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# Indexing Best Practices (# 1, July 20, 2022)

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PROPERTY RECORDS INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION

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For

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# Introduction

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## Purpose of the Index

The recorder's Property Records Index is the means for searching data to retrieve a recorded document from a county's land records management system or record books. The index does not answer the question of whether ownership of property or an interest in the property has changed. The document itself must ultimately be evaluated to determine ownership or interest.

Typically, statutory requirements for an index are 1) names of the parties to the document; 2) the date and time of filing or recording; 3) the document/instrument number (or other location data, such as "book and page"); and 4) the type of document/instrument.

Over the past 75+ years, many recorders have adopted practices for adding information to the index to make it easier for all users to determine whether a particular document needs to be examined more closely.

Examples of information added to the index include abbreviated legal descriptions, cross-references to related documents or court-case numbers, multiple variations on a name appearing in a document, and specific types of documents.

Although potentially helpful to the user, there is a possible increased liability to the recorder to adding information to the index that is not statutorily required. Improvements in document imaging have made it much easier to offer a user a view of the actual document for evaluation rather than providing that information through the index.

Additionally, the index is a living document. Index information is added and changed daily, and corrections are made when errors are discovered. The index needs to be consistent and straightforward.

## Background

Throughout the approximately 3,600 recording jurisdictions in the United States, there is minimal legislation or administrative regulation on how to index recorded documents. For example, the states of Georgia, North Carolina, and Virginia have legislated or adopted statewide indexing standards and rules for the various recording jurisdictions. Indexers should review and discuss the guidelines in place in their jurisdiction for indexing property records. Understanding the standards, rules and guidelines is important for keeping the index consistent and easily searchable.

Historically, there was no expectation for submitters to provide any index data when presenting their paper document for recording. This was viewed as the responsibility solely of the recorder. The advent of eRecording made it possible for document submitters to furnish a minimal amount of index data. Today, the submission requirements for indexing continue to vary significantly among eRecording jurisdictions.

The adoption of indexing best practices should address any submission discrepancies and help reduce eRecording rejections. PRIA recommends that recording jurisdictions require only the minimum amount of index data necessary to match a submitted document to its associated image(s). Also, recording jurisdictions should set reasonable tolerance levels for accuracy of submitted data, allowing for misspellings, punctuation variances, and abbreviations, for example.

Each recording jurisdiction should continually maintain quality control within their records. To expect each submitter to duplicate the indexing expertise of the recorder's internal staff is unrealistic and impractical.

PRIA recommends that recorders, submitters, aggregators, and eRecording software vendors continue to work together to develop and refine technologies that will aid in the automated creation of index data.

In the past, limited field lengths of legacy database systems, and significant input and data storage costs mandated the abbreviation of common names and words. Advances in technology, including expanded field lengths, optical character recognition, and low-cost storage have resulted in reduced training times for indexers, more consistent data elements, and overall improvement in data quality.

These advancements in technology have allowed for a "key it as you see it" approach where index data is not abbreviated or expanded, nor are the spellings changed from how they appear on the documents. However, there remain certain naming conventions, punctuations (e.g., dashes, apostrophes), and special characters (e.g., @, &) that often require some special handling to keep search routines and outputs consistent.

It is important to note that the goal of creating indexing best practices is to normalize the data elements and improve the overall quality, efficiency, and confidence in searching public land records. Today's Land Records Management Systems (LRMS) allow for greater flexibility with indexing procedures which should be considered when adopting these Best Practices. Where appropriate, this paper will provide multiple options that address both the limitations and abilities of database structures.

## Scope

This paper focuses primarily on the manual procedures and ultimate data structures deemed necessary to achieve the desired consistency in the database elements across any LRMS. The methodologies and procedures required to perform queries and searches of the indices themselves are beyond the scope of this paper.

## Section 1. General Guidelines

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### 1. Capitalization of Letters

- A. Recommend upper case letters throughout the index.
- B. Most LRMS systems convert lower to upper case.

### 2. Corrections

- A. Make corrections to the index whenever and wherever necessary. However, incorrect data should never be deleted from the index; rather an additional index entry with the corrected information should be added.
- B. Aim to make the index consistent and accessible through the span of years. Provide notice in the comments/notes section indicating where, when, and why changes occurred.

### 3. Index as Shown on the Document

- A. Index -data as it appears on the documents. This statement applies to all applicable fields within your LRMS. If it is spelled incorrectly on the document, input exactly as shown.

### 4. Cross-Indexing/Referencing

- A. Cross-Indexing refers to the practice of indexing names or companies that may be related to another name or heading.
- B. Use common sense when cross-indexing by name variation (e.g., when you see a/k/a or f/k/a, key the second name separately). The extra time it takes to cross-index a name variation may save hours of searching in the future.
- C. Cross-referencing is vital when indexing documents in a chain of title, e.g., document number, book and page, legal description, and receipt number.

### 5. Numbers

- A. Arabic numbers stay as numbers (e.g., 1, 2, 3, 4, 10).
- B. Roman numerals stay as numerals (e.g., I, II, III, IV, X).
- C. Legacy system restrictions may require different variations.

### 6. Abbreviations

- A. Most recording jurisdictions now have an unlimited or 100-character field length for the party name field, so DO NOT ABBREVIATE, unless the abbreviation is on the document.
- B. Legacy software may dictate the need to truncate entries if there is inadequate room in the entry field.

### 7. Punctuation and Special Characters in Organization/Corporation Names

Use punctuation when necessary to keep the integrity of a name.

- A. If there is a possessive apostrophe ('), use it (e.g., JOE'S).

- B. If there is an apostrophe (') in a name, use it (e.g., O'MALLEY'S).
- C. If there is a period (.), use it (e.g., BANK.COM).
- D. If there is a comma (,), use it (e.g., ROMER, COOK & JONES).
- E. If there is a hyphen (-), use it (e.g., ROSS-JONES APOTHOCARY).
- F. If there is a slash (/), use it (e.g., ROSS/JONES APOTHOCARY).
- G. If there are any other special characters, use them (e.g., @, #, \$, &).

## Section 2. Indexing Individual Names

### 1. Single Last Names

Index as: LASTNAME FIRSTNAME MIDDLENAME/INITIALS SUFFIX

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Richard and Sarah Marshall	MARSHALL RICHARD MARSHALL SARAH
John J. Brown	BROWN JOHN J
Dorothy Brown	BROWN DOROTHY
William Samuel Jones III	JONES WILLIAM SAMUEL III
J R Smith	SMITH J R

NOTE: Avoid the use of "Mr." and "Mrs." Use only when first name for the individual is not presented. When back indexing historical records, it may be necessary to consider the following examples.

Mrs. John J Brown	BROWN JOHN J MRS
Mr. and Mrs. Brown	BROWN MR BROWN MRS
Richard Marshall and spouse	MARSHALL RICHARD

### 2. Last Name Prefixes and Compound Names

If unsure of last name or middle name, index multiple ways, as follows.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Mary Der Kegan	DER KEGIAN MARY KEGIAN MARY DER
John Mac Donald	MAC DONALD JOHN DONALD JOHN MAC
Walter Van de Kamp	VAN DE KAMP WALTER DE KAMP WALTER VAN
Ted de Grazia	DE GRAZIA TED GRAZIA TED DE
John L. St. George	ST GEORGE JOHN L
Jean Saint Martin	SAINT MARTIN JEAN



	MARTIN JEAN SAINT
Dorothy Ste. Marie	STE MARIE DOROTHY
Diane de la Varga	DE LA VARGA DIANE VARGA DIANE DE LA

### 3. Hyphenated Last Names of Individuals

USE the hyphen as follows. Index entries showing “\*” are optional indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Cecil P. Spring-Rice	SPRING-RICE CECIL P RICE CECIL P SPRING-*
Blanche Duff-Gordon	DUFF-GORDON BLANCHE GORDON BLANCHE DUFF-*

### 4. Common Middle Name or Two Word Last Name with No Hyphen

Index entries showing “\*” are optional indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Joyce Martin Gray	GRAY JOYCE MARTIN MARTIN GRAY JOYCE*
Hernando Gomez Gonzalez	GONZALEZ HERNANDO GOMEZ GOMEZ GONZALEZ HERNANDO*

### 5. Individual Names Beginning with Honorary Title

Any known honorary title should be ignored.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Rev. John W. Jones	JONES JOHN W
Captain Robert Baker	BAKER ROBERT
The Honorable Roy Jones	JONES ROY

### 6. Individual Names Ending with Professional Title

Any known professional title should be ignored.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Betty R. Smith, CPA	SMITH BETTY R
Norma Jane Baker, MD	BAKER NORMA JANE
Judson Starr, Esq.	STARR JUDSON

## 7. Parentheticals and Nicknames

If the name presented appears to be a nickname and is typed or signed, DO pick up the variation with or without special characters.

Index entries showing "\*" are optional indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
James (Jim) Smith	SMITH JAMES JIM SMITH JIM*
George "Rocky" Brown	BROWN GEORGE ROCKY BROWN ROCKY*
Mary (Smith) Brown	BROWN MARY SMITH SMITH MARY BROWN*

If a portion of a name appears in parenthesis and the intent is NOT clear, index each possible variation

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
R Margaret Watts (Barber)	BARBER R MARGARET WATTS WATTS BARBER R MARGARET WATTS R MARGARET BARBER

## 8. Foreign Names

Index entries showing "\*" are optional indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Federico Sanchez Martinez	MARTINEZ FEDERICO SANCHEZ SANCHEZ MARTINEZ FEDERICO*
Magda Maria de Sanchez	DE SANCHEZ MAGDA MARIA SANCHEZ MAGDA MARIA DE MARIA DE SANCHEZ MAGDA*
Tuey Far Low	LOW TUEY FAR FAR LOW TUEY*
Bill Soo Hoo	HOO BILL SOO SOO HOO BILL*
King Chana	CHANA KING

### 9. “Also Known As” or “Formerly Known As” Names (a/k/a and f/k/a)

Index entries showing “\*” are optional indexing:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Mary Smith Brown a/k/a Mary Smith	BROWN MARY SMITH SMITH MARY SMITH BROWN MARY*
Jean Jones Williams f/k/a Jean Jones	WILLIAMS JEAN JONES JONES JEAN JONES WILLIAMS JEAN*

### 10. Individual's Name Abbreviated

Index as presented. When back indexing historical records, it may be necessary to look at how the document was signed and then index additional entries, as noted below.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Chas. Jackson	JACKSON CHAS JACKSON CHARLES
Wm. Gardner	GARDNER WM GARDNER WILLIAM
Jos. Brown	BROWN JOS BROWN JOSEPH

### 11. Multiple Unidentified Parties (Unknown Tenants, Spouses, Heirs, Trustees, et al.)

Index the individuals shown and DO NOT add the unidentified parties or the phrase “et al.” Additional entries may be necessary if there are other signatures included on the document.

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Ringo Starr, et al	STARR RINGO

### 12. Trust Names Are Treated as an Organization

Index it as you see it. Some variations to this are those that index all documents as LAST NAME, FIRST NAME, MIDDLE INITIAL, TRUST as shown below

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
John J Smith Living Trust	JOHN J SMITH LIVING TRUST SMITH JOHN J LIVING TRUST

### 13. Misspelled Names.

Index as presented on document. If possible, note that document is indexed as presented.

Index as follows. It may be necessary to look at how the document was signed and then index based on the signature, as noted below.

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Dyylan Eric Jones	JONES DYLLAN ERIC JONES DYLAN ERIC
Megan Ann Smmith	SMMITH MEGAN ANN SMITH MEGAN ANN

## Section 3. Indexing Corporation/Organization Names

### 1. General Rules

Names of Corporations/Organizations

- A. Recommended format: Index as seen/shown.
- B. Use “The” at the beginning of a firm name if it is part of the official name.
- C. Use “A” at the beginning of a firm name if it is part of the official name.

Punctuation Marks

- A. Use punctuation marks and symbols.
- B. If there is a possessive apostrophe (’), use it (e.g., JOE’S).
- C. If there is an apostrophe (’) in a name, use it (e.g., O’MALLEY’S).
- D. If there is a period (.), use it (e.g., BANK.COM).
- E. If there is a comma (,), use it. (e.g., ROMER, COOK & JONES).
- F. If there is a hyphen (-), use it. (e.g., ROSS-JONES APOTHCARY).
- G. If there is a slash (/), use it. (e.g., ROSS/JONES APOTHCARY).
- H. If there are any other special characters, use them (@, #, \$, &).

### 2. Firm Names Containing Given Names or Initials

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
A L Johnson Corporation	A L JOHNSON CORPORATION
J and A Smith Co	J AND A SMITH CO
Marshall Field and Co	MARSHALL FIELD AND CO
Montgomery Ward & Co	MONTGOMERY WARD & CO
J. C. Penney	J. C. PENNEY
B. W. Paper Box Corp.	B. W. PAPER BOX CORP.
Virginia Insurance Corporation	VIRGINIA INSURANCE CORPORATION
Cecil W. Spring-Rice Title Co	CECIL W. SPRING-RICE TITLE CO
David Mac Donald Escrow	DAVID MAC DONALD ESCROW

Crown Savings Bank of New York	CROWN SAVINGS BANK OF NEW YORK
DiTech.com	DITECH.COM
Net.B@nk	NET.B@NK

### 3. Firm Names Containing Hyphens, Commas, Apostrophes, Slashes, Parenthesis, Numbers, Symbols and Letters.

Index as the names appear as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Romer, Cooke, and Jones Inc.	ROMER, COOKE, AND JONES INC.
O'Malley and Johnson, Inc.	O'MALLEY AND JOHNSON, INC.
Bar-B-Q Pit of Florida	BAR-B-Q PIT OF FLORIDA
Ed's Bar B-Q	ED'S BAR B-Q
M & A Alexander Productions	M & A ALEXANDER PRODUCTIONS
D/3 Aluminum Products, Inc.	D/3 ALUMINUM PRODUCTS, INC.
Joe D'Andre 1980's Bar	JOE D'ANDRE 1980'S BAR
Century 21 (R) Mortgage (SM)	CENTURY 21 (R) MORTGAGE (SM)
A-1 Auto Parts	A-1 AUTO PARTS
\$1 Store	\$1 STORE
No. 6 Speckels, Inc.	NO. 6 SPECKELS, INC.

### 4. Multiple Names: Also Known As (a/k/a), Formerly Known As (f/k/a), Doing Business As (d/b/a), Successor By, As Trustee, etc.

Index as follows:

Name(s) on Document	Index Entry
Bank of America National Association as Trustee successor by merger to Lasalle Bank National Association, as trustee for Wachovia Bank Commercial Mortgage Trust, Commercial Mortgage Pass-through Certificates, Series 2006-C24 by Wells Fargo Bank N.A., and successor by merger to Wachovia Bank N.A., as master servicer	BANK OF AMERICA LASALLE BANK WACHOVIA BANK WELLS FARGO BANK
24/7 Services Repair DBA Stamps Truck & Tire Repair	24/7 SERVICES REPAIR STAMPS TRUCK & TIRE REPAIR
Generations Bank f/k/a First Community Bank	GENERATIONS BANK FIRST COMMUNITY BANK

## 5. Location and Directional Words in a Name

Index as follows:

<b>Name(s) on Document</b>	<b>Index Entry</b>
Bank of Brandon at Lutz	BANK OF BRANDON AT LUTZ
Robinson's of Florida	ROBINSON'S OF FLORIDA
Pacific Finance Co. San Diego	PACIFIC FINANCE CO. SAN DIEGO
Steel & Iron Co Dallas	STEEL & IRON CO DALLAS
Southeast Water Company	SOUTHEAST WATER COMPANY
5010 W. Kennedy Associates	5010 W. KENNEDY ASSOCIATES