



# Land, Licenses, Love Gone Wrong, and Other Assorted Courthouse Records

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## **Courthouse Records**

The United States has a dual court system. At the Federal level, we have Federal Courts and at the State level, we have State Courts that have been established by statute (by law). At the State level, you need to ensure that you look at all three levels of record keeping: City/Municipal Courts, County Courts, and State Courts. Court names will vary from state to state and by time period. We are going to concentrate on the County level courthouses and the records they might record.

## **What is a Courthouse?**

It is not only a physical building or buildings, but it is also the repository for the records of the county.

## **County Courthouse Records**

A county courthouse is responsible for:

- 1) Records and Registrations include the recording of records and various registrations. These can include marriage and divorce records; deeds; probate case file records; naturalization records; Soldier & Sailor Discharge Books; animal registrations; and much more.
- 2) Civil Court Records
- 3) Criminal Court Records.

## **Records That Might be Available:**

**Vital Records (Birth, Marriage, and Death).** You may find some early birth registration books in the courthouse. Delayed or Corrected Birth Certificates might have also been completed in a courthouse, maybe in the courthouse of the county they were living in, not the county of actual birth. Marriage proceedings can result in application, license, and certificate files; divorces can provide case files full of genealogical and family information. Death record information might be found in death registers, probate/estate records, coroner reports, etc.

**A deed (an indenture)** is a written instrument of a sale or conveyance. It is normally land but can apply to any property, real or personal. Deed books can contain Patents (deeds), surveys, plat books; powers of attorney, tax records, selling/buying of slaves, mortgaging of crops, cattle, land; apprenticeship records; etc. The indexes are usually called Grantee and Grantor indexes or can also be called Direct and Indirect indexes.

**Tax Records** are created by laws governing the collection of taxes on goods for sales taxes, personal property taxes, poll taxes, levies, etc.

**Coroner Reports** are issued when an inquest is held to investigate an unusual/unknown circumstance related death. They might include the cause of death, autopsy findings, testimony about the circumstances existing at the time of death & findings of the coroner's jury.

**“Insane” Records** might include an admission record with relationships and signatures. Look also at the Order Books for clues to other records.

**Estray Books** recorded records of animals that went astray and ended up in someone else's pasture.

**Dog, Boat, and Stud (horse) Books** recorded the names, the owner's name and the amount of the license or the tax.

**Hawkers, Theatrical Exhibitions, Ordinary and Retailers** licenses recorded dealings with businesses.

**Brand Books** recorded the owners of brands, and possibly the image, used to brand animals.

**Voter Registration Books** were used to tabulate those eligible to vote.

**Professional Licenses and Registers** provide information on or licenses for physicians, nurses and other professionals.

**Naturalization Records** provide for the naturalization to U. S. citizenship of those persons of foreign birth. Before 27 Sep 1906, naturalizations could be completed in any court of record. After that date, by law, naturalizations were regulated by the Immigration and Naturalization Service (now known as the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services).

**Order Book** entries are made when the court issues an order and it is recorded. The recordings are normally in chronological order by the court term and date. They can contain the recording of deeds; processing of probate cases; entering of soldier pension information; notations of county level appointments and commissions; recording of court cases; etc.

**Bond books** record an assortment of bonds (a financial agreement between a person and the court that something will or will not happen). In the case of a marriage bond, usually the groom and another person provide a bond that the marriage can legally take place and will take place.

**Court Minute Books** cover the day-to-day business of the court and the recordings are normally in chronological order by the court term and date. They can contain the recording of deeds; processing of probate cases; entering of soldier pension information; notations of county level appointments and commissions; recording of court cases; etc.

**Jury registers** record the names of those who were summoned for jury duty.

**Probate /Estate** proceedings contain the papers created during the act/process when a will is proved or a deceased person's estate is dispersed. There are two types of probate estates: 1) Testate Estates (there is a will with and Executor/trix) and 2) Intestate Estates (there is no will and an Administrator/trix is appointed. A probate case can generate a lot of records including, but not limited to, the will and possibly a codicil, guardianship papers, an estate inventory and sale, proof of heirship record, etc.

**Adoption records** might be located in guardianship records or in Order Books.

**Other records** you might locate in a courthouse are

Patents	Court Dockets	Fictitious Name Recordings
Militia Rolls	Juvenile Records	County Land Maps and Plats
Elections	Pension Records	Probation and Parole Records
Lien Record Books	Court Transcripts	County Commission Records
Mortgage Books	County Correspondence	
Oaths of Allegiance	Oaths of County Officials	

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