

Louisiana State Historical Land Records and Their Relevance to Genealogists

**Information and guide to utilizing the Louisiana State Land
Office website for genealogical purposes.**

Written by:

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Preface

This guide to Historical Records on file at the Louisiana State Land Office has been written and compiled by Brandi A. Newman, Public Land Analyst for the State of Louisiana in the months of January, February, and March of the year 2014. The purpose of this guide is to impart basic knowledge of the documents contained in the Louisiana State Land Office Historical Records Collection as well as provide detailed instructions on how to locate these documents on the State Land Office website, primarily with genealogical purposes in mind. This guide was presented to the St. Tammany Parish Genealogical Society on March 8, 2014.

An enormous special thank you is extended to Ms. Marguerite Scully for her generous editing and continued support while undertaking this publication.

As there are revisions to the website, this publication will be updated as well.

Louisiana State Land Office

Physical Address:

Claiborne Building 1201
North Third Street
Suite G-223
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
70802

Mailing Address:

State Land Office
Attn: Historical Records
P.O. Box 44124
Baton Rouge, Louisiana
70804

Website Address:

<https://www.doa.la.gov/doa/osl/>

Contact information:

Manager: Tripp Fairly – Tripp.Fairly@la.gov – 225-219-9537

Staff: Linda Turner – Linda.Turner@la.gov – 225-342- 4587

*****Please call to schedule an appointment
before planning a visit to our office*****

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The Bureau of Land Management

The BLM houses all U.S. Patents as well as copies of Plats and Field Notes. These are available online at their website, <http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/> .

Important Documents to Read

Prior to utilizing our website to search for Historical Land Records, it is recommended that new users first review the documents that may be found at the following links. These documents contain a wealth of information about the records on file in the State Land Office and will help explain land terms and the procedures that were in place when your ancestor first acquired land from a public entity.

The documents are:

- **Definitions of Terms** frequently used in Historical Land Records can be found here: https://www.doa.la.gov/media/1gobawko/osl_document_definitions.pdf
- **History of Land Titles in Louisiana** by Ory G. Poret can be found here: https://www.doa.la.gov/media/crzhovei/ory_poret_bklt.pdf

About the Historical Land Records at the Louisiana State Land Office

The Louisiana State Land Office was created by State Legislative Act dated March 25 1844, and currently houses all State severance information as well as Federal severance information. Severance information is the record of the *first* land owner of each piece of property within the State of Louisiana. The Land Office was created to aid in the selection and selling of property which had been transferred from the Federal Government to the State.

The State Land Office has been housed in several locations including the Old State Capitol, the New State Capitol, the Old State Lands & Natural Resources Building which has since been demolished, and currently in the Claiborne Building in downtown Baton Rouge. The Historical Records section of the State Land Office only has one person on their staff; therefore we require our customers to give at least 24 hour advance notice and set up an appointment before visiting the Office.

When the United States took ownership of Louisiana, all land in the State of Louisiana was considered federal property. The Federal Government worked with Louisiana inhabitants who “owned” property to confirm their claims to their property. When the Federal Government sold or granted land to a private individual, it was referred to as “severing the property” or “the severance of the property.” Over time, various Acts of Congress allowed the State of Louisiana to “select” vacant federal property, and upon approval from the Federal Government, this property would pass from federal ownership to state ownership. The State could then sell the property to private individuals, which is also known as “severing” the property. The State Land Office still sells vacant state land today.

The documents on file in the State Land Office create the severance record of the *first sale* of each piece of property within the State of Louisiana. Any subsequent transfers of property between private individuals are *not* at the State Land Office but instead are held in the courthouse of the parish where the land is located. The State Land Office has no private land records or deeds of any type. Over time, the U.S. District Offices were consolidated, and in 1927 the last office was closed and their records were given to the State Land Office. The State Land Office also received the plats and field notes from the U.S. Surveyor General Office which closed in 1910. For these reasons, the collection is very extensive and of great value to genealogist doing research.

Prior to the United States ownership, the area known as Louisiana had been ruled by several countries: France, Spain and Great Britain, all of which granted land to some of its earliest settlers. In 1803, the majority of present-day Louisiana was acquired from France by way of the Louisiana Purchase which added 544 million acres of land to the United States at a cost of \$15 million dollars (roughly \$.03 per acre).

The next big event in our State's history is the passing of the Act of Congress dated March 2, 1805 which had three important implications. First, this Act allowed the President to appoint Federal District Land Registers who would classify, arrange, and translate(when needed) papers and documents relative to the private land claims based on the old land grants. We still have some of this paperwork today, which we refer to as the “Land Claim Papers”. The first Federal District Land offices were opened in New Orleans, and Opelousas, and then eventually in Greensburg, Monroe, and Natchitoches. These districts are still used today, although they are referred to as Southeast District East and West of the Mississippi River, the

Southwestern District, Greensburg District, District North of Red River, and Northwestern District. You can see the boundaries on the District Map which will be available for sale after the presentation.

Secondly, this Act allowed Congress to appoint a Board of Commissioners, comprised of a Register and two other persons. Inhabitants holding a Spanish, French, or British land grant, or those whose title stemmed from such, had to appear before the Board with witnesses and affidavits to certify that the grant was fully legal. If the grant was approved by the Board, approval was forwarded to Washington and a U. S. Act of Congress was passed in which the Federal government acknowledged the claimant's title to the land. If the grant was unapproved, the paperwork was sent back to the individual (see letter dated February 8, 1840).

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, this Act directed the Surveyor General of the United States to send surveyors into the new territory to establish a system of subdividing the vacant land, so that it could be sold by the Federal Government for profit. The Surveyor General first created the base lines, and meridians, one with the center in present Rapides Parish, called the Louisiana Meridian, and another with its center near the East Feliciana/West Feliciana Parish line called the St. Helena Meridian. After that, they would lay out six-square-mile parcels which we call the Township and Range; basically a grid that divides the whole State into six-square-mile blocks. Within the Township and Range, land is further divided into smaller pieces that we call "sections". The surveyor would first lay out the long skinny river lots, then the approved land claims, and lastly the one-square mile sections of public land. You can see on this Township plat an example of each type of section, with the table of contents showing names of approved claimants, and acre figures for the public land. (Show a plat). Knowing the Township, Range and Section of your ancestor's property is useful information, and will help in finding an Official Plat of the area. Searching by name is possible, and I will go into greater detail at the demonstration portion of the presentation.

Finally, in 1812, Louisiana became a State, however **all** public land was owned by the Federal Government. It would not be until later that special Acts of Congress would allow the passing of land from the Federal Government to the State Government. If a person inhabiting land in Louisiana at that time did NOT have a land claim, they could purchase public land from the Federal Government after it was surveyed. All land title begins with the Federal Government.

In the early 2000's, the whole collection of documents was scanned and indexed for preservation reasons, and an online system was put in place for employees to use. When the programmers were creating the program, the primary purpose was inner-office usability, *not public use*. Later, this database was published on the website and has since seen several upgrades but search functionality is still geared towards in house use. Because State Land Office staff primarily search for documents based on Township, Range and Section, this is the easiest way for the public to search as well, if you have this information.

Besides housing all the scanned images of the Historical Documents, the website has several features which I recommend a new user to look at before digging into our search fields.

If you are new to Louisiana land title records, my first recommendation for you is to stop by our "definitions" section. This gives users a guide to the terminology used in many of the search categories. The second publication I recommend is an informational piece written by Mr. Ory G. Poret, a former Louisiana State Land Office Register, called ***History of Land Titles in the State of Louisiana***, in the "Forms, Procedures and Publications" section of our website. This gives a more detailed overview of the information I have just shared. These are also available in the "Forms, Procedures and Publications" section of our website.

U. S. Tract Books, State Tract Books, Land Claim Papers, and Official Plats

There are numerous types of documents in the Historical Land Records Collection of the State Land Office. The ones most useful for genealogists are the following: U. S. Tract Books, State Tract Books, Land Claim Papers and Official Township Plats.

What information is in these documents?

- **U. S. Tract Book Pages** – These are ledger books which are indexed by township, range, and section, showing to whom the U. S. Government sold or granted property. The pages in each U.S. Tract Book contain a property description. These pages often also include names of purchasers, dates of purchase, patent numbers and dates, and certificate numbers. These are read left to right as one single line. Columns are labeled with key information.
- **State Tract Book Pages** – If the Federal Government granted land to the State, these lands will appear on State Tract Book pages. The State Tract Book pages are similar to U. S. Tract Book Pages, but show more information. The information provided may include: the reason the State acquired the property; the names of the purchasers of the state land; property descriptions; dates of selection, approval, and sale; certificate numbers; and patent numbers.
- **Land Claim Papers** – When the United States took possession of Louisiana, the Federal Government worked with Louisiana inhabitants who “owned” property to confirm their land claims. These land claims included claims from individuals who received French, Spanish, or British land grants. Some of the papers supplied to the Federal Government for this purpose are still on file in the State Land Office; these records may include maps, affidavits, and certificate numbers.
- **Official Township Plats** – Before any vacant land could be sold, it had to be surveyed. The plat maps were created from surveyors’ field notes. The maps show the dimensions of the land in Louisiana; they are indexed by township/range/section. Typically these maps do not show roads, churches, cemeteries, parish boundaries, cities, towns, plantations, etc., however, major lakes, rivers, and streams will appear on the Official Plats.

The following pages will provide detailed instructions on how to read the information on the U. S. Tract Book pages, State Tract Book pages, Claim Papers, and Official Plats.

Enlargement of left side of page

TOWNSHIP No. 15 N.

DESCRIPTION OF THE TRACT.				Contents.		Rate per acre.		Purchase money.		NAME OF THE PURCHASER.
PART OF SECTION.	Section.	Township	Range.	Acres.	100ths.	Dollars.	Cents.	Dollars.	Cents.	
Lot	1	15 N.	14 E.	26	97	125	331	21		Thomas Bernard, and John Stewart,

Enlargement of right side of page

RANGE No. 14 East DISTRICT OF

DATE OF SALE.	Number of receipts and certificate of purchase.	TO WHOM PATENTED.	DATE OF PATENT.	Where recorded.	
				Volume.	Page.
1837. Aug. 26 th	1334	Levy to K June 2. 1895 & Aug 31. 1895	June 20-1837	3	79

State Tract Books

The State Tract Books provide key information about each piece of property in Louisiana. Every parcel of land which passed from federal ownership to state ownership should have an entry. When property was severed from the state domain, a clerk would make note of it in a State Tract Book.

To better understand the information contained on each line of the pages in a State Tract book, it is best to separate the information on each line into two parts. The first part answers the question: how did this property become State-owned? The second part answers the question: who did the State sell it to? The easiest way to keep things straight is to first look at the page as a whole. You should see the columns "approved" and "purchased" on the left side of the page. Between these two columns, draw an invisible line. Anything to the left of that line shows how this property came to the State and anything to the right of the line shows how the property was severed from the State.

The image shows two pages from a State Tract Book. The left page is titled "Township No. 15 North" and the right page is "Range No. 111 East N.T.R.R. District". Both pages have columns for "DESCRIPTION OF TRACT", "AREA", "APPROVED", and "PURCHASED". The entries include dates, acreage, and names of individuals or companies involved in the land transactions.

DESCRIPTION OF TRACT	AREA	APPROVED	PURCHASED
All 16	271 23	John Landlaw	
All 17	243 30	John W. Hume	
All 18	641 76	Richard S. Cook	
All 19	622 00	Wm. H. Hume	
1/2 of 18	483 00	Wm. H. Hume	
1/2 of 18	161 00	Wm. H. Hume	
1/2 of 18	562 42		
1/2 of 18	488 00		
All 22	640 24		
All 23	643 32	Thomas A. Campbell	
1/2 of 18	483 43	Wm. H. Hume	
1/2 of 18	501 11	Wm. H. Hume	
1/2 of 18	480 00		
1/2 of 18	382 80		
1/2 of 18	182 00		

With 'invisible line' drawn

Township No. 15 North								Range No. 14 East N.P.R. District												
DESCRIPTION OF TRACT				AREA		Character of Land	Selected	Approved	PURCHASER	DATE OF SALE	No. of Certificates	DESCRIPTION		Area	AMOUNT	No. of Pages	Volume			
Part or Section	Section	Township	Range	Acres	100ths							Acres	100ths					Acres	100ths	Acres
	All 16	15	14	271	23	School			John Lardlaw	2 July 1860	1930	All 21	271	33	349	16	11	270		
	All 17	"	"	215	30	School			John W. Hanna	17 January 1853	183	1/2 of 18 1/2	17	22	90	25	63			
	All "	"	"	330	92	"			W. H. Workman & Burnett	29 May 1855	1791	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	40	10	52	12	2	204	
	All 18	"	"	641	96	"			Richard S. Buck	2 May 1868	146	1/2 of 18 1/2	17							
	"	"	"	600	08	"			See Sect 29				15	686	42	155	02	2727	3	17
	All 19	"	"	622	00	"			Highmore & Deane				18							
	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	"	483	00	"			"				19	10	40	100	51	4867	5	244
	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	"	161	00	"			rejoice Henry Myers				"	18	30	100	62	19135	41	85
	All 20	"	"	580	42	"			See Sect 26											
	All 21	"	"	480	00	"			Thomas A. Compton	15 February 1856	2529	1/2 of 18 1/2	23	120	66	150	52	2227	2	320
	All 22	"	"	640	24	"			See A. Lee	20 December 1853	1296	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	80	00	100	00	19135	71	87
	All 23	"	"	623	50	"			See Sect 26											
	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	"	480	00	"			See Sect 26											
	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	"	320	00	"			"											
	1/2 of 18 1/2	"	"	160	00	"			"											

Columns showing land passing from Federal Ownership to State Ownership

For example, this would read: All of section 16, Township 15 North, Range 14 East, being 271.23 acres was School Land, Selected on January 10, 1853, and Approved on March 11, 1835.

Township No. 15 North								
DESCRIPTION OF TRACT				AREA		Character of Land	Selected	Approved
Part or Section	Section	Township	Range	Acres	100ths			
	All 16	15	14	271	23	School		

Columns showing land passing from State Ownership into Private Ownership

This is a continuation of the above line and would read: John Laidlaw, on July 2, 1860, under certificate 8930 NSH purchased Lot or Section 16 (cancelled & wt. 159, Act 104 1888 issued in lie hereof), being 271.33 acres, at a price of \$349.16, with patent no. 10369 in volume 11 page 72 issued.

Range No. 14 East N.R.R. District. 258											
VOL 18A PG 258											
PURCHASER	DATE OF SALE	No. of Certificate	DESCRIPTION	Section	AREA		AMOUNT	No. of Patent	RECORDED		
					Acres	100th			Vol.	Page	
John Laidlaw	July 1860	8930	Pat. or Dec. 1888 ^{Cancelled wt. 159, act 104} in lie hereof	16	271	33	349.16	10369	11	72	

Now that we've covered the basics, we can take a look at The State Land Office Website, and I will show you how to search for Historical documents knowing only the original owner's name.

Beginning at <https://www.slodms.doa.la.gov/HistoricalDocument> you will click on "Document Access" located on the blue sidebar. This will bring you to another page where you will choose the hyperlink to "Historical Documents" in the first paragraph, or alternatively, take a look at the definitions. This is our main search screen. You see many different fields which can be filled in, but there are some tricks to finding what you are looking for. I mentioned earlier that searching by Township and Range is the best way to find documents, but I understand that this information may not be readily available. Sometimes all you have is a name, and my first example will search using only that. Please remember that we only have record of the *first land owner* from either the Federal or State Government. If your ancestor received their property from a private individual we will have no record, as those should be in the Courthouse of the Parish where the land is located. If your ancestor received a Land Grant, and subsequently transferred their land to another private individual prior to the Louisiana Purchase, that person who owned it at the time of the Louisiana Purchase will be called the claimant and the first owner in our records.

A genealogist recently contacted me with the name John W. Hanna, born around 1800 in Ireland then immigrating to the U.S. He lived in the Natchitoches area around 1850 with a wife named Eliza Davidson Hanna before passing away in 1858, and is buried in Mississippi. This presentation will help you learn to utilize the State Land Office website to find historical land title records which may help in your genealogical search. Having only the name, approximate area, and a range of dates, we will begin our search. Starting on our main search page, you can leave your document type as "**unspecified**", and in the "**original owner**" field, you can type a name.

One key thing to note is that this index is inherently sorted by *first* name, not last name. If we type, "Hanna", we will only get results for the *first name* "Hanna", not results for the last name. Since we know our person is named "John W. Hanna" we could type a number of things: "John W. Hanna", "JW", "John W.", or "John W Hanna" without a period, and all may yield slightly different results. There is also a wildcard option. You can type "Hanna*" if searching for a first name, "*Hanna" if searching for a last name, or "*Hanna*" which will include *all* names with the letter sequence, "hanna". I recommend typing "*Hanna*" because it will give the most results which you can then read and pick the best choice. For our example, I picked "John W Hanna" which yielded six results, but I also recommend trying many variations and looking at the results for all of them, just to make sure you have covered your bases.

Once you click the "search historical documents" button, you should get six results. Here is a tip: If you get back any result which begins with "U.S. Tract Book..." pick that one first. This is the best way to get started since this is the *first* place State Land Office staff would check to find the history of any piece of property. This should give you a Township and Range, which will help you find out where this piece of property is located presently.

Let's first choose the result called "U.S. Tract Book Volume 31 Page 50, Monroe District". Monroe District is another name for the Ouachita District or the District North of Red River, so you will know that this piece of property is somewhere in the northeast portion of the state colored orange on our District Map. We only knew that Mr. Hanna was in the Natchitoches area, so this could be a bust or it could give us new information. Click on the result and a new window will open showing a scanned image of the U.S. Tract Book Page. You can hold your mouse over the toolbar icons to find out what each one does. We will use the zoom tool most, but you can also save or print at home for free.

U.S. Tract Book Pages are basically a ledger giving key information about property severance. There are several columns with different fields that are read left to right. Our name, John W. Hanna, should appear on this page at least once (be sure to check the whole page for numerous entries), and you can visually scan the page until you find his name. If you don't see it quickly, click on the yellow cross-hatched box on the top toolbar near the save and print icons. This will bring up a typed index of key information on the page. Once you find his name on the page, go to the leftmost column and begin reading. It says: The Southeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 30, being in Township 17 North, Range 3 East, being 39.99 acres was appraised at \$132.00, purchased by John W. Hanna on June 12, 1916, under certificate 07747, and patented to John W. Hanna on October 20, 1916, Patent number 551316. Now we know where the land was, how much he purchased, the price he paid, the certificate he was issued, and the patent date and number. No U.S. Patents are on file in the State Land Office, but rather with the Bureau of Land Management in Washington (I've included a web address in your handout). The State Land Office also has some duplicate copies of certificates, but they are few and far between, and require a good bit of research to find. If there is indication that a patent was issued, I would recommend checking the Bureau of Land Management as my next step. But wait, didn't we say that our John Hanna died in 1858? This couldn't be him if he was deceased at the time of this purchase. Perhaps this is a dead end, or perhaps we've found another relative!

This is all the information we can find out from this U.S. Tract Book Page. Since we had two U.S. Tract Book Page results, I will next check the second one. You can close this window, or minimize it to go back to your results page. Click on the second result called, "U.S. Tract Book Volume 40 Page Number 185,

Monroe District". You should once again scan the page for John Hanna's name, and then read across. You will find his entry near the bottom of the page but only partially filled out. You will see that: the Northeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of section 17, Township 15 North, Range 14 East was sold to John W. Hanna on January 17, 1854 under Certificate 83, Swamp, at Baton Rouge. This is included in a bracket stating "State Entries". What does this mean? Above Mr. Hanna's entry, you will see another entry that explains this. It says "The whole of section 17, Township 15 North, Range 14 East being 330.92 acres was granted to the State as Swamp Lands under Act of March 2, 1849; See list no 1". Without going into all the specifics, this sentence indicates that the Federal Government gave all of section 17 to the State Government, and that John Hanna got this land from the State Government, and that we should look at the State Tract Book Page for this. I would write down this Township, Range and Section, just in case, for some reason, there was an error in indexing and the *State* Tract Book Page for this section is not included in our results from our name search. We have gathered our information from this U.S. Tract Book Page as well, and we can now close the window.

Let's return once again to our search results where we had two State Tract Book page results. Let's choose the first one called, "State Tract Book Volume 18A, Page Number 258, North of Red River District". This is in the same district as the U.S. Tract Book Pages which is a good sign. Click on this result.

Reading a State Tract Book is very different from reading a U.S. Tract Book. Don't worry; I've included some guidelines in your handouts in case you don't catch everything now. The State Tract Book page should be read in two parts: First, how did this property become State-owned, and second who did the State sell it to? The easiest way to keep things straight is to take a look at the page as a whole. You should see the columns "approved" and "purchased" on the left side. Between these two, you should draw an invisible line. Sometimes you can read straight across, but more often than not, you cannot. Anything to the left of that line shows how this property came to the State and anything to the right shows how the property was severed from the State. For genealogists, I wouldn't worry too much about things to the left of the line, but if you would like more information, *The History of Land Titles in the State of Louisiana by Mr. Ory G. Poret* gives more information. State Tract Books have the same yellow cross-hatched box that U.S. Tract Book pages have on the toolbar, so you can utilize this if you don't immediately see the name you're searching for. We will find John W. Hanna's name near the top, and if we read across, we will see that on January 17, 1854, under certificate 83 NS, he purchased the Northeast Quarter of the Southeast Fractional Quarter being 22.90 acres, for a price of \$28.63. The last column is blank, indicating that a State patent was not issued, which is not terribly abnormal; the certificate would pass title from the State to Mr. Hanna. Close the window and return to the search results.

We still have another State Tract Book Page to look at, so let's click on "State Tract Book Volume 18A, Page 259, North of Red River District". We'll go through the same steps of looking for John Hanna's name on the page, and once found, read across. This time, we don't see his name, so we'll check the yellow cross-hatched box. Still, no John Hanna. So, why did this page come up? I wish I could tell you a concrete answer. Our system is flawed for genealogist's purposes to say the least. I *think* this result comes up because his name appears on the other page where the entry for his acquisition of a portion of section 17 in Township 15 North, Range 14 East is shown, and thus *all* State Tract Book pages with that township and range are shown. I'm not very familiar with the inner-workings of the databases, but this is my best guess. If you do not see your ancestor's name on a page, I would not spend much time worrying if you are missing something, and I would move on. The Tract Book Pages are the most important asset you can look at; they are our roadmap to the rest of our records.

Upon closing this State Tract Book Page, we can now look at the first two results. These are both "Claim Papers"—that paperwork of individuals who had French, Spanish, or British land grants that is still on file in the State Land Office. Usually these include a property description, small map, field notes, and possibly an affidavit. The townships and ranges that are included in each book are listed in the title, and once you click on a result, you will see an index of what is included in the book. Let's look at the very first result.

You will notice that this book opens in a new window like the Tract Book and Plats, but looks a little different. There is no yellow cross-hatched box, but there is another section to the left of the main image with thumbnails. The actual book was scanned page by page in order so unlike the Tract Book Pages which have one image, these are multi-page/multi-image documents. You can navigate the pages using the thumbnails or the page number box in the top, right-hand corner. If you click on a thumbnail, that thumbnail will become highlighted so you can easily see it. You will notice that the first two pages of this book, and all claim paper books, are a typed index of what section, township and range, and name is included in the book. These are not listed in page order, but rather alphabetical order by last name of the claimant. The book itself has townships grouped together with a white page indicating when the township changes.

First, visually scan the index pages for John Hanna's name. We will not find his name, and I believe the reason is the same reason that we did not find him on the State Tract Book Page. We know from the Tract Books that he purchased land in Township 15 North, Range 14 East, and therefore, since claim papers have township and range data, this result appears in the name search because it contains that same land description. Like I said, our database was not meant to search for names, but I want you to have as

much information as possible. We can close this window now and take a look at the second claim paper result.

Use the same method to determine whether or not John Hanna's name appears in this book as well. Reading through the index, it does not appear to be included, for the same reasons as I have already mentioned. If you don't see a name you expect, don't spend hours flipping through the book pages online; just know that the "name" search is not completely conclusive.

Now, I want to take a step in a slightly different direction. We are assured from the first State Tract Book page that Mr. Hanna was a landowner around the time we thought he could have been, but in a different area than we thought. Let's look at our District Map to find out what Parish he was in so that you can utilize records there, if need be. We know he was in the District North of Red River, in Township 15 North, Range 14 East, section 17. Sections are not shown on the District Map, but Townships and Ranges are. We are going to go to the cross of the Louisiana Meridian in Rapides Parish and count up (north) 15 squares, and the count right (east) 14 squares. This puts us almost at the State line in Madison Parish. Having this knowledge, we can utilize Madison Parish Courthouse, Historical Societies, and other records that we didn't know about before!

We can go a step further though to see *exactly* where this property was located. The State Land Office has copies of the original Government Surveys in our collection which will show us the exact location of the section. On the main search screen where we previously searched using the "original owner" field, we are going to click the "new search" button to clear all the fields. Then, we will choose "Plats, Official" as our document type, and in the Township field type "15N", and in the Range field type "14E", and hit search. This should bring up two results. Go ahead and click on the first result. You will see a rather boring black and white plat, created by surveyors for the primary purpose of selling Public Land. You will see that section 17 is in the top, right-hand corner. It looks like a normal square section. To the right of the plat, you will find a table of contents which lists acreage for the public land sections, and beneath that the names, acreage, and certificate numbers for the private claims. Only claimed lands will show names of individuals on the plat. This plat does indicate the nature of the land as "low slashy land", and that there was a "cart road" nearby. Beneath the table of contents is some verbiage listing the surveyors and years they surveyed and lastly the date that the plat was approved by the U.S. Surveyor General, in our case 1846. Oftentimes, there will only be one plat for a township, but we had two results, so let's take a look at the second one.

This Official Plat is actually two diagrams on one page, and as indicated in the verbiage, only covers a portion of the township, but it does happen to show our section 17. The lower diagram is from

1847, and the upper from 1848. The purpose of a diagram is to clear up issues with certain sections; in this case, sections 50 and 51, which in turn affected the size of section 17. Since the latest diagram of section 17 was from 1848, *this is the one that was in effect when John Hanna purchased his property in 1854. You'll even see that the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter shows 22.90 acres, just like the Tract Book.*

Neither the District Map nor the Official Plats show us any present-day features of the land, such as roads, houses, cemeteries or churches, so we will have to look at some other resources to get a better picture of where this land is today. I would recommend obtaining an Official State of Louisiana Road Map from the Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD). These maps actually show township and range numbers as well, but because the maps are much busier, and each square is not labeled, they are harder to read than the District Map. Knowing the general area from the District Map, I would then look to the road map to get a better feel of the land. You could also use Google Maps once you are more familiar to really zoom into your area of interest.

This concludes my speech and demonstration. I hope I've shed some light on how to search the State Land Office Historical Records collection using the "original owner" field for genealogical purposes. We have numerous types of documents in my office, but the ones I've highlighted are those that I feel are most pertinent to those doing family research. Before we go into the question & answer part, I would like everyone to look under their chair to see if you have a gold star. If so, bring it up to me after and you will receive a large District Map free of charge!

Large maps are approximately 38" x 40" and \$40.00 and small maps are about 22" x 22" and \$20.00. You can also call our office and order one over the phone with a Visa or MasterCard. If you have questions in the future, please feel free to e-mail or call us, and if you would like to visit the State Land Office to see some records, please set up an appointment a few days before your arrival.

Land District Name Changes

These names can be used interchangeably; note that both Southeastern Districts were once considered the Orleans District.

Old Name	New Name
Orleans District	Southeastern District West of the Mississippi River
Orleans District	Southeastern District East of the Mississippi River
Greensburg District	Greensburg District
Opelousas District	Southwestern District
Natchitoches District	Northwestern District
Ouachita or Monroe District	North of Red River District

Frequently Asked Questions

My ancestor had a Spanish/British/French Land Grant. Does the State Land Office have those original Land Grants?

No. Based on State Land Office records, it looks like those original land grants were given to the grantee at that time. After the Louisiana Purchase, those holding grants were asked to prove their claims, and submit certain paperwork which would be reviewed by the Commissioner of Claims, who would assign certain 'degrees of validity' using an A-D scale. If claims were approved, they would be confirmed by an Act of Congress, which would be denoted on the U.S. Tract Book Page for that Township, Range and Section.

What is the difference in an "A" Claim vs. a "B" Claim, etc.?

Description of Land Claims A, B, C, D, etc., summarized from the book on file in the State Land Office entitled, *Abstractions & Certificates of Confirmation, Cosby Reports & Lists, French, British and Spanish*, document ID # 501.00085, image page 59.

A Claims – Patents were issued by the Spanish or British Government. When Spain took over after Britain, Spain said that the Brits could leave if they wanted and gave them 18 months, then 4 extra months, but none of them left. British patents were then "grandfathered in" as Spanish patents. For reason of a

patent being issued by a previous government, Cosby, Commissioner of Land Claims, recommends that these claims should be confirmed.

B Claims – Orders of Survey were issued by Mero, Carondolet, de Lamos, Morales, and Grandpere. These Orders of Survey originated from Spanish authorities and followed all Spanish rules and regulations. Some claims exceeded normal quantity of acreage. For these reasons, Cosby recommends that these claims should be confirmed, but excess acreage could be limited.

C Claims – After Spain, the French were in control, yet the Spanish Government still sold land. These sales were invalid because the Spanish no longer had the right to sell property they didn't own. In most cases these were large tracts with no cultivation or inhabitants. In instances where small tracts had claimants that actually cultivated and inhabited the land, and followed all Spanish guidelines for getting a patent, these could be considered for approval; however Cosby recommended that most not be confirmed.

D Claims – These have the same criteria as C claims, yet persons never actually paid for land, just surveyed it. Grandpere recommended individuals to submit application for land, yet no application of purchase money was received. Cosby does not recommend confirmation.

Anomalous Claims – Title papers were lost or destroyed. If papers are found, these claims will fall under the above criteria. Cosby has no comment. *{Note: these are never referenced on Tract Books or Plats}*

Why do I see so many different names for the federal land districts?

A land district is a geographic area that was established by the U. S. Government. Over time, federal land districts were given different names. First, they were named after the city in which the U. S. Land District Office was located. Later when more Land Offices were established, the names of most land districts were renamed to reflect the geographic area in which property was located. Note that both Southeastern Districts were once considered the Orleans District.

Old Name	New Name
Orleans District	Southeastern District West of the Mississippi River
Orleans District	Southeastern District East of the Mississippi River
Greensburg District	Greensburg District
Opelousas District	Southwestern District
Natchitoches District	Northwestern District
Ouachita or Monroe District	North of Red River District

I know the Township, and Range of my ancestor's property in Evangeline Parish. It is Township 2 South, Range 2 East, but I get two results; one in the Southwestern District, and one in the Greensburg District. Why?

The State of Louisiana has two principal meridians running through it. They are the Louisiana Meridian with its axis is present day Rapides Parish, and the St. Helena Meridian with its axis near the East Feliciana/West Feliciana Parish Line. Knowing what District your property is in is critical to finding the correct documents. The Greensburg District & the Southeastern District East of the Mississippi River are the only Districts which use the St. Helena Meridian; all others stem from the Louisiana Meridian.

My great-great-great Grandfather had a plantation and I'm looking for those records. Does the State Land Office have those?

No. The State Land Office does not have any personal records of individuals, nor any deeds or evidence of property transfers between private individuals. If you know the township, range and section of the property where the plantation was located, the State Land Office has record of who *first* owned that land, but nothing after.

Where can I find federal patents?

The Bureau of Land Management has federal patents. The BLM houses all U. S. patents as well as copies of plats and surveyors' field notes. These are available online at their website: <http://www.gloreCORDS.blm.gov/>.

What information is in a "Tract Book"?

A tract book is basically a ledger showing the first severance information for every piece of property, sorted by township and range. Information included is: property description, purchaser, price, acreage, date of sale, certificate numbers, and patent numbers. See above pages for further information.

Township,
Range, & District → T. 15. N. R. 14. E.
District North of Red River.
La.

Public Land
Sections &

Character of
Land

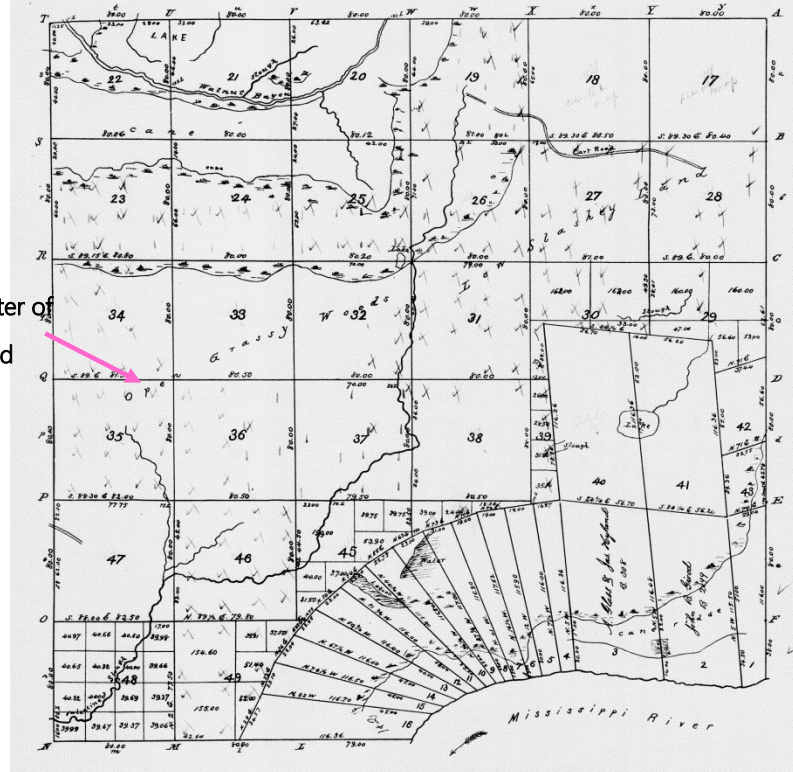


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Sec.	Area	Sec.	Area	Sec.	Area
1	240.97	16	271.23	31	474.40
2	161.16	17	641.60	32	481.90
3	167.48	18	648.00	33	460.00
4	167.59	19	640.00	34	460.00
5	169.36	20	640.00	35	460.00
6	161.70	21	640.00	36	460.00
7	165.96	22	640.00	37	460.00
8	161.07	23	643.34	38	460.00
9	163.18	24	640.00	39	460.00
10	161.90	25	642.28	40	460.00
11	176.86	26	640.00	41	460.00
12	163.51	27	640.00	42	460.00
13	161.33	28	641.60	43	460.00
14	161.33	29	641.60	44	460.00
15	161.33	30	641.60	45	460.00
2257.53		7976.97		3884.75	
				7907.14	
				7976.97	
				2257.53	
				3091.17	
Private Claims					
J. Blair & J. Highland		3		641.17	
J. Blair & J. Highland		3		641.17	

Private Land Claim
Sections &

Witness of the State & Co. Court
All the boundaries of this Township and base of section lines were surveyed by Angus McPhee & Joseph Brown Deputy Surveyors in the winter of 1826 & 1827 and paid for in the 4th quarter of 1827. The remainder of square sections and connections were surveyed by J. S. Berry Deputy Surveyor in the 2nd quarter of 1828 & 1829 under contract of 15th March 1828 and paid for in the 2nd qtr of 1829 amounting to 37 miles 13 chs and 45 lbs.

Approval Date & Signature

Utilizing the State Land Office Website to Find Historical Land Title Documents Relevant to Genealogists by Name

Known information: Name of individual and a clue that they may have purchased land from the State or Federal Government in Louisiana. We will use the name John W. Hanna for our example. We also know that he was born in 1800, lived in Natchitoches around 1850 with a wife name Eliza Davidson Hanna, and died in Mississippi in 1858.

- On the main search screen, leave your document type as “unspecified” and go down to the “original owner field” where you will type a name. This index is by first name, not last, so if you type “Hanna” you will only get results beginning with the first name Hanna. I recommend utilizing the wildcard (*).
 - *Hanna will find results for the last name Hanna
 - Hanna* will find results for the first name Hanna
 - * Hanna * will find results with any string of the letters such as the first name **Hannah**, the last name **Hanna**, or even the name **Hannabal**.
 - Hint: Be sure to check every variation and even initials. Results may vary.
 - Choose “John W Hanna” then click “search historical records” button.
 - Six results found
- Review your results
 - There are two “Claim Paper” results, two “State Tract Book” results and two “U.S. Tract Book” results.
 - Hint: Always choose the results that begins with, “U.S. Tract Book” first.
 - Choose a U.S. Tract Book result. First choose “US TRACT BOOK VOLUME 31 PAGE NUMBER 050 (MONROE DISTRICT)”. This will open in a new window.
 - In this new window there is a toolbar with several functions. Hold your mouse over the icons for a description of what each one does. You can zoom, print, or save each and every document free of charge!
- Read your first U.S. Tract Book Page
 - Familiarize yourself with the way the page is set up. Take a look at names of columns. These books tell you key information about the piece of property and every parcel of land in the State of Louisiana should have an entry with the exception of land reserved for schools. These are arranged by property description, not name. When a piece of property was severed from the U.S. Government, a clerk would make note of it here.

- Look for your name. Visually scan the page. If you don't see it, click on the yellow cross-hatched box in top toolbar to see a typed index of information on the page.
 - Hint: Names can appear more than once on a page. Be sure to look at the whole page.
- Once you find your name, start reading the line from the left-most column to the right. For instance, our example would read: *The Southeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of Section 30, being in Township 17 North, Range 3 East, being 39.99 acres was appraised at \$132.00, purchased by John W. Hanna on June 12, 1916, under certificate 07747, and patented to John W. Hanna on October 20, 1916, Patent number 551316.*
 - Hint: If a U.S. Patent is indicated, check for a copy on the Bureau of Land Management website. None are on file at the State Land Office.
- Make note of Township, Range, Section, portion of Section, and dates that your ancestor acquired the property for future use.
- Print or Save
 - Use icons on toolbar.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Read your second U.S. Tract Book Page
 - Choose "US TRACT BOOK VOLUME 31 PAGE NUMBER 050 (MONROE DISTRICT)".
 - Use same steps as the first U.S. Tract Book Page
 - Once you find your name, start reading the line from the left-most column to the right. For instance, our example would read: *the Northeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter of section 17, Township 15 North, Range 14 East was sold to John W. Hanna on January 17, 1854 under Certificate 83, Swamp, at Baton Rouge.* This is included in a bracket stating "State Entries".
 - Note: Above Mr. Hanna's entry, you will see another entry that explains the significance of "State Entries". It says "The whole of section 17, Township 15 North, Range 14 East being 330.92 acres was granted to the State as Swamp Lands under Act of March 2, 1849; See list no. 1". ***This means we will have to see a State Tract Book Page for more information.***
 - Note: Some U.S. Tract Book Pages will simply say a variation of, "Selected by the State of Louisiana and Approved". Most will not mention the person who received the land from the State.

- Make note of Township, Range, Section, portion of Section, and dates that your ancestor acquired the property for future use.
- Print or Save
 - Use icons on toolbar.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Read your first State Tract Book Page
 - Choose a State Tract Book result. First choose "STATE TRACT BOOK VOLUME 18A PAGE NUMBER 258 (DISTRICT NORTH OF RED RIVER DISTRICT)". This will open in a new window.
 - Familiarize yourself with the way the page is set up.
 - Note: The State Tract Book page should be read in two parts: First, how did this property become State-owned, and second who did the State sell it to? Draw an invisible line between the columns marked "approved" and "purchased" on the left side and treat them separately. Anything to the left of that line shows how this property came to the State and anything to the right shows how the property was severed from the State. For genealogists, I wouldn't worry too much about things to the left of the line
 - Take a look at names of columns. These books tell you key information about the piece of property and every parcel of land which passed from Federal Ownership to State Ownership should have an entry. When a piece of property was severed from the State domain, a clerk would make note of it here.
 - Look for your name. Visually scan the page. If you don't see it, click on the yellow cross-hatched box in top toolbar to see a typed index of information on the page.
 - Hint: Names can appear more than once on a page. Be sure to look at the whole page.
 - Once you find your name, start reading at that column marked "purchaser" to the right-most column marked "page". For instance, our example would read: *John W. Hanna, on January 17, 1854, under certificate 83 NS, purchased the Northeast Quarter of the Southeast Fractional Quarter being 22.90 acres, for a price of \$28.63.* The last column is blank, indicating that a State patent was not issued, which is not terribly abnormal; the certificate would pass title from the State to Mr. Hanna.

- Hint: All State Patents are on file in the State Land Office. Most State Certificates or Warrants are also on file.
 - Make note of Township, Range, Section, portion of Section, certificate, warrant, or patent numbers, and dates that your ancestor acquired the property for future use.
- Print or Save
 - Use icons on toolbar.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Read your second State Tract Book Page
 - Choose "STATE TRACT BOOK VOLUME 18A PAGE NUMBER 259 (DISTRICT NORTH OF RED RIVER DISTRICT)".
 - Use same steps as the first State Tract Book Page.
 - What if your name does not appear?
 - Note: SLO databases were not created with genealogist's purposes in mind. This entry appears because John W. Hanna's name appears on one State Tract Book page for Township 15 North, Range 14 East, and therefore *all State Tract Book Pages containing that land description appear.*
 - Note: If you do not see your ancestor's name on a page, do not spend much time worrying; move on.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Read your first Land Claims result
 - Choose "CLAIM PAPERS N.R.R. T.14N. R.13 & 14 E. & T.15N. R.3, 9, 12-15 E. & T.16N. R.4, 11, 14, 15 E. & T.17N. R.3E. VOL. 7".
 - Familiarize yourself with the way the book is set up. The claim paper books are compilations of the paperwork that individuals holding French, Spanish, or British land grants submitted that are still on file in the State Land Office. The whole book was scanned in order and you will notice thumbnail images on the left side of the new window. There is no yellow cross-hatched box with information. There is a place to fill in "Page ___ of 230" where you can enter a page number and jump to that page without scrolling through each of these. The first few pages are an index of what section, township and range, and name is included in the book. Pages are not listed in page order, but rather alphabetical order by last name of the claimant. The book itself has townships grouped together with a white page indicating when the township changes.

- Visually search index pages for your name.
- What if your name does not appear?
 - Note: SLO databases were not created with genealogist's purposes in mind. This entry appears because John W. Hanna's name appears on one U.S. or State Tract Book page for Township 15 North, Range 14 East, and therefore, since claim papers have township and range data, this result appears because it *contains that land description*.
 - Note: If you do not see your ancestor's name on the index page, do not spend much time worrying; move on.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Read your second Land Claims result
 - Visually search index pages for your name.
 - If your name does not appear, it is for the same reasons mentioned above.
 - What should you do if you **do** see your name?
 - Make note of the township, range, and section that is listed with their name.
 - Using the thumbnails on the left, scroll through until you see a white page with that township indicated. After the white page, usually results are in numerical order by section number.
 - Click on the first page after the white page (thumbnail will become highlighted) and read the document. A name, property description, field notes, a small map, and sometimes an affidavit will included in these papers.
 - If the first result is not yours, click on the thumbnail for the next image and continue until you find your name.
- Print or Save
 - Use icons on toolbar.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Consult your District Map
 - Based on your previous research, you should have a Township, Range and Section where John Hanna acquired property. Using Township 15 North, Range 14 East, section 17, in the

District North of Red River, begin at the Louisiana Meridian axis in Rapides Parish and count up 15 squares, then right 14 squares.

- Now you can see that this property is in Madison Parish near the Louisiana/Mississippi State Line.
- No Sections are shown on the District Map, so you will need consult our Official Government Survey Plats.
- Start a New Search
 - Click the "new search" button to clear all fields on the main search page.
- Find an Official Government Survey Plat
 - Choose "Plats, Official" as your document type.
 - Type your Township in the "Township" field in this format: 15N .
 - Type your Range in the "Range" field in this format: 14E .
 - Choose your land district in the "Land District" dropdown, if known.
 - Click the "execute search" button.
- Review Your Results
 - If the results have dates in their title, click the earliest Plat first.
 - Note: Oftentimes, only one result will appear. This means the U.S. Surveyor's General Office only surveyed this township once. It is not uncommon to have more than one result indicating that at least a portion of the Township was surveyed more than once.
- Read the Earliest Plat
 - Plats open in a new window like all other documents. These are one page documents so no thumbnails will appear.
 - Note: These plats were created by surveyors with the primary purpose of using them for selling Public Land. To the right of the image, you will find a table of contents which lists acreage for the public land sections, and beneath that the names, acreage, and certificate numbers for the private claims. Only claimed lands will show names of individuals on the plat. Some plats indicate the nature of the land as this one indicates, "low slashy land", and that there was a "cart road" nearby. Beneath the table of contents is some verbiage listing the surveyors and years they surveyed and lastly the date that the plat was approved by the U.S. Surveyor General, in our case 1846.

- You will see that section 17 is in the top, right-hand corner. It looks like a normal square section.
- John Hanna purchased the Northeast Quarter of the Southeast Quarter; now you can see exactly where that is.
- Print or Save
 - Use icons on toolbar.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Read the Next Plat
 - Visually scan the image or check the Table of Contents to see if your section appears on the plat.
 - Note: Sometimes Official Plats are really diagrams completed without on-the-ground surveys. The purpose of a diagram is to clear up issues with certain sections; in this case, sections 50 and 51, which in turn affected the size of section 17.
 - The lower diagram is from 1847, and the upper from 1848.
 - Since the latest diagram of section 17 was from 1848, *this is the one that was in effect when John Hanna purchased his property in 1854. You'll even see that the northeast quarter of the southeast quarter shows 22.90 acres, just like the Tract Book.*
- Print or Save
 - Use icons on toolbar.
- Close Window and Return to Search Results
- Utilize other resources such as a Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) Road Map or Google Maps to give you an idea of where the land is located today.

These guidelines are for a basic search. The State Land Office houses dozens of types of documents, but for genealogical purposes, these are the most pertinent as they provide evidence of where a person may have lived. Depending upon the time period, land ownership may have been a criterion for voting rights as well.