

# Resources for Conducting Bucks County Property Research

Prepared by Jesse Crooks

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## Online Resources

### Bucks County Tax Parcel Viewer

- URL: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=2eda3020dd9847eaa00d1d6c0764a607>
- To enable aerial photography overlays, select the desired year on the Layers tab.
- The Measurement tab provides tools for measuring length and area, and providing the GPS coordinates
- The “Parcel” layer is enabled by default.
- Viewing parcel details:
  - The parcel number is visible on map
  - Click on the parcel for more information, including address, acreage, owner name, etc.
  - Click on “View Parcel Information” to open the record for the lot in the Board of Assessment database for additional information, such as its sales history and deed information.

### Bucks County Board of Assessment Database

- URL: <http://www.buckscountyboa.org/Search/Disclaimer.aspx?FromUrl=../search/commonsearch.aspx?mode=owner>
- Provides information about the owner, recent chain of title, and attributes of the property. For homes, it may include a construction style, estimated construction date (treat this with skepticism), and a sketch of the floor plan.
- It is easiest to search using the parcel number. If the location of the property is known, start by locating it on the parcel viewer to identify the parcel number. Be sure to use the correct number of digits (include leading zeros). The database can also be queried using owner name or address.
- The chain of title is only available for property transfers after the system was digitized in the 2000s. Typically, the records under “Owner History” and “Sales” end with the last transfer that occurred before this date. Records that predate the new system will be listed as “01-JAN-00.” This is NOT the actual date of the transfer. It is a placeholder because the data was not migrated to the electronic database.

### PA Cultural Resources Geographic Information System (CRGIS)

- URL: <https://share.phmc.pa.gov/pashare/landing>

- Sign in as a guest using the ArcGIS login option. Check “Keep me logged in” to avoid repeated log-in prompts.
  - User: GuestPASHARE
  - Pass: GuestPASHARE1
- Select “Search PA-SHARE” to access the map
- Clicking on the map will produce a pop-up menu. Clicking on the pop-up will reveal a navigation menu to select various layers of the map (ex., county, historic district, building). On the desired tab, scroll down to the “View Details” row at the bottom and click “view.” The asset will open in a new tab. You will be prompted to reenter the guest username and password. (Note: Unwanted layers can be deactivated using the layers menu on the right.)
- Scroll down to the “Attachments” section, select the file you want to view, and click “View” on the top right.
- Contains National Register of Historic Places nomination forms, maps, and photographs.

## Historic Mapworks

- URL: <http://www.historicmapworks.com/>
- Includes a number of very useful maps of Bucks County, including:
  - [1876 J.D. Scott atlas](#)
  - [1891 E.P. Noll atlas](#)
  - [1891 G. William Baist North Pennsylvania and Bound Brook Railroad atlas](#)
  - [1886 J. D. Scott North Pennsylvania Railroad atlas](#)
  - [1948 Franklin Survey Company farm atlas](#) (Central Bucks only)
- Some maps can be overlaid on a modern GIS map. Maps that have this option will have a globe beneath their icon. Load the map and click the “Historic Earth Basic” button below the image to overlay it on Google Maps or Open Street View. Note that the overlay will not be perfectly aligned.

## Library of Congress Digital Collections

- URL: <https://www.loc.gov/collections/> or search for [Bucks County items](#) available online
- Resources include historical maps, HABS photographs, etc. Notable maps include:
  - [1681 Holmes map](#)
  - [1831 H. S. Tanner map](#)
  - [1850 W. E. Morris atlas](#)
  - [1885-1924 Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps](#)
  - [1891 E. P. Noll atlas](#)
  - [1893 Morrisville Panoramic](#)
  - [1893 Newtown Panoramic](#)
- They also have [Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for Bucks County](#)

## Ancestor Tracks - Philadelphia Area Early Landowners Resources

- URL: [https://ancestortracks.com/Phil\\_Mont\\_Bucks\\_Del\\_maps.html](https://ancestortracks.com/Phil_Mont_Bucks_Del_maps.html)
- Includes the following atlases (reproduction quality varies):

- 1850 W. E. Morris atlas
- 1857 Kuhn & Shrope atlas

## New Jersey State Library Digital Collections

- URL: <https://dspace.njstatelib.org/home>
- Bucks County Resources include:
  - [1860 Lake and Beers atlas](#) (download for full zoom)

## Penn State University Libraries - Sanborn Insurance Fire Maps

- Interactive Map: <https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/90655b305c7c4a519fd04d55b68eb96d/page/>
- List by location: <https://libraries.psu.edu/about/collections/sanborn-fire-insurance-maps>

## Penn Pilot - Pennsylvania Historical Aerials

- URL: <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=d17df63270154864a4fbdec292c5b829>
- Provides a lot of the same imagery as the US Geological Survey, but with an easier interface.

## Historic Aerials

- URL: <https://www.historicaerials.com/viewer>

## Google Earth

- URL: <https://earth.google.com/>
- Similar to Google Maps, but includes a historical imagery feature to look at earlier aerials

## US Geological Survey

- TopoView
  - URL - <https://ngmdb.usgs.gov/topoview/>
  - Topographic maps dating back to 1891<sup>1</sup>
- EarthExplorer
  - URL - <https://earthexplorer.usgs.gov/>
  - Aerial photographs dating back to 1937

## Tract Plotter

- URL: <http://www.tractplotter.com/>
- Input the metes and bounds to generate a map of the property boundaries.

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<sup>1</sup> This tool is the easiest way to identify the USGS quadrangle where the property is located, which is required for National Register of Historic Places nominations.

## FamilySearch - Bucks County Deeds

- URL:  
<https://www.familysearch.org/en/search/catalog/244488?availability=Family%20History%20Library>
- Bucks County deeds through Deed Book 131 (1865-1866)
- Must be using the site through a FamilySearch affiliate organization, such as the Mercer Museum.

## Archival Resources

### Mercer Museum Library

- **Books on open shelving** - Located on the book stand in the reading room.
  - **1876 & 1891 Atlases (on reading room book stand)** - One volume containing reproductions of the 1876 J. D. Scott atlas and the 1891 E. P. Noll atlas of Bucks County. Both atlases include property boundaries, property owners, locations of major buildings, etc.
  - **1914 Farm Atlas and Business Directory (974.821 Dir)** - The directory includes house numbers, which can be found on the corresponding map (SC-27-02, 77). When searching for the owner of a property, find the house number and then scan the township directory listings to find the corresponding resident.
  - **1948 Bucks County Farm Atlas, Vol. 1 (on reading room book stand)** - The only volume out of a proposed set, mostly covering Central Bucks. Includes property boundaries, property owners, acreage, road names, etc. Boroughs that fall within the townships are included, but with less detail. The information for small lots is usually omitted.
    - Buckingham
    - Chalfont (see New Britain)
    - Doylestown
    - Ivyland (see Warminster)
    - Lower Southampton
    - New Britain
    - New Hope (see Solebury)
    - Newtown
    - Northampton
    - Plumstead
    - Solebury
    - Upper Makefield
    - Upper Southampton
    - Warminster

- Warrington
  - Warwick
  - Wrightstown
- **The Direct Tax of 1798 (974.821 Ada)** - This contains particularly detailed notes about the properties being taxed, such as building dimensions and construction materials. Records with this detailed accounting have only survived for Upper Bucks, from Plumstead and New Britain and northward.
- ***How to Find the Story of An Old House: A Guide to Research Sources and Techniques in Bucks County (974.821 McNealy)*** - A guide to property research that covers the basics such as how to read a deed and perform a title, and points to specific resources for Bucks County. The best starting point for those who are new to property research.
- ***Index to Bucks County References in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1789 (974.821 McNealy)*** - Includes many property sale advertisements. To be crossreferenced with the library's reproduction edition of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (071 Pen).
- **Bucks County Archives**
  - The Mercer Museum Library is the repository for most early county government records dating back to 1683. Useful record series for property research include:
    - **Appearance Dockets (RG 3:01)**
      - Sheriff's deeds, issued when property was seized to pay off a debt, were not always recorded in the county deed books. They were, however, recorded in the Appearance Dockets, either as a short note, or a full transcription of the deed.
      - Date range: 1727–1948
    - **Mechanics Liens Dockets (RG 3:15) and Papers (RG 3:40)**
      - When a building was constructed, the tradesmen providing the materials and labor could take out a lien to ensure that if the property owner went into debt, repaying the tradesmen would be prioritized. These records can contain very detailed information about the structures, including dimensions, layout, and materials.
      - There is a card file index in the newspaper room.
      - Date range: 1836–1949
    - **Orphans' Court Papers (RG 5:03)**
      - If a property owner died intestate, or if the court had to oversee the equitable distribution of property to multiple heirs, records may appear in the Orphans' Court papers.

- These records can be found using the General Index to Orphans' Court Records, available on microfilm and on Ancestry.com. Search for the decedent, and the "File Number" column corresponds to this series.
  - Date Range: Early 1700s–1926
- **Partition Docket (RG 3:18) and Papers (RG 3:36)**
  - When property was left to multiple heirs and the court had to oversee its equitable division, so that each heir received a lot of comparable value, it would be recorded in this series.
  - Papers date range: 1755–1957
  - Docket date range: 1853–1943
- **Road Books (RG 2:15)**
  - Road records can provide information about the properties adjacent to road construction.
  - Date range: 1721–1964
- **Tax Records (RG 1:01, with some available on microfilm)**
  - Tax records can sometimes provide information about the property being taxed, such as the number of acres, or whether certain structures that affected the tax rate were present, such as a mill, tavern, or church.
- **Wills & Estate Papers (Microfilm)**
  - When a property was passed to heirs through a will, there is sometimes valuable information included, such as a partial description of the house if some heirs are left life rights to occupy a portion of the building, a description of which family members or tenants were occupying specific houses at the time the will was written, and what crops were being cultivated. Estate paper can provide detailed, itemized lists of all personal property.
- ***Bucks County Daily Intelligencer Clippings Files (SC-39)***
  - Newspaper clippings from the 1850s through the 1890s, although most were collected from the 1870s–1890s.
  - They are arranged in three ways: By surname, topic, and municipality. For property research, the two most useful methods are to search for the surname of a known owner of the property, or to search by municipality. The latter is subsorted by topic, including a folder for real estate. You may be able to find a description of the property when it was advertised for sale, etc.
- **Deed Collection (MSC 278)** - A large collection of original deeds, some of which were not recorded by the county. Deeds are arranged by municipality and date, and have a

separate card index. A manuscript index is also available (BM-B-611), along with a guide to deeds that have drafts of the property or are of particular historical interest (MSC 802, oversized).

- **Map Collection (SC-27)** - A large collection of maps, most of which are in the online catalog. For property research, the most useful portion of SC-27 is the set of township maps located in the flat files in the newspaper room. However, there are many more maps in SC-27 that are filed elsewhere due to size, condition, fragility, etc. For the full listing, refer to the catalog.
  - Township Maps - Newspaper room, flat file cabinet, Drawers 2-4. Arranged alphabetically by municipality. Note that the alphabetization scheme ignores some directional qualifiers (ex., Upper and Lower Makefield are both filed under M for Makefield), and some municipalities are filed under the name of the township they were divided from (ex., Quakertown Borough is filed with Richland Township).
- **Moon Family Papers (MSC 353)** - A collection of survey maps created by Moses Moon (b.1754) and James Moon (b.1782). Most properties are in Lower Bucks.
- **Moon Family Land Drafts (MSC 304)** - Survey maps primarily created by Moses Moon, for properties in Bristol Township, Lower Makefield, Middletown, and Biles Island in Falls.
- **Orphans' Court Land Drafts (MSC 867)** - Copies of land drafts recorded in Orphans' Court proceedings. Arranged alphabetically by municipality.
- **Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps** - Detailed maps drawn for the purpose of assessing the insurance risk for individual properties. They provide information about the layout and construction materials of buildings, any activities that may increase the risk of a fire, and fire suppression equipment, street names, property boundaries, etc.
  - Microfilm - Cabinet C, drawer 5
    - Andalusia
    - Bristol
    - Doylestown - 1885, 1891, 1896, 1904, 1909, 1921, 1928
    - New Hope
    - Newtown
    - Perkasio
    - Morrisville
  - Physical copies
    - Bristol, 1915 (SC-15 98)
    - Doylestown, 1904 (SC-15, 103)
    - Doylestown, 1909 (SC-15, 97)
    - Doylestown, 1922 (SC-15, 105)
    - Doylestown, 1928 (SC-27-02, Vol. 1)
    - Langhorne, 1924 (SC-15, 99)

- New Hope, 1909 (SC-15, 100)
- Newtown, 1909 (SC-15, 101)
- Quakertown, 1909 (SC-15, 102)

## General Recommendations

### Tips for Conducting a Chain of Title

- Use historic maps to skip more recent land transfers. This is easiest with maps that show property boundaries. For land that has been subdivided, try comparing the modern parcel map with a historic atlas. Since parcels typically get carved into smaller pieces over time, you can often find the outlines of the historic property boundaries.
- When you reach a dead end, move to an adjacent property. Trace that property's chain of title and look for the name of the owner of the property you're searching for in the description of the metes and bounds.

### Unit Conversions

#### Distance & Area

1 perch (length) = 16.5 feet

1 rod = 16.5 feet

1 pole = 16.5 feet

1 chain = 4 rods

1 chain = 66 feet

1 link = 100 chains

1 rood = 0.25 acres

1 rood = 40 square perches

1 perch (area) = 0.00625 acre

1 acre = 160 perches

#### Bearing

Angles are usually given in degrees, minutes, and seconds. When plotting property boundaries, it is useful to convert to decimal degrees.

1 degree = 60 minutes

1 minute = 60 seconds

1 degree = 3600 seconds

Decimal degrees = degrees + (minutes / 60) + (seconds / 3600)

Free online [conversion tools](#) are also available.