

# Missouri State Archives

## Finding Aid 952.1

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### U.S. SURVEYOR GENERAL

### NEW MADRID CLAIMS, 1816-1856

*Abstract:* Records pertaining to land claims after the New Madrid earthquakes of 1811-1812, including an office copy of certificates and a ledger of land relocation entries.

*Extent:* 0.66 cubic ft. (2 volumes in 2 archival flat boxes)

*Physical Description:* Paper

*Location:* MSA Rare Documents

### ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

*Access Restrictions:* No special restrictions. However, as some of the records are fragile, alternate access formats should be used whenever possible.

*Publication Restrictions:* Copyright is in the public domain. Items reproduced for publication should carry the credit line: Courtesy of the Missouri State Archives.

*Preferred Citation:* [Name], [Certificate #]; New Madrid Claims, 1816-1856; U.S. Surveyor General, Record Group 952; Missouri State Archives, Jefferson City.

*Acquisition Information:* Agency transfer. At some point, likely in the 1970s or 1980s, MSA sent these volumes to Walz-Cremer bindery in Jefferson City to be rebound. For whatever reason, these records were forgotten by both parties until the bindery closed in 2013. At that time, the bindery signed a deed of gift to MSA. However, at no point did the State of Missouri actually relinquish ownership of these records.

*Processing Information:* Processing completed by Mary Kay Coker on July 30, 2019.

### HISTORICAL AND BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

At about two in the morning of December 16, 1811, a devastating earthquake hit southeastern Missouri and neighboring Arkansas. Estimated at about 7.5 Richter scale (USGS), the quake damaged about two hundred thousand square miles of land and rang church bells as far away as

Philadelphia and Boston. Subsequent quakes and aftershocks lasted into April 1812, displacing settlers and destroying the town of New Madrid.

The scale of the earthquakes spurred the country's first Congressional disaster relief legislation: "An act for the relief of the inhabitants of the late county of New Madrid, in Missouri Territory, who suffered by earthquakes." (17 Feb 1815) The act allowed displaced settlers to relocate their lands elsewhere in the territory.

Depending on the size of their original grants, landowners were eligible for between 160 and 640 acres. Unfortunately, speculators in St. Louis took advantage of the situation, buying up damaged land for a pittance from owners who had yet to hear of the act's passage. Only a small fraction of original landowners retained their certificates. In addition, many land entries made in new locations were found to interfere with prior preemption rights and had to be amended. Litigation and legislation over the New Madrid claims continued until the last case was settled in 1862.

Per Missouri statutes (Section 446.270): "Copies of certificates granted by the recorder of land titles, under the act of Congress for the relief of the sufferers by earthquakes in the county of New Madrid, and all other books and papers, which by law are required to be deposited or kept at his office, duly certified by him, shall be received as evidence."

## ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTIVE INFORMATION

### Related Material

For original certificates and testimony to lands damaged and associated indexes, see the U.S. Recorder of Land Titles (RG 951) series for *New Madrid Claims, 1815-1855*. For plats of survey of New Madrid relocations, see *Record (Survey) Book A: New Madrid Locations* in RG 952.

## SERIES

The New Madrid Claims are broken down into the following series:

New Madrid Certificates, Assignments, Locations, and Amendments (Office Copy), 1856  
New Madrid Locations, 1816-1842

## NEW MADRID CERTIFICATES, ASSIGNMENTS, LOCATIONS, AND AMENDMENTS (OFFICE COPY), 1856

*Arrangement:* By certificate number

*Extent:* 0.33 cubic ft. (1 volume in 1 flat archival box)

### Scope and Content

This series comprises one volume (no binding) of 638 pages. Information starts on page 40 and ends on page 550. John Loughborough, Surveyor General, endorsed the last page as a true copy on February 7, 1856.

The original records, which were later damaged by brittle paper and water damage, are found under the U.S. Recorder of Land Titles (RG 951). This copy is much more legible, not only because of damage to the originals, but because the original certificates were in Recorder Frederick Bates' handwriting, which is very difficult to decipher.

Organized by New Madrid certificate number from #1-#516, each entry in this volume has a complete transcription of original certificate, any endorsements on certificate giving assignees, locations, and amendments to locations. Not all certificates were located in Missouri as some were in Arkansas and a few were not located at all.

No index. Certificate number indexes can be found in RG 951.

### Container List

Box	Contents
1	New Madrid Certificates, Assignments, Locations, and Amendments (Office Copy) (1 vol), 1856

## NEW MADRID LOCATIONS, 1816-1842

*Arrangement:* Chronological

*Extent:* 0.33 cubic ft. (1 volume in 1 flat archival box)

### Scope and Content

This series comprises one volume (no binding) of 393 pages. The full title is “Record of entries of location of land in the Missouri Territory in conformity to an act of Congress dated February 17, 1815, entitled ‘An act for the relief of the inhabitants of the late county of New Madrid in the Missouri Territory who suffered by earthquakes.’”

Although the volume suffers from some water damage with dirt in overleaf, it has undergone conservation treatment to stabilize its condition. The first page has a plat of survey tipped in (for Certificate No. 54, William Clark). A note pasted on the overleaf states that the Surveyor General’s Office will be opened to take locations.

This volume contains a description of the land claimed (in the modern rectangular survey system but sometimes with metes and bounds thereunder) but very rarely the actual plat. (See instead *Record [Survey] Book A: New Madrid Locations* in RG 952.)

The land description was transcribed into the office copy of 1856, which is by certificate number. Many of these initial locations were withdrawn and relocated because of interferences with prior claims. Notations to this effect are often found in the margins.

No index.

### Container List

Box	Contents
2	New Madrid Locations (1 vol), 1816-1842