PROPERTY LINES FROM AN OLD SURVEY BOOK

HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA
1741 TO 1901

By Roger C. Dodson

Published by the VA-NC Piedmont Genealogical Society
P. O. Box 2272
Danville, VA 24541

U. S. Department of the Interior.
Geological Survey Topographical Maps
7.5 Minute Series 1987

--------About the Author --------

Roger Dodson is a very active member of the VA-NC Piedmont Genealogical Society who has contributed very much to help the Society grow from little over two hundred to almost seven hundred members in the last ten years. He has been a member for many years.

Roger was born and grew up in the Ringgold area of Pittsylvania County, VA. After a thirty year career as an electronics engineer in the United States Naval Research Lab in Washington, DC, he retired and returned to his roots in Ringgold. He lives in a beautiful home in the midst of this area on the land of his family, 1308 Countryside Drive, Ringgold, VA 24586.

After retiring, he got caught up in a massive project which began when he was working. Spurred by curiosity about previous land ownership in the Ringgold area. Roger began researching the original surveys matching them with their metes and bounds, plotting the land ownership areas with current topographical maps. Since retirement he has spent incalculable time in court houses recreating the original land ownership perimeters on the maps of the local counties.

This is Roger's third original writing endeavor. His first was "Footprints from the Old Survey Books of Pittsylvania and Halifax Counties, Virginia" which was published by the Pittsylvania County Historical Society. His next effort was "Property Lines from the Old Survey Books, Pittsylvania County, Virginia" published by the VA-NC Piedmont Genealogical Society in 1995.

The VA-NC Piedmont Genealogical Society greatly appreciates the opportunity to publish this third reference work by Member Roger Dodson.

PROPERTY LINES
FROM AN
OLD SURVEY BOOK
HALIFAX COUNTY, VIRGINIA
1746 to 1901

The property lines drawn in this book show the transition of wilderness into identifiable areas of land that were owned by someone. A major addition to the drawings in this book over that of the companion book "Property Lines From The Old Survey Books, Pittsylvania County, Virginia, 1746 to 1840" is the inclusion of most of the vectors describing a boundary (but still without the corner designations). The vectors are very important when trying to relate a later property to those shown herein. This will, therefore, greatly improve the chances of determining where an ancestor's land was located and thus where that person probably lived. Regarding the vectors, the default distance is poles.

The primary source of the information came from the Halifax County Survey Book No. 1, 1746-1901 which was, at that time, the Southern District of Lunenburg County and which became the initial Halifax County, and included the part of Mecklenburg County that lies south of the Roanoke River, all of Halifax, Pittsylvania, Henry, Patrick, and Franklin counties of today. In a few cases, data from a grant or patent was used in lieu of missing surveys. A concession was made for the area of William Byrd's grant for 105,000 acres, which will be discussed later, where data from deeds were used. The closing date of 1901 is given, but very few surveys are after 1840.

Each survey had a word description (called a certificate) and a drawing of the land (a plat) with waterways indicated by the surveyor. It is the showing of the waterways that makes the survey book so valuable and the plat to show where an error might have occurred. The drawing and fitting together of these surveys provides a basic framework of property locations in the beginning, which provides help in determining the history of a piece of land when a title search, which begins with the present owner and progresses back in time, reaches a block.

The procedure I used was to make a plat of the land according to the description and compare it with the plat made by the surveyor (some of the surveyors are listed in Appendix 1). Note that the way that I have written a given direction is a departure from how a surveyor would write it. He would write it such that the direction that it is read is the direction that the line is headed. I have written it such that I did not have to turn the page upside down to write it and the reader doesn't have to do so to read it. Then a map of today was examined to find a place on the waterway indicated by the description that the plat seemed to fit. When all possible surveys belonging to a given area were considered, then they were fitted together to form a larger land mass. However, resist saying or even thinking "Gee, those survey plats fit like a glove" for in most cases they do not. Frequently the distance from one corner to another will be different in two surveys or the angle will be different, especially when different surveyors are involved or there are more than a few years between the two events. What you see on a drawing is a judgement decision of the author who decided which of the two vectors was correct and that they were the same line.

The "map of today" is based on the U.S. Geological Survey maps, 7.5 minute Series, of the latest printing available as of about 1987 (see Appendix 2). The maps were cut and pasted to form a map portraying a land area of about 5.3 miles wide and 3.4 miles high, or about 11,580 acres. Each map thus formed was initially 9 x 14 inches but reduced to 70% for publication. Also each map page identifies what USGA map(s) the part(s) came from. A unique designation is assigned each map, within the context of this study, according to a grid system.

The grid system used in this study was established by the requirements of the initial Halifax County, mentioned above. A vertical column was set up which would include the western boundary of Patrick County and progress eastward with increasing numbers. A horizontal row called "A" was established which would include the VA-NC state line at the southernmost point and the row just above "A" was called "B", etc, until the northernmost part was included. A diagram of the grid system is shown in Figure 1 and was essentially lifted from the Footprints book. An added feature is the rough inclusion of most of the creeks. That book was a by-product of this study and that of the companion book mentioned above and has been published by the Pittsylvania County Historical Society under the title Footprints From the Old Survey Books of Halifax & Pittsylvania Counties in Virginia which is a combined index of the surveys contained in the aforementioned Survey Book No. 1, and the three books of old surveys of Pittsylvania County. The book makes fairly dull reading until you find the name of an ancestor along with a date and a general area for that person.

Some have said that what is being attempted is impossible. In a sense the statement is correct. There is room for error in every step beginning with the surveyor going into the wrong area or being told the wrong name for the stream flowing through the land being surveyed. At the other end the author read the number wrong or transposed the numbers, etc, etc. Most surveying books will list typical errors and they have all been encountered in this study. However, I feel that any point shown on the drawings and related to the maps will, in general, be within 140 poles of its place in the real world. An exception to this accuracy is anything in Byrd's grant land for which I am reluctant to give any suggested margin of error.

For any given survey a good case can be made that certain errors were made somewhere and upon making corrections, a rather accurate plat can be drawn. One might do the same thing for an adjacent property but if the direction or distance of the line common to both are different, what can be done? In some instances, the placing of two surveys on paper according to the descriptions would leave a thin pie-shaped space between them. Is the space real? Or should one survey be rotated? Later a survey sometimes showed up that occupied that space, but not always. The point is: resist demanding perfection. Do what you feel is best because future investigation will likely prove that you were right or that you were wrong - it is that simple. The problem multiplies as larger land areas are involved. So if you find your desired point on the map and wanted to walk out into the woods to see it, you should be able to walk to the true point instead of having to get into your vehicle and driving several miles to it.

How is a Survey Identified?

Each drawing shows the person for whom that survey was made, date of the survey, initials of the surveyor, acreage, location, and the source of the data. In addition, transferees are also indicated, if the information was in the survey book. Similar identification is given for deeds and grants. A listing of the source designations is shown below; and this is very important because it is like a code to show which of the various sources was used for that particular plat. The number used in the example is unimportant; it is the letter and its placement that is crucial.

81R	Halifax Co., Survey Book 1, page 81, on the right-hand side
12L	Halifax Co., Survey Book 1, page 12, on the left-hand side
185H	Halifax Co., Survey Book 1, page 185 [pages after 181 are numbered by single page, i.e., no left or right]
164P	Pittsylvania County Survey Book 1, page 164
B2-56	Brunswick County Deed Book 2, page 56
L1-150	Lunenburg County Deed Book 1, page 150, where Byrd's executor is the grantor and the name listed is the grantee
H10-76	Halifax County Deed Book 10, page 76, where Byrd's son is the grantor and the name listed is the grantee
H9-32DD	Halifax County Deed Book 9, page 32, where Daniel Dean is the grantor
H11-4JS	Halifax County Deed Book 11, page 4, where John Sizemore is the grantor
GB35-28	Grants Book 35, page 28
PB40-5	Patents Book 40, page 5

For the most part, grants or patents are mentioned only when there was no survey and the information was already on hand. Including them makes fitting of properties more reliable. There is no published index to the grants or patents known to the author for the southern district mentioned above except for those listed in History of Patrick and Henry Counties, Virginia by Pedigo. However, if you examine the card file of grants/patents at the Virginia State Library and Archives you may find the property under a different name. The number of acres and the location is usually the same as the survey and the description is likely to be identical.

What Else is Included?

The primary area drawn is Halifax County, as it exists today, but also included is a small part of Mecklenburg County (the part south of the Roanoke River) and a very small part of Pittsylvania County. Some of Mecklenburg County was included because it was included in the Survey Book No. 1, and it was contiguous with Halifax County, but it was insufficient to become a separate book. A very small part of Pittsylvania County was included because it was part of William Byrd's grant and was included for its completion, as far it could be completed.

About forty-one early roads dating from 1748 to 1854 were found in the survey book. These are discussed and shown in Appendix 3.

Since William Byrd's grant for 105,000 acres (he called it "Havila") occupied such a large part of the county, the problem of showing it as a grant only would result in many "blank" pages. The decision to utilize deeds in that area greatly multiplied the complexity of the project by several orders of

magnitude because of the absence of a drawing by the surveyor and the scarcity of anchors. An anchor might be a corner on the Dan River, somewhere, and another anchor, of sorts, might be five miles away. Thus the accuracy of +/- 140 poles is impossible for the deeded area.

Some surveys never made it into the survey book, and similarly some of Byrd's deeds have not been found by the author. For example, when Hugh Moore was deeded 540 acres on the north side of Dan River on 20 Feb 1747 (L1-168), it adjoined land of Joseph Moore. But where is Joseph Moore's deed?

According to the deed books, on 27 June 1743 John Caldwell was empowered to sell the land in Havila, but the earliest deed that has been found was dated 20 Feb 1746, namely to Gideon Smith (L1-176). It is possible that deeds were granted during the three year gap and recorded in the General Court whose records were burned during the Richmond fire of April 1865. No secondary deeds have been found that gave any hint of where the primary deed was filed.

A further concession was made for Byrd's grant area by including secondary deeds from Daniel Dean, who was deeded the unsold part of Byrd's land on 15 Mar 1764 (H5-46), and tertiary deeds from John Sizemore, who was deeded the remaining unsold land by Dean, on 19 Mar 1782 (H12-199) and on 3 Mar 1783 (H12-344). An attempt was made to include only their deeds for land in Byrd's grant area.

There were a few surveys made for some land in Byrd's grant area on or about 18 May 1784 and they are so noted. It is my guess that at least some of these were the result of land reverting to the Commonwealth because of politics relative to the Revolutionary War.

Some Notes Concerning Mapping

To place the drawings on a map of today could be misleading, because you would expect to find a degree of perfection that is simply not there. The drawing might be good for one plat but not for another. Typically a reader will copy the plat onto a map. And just as likely will find that a line that was supposed to end at a stream ends up on top of a hill. An overlay of one survey is very desirable because if you slide the plat around you are likely to find a place it fits. In other words, keep flexible until you are satisfied with the placement of your plat of interest. I suggest that you avoid whole page overlays, all the time.

A real problem encountered in drawing the maps is illustrated in the following example (which happened for the Pittsylvania book). On 7 Apr 1748 a survey for 400 acres was made for Hugh Moore which is mathematically perfect because of the rectangular shape. Then on 6 Apr 1757 a survey of 1,580 acres was made for Joseph Terry, which surrounds Moore's land on three sides. However, the hole left for Moore's land is equivalent to 582 acres. So what happened? Did the surveyor use a pole that was too long? In this, and another similar example, it appears that the pole might have been almost 20 feet instead of 16.5 feet.

For another type of problem (which may be related to the one just mentioned) there have been a few instances where a couple of good anchors were found, (like the mouth of a branch or where a line met a stream at right

angles.) The metes and bounds of all of the properties between those two points were combined to determine the direction and length of a single line connecting the two anchors. It was nearly always short by about 50 or 60 poles for a line that was about 600 poles long in entirety.

You may wonder why a drawing on the edge of one page does not align with the remainder of the survey on the adjacent page. The reason for it is that whenever a place on the map was found that seemed to be the point used by the surveyor, then that survey was drawn from that reference point. Adjacent surveys were drawn until another anchor was found. Rather than simply stretching the lines, a gap was generated.

Nothing has been said about angles, but they are subject to the same writing and/or reading errors as the distances. Likewise, did the surveyor stay with magnetic North or correct to true North? If he stayed with magnetic North then the survey should be rotated counterclockwise (about 3.5 degrees is a good number) and oftentimes this does improve fitting. In general, the plats drawn from surveys and deeds were drawn without angular correction. It is believed that seasonal and annual magnetic variation is too small to be considered compared to the other problems. Ordinarily, angular error was not too much of a problem, because it is so easy to rotate the paper, but distance variation is very annoying.

A problem that some will encounter as the drawings are used is that some specific survey may contain one or more major errors. If the survey is examined closely, and upon applying every possible solution, like replacing an 8 with a 3, or a 6 with an 0, etc, and yet the error of closure is still simply too large, then you are very likely to find that deeds at a later date involving the same land will describe the boundaries by the neighbor's names. Said another way, the border lines will have no direction or distance.

A few aids for anyone working with the early deeds and trying to tie in with the surveys and grants: distances given in chains may involve a two-pole chain or a four-pole chain (the latter is more common except for Byrd's land which used only the two-pole chain) and direction is sometimes given in a reverse configuration. An example of the latter is East 10 degrees North (or E10N) which is the same as North 80 degrees East (or N80E). Inverse directions have been encountered only in some of the deeds for William Byrd's grant area. Also seen in some of those deeds (namely John Sizemore's deeds) is another unit of distance which was read as "Let" and seems to equal 4 poles. There appears to be consistency in the length of a link which is 25 links = 1 pole. At least once the unit of "perch" has appeared, which is the same as a 4-pole chain, which is the same as a rod. That unit of perch is more common up north.

Many of the plats are being shown even with obvious errors and unresolved inconsistencies. Some readers may call it crude, but with a few thousand plats involved and with six or more vectors per plat, a massive problem is created. As stated above, you can take almost any single survey and make a good case. But a neighboring survey can also destroy your solution. About twenty-four years have lapsed since the idea was formulated and this presentation. Since every examination of a given small area results in some small correction, it is futile to fine-tune any more prior to publication for in the end it can only be close, not perfect.

Some surveys could have been missed entirely. Some could have been thought to be in one county when they were in another. Much effort has been made to separate surveys that were on streams of the same name but were in different counties (of today), like Fall, Sandy, Buffalo, Grassy, Reed/Reedy, the two Winns/Wynns, etc, creeks. Similarly the rivers Dan and Staunton.

As this study neared completion (or being stopped), a search of the records was made to find the residue of surveys (and deeds for Byrd's land) that had not been used. Many of them did find a home, and the remainder are listed in Appendix 4.

How a Survey/Deed was Treated

The procedure for drawing a survey is basically the same as drawing a property that was described by a deed (the surveys are all in poles). All of the drawings were made initially with a scale to conform to the U.S. Geological Survey Maps, 7.5 Minute Series, and then reduced to 70% for publication. A listing of the numbers used is shown in Appendix 5, but to an accuracy far in excess of what is reasonable. To measure a line to 0.05 inches will result in a very minor inaccuracy.

The tools needed are: some good graph paper; a protractor; a ruler graduated in tenths of an inch (a dial micrometer was used for this study); and a sharp pencil. Mark a dot for the beginning, set the protractor center on the dot and zero to the north (or south), proceed from zero to the right (if east of north) or to the left (if for west) to the number of degrees called for, mark that point, place a straight edge to connect that point to the center, measure from the center along that line for the number of inches representing the number of poles called for and mark it. Repeat the procedure for each vector given, merely considering the last corner marked as the beginning of the next vector. If the last point is within 0.1 inches of the beginning, consider the description good.

The above is a solution - not the solution. There are a number of software programs for drawing plats but I had drawn all of the surveys and most of the deeds before I became aware of them.

A Use of the Information in this Book

A specific example will be given to illustrate its usefulness. The example happened to involve land in Pittsylvania County. The question was presented: where was the land owned by Edward Carter who died in 1843 and was on Roaring Fork of Cherrystone Creek? If that were known it might be possible to find his graveyard.

To answer the question required knowing what land he acquired and what land he sold. Edward Carter was found in the Grantee Deed Index about seven times and fortunately some of the deeds had metes and-bounds and all were continguant. It so happened that he sold no land. Upon drawing plats of the described land, it became obvious that his land was within or adjacent to the survey plat for William Wright. Thus location was established.

Knowing that ordinarily a family graveyard is going to be fairly close to the family home necessitated determining where that was located. A check of

the land tax books revealed that only one of his tracts was taxed for a building. So that is where his home had to be. Looking at the map associated with that page of drawings, a graveyard was noted. A drive was made to that place and lo and behold there was Edward Carter's grave with tombstone and others of his family. This is an ideal case but it was real and answered someone's question that had existed for some years. There was no need to embellish it at all.

Conclusion

What about future findings? If you find a gross error or know where one of the leftovers belongs, send the information, along with some kind of supporting facts, to the VA-NC Piedmont Genealogical Society.

The gathering of data for this project began about twenty-four years ago as a result of wanting to learn the location of my Great-great-great-grandfather's land. By the way, it was found. So if you find the drawings useful in locating the property of an early ancestor then the author is pleased and consider the many years of toil and sweat worthwhile. It is my gift to the place of my roots.

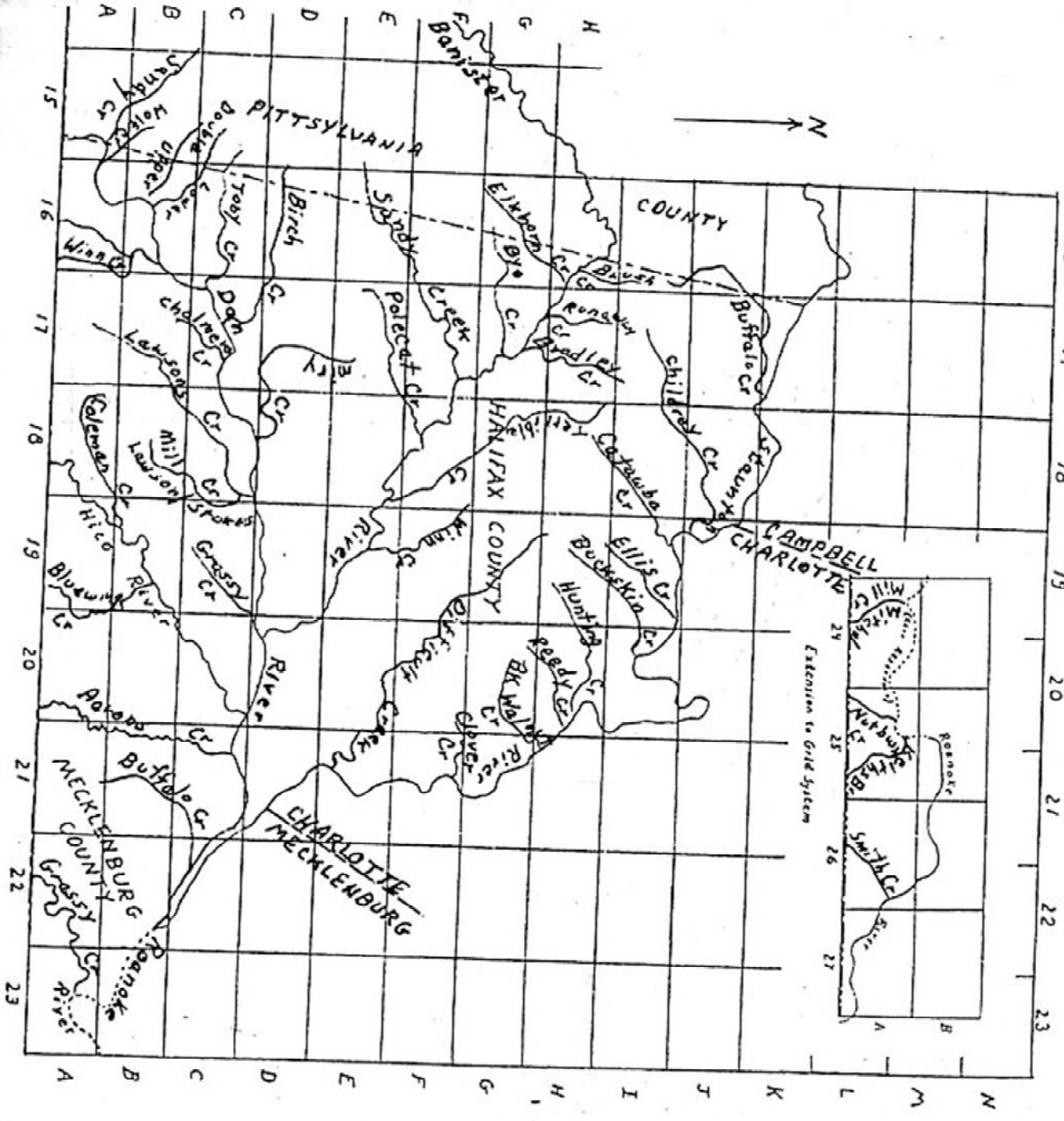
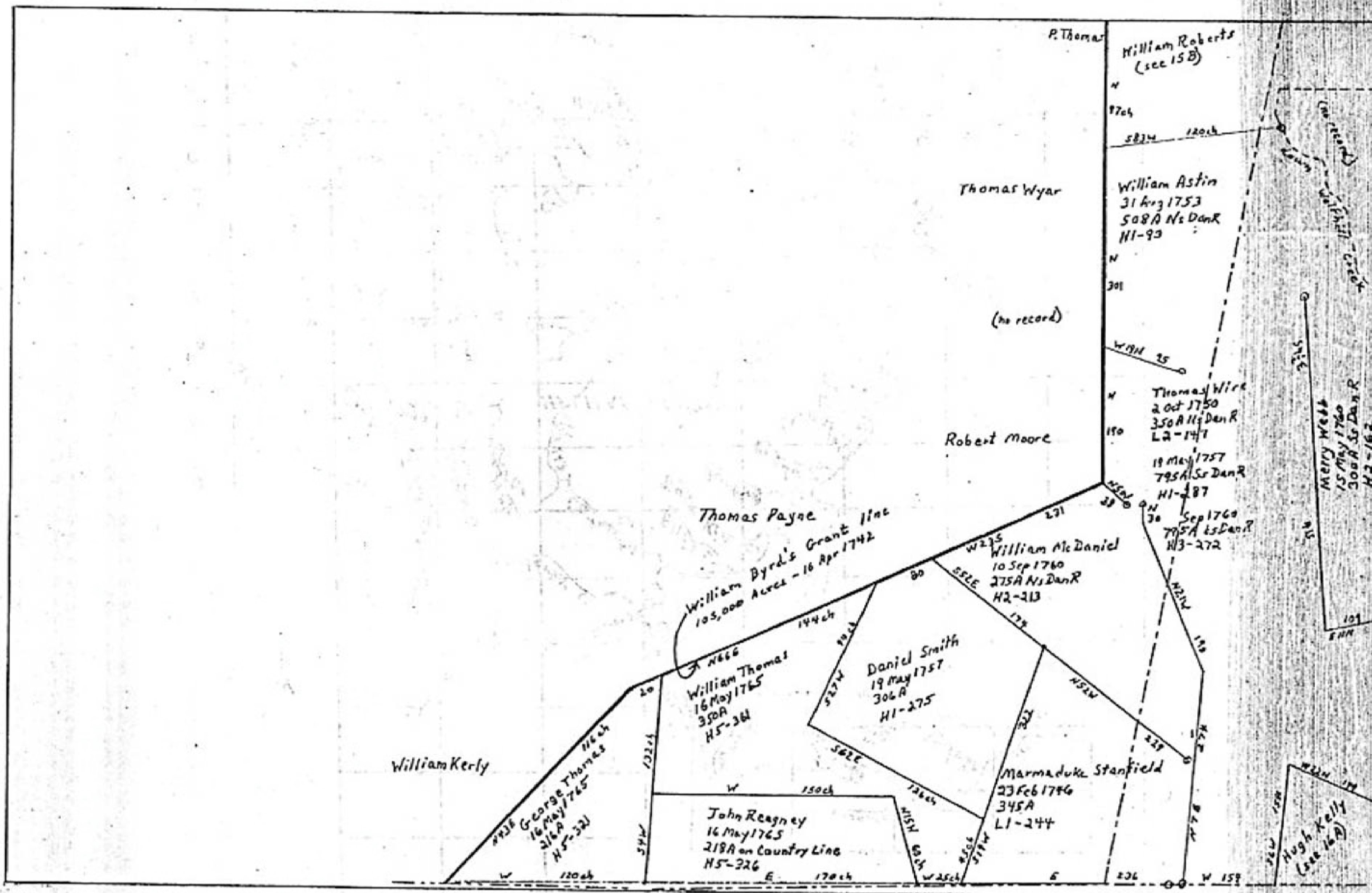
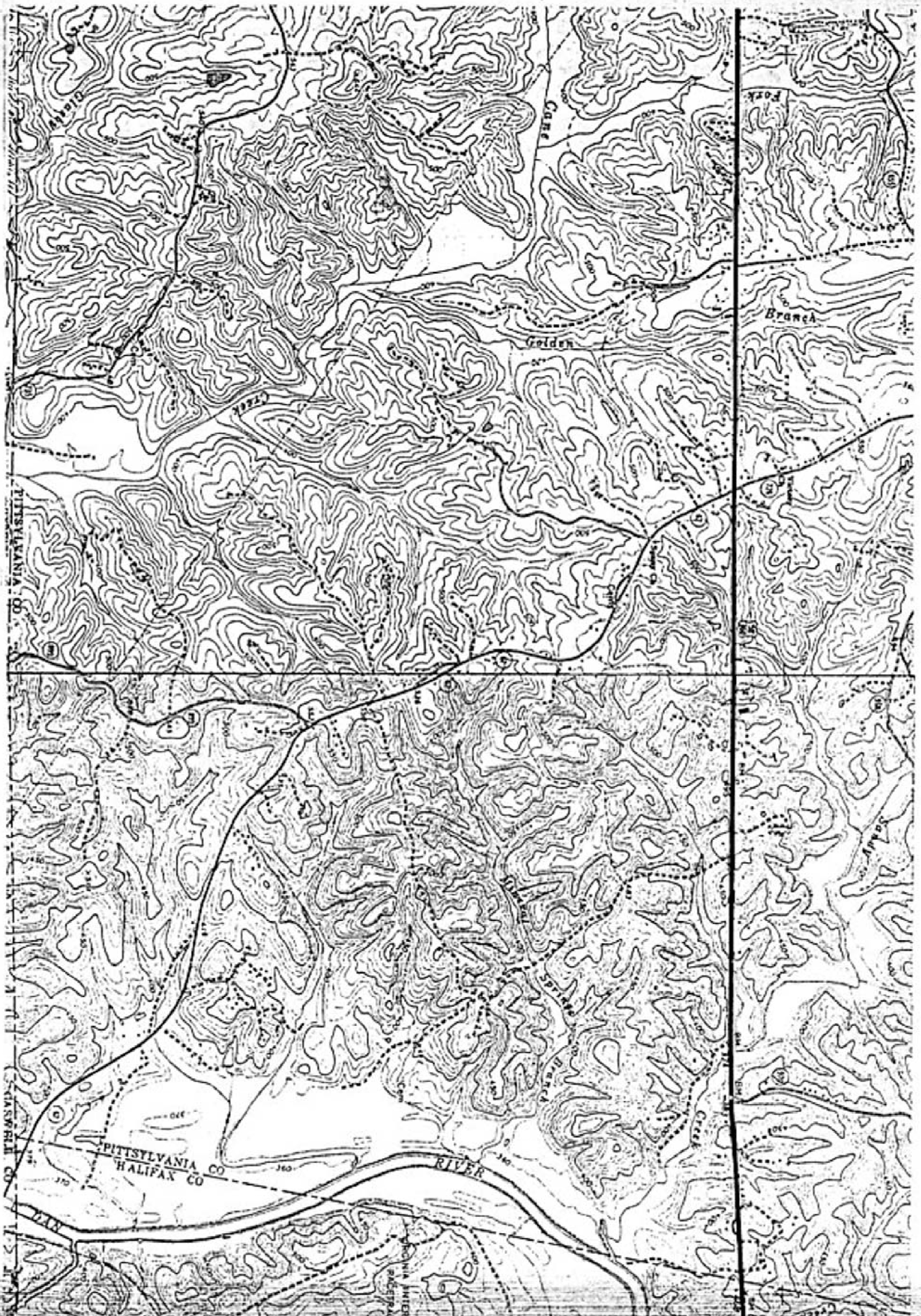
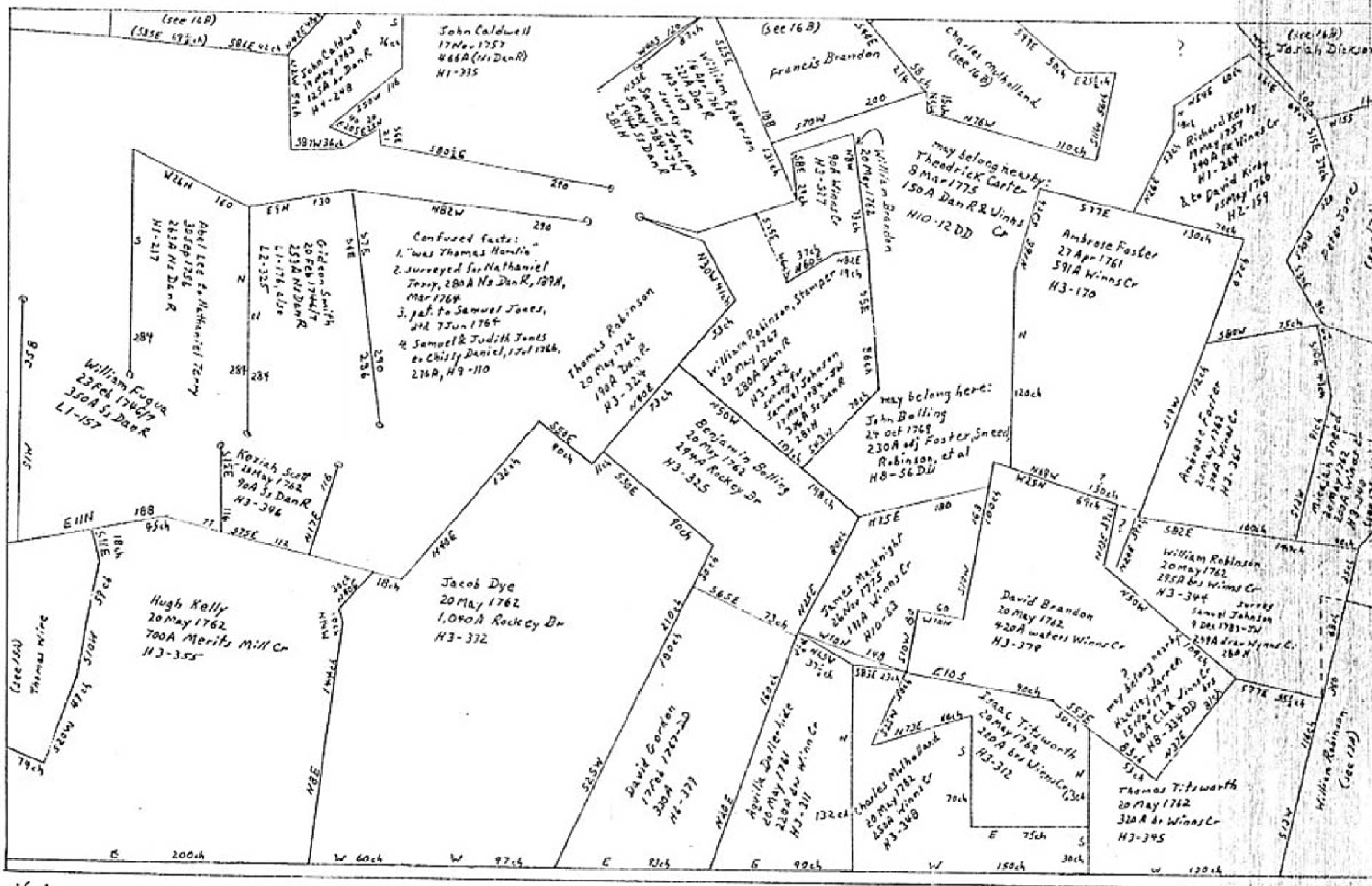


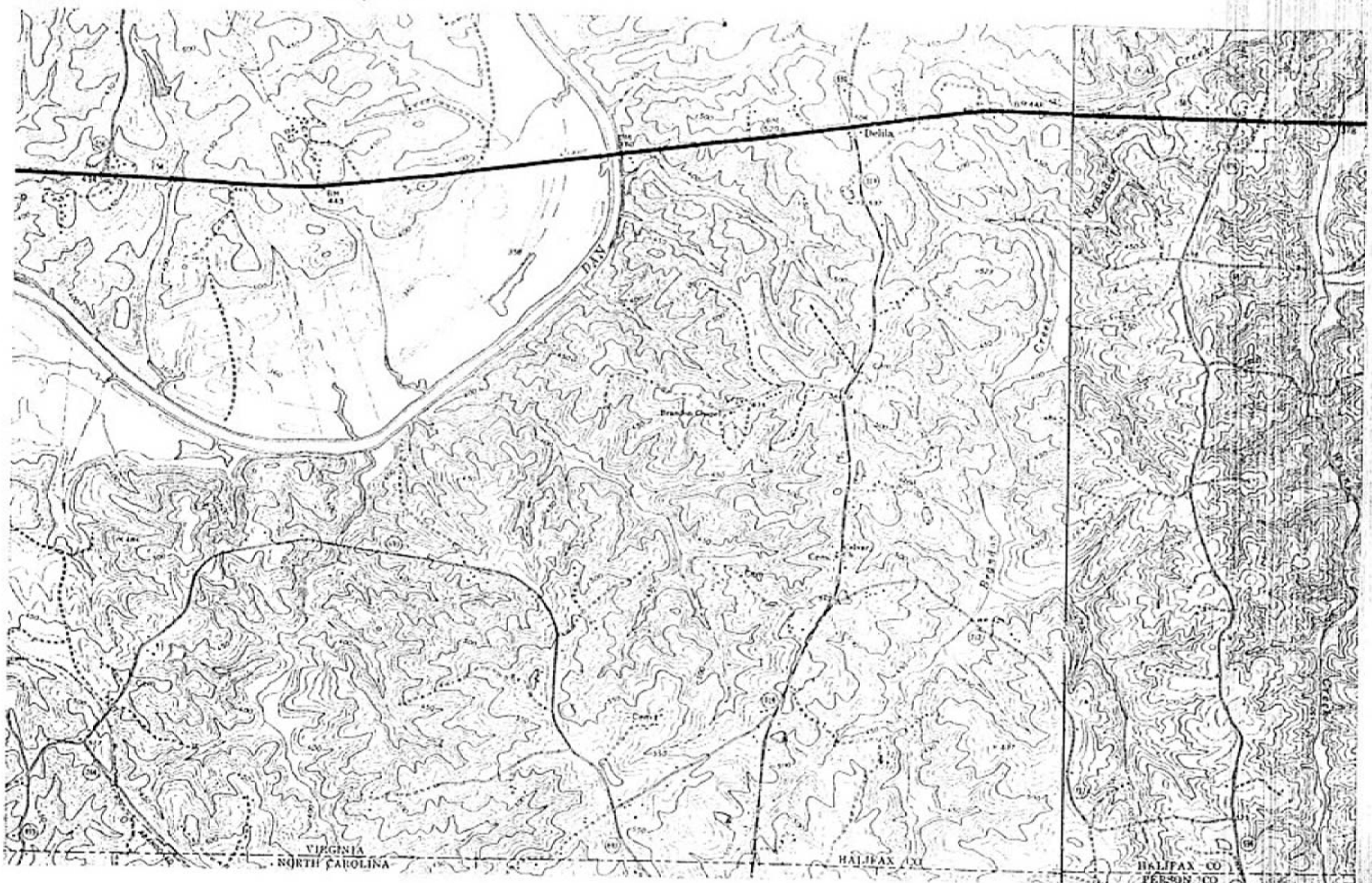
Figure 1. Grid Index to the Drawings and Maps


P. Thomas
William Roberts (see 15B)
Thomas Wyar
William Astin
31 Aug 1753
508A Ns Dan R
H1-93
(no record)
Robert Moore
Thomas Wire
2 Oct 1750
350A Ns Dan R
L2-147
19 May 1757
795A Ss Dan R
H1-287
Sep 1760
795A Ss Dan R
H3-272
Merry Webb
15 May 1760
300A Ss Dan R
H2-162
Thomas Payne
William Byrd's Grant line
105,000 Acres - 16 Apr 1742
William McDaniel
10 Sep 1760
275A Ns Dan R
H2-213
Daniel Smith
19 May 1757
306A
H1-275
William Thomas
16 May 1765
350A
H5-361
William Kerly
George Thomas
16 May 1765
216A
H5-321
John Reagney
16 May 1765
218A on Country Line
H5-326
Marmaduke Stanfield
23 Feb 1746
345A
L1-244
Hugh Kelly (see 16A)


PITTSYLVANIA CO
PITTSYLVANIA CO
HALIFAX CO
CASWELL CO
RIVER
DAN
Golden
Branch
Cane
Fork
Creek
Springs
Branch


John Caldwell
19 May 1763
125A br Dan R
H4-248
John Caldwell
17 Nov 1757
466A (Ns Dan R)
H1-335
William Robertson
16 Apr 1761
221A Dan R
H3-107
survey for
Samuel Johnson
5 May 1784-JN
244A Ss Dan R
281H
Francis Brandon
(see 16B)
Charles Mulholland
(see 16B)
Josiah Dickson
(see 16B)
Richard Kerby
19 May 1757
140A Fk Winns Cr
H1-264
& to David Kirby
25 May 1760
H2-159
may belong nearby:
Theodrick Carter
8 Mar 1775
150A Dan R & Winns Cr
H10-12 DD
William Brandon
20 May 1762
90A Winns Cr
H3-327
Abel Lee to Nathaniel Terry
30 Sep 1756
263A Ns Dan R
H1-217
Gideon Smith
20 Feb 1746/7
253A Ns Dan R
L1-176, also
L2-325
Confused facts:
1. "was Thomas Hamlin"
2. surveyed for Nathaniel Terry, 280A Ns Dan R, 189A, Mar 1764
3. pat. to Samuel Jones, dtd 7 Jun 1764
4. Samuel & Judith Jones to Christy Daniel, 1 Jul 1766, 276A, H9-110
Thomas Robinson
20 May 1762
190A Dan R
H3-324
William Robinson, Stamper
William Robinson
20 May 1762
280A Dan R
H3-342
survey for
Samuel Johnson
17 May 1784-JN
34A Ss Dan R
281H
Ambrose Foster
27 Apr 1761
591A Winns Cr
H3-170
Peter Jones
(see 17A)
William Fuqua
23 Feb 1746/7
350A Ss Dan R
L1-157
Koziah Scott
20 May 1762
90A Ss Dan R
H3-346
Benjamin Bolling
20 May 1762
294A Rockey Br
H3-325
may belong here:
John Bolling
24 Oct 1769
230A adj Foster, Sneed, Robinson, et al
H8-56 DD
Ambrose Foster
20 May 1762
270A Winns Cr
H3-365
Micajah Sneed
20 May 1762
201A Winns Cr
H3-340
(see 17A-wire)
Thomas Wire
(see 12A)
Hugh Kelly
20 May 1762
700A Merits Mill Cr
H3-355
Jacob Dye
20 May 1762
1,040A Rockey Br
H3-372
James Mcknight
26 Nov 1773
14A Winns Cr
H10-63
David Brandon
20 May 1762
420A waters Winns Cr
H3-379
William Robinson
20 May 1762
295A brs Winns Cr
H3-344
survey
Samuel Johnson
9 Dec 1783-JW
249A draws Winns Cr
280K
may belong nearby
Hackley Warren
15 Nov 1771
60A CL & Winns Cr
H8-334 DD
David Gordon
17 Feb 1767-DD
330A
H6-379
Aquilla Dollerhide
20 May 1761
220A br Winn Cr
H3-311
Charles Mulholland
20 May 1762
250A Winns Cr
H3-348
Isaac Titsworth
20 May 1762
280A brs Winns Cr
H3-312
Thomas Titsworth
20 May 1762
320A br Winns Cr
H3-345
William Robinson
(see 17A)

16-A


Delila
DAN
Creek
VIRGINIA
NORTH CAROLINA
HALIFAX CO
HALIFAX CO
PERSON CO