

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

General Land Office: Gateway to Land Ownership 1812–2012



The Gateway to Land Ownership!!

Two hundred years ago, the General Land Office (GLO) first opened its doors for business – helping millions of Americans in the 19th and 20th centuries acquire public lands for private and agricultural usage, while simultaneously generating income for the Federal Government. Today that "land office business" continues at the Bureau of Land Management, which will commemorate the occasion with events scheduled throughout the year.

Land Offices in Oregon

With establishment of Oregon's northern boundary in 1846, and increasing pioneer settlement throughout the Oregon Country, the need for established property lines and the proper registry of land titles became imperative.

The passing of the **Donation Land Law in 1850** made this mandatory upon all property holders. The following year the first land surveys were begun; thereafter all private and public land holdings were confirmed by these surveys, and so registered.

The first land office for the registry of titles was the **Public Survey Office at Oregon City**, serving the Willamette Land District. In 1855, a land office was opened at Winchester, serving the **Umpqua Land District**. In 1859 this office was moved to Roseburg. Meanwhile, the Oregon City office moved to Salem in 1854, and moved again in 1859 to Eugene, where it remained until 1875, when it moved to Portland. With the growth of settlement in eastern Oregon, offices were opened at La Grande, 1864; The Dalles, 1875, Klamath Falls, 1872, but moved to Lakeview in 1879; and Burns, 1889. The La Grande office closed in 1925 and its records were removed to The Dalles. All original survey records for Oregon are retained in the Portland land office. A gradual consolidation of offices had followed through the years, with all operations transferred to the Bureau of Land Management in 1946. (*Dictionary of Oregon History, Howard McKinley Corning, ed. Binford and Mort, 1956*)



Resources about Land Offices in Oregon – Books/Articles/Web

- 1) National Historic Oregon Trail Interpretive Center. The United States Government Land Office is also featured at the center since many of those who traveled west on the Oregon Trail homesteaded. <http://www.blm.gov/or/oregontrail/index.php>
- 2) The Official Federal Land Records Site: This site provides live access to Federal land conveyance records for the Public Land States, including image access to more than five million Federal land title records issued between 1820 and the present. There are also have images related to survey plats and field notes, dating back to 1810. <http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>
- 3) Oregon Federal Land Records: Oregon/Washington BLM maintains the official Land Status and Cadastral Survey records since the early days of the Government Land Office (GLO). These records are comprised of the Master Title Plats, Historical Index pages, Cadastral Plats and Survey Notes (organized by state, township and range). In addition, this site provides an on-line serialized casefile system (database), which contains mining claim data and information about federal current and historical leases, permits, land and mineral acquisitions, sales and exchanges, grants, withdrawals and more. <http://www.blm.gov/or/landrecords/index.php>
- 4) Shaping America's History – The National BLM Homestead Act website: This site provides information on homesteaders' stories and the BLM's role in preserving them. http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/res/Education_in_BLM/homestead_act.html
- 5) The Public Lands Foundation: Celebrating the 200th anniversary of the establishment of the General Land Office, and the 150th anniversary of the passage of the Homestead Act of 1862. Learn more about how PLF is working to educate America regarding that history and the value of the public lands. <http://www.publicland.org>
- 6) "Nimrod – Courts, Claims, and Killing on the Oregon Frontier," by Ronald B. Lansing, Washington State University Press, Pullman, 2005 -- has some good information about the realities of recording land claims when there was not a land office nearby, or before land offices were established, including the idea of "squatting" and the interpretation of pre-emption claim clauses in land acts.
- 7) "Chaining Oregon – Surveying the Public Lands of the Pacific Northwest, 1851-1855," by Kay Atwood, McDonald and Woodward Publishing Company; 1st edition, 2008 -- has some good portraits of early day surveyors and the author has included sources.
- 8) "Surveys and Surveyors of the Public Domain 1785-1975," by Lola Cazier, University of Michigan Library, 1976 -- has many photo images of surveyors in the field throughout GLO-BLM history and pre-Federal Land Policy and Management Act. The introduction says it was part of training materials for BLM cadastral surveyors.

