

Before They Were States....

Finding and Using Territorial Records

by Jack Butler

The United States was born owning territory outside the 13 original states. In the end, thirty three U. S. States were U. S. Territories before becoming states. The exceptions were:

- **13 Original Colonies** - Virginia, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Maryland, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Delaware, North Carolina, South Carolina, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Georgia.
- **2 Independent Republics** – Texas, Vermont
- **2 Carved From Existing States** – Kentucky, West Virginia

Note: Hawaii was originally a kingdom before American Colonists led a quiet revolution in 1893 and took over the island chain. Hawaii then operated as an independent nation briefly before becoming an American Territory in 1898. It remained a Territory until it became a state in 1959.

Every other state spent at least a short time as a territory. Many Territorial records were maintained by the Federal government. We will look at three distinct collections of territorial records.

Territorial Papers of the United States

This massive collection of transcribed Federal records covering the states and periods below.

Vol. 1 *General*

Vol. 2-3 *Northwest Territory, north of the Ohio, 1787-1803*

Vol. 4 *Northwest Territory, south of the Ohio, 1790-1796*

Vol. 5-6 *The Territory of Mississippi, 1798-1817*

Vol. 7-8 *Indiana Territory, 1800-1816*

Vol. 9 *Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812*

Vol. 10-12 *Territory of Michigan, 1805-1837*

Vol. 13-15 *Territory of Louisiana, 1803-1821*

Vol. 16-17 *Territory of Illinois, 1809-1818*

Vol. 18 *Territory of Alabama, 1817-1819*

Vol. 19-21 *Territory of Arkansas, 1819-1836*

Vol. 22-26 *Territory of Florida 1821-1845*

Vol. 27-28 *Territory of Wisconsin, 1836-1848*

The Territories Changed With Time, causing specific locations to appear in multiple volumes:

Alabama: Volumes 4, 5, 6, & 18

Arkansas: Volumes 13, 14, 15, 19, 20 & 21

Florida: Volumes 22, 23, 24, 25 & 26

Illinois: Volumes 2, 3, 7, 8, 16 & 17

Indiana: Volumes 2, 3, 7 & 8

Michigan: Volumes 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, & 12

Minnesota: Volumes 2, 3, 7, 8, 10, & 12

Mississippi: Volumes 4, 5, & 6

Wisconsin: 2, 3, 7, 8, 16, 17, 27 & 28

This series is also available as National Archives microfilm publication M721. Volumes 1-14 and 16-17 were issued by the State Department; volumes 15 and 18-28 were issued by the National Archives. Additional territorial papers for Wisconsin, Iowa, Oregon, and Minnesota are available as microfilm publications only.

You will find these volumes in larger libraries and research libraries. The Florida State Library in Tallahassee has a complete set, and a quick check of online catalogs shows that UCF in Orlando has both the 28 volume set of transcribed and fully indexed books and also the microfilmed version of the original records., as does Indian River County Main Library. The University of West Florida also has some volumes; check with other major libraries.

The Family History Library has microfilmed Carter's 28 volumes and also has some microfilms of original territorial records. These are available through your local Family History Center.

There is no single place with all of the Papers online, but different parts have been put online by genealogical and historical societies, or even individuals. An internet search using the full name, Territorial Papers of the United States, will likely turn up other repositories that hold this valuable resource..

Private Land Claims

At varying time, the British, French Spanish and Mexican governments owned large chunks of land that eventually became part of the U. S. All three of the countries made land grants to settlers in these areas. When they took over these territories, the U. S. established commissions and required the holders of these foreign grants to prove their right of ownership. Most of these claims arose in what are now the States of Louisiana, Missouri, Florida, Mississippi, Arkansas, Illinois, Iowa, and Michigan, with a small number of claims appearing in other States.

The best example of these records can be found in the Florida Confirmed Spanish Land Grants. The Florida State Archives has made this marvelous collection available at <http://www.floridamemory.com/Collections/SpanishLandGrants/>

as part of the Florida Memory Project.

This web site has a search capability as well as an alphabetical index. Files vary wildly, from 4 pages to several hundred pages. The genealogically valuable info can vary widely, too.

American State Papers

In the 1830s, Congress had the papers of the first fourteen congresses published in the American State Papers series. The nine volumes of Public Lands of the series are of most interest to genealogists. The volumes include military bounty lands, land claims in various territories, and grants to settlers, among other useful land records.

The Library of Congress has put the collection online as part of it *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation* series.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lawhome.html>

I have given you the URL for the opening page because there may be other links there that are worth exploring. Click the American State Papers link to the bottom left of the page. When the American State Papers page displays, you can choose to Browse or Search by clicking the appropriate link below the picture of Books on the left side of the page. Click Search to search by name, key words, phrase, or a combination. There are literally thousands of pages available.

Some Other Territorial Records

The Trans-Mississippi West 1804—1912, 4 parts. This series is really a finding aid created by the National Archives as a guide to its collection of territorial papers not covered by the *Territorial Papers of the United States* series. The collection covers the period 1803 – 1912, and holds records pertaining to the contiguous states west of the Mississippi River.

Territorial papers of the United States Senate, 1789-1873. Records and papers of the United States Senate concerning territories, their administration, governance, and movement toward statehood. Documents dated earlier or later than the period of existence of a particular territory are frequently included.

There are huge quantities of other territorial records out there. Many can be found online or the information necessary to locate them can be found on line. Try a simple search with the name of the State that interests you, along with the words Territorial Records and you will get a glimpse of what I mean.

Good hunting!

Bibliography

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Territories of the United States

Name	Territorial Date	Statehood Date	Notes.
Territory of the United States Northwest of the River Ohio (Northwest Territory)	13 Jul 1787		Eventually became Ohio (1 Mar 1803), Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota
Territory of the United States Southwest of the River Ohio (Southwest Territory)	26 May 1790	1 Jun 1796	Became the State of Tennessee.
Mississippi Territory	7 May 1798	10 Dec 1817	The western portion became the State of Mississippi, the eastern portion became the Territory of Alabama.
Indiana Territory	5 Jul 1800	11 Dec 1816	
Orleans Territory	1 Oct 1804	30 Apr 1812	Became the State of Louisiana
District of Louisiana	1 Oct 1804		Included all of the Louisiana Purchase except Territory of Orleans.
Michigan Territory	1 Jul 1805	26 Jan 1858	
Louisiana Territory	4 Jul 1805		
Illinois Territory	2 Mar 1809	3 Jul 1818	
Missouri Territory	7 Dec 1812	10 Aug 1821	
Alabama Territory	15 Aug 1817	14 Dec 1819	
Arkansas Territory	5 Jul 1819	15 Jun 1836	
Florida Territory	30 Mar 1822	3 Mar 1845	
Indian Territory	30 Jun 1834		Originally part of Arkansas Territory. Became the Indian Territory and joined with Oklahoma Territory to become the State of Oklahoma.
Wisconsin Territory	4 Jul 1836	29 May 1848	
Iowa Territory	4 Jul 1838	28 Dec 1846	
Oregon Territory	14 Aug 1848	14 Feb 1859	
Minnesota Territory	3 Mar 1849	11 May 1855	
Utah Territory	9 Sep 1850	4 Jan 1896	
New Mexico Territory	3 Dec 1850	6 Jan 1912	
Washington Territory	2 Mar 1853	11 Nov 1889	
Kansas Territory	30 May 1854	29 Jan 1861	
Nebraska Territory	30 May 1854	1 Mar 1867	
Colorado Territory	28 Feb 1861	1 Aug 1876	
Dakota Territory	2 Mar 1861	2 Nov 1889	
Nevada Territory	2 Mar 1861	31 Oct 1864	
Arizona Territory	24 Feb 1863	14 Feb 1912	
Idaho Territory	3 Mar 1863	3 July 1890	
Montana Territory	26 May 1864	8 Nov 1889	
Alaska Territory	11 Oct 1867	3 Jan 1959	
Wyoming Territory	29 Jul 1868	10 Jul 1890	
Oklahoma Territory	2 May 1890	16 Nov 1907	
Hawaii Territory	12 Aug 1898	21 Aug 1959	