

Spotlight

Genealogical Materials in Federal Land Resources in the Forum Library

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"Oregon Trail (Campfire)," by Albert Bierstadt (1830 – 1902), public domain image via Wikimedia Commons.

Editor's Note: This article, together with a subsequent article in the Bulletin will be turned into a research guide for visitors to the GFO Library.

Early settlers to the Oregon Territory received land under a variety of provisions and land acts. Over seven thousand claims were filed in Oregon under the Oregon Donation Land Law. Indexes and books of abstracts of these claims have been published by the Genealogical Forum of Oregon (GFO). In addition, the GFO has copies of the original donation land entry files on microfilm. The originals are located in the National Archives in Washington, D.C.

These documents cover settlements from roughly the early 1840s through 1855, although papers may have been filed after that period. The applications often contain an abundance of genealogical detail. They may include dates and places of births and marriages, names of spouses, dates of arrival in Oregon, and names of those who signed affidavits (often family and friends). Anyone

with early Oregon settlers should check this resource.

Viewing these documents will require multiple steps. This first *Bulletin* article will explore where the indexes are located in the library as well as the claim applications and what type of information may be found on them. It will be important to know the difference between microfilm and microfiche as well as their location in the library. Our Research Assistants (RA) are available to help. If you are unable to get the images you seek during your visit, leave a message for our research team to locate them when a team member is available.

MICROFILM

The microfilm for all the various record types may be read on either of our two readers. One is in front near the whiteboard; the other is in the multi-purpose room in the back of the library. Once the images are located on the film, mark its location with one of the sticky tabs located near the readers, and then move the film to one of the reader/printers. There is one in the front and one in the back of the library.

MICROFICHE

The microfiche can be read and copied only on the reader/printer in the multi-purpose area. It can be found in a cabinet nearby.

FINDING YOUR EARLY SETTLER OR PERSON OF INTEREST (POI) IN AN INDEX

If your POI filed a claim, they will most likely be found in one of the land claim indexes on the GFO website: provisional claims (<http://www.gfo.org/provisional/index.htm>) or donation land claims (<http://www.gfo.org/donation/index.htm>). The index gives the settler's name, Donation Land Claim number, and the page in

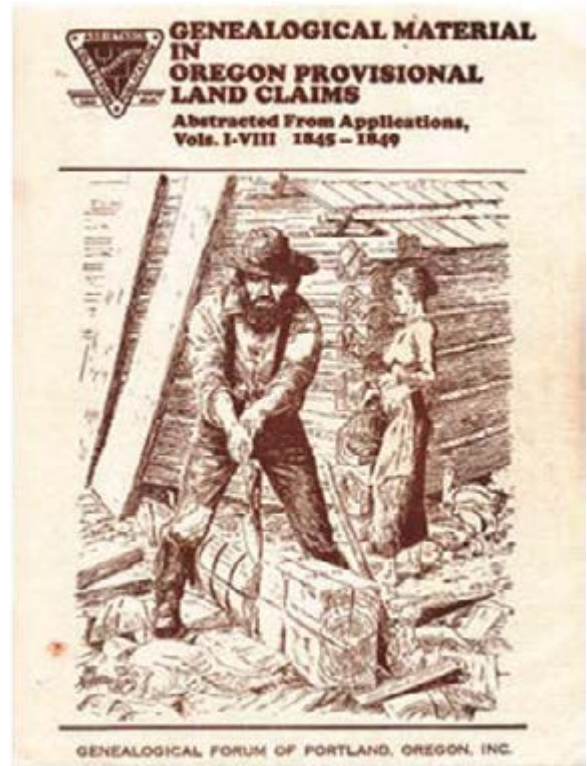
the respective land office book. To look at the actual application, you must come to the GFO, or for a fee our research team will look it up and send you hard copies or digital images of the claim (research@gfo.org).



Names may also be searched at the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) website (General Land Office [GLO] division) (<http://www.glorecords.blm.gov/search/>). In addition, the GFO has published multiple indexes located in the library, call number 979.5, A000, Land. (See the *Bulletin* March 2015 edition for a complete description.) This set of books includes provisional and donation land claims, rejected claim applications, and railroad lands (which were treated differently).

OREGON PROVISIONAL LAND CLAIMS

In 1843, settlers in the Willamette Valley organized a provisional government, and in August 1848, Congress created the Oregon Territorial Government. If your POI might have been in the Oregon Country during this time and might have applied for an Oregon Provisional Land Claim between 1843 and 1850, use the *Genealogical Material in Oregon Provisional Land Claims* (979.5, A000, Land, 1845-1849). This volume is more than an index and contains a complete transcription of all the material found in the original records, including but not limited to the general locality and names of neighbors. There are over 3,700 entries; however some people may have multiple claims. The GFO does not have these records on microfilm.

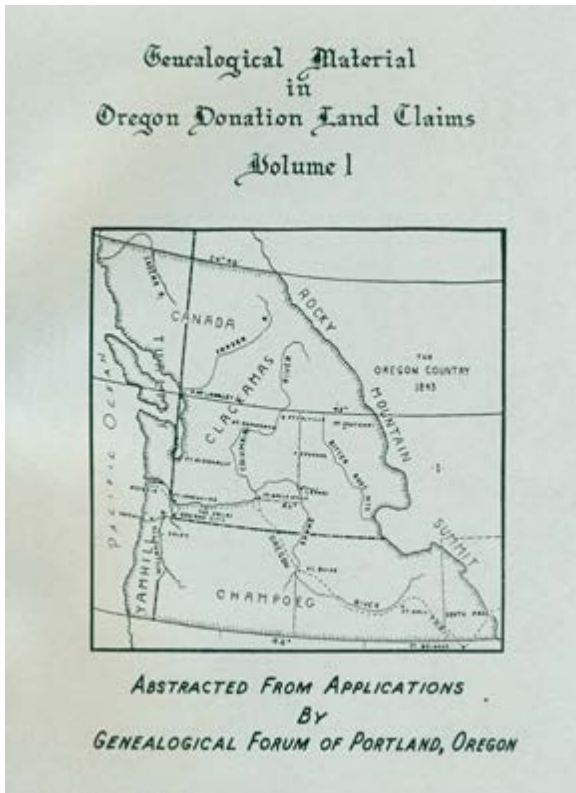


OREGON DONATION LAND CLAIMS INDEXES

Congress passed the Donation Land Act in 1850 which included a provision for settlers who were residents of the Oregon Territory before December 1, 1850. Settlers were required to re-register their Provisional Land Claims to secure them under the Donation Land Act. In other localities, under different federal land laws, this was known as exercising pre-emption rights. It applied to settlers who were already on the land when the new land law passed; therefore, they could claim the same land under the new law. If your POI was suspected of having an Oregon Donation Land Claim (ODLC), use the *Index to Oregon Donation Land Claims, Second Edition* (979.5, A000, Land). This volume is an index of the abstracts found in Volumes 1 through 3, which cover claims based upon the land office where the applications were filed.

If you do not find your POI and you know the correct land office, you can look at the volume specific to that land office. The Oregon City Land Office abstracts are found in *Volume 1, Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims*, and its supplement, *Volume 5, Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims, Supplement to Volume 1*. The abstracts for the Roseburg, The Dalles, and La Grande offices, are found in *Volume 3, Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims*.

Author's note: I have found several errors in this index. The errors are usually in transcribing the actual certificate number. If the POI is not found in the film as indicated by the index, be creative in looking for another certificate number similar to the one indexed.



OREGON DONATION LAND CLAIM MICROFILM RECORDS

Once you have located your POI in one of the indexes, the next step is to locate the application on microfilm. You will need all of the information you find for the claimant, including:

- Claim number
- Date filed
- Land claim office where the claim was filed
- Name of claimant and anyone else listed (as in deceased spouse, children, or others)
- How many acres claimed and where they are located. The "where" will be listed probably as something like "Sections 15 and 16 of Township 2 South, Range 3 East" or abbreviated as "2S 3E 15,16."



With this information in hand, you will need to get the correct microfilm to see images of the actual land entry file. The land office and the certificate numbers are listed on the green boxes in the microfilm drawer. First, using the land office code from the index, locate the boxes for the correct land office:

- LG: La Grande
- OC: Oregon City
- RB: Roseburg
- TD: The Dalles



Next, within that land office group, locate the reel with the correct claim number. The microfilm reels are arranged numerically by ODLC Certificate number and display beginning and ending numbers on the reel.

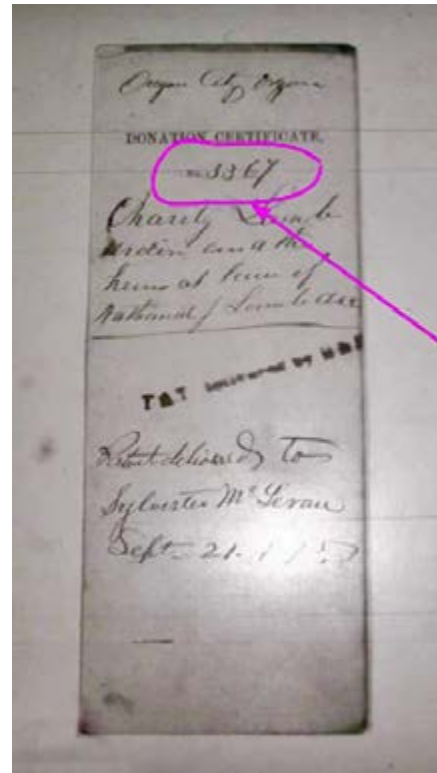
After you find the microfilm reel, take it to one of the readers. Instructions for threading the film appear on the back wall of the reader, or ask an RA for help.



Scroll through the film looking for the claim or certificate number which appears on the image of each jacket cover. The pages that follow each jacket cover are the records included in that file. Claim applications may be as short as two pages (basically just the jacket), and as long as 50 pages.

So what might you expect to find in the claim application? These application records have been described as containing the most comprehensive and detailed records ever produced by any government land record system and are also called Land-Entry Case Files. Most of the files are from the Oregon City Land Office (5,289 files). Next largest was Roseburg with 2,141 files. The Dalles has five entries and La Grande has two entries.

Originally, all the pages in each claim were folded and tucked into a pocket. That pocket was labelled and is called a jacket cover. There you may find notes that pertain to recording and entry dates. There may also be notes that bear a date of 1940-1941 with the name J. Nielson Barry who did much research on early Oregon settlers around that time. If Barry's name appears on the jacket for your POI's claim, his material may be of interest. Much of his research was published in the *Oregon Journal* and has been reprinted in books, magazines, and other reference materials.



Each file usually contains records that indicate the applicant's name, age, birthplace, marriage date and place, given name of wife, and date of arrival in the territory. They may also contain date and court of naturalization, date of settlement, record of land improvements, description of donation claim, depositions of acquaintances, purchase agreements (deeds) from the next owners of the 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 ODLC file; however, at the time the files were filmed, it was not legal to make copies of original naturalization records. Therefore, they still reside in the original file, but are not included on the microfilm.

The microfilm does contain an affidavit from the applicant that includes name, residence at the time of 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 (country or county and state), date of birth, dates of continuous occupation and cultivation of selected land, given name of wife, date of marriage, place of marriage, and date of court deposition.

WHAT IF I AM UNABLE TO FIND MY PERSON OF INTEREST?

If your POI is not found in any of the indexes for the Oregon Land Claims, there are additional places you can look; the *Genealogical Material in Oregon Provisional Land Claims* (979.5, A000, Land, 1845-1849) or in *Vol. 4, Abstracted from Rejected Applications* (979.5, A000, Land, v4).

If your POI is found in the Provisional Land Claims, you may want to investigate the neighbors who were identified in the transcription. Try to locate an ODLIC for each of them. This may give some indication of where your POI was living at the earlier date.

Many French Canadian settlers left the Willamette Valley to live with the families of their native wives. They may have gone anywhere in the Pacific Northwest, or east of the Rocky Mountains, or to the Canadian country north of the 49th parallel. However, their names may be represented in the Provisional and Donation Land Claims. If they patented their land through the federal government, the land sale will appear in the county deed books and you will have a better idea when they may have left the area.

Do not overlook *Vol. 4, Genealogical Material in Oregon Donation Land Claims: Abstracted from Rejected Applications* (979.5, A000, Land, v4) which includes claims not included in the *Index to Oregon Donation Land Claims*. These are rejected, cancelled, or otherwise ineligible claims under the various ODLIC rules for obtaining claims. There is a detailed index in the back of this volume. The index is by claimant's name followed

by the cancelled claim number. This volume may contain individuals who had qualified under the original ODLIC opportunities, but waited too long to file. If they waited until after 1862, individuals who had obtained land under the Homestead Act may have preceded the late-claiming ODLIC applicant for a specific parcel. Details of these conflicts are usually included in the rejected abstracts. This may be the only place an early settler's name is found in the original land records, and this index does not yet appear on the GFO website.



The microfilm boxes in the Oregon collection of land records that have details for rejected ODLIC claims/ applications have the title “Cancellations” on the boxes. The word “Rejected” does not appear on these boxes. The rejected/cancelled claims for any land office can be found at the back end of each set of land claims by land office. There are several boxes for Oregon City.

In the September *Bulletin* “Spotlight” column we will discuss in more detail the land itself, how you can find where the land is located on a map, how to read legal descriptions of land, and some of the history of creating these maps.

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