

Territorial Records – Where Are They?

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1. Name a territory.
2. What kinds of records would you expect to find in territorial records?
3. Where would you look to find territorial records?

Background

Territories were created to organize and manage new land acquisitions: land ceded by the original 13 colonies after independence and from land acquired through purchase or cession, treaty or annexation. Many *organized* territories existed from 1787 to 1959. They were administered by the State Department (RG 59) until 1783 and then the Department of the Interior (RG 48). During that time 31 territories applied for and achieved statehood.

The Northwest Ordinance of 1789 established territorial governments and mandated that new states be created from the territories, as opposed to them becoming part of existing states. The President appointed a governor; the land was surveyed; Public Lands sales and grants were administered by the governors. A population of 60,000 was required in order to apply for statehood. A referendum would be held, Congress petitioned, and a constitution and form of government adopted, following which Congress would vote on acceptance and the President would sign legislation creating a new state.

When the whole territory did not qualify for statehood, a portion with sufficient population for a vote could be taken petitioning Congress for statehood rights. As parts of territories became states, many *unorganized* territories were orphaned from the parts of a larger territory. Vern Dale has provided an excellent chart showing the progression to statehood for each of the 31.

Kinds of Records That Were Kept

A variety of records were kept in the different territories. They consist of territorial administrative records (*Territorial Papers of the United States* – 28 vol., *American State Papers* – 1st to 14th Congress, *Trans-Mississippi West 1804-1912*, *US Serial Set* – 15th Congress to today), county records, and other local records. Censuses were taken prior to statehood and these are widely available. Tax records, petitions, and memorials were also kept and may still be in existence.

Status of Records

Some of the records were destroyed. Some were filmed or transcribed and published in books; some are still in boxes in state and local repositories. Some of these records have been indexed, some have not.

Where are they now? Where can you find them?

Territorial Records If the territorial records were for some reason sent to Washington, DC, they are located at the National Archives. The National Archives has filmed the territorial records kept there. The 26 volumes of *The Territorial Papers of the United States* can be found at the Green Library at Stanford.

Other Federal Resources Some territorial records were kept by the departments which created them and not turned over to the National Archives. A list of sources for documents describing them is below.

Records Found in the States Other records may still be found in county courthouses and state archives. Local historical and genealogical societies may also have some territorial records. A listing of selected online information about records held in different states is below. Some include only listing and descriptions, others have abstracts, transcriptions, and digital images.

Sources for Genealogists There are books and websites which were useful in understanding what the records are and where they can be found. The list below will be helpful to you as you search for your ancestors' records.

YOUR PLAN

1. First determine the dates your family lived in an area. Using the chart, Territorial Time Line, list the territories where your ancestors lived.
2. Check for your state, using the list, Some Records in the States. Explore any resources found there.

3. Using the chart, Territorial Records at the National Archives, determine what microfilm is available for your territories. Visit NARA San Bruno or the Green Library at Stanford to view them.
 4. Using the list Other Federal Resources, determine what other departments have records for your area. Correspond with the department(s) to determine access to the records.
 5. Go back to the state records; correspond with state, county, and local history and genealogy groups. Is there a website or message board, or must you use the snail? Get in your car and go visit their archives!
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FEDERAL RESOURCES: Accessed Sep 2013

- **Territorial Records on Microfilm at the National Archives.** *The U. S. National Archives and Records Administration*, <http://www.archives.gov>. [To reach the NARA Microfilm Catalog, choose Genealogists, then choose Online Research Tools, then choose Microfilm Catalog, then search for *territorial* (Most available at NARA San Bruno)].
- Carter, Clarence Edwin, and John Porter Bloom. *The Territorial Papers of the United States*. Washington, DC: U.S. G.P.O., 1934-1969. Available at Archive.org. Also check WorldCat. Compendium of documents and references to other Federal/State documents – includes index, transcriptions of records, originals in RG files; excludes purely local matters, local Bureau of Indian Affairs documents, justice.
- Congressional Information Service. *(CIS) U.S. Serial Set Index, 1789–1969*. Washington, DC: Congressional Information Service, 1975–. Also indexes the *American State Papers*. Although the CIS index is not as comprehensive as Grassroots of America for individual names, it can lead to information in the other classes of the *American State Papers* or the *U.S. Serial Set* that is not contained in Classes VIII and IX.
- McMullin, Phillip W. *Grassroots of America*. Elk Grove Village, IL: Genedex Corporation, 1972. A computerized index to the American State papers: land grants and claims (1789-1837) with other aids to research (Government document serial set numbers 28 through 36) Complete index to the individuals named in the American State Papers. (Class VIII and IX only).
- Parker, David W. *Calendar of papers in Washington archives relating to the territories of the United States (to 1873)*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Institution, 1911. A list of all the government papers related to the acquisition and development of the States. Includes documents from Department of State, Treasury, Land Office, and Congress.
- *The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804-1912: A Guide to Federal Records for the Territorial Period* Parts I-IV. Compiled by Robert M. Kvasnicka. Washington, DC: National Archives and Records Administration, 1993., Section 3 of this 4-part record covers the General Land Office. Included are descriptions of records pertaining to land-grant railroads, Indian and forest reserves, mining claims, and private land claims in areas acquired by the Louisiana Purchase and the Mexican War, as well as the land entry papers documenting thousands of individual transactions transferring public lands to private ownership.

SOME RECORDS IN THE STATES: Accessed September 2013

- Council of State Archivists, "Directory of State and Territorial Archives and Records Programs." <http://www.statearchivists.org/states.htm>.
- **Arkansas** – University of Arkansas at Little Rock, William H. Bowen School of Law, "Arkansas Territorial Briefs and Records." <http://arcourts.ualr.edu/>. Images, transcripts & abstracts of records & briefs filed with Arkansas territorial courts 1809-1819.
- **Dakota Territory Records** – State Historical Society of North Dakota, "Dakota Territory." <http://history.nd.gov/archives/stateagencies/dtrecords.html>. Description, listing, & location of territorial records in North Dakota and South Dakota. No images online. <http://history.nd.gov/archives/stateagencies/dtrecords.html>
- **Florida** – Florida Memory, "Spanish Land Grants." <http://www.floridamemory.com/collections/spanishlandgrants/>. Images of land claims filed by Florida settlers in order to prove land ownership after the transfer of the territory from Spain to the United States in 1821.
- **Illinois** – James, Edmund J. *The Territorial Records of Illinois*. Springfield, Ill.: Phillips Bros., 1901. <http://archive.org/details/territorialrecor00jame> Book online at the Internet Archive.
- **Indiana** – January, Alan F. Friends of the Indiana State Archives, "Territorial Records in the Indiana State Archives." http://fisa-in.org/news/articles/territorial_records.html. Description of the records that are available

- **Iowa Territorial Records** – State Historical Society of Iowa, "State Archives Holdings." <http://www.iowahistory.org/archives/holdings/>. Military, governors' papers, marriage records, no images.
- **Kansas 1854-61** – Kansas Historical Society, "Kansas Territorial Records 1854-1861." <http://www.kshs.org/p/kansas-territorial-records-1854-1861/13856>. Slave or no slave election ballots, land survey plats, territorial census records.
- **Louisiana-Missouri and Arkansas Territories** – Arkansas Archives, "Territorial Papers." <http://www.usgwarchives.net/ar/territory.htm>. Includes links to transcriptions.
- **Mississippi** – Mississippi Department of Archives and History, "Government Records: Colonial and Territorial." <http://mdah.state.ms.us/arrec/collection.php>. Catalog and digital archives of maps and government records from Mississippi's colonial periods—French, Spanish, and English—and Mississippi Territorial records.
- **Nevada** – Nevada State Library and Archives, "Territorial Records." http://nsla.nevadaculture.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1914&catid=84:library-services&Itemid=417. 1860 census, governors' records, guides.
- **New Mexico** – Rocky Mountain Online Archive, "Inventory of the New Mexico Adjutant General Records, 1847-[ongoing]." http://rmoa.unm.edu/docviewer.php?docId=nmar1973-019.xml#i_140950152_622
- **North Dakota** – North Dakota State University Archives, "Dakota Territory 1885 Census Index." <http://library.ndsu.edu/db/census/> Can also browse by occupation.
- **Oklahoma** – Oklahoma Historical Society, "1890 Oklahoma Territorial Census." <http://www.okhistory.org/research/1890/index.php>.
- Smith, J. W. "Smith's First Directory of Oklahoma Territory" <http://www.okhistory.org/research/smiths/index.php> Lists individuals living in Oklahoma Territory. First half of book lists those residing in towns; second half lists homesteaders. Census and directory available on CD.
- **Oregon** – Oregon State Archives, "Provisional and Territorial Records Guide." <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/pages/records/provisionalguide/provisionaltable.html>. Includes maps, agency and county histories, and descriptions of provisional and territorial government records in Oregon State Archives.
- ^a **Utah** – Family Search, "Utah, Territorial Case Files of the U.S. District courts, 1870-1896." <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/1854318>. Court records at Family Search (view on Fold3).
- Utah Department of Administrative Services, Division of Archives & Records Service, "Utah State Archives Research." <http://archives.utah.gov/research/index.html>. Descriptions of land, military, mining, probate, criminal cases, brands, Indian wars service.

SOME SOURCES FOR GENEALOGISTS: Accessed September 2013

- Butler, Jack. *Southern Heir Genealogy*, "Before They Were States . . . Finding and Using Territorial Records." <http://www.shwgenealogy.com/TerritorialRecords.pdf>.
- Dollarhide, William. *Census Substitutions and State Census Records. Volume 1: Eastern States; Volume 2: Western States*. Bountiful, Utah: Family Roots Publishing Company, 2007. Identifies Census Substitutes, as well as State Census Records for the United States of America. The substitutes are those name lists derived from tax lists, directories, military lists, land ownership lists, voter registrations, and other compilations of names of residents for an entire state, one or more counties of a state, or one or more towns of a county.
- Lainhart, Ann S. *State Census Records*. Baltimore Maryland: Genealogical Publications, 1992. Comprehensive list of state census records, state by state, year by year, often county by county and district by district.
- Legried, Jean R., adapted by Don B. Dale. *Kansas Heritage Group*, "Beginning Genealogy Lesson 8: Federal, State and Territorial Records." <http://www.kansasheritage.org/research/dbd/08lesson.html>.
- Stein, Mark. *How the States Got Their Shapes*. New York, NY: Smithsonian Books/HarperCollins, 2008.
- *Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*, articles include: "Historic Regions of the United States," "Northwest Territory," "Organized Incorporated Territories of the United States," "Territorial Evolution of the United States," "United States Territorial Acquisitions."

Homework:

- Identify the territories where your ancestors may have lived.
- Visit territorial records to look for your ancestors.

Territorial Records at the National Archives

National Archives – Pacific Region at San Francisco, located in San Bruno

Cabinet 118, drawer 5, & 119, drawers 1 & 2

A further list is available for the first two items, The Territorial Papers of the United States, 1787-1845

Cabinet	Drawer	RG No	Pub No	Rolls	Title
118	5	64	M721	1 - 15	The Territorial Papers of the United States, 1787-1845
119	1	64	M721	16 End	The Territorial Papers of the United States, 1787-1845
119	1	48	M191	1-3 End	Interior Department Territorial Papers: Idaho, 1864-1890
119	1	48	M192	1-2 End	Interior Department Terr. Papers: Montana, 1867-1889
119	1	48	M364	1-15End	Interior Department Terr. Papers: New Mexico, 1851-1914
119	1	48	M429	1-8 End	Interior Department Territorial Papers: Arizona, 1868-1913
119	1	48	M430	1-17End	Interior Department Territorial Papers: Alaska, 1869-1911
119	1	48	M431	1 Only	Interior Department Terr. Papers: Colorado, 1861-1913
119	1	48	M828	1-5 End	Interior Department Terr. Papers: Oklahoma, 1889-1912
119	2	48	M189	1-4 End	Interior Department Terr. Papers: Washington, 1854-1902
119	2	48	M204	1-6 End	Interior Department Terr. Papers: Wyoming, 1870-1890
119	2	48	M428	1-6 End	Interior Department Territorial Papers: Utah, 1850-1902
119	1	59	M116	1-11End	State Department Territorial Papers, Florida, 1777-1824
119	1	59	M13	1 Only	Papers in Washington Archives Relating to the Territories of the United States (to 1873) Nevada 1861-1864
119	1	59	M218	1-2 End	State Department Territorial Papers, Kansas 1854-1861
119	1	59	M228	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Nebraska 1854 - 1867
119	1	59	M3	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Colorado, 1859-1874.
119	1	59	M309	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Dakota, 1861-1873
119	1	59	M342	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers: Arizona, 1864-1872
119	1	59	M356	1 -2 End	State Department Territorial Papers, Montana, 1864-1872.
119	1	59	M419	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Oregon, 1848-1858.
119	1	59	M445	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Idaho, 1863-1872.
119	1	59	M470	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1801
119	1	59	M471	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Territory Southwest of the River Ohio, 1790-1795
119	1	59	M827	1-4 End	Interior Department Territorial Papers - Hawaii 1898-1907
119	1	59	T17	1-4 End	State Department Terr. Papers, New Mexico, 1851-1872
119	1	59	T260	1 - 6	State Department Territorial Papers, Orleans, 1764-1813
119	2	59	M12	1-2 End	State Department Territorial Papers, Utah, 1853-1873
119	2	59	M26	1-2 End	State Department Terr. Papers, Washington, 1854-1872
119	2	59	M85	1 Only	State Department Territorial Papers, Wyoming, 1868-1873
119	2	59	T260	7-13End	State Department Territorial Papers, Orleans, 1764-1813

Territorial Time Line

	Statehood	1776	1790	1800	1810	1820	1840	1850	1860	1870	1880	1900	1920	1960
Alabama	1819				E	1819								
Alaska	1959								MM	MM	MM	DD	DD	1959
Arizona	1912							Q		X	X	X	1912	
Arkansas	1836			A	J	1836								
California	1850							1850						
Colorado	1876			A	I	Uorg	Uorg	Uorg	FF	FF	1876			
Florida	1845					Uorg	N	1845						
Hawaii	1959										LL	CC	CC	1959
Idaho	1890			G	G	G	R	U	U	U	V	1896		
Illinois	1818			D	1818									
Indiana	1816			C	1816									
Iowa	1846			A	I	M	1846							
Kansas	1861			A	I	Uorg	Uorg	T	1861					
Louisiana	1812			A/K	1812									
Michigan	1837			B	B	1837								
Minnesota	1858			A/D	B	L/M	S	1858						
Mississippi	1817		GG	GG	1817									
Missouri	1821			A	I	1821								
Montana	1889			A	I	Uorg	Uorg	V	BB	BB	1889			
Nebraska	1867			A	I	Uorg	Uorg	V	1867					
Nevada	1864							P	EE	1864				
New Mexico	1912							Q	Q	Q	Q	Q	1912	
No Dakota	1889			A	I	M	S	Uorg/V	AA	AA	AA	1889		
Ohio	1803		JJ	JJ	1803									
Oklahoma	1907			A	J	Uorg	Uorg	Uorg	Uorg	Uorg	Uorg	H	1907	
Oregon	1859			G	G	R	1859							
So Dakota	1889			A	I	M	S	Uorg/V	AA	AA	AA	1889		
Tennessee	1796		KK	1796										
Texas	1845						HH	1845						
Utah	1896						P	P	P	P	P	1896		
Washington	1889			G	G	R	U	U	U	U	U	1889		
Wisconsin	1848			D	B	L	1848							
Wyoming	1890			A	I	Uorg	Uorg	V	Z	Z	Z	1890		

Foreign Area
Uorg
Unorganized Territory
Territory

State
Republic or Country or misc

- A Louisiana Territory (1805-1812)
- AA Dakota Territory (1861-1889)
- B Michigan Territory (1805-1837)
- BB Montana Territory (1864-1889)
- C Indiana Territory (1800-1816)
- CC Hawaii Territory (1900-1959)
- D Illinois Territory (1809-1818)
- DD Alaska Territory (1912-1959)
- E Alabama Territory (1817-1819)
- EE Nevada Territory (1861-1864)
- FF Colorado Territory (1861-1876)
- GG Mississippi Territory (1798-1817)
- H Oklahoma Territory (1889-1907)
- I Missouri Territory (1812-1821)
- J Arkansas Territory (1819-1836)
- JJ NW River of Ohio (1787 - 1803)
- K Territory of Orleans (1804-1812)
- KK So River Ohio (1790 - 1796)
- L Wisconsin Territory (1836-1848)
- M Iowa Territory (1838-1846)
- N Florida Territory (1822-1845)
- P Utah Territory (1850-1896)
- Q New Mexico Territory (1850-1912)
- R Oregon Territory (1848-1859)
- S Minnesota Territory (1849-1858)
- T Kansas Territory (1854-1861)
- U Washington Territory (1853-1889)
- V Nebraska Territory (1854-1867)
- X Arizona Territory (1863-1912)
- Y Idaho Territory (1863-1890)
- Z Wyoming Territory (1868-1890)

- G Oregon Country (1818-1846)
- HH Texas Republic (1836-1845)
- LL Republic of Hawaii (1894 -1898)
- MM District of Alaska (1884 - 1912)