

**An Outline the Story of the Trona Area from  
Bureau of Land Management Records  
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**BLM Web Resources**

Over the last few years Bureau of Land Management land records have been made available to the public on two websites. The Official Federal Land Records Site (<http://www.glorerecords.blm.gov/>), hosts transcribed records as well as original documents, survey plats and Master Title Plats. The Bureau of Land Management's Land & Mineral Legacy Rehost 2000 System website, known as LR2000, (<http://www.blm.gov/lr2000/>) compliments the "GLO Records" site by providing additional ways to query BLM records, as well as more detailed reports on land use authorizations.

These websites provide researchers with a treasure trove of historic information. I have utilized a sample of this information to create an outline of the story of the development of the Trona area.

**Land Patents**

According to no less a source than Wikipedia, a land patent is, ". . . an exclusive land grant made by a sovereign entity over the land in question. To make such a grant "patent", a sovereign (proprietary landowner) must document the land grant, securely sign and seal the document (patent), and openly publish the documents for the public to see."

On March 4, 1788, the first land patent was issued by the United States of America to John Martin in what is now Belmont County, Ohio. Twenty- four years later, in 1812, the General Land Office (GLO) was created to handle and dispose of public lands. In 1946 the Bureau of Land was established with the merger of the GLO and the Grazing Service.

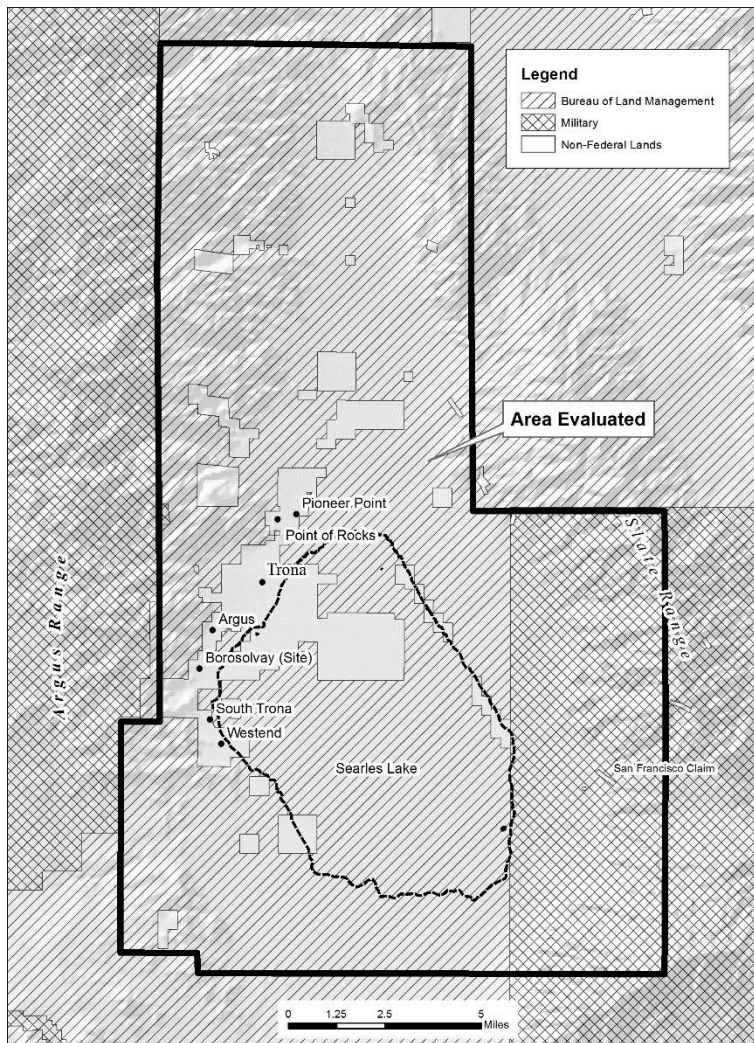
**Searles Valley Patents**

For this paper I created a GIS project within the Searles Valley that encompasses 167,057 acres (261 square miles). In this area 118,018 acres are administered by BLM, 29,493 acres by the Navy, and 19,546 acres of private, state and county lands. The acreage of patents to private, state and county entities can be further broken out as follows:

State of California	7,576
Land Exchanges	1,399
Railroad Grants	440
Homesteads	1,744
Indian Fee Patents	168
Mineral Patents	6,221
Land Sales	917

Small Tract Act	635
Townsite Settlement	177
Script Patents	120
Public Purposes (R&PP)	149

Within the Searles Valley, the first lands patented were granted to the State of California in 1857, under the authority of the Enabling Act, which established California as a State.



**Map Showing Federal and Non-Federal Lands**

### **Mineral Patents - Gold and Silver**

John and Dennis Searles, born in New York, joined the 1849 California gold rush and settled near Oroville. In the spring of 1860, Dennis Searles left with a party of prospectors to locate the Lost Gunsight Mine in the Death Valley region. They did not find the Lost Gunsight, but did find gold and silver at Coso.

A short time after returning, Dennis and John Searles set out on a second expedition. While prospecting in the Slate Range they discovered gold and silver. Immediately (Nov. 10, 1861) the Searles brothers,

Willet P. Dean, W. S. Morrow, A. H. Clarke organized a mining district. Although there was considerable mining activity in the region between 1861 and 1866, it wasn't until the passage of the mining law of 1872 that mineral lands could even be patented.

In 1880 to J. B. Haggin, George Hearst, and D. L. Reese patented the Lone View and San Francisco Mining lode claims (located for gold), as well as the Slate Range Millsite claim . These lands are located on the south side of the mouth of New York Canyon. From the San Francisco claim about 2.7 miles to the northeast, and just outside of my project area, these three individuals also patented two other claims at the same time; the New York and Alta. These claims were staked for lead-silver, ore. Ore from this mine was shipped to the Reilly mill, situated north of Slate Range Crossing.

Between 1907 and 1932 nine additional patents encompassing about 243 acres, were issued presumably for gold.

### **Mineral Patents - Searles Lake**

The gold and silver mines in the Slate and southern Argus Ranges, while interesting, failed to yield sustained production. But all that changed with the Searles brother's discovery of Borax in 1872.

Following F. M. "Borax" Smith's 1872 discovery of "cottonball" borax at Teel's Marsh, Nevada, John and Dennis Searles headed back to the barren salt lake at the foot of the Slate Range, and there discovered borax. They soon founded the San Bernardino Borax and Mining Company in 1873 and began refining borax and hauling it by mule team to the rail head at Mojave.

On July 16, 1875, mineral patents totaling 640 acres on Searles Lake were issued to Dennis & John Searles, Charles Gressard, and Eben Skillings. Between 1875 and 1920, 19 patents, encompassing 5,555 acres on Searles Lake, were issued for borax, and other saline minerals. On February 21, 1913, the director the U. S. Geological Survey issued an order closing 70,698 acres of Searles Lake from the location of mining claims, except for metalliferous minerals. On February 25, 1920 Congress passed the Mineral Leasing Act. With this Act and subsequent amendments, Leasable Minerals (phosphates, sodium, potash, oil and gas, coal) could no longer located by mining claim; they were acquired by a lease from the government. Except for claims existing prior to 1913, and subsequently patented, no other patents were issued for saline minerals. In 1940 the West End Chemical Company patented 370 acres for limestone for use in processing brine from Searles Lake. This property is located about 2 miles southeast of Slate Range Crossing.

### **A Place to Live**

The Searles Lake chemical industry, while suffering from ups and downs, has continued to provide income to the region and literally the world beyond. Without the unique geology of the brines of Searles Lake this would simply be another barren salt lake. But the chemical industry requires infrastructure and a labor force, houses, stores, churches; the elements of a town. But as late as 1918 there was literally no private land in the valley except for the mineral patents mentioned above and scattered sections of land that had originally deeded to the State. The General Land Office March 1918 survey of the township 25S 43E, shows the "Main Potash and Borax Plant" and the "community" of Trona on lands that were still held by the government. But that soon changed.

Between 1919 and 1935 fifty-nine patents were issued for 3,092 acres. These lands included the community of Trona, as well as Borosolvay and Westend.

In 1935 the General Land Office platted the townsite of Argus, originally 160 acres in total size, it expanded to 240 acres. The first lot was patented in 1943. Eventually 583 parcels were sold. In 1948 Bureau of Land Management platted the townsite of Point of Rocks. It totaled 120 acres. The first lot was sold May 1950. Eventually 292 parcels were sold. Beginning in 1962 BLM began to sell 5 acre parcels immediately north of Pioneer Point under the authority of the Small Tract Act. This area was divided into 112 parcels. A review of current air photos shows a number of structures within Argus and Point of Rocks, but only a few on the lands patented under the Small Tract Act. There are still a number of lots owned by the Government in Argus and Point of Rocks. Between 1935 and today a total of 1,040 parcels were patented totaling 4,817.

Every community needs a dump or "sanitary landfill," and Trona is no exception. On November 3, 2000 BLM deeded San Bernardino County 146 acres under the authority of the Recreation and Public Purposes Act for such a purpose.

### **A Footnote – A Script Patent**

On January 3, 1920 Henry Jaques was issued patent to 39.97 acres of land under the processing plant at Trona. It is impossible to know if he was an agent of the company or if he acquired this land with malicious intent. That is not the point of sharing this. BLM's LR2000 computerized land record system refers to the patent authority as "Scrip or Nature of Scrip." This is a catch-all category. For example during the Revolutionary War, in lieu of cash, some soldiers following their terms of service, were given scrip as an IOU for a parcel of government land. These are officially known as "military bounty land warrants." According to the Patent document, Jaques Henry received his scrip as follows:

WHEREAS, By the fourteenth Article of the Treaty between the United States of America and the Wyandotte Nation of Indians made and concluded at Upper Sandusky in the State of Ohio, on the seventeenth day of March, one thousand eight hundred and forty-two, as ratified on the fifth day of October, one thousand eight hundred and forty-two, the United States agreed to grant to Henry Jaques one Section of land of six hundred and forty acres out of any lands west of the "Missouri River set apart for Indian use not already claimed or occupied by any person or tribe;" and

WHEREAS, By the ninth Article of the Treaty with the same Tribe made and concluded at the City of Washington on the thirty-first day of January, one thousand eight hundred and fifty-five, "It is stipulated and agreed that each of the individuals to whom reservations were granted by the fourteenth Article of the Treaty March seventeenth, one thousand eight hundred and forty-two, or their heirs or legal representatives, shall be permitted to select and locate said reservation on any Government Land west of the States of Missouri and Iowa subject to pre-emption and settlement; said reservation to be patented by the United States in the name of the reserves as soon as practicable after the selections are made;"

### **Conclusion**

I have just barely scratched the surface with this paper. I offer this as a springboard for future researchers. Mineral and Cadastral surveys and field notes are not online for this area. You can use them

in person at the BLM Ridgecrest or Sacramento offices, or they can be ordered from Sacramento (helps if you have a microfiche reader!)

Other sources of information are the actual patent case files and cancelled patent application files. These are available from the National Archives: <http://www.archives.gov/research/land/>

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