

Glossary of Land Records Terms

(Definitions obtained from *Black's Law Dictionary, 9th Edition* and wikipedia.org.)

Administrator: Person who manages or heads a business, public office, or agency; person appointed by the court to manage the assets of a deceased person who died intestate.

Bounty: A gift, often of land or property.

Bounty-land warrant: A state or federally issued certificate granting ownership of land to a veteran. *For example, warrants were issued to Revolutionary War veterans by the new U.S. government in payment of military service. The last warrants were issued in this country in 1906.

Deed: A written land conveyance; document that conveys land or property ownership.

Distress: Seizure of property to secure payment of a debt, often delinquent taxes; term for the seized property itself.

Escheat: Reversion of land ownership back to a lord (or the state) upon the death of an owner with no will; land that has been reverted.

Fee simple: A broad land interest that endures until the current holder dies without heirs.

Feoffment: A grant of land in fee simple; charter that transfers land. *Also termed 'feoffment with livery of seisin' in early documents. In Old English law, this kind of property transfer gave the new owner the right to sell or pass the land to heirs.¹

Furlong: 1/8 mile or forty poles; measure of distance used by surveyors of large land holdings.

Grant: An agreement that creates a right of transfer from one person to another; formal transfer of real estate property. Examples include leases, easements, and deeds.

Grantee: Receiver (often the buyer, sometimes referred to as the 'lessee') in a deed.

Grantor: Giver (seller, or 'lessor' may appear) in a deed.

Hereditament: Any kind of property that can be inherited.

Indenture: A deed or elaborate contract signed by two parties; formal written agreement.

Intestate: Of or relating to a person who has died without a valid will.

Lessor/Lessee: Often used interchangeably with Grantor/Grantee (see above.)

Livery of seisin: The ceremony by which a grantor conveyed land to a grantee.

Metes and Bounds: territorial limits of a real property as measured by distances and angles from land marks and other properties.

Moiety: A half of something (such as an estate); a portion less than half, or a small segment. A 'moiety' in land research refers to a portion of land that has been divided, such as in an estate settlement.

Memorial: An abstract of a legal record, especially deeds and land transactions.

Plat: A map describing a piece of land and its features, such as boundaries, roads, and easements; a document that gives legal descriptions of land by lot or block number. *Plats are often annexed to deeds to illustrate that land being conveyed, and may show buildings, trees, and other geographic or built features.

Quitrent: Payment to a feudal lord by a freeholder. *This term appears in Proprietary era records for South Carolina, and refers to a sort of 'land tax' imposed by the Lords Proprietors.²

Register of Mesne Conveyance (RMC): Called simply the 'deeds office' in many areas, this is the county level government office where land records, including deeds and plats, are housed.

Renunciation of Dower: Abandonment of a right without transferring it to another (in this case, a woman relinquishing her right to property, usually in a marriage arrangement.)

Warrant: Document entitling a person to receive land from the government. Contains a legal description of the land being granted, as well as evidence of truth from the recipient.

Writ of Attachment: A written court order for the legal seizure of a property, often for delinquent taxes.



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¹ As opposed to a 'fee simple' arrangement. See definition above.

² Carolina was a proprietary colony from 1670 to 1719, meaning that it was owned by eight Lords Proprietors who received the land from the King of England and operated the colony as a business venture. Early colonists who were granted land paid quitrents to the Lords Proprietors. In 1720, South Carolina became a royal colony led by the King of England. During the royal period (1720- 1776), Royal grants were a common form of land transaction in American colonies in both the north and south.

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