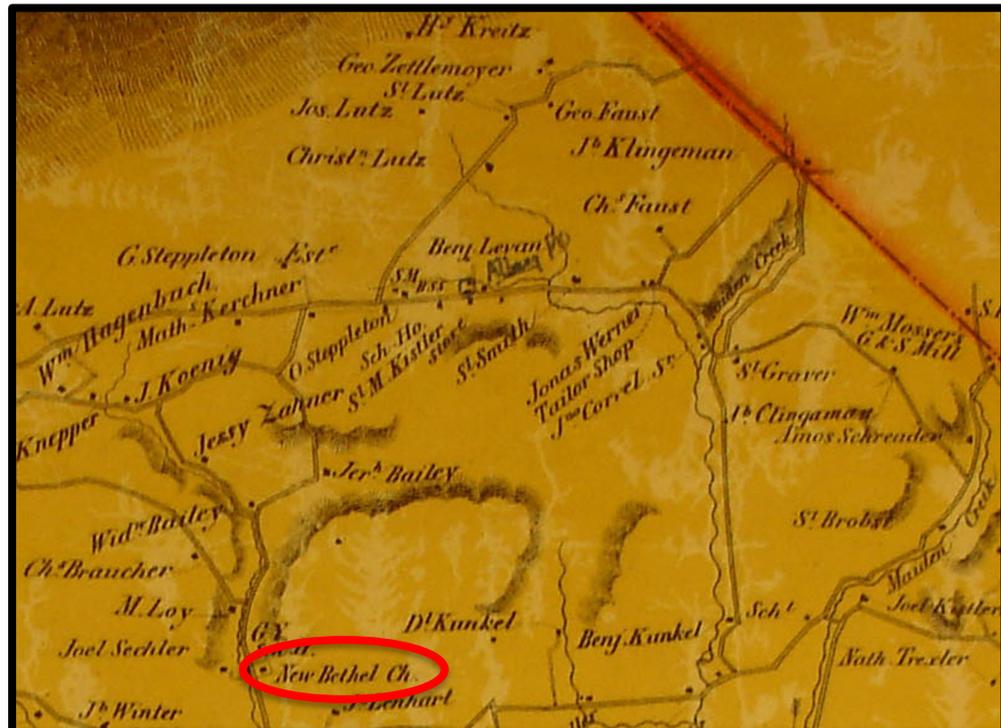
- o Old Maps Online (http://www.oldmapsonline.org/): enter the county or town in the search bar; when you find a map image with an interesting date, click on "View this map" and it will take you to the site on which the map is posted
- o Alternately, search Google for "historic atlases" and "historic maps" and "plat maps" for county and state. Many state historical societies, universities, and county websites have posted such images; others have been published by private individuals.

- ❖ **Birds-eye maps** of towns can often reveal a church attended by your family or a nearby cemetery; same for city directories (then look up those cemeteries on FindAGrave)
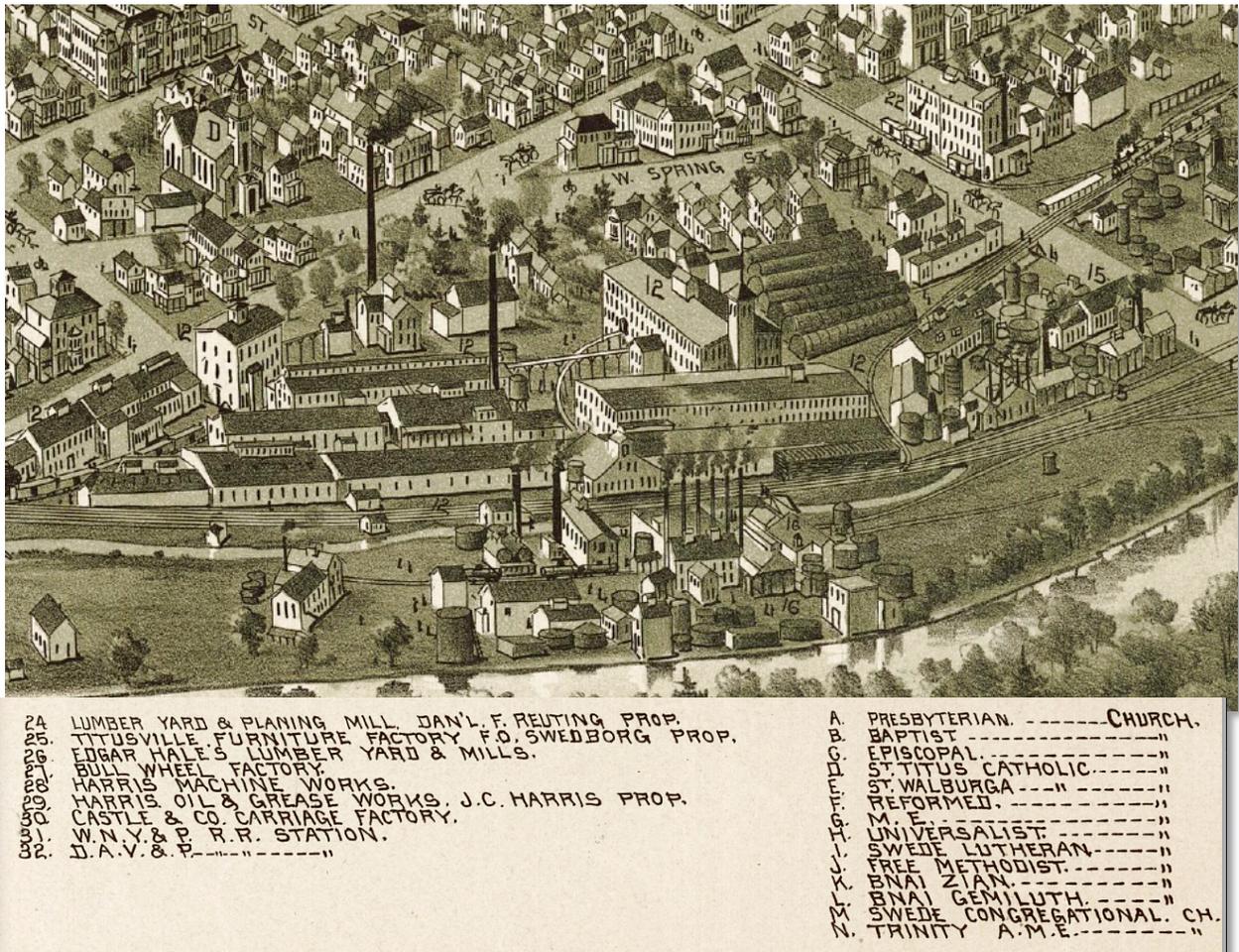
- ❖ Real estate fire maps show whether dwellings were made of brick or frame (indicating they would burn easily) and give information about some structure usages such as houses of worship, stables, taverns, and steam cleaners.
- ❖ Geographic Names Information System (GNIS): https://edits.nationalmap.gov/apps/gaz-domestic/public/search/names
  - o Search for any geographic name, even obsolete ones (abandoned cemetery, church, crossing, forest, populated place, post office, etc.)

❖ Home Town Locator (http://www.hometownlocator.com/) is essentially an online gazetteer for all 50 states, including many obsolete features.

U.S. Changing county boundary lines

In order to access the records your ancestors left behind (wills, court, land, marriage, death, etc.) and recreate their lives, you need to know where to look. Most records for your family will be in a county courthouse, but which county? Over time, county boundaries changed and new counties were carved from "parent" counties. Your family may not have moved but the county changed around them, so you may find their records in more than one county. There are a few tools for determining county boundaries over time, but the *Newberry Atlas of Historical County Boundaries* is in a class of its own.

o Newberry Library's *Atlas of Historical County Boundaries* paired with Google Earth: http://publications.newberry.org/ahcbp/ has three sections: online interactive maps for each state, downloadable state atlases, and overlays that work with Google Earth. For a more detailed, illustrated article I wrote, see https://ancestortracks.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/Newberry-Atlas-handout-2024.pdf

o Interactive Maps: Click on a state and then "View Interactive Map" where you can select a date and see county boundaries for each state as the counties evolved over time. Check out the other options as well.

o Downloadable Files: Click on "Download Files" where you can access "State Downloads" and "U.S. Downloads" (I use the "State Downloads"). There are three downloads for each state to choose from: GIS, KMZ, and PDF. I download the KMZ and PDF files for each state in which I am researching:

▪ KMZ Files: Click on and save the KMZ file which may be zipped so you may need a program to unzip it. Since these files are overlaid onto Google Earth, be sure to download and install Google Earth (free) onto your computer (https://www.google.com/earth/versions/). Once you've installed it, open Google Earth, then navigate to where your ancestor lived. Next, open the KMZ file for that state by double-clicking on it from wherever you saved it on your computer. You will see the counties superimposed onto today's Google Earth. Finally, move the slider in the upper left corner to whatever date you are searching to see the counties as they existed at that time. The counties may have changed shape around the family, giving you more than one county where records might be filed.

▪ PDF Files: An entire atlas exists for each state showing changing county boundaries. Each map shows the county boundaries when each legislative act changed the makeup of the state. Download the atlases for free as zipped pdfs from this website. Unzip them and save to your computer.

o Pennsylvania: https://www.mapofus.org/pennsylvania/: scroll down to "Interactive Map of Pennsylvania County Formation" and click year-by-year to see county changes

Where to Find Published and Online Maps Helpful for Genealogists:
❖ National
o Atlas of the Historical Geography of the United States (https://dsl.richmond.edu/historicalatlas/): amazing website with 700+ digitized

maps animated over time showing explorations, national origins, transportation, economy, railroads, presidential elections, etc.

- o Library of Congress digital online collection: https://www.loc.gov/maps/
  - You can search using the general search box at the top of the page and then filter to time period or filter to the type of map (railroad, Civil War, cities and towns, panoramic maps, Sanborn maps, etc). You can download these maps and save them to your computer. The Library of Congress is continually scanning its huge inventory, so check back often. Unfortunately, the changes they have made to their site have made finding specific maps much harder.
- o Topographic maps:
  - https://www.usgs.gov/programs/national-geospatial-program/national-map
- o U.S. Digital Map Library: http://usgwarchives.net/maps/maps.html
- o Google maps: You can create migration maps using "pins" on Google maps and use the date slider to see counties as they existed at that time.
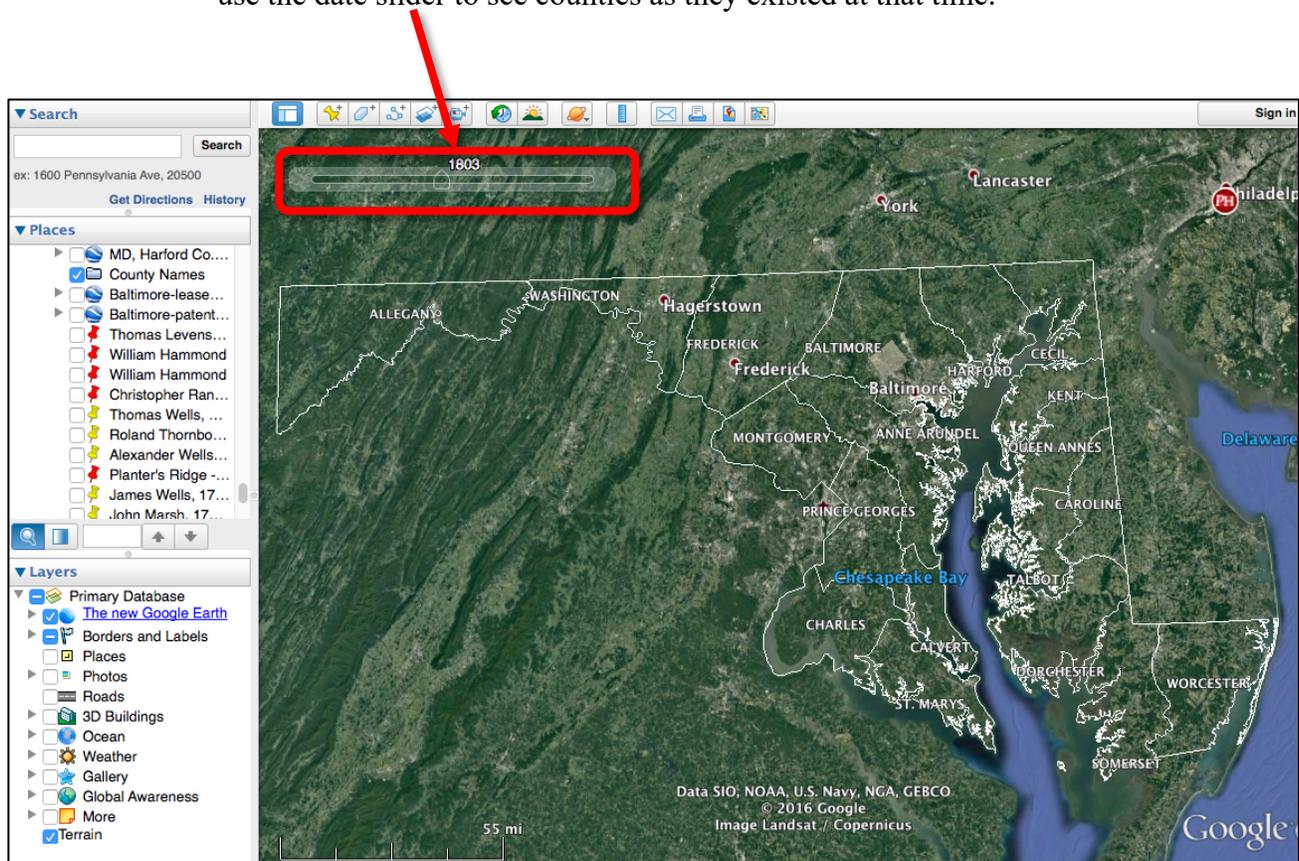
o   Bureau of Land Management (https://glorecords.blm.gov/search/default.aspx, settlers of 30 Public Domain or State-Land States): Search the online patents to see the final document that conferred ownership of a tract from the federal government to the first individual to own it. Once you receive a hit, be sure to enable the map by checking "Map." Be aware that this is the *final* document in a usually years-long process. Obtain the Case File for each patent from the National Archives in Washington, D.C.—the Case File may contain detailed information about the family, how the land was improved, military information, personal descriptions, naturalization details and documents, etc.

o   A membership in www.historygeo.com ($) allows you to see online all of the plat info plus historic maps. Information included in these volumes comes from the Bureau of Land Management patent database or the Texas General Land Office database. $20 for 3 months access, $34 for 6 months, or $59/year. If you're researching homesteaders or early residents of specific counties, I can't recommend this site enough!

o   If your ancestor wasn't actually the *first* owner of his tract but you know the township, range and section in a particular county, you can still find the exact location and first owner of the tract (who might be related) by using the BLM's Land Patent site (https://glorecords.blm.gov/default.aspx). First, enter the state and county under "Location." Skip the "Names" section and fill in the township, range and section under "Land Description." The next page will give you the names of each original owner of that tract of land. Click on the link in the

"Accession" column and that will give the patent for the original owner who may not be of interest to you. What will be of interest to you, however, is the map at the bottom of the page under "Land Descriptions." You must click under "Map" in the first column to put a check mark in the box and activate the map or it may not appear! You can zoom in or out to see the exact location of the tract.

- If you know the township, range, and section where your ancestor lived, enter that information at https://www.randymajors.org/section-township-range-maps-by-state
- If you know the latitude and longitude (perhaps the place no longer exists but you located it at GNIS), you can convert it to township and section at https://www.randymajors.org/section-township-range-maps-by-state.

❖ Privately published maps and atlases (many online) – do a Google search using your county name and "atlas" or "plat map" or something similar.
   - https://www.historicmapworks.com/ ($) has one of the most extensive county atlas collections in the U.S. You can view the maps but cannot zoom in completely unless you create an account and deposit a nominal fee into it. Use this site to first find out what landowner maps and atlases exist for a county, and then search for other sites that might have posted those maps for free.
   - Deedmapper ($99; http://directlinesoftware.com/) is a do-it-yourself land platting program. Using original deeds ("Beginning at a black oak..."), you enter the metes and bounds and then the metes and bounds of neighbors. If you own it, you can access user-generated content through their "Deed Data Pool" (especially good for Virginia—see below)
   - Plat Plotter (free; https://platplotter.blogspot.com/p/blog-page.html (but see the "Quick Start Guide" at http://platplotter.appspot.com/lib/pp_help.html#.WQ6bAlPytgs) allows you to enter the metes and bounds from your land description to product a plat map that can be viewed in Google Maps. Very nice program!
   - David Rumsey (free; Wow!): http://www.davidrumsey.com/view/google-maps
   - Histopolis: free, collaborative source that pinpoints locations - http://www.histopolis.com/
   - Linkpendium (free): http://www.linkpendium.com/ (search for the location, then scroll down to "Maps and Gazetteers" under "Statewide resources" or specific counties
   - www.familysearch.org (free; search the catalog)
   - Railroad maps: many, including https://www.loc.gov/collections/railroad-maps-1828-to-1900/about-this-collection/
   - Fire insurance maps – the privately published insurance maps are often in local repositories. The most complete collection is at the Library of Congress which is gradually posting them online. See http://www.loc.gov/rr/geogmap/sanborn/.
   - Road maps – often in local directories (see below)
   - City directory maps –city directories often have maps in them that can be consulted when you find a family listed. These directories may show which streets have been renamed and can be invaluable when a family appears to have moved from one census to another. Many are being posted online (ex: NC has

posted various directories from 1860-1963 covering 108 cities in 64 counties, https://lib.digitalnc.org/search?p=City+directories&sf=year&so=a
- Fold3 (https://www.fold3.com/collection/city-directories/publications) has many directories for major cities – search by location
- Ancestry (https://www.ancestry.com/search/collections/2469/) has a collection of city directories spanning 1822-1995.
- Internet Archive (free): www.archive.org (search for location)
- Whatever genealogy software you are using undoubtedly has a mapping function

❖ University and Library Collections – there are many, many university and library collections online. Some examples:
- University of Pittsburgh's "Historic Pittsburgh" site: https://historicpittsburgh.org/pittsburgh-maps
- University of Texas, Perry-Castaneda Map Collection: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/united_states.html
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- Boston Public Library's Norman Leventhal Digital Map Collection: https://collections.leventhalmap.org
- Johns Hopkins: https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/handle/1774.2/32585
- New York Public Library online atlases: https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/collections/atlases-of-the-united-states#/?tab=navigation
- Historical Map Archive posted by the Department of Geography at the University of Alabama: https://alabamamaps.ua.edu/historicalmaps/us_states/states.html

❖ Selected State Collection examples:
Maryland:
- "Beneath the Underground: The Flight to Freedom and Communities in Antebellum Maryland" shows people on the 1865 *Martenet's Atlas of Maryland*: http://slavery.msa.maryland.gov/html/mapped_images/mapsindex.html (search this source and others by name at https://slavery2.msa.maryland.gov/pages/MapsSearch.aspx); this site is also an outstanding resource for researching enslaved people in Maryland
- Historical Society of Carroll County, MD "Tracey Collection*"* in Westminster (*410/ 848-6494)*
  - Early land patents west of Baltimore Co. The index cards (arranged by tract name, not landowners' names; navigate using <<PREVIOUS NEXT>> at top right of page) are online at http://mdhistory.msa.maryland.gov/msaref07/tracey_fr_wa_cr/html/index.html but a visit is more efficient if you have early landowners in western MD (open W-Sat, 12:00-4:00pm, $5 user fee). Also see Mike Pierce's free and truly amazing "Happy Map-Maker's Website" (http://map-maker.org/).
North Carolina:
- State Library of North Carolina: http://web.lib.unc.edu/nc-maps/
- NC State University: https://www.lib.ncsu.edu/gis/historic.html

- Land Grants by David McCorkle: https://info.nclandgrants.com/about/
- Pennsylvania (free):
  - USGenWeb Digital Map Library for Pennsylvania:
    http://www.usgwarchives.net/maps/pa/county/pausgs.htm
  - 19th Century PA County Atlases: free, downloadable images at
    https://ancestortracks.com/wp/free-resources/.
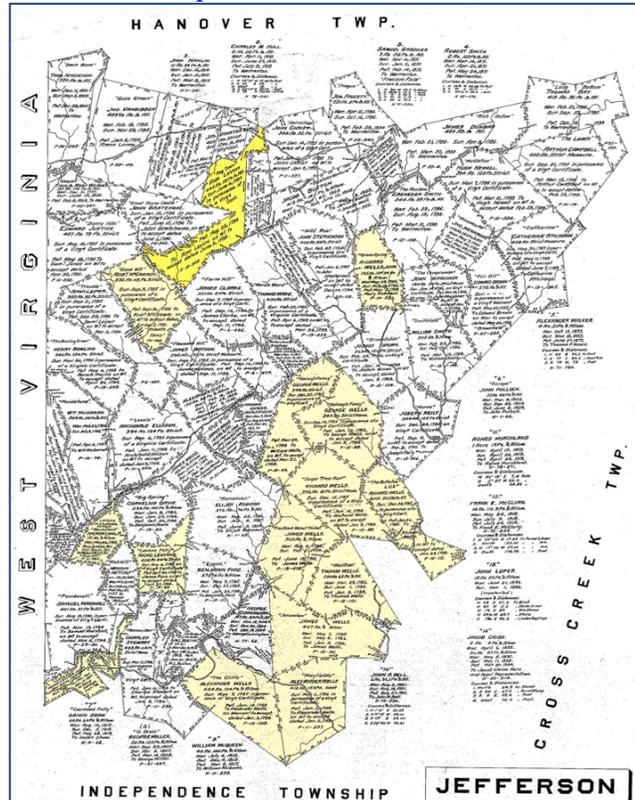
Jefferson Township, Washington County, PA Warrant Map (1st landowners)
Courtesy *Pennsylvania State Archives*

- VA (& others):
  - https://www.cyndislist.com/us/va/maps/
  - Deed Data Pool: http://www.directlinesoftware.com/pool.htm (you can only see the indexes for free; if you want to download these files that volunteers have donated into a map, you will need to have a copy of DeedMapper on your computer for $99)
  - https://mapgeeks.org/virginia/
- KY:
  - Map Geeks: https://mapgeeks.org/kentucky/

International Maps: Old Maps Online: http://www.oldmapsonline.org/
- ❖ Old maps of the area (European, North American, etc.) show up on the right side. Click on your choice and zoom in to see any of their 30,000 historic maps

Videos on Youtube
  - "Two Centuries of US Immigration": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ie-X_cdbw4Y
  - Nice 10-minute "Growth of a Nation" overview:
    https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wAXuDSPcCr8