

How to Use the Charleston County Register of Deeds Office*

Don't Re-invent the Wheel:

Before you embark on a primary research project, check with the many libraries and archives in the Charleston area to see if historical research already exists for your property. Historic Charleston Foundation Archives, the South Carolina Historical Society and the South Carolina Room at the Charleston County Library are all good places to search for this basic information.

Deed Research, Ward Books and McCrady Plats

Deed research will form the “bones” of expanded historical research. This research will give you names of owners of the property back through time and sometimes much more. Once this information is known, the researcher can go on to gather more specific information like date of construction, building materials and much more.

Once you have finished with deeds, ward books and plats, be sure to revisit local libraries and archives to look for historic photographs and blueprints. You may also find great information from city directories, census information, newspapers and Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps. Some of these sources are now available on-line.

Deeds

The County Offices (O.T. Wallace Building) are located at 101 Meeting Street- just across from the Fireproof Building. The Register of Deeds office on the 2nd floor.

1. Before you get to there—Go to the County website at www.charlestoncounty.org – go to online services and then select “Pay Taxes and View Records.” On the left side of the page, under Functions, select “Real Property.” From here you can search by Property ID, Street Address or Owner Name. Most property research begins with the street address. Input the address for information on recent transactions. The information under the “Sales Disclosure” heading relates to the last few sales. Be sure to copy down the names and dates of those sales and the deed book and page references.
2. While you are on this page you will also want to copy the Property ID number, located near the top left.
3. For information on older transactions, go back out to the Online Services page, and select “View property Record Cards.” Enter the property ID number to search by Parcel ID. Click on the blue button at the bottom titled *card image*. This pulls up a scan of the old property record card. Copy all relevant information:

*Formerly known as the Register of Mesne Conveyance (RMC) Office.

Property Record Card- Important information to record: 1) the dimensions of the lot, 2) property owners, 3) date and type of conveyance if mentioned, 4) book and page number of oldest deed reference.)

2. The property record will give a book and page number for the deed that may be looked up on microfilm in the Register of Deeds office. (Remember, you are moving backwards through time so you want to start with the oldest transaction on the property record). The microfilm for transactions from the present, back through much of the 20th century, is located on the right of the main room and organized alphabetically and numerically. Microfilm for older deed books is located in the Historic Records Room down the hall. Cartridges contain two deed books each. So ST24 contains books S24 and T24. Manually search for the page. Read through the deeds and pay special attention to:
 - a) type of transaction (is it a conveyance, mortgage, deed of trust? Was it inherited?)
 - b) amount paid for property (\$5.00, love and affection = family member conveyance)
 - c) butting and bounding properties (this helps to locate/orient yourself if the property was once a part of a larger area of land)
 - d) dimensions of the land sold (this also helps you stay on track so as to ensure you aren't tracing the wrong piece of land)
 - e) plat references (if an old plat reference is mentioned in the deed, it is usually helpful to pull it)
 - f) the prior owner of the property, the book and page number of that transaction
3. Using the book and page number of the previous owner will keep you moving back through time. However, this is sometimes impossible to do. When you come to a dead end (and you will) see below.
4. When you come to a dead end with the deeds, (i.e. the deed does not lead you to a prior conveyance) consult the indexes - in the main room for the 20th century and the historic room down the hall for older ones.
 - a) look in the **Direct Index** if you have the name of the grantor (seller) and an estimate of the time of the transaction
 - b) look in the **Cross Index** if you have the name of the grantee (buyer) and an estimate of the date of transaction (**MOST COMMON**)
 - c) the historic deed room provides direct and cross indexes for deeds recorded earlier than the 1890s.
 - d) most of the deeds recorded before 1890 are on microfilm as well as in laminated text form on the book shelves in the historic room.

The Historic Records Room:

Deed Books:

Original deed books and mortgage books are located in the rear. Microfilm and microfilm readers are in the front. None of the readers are set up to make copies, however. You can take the cartridges to the main room to make copies if needed.

Ward Books

For another good general source regarding a particular property, refer to the Charleston Co Tax Assessment **Ward Books** on microfilm in the historic room. These can also help get you back on track if you have run into a dead end. Check the location of your property on the **Ward Map** (located in the historic room) and then go through the appropriate microfilm cartridge for that date and ward number. The ward boundaries changed slightly over time. The ward books on microfilm are organized by street (index in the front of the book). The books record over a three- to five-year period, who bought and sold the property, whether the buildings were brick (B) or wooden (W), the number of stories, and the dimensions of the property. The ward books also give an assessed value of the property from year to year. (If the value increases a large amount this may indicate a house was built on the property between those years.) However, the Ward Books will give no follow up reference. You will have to return to the Cross and Direct indexes with the new property owner name to continue your title search. The earliest ward book is 1852. There is a gap between this year and the 1870s.

McCrary Plat Collection*

Search the McCrary plat index on 3 rolls of microfilm located in the microfilm rack in the historic room. (If they aren't there – check with the clerk at the main desk) Look up the property by street name, property owner, or by surveyor name. This is all in alphabetical order.

After the plat description, there is a long reference number,

example: B1AC 900 00979 00 <0979 is the 4-digit plat number>

Look up this 4-digit plat number on the microfilm rolls labeled “McCrary Plats” in the historic room. Use the manual control to find a particular plat; copies can be made on the reader once a copy card is purchased from the main desk.

*The McCrary Plat Collection can also be searched remotely through the website of SC Dept. of Archives and History; however, as yet it is not possible to pull the plats up remotely for viewing on-line.