

# House & Property Research

Information provided by the  
Cumberland County  
Historical Society  
on March 8, 2010.



To get started, you **must** know the name(s) of the current owners of the property/house.

## Recording Information:

- ◆ Record the source of all information (You will be surprised how often you may need to refer to it)
- ◆ Try to find original records or reproduced images of the originals
- ◆ Be careful not to publish or write down misleading information
- ◆ Be open-minded
- ◆ Do not discount anything, if something is in question, try to find multiple sources
- ◆ There are two trails for research: Paper Trail and a People Trail--try all avenues
- ◆ If possible, make physical hard copies of everything

## People:

- ◆ Be prepared to try different spellings of the same name  
For examples: Reidenbach, Reidebaugh, Radebaugh, Rodebaugh, Roudbaugh, Ridebaugh or Solomon READ/REID
- ◆ Married Ladies: Try looking for: Cynthia (Lee) HAMILTON SMITH
- ◆ Aliases: Donald Dale SMITH (a.k.a. Donald Dale JONES)
- ◆ Nicknames: Donald "Skip" Dale SMITH

## Dates:

- ◆ Typically recorded Date Month Year: 27 February 2007
- ◆ Be sure to do a four-digit year  
(Make sure you are not accidentally using "1906" or "2006" instead of "1706" or 1806")
- ◆ Be as specific as possible without misleading--Use phrases like "circa," "before" or "after" if you are unsure about an exact date
- ◆ If you know an event took place between two dates, record the date as:  
"bet. 13 April 1789 - 3 May 1880"

## Main Resources

### ◆ DEEDS

#### If you know the owner's name:

New Courthouse, Carlisle (for Cumberland County only)—Deeds, especially older ones, will indicate who owned the property. That doesn't necessarily mean they lived there. It may have been a rental property, which was quite common.

From deeds, you can figure out the Chain of Title since the deed should reference previous deed; you can trace it back further and further in this manner.

#### If you don't know the owner's name:

Try Tax Assessment Office in Old Courthouse, Carlisle (for Cumberland County only)—They also have an online database.

Caveat: These will be listed by township. Remember, over time the property boundaries for townships and counties have changed significantly; be sure to look in surrounding townships as well.

#### Information on Deeds:

- ◆ Index Number
  - ◆ Grantor's (seller) Address
  - ◆ Grantee's (buyer) Name
  - ◆ Consideration (Amount of money exchanging hands)
  - ◆ Property Description
- Caveat on Property Descriptions:  
These could be difficult to comprehend, they may use references such as "behind the oak tree" or "beside the large rock" and the oak tree and rock may no longer exist. Look for (items) such as creeks, rivers, roads, etc.; those will be more helpful.

#### ◆ Restrictions

##### Caveat on Restrictions:

Although some restrictions might be that the new owners cannot open a business on the property or something similar, be prepared for restrictions such as not allowing African Americans to live on the property or other prejudices (as given the time, these things happened).

#### Remember:

- ◆ The further back you go, the harder the deeds will be to read—due to age, poor/strange handwriting and misspellings.
- ◆ Even if the house/building is not that old, the property IS. The land may have a much richer history than you imagined.

### ◆ CITY DIRECTORIES

These are no longer published, but are an excellent source when researching properties. They are arranged by street address and may even give the resident's occupations.

### ◆ CENSUS RECORDS

Cumberland County has Census records available from 1880-1930. The 1940s will soon be made available—as Census records remain private until they are 70 years old.

### ◆ NEWSPAPERS & MAGAZINES

Up until the mid-19th Century, newspapers would include social events given at people's homes: weddings, parties, etc.—as well as with today—births, deaths and marriages. They may also include: Auctions, Fires, Sheriff's Sales, etc. although will need at least an approximate date of these events in order to locate a possible article.

### ◆ MAPS

Currently the CCHS has maps of Cumberland County from 1858 and 1872.

Maps Caveat: Be aware that many maps used to be hand-drawn and that the distances and measurements may not be accurate and that some items could be the artist's conception.

- ◆ Atlas
  - ◆ Bird's Eye View Maps
  - ◆ Plot
  - ◆ Survey
  - ◆ Road Papers
  - ◆ Sanborn
- Sanborn maps are "Fire Insurance Maps" and are very detailed and useful, but generally only exist for "in town" properties.
- On Sanborns Maps: **Red House** = Brick, **Blue House** = Stone, **Yellow House** = Frame

### ◆ ORPHAN'S COURT

Source for birth, death & marriage certificates.

#### Remember:

Orphan's Court has nothing to do with parentless children, it is simply a place for items that do not fall under any other category.

Cumberland County has birth and death certificates from 1893-1906. Anything further back, you would need to request from the state, as they are housed elsewhere.

### ◆ CHURCH & CEMETERY RECORDS

Many churches will keep birth, death and marriage records of their parishioners.

### ◆ PROTHONOTARY—CIVIL COURT RECORDS

If the property was involved in any type of civil court case (trespassing, property dispute, minor offenses) this is where the records of it would be kept.

### ◆ REGISTER OF WILLS

Wills, Estate Inventories, Vendue

### ◆ RECORDER OF DEEDS

Deeds

### ◆ BOROUGH & MUNICIPALITIES

Building permits

### ◆ State Archives—Begin in 1682

<http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/state.archives/2887>

Link for land records is on left-hand side.

### First Title to the Land was a Five State Process

- ◆ Application
- ◆ Warrant
- ◆ Survey
- ◆ Return of Survey
- ◆ Patent

### Useful places to look:

Warrant Registers  
Patent Registers

## Other Resources

- ◆ Architectural Journals
- ◆ Builders' Catalogs & Manuals
- ◆ Biographical Annals
- ◆ Family Genealogies
- ◆ Insurance Records
- ◆ Local Histories
- ◆ Local Tour Guides
- ◆ Manuscript Groups

## Photographs

Many historical societies and state archives have archived photographs. You can try to find a photo of the property by using:

- ◆ Address of the Property
- ◆ Street Name  
(Remember: the street name may have changed over the years)
- ◆ Names of Businesses that were nearby  
(There are many photos of businesses, if the property is near enough, it may show up in a photo.)
- ◆ Bridges, Roads, Other Landmarks  
(Again, if the property is near, it may have been captured in a photo.)
- ◆ Names of Families that have lived there

## Architectural Styles (May Assist in Dating the House)

Remember: These are only useful tools. Due to style revivals, a Colonial-style home may be from the Colonial Period (1670-1820) or from a Colonial Revival (1860-1900) wherein that style became popular again. You will need more sources to authenticate, but architectural style can be a good place to start if you do not know the date of the home.

Due to personal tastes, over the years architectural elements may have been removed, added or changed—so you may need to go roof style, window spacing or other “unchangeable” features to determine style.

Other clues may exist, for example, if the house has horsehair plaster, it most likely was build before the 1900s.

<b>1670-1820</b>	Colonial	
<b>1735-1790</b>	Georgian	
<b>1790-1820</b>	Federal Adam	
<b>1820-1860</b>	Greek Revival	
<b>1840-1860</b>	Early Victorian Gothic Revival Italian Villa Romanesque	
<b>1860-1900</b>	Victorian Italianate Beaux Arts Second Empire Victorian Gothic Stick Style Queen Anne Chateausque Richardsonian Shingle Style Classical Revival Colonial Revival	
<b>1900-1940</b>	Prairie School American Foursquare Bungalow Period Revivals Modern Multi-Family Residences Arts & Crafts Spanish Mission Mail Order Homes	
<b>1940-Present</b>	Ranch Style Split-Level Cape Cod Revival “McMansion”	International Style A-Frame Post Modern

# Land Measurements

Remember: Land measurements have changed over the years as well. Here are some terms/measurements you will probably come across in your search.

## LINEAR MEASUREMENTS

- 1 Link = 7.92 Inches
- 1 Rod (pole) = 16.5 Feet
- 1 Chain = 4 Perches
- 1 Chain = 66 Feet
- 80 Chains = 1 Mile
- 8,000 Links = 1 Mile

## SQUARE MEASUREMENTS

- 640 Acres = 1 Square Mile
- 1 Section = 1 Square Mile
- 1 Perch = 30 1/4 Square Yards
- 160 Square Perches = 1 Acre
- 6,400 Square Chains = 640 Acres

## HOW THEY FIT TOGETHER

- 1 Rod = 25 Links
- 1 Chain = 4 Rods
- 1 Chain = 100 Links
- 1 Mile = 320 Rods
- 1 Acre = 10 Square Chains

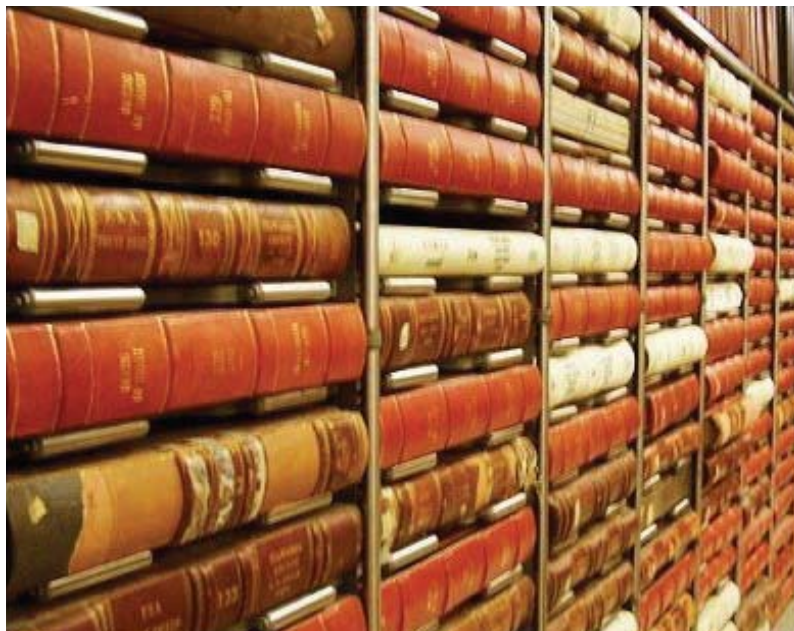


# Abbreviations & Terms Used in Tax Lists

Compiled by Beth Nonemaker

b.m.	brickmaker, breeches maker
<b>b. maker</b>	<b>breeches maker</b>
b' k	black
<b>b' s</b>	<b>blacksmith</b>
c	cows
<b>C</b>	<b>cleared of trees</b>
c. maker	clockmaker
<b>cooper</b>	<b>made metal bands for wheels, barrels &amp; buckets</b>
d.	distillery, double tax
<b>D</b>	<b>pence, equal to 1/12 shilling</b>
f.	ferry, forge or furnace
<b>f. m.</b>	<b>fulling mill</b>
F. Master	Forage Master
<b>freeman</b>	<b>male, over 21 yrs., not married; bachelor</b>
g. m.	grist mill
<b>g. r.</b>	<b>ground rent</b>
h	horses
<b>h. m.</b>	<b>hemp mill</b>
inmate	renter
<b>joiner</b>	<b>made cabinets</b>
L (or British pound sign)	pound, a unit of money equal to a pound of silver
<b>m.</b>	<b>mill, miller</b>
m. w.	millwright
<b>o. m.</b>	<b>oil mill</b>
patent	document passing title to land out of the Commonwealth
<b>p.</b>	<b>patented land</b>
p. h'd	per head
<b>p. m.</b>	<b>paper mill</b>
q. m.	quarter master
<b>r. m.</b>	<b>rolling mill</b>
s.	still
<b>S</b>	<b>shilling, 1/20th of a pound</b>
s. f.	steel forge
<b>sh</b>	<b>sheep</b>
s. keeper	shop keeper
<b>s. m.</b>	<b>saw mills, single man</b>
mason	worked with stone
<b>s. master</b>	<b>school master</b>
s'm'k'r	shoemaker
<b>s. q.</b>	<b>stone quarry</b>
s. weaver	stocking weaver
<b>s. smith</b>	<b>silversmith</b>
t. k.	tavern keeper
<b>t. y.</b>	<b>tan yard</b>
Unw	unwarrented land
<b>w.</b>	<b>weaver</b>
w'm'k'r, w. maker	(town) watchmaker, (rural) wager maker
<b>w. m.</b>	<b>woolen mill</b>
warrant	the authority to survey a tract of land
<b>W</b>	<b>Warrented land</b>
W. M.	Wagon Master
<b>w.s.q.</b>	<b>whet-stone quarry</b>
window tax	tax assessment figured by the # of windowpanes





# Glossary of Legal Terms

often encountered in record research

**Administration:** Management and settling of an estate.

**Administrator:** A person appointed by a court to settle the estate of a deceased person who has died without leaving a valid will.

**Assignee:** One to whom some right, privilege or property is signed over by the court.

**Collateral Ancestor:** An ancestor not in direct line of ascent, but of the same ancestral stock (e.g., the brother or sister of a direct ancestor).

**Consort:** Spouse.

**Decedent:** A deceased person.

**Deed:** A formal written instrument, signed, sealed and delivered according to law and conveying title to real estate.

**Descendant:** One who is descended, however remotely, from another.

**Devise:** To grant real property by will.

**Dower:** The legal right of a wife to use or own portion of her husband's real estate, should she survive him.

**Estate:** The property of a deceased person; a right, title or interest in that property.

**Fee Simple:** An estate of inheritance in land, absolute and without limitation to any particular class of heirs.

**Fee Tail:** An estate of inheritance in land, limited to a particular class of heirs.

**Freeholder:** A person who held land in fee simple. He had the right to vote and hold public office.

**Friend:** Often mentioned in wills, especially in German families, means of the greater freardschaft or

family.

**Guardian:** A person appointed by a court to care for the property and rights of a minor or someone otherwise incapable of administering his own affairs.

**Holographic Will:** A will entirely in the handwriting of the testator.

**Indenture:** Any deed, written contract or sealed agreement; a contract by which a person, as an apprentice, is bound over for service; the formal agreement between a group of bondholders and the debtor as to the terms of the debt.

**Intestate:** A person who has died without having left a valid will or otherwise disposed of his real and personal property.

**Legacy:** A gift by will.

**Nuncupative Will:** An oral or unwritten will, declared by the testator in his last sickness and in the presence of witnesses, and later reduced to writing by someone other than the testator.

**Probate:** The process of proving a will.

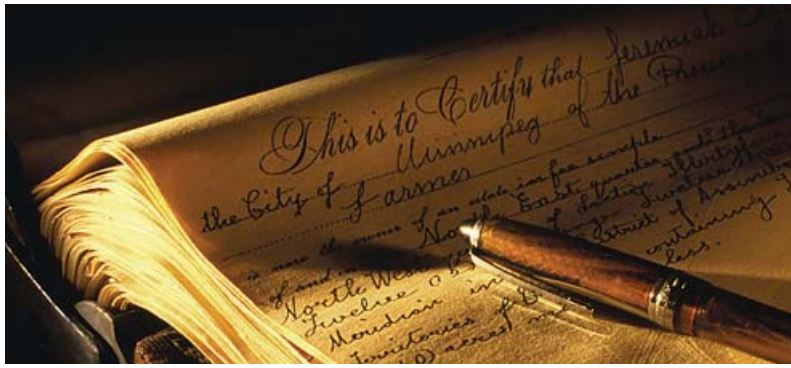
**Relict:** Widow.

**Testate:** Having made or left valid will.

**Testament:** The disposition of one's personal property by will.

**Yeoman:** A small farmer who cultivates his own land—one belonging to a class of English freeholders below the gentry.

*Part of this list was taken from "How to Trace Your Family Tree," published by American Genealogical Research Institute Staff.*



# Old Deed Terms

From: "Researching Historic Buildings"

**alien:** To make over to another; to transfer or convey.

**all and singular:** The whole, without exception, including each of the parts.

**appurtenance:** An adjunct to something more important, such as a right of way to land or an orchard to a house.

**collier:** One who works in a coal mine (in early Pennsylvania, one who made charcoal).

**conveyance:** A transfer of legal title by deed, lien, mortgage or assignment.

**cordwainer:** Leather worker.

**covenant:** A contract or a clause within a contract.

**covenant of non-claim:** Used in Pennsylvania in deeds terminating ground rents; for example, "that neither the vendor nor his heirs, nor any other person shall claim any title in the premises conveyed."

**covenant of seisin (or seizen):** An assurance to the purchaser that the seller has the very estate in the quantity and quality that he purports to convey.

**deed of release:** A document releasing property from the encumbrance of a mortgage, lien, etc., by payment or performance of certain conditions.

**deed poll:** A deed made by one party and ordinarily used only when there were no covenants obligating the grantee. It was replaced by the indenture, except as used in the sheriff's deed poll. Before 1700, the proprietors of Pennsylvania allowed no one to locate and survey more than 300 acres. To evade this rule, speculators customarily made application in the names of third persons and, having obtained a warrant, took from them what was called a "deed poll," or a brief conveyance of their claim.

**demesne:** Domain, held in one's own right; not allotted to tenants.

**devise:** To bequeath real property by will. (*Devise* is the property bequeathed.)

**enfeoff:** To invest with an estate.

**estate:** The interest anyone has in land, real property, real estate; everything a man owns.

**feoffment:** Originally the grant of a "feud" or "fee" (a barony or knight's fee) for which certain services were due; later a grant of a free inheritance to a man and his heirs.

**freeman:** In early Pennsylvania, not holden to any lord or superior; a bachelor.

**grantee:** Purchaser; a person to whom a grant is made.

**grantor:** Seller.

**hereditaments:** Originally things capable of being inherited; not only lands and everything thereon, but also heirlooms and certain furniture that, by custom, could descend to the heir together with the land; generally used as the widest expression for real property

of all kinds and therefore employed in conveyances after the words "lands" and "tenements" to include everything in realty that those words did not cover.

**indenture:** A deed signed by two or more parties in counterpart, but on a single sheet of paper or parchment. The counterparts were then separated by cutting or tearing along a line containing indentations; hence the term "indenture." Each party kept one of the counterparts, which could be matched if its authenticity were questioned.

**inmate:** In Pennsylvania tax usage, a married man; one who lodges in the same house with another, but not in the same room.

**liberties:** Privileged districts exempt from the sheriff's jurisdiction; in colonial times, laws or legal rights resting upon them (Massachusetts's ordinances were called "laws and liberties"); in Philadelphia, early political subdivisions, as "Northern Liberties."

**messuage:** Dwelling house.

**parcel:** A piece of ground, usually part of a large acreage or estate.

**patent deed:** The very first deed for a given property, given from the proprietors to the first owner.

**perch:** Measure of land equal to 5 1/2 yards (also called rod or pole); early measurement of distance equal to 5 1/2 yards used in conjunction with degrees (angles) to give the bounds on surveys and descriptions.

**public vendue or outcry:** Public sale or auction, under authority of law, as by constable, sheriff, tax collector, administrator, etc.

**quit-claim deed:** A deed clearing the title of the old encumbrances.

**relict:** A widow or widower.

**remainder:** Remnant of the whole state after a preceding part has been given away; arises through act of the parties.

**reversion:** The residue of an estate left to the grantor or his heirs during the continuance or termination of an estate; arises through act of law.

**seisin:** The right to immediate possession.

**tenement:** In its original, proper and legal sense, everything that may be holden (held), provided it is of a permanent nature, applicable not only to lands and other solid objects, but also to offices, rents, commons, franchises, peerages, etc.; vernacular usage applies only to houses and other buildings; not used in modern deeds. (In old deeds, the first definition is applicable.)

**weaver:** One who weaves cloth. (Beware the designation. In the early 18th century, many men listed themselves as weavers because as such they were taxed less.)

**yeoman:** In England, a commoner, a freeholder under the rank of gentleman. In America, a farmer.



# Some South Central Pennsylvania Townships and How They've Been Established Through the Years

By Raymond M. Bell, 1989

Pennsboro 1735	East Pennsboro 1745	Hampden 1845		East Pennsboro	
		Silver Spring 1787		Hampden	
		Allen 1753	Upper Allen 1850	Silver Spring	
			Lower Allen 1850	Upper Allen	
	Monroe 1825		Lower Allen		
	Middleton 1750	North Middleton 1810	Middlesex 1859		Monroe
			South Middleton 1810		North Middleton
				Middlesex	
	West Pennsboro 1745	Frankford 1795	Upper Frankford 1920		South Middleton
			Lower Frankford 1920		West Pennsboro
Dickinson 1785		Penn 1860		Upper Frankford	
		Cooke 1872		Lower Frankford	
				Dickinson	
Hopewell 1735	Newton 1767	North Newton 1929		Penn	
		South Newton 1929		Cooke	
	Mifflin 1797	Upper Mifflin 1892		North Newton	
		Lower Mifflin 1892		South Newton	
			Hopewell		Hopewell
			Shippensburg 1793		Shippensburg
			Southampton 1783		Southampton
Antrim 1741	TO FRANKLIN COUNTY				

*Raymond M. Bell © 1989.  
Mother Cumberland: Tracing your  
ancestors in South Central PA.*