

A Lawyer's Guide to Genealogical Research

Central New York Genealogical Society



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November 2012

Court-house Research

Theme: Follow the Money-Trail

- P County Clerk's Office
- P Surrogate Court Records
- P Miscellaneous Records
- P Courthouse Archives

= Attorneys are trained to talk -- for any length of time, on any topic, and sound like an expert.

= What we can contribute to Genealogy is an insider's knowledge of the public records which might be important in researching your family lines.

One recurring theme: "Follow the Money Trail."

Reason - in the 1700s and even 1800s, our farmer or tradesmen-ancestors could not take time away from the farm or their other duties to file documents at the Courthouse, unless it was **really** important.

= Everyone knew that you had just bought the old Smith Farm -- why bother to file the Deed? But, old man Smith (or widow Smith) might just want to record that mortgage, to ensure payment (and have a day or two in the big city to spend some of the proceeds).

= Where are these records maintained?

- County Clerk's Office
- Surrogate Court
- Sometimes county Archives and miscellaneous records can assist.

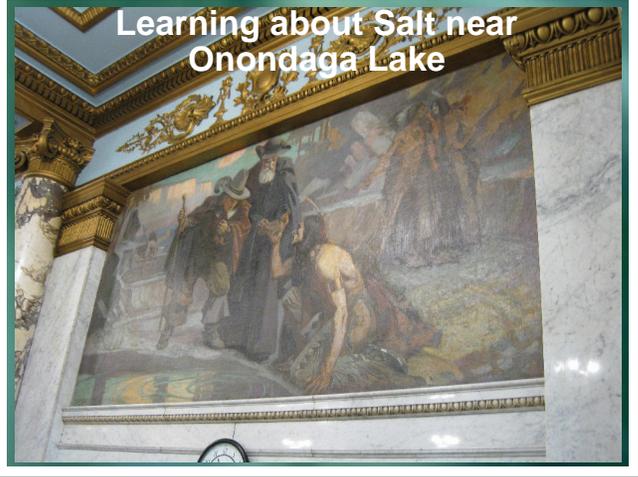
At the Courthouse -
The County Clerk's Office



Onondaga County Courthouse

Note the magnificent Marble columns and frescoes!

Learning about Salt near
Onondaga Lake



The County Clerk's Office is on the second floor.

- Don't bring any knives or sharp objects -- there will be metal-detectors and bag-screeners just as at an airport. Your belongings are subject to search.

- You have every right to be there, so don't hesitate to avail yourself of this opportunity. The Courthouse is open to the public, despite its security. Just dress and act professionally, and know that it is just another example of your tax-dollars hard at work.

- These are all Public Records -- since they involve the transfer of title and other interests in real property, they must be open to the public.

Onondaga County Clerk's Office

(Second Floor - County Courthouse)

- P Grantor / Grantee Indexes to Deeds
 - (1794 to the present)
 - Computerized, since 1978
- P Early Deeds, indexed by Town
- P Early Cayuga County Deeds (1799 – 1805)
- P Mortgages, Indexed from 1854
- P Civil & Criminal Actions (Names & Dates)

County Clerk's Office

All Records Are PUBLIC.

- P DEEDS
 - Conveys an interest in real property.
 - Kind of deed makes very little difference.

- INDEX, by groups of years, and:
 - Buyer = Grantee Index (think "donee")
 - Seller = Grantor Index (think "donor")
 - Write down Book & Page numbers, and Location (town, village or city information) from the Index.

Onondaga County Clerk's Office (Second Floor - County Courthouse)

Grantor / Grantee Indexes to Deeds
(1794 to the present)
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Early Deeds, indexed by Town
Early Cayuga County Deeds (1799 –
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Mortgages, Indexed from 1854
Civil & Criminal Actions (Names &
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County Clerk's Office All Records Are PUBLIC.

- = DEEDS
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- = INDEX, by groups of years, and:
 - Buyer = Grantee Index
 - Seller = Grantor Index
 - Write down Book & Page numbers from Index.
 - Note the Location of the property -- Town and Tract.

Great Info from Deeds

- P Seller (Grantor) - where living at the time of sale.
- P Buyer (Grantee) - where living when bought property.
- P Consideration (\$\$)
- P "Legal Description" of the property
 - Military Tracts
 - Great-Lots & Farm Lots

Indexes to Deeds



Great Info from Deeds

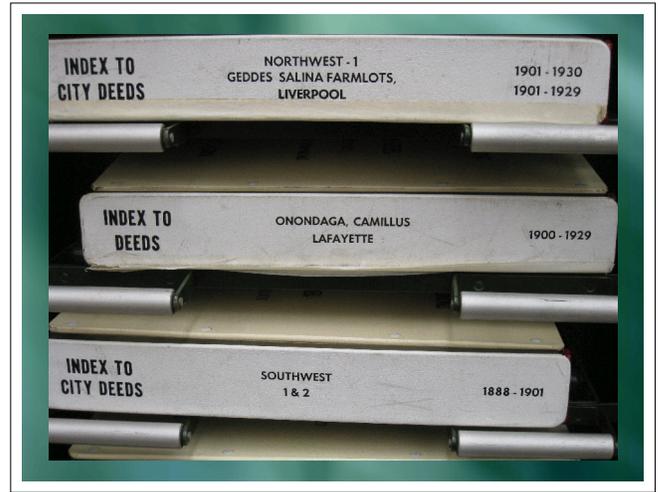
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Grantee Index -- Starting in January 1931.

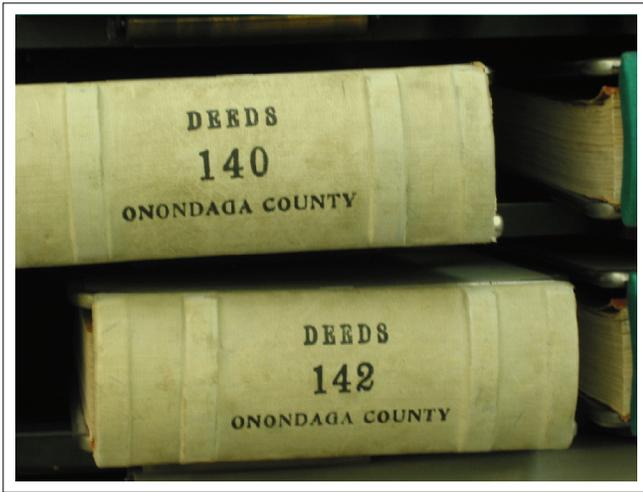
-- Those whose names started with H, I, J, and the first half of the K-surnames, who **purchased** after 1931, and so on.



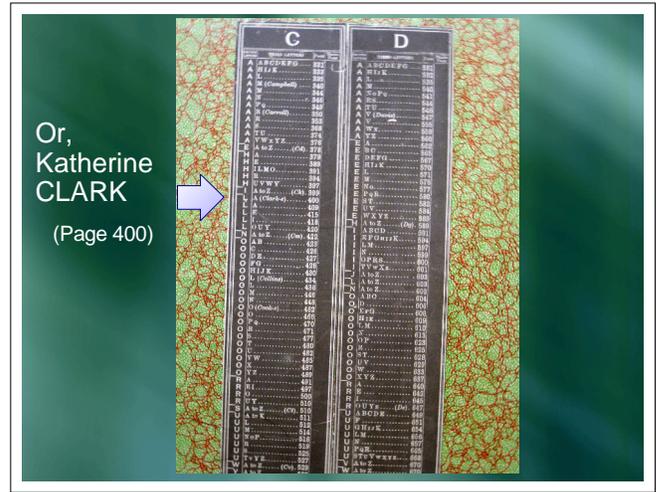
The GRANTOR-Index is essentially the same -- for those Selling property.



There are some specialized Indexes, too -- property Indexed by locale, for example.



We then go to find the right Book of Deeds, based on what we've found in the Index.



Another Example -- searching for CLARKs.

- C
- L
- A (Clark-e) -----> page 400.

INDEX TO DEEDS - GRANTEEES - ONONDAGA COUNTY, N. Y. COMMENCING 1830 400

YEAR	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U	SECOND INITIAL	GRANTEE	
1939																								
Jan 16																								
" 19																								
" 26																								
Feb 1																								
" 8																								
" 10																								
" 25																								
" 25																								
" 25																								
Mar 9																								
" 13																								
Apr 14																								

INDEX TO DEEDS - GRANTEEES - ONONDAGA COUNTY, N. Y. COMMENCING 1830 400

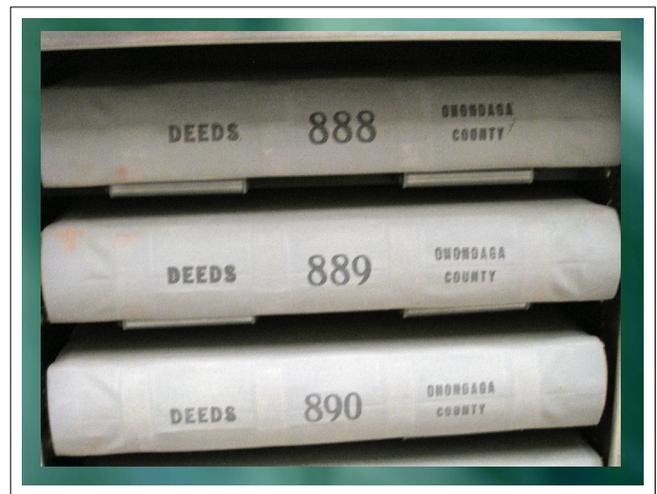
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- Turning to Page 400 of the Index.
- Look for "Katherine C. Clark" (2nd Line).
 - She purchased from "R. J. Clark."
 - Book 889, at Page 301.
 - Property in the Town of DeWitt....

The Deed was recorded on January 19th, of 1939.

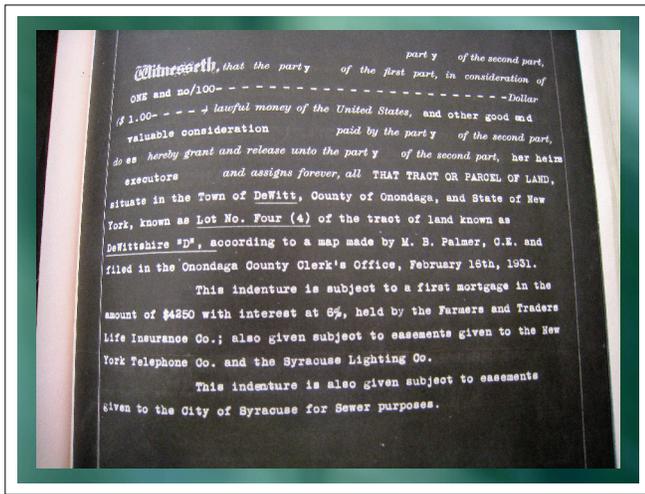
DEEDS - ONONDAGA COUNTY, N. Y., COMMENCING 1939 400

BOOK	PAGE	LOCATION	LOT	BLOCK	TRACT	NATURE OF INSTRUMENT
889	173	Eyr	2	602	Dewittshire D.	
889	301	Dew.	4		Dewittshire D.	
890	22	Onon	11		Standa	
890	156	Onon	70			
890	423	Lyn	10		Farrel	
891	52	Onon	17		Standa	
891	528	Onon	128		Standa	
891	530	Onon	100		Standa	
26	498				Onon	Will
892	530	Eyr	7	361	Onon	
893	119	Onon	44		John	
894	353	Onon	105		John	
895	511	Page	54		John	
896	309	Sal.	140		John	
897	343	Lyn	70		John	
900	410	Dew.	Parcel		Dewittshire B.	
901	167	Onon	1		Onon	



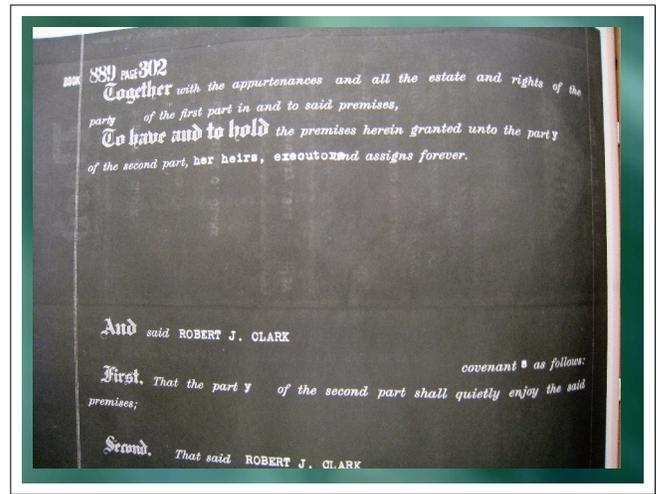
Note that the property was in the Town of DeWitt, part of its Lot 4 -- "Dewittshire D."

So, we go over to Book 889 of Deeds, and open it to page 301.



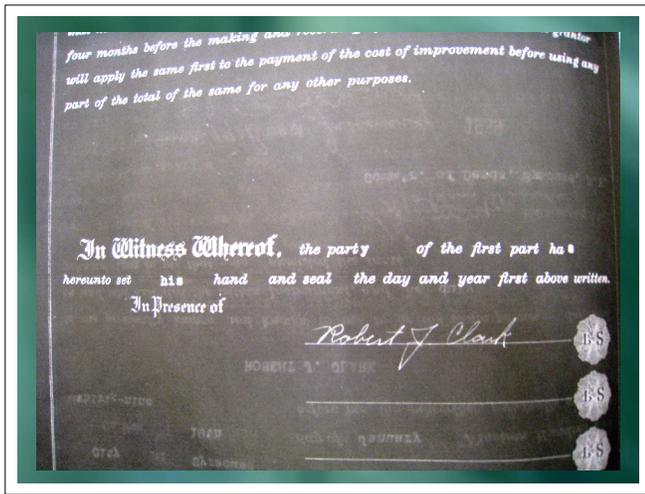
Here is the "Legal Description" of the Property.

- Note that the purchase / transfer of the property is "Subject To" a Mortgage of \$4,250 with interest at 6%....

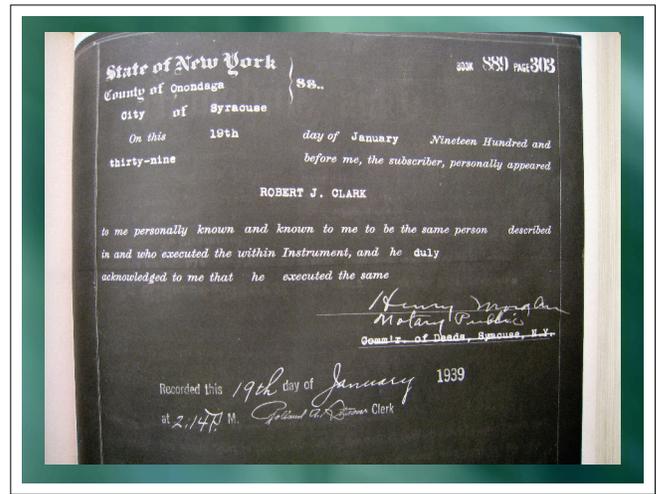


These are the typical "boilerplate language" portions of a Deed.

- You are only buying the LAND.
- Coincidentally, it happens to have been "Improved" by a House, which you also now own...



Note that this is a copy of the Seller's actual signature on the Deed.



And this Notarization of his signature pretty much is a guarantee that he was alive, at least until this date -- January 19, 1939.