

# GENEALOGICAL MATERIALS IN FEDERAL LAND RECORDS IN THE FORUM LIBRARY

## Determine the Township and Range

In order to locate someone in the various finding aids, books, microfilm and microfiche for land acquired from the Federal Government in Oregon, one must first determine the Township (T) and Range (R) for the specific parcel of interest. This is because the entire state was originally surveyed under the cadastral system of land measurement. **The Willamette Meridian (north to south Townships) and Willamette Base Line (east to west Ranges)** are the principal references for the Federal system. All land records in Oregon are organized by this system, even those later recorded for public or private transactions by other governments.

## Oregon Provisional Land Claims

In 1843, the provisional government was organized in the Willamette Valley. In 1849 the territorial government was organized by Congress in Washington D.C. Look to see if your person of interest might have been in the Oregon Country and might have applied for an Oregon Provisional Land Claim. Use the *Genealogical Material in Oregon Provisional Land Claims* to find a general locality and neighbors to the person for those who might have filed at the Oregon City Land Office. This volume contains all the material found in the microfilm copy of the original records. There are over 3700 entries, with an uncounted number of multiple claims by the same person.

## Oregon Donation Land Claims

The Donation Land Act passed by Congress in 1850 did include a provision for settlers who were residents in Oregon Territory before December 1, 1850. They were required to re-register their Provisional Land Claims in order to secure them under the Donation Land Act.

If the person of interest was suspected of having an **Oregon Donation Land Claim (ODLC)**, use the *Index Oregon Donation Land Claims, Second Edition*, to find the T and R. If the parcel of interest is generally known by geography, but not by T and R, use the large map of the State of Oregon located on the west wall near the Research Assistants desk to determine the T and R. Once the T and R are known, proceed with the appropriate locator map below.

If the person of interest is not found in the index to the Oregon Donation Land Claims, investigate the neighbors who were identified in the Provisional Land Claims. The neighbors' ODLC may give some indication of where the person was living at the earlier date. Often, the French Canadian settlers left the Willamette Valley to live with the families of their native wives. They may have gone to any place in the Pacific Northwest,

perhaps even east of the Rocky Mountains or to the Canadian country north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel.

### **Oregon & California Railroad Lands**

The **Oregon and California Railroad** was authorized to sell lands in the Willamette Valley, south of the Willamette Base Line, for agricultural development. As was the case with most of these railroad grants, the railroad attempted to hang on to the property as long as possible for their own economic benefit. In Oregon, the obvious benefit was the timberlands that fringed the valley on the east to the Cascade Mountains and covered the coast mountain range to the west. These lands were available for individual purchase through the 1860's and 1870's through the Homestead Act of 1862. Eventually, Congress terminated the grant rights because the railroads were not selling enough of the lands. The O & C Railroad forfeited over two million acres because of their lack of appropriate action.

Before the termination, many individuals did purchase private patents to O & C lands. As with purchases directly from the Federal government, these lands do not appear in county records until such time as the individuals sold the property to someone else. Then, they are entered in the land records for the county in which the parcel is located. The lands purchased from O & C Railroad are not found in the Federal records either. They are found in the microfilm of the O & C Tract Books in the Forum library. The grants from the Federal government gave the railroad the responsibility as well as the right to sell the land. There was a unique feature to the sale of these lands. All of Sections 16 and 36 in each township was reserved to the local government, usually the county, for the use of public schools.

### **Formation of Districts and Counties**

When investigating the land records, carefully study the formation of the various districts in existence through 1844. The Oregon Country ran north and south from the 42<sup>nd</sup> parallel (about the current California border) to the Skeena River at 54° 40'. The northern border was the 1844 treaty line with Russia. The Oregon Country ranged east to west from the Pacific Ocean to the summit of the Rocky Mountains. When the Provisional government was created in 1844, the districts were replaced by counties and renamed in that year. In subsequent years, the counties were reduced in size as new counties were formed from them.

One needs to understand the formation of the counties to be able to locate the land records once they passed in ownership from the Federal government to private individuals. There may be no record in the county records for the purchase or acquisition of land by an individual from the Federal government. One needs to look in the Federal records for that action. As private individuals sold their land originally acquired or purchased from the Federal government, the record of the sale will be found in the county in which the land was located at the time of sale. One needs to determine the county of record at the time of the sale. Maps in the references listed below may help to provide the name of that county. The Oregon State Archives website contains a reference section for

land records. To find it, go to <http://arcweb.sos.state.or.us/>. This is the home page. Click on “Genealogy.” Under Genealogy Helping Aids, click on “Land Records.” This will display some narrative text and a detailed list of land and tax records available for each county. It will also identify Federal records at the Oregon State Archives. Land records for more recent years will be in the holdings of the counties.

See *Genealogical Material in Oregon Provisional Land Claims* for maps from 1843 through 1847. See *Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims, Volume 1*, for maps that depict county boundary changes from 1847 through 1941.

### **Locator Maps for Microfilm and Microfiche**

There are locator maps located near the microform viewing room that require one to know the Township and Range for a parcel of land in order to be able to find it in the microfilm or microfiche collections. The Tract Books, Plat Books, and O & C Plat Books microfilm are all in plain white boxes in the Oregon microfilm collection. The Oregon Donation Land Claim Files are in green boxes in the Oregon microfilm collection. The Oregon Land Surveys are in a microfiche cabinet near the door to the viewing room. The locator maps will lead to the correct microfilm box number.

### **Oregon Tract Books**

Once the Township and Range are identified for a person of interest, use the **Oregon Tract Books** locator map found on the west wall (left) just inside the microform viewing room to determine the specific box number for the microfilm. Carefully retrieve the tract books microfilm from the drawers in the Oregon collection. The tract books, plat books, and O & C plat books are all in plain white boxes. Be sure to retrieve the exact record type desired.

The information on any individual film can be organized in two different ways. Usually the information is arranged by Township in Range. Other times, they are compiled by Range within Township. The first few frames of the film need to be carefully reviewed to determine which system is used on that reel.

The **Tract Books** are large two-page registers. They are the same type of large books as used in other states for recording original entries from the Federal government in those states under different land laws. The entry information is organized numerically by Section (S), regardless of the overall assembly of the books.

The left page contains a description of the tract by T, R and S. Sometimes, the information is entered in sequence by the specific Claim number in the specific Township/Range. This Claim number is a different number from the ODLC, and may indicate parcels in more than one Section in the same Township. Other times the information is entered strictly in Section number sequence, so the same Claim number may appear in more than one Section. Because the Claim number applies to the order in which claims were made in a specific Township/Range, there may be similar numbers in adjacent Townships/Ranges. Within any Township/Range, the numbers usually ranged

from 1 to less than 100. This left page also contains the name of the purchaser and sometimes the number of acres.

The right page contains the date of sale, the number of receipt/certificate of purchase. This number is also known as the ODLC number. **Name of patentee**, date of patent, and volume and page in the land register book in which the patent is entered are also listed.

### **O & C Plat Books**

Once the Township and Range are identified for a person of interest, use the **O & C Plat Books** locator map found on the east side of the microfiche cabinet by the viewing room door to determine the specific box number for the microfilm. Carefully retrieve the O & C Plat Books microfilm from the drawers in the Oregon collection. The tract books, plat books, and O & C plat books are all in plain white boxes. Be sure to retrieve the record type desired. It is very easy to confuse the tract and plat boxes.

There are several numbered Townships on each roll of microfilm. The Townships go south from 1 through 41. Any Township may contain information from Range 13 West to Range 7 East. The Townships are all in the Willamette Valley and adjacent foothills and mountains east and west.

The **title** of this series of records **implies that they are maps. They are not maps.** They are forms that contain spaces for entering the following information: Meridian, Township, Range, Section, part of section, number of acres, kind of land entry, number of entry, date of entry, **name of patentee**, and date of patent.

### **Oregon Plat Books**

Once the Township and Range are identified for a person of interest, use the **Oregon Plat Books** locator map found on the west wall just inside the microform viewing room to determine the specific box number for the microfilm. Carefully retrieve the Oregon Plat Books microfilm from the drawers in the Oregon collection. The tract books, plat books, and O & C plat books are all in plain white boxes. Be sure to retrieve the record type desired.

Each Township on the film may contain map information that runs from Range 15 West to Range 46 East in the southern part of the state, and from Range 10 West to Range 51 East in the northern part of the state.

Each Township is described by at least two maps. One map was typically created in the 1860's after government approved surveyors had actually mapped the particular claims being made for all individuals under the Donation Land Act of 1850. The individual had obtained a warrant after selecting his parcel to be located in a standard grid that had already been pre-surveyed by a government surveyor from the **Willamette Base Stone** in the foothills of Portland, Oregon. This warrant was usually given a Claim number in the

specific Township where the claim was located. This Claim number applied only to that Township, not to any others.

The map gives the outside boundaries of each claim in the Township. It details the length of each survey run, and the angles made at each turning point. Major geographic features, such as rivers, may be included. The map gives the number of each Section. It **contains the name of the claimant**, number of acres claimed, Claim number, and Notification number. The Notification number was carried back to the U.S. Surveyor General's Office by the field surveyor. The Office then issued a Certificate number. This Certificate number is what we know as the **Oregon Donation Land Claim** number. (The Notification number was used on all forms, such as affidavits and depositions from the claimant and his neighbors. These were included in the application prior to the time the ODLC number was issued).

Another type of map may be included in the plat books. This map was drawn from the field notes made by the surveyors as they detailed each of the Donation Land Claims (DLC) in any Township. It contains the original measurements on each line run for the Township grid according to the **Willamette Meridian and Base Line**. These numbers are usually of little interest to researchers as they were made to specifically locate the N-S and E-W boundary lines and each corner of each Section. **The important items on this map are the physiographic and man-made features.** Rivers and streams are named. Cross-hatching and dimpling was used to convey elevations and depressions. These in turn were named if they were major features. Roads, trails, farm plots, and orchards were sketched. **Of most importance to researchers, individual houses were specifically identified with the donation land claimant's name.**

There may be other maps included for any given Township. Most of them describe details not otherwise exhibited on the other two maps. This may happen when an individual makes a claim that crosses into two separate Townships. There may be a small explanatory map in both Townships that show the relationship to the whole claim. However, there will be a separate Claim number for the parcel in each Township. The Notification number will apply to all parcels in all Townships, as will the Certificate number that is issued as the ODLC number.

### **Oregon Donation Land Claim Files**

These records are also called **Land-Entry Case Files**. They have been described as containing the most comprehensive and detailed records ever produced by any government land record system. Most of the files are from the Oregon City Land Office (5289 files). Next largest was Roseburg (2141 files). The Dalles has 5 entries and La Grande has 2 entries. Once you have identified a person of interest, use the ***Index Oregon Donation Land Claims, Second Edition***, to determine the ODLC Certificate number. Find the green boxes in the Oregon microfilm drawer. There are separate Certificate numbers for each land office. Be sure to find the number in the correct land office. Select the one that contains a series of numbers that includes the ODLC Certificate number. The author of this article has found several errors in this index. The errors are usually in transcribing the actual Certificate number. If the person of interest is not found in the film

as indicated by the index, be creative in looking for another Certificate number similar to the one indexed.

The film reels are arranged numerically by ODLIC Certificate number. This number appears on an image of the jacket cover for the records that appear in the file. There also may be notes on the jacket cover that pertain to recording and entry dates. Some of these notes may bear a date of 1940-1941 with J. Nielsen Barry's name. Barry did much research on early Oregon settlers near that time. His material may be of interest to researchers who are investigating the names on which the reference to Barry appears.

Each microfilm file contains records that indicate; **name of the applicant, birth year or age, birthplace (usually county and state/country), marriage date and place, given name of wife**, date of arrival in territory, date and court of naturalization (see later paragraph), date of settlement, record of land improvements, description of donation claim, depositions of acquaintances, purchase agreements (deeds) from next owners of land, and other items such as maps and drawings of the donation land claim.

The original naturalization records for the applicant were included in each ODLIC file. However, at the time the files were filmed, it was not legal to make copies of original naturalization records. Therefore they are still included in the original file, but not included on the microfilm. The microfilm does contain an affidavit from the applicant that includes **name**, residence at application, deposition that applicant was 18 years of age on a specific date, **reference to an annexed naturalization record**, court and county in which naturalization was registered, place of birth, date of birth, dates of continuous occupation and cultivation of selected land, **name of wife**, date of marriage, place of marriage, and date of court deposition.

### Oregon Land Surveys

Determine the Township and Range for a person of interest with the use of ***Index Oregon Donation Land Claims, Second Edition***. If the parcel of interest is generally known by geography, but not by T and R, use the large map of the State of Oregon located on the west wall, near the Research Assistant desk and main entry door, to determine the T and R. Once the T and R are known, locate the microfiche for the **Oregon Land Surveys** in the file cabinet to the immediate left as one enters the microform viewing room.

Several of the fiche drawers contain records organized by Range from 1 East to 49 East from the Willamette Meridian. Other drawers contain records organized by Range from 1 West to 15 West from the Willamette Meridian. Within each range, the fiche are organized from 1 South to 41 South from the Willamette Base Line, and from 1 North to 9 North from the Willamette Base Line.

Locate the folder for the T and R for the person of interest. The packet will contain several fiches that contain the specific field notes for the surveys conducted by the government surveyors for each Township. The first fiche will be labeled 1 of (n) in the upper right hand corner. The last one will be labeled (n) of (n). Somewhere on the images will probably be listed the name of a person of interest. There is no index to the names

listed in the packets to accurately locate them on a specific fiche in the packet. Further, each Township was surveyed in a different manner, so there is no way to estimate where the surveyors may have started or finished. The surveyors did not start with Section 1 and proceed through Section 36. They wandered all over the place, tying in certain specific landmarks and man-made improvements as best they could.

The very last fiche in the packet, labeled one of one, contains images of maps that are either identical to, or are very similar to, the ones contained in the **Oregon Plat Books**. **One will outline the boundaries of the Oregon Donation Land Claims. The other will detail the landforms and man-made improvements.** Often there are additional maps that describe obscure relationships and features for the landscape, or for the Oregon Donation Land Claims. **Usually, this last fiche is easier and quicker to view before attempting to load the microfilm for the plat books.** However, there may be more maps on the Plat Books microfilm than appear on the Land Survey fiche. Both should be investigated.

### Oregon DLC Surveys

There is a small collection of fiche in a middle drawer of the cabinet to the left as one enters the microform room. The fiche is identified with the term DLC, followed by a number, in the upper left-hand corner of each fiche. This is **not the Oregon Donation Land Claim number** that was issued as a certificate after full processing of an application by the Surveyor General's Office.

**The number on the left corner of the fiche is the Claim number that** was issued to each applicant under which a survey was conducted so that person could obtain a final certificate commonly called an Oregon Donation Land Claim. The Claim number was usually abbreviated as a capital "C" or as "CI" on the notes and maps. As stated earlier, **the Claim number was unique to each Township**, so one needs to know the Township for the person of interest before attempting to locate them in this collection. **The Township and Range are listed on the label of each fiche.**

The fiches contain the complete survey for each of the Claims as listed on the fiche. However, it does not appear that all Claims are included on the fiche. **The name of the claimant for each Claim number is listed** when the survey is shown.

The microfilm for all the various record types can be copied on a reader/printer/storage machine located near the Rare Book Room. The Research Assistant should be able to help the individual patron. If the Research Assistant can't help, an order can be left to be filled by the Research Committee at a later time. Microfiche can be copied on a machine located in the microform viewing room.

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Gerald S. Lenzen  
10411 S.W. 41st Ave. Portland, Oregon 97219-6984  
Phone: (503) 244-4357 E-mail: [gerrvlenzen@comcast.net](mailto:gerrvlenzen@comcast.net)