

Settling the West

The *United States Territorial Papers*

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OVERVIEW

In 1911 David W. Parker in his *Calendar of Papers in Washington Archives Relating to the Territories of the United States (to 1873)* described the papers held by various Washington, DC, repositories that pertained to the territorial period. Lobbying by historians persuaded Congress to make these papers more readily available to the public and resulted in the passage of the Ralston Act of March 3, 1925 (43 Stat. 1104). The provisions of this act required the Secretary of State to have the important papers of the territories “collected, edited, copied, and suitably arranged for publication.” Publication began in 1934 with the first volume of the *Territorial Papers of the United States*. The printed volumes, compiled and edited first by Clarence Carter and then by John Bloom, were published from 1934–1975. The volumes, organized by territory, contain transcribed original documents from the territorial period (1787–1845). Over time, resource limitations allowed the effort to continue only as a microfilm project of selected documents from the remaining territories. Further resource limitations led to a decision to conclude the effort with a series of finding aids, *The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804–1912: A Guide to the Records of the Territorial Period*. Though these guides are finding aids, not records, they are of tremendous value to genealogists.

GENEALOGICAL VALUE

Many of the records contain petitions and memorials that locate individuals in time and place similar to a census. Some of the records give valuable information concerning land transactions. Correspondence records may reveal many of the activities that occupied the settlers. Successive locations documented over time may reveal migration patterns. Many of the papers of the various governors record the appointments to positions in the militia and other functions such as postmasters.

THE PUBLISHED VOLUMES

The State Department was responsible for implementing the provisions of the act until it was subsequently transferred to the Archivist of the United States in 1950. Titled *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (TPUS) and compiled and edited by Clarence Edwin Carter and then by John Bloom, it consists of 28 volumes as described below. The first volume describes the intent of the project and outlines selection criteria for documents. The volumes have also been filmed as *NARA Microfilm Publication M721, The Territorial Papers of the United States, 1787–1845*. The records selected for inclusion came from the archives of the Departments of State, War, Treasury, and Interior. Records of the Post Office, Congress, and the Manuscripts Division of the Library of Congress are also included. The volumes are available online at the *HathiTrust* and *FamilySearch Books*.



- *Vol. I, The Territorial Papers of the United States, General.*
- *Vols. II & III, The Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787–1803.*

- *Vol. IV, The Territory South of the River Ohio, 1790–1796.*
- *Vols. V & VI, The Territory of Mississippi, 1798–1817.*
- *Vols. VII & VIII, The Territory of Indiana, 1800–1816.*
- *Vol. IX, The Territory of Orleans, 1803–1812.*
- *Vols. X – XII, The Territory of Michigan, 1805–1837.*
- *Vols. XIII – XV, The Territory of Louisiana-Missouri, 1803–1821.*
- *Vols. XVI & XVII, The Territory of Illinois, 1809–1818.*
- *Vol. XVIII, The Territory of Alabama, 1817–1819.*
- *Vols. XIX, - XXI The Territory of Arkansas, 1819–1836.*
- *Vols. XXII, & XXIII The Territory of Florida, 1821–1828.*
- *Vols. XXIV, - XXVI The Territory of Florida, 1828–1845.*
- *Vols. XXVII, & XXVIII The Territory of Wisconsin, 1836–1848.*

THE FILMED RECORDS

As funds dwindled for the published volumes, selected documents were published as microfilms either as an effort to supplement the published volumes or to extend the series to yet unpublished territories. These publications are identified below:

- *The Territorial Papers of the United States: The Territory of Wisconsin, 1836–1848 (A Microfilm Supplement), M236, 122 rolls.*
- *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Iowa, 1838–1846, M325, 102 rolls.*
- *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Oregon, 1848–1859, (RG 64) M1049, 12 rolls.*
- *The Territorial Papers of the United States: Minnesota, 1849–1858, (RG 64) M1050, 19 rolls.*

In addition to the films above, NARA published many other titles that relate to the territories. The Senate papers were published as *Territorial Papers of the U.S. Senate, 1789–1873 (RG 46), M200*. Some Senate papers are included in the published 28 volumes, and some are not. These filmed records are described by appropriate descriptive pamphlets (DPs), and many are also described in *The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804–1912: A Guide to the Records of the Territorial Period*.

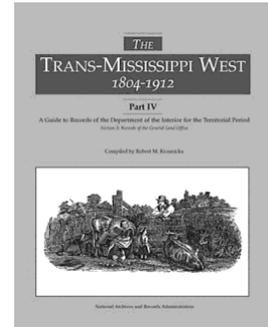
The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804–1912

Once again faced with resource limitations, NARA determined in 1989 that the most effective approach to provide the greatest access was to publish a series of finding aids. The area of coverage was also broadened to include the period from the Louisiana purchase in 1803 to the admission of the last contiguous state in 1912. This expansion also allowed the coverage of Texas and the Indian territories. The resulting guide, titled *The Trans-Mississippi West, 1804–1912: A Guide to the Records of the Territorial Period*, consists of six volumes and is organized as described below:

- *Part I: A Guide to Records of the Department of State for the Territorial Period*
- *Part II: A Guide to Records of the Department of Justice for the Territorial Period*
- *Part III: A Guide to Records of the Department of Agriculture for the Territorial Period*
- *Part IV: A Guide to Records of the Department of the Interior for the Territorial Period*
 - *Section 1, Records of the Offices of the Secretary of the Interior and the Commissioner of Railroads*
 - *Section 2, Records of Select Agencies*

- *Section 3: Records of the General Land Office*

Arguably, Section 3 of Part IV, Records of the General Land Office (GLO), is the most significant publication of the series for genealogists. Not only are land records a major genealogical resource, but the records of the GLO have never been adequately described before this publication. Despite the limitation in timeframe and geographic area of this new guide, it describes the activities of the GLO broadly and has relevance to all of the 30 public land states. Among many topics, this guide provides access to mining claims, private land claims, and the thousands of transactions found in land entry papers that record the transfer of public lands to individuals or other private ownership. Also, this guide describes the extensive correspondence records of the GLO.



The other guides also describe records of interest to the family historian. *Part I, Records of the State Department*, includes the records and films described above that relate to the territories. Also of note are records relating to consular despatches and special agents. Of interest to some may be records from diplomatic posts in the Republic of Texas. Records of the Justice Department in Part II includes information on the appointment of federal judges and marshals. Part III describes the records of the Department of Agriculture. Included in this guide are descriptions of climatological records by state.

ACCESSING TERRITORIAL PAPERS

All of the published volumes of the *TPUS* are online at *HathiTrust*. Also *FamilySearch Books* has all but volume XI online and downloadable.

Other territorial resources include excellent sites such as *Territorial Kansas Online* at <http://www.territorialkansasonline.org/~imlskto/cgi-bin/index.php>. Also, volumes of the *Wisconsin Territorial Papers: County Series* are online at *HathiTrust* and *FamilySearch Books*. Volumes exist for St Croix County, 1840–1849 and Iowa County, 1830–1849.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation*, <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/>. This website provides access to the published debates, journals, statutes, and documents generated by the Continental, Confederation, and U.S. Congresses. The scope of the collection extends to 1875. In addition to the digitized materials, researchers should familiarize themselves with the material on the splash page titled “Understanding the Collection.”
2. *CIS United States Serial Set Index, 1789–1969*. This index, published by Congressional Information Services (now part of LexisNexis), allows name and subject searching to locate information in the some 14,000 volumes that comprise the *Serial Set* and *American State Papers*. The index is available in depository libraries and many large libraries.
3. *CIS United States Serial Set Index, Part XIV, Index and Carto-Bibliography of Maps, 1789–1969*. This index catalogs over 52,000 maps found in the *Congressional Serial Set* (including *American State Papers*). The maps were originally published by the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives as part of official reports. Hi-resolution color scans are available as part of

the subscription services, *ProQuest Congressional* or the *U.S. Congressional Serial Set, 1817–1994* by Readex. Eventually the maps will be placed online at the Library of Congress website.

4. Farrand, Max. *Legislation of Congress for the Government of the Organized Territories of the United States, 1789–1895*. Newark, NJ: William A. Barker, 1896.
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9. Schmeckebier, Lawrence F. and Roy B. Eastin. *Government Publications and Their Use*. 2d rev ed. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1969. A general guide to government documents.
10. University of Virginia, *U.S. Territorial Maps 1775–1920*, http://xroads.virginia.edu/~map/terr_hp.html. Thirteen maps show the evolution of the territories.
11. Wheat, Carl I. *Mapping the Transmississippi West*. 5 vols. San Francisco: The Institute of Historical Cartography, 1957–1963. A monumental effort to compile an encyclopedia on mapping the west.

All Urls are current as of 10 November 2018

Related Records

The *American State Papers (1789–1838)* (*ASP*) were created by Congress to provide selected documentation of Congressional sessions before 1817 and continuing until 1838. The collection comprises 38 volumes arranged in 10 classes. The *ASP* have been digitized and are online at *A Century of Lawmaking*. However, the online collection is not fully searchable; the table of contents and index may be searched. Links to more detailed explanations can be found on the website. The *ASP* volumes were privately printed by Gales and Seaton. GenealogyBank.com has scanned the *ASP* and it is fully searchable on that subscription website. The 38 volumes of the *ASP* can also be downloaded from the Internet Archive as separate PDF documents. Cross-references appear in the published *Territorial Papers of the United States* to the *American State Papers*.