

DeedMapper: Reconstruct Your Ancestor's Land

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Why should a genealogist seek to identify the neighbors and neighborhood of his ancestors?

Julian G. Hofmann and B. Ransom McBride:

“For the genealogist, mapping a parcel of land later subdivided and sold by heirs can often be the only way to assure proper identification of the heirs...”

“Mapping”, *North Carolina Research*, p. 106

Ge Lee Cortey Hendrix:

“Land records can be the building blocks needed to reconstruct identities, the stones to pave migration trails. But success requires a methodical use of this resource to re-create ancestral circumstances, neighborhoods, and associated patterns.”

“John Bond vs. John Bond: Sorting Identities via Neighborhood Reconstruction,” *NGS Quarterly*, Vol. 79, pgs. 268-282

How does a researcher reconstruct a neighborhood?

Use land records

- Surveys
- Plats
- Deeds
- Patents

Supplement with:

- Census records
- Tax lists
- Cemetery records
- Church records
- Wills and probate
- County histories
- Family histories
- Immigration records

The Rev. Daniel Elmer Case Study

The Rev. Daniel Elmer moved from Massachusetts to Cohansey, Salem County, New Jersey in 1726. He became pastor of the Cohansey Presbyterian Church of Christ. A monument marks the old cemetery and names the original members of the church, dated 1680.

Using land records – surveys, deeds, and plats, we can discover where the Rev. Daniel’s land was, who were his neighbors, and who inherited the land. 320 acres were surveyed for Daniel Elmer in 1733. In a deed dated 1746, the Rev. Daniel conveyed 3 acres of his land to the church trustees. This information gives us an idea of where his land was located since we know where the old church and graveyard were.

In his will of 1753, the Rev. Daniel divided his land among four of his sons: Samuel, Theophilus, Silvanus, and Theodorus. Silvanus and Samuel died young. Can we pinpoint more exactly where his land was?

Daniel Elmer’s will, June 30, 1753:

“...belonging to my Homestead lying on ye Highway from the meeting house to Sayre’s Neck...”

USGA map of Fairton and area from www.topozone.com

Using the coordinates on the 1733 survey, I platted Daniel Elmer’s land using *Deedmapper*.

One important deed dated 1825 established two generations of Jonathan Elmer’s, grandson and great grandson of the Rev. Daniel. Earlier researchers had missed a generation, not realizing there were a Jonathan Senior and a Jonathan Junior.

- In the 1700s, Jr. did not mean what it means today. A man would use Jr. after his name if he were related to an important person in the county in order to establish a tie to that person.
- Jonathan Elmer, son of Theodorus, used Jr. after his surname to tie him to his 1st cousin, Jonathan Elmer, who was a doctor and senator. He was, however, Jonathan Sr. to his son Jonathan Jr.
- Many deeds for Elmer and related families were found in the indexes and deed books from Cumberland County.

Platting land

Why do I want to plat land?

- The description of metes and bounds on a deed or survey is only one-dimensional. You get directions and degrees, but it is very hard to visualize.
- When you plat the land, it takes on a second dimension – you can see where the boundaries of the land lie, and their direction.
- You can see how neighboring landowners relate to your property.

The basic tools of platting land - metes and bounds surveying

- Direction on the protractor – NE-SW or NW-SE
- Degrees for the angle
- Distance for the length of the line

Metes and bounds surveying measurements

- 1 mile = 80 chains = 320 poles, rods, or perches = 5,280 feet
- 1 chain = 4 poles, rods, or perches = 66 feet = 100 links
- 1 pole, rod, or perch = 25 links = 16 ½ feet
- 1 link = 7.92 inches

Lessons learned about the value of neighborhood reconstruction:

- Family names repeated every generation! Careful tracking required.
- A missed generation was identified through deeds.
- Land very often stayed in the extended family.
- Daughters as well as sons inherited land.
- Tracing land of daughters gave names of spouses and parents of spouses.

Use other sources to corroborate what you find in deeds.

Cemetery Records

Tax lists

Mortgage records
Census records
Plat atlases and gazetteers
Information given in county biographical sketches
Library of Congress maps

Birdie Monk Holsclaw

Birdie looked at 96 deeds to find the 10 that solved her research problem.
“*Beginning At A Black Oak...*”: *Reconstructing Your Ancestor’s Neighborhood with Plat Maps*. 1996 NGS Conference in the States

Other neighborhoods reconstructed

Harold M. Hegyessy Jr. Master’s Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1977

Chestnut Creek, Carroll County, Virginia

John Perry Alderman. *Carroll 1765-1815, the Settlements: a History of the First Fifty Years of Carroll County, Virginia*

Maps

- USGS Maps – www.topozone.com
- Aerial photographs - <http://teraserver.homeadvisor.msn.com/>

Building a plat

- Wade Hone’s CD *Platting and Graphing of Land Records* – platting by hand.
- Helen Leary’s *North Carolina Research* – Mapping and Land
- *DeedMapper* software. Order a map of your area.
<http://users.rcn.com/deeds/>
<http://users.rcn.com/deeds/factsht.htm>
- Free platting online: <http://www.genealogytools.net/deeds/>
- Other platting programs:
<http://www.outfitters.com/genealogy/land/compmaps.htm>