

## The Territorial Papers of the United States

By John Stemmons

After the Revolutionary War, many people desired to move west and obtain inexpensive land in the vast areas acquired by their new country from 1783 through 1803. The period following our nation's independence witnessed one of history's greatest migrations as a large percent of U.S. citizens and foreign immigrants moved from the Eastern Seaboard to the territories. Very few records were kept until an orderly form of government was established. Of course, record destruction took its toll. Therefore, many of our most difficult genealogy problems bog down in the period of the first territories of the United States. And, as luck would have it, many of the missing federal censuses prior to 1830 are for the territories before they became a state.

One of the best resources for this period is *The Territorial Papers of the United States* (listed below) which contains a wealth of information on many thousands of individuals making it an excellent substitute for lost census records. Numerous records not made by states or counties are contained in these volumes.

United States, Department of State, compiled and edited by Clarence Edwin Carter, *The Territorial Papers of the United States* Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1934-1962. 26 volumes. National Archives microfilm publications: M0721

vol. I The Territorial Papers of the United States, General.

vols. II & III The Territory Northwest of the River Ohio, 1787-1803. [Includes Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota.]

vol. IV The Territory South of the River Ohio, 1790-1796. [Includes Tennessee.]

vols. V & VI The Territory of Mississippi, 1798-1817. [Includes Alabama and Mississippi.]

vols. VII & VIII The Territory of Indiana, 1800-1816. [Includes Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin and part of Minnesota.]

vol. IX The Territory of Orleans, 1803-1812. [Includes Louisiana.]

vols. X - XII The Territory of Michigan, 1805-1837. [Includes Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota.]

vols. XIII - XV The Territory of Louisiana-Missouri, 1803-1821. [Includes Missouri, Arkansas, and the states north and west that were in the original Louisiana Purchase.]

vols. XVI & XVII The Territory of Illinois, 1809-1818. [Includes Illinois, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota.]

vol. XVIII The Territory of Alabama, 1817-1819. [Includes Alabama.]

vols. XIX - XXI The Territory of Arkansas, 1819-1836. [Includes Arkansas and part of Oklahoma.]

vols. XXII - XXVI The Territory of Florida, 1821-1845.

These books, are one of the most underused resources for the U. S. territorial period because many researchers are unaware of their existence and they are to be found usually in the larger libraries. Many territorial records were filmed by the National Archives and are available at the Salt Lake City, Utah Family History Library and its various centers. There are few inventories and no indexes to the filmed records. They may contain

information not published in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*.

Since there are so many volumes, it is really time consuming to search them all, especially for common names, but one should review each book because many persons migrated through several territories.

To make using *The Territorial Papers of the United States* more convenient and time saving the names and relevant information attached to the names before 1825 is being extracted to help one determine if the name has any meaning to their research.

To find this resource go to [www.censustrail.com](http://www.censustrail.com) where all extractions have been combined into one database. This may help determine residence when one record doesn't list a locality, but another does. This remarkable database can be used at home without going to the library. It also provides multiple ways to search the data, including by soundex. This is helpful since the variety of spellings for names is unusually large. In addition, it provides a means of searching names by the boundaries of the territory or by the state which later came from the territory. Although there is a fee for using this website, it is small compared to the wealth of information now contained therein and which will be added to from time to time.

Many of the names in these volumes are contained in petitions submitted to various governmental agencies. While most often just a name is given, there are many things you can learn about the persons listed, such as:

- Clues that provide details about one's ancestors.
- The migration trail of an ancestor through multiple territories or states.
- Insights into personal feelings, cultural settings, literacy, hardships, and historical details about an individual.
- Names of potential family members that may have signed the petition also.
- Information about individuals who lived in the area prior to its becoming a part of the United States.

While not on the website, the signature in the original petition can be used to compare with other known signatures of your ancestor to help identify individuals. This is especially helpful with common names. The website [www.censustrail.com](http://www.censustrail.com) is very helpful in knowing what petitions to search for to see the original signature.

Many other records besides petitions are contained in these volumes such as an 1809 census for Madison County, Alabama.

A partial solution to your research problems for this period may be found in the information contained in *The Territorial Papers of the United States*.

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