

Homesteading refers to a specific means of acquiring land in Western Canada. Homesteads were initially granted by the federal government under the Dominion Lands Act (1872). After 1930, homesteads were granted by the Alberta government.

About Homestead Records

1. Homestead Application Files

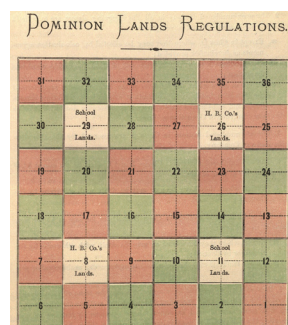
Homestead application files identify when an individual applied, received and worked a section of land through the historic Dominion Lands Branch homestead process. These records are often used in applications for the Alberta Century Farm and Ranch Award. Documents relating to the application and patent process typically include a legal description of the land and details about the applicant, including age, place of birth, former place of residence and date of entry onto the land. Marital status is indicated but the spouse is not usually named. Minor children are rarely identified. If the applicant was not a Canadian citizen or British subject at the time of application, naturalization documents may be included because only Canadian citizens and other British subjects received homestead titles.

2. Township Maps

Township maps date back to when the land was first surveyed. Some township maps were annotated to include the names of the people who successfully homesteaded particular parcels of land. The Provincial Archives of Alberta has a series of township maps (arranged by township, range and meridians) that identify homesteaders, not subsequent land owners.



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



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

More information about Homesteading

Lands were surveyed by Dominion Land Surveyors and much of Western Canada was divided north-south along meridians. The Saskatchewan-Alberta border is the fourth meridian, and homesteads in Alberta are all west of the fourth, fifth or sixth meridians. The map is divided further by townships, with Township 1 starting at the southern border of the province and going up to Township 126 at the northern border. Each six-mile square township was then subdivided into 36 sections. These plots are described as "Township X, Range Y, West of the 4th, 5th or 6th Meridian." The one-mile-square sections contain 640 acres and were subdivided into northeast, northwest, southeast and southwest quarters of 160 acres each. A homestead would have been one of these quarter sections.

Under the Dominion Lands Act, individuals could apply for parcels of Crown land in Western Canada. The individual was required to clear at least 10 acres of land, undertake some cultivation, build a habitable dwelling and farm buildings, and live on the land for at least six months of the year for three years. Once these requirements were met, the individual would submit an application for a title (letters patent) for the land. A second quarter section, called a pre-emption, could be acquired as well.

Not all land was made available for homesteading. In most townships, odd-numbered sections (except for sections 11 and 29) were set aside for the Canadian Pacific Railway or other railway companies. The Glenbow Library and Archives has a record of the land sales from the Canadian Pacific Railway from 1881 to 1927 and its database, the CPR Land Sales Catalogue, can be searched online. Sections 11 and 29 were designated School Lands and proceeds from their sale went to fund the construction of schools in the area. Finally, the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) received section eight and three-quarters of section 26. HBC records are held at the HBC Archives in Manitoba.