

## Following the Clues: Beyond the Database Index to Texas Land Records

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So you found a record on Ancestry.com for a Texas land grant to your ancestor Sally Glenn.<sup>1</sup> It indicates she received title to 4,428.4 acres patented 4 November 1834 in Jasper County, Texas, Jasper Land District, patent volume 83, patent number 22.<sup>2</sup> You studiously enter the information into your genealogy database. Are you finished?

| Texas Land Title Abstracts about Sally Glenn |             |
|--|-------------|
| Grantee:                                     | Sally Glenn |
| Patent Date:                                 | 4 Nov 1834  |
| Acres:                                       | 4428.40     |
| District:                                    | Jasper      |
| County:                                      | Jasper      |
| Patent #:                                    | 22          |
| Patent Volume:                               | 83          |
| Class:                                       | Title       |

If you think so you have never heard Helen F. M. Leary speak on thorough research techniques. Where was the land? Where can you find copies of the original documents to learn more? Why was such a large land grant given to a woman in 1834 when so many women are only named in legal

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<sup>1</sup> All Web sites referenced were accessed on 29 May 2009.

<sup>2</sup> "Texas Land Title Abstracts," database, *Ancestry.com* (<http://www.ancestry.com>), entry for Sally Glenn, Jasper District, patent no. 22; from "Abstracts of all Original Texas Land Titles comprising Grants and Locations," Texas General Land Office, Austin.

documents signing away dower rights? This article uses Sally's land grant as an example to locate additional information online. Similar steps could be used for other index entries.

### **Finding the Original Records**

Online databases without copies of the original images are clues to be followed, not an end in themselves. Online image sources may not contain all the documents in the physical file. We must dig deeper. The Ancestry citation gives a clue to finding the originals. This database is from the Texas General Land Office (TXGLO). An online search displays the URL. One click brings up the TXGLO site<sup>3</sup> where you can select "Archives & Records" in the left navbar, then "Finding Aids" in the top navbar.

The "Finding Aids" page offers three selections. The "Surname Index" links to PDF files listing patented and rejected claims. At TXGLO this index lists rejected and other special items that may be missing from online databases of patented claims. The "Historic Map Collection" link allows exploring a vast collection of maps, including those illustrating plats of all original grants in a county. The "Land Grant Database" link displays a page with links to usage tips, "genealogy research" information about placing orders, and another "Land Grant Database" link that displays the database search screen.<sup>4</sup>

Enter "glenn, sally" without quotes in the grantee box of the search screen then click "Search." Two entries are found for Sally Glenn: a Character Certificate and a Title. The "pdf" links in the rightmost column indicate images of these documents are available online. When no "pdf" link is shown the information linked from the "Abstr" column is needed to order a hardcopy of the file.

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<sup>3</sup> "Texas General Land Office," database, digital images, and historical information, *Texas General Land Office* (<http://www.glo.state.tx.us/>).

<sup>4</sup> "Land Grant Search," database and digital images, *Texas General Land Office* (<http://www.db.glo.state.tx.us/central/LandGrants/LandGrantsSearch.cfm>).

**Texas General Land Office  
Land Grant Search**

( Record 1 thru 2 of 2 total )

**Your request resulted in 2 records:**

| County | Abstr.               | District Class         | File Number                                   | Grantee      | Patentee            |
|--------|----------------------|------------------------|---|--------------|---------------------|
|        | <a href="#">View</a> | Character Certificates | SC 000073:23                                  | Glenn, Sally | <a href="#">pdf</a> |
| Jasper | <a href="#">14</a>   | Title                  | SC 000054:19<br>English Field Notes<br>GWS-36 | Glenn, Sally | <a href="#">pdf</a> |

( Record 1 thru 2 of 2 total )

Click the “pdf” link to Sally’s Character Certificate. This document indicates Sally Glenn arrived in the District of Bevil of the Nacogdoches Department by 10 October 1834, is from Kentucky, is a widow with a family of four (the widow and three children) and is “of good Moral habits and friendly to the Laws and Religion” of Mexico. We learn many facts about Sally and her family from this one document.

Department of Nacogdoches } Octn the 10<sup>th</sup> 1834  
District of Bevil } I Certify that  
Sally Glenn is a Native of the State  
of Kentucky in the US of the North is  
A Widow with A family Consisting of four  
Persons is of Good Moral habits and  
friendly to the Laws and Religion given  
at the Request of the Party interested  
widow with three children  
I certify  
the plan she has in from J. W. S.  
John Bevil Alcalde

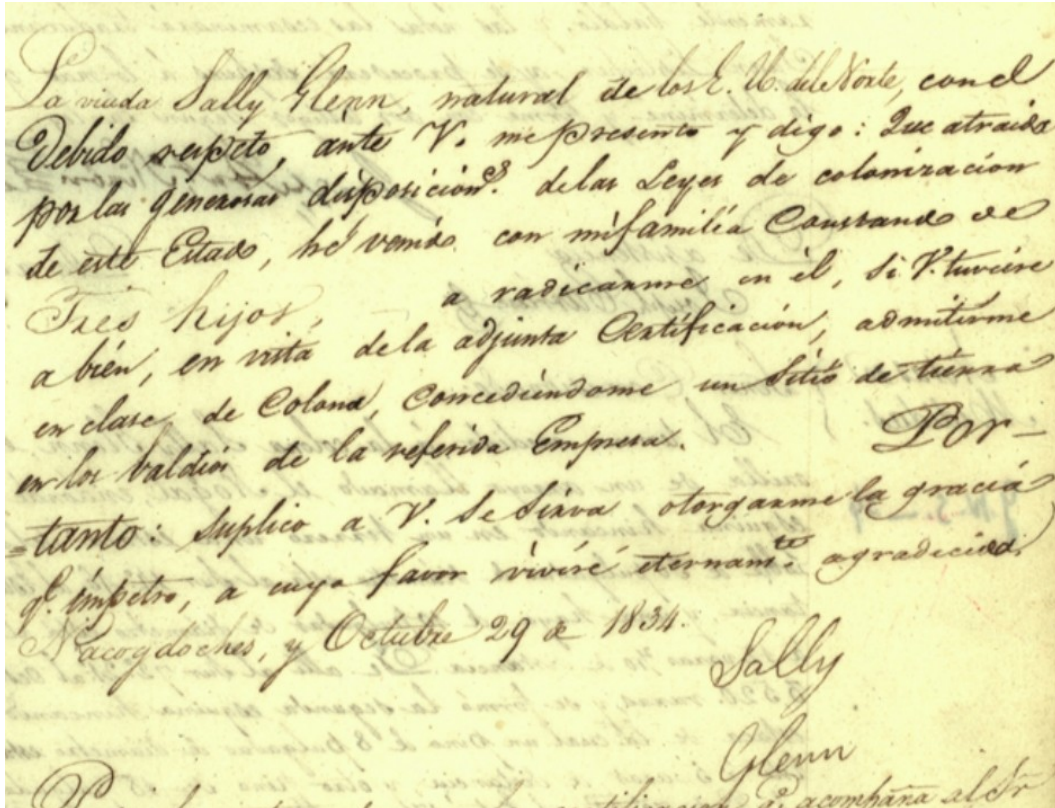
Click on the link in the “Abstr” column of the title entry. More information is displayed than was shown on Ancestry.com. In this case the abstract number, the file number, and an indication of a translation. The file number that was missing from Ancestry’s database is a critical piece of information needed to order a copy of the file from TXGLO using the instructions in “genealogy research.”

***Texas General Land Office  
Land Grant Search***

**County:** Jasper  
**Abstract Number:** 14  
**District/Class:** Title  
**File Number:** SC 000054:19  
English Field Notes GWS-36  
**Original Grantee:** Glenn, Sally  
**Patentee:**  
**Title Date:** 04 Nov 1834  
**Patent Date:**  
**Patent No:** 83  
**Patent Vol:** 22  
**Certificate:** Translation #1580  
**Part Section:**  
**Survey/Blk/Tsp:**  
**Acres:** 4428.4  
**Adj Acres:**  
**Remarks:**  
**[View PDF](#)**  
(5,355,379 bytes)

In 1834 Texas was a part of Mexico, official documents were written in Spanish. “Translation #1580” indicates an English translation of Sally’s Mexican land title is available, but there is no link to an online version. Order the translation from TXGLO. But we can view the Spanish title using

the "View PDF" link. A small part of the six-page document is translated below.



La viuda Sally Glenn, natural de los E. U. del Norte, con el  
Debido respeto, ante V. me presenta y digo: Que atraida  
por las generosas disposiciones de las Leyes de colonizacion  
de este Estado, he venido con mi familia buscando de  
Tres hijos, a radicarme en el, si V. tuviere  
a bien, en vista de la adjunta Certificacion, admitirme  
en clase de Colono, concediendome un sitio de tierra  
en los baldios de la referida Empresa. Por  
tanto: Suplico a V. se sirva otorgarme la gracia  
de impetra, a cuya favor vivire eternam<sup>te</sup> agradecido.  
Sacramento, y Octubre 29 de 1834.  
Sally  
Glenn  
acompana al Sr

### Translating Text

Many of us are impatient when we have new documents and won't want to wait for the translation to arrive by mail. The Spanish documents can be difficult to read. Text is usually written on both sides of a page and the ink bleeds through. But you've persevered and created a transcript of the Spanish text. What next? An online translation tool may get you the gist of the text, if not the exact meaning.

Google Translate<sup>5</sup> supports many languages. Select translation from Spanish to English then paste your transcribed Spanish text into the box.

| Spanish Transcript  | Google English Translation   |
|---|--|
| La viuda, Sally Glenn, natural de los E. U. del Norte, con el debido respeto, ante y me presentar y digo: que atraídos por las generosas disposiciones de la leyes de colonización de este Estado, he venida con mi familia constar de le Tres hijos, a radicarme en el, Si y tuviere a bien, en vista de la adjunta certificación, admitir en clase de Colona; concediendome un Sitio de tierra en los baldios de la referida Empresa. | The widow, Sally Glenn, a native of the E. U. North America, with all due respect, and submit to me and say that, attracted by the generous provisions of the colonization laws of this State, I have my family coming with him provide for three children to settle in, if any, and to However, in view of the attached certification admit Colona class, giving a site of the vacant land in the said Company. |
| Portanto: suplico a y Se Sinva otorgar me la gracia que impetro, a voy a favor vivere ternamente agradecido   | Portanto: We beseech ay Sinva give me grace impetradas, I favor a thankful vivere ternate  |
| Nacogdoches, y Octubre 29 de 1834<br>Sally Glenn  | Nacogdoches, October 29 and 1834<br>Sally Glenn  |

Well, not a perfect translation. Some of the words are archaic or the meaning of the word has changed since 1834. Google doesn't understand that a "sitio" is a league of land (more below). Some words may not be properly transcribed making it difficult for the electronic translator. But we now know Sally was still in Nacogdoches on 29 October 1834 and asked for a land grant.

The TXGLO translation,<sup>6</sup> once it arrives, has more correct English and is included for comparison purposes:

I, the widow, Sally Glenn, a native of the United States of the North, with due respect present myself before you and say: that attracted by the generous provisions of the Colonization laws of this State, I have come with my family, consisting of three children, to settle myself permanently in it, if you should see fit, in view of the attached Certificate, to admit us in the class of colonist; conceding to me a league of land in the vacant tracts of said Enterprise.

<sup>5</sup> "Google Translate," *Google* (<http://translate.google.com/>).

<sup>6</sup> Sally Glenn Title, Jasper Land District, Spanish Collection file 000054:19, 4 November 1834, Translation #1580; Texas General Land Office, Austin.

Therefore, I supplicate of you to be pleased to grant the favor which I ask of you, to which favor I shall forever be grateful

Nacogdoches, October 29, 1834  
Sally Glenn

## Historical Information and Definitions

We've only grazed the surface of what we can learn using online sources. Other useful information includes:

- What is a league of land – typing “define:league” without quotes into a Google search box displays some conflicting definitions. If we go back to the TXGLO site and access the “Glossary”<sup>7</sup> we find the meaning of terms as specifically related to Texas land grants. For example, league: a measurement of area equivalent to 25 million square varas or 4,428.4 acres. Exactly the amount of land the database entry indicates was granted to Sally. We also find the meaning of vara.
- Why does a woman get a land grant of over 4,000 acres – *The Laws of Texas, 1822–1897, Volume 1* compiled by H. P. N. Gammel<sup>8</sup> contains English translations of Spanish and Mexican documents related to the early settlement of Texas. Digitized copies are online at the “The Portal to Texas History”<sup>9</sup> and list the specifics of the colonization laws. Other volumes cover Texas laws up through 1897.

There are some great Texas history books that explain land grants in phrases more easily understood than those used in official decrees and legislation. *Homesteads Ungovernable: Families, Sex, Race, and the Law in Frontier Texas, 1823-1860*<sup>10</sup> is one of those great books. Page 3 discusses land grant policies and can be

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<sup>7</sup> “Glossary,” *Texas General Land Office* (<http://www.glo.state.tx.us/archives/history/glossary.html>).

<sup>8</sup> H. P. N. Gammel, *The Laws of Texas: 1822–1897*, 10 volumes (Austin: The Gammel Book Co., 1898).

<sup>9</sup> “Portal to Texas History,” digital images, University of North Texas (<http://texashistory.unt.edu/browse/collection/GLT/>).

<sup>10</sup> Mark M. Carroll, *Homesteads Ungovernable: Families, Sex, Race, and the Law in Frontier Texas, 1823–1860* (Austin, Univ. of Texas Press, 2001).

previewed using Google Books.<sup>11</sup> You'll want a copy of this for your personal library so don't miss the "Buy this book" links.

- Where is the District of Bevil – The "Handbook of Texas Online"<sup>12</sup> tells us about the general area where Sally may have settled while we wait to see a copy of the land grant map for Jasper County with an exact location of her land.
- What is a character certificate – A "character certificate" or "entrance certificate" is an 1820-1830s version of a Mexican Texas immigration record.<sup>13</sup>

Not everything will be online, but there is so much more available than any one person can know. Don't stop with what you find in an index. Dig deeper. If the document images aren't online, find out how to order photocopies. Maybe knowing Sally came from Kentucky is that critical piece of information that lets us find the next generation of ancestors. If we stop with what was found in Ancestry.com's database this could become our brick wall. If we dig further that wall quickly falls.

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<sup>11</sup> "Google Books," snippet view, Google Books ([http://books.google.com/books?id=YEwFREzG\\_TcC](http://books.google.com/books?id=YEwFREzG_TcC)).

<sup>12</sup> "Bevil's Settlement," *The Handbooks of Texas Online*, ([http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/hvb58\\_print.html](http://www.tshaonline.org/handbook/online/articles/BB/hvb58_print.html)).

<sup>13</sup> "Nacogdoches Archives," *Texas State Library* (<http://www.tsl.state.tx.us/arc/nacogdoches.html>), "Entrance Certificates and Certificates of Citizenship, Nacogdoches (1821–1828, 1835)" section.