

that was formerly in the custody of that Office. Many of the records date back to the colonial period and constitute a valuable source of information for scholars, genealogists and other persons interested in the history of Maryland.

The patent records particularly have been widely used. They record the original distribution or granting of land to individuals; by the Lord Proprietary until 1776 and subsequently by the State. Thus they are indispensable in tracing the ownership of land in Maryland. From 1634 until 1680, land was granted under the "Conditions of Plantation" which allowed a certain number of acres of land to every person who transported himself or other persons to Maryland to settle. In filing his claim for land, the claimant had to prove his right and list the persons transported. In the absence of any official records of immigration, these claims serve a very useful purpose, which has been recognized by the compilation of a special "Index of Early Settlers." There are also two card indexes covering the entire Patents series: The Patentee Index refers to the names of the persons to whom the land was granted and the Tract Name Index refers to the names of the lands granted.

Persons who took up land during the colonial period did not acquire outright title, but were required to pay a rental to the Lord Proprietary for the use of the land. Two types of records were kept to facilitate the collection of the rents. The Rent Rolls listed the land granted by tract name and recorded the names of the successive owners. The Debt Books recorded the names of the owners of land and listed the various tracts held by them. A card index is available for each series.

In addition to being a court of original jurisdiction and an appeals court for cases tried in county courts, the Provincial Court also served as a court of record. At first, the records of all of these functions were entered in the same volumes; but beginning in 1679, court proceedings were entered in separate volumes called Provincial Court Judgments. Soon after the Hall of Records Commission became the State archival agency in 1935, these Judgments were transferred to the Commission. But at the insistence of the Commissioner of the Land Office, the Provincial Court Deeds remained in his office. Now the records will be reunited again.

The records of the Chancery Court were placed in the custody of the Land Office in 1851 when the Court was abolished. Many of the cases heard by the Court related to the settlement of estates and are thus very important in tracing land titles. Historians and genealogists also find these records a rich source of information.