

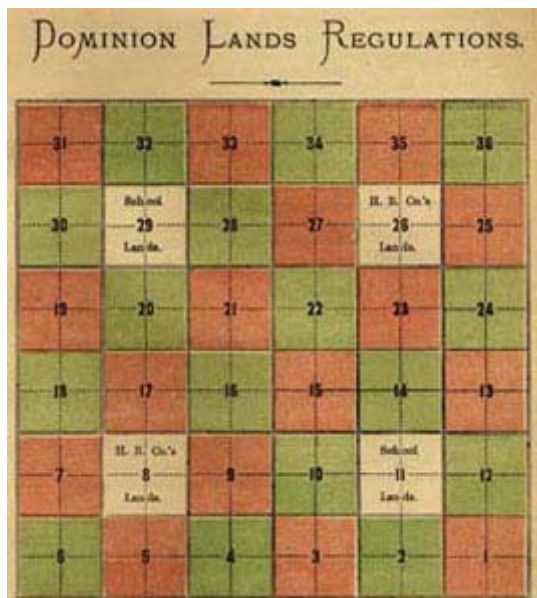


## Searching for Homestead records at the Provincial Archives of Alberta

Homesteading refers to a specific means of acquiring land in Western Canada. Homesteads were initially granted by the federal government under the provision of the *Dominion Lands Act (1872)*; after 1930, homesteads were granted by the provincial government. These lands had been, and were being, surveyed by Dominion Land Surveyors. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and even parts of British Columbia were divided north-south along **Meridians**. The First (or Principal) Meridian runs just west of Winnipeg, Manitoba. The Saskatchewan-Alberta border is the Fourth Meridian. Homesteads in Alberta are either west of the Fourth, Fifth or Sixth Meridians.

These Meridians were further divided vertically into **Ranges**, running east to west, numbered 1 through 30 (at the south of the province; since the Earth is spherical, there are fewer Ranges the further north you go). The map was divided horizontally by **Townships**, with Township 1 starting at the southern border of the province, and going up to 126 at the northern border of the province.

Each 6 mile square Township that resulted from this subdividing was then further subdivided into 36 **Sections**. Each Township is described as Township X, Range Y, West of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> Meridian:



Federal Order-in-Council PC 1710, 1881  
Provincial Archives of Alberta Accession  
GR1982.0104/3

Each of these one mile square sections contained 640 acres. These were then further subdivided into quarters of 160 acres each – the northeast quarter, the northwest quarter, the southeast quarter and the southwest quarter.

NW	NE
SW	SE

A homestead would have been one of these quarter sections.

Not all land was available for homesteading. In most townships, odd numbered sections (except 11 and 29) were set aside for railway grants, often to the Canadian Pacific Railway or other railway companies, and these lands were theirs to sell so that they could earn money to construct the railways. The Glenbow Archives has a record of the sales from the Canadian Pacific Railway from 1881 to 1927. Their database, CPR Land Sales Catalogue, can be searched at <http://ww2.glenbow.org/search/archivesCPRSearch.aspx>.

The Hudson's Bay Company received sections 8 and three-quarters of section 26. Sections 11 and 29 were designated School Lands, and proceeds from the sales of these lands went to fund the building of schools in the area. These lands could be purchased by people coming west, but were not "homesteads" according to the *Dominion Lands Act*.

Under the provisions of the *Dominion Lands Act*, individuals could make application for parcels of Crown land in Western Canada. Upon taking up the homestead, the individual was required to clear at least 10 acres of land, to undertake some cultivation, to have built a habitable dwelling and some farm buildings, and to live on the land for six months a year for three years. Once these requirements were met, the individual would submit an application for title (letters patent) for the land. A second quarter section, called a pre-emption, could be obtained by a homesteader who had proved up his primary homestead quarter.

The Provincial Archives has two main series of records for those interested in learning more about a particular homestead:

- homestead application files
- township maps



## Homestead Application Files

The Alberta Genealogical Society has created databases to help locate the homestead application files. The databases are available through their website, <http://abgensoc.ca/>. The database for homesteads patented between 1870 and 1930 is available at <http://abgensoc.ca/homestead/index.htm>, and the database for homesteads patented after 1930 is available at <http://abgensoc.ca/land/index.html>. You are able to search these databases by the name of the individual, or by the land location. From the databases, you will find the microfilm reel number and file number to be able to locate the file at the Provincial Archives of Alberta.

If you can't find the name in the database, do not worry just yet. Spelling can sometime be an issue, so you can try searching by location. There is also a different means to manually locate file numbers based on the legal land description. Please talk to the Reference Archivist in person or call 780-427-1056.

Library and Archives Canada has a database relating to Letters Patent issued by the Lands Patent Branch of the Department of the Interior from about 1870 to 1930. The Western Land Grants database can be searched at: <http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/western-land-grants/index-e.html>. The Provincial Archives of Alberta does not hold these microfilm reels, but they could be ordered through interlibrary loan. These microfilms have the certificates only, not the application file.

## Township Maps

If you know the Township, Range and Meridian, the Provincial Archives of Alberta has a series of Township maps, which identify the homesteaders on the township.

To view a map like this one, you will need to fill in a yellow request slip with the accession number GR2004.0214, and the Township, Range and Meridian in the "Description" field, then your name, date and table number, and place the slip in the Request box at the Reference Desk. The map will come to the table you've indicated, usually in 10 to 15 minutes.



GR2004.0214/1958. Township map for Township 34, Range 27, West of the 4<sup>th</sup> Meridian.

If you can't visit the Provincial Archives of Alberta, you can order a homestead search through our Archives Store at, <https://sales.ccs.alberta.ca/paa/services/HomesteadSearch.aspx>. For a \$25 fee when you provide the legal land description (\$40 if you don't know the land description) you will receive copies of the homestead application file held on microfilm at the Provincial Archives.

**If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to telephone the Provincial Archives of Alberta (780) 427-1750, or fax (780) 427-4646.**