

**NAME OF SYSTEM:**

**Land Patent Control Document  
Index**

**ORIGINATOR:**

**Bureau of Land Management  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20240**

**OBJECTIVE.** To develop and implement an information handling system that will help preserve old historical patent documents and improve the management of public land records.

**BACKGROUND.** The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is responsible for the conservation and management of public domain lands and resources of the Nation. The forerunner of the present Bureau, the General Land Office, was established in 1812 to "keep land records and record titles." Today, the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for all the control documents, which include patents, lists, and other instruments that convey title. These control documents pertain to the one-half billion acres of present public domain land and the more than one billion acres, representing seven million ownership titles, granted since the first public land patent in 1788.

The methods of keeping these public land records had changed little through the years until it became almost impossible to handle some of the older, active records. The Bureau of Land Management solved the problem by turning to microfilm as the best medium for preserving the old records as well as for day-to-day search and retrieval activities.

**THE NEW METHOD.** Beginning in 1955 and lasting for one year, all the old records legible enough for processing were recorded on 35-mm. microfilm. Subsequently microfilm positive images were made from the master file and mounted on aperture cards. More than four million such cards were produced. Later, the aperture cards were keypunched, sorted by land description, and duplicated.

One copy was shipped to the appropriate State land office to satisfy local management needs and the other remained with the BLM in Washington, D.C.

Under present procedures, newly created control documents originating in the 12 regional offices are forwarded to the Bureau of Land Management in Washington. Documents, usually consisting of one to four pages, appear in many formats and pertain to orders, acts, and proclamations regarding rights and uses of land. Each record is recorded on 35-mm. roll microfilm, which is cut into individual images and mounted on military size D aperture cards. The identifying index information is then typed across the top of each card. Two such aperture cards are made for each control document. One is forwarded to the security file and the other sent to the originating State's public use file. Files are arranged geographically by State, meridian, and township. Within the township file, they are filed chronologically by the effective date of issue.

The users of the files include the general public, such Government agencies as the Department of Defense and the General Services Administration, and many State agencies. Individuals tracing the chain of land patent transfers request the land patent by meridian and township. Since location of the patent search is usually known, the search clerk can normally retrieve the proper aperture card in a minimum of time, on the basis of the printed heading. The searcher may either obtain an enlarged copy of the patent made from the aperture card or visually review the patent information on an aperture card viewer, which is usually located in the State's BLM public reference room.

**REMARKS.** The main advantage of the aperture card as a storage media for large and cumbersome documents is its small uniform size, which reduces the total storage space and facilitates document handling. The file's relatively small size makes it possible to store the documents close by the user's work area and permits fast retrieval. In addition,

the new system assures that these valuable records will be spared further wear and tear and that they will be protected against accidental loss or destruction. Further, there is available a wide variety of relatively low-cost

equipment for viewing, duplicating, and making paper enlargements of the images. Finally, the cards can be keypunched, if desired, to permit machine sorting, merging, and searching.

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