Ins and Outs of Indexes

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Description:

Indexes for county records can be the key to finding deeds, probates and more, whether you are doing onsite research at a courthouse or archive, or working online. As FamilySearch continues to digitize and make available more and more records, it's crucial to be familiar with the different indexing systems and how to use them.

Objective:

To become familiar with different types of indexes and how to use them. When you run across a new index you haven't seen before, you'll have the skills to decipher how to use it.

Introduction:

Everything you need to know, you learned in kindergarten (almost.) Indexing schemes are based on some alphabetical combination, so if you can sing the ABC song, you're most of the way there.

County records such as probate and land records and sometimes vital records are indexed to make retrieval easier. There is generally a book or a section of a book that indexes the entries for some period of time, maybe a year, maybe a decade, maybe 100+ years.

Sometimes there will be a key at the beginning of the book, like a table of letter combinations that will direct you to the index page with entries for that letter combination. There *should* be instructions for these tables, but they are not always there. You may need to look at a few pages of entries to figure out the organization scheme. Or sometimes the table will be missing all together. Sometimes looking in another volume (i.e. if the table is missing from the Grantor index, try the Grantee for the same time frame, or look at the Grantor index for the previous or next period) will give you the letter table or the instructions as to how to use it.

Table of Examples

Rather than fill the handout with images of the various indexes shown in the presentation, I have included a table of examples below. These are the images that I have used in the presentation,

and a bit.ly link to them. Just type the bit.ly link in your browser and it will take you right to the image I showed in the presentation, and allow you to explore the records at your leisure.

I have tried to make these links clickable. They work for me in Chrome, which I have set to be the Default Browser on my computer. When I had Firefox as the default browser, the images came out blurry.

So, you options are to click on the link. If that doesn't work, copy and paste the link into your browser. If that still doesn't work, type in the url.

Usage	Example	Bit.ly
Probate	LMNRT key	http://bit.ly/2wjdPy9
	Somerset NJ M 11-1	http://bit.ly/2f61bPO
Probate	Somerset NJ Vol 5 pg 75 Benjamin McDowell	http://bit.ly/2vgr1Xu
Probate	Union NJ Surrogate's Docket 1857-1949 A-G	http://bit.ly/2tWXkag
	Index to Surrogate's Dockets	http://bit.ly/2vqXwTA
	Actual Docket	http://bit.ly/2vgk3SD
Probate	Warren NJ Probate Record Index	http://bit.ly/2hlzB1L
	Docket index - left hand page	http://bit.ly/2wjpvRE
	Docket index - right hand pg	http://bit.ly/2f5yPFn
Deeds	Erie NY Deed Grantee Index Division table	http://bit.ly/2tX9Era
	Grantee Index showing Philip Becker on page 38	http://bit.ly/2vfHFH6
Deeds	Erie Co NY 1937-43 Grantee Index	http://bit.ly/2wjo0CN
Deeds	Orange Co NY 1703-1869 A-H Index grantees	http://bit.ly/2vqMeyC
Deeds	Onondaga Co Grantor 1794-1870, Vol 6 S-V	http://bit.ly/2hm4O4A
Wills	Hampshire County WV will index, page 125	http://bit.ly/2vkD5an
Wills	Montgomery County, Maryland letter chart for M names	http://bit.ly/2w8Q9gM
	Montgomery Co MD index with Marindin, Henry Louis	http://bit.ly/2u94g8e
Probate	Talbot Maryland Administration Account Index Title page	http://bit.ly/2vkT3RP
	Index to Administration Accounts - Dav-z	http://bit.ly/2hpsDsy
Deeds	Richland Ohio Deeds letter table	http://bit.ly/2hpIh77
Probate	Van Buren MI General Index Probate 1839-1960	http://bit.ly/2vrOx3y
Deaths	Champaign County Illinois Death Index	http://bit.ly/2u6v9K4
Estates	Champaign County IL Index of Estates of Descedents - F-a page	http://bit.ly/2f9ZjFI
Deeds	Itasca County MN Grantor Index	http://bit.ly/2wpwpoe
Deeds	Pierce County, WA deeds	http://bit.ly/2v0nEDs
Deeds	Belmont County Ohio deeds	http://bit.ly/2vtlGfj
Wills	Roane County WV Index to Wills	http://bit.ly/2f6Djvd
	Roane County WV Index to Wills Legatee	http://bit.ly/2tXBG5S

Resources:

Rose, Christine, *Courthouse Indexes Illustrated,* San Jose: CR Publications, 2006

Sittner, Kathi, "Documents in Detail : Land Deed Indexes," *Ancestry Magazine,* Nov/Dec 1994, page 25-27
https://books.google.com/books?id=MISoFbYaChAC&pg=PT25&lpg=PT25&dq=russell+indexing+system&source=bl&ots=4PU53UZq_r&sig=4U5-TTX6cDt2VS1zbwrS4RO-FsU&hl=en&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwj_8OHyybjTAhUB_2MKHViJDTIQ6AEIfzAR#v=onepage&q=russell%20indexing%20system&f=false

FamilySearch Wiki - https://familysearch.org/wiki/en/United_States_Index_Systems

"Identifying and Using Indexes," *Maryland State Archives Guide to Government Records*, http://guide.mdsa.net/pages/viewer.aspx?page=using%20indexes

Mary Kircher Roddy – Searching for Stories Blog
http://mkrgenealogy.com/searching-for-stories-blog

"Grantor Indexes, Grantee Indexes or a Combo? – Belmont, Ohio" – 1 Aug 2017

"Understanding Indexes - West Virginia Will Index" – 29 Mar 2016

"Understanding Indexes in County Records – Graves Tabular Initial Index" – 1 Mar 2016

I am continuing to post research tips on my blog, typically on Tuesdays, so check back to see if there are other posts with the tag, "Indexes" or "FamilySearch".