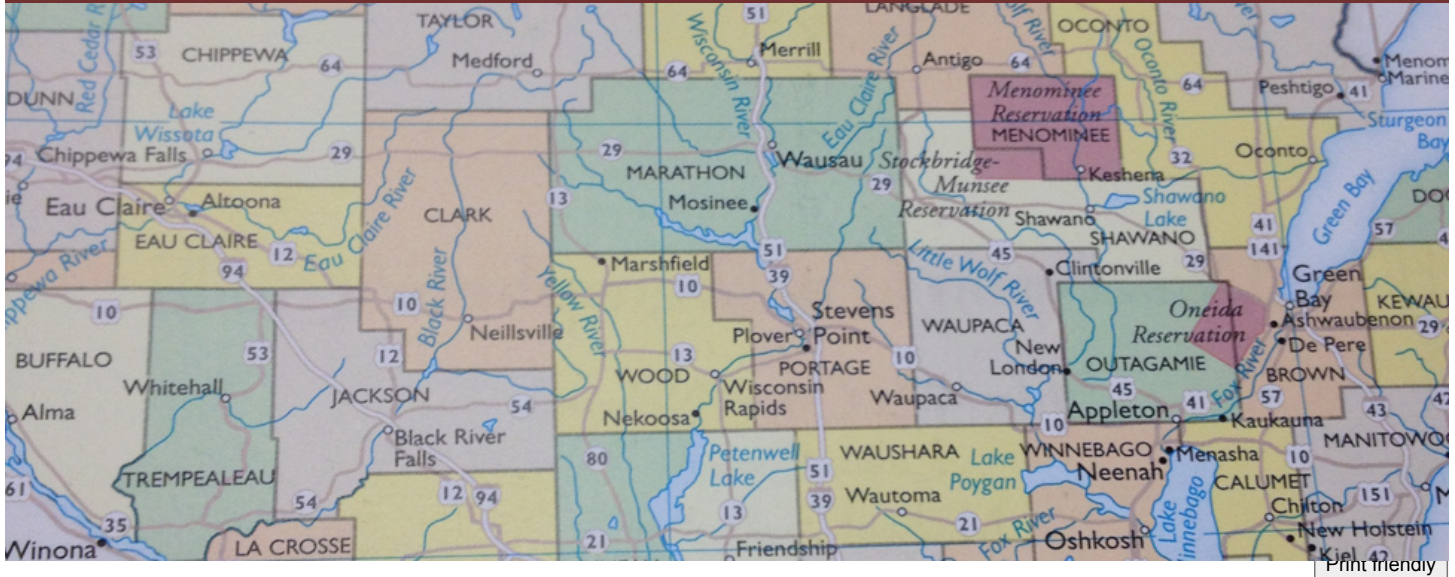


# Using the BLM General Land Office Database



## Introduction

As background for the information here, it's important to first become familiar with the Public Land Survey System used throughout much of the U.S. from Ohio west. See the page "Background on the Public Land Survey and How to Use the Survey Notes"

Land patents are records that document the initial land title transfers from the US government to private owners. These documents include the name of the individual (or group) to which the title is transferred, a description of the land parcel, and the issue date. Land patents document an important step in the process of Indigenous land dispossession and the distribution of those lands to settlers who were interested in resources ranging from copper ore to white pine timber to soils well-suited for farming. Under legal doctrines established in the early 19th century, only the US government could negotiate land cession treaties with Native Nations, but there was always strong political pressure to distribute the ceded lands to private owners as quickly as possible. Land patents document the way that distribution was carried out in various parts of the U.S.

In these instructions, we'll use an interesting example of the information available from the land patents in the GLO database, a township in northern Wisconsin where many land parcels were bought by speculators interested in white pine timber. In particular, this parcel was purchased using *scrip* (paper that could be exchanged for land) distributed to states under the Morrill Act of 1862, which provided funding for what we now call land grant universities. Under the Morrill Act, states that did not have much remaining public land within their borders were given scrip in proportion to the number of members of Congress from that state, so states with larger populations got more. States could then sell the scrip to land or timber speculators, who would use it to acquire land parcels they thought were good investments in states that still had a lot of public land, like Wisconsin in 1862. The states would use proceeds from the sale of Morrill Act scrip to fund agricultural colleges, including today's land grant universities. In New York, the most populous state at the time, Ezra Cornell stretched the law by using New York's scrip to buy land on behalf of what became Cornell University. He focused on lands with valuable white pine near rivers flowing into the Chippewa River, so logs could be floated to mills near Eau Claire or down the Mississippi. We will look up the patent for a particular piece of land Ezra Cornell acquired using scrip issued under the Morrill

The Morrill Act was only one of many ways to acquire land from the US government in the 19th century. Land could be bought for cash or acquired under the Homestead Act of 1862 or later homestead laws. Railroads were granted large areas of land they could sell to private parties, and military veterans were given scrip they could exchange for land or sell to someone else. Using land patents in the GLO database, it's possible to determine which kind of land transfer took place with individual land parcels across large parts of the US

## Finding Land Patents for an Area of Interest

To find land patents for a particular area, you have three options. The first and simplest option is to use the interactive map in this module. You can click on the map anywhere in Wisconsin, and get a link directly to land patents for that township. If you use that approach, you can skip down to the section on Interpreting Search Results. The second way to access these records is to use the BLM website and search by entering the township and range numbers for the place you're interested in. This is what we'll do to find the patent issued to Ezra Cornell for that land in northern Wisconsin. A separate page explains the US Public Land Survey System and how townships and ranges are identified. Finally, a third option is to use a map on the BLM website to search by location in Wisconsin. We'll get to that option later, using a different location in southern Wisconsin. The first thing we need to do in for either the second or third option is to choose the Search Document link on the BLM website (see Fig.1).

Click here to start your search

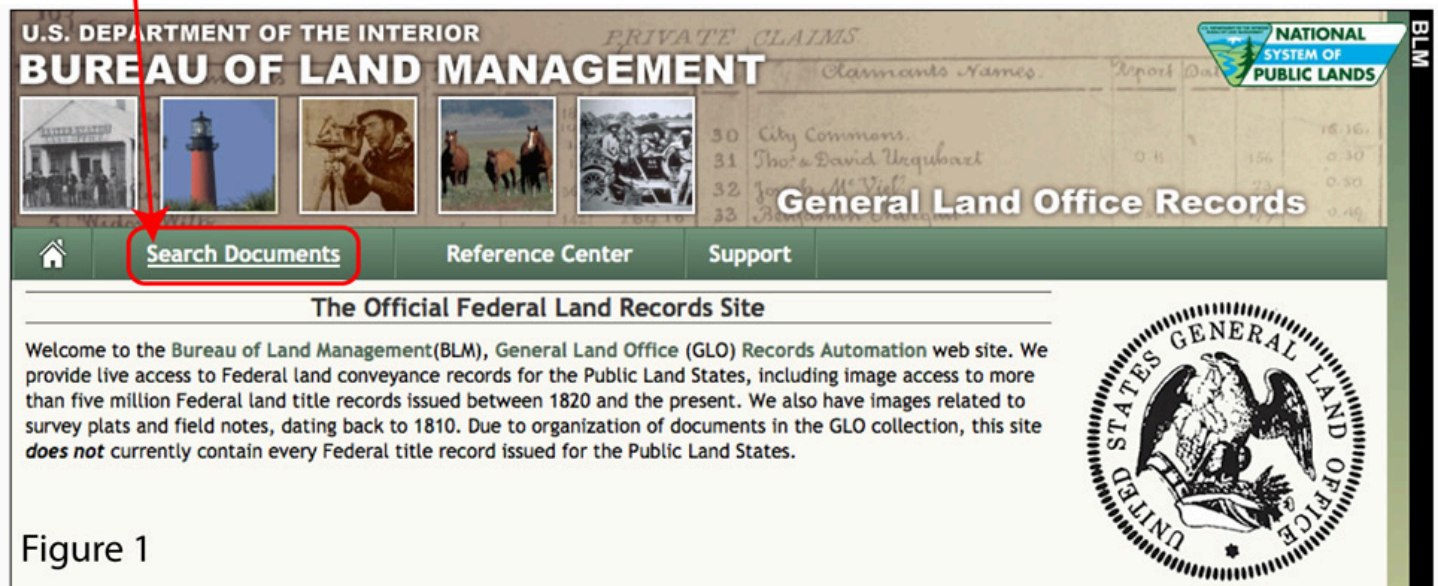


Figure 1

## Searching by township and range

Notice in the Search Document by Type menu (Figure 2), the default search document is 'patent,' which is what you want. From here you will need to choose the state (WI) and enter the township and range for which you are interested. In this case, we'll use a specific township in Taylor County, WI: T23N, R20E. Make sure to choose the directional component associated with the township and range (i.e., North and East). Also, you need to choose the meridian the range coordinates are based upon (even though the only choice for Wisconsin is the 4th Prime Meridian). When you're ready, click Search Patents.

default search is for patents,  
which is what we want

change to this tab to search  
with a map

**Search Documents By Type** | **Search Documents By Location** | **Search Documents By Identifier**

**Patents** | **Surveys** | **LSR** | **CDI** | **Tract Books**

choose Wisconsin

enter township and range including directions

set meridian (only one in WI)

**Search** [Clear Form]

**Location**

State: **WISCONSIN**

County: **Any County**

**Names**

Last Name:

First Name:

Middle Name:

☒ search patentees ☒ search warrantees

**Land Description**

Township: **33** / **North**

Range: **1** / **West**

Meridian: **4th PM - 1831 MN/WI**

Section #:

**Miscellaneous**

Land Office: **Any Land Office** Issue Date:  to

Document #:  Militia:

Indian Allot. #:  Tribe: **Any Tribe**

Survey #:  Geo. Name/ Mining Claim:

Authority: **Any Authority**

**Search Patents**

**To search for land patents:**

1. Start by selecting the State.
2. You do not have to fill in all fields, but provide at least one additional field.
3. Click the Search Patents button.

**Search Tips:**

- Hover your mouse over a field to get a brief description.
- Get detailed information by checking the [Glossary](#) in the Reference Center.
- For more tips and help, check out our [Patent Search Overview](#).

**Note:** This site does not cover every state, but we do have [resource links](#) for most states.

Figure 2

## Interpreting Search Results

The first thing you'll want to do with the search results is sort them in order of date. Do this by clicking on 'date' (Fig 3a). Once you do, you should see an upward pointing arrow in the date column heading, which means the results are sorted in ascending order of date. Note that the first two patents in this township were issued in September 1867 to Ezra Cornell, who had a connection in the Eau Claire land office and may have used it to get these parcels ahead of the auction in 1868 when many others in the same township were sold. Look at the Accession Number column. The AGS- prefix refers to Agricultural College patents, those issued under the Morrill Act. The rest of the first page of patents are AGS- patents and all were issued to Henry Corwith, a major land speculator who bought Morrill Act scrip from at least two or three different states.

Click on the first patent to Ezra Cornell. Later, you can also look at the many patents issued later for land in this township

Search Documents Results List

Patents 1 2 3 4 5 6

click here to sort by date shows if sorting is ascending or descending

Printer Friendly

AGS- indicates Agricultural College (Morrill Act) grant

| Image | Accession                    | Names          | Date ↑    | Doc # | State | Meridian            | Twp - Rng   | Aliquots | Sec. # | County |
|-------|------------------------------|----------------|-----------|-------|-------|---------------------|-------------|----------|--------|--------|
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0246-375</a> | CORNELL, EZRA  | 9/10/1867 | 1882  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NE¼      | 2      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0246-376</a> | CORNELL, EZRA  | 9/10/1867 | 1883  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NW¼      | 2      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-290</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3941  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | SW¼      | 2      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-291</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3942  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | SE¼      | 2      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-292</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3943  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | SE¼      | 3      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-293</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3944  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | SW¼      | 3      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-294</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3945  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NE¼      | 3      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-295</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3946  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NW¼      | 3      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-296</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3947  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NE¼      | 9      | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-297</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3948  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NW¼      | 10     | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-298</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3949  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NE¼      | 10     | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-299</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3950  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | SE¼      | 10     | Taylor |
|       | <a href="#">AGS-0269-300</a> | CORWITH, HENRY | 7/10/1868 | 3951  | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NW¼      | 11     | Taylor |

Figure 3

The patent record that opens (Figure 4) will show the name of the person who received the patent (Name on Document). The record also includes the date the patent was issued (top right) and the authority (the law under which it was issued). In this case, the authority is "July 2, 1862: State Grant-Agri College (12 State.503)", which refers to the Morrill Act. Later, you may want to scan through later patents listed for this township and look at the Authority lines to see the other ways land was acquired, such a military warrants and the Homestead Act of 1862. If you scroll down a little more, you'll see the parcels affiliated with the patent listed under "Land Descriptions." You can check the box(es) to get a sense of where they are located on a map. The precise location and outline of the parcels is not always shown accurately. In Figure 4 it is the darker orange shaded area that makes up the actual 161.31 acres covered by the patent issued to Cornell. The standard size of a quarter section of land is 160 acres but this one apparently had a little more, maybe through surveyor error.

Accession Nr: AGS-0246-375 Document Type: Agricultural Scrip Patent State: Wisconsin Issue Date: 9/10/1867 Cancelled: No

Figure 4

Patent Details Patent Image Related Documents Printer Friendly

| Names On Document  | Miscellaneous Information                                        |
|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CORNELL, EZRA      | Land Office: Eau Claire                                          |
|                    | US Reservations: No                                              |
|                    | Mineral Reservations: No                                         |
|                    | Tribe: ---                                                       |
|                    | Militia: ---                                                     |
|                    | State In Favor Of: NY                                            |
|                    | Authority: July 2, 1862: State Grant-Agri College (12 Stat. 503) |
|                    | General Remarks: ---                                             |
| Military Rank: --- |                                                                  |

| Document Numbers      | Survey Information   |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| Document Nr: 1882     | Total Acres: 161.31  |
| Misc. Doc. Nr: ---    | Survey Date: ---     |
| BLM Serial Nr: ---    | Geographic Name: --- |
| Indian Allot. Nr: --- | Metes/Bounds: No     |
| Coal Entry. Nr: ---   |                      |

| Land Descriptions                   |       |                     |             |          |         |          |        |
|-------------------------------------|-------|---------------------|-------------|----------|---------|----------|--------|
| Map                                 | State | Meridian            | Twp - Rng   | Aliquots | Section | Survey # | County |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | WI    | 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI | 033N - 001W | NE¼      | 2       |          | Taylor |

You can also choose to see an image of the actual land patent by choosing the patent image tab (Fig. 4). Figure 5 shows an example.

Accession Nr: AGS-0246-375 Document Type: Agricultural Scrip Patent State: Wisconsin Issue Date: 9/10/1867 Cancelled: No

Patent Details Patent Image Related Documents Printer Friendly

Add Certified Copy To Cart More on information on [certified copies](#). (You can decide later whether or not to purchase the documents in your cart.)

1 of 1 Automatic Zoom

Agricultural Scrip Patent Vol. 246

Figure 5

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,  
To all to whom these presents shall come, Greeting:

Whereas, In pursuance of the Act of Congress, approved July 2, 1862, entitled "An act  
Donating Public Lands to the several States and Territories which may provide Colleges for the benefit of Agriculture and the Mechanic Arts,"  
there has been deposited in the GENERAL LAND OFFICE Scrip No. 1172, for one quarter section  
of Land, in favor of the State of New York, duly assigned by the proper authority of  
the said State to Ezra Cornell, with evidence  
that the same has been located upon the North East quarter of Section Two in Township  
Thirty-three, of Range One West, in the District of lands subject to

### Searching by Location (map)

If you don't know the exact township coordinates, you can search using a map. In this case, you will need to switch from the 'search documents by type' tab to the 'search documents by location' tab (Figs 2, 6). You will see a map of the US, and unfortunately, this map does not have selection tools, so you will have to double click on the map until you are zoomed in enough to see your place of interest. In Figure 6, the map is zoomed in on an area in Dodge County, Wisconsin. Once zoomed in enough, right-click on your place and click on the 'map township' button that appears (Fig. 6). The

township you clicked on will be highlighted in orange, and to the left of the map, you should see your township listed (Fig 7). If this is the township you want, then click 'search.' If not, you can try again by right-clicking the area you're interested (you can still zoom in or out) from the same map.

Switch to this tab to search using a map

1. Right-click on or near your place of interest to bring up the 'Map Township' option
2. Click on 'Map Township' option that appears

**Search Documents By Type** | **Search Documents By Location** | **Search Documents By Identifier**

**Mapped Townships**

| Land Description | Search |
|------------------|--------|
|                  |        |

**To search for documents by location:**

1. Right-click on the map location.
2. Select **Map Township**.
  - The township will be drawn on the map.
  - The township will appear in the panel above.
3. Click **Search** next to the desired township.

**Figure 6**

Click 'search' to retrieve land patent records for this township

**Search Documents By Type** | **Search Documents By Location** | **Search Documents By Identifier**

**Mapped Townships**

| Land Description                                                                      | Search        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WISCONSIN, 4th PM - 1831 MN/WI Twp 9.0N Rng 15.0E | <b>Search</b> |

**To search for documents by location:**

1. Right-click on the map location.
2. Select **Map Township**.
  - The township will be drawn on the map.
  - The township will appear in the panel above.
3. Click **Search** next to the desired township.

**Figure 7**

Check to make sure the results are still sorted by date. Note that if you click on the back button of your browser, you'll be taken to the beginning of the search—you'll have to start your map search over (or you can hit the forward button in your browser to take you back to the search results).