

The most rewarding, but most difficult, thing to do when you are researching your house's history is to do a title search on your property. This will provide you with the deeds to your house, or the land which your house sits on, for as far back as a couple of hundred years. A lot of information can be found in the old deeds, some of it quite surprising.

If you currently live in the city limits, you start your search at the John Marshall Court House at 400 North 9th. If your property was annexed from Henrico County at some time in the past (check [this map](#) at Richmond GeoHub to see), you will need to go to the Henrico County Court House, 4309 East Parham Road, to search for earlier deeds. If you are in Henrico County now, of course you will start at Henrico County. Both Richmond and Henrico County have used different ways of filing their deeds over the centuries, and even the manner of alphabetizing looks very different to the modern eye. Scanned deeds, searchable by computer, are only available at their offices. Don't be afraid to ask for help at the counter of either property office. You will definitely need it, especially to get started. You will ask lots of questions until you get the hang of it; I still ask lots of questions.

You should make copies of every deed you find – it will cost you 50 cents a copy. I believe they only take cash – I try to take about 15 dollar bills with me to make it easier to pay because they don't handle a lot of cash there. I don't always use all of \$15, but I have it just in case. Be sure to ask how to print the copies you want, because even that is a bit tricky and is different at both Richmond and Henrico County.

Deeds are very difficult to read as you get back to the era before typewriters were used (prior to about 1945 or so). Every deed should have a reference to the deed before it, and so it is for that tidbit you look so you can go back in time following these references. A typical reference will refer to a deed book number (for example, DB 45A) and the first page the deed started. Make sure to print all the pages of the deed. Sometimes the person who recorded it back in the day failed to put in the previous deed number, but there are other ways to locate a deed – ask the folks who work there.

Sometimes wills will be mentioned in the deeds. Probated wills are kept in the same offices that the deeds are kept, so be sure to ask how to find them. I am always excited to find a will. There is a lot of fascinating information in them giving insights into how the family lived, about family feuds, slaveholding, and the like. Incidentally, Henrico County wills can also be found on ancestry.com; Richmond City has not allowed their wills to be loaded on to that site.

A fun find you might locate while doing the deed search is a plat map, a little map of the property at whatever time period the plat was produced. The plat may be with the deed, or

there may be a reference to a plat book – if the latter, ask how to find it and make sure to print a copy.

I usually only stay two hours (this is the amount of time allowed on the meters at the Marshall Court House anyway) and find as much as I can. I print everything and take it home to read more carefully. I transcribe everything (type it up) as best I can, inserting question marks for areas I can't make out. This makes it much easier to refer back to them, which you probably will need to do fairly often. I have gotten pretty skilled at reading these old deeds; in particular, I have become familiar with the terminology used. If after you have taken a stab at it and still can't figure something out, feel free to send it to me along with the transcription as far as you could take it, and I'll take a look at it.

Because both Richmond and Henrico County property offices are located in court buildings, you will need to go through security to enter the buildings. You are **NOT ALLOWED TO BRING A CELL PHONE** into either building or anything that looks like technology (like thumb drives) or, of course, like a weapon. They have even given me a bit of extra look for having a mini stapler in my bag. At Richmond City, at least, they won't let you take any snacks in unless you say you are diabetic. Building restrooms are close to both property offices and are very clean.

There are lockers at the John Marshall building to put stuff in that is prohibited to take inside, but the lockers are not reliably available so I would not count on them. Parking at the John Marshall building is on-street and there is a fee of about \$4.50 for two hours, which is the maximum you can stay. There is a parking building about two blocks away that will let you stay longer but is quite expensive. The GRTC bus terminal is located adjacent, so if you want to take the bus, it is super convenient, but then you have to hope the lockers are working for your phone.

Parking at the Henrico County building is free, but the closest lot gets busy fast. You can park in the multi-story parking deck nearby. There are no lockers, so anything you can't take in, you have to hike back to your car to return. Buses go there, too, but I don't know what people do with their phones in that case.

Hours at both Richmond City and Henrico County are from 8 am to 5 pm, but the clerks at Richmond City say they prefer that researchers come in after 10 am. Henrico County doesn't care.