Finding Early Deeds at the Cayuga County Clerk's Office in Auburn NY

Private land ownership started within Central NY when the state government issued land patents (similar to deeds) to eligible Revolutionary War soldiers as bounty land. The process of balloting the bounty land by the State to private owners began in about 1790. The names of the first soldiers who were issued land patents are found in a book known as "The Balloting Book". For more information, see website: https://www.cayuga.nygenweb.net/land/mtracths.html

If your ancestor resided in Cayuga County NY and was a land owner, the deed will probably be filed in the Cayuga County Clerk's Office in Auburn NY. Their first Grantee deed index (covering about 1793-1823) only provides a sorting of names by the first letter of the last name and then sequentially by file date. Thus, depending on how much information you already have, you may need to scan a long list of all deeds where the Grantee (buyer) had a surname starting with a specific letter. The county clerk's office is located on the 1st floor of the county office building at 160 Genesee St. in Auburn, NY 13021. Their early deed index is also available on the FamilySearch website.

There is a separate Grantor (Seller) index for about the same period (1793-1823) that is indexed by the first letter of the surname and then the first letter of the first name. From about 1823-1916, there are separate indexes for both the Grantor (Seller) and Grantee (Buyer). Again, these indexes are organized into page sections by the first letter of the surname and then the first letter of the first name. After about 1916, the Grantor & Grantee indexes are sorted by the first 3 or 4 letters of the surname. Be aware that until the late 1800s, there were a separate set of deed indexes and separate deed books to property conveyances for land areas that resided in the former Cayuga (Native American Indian) Reservation. In addition, for certain time periods in the early to mid 1900s, there was a separate set of deed index books for deed documents conveying areas within the City of Auburn NY.

Although Cayuga County NY was not formed until March 1799, the Cayuga County Clerk's Office has some deed books dating back to the mid 1790s. The earliest Grantee index at the Cayuga County Clerk's Office suggests that the first (circa 1793-74) deed book was Liber "F-A". Followed by F-B, F-C. Meanwhile, there were also some deeds filed in a book "M-A" (Don't know if it is true…but, I was once told that this book was perhaps named "M-A, because it was considered a Miscellaneous Record Book). It appears that in 2019, the FamilySearch website only obtained microfilm copies of the Cayuga County Clerk's Office Deed records starting with their copies of Onondaga Deeds in circa 1794. These were contained in Books labeled, such as: O-A, O-B, O-C, O-D, O-E, O-F, O-G, (Onondaga Deed Books). After about 1799, the deed books are each given letters. Book A, B, C, etc. Then, there are double letters like AA, BB, CC, etc. Sometime in the early 1800s they began to use numbers and still do today. (i.e. deed book 100, deed book 101, etc.).

The deed indexes from about 1823 thru about 1916, make reference to the township number and military tract lot location where the property conveyed resides. The deed index books also often indicate the number of acres or designate part of an acre being conveyed. See the township numbers and lots on an 1875 map found on website: https://www.cayuga.nygenweb.net/land/miltract.JPG

When researching land records at the Cayuga County Clerk's Office in Auburn NY, most records are now saved as digital images within a database system. Their staff can easily search & copy deeds for you.

In addition to the 'Grantor & Grantee' (Seller & Buyer) deed index books, the Cayuga County Clerk's Office also maintained a separate deed index book with entries by 'Military Tract Lot'. This (little known) supplemental index was only maintained until the mid-1800s and then discontinued. For every early deed recorded in the Cayuga County Clerk's Office, they would make an entry in the related township section within the column corresponding to the specific lot #. The entry would only include the deed book number and then a number written like a fraction with the acreage conveyed over the page number. This Military Tract Lot Deed Index Book does not cite any names. The Cayuga County Deed 'Military Tract Lot Index' book has become very fragile and faded. The original book now resides at the Cayuga County's Records Management/ Records Retention Office on Court Street in Auburn NY. Digital images of this Military Lot Deed Index Book are also available for researchers at the Cayuga County Historian's Office in Auburn, NY.

Early deeds in central NY will often cite boundary line descriptions with dimensions given in rods (16.5 Ft) or chains (66 Ft.) or links (.66 Ft). If you find an early deed, it can sometimes be difficult for a novice to deciphering the deed description and determine the exact location of the property on modern maps. Hope the above information helps a little. If my explanation is confusing or you have any specific questions, feel free to write me.

Respectfully,
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