Genealogical and Historical Resources at the GLO Archives

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Jerry Patterson, Commissioner
Why look at land records for genealogy?

- Land records are the oldest, largest and most complete record group in the U.S.
  - Every piece of land in Texas (and across the US) has its own individual historical record, or chain, dating back to the sovereignty.
- Tells you what land your ancestors may have owned, and where it’s located.
- A potential source of information on family members, family relationships, and other locations in which your ancestor lived.
Who should do research at the GLO:

- Ancestor came to Texas prior to 1836 (Spanish Collection)
- Ancestor fought in the Texas Revolution or in the Republic of Texas or early statehood (Land grant records, Court of Claims records, Muster Roll, etc…)
- Ancestor was part of the German immigration movement to Texas in the 1840s-1850s
- Ancestor served the Confederate State of Texas
- Ancestor was in Texas during early statehood (1845-1900)
- If your ancestor was involved in railroads in Texas
- If you are interested in Stephen F. Austin, Moses Austin, or lots of other Austins!
A Brief History of the GLO

- An Act of December 22, 1836 created the General Land Office
  - This act ratified and confirmed valid Spanish and Mexican land grants
  - The commissioner had the responsibility to collect records pertaining to grants
- The land system initially adopted by the Republic of Texas was essentially a continuation from the Spanish and Mexican rule, with notable changes in the manner of administering the land granting process
Land Grant Records of the GLO

What you might find?

- When did a person arrive in Texas?
- Was a person single or married? Head of household?
- Did a person serve in the Texas revolution?
- Where did a person settle?
- Where did a person come from?
- How much land did a person receive from the government?
- Why did a person receive a certain amount of land?
The Spanish Collection
The Spanish Collection of the GLO

What you might find?

- When did your ancestor come to Pre-revolutionary Texas?
- Was your ancestor single or married?
- Where in Texas did your ancestor go?
- Where did your ancestor come from?
- Interesting correspondence about settlement between government officials
- Signatures
The Spanish Collection of the GLO

The Spanish Collection contains 6987 land titles granted in Texas by the Crown of Spain and Republic of Mexico.

The Spanish Collection represents 26.28 million acres of land in Texas, or 1/6 of the present territory of the state, in the 57.5 linear feet of boxed material and 54 bound volumes housed in the GLO vault.

The oldest document in the GLO vault is the title to the San Jose Mission in San Antonio, dating back to 1720.
Why did Americans come to Mexican Texas?

- Married men shall receive one league of land and single men shall receive one-quarter of a league of land.
  - One league = 4,428.4 acres
  - ¼ of a league = 1107.1 acres

- In the United States, under the land law of 1820, land cost $1.25/acre.
  - A minimum of 80 acres (or $100) was required.

- Under the Mexican Colonization Law of 1825, a head of family could obtain 4,428.4 acres for $117, or $0.38/acre.
Requirements for foreign settlers to obtain land in Mexican Texas

- Respect the general laws of the Republic, and the laws of the State.
- Shall reside in the State
- Take an Oath of Allegiance of the Federal and State Constitutions before the Ayuntamiento
- Have his name, and those of his family, entered into a book specifying place of origin, age, occupation, and whether married or single.
- Provide certificate that they are Christian and of good moral character.
Conditions subsequent to obtaining the grant

- Settlers shall pay to the State, $30 for each league of grazing land; $2.50 for each labor of non-irrigable land, $3.50 if irrigable.
- The payments for the land shall be made in the fourth, fifth and sixth year of ownership under penalty of forfeiture for failure of payment.
- Establish permanent markers on the corners of the tract.
- Settle and cultivate the land within the six years.
- Land was not to be conveyed in mortmain.
The Spanish Collection of the GLO

Saint Augustine, Sept 23rd, 1834

I certify that D. Samuel Sturw, a native of Newburg, of the United States of the North, is a man of a family consisting of eight persons and a man of good moral habits and industrious and a good citizen and friendly to the laws and religion of the country given at this instance of the said certificate.

Benjamin Lindsey Alexander

Character Certificate – SC 77:6
Perfected title under Mexico: Title to James Bowie (Page 1)
El Ciudadano MIGUEL ARGÜELLO. Comisionado nombrado por el Supremo Gobierno de este Estado, para el repartimiento y posesión de tierras, y expedición de títulos a los nuevos Colonos en la empresa de colonización del Empleado Ciudadano Esteban F. Austin, cerca de las diez leguas litorales de la Costa:

A la celebración del Estudio, en fecha y lugar como se ha dispuesto, y en el cumplimiento de la misma,

He de declarar que en la forma como se ha dispuesto, ha sido el acto que se ha cumplido con la misma.

Y he de firmar el presente documento.

El comisionado:...

Comisión de Justicia...

Dr. Antonio...

Field Notes and land classification

Confirmation of title

Conditions subsequent

Commissioner’s signature with two assisting witnesses
The Spanish Collection of the GLO

Catalogue of the Spanish Collection Part I & II - $15 each
REPUBLIC OF TEXAS

KNOW ALL MEN
To whom these Presents shall come:

THAT

HAVING

IS ENTITLED TO
SIX HUNDRED AND FORTY ACRES OF
DONATION LAND,
IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE ACT OF CONGRESS, PASSED DEC. 91, 1837.

SAID

AND IS EXEMPT FROM EXECUTION
DURING THE LIFE-TIME OF THE PERSON TO WHOM IT IS GRANTED.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand, at Austin this
11th day of March 1840.

Secretary of War.
Types of Land Grants and filing at the GLO

- Texas is divided into 38 land districts.
- Bounty, Donation and Headright Grants to Texas Revolution, Republic and Indigent Republic and Confederate Veterans
- Headright Grants to Settlers, 1836-1845
- Empresario Contracts, Republic of Texas
- Preemption Grants to Settlers, 1845-1898
- Loan and Sales Scrip, 1836-1858
- Internal Improvement Scrip, 1844-1882
- School Land Sales, 1874-1905
Types of Land Grant Programs and Acreage Appropriated and Awarded

- Spanish and Mexican Titles: 26,000,000
- Military Grants: 10,000,000
- Headrights and Pre-emptions: 35,000,000
- Colony contracts: 4,700,000
- Compromise of 1850: 67,000,000
- Sold for Cash: 4,500,000
- Internal Improvements: 40,000,000
- Land for Education: 52,000,000
- Submerged Lands: 5,000,000

Types of Land Grant Programs in Texas
How does the land grant process work?

- Depending on the type of land grant or specific situation of the settler, a land grant certificate would be issued from the following:
  - A County Board of Land Commissioners
  - Secretary of War
  - Commissioner of the General Land Office
  - Court of Claims
  - Adjutant General
  - Commissioner of Claims

- Once a certificate was granted, it was up to the grantee to have a survey made on vacant public land.

- Certificate and field notes were then delivered to the GLO for approval.

- Patent (final title) is then issued.
Anatomy of A Land Grant File

Current GLO file vault

Old GLO file vault
Anatomy of A Land Grant File

GLO file vault, circa 1970s
Anatomy of a Land Grant

First, apply for, and provide proof, that you are deserving to receive land.
Anatomy of A Land Grant File

File Jacket, Wrapper, or Envelope
Anatomy of A Land Grant File

Certificate
Anatomy of A Land Grant File

Field Notes
“On the watters of the Neches River in Cherokee Nation near One Eyes Place...” – from GLO File NAC-1-254

“...Thence N 71 E at 815 vrs nest of young birds in a haw thicket...” – from GLO File MIL-P-3737

“...in the year 1839 or 40...[the certificate] was placed in the hands of a surveyor, who is said to have been killed by the indians, and that the said certificate was lost...” – from GLO File LIB-2-17
Anatomy of A Land Grant File

A Good Survey, Field Sketch or Plat
Platting the Survey on a Map

- Each valid land grant is drawn on the appropriate county map in our office to ensure there are no conflicting claims to the land.
- Then file annotated “correct on map”
IN THE NAME OF THE STATE OF TEXAS.

To all to whom these Presents shall come, know ye,

I, Richard Coke, Governor of the State aforesaid, by virtue of the power vested in me by Law, and in accordance with the Laws of said State, in such case made and provided, do, by these presents, Grant to J ohn Harmon, of .

He hereby relinquishing to , and his heirs or assigns, forever, all the right and title in and to said Land, herebefore held and possessed by the said State, and I do hereby issue this Letter Patent for the same.

In Testimony Whereof, I have caused the Seal of the State to be affixed, as well as the Seal of the General Land Office.

Done at the City of Austin, in the Year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and .
Our County Maps

- The county maps also act as an index to the land grant files
What information can be found by looking at a county map?

- Name of ancestor
- Class of headright or land grant
- File number
- Abstract number
- Location of survey
- Whether patented or not
First draft of the Constitution of the Republic of Texas, March 7, 1836
The Court of Claims files at the GLO

- The Court of Claims was an administrative body established on August 1, 1856.
  - Lasted only six years
- Administrative body established to investigate claims against the state
What can be found in the Court of Claims files?

- Hand-written letters from family members requesting land.
- Documents from the battlefield
- Testimony about an individual in early Texas
- Descriptions of individuals, places, events, etc.
What can be found in the Court of Claims?

Court of Claims #4975 for John C. Logan
What can be found in the Court of Claims?

Court of Claims #4269 – William H. Jack Discharged from Army
The Clerk Returns at the GLO

Boards of Land Commissioners were appointed to each land district to receive petitions from residents for the right to be granted, land.

The Clerk of the Board was required to make lists of the persons given land certificates.

The General Land Office referred to these reports to confirm eligibility.

There are approximately 3400 documents in this collection.
TSGS & Clerk Returns

TSGS has donated a total of $45,000 for the conservation and scanning of the Clerk Return Records

Started under TSGS President Marynell Bryant

Continued under TSGS President Nancy Brennan, and under current TSGS President Sue Kaufman
What might be found in the Clerk Returns of the GLO?

- When a person came to Texas;
- When they applied for land;
- Where they were when applying for land;
- Who testified on their behalf.
What might be found in the Clerk Returns?

Bexar County Clerk Return #3
Maps of the General Land Office

- 80,000 maps, sketches and drawings
- County maps can feature genealogical information
- County maps show land grants of all original grantees up to the year the map was created
Save Texas History

• No money from legislature
• 100% of money generated goes to document conservation
• Educational programs
2.5 Million Documents and Growing