



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Minnesota State Archives

U.S. GENERAL LAND OFFICE Stillwater Land District

An Inventory of Its Records

OVERVIEW OF THE RECORDS

- Agency:** United States. Stillwater Land District (Minn.).
- Series Title:** Stillwater Land District records,
- Dates:** 1848-1893.
- Abstract:** Correspondence, registers of homestead and agricultural college scrip entries; patent records; land contest records; and related materials covering land transfers in northeastern and east central Minnesota.
- Quantity:** 9.0 cu. ft.
- Location:** See Detailed Description section for box locations.

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE STILLWATER LAND DISTRICT

The Stillwater Land District, encompassing all of the land in Minnesota Territory east of the Mississippi River, was established by an act of Congress of March 2, 1849. This land had been part of the Chippewa Land District created in 1847 and encompassing all of Wisconsin Territory north of a line between townships 22 and 23 and west of the Wisconsin River. The act of 1849 created a new land district in the state of Wisconsin and moved the land office of the Chippewa district from the Falls of the St. Croix to Stillwater. All of the land in the Stillwater Land District was subject to the survey based on the 4th principal meridian.

An act of August 30, 1852, removed a small parcel of land east of the Mississippi and west of range 27 (townships 32-47 in ranges 28-33) from Stillwater to the new St. Cloud district. These lands were restored to the Stillwater district by an act of April 12, 1854. The Stillwater district was reduced in size by an act of July 8, 1856, establishing the Northeastern (Duluth) Land District north of the line between townships 45 and 46. Between July, 1856, and December, 1893, the Stillwater district encompassed townships 26-45 in ranges 15-33 in the territory and state of Minnesota. On January 1, 1894, the Stillwater Land District was merged into the St. Cloud district.

Land offices of the Stillwater Land District: Falls of the St. Croix (July 1848 to September 1849); Stillwater (ca. October 9, 1849 to November 15, 1858); Cambridge (December 15, 1858

to ca. May 19, 1860); Sunrise City (ca. July 25, 1860 to ca. September 30, 1861); Taylors Falls (October 1, 1861 to ca. December 30, 1893).

Registers of the Stillwater Land District: C. S. Whitney (1848-August 4, 1849, Falls of St. Croix), A. Van Vorhes (May 1850?- ?), A. Pierse (September 28, 1852?-November 13, 1852), T. M. Fullerton (May 7, 1853-May 29, 1857), Charles G. Wagner (May 31, 1857-January 31, 1860), Henry N. Setzer (February 28, 1860-April 1, 1861), Grenville Strickney (April 25, 1861-November 30, 1864?), C. B. Whiting (March 20, 1865-September 1, 1866), William Comer (September 1, 1866-May 19, 1869), John Powers (May 19, 1869-September 8, 1884), L. K. Stannard (November 7, 1884-September 2, 1889), Ed. C. Gottry (September 30, 1869-December 30, 1893).

Receivers of the Stillwater Land District: Samuel Leech (July 1848-August 4, 1849, Falls of St. Croix), N. Greene Wilcox (September 7, 1849-November 6, 1850?), Jonathan E. McKusick (September 22, 1852?-April 1853), W. Holcombe (May 2, 1853-May 4, 1857), W. H. Abbott (June 1, 1857-February 20, 1860), William H. Mower (March 16, 1860-May 1, 1861), Lucas K. Stannard (May 24, 1861-December 31, 1870), Oscar Roos (January 17, 1871-November 30, 1875), George B. Folson (December 1, 1875-August 6, 1884), P. H. Stolberg (August 7, 1884-February 17, 1887), E. A. Umland (February 21, 1887-June 2, 1890), J. Walfrid (June 6, 1890-December 27, 1893).

ORGANIZATION OF THE RECORDS

These records are organized into the following sections:

- Abstract of Preemption Declaratory Statements, 1882-1891. 1 volume.
- Contest Docket, 1883-1893. 1 volume.
- Correspondence: Letters Received from GLO, 1848-1893. 4.0 cu. ft. (4 boxes).
- Correspondence: Receiver's Letters Sent, 1848-1893. 2 volumes.
- Correspondence: Register's Letters Sent, 1848-1893. 5 volumes.
- Proof of Right to Preemption, 1871. 1 folder.
- Record of Patents Delivered, 1884-1893. 1 volume.
- Register of Agricultural College Scrip Entries, 1864-1872. 1 volume.
- Register of Certificates to Purchasers, 1875-1893. 1 volume.
- Register of Final Homestead Certificates, 1868-1893. 2 volumes.
- Register of Homestead Entries, 1863-1893. 3 volumes.

OTHER FINDING AIDS

Some of the volumes include indexes.

INDEX TERMS

These records are indexed under the following headings in the catalog of the Minnesota Historical Society. Researchers desiring materials about related topics, persons or places should search the catalog using these headings.

Topics:

Agricultural college lands—Minnesota.
Betterments—Minnesota.
Bounties, Military—United States.
Cities and towns—Minnesota.
Homestead law—Minnesota.
Indian land transfers—Minnesota.
Land grants—Minnesota.
Land titles—Registration and transfer—Minnesota.
Ojibwa Indians—Mixed descent—Land tenure.
Pioneers—Minnesota—Biography.
Pre-emption rights (United States).
Public land sales—Minnesota.
Public lands—Minnesota.
Railroad land grants—Minnesota.
Swamp lands—Minnesota.
Timber trespass—Minnesota.

Places:

Fort Snelling (Minn.).
Mille Lacs Indian Reservation (Minn.).

Organizations:

Lake Superior and Mississippi Railroad Company.
Northern Pacific Railroad Company.
St. Paul and Duluth Railroad Company.
United States. General Land Office.

Types of Documents:

Deeds—Minnesota.
Land scrip—Minnesota.
Sioux half-breed scrip.

Titles:

United States. Land Grant Act of 1862.
United States. Preemption Act of 1841.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Preferred Citation:

[Indicate the cited volume and page or item and folder title here]. U.S. General Land Office: Stillwater Land District (Minn.). Minnesota Historical Society. State Archives.
See the Chicago Manual of Style for additional examples.

Accession Information:

Accession number(s): none

Processing Information:

Processed by: Gregory Kinney.
PALS ID Nos.: 900036644 to 900036654
RLIN ID Nos.: MNHV2637-A to MNHV2647-A

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE RECORDS

Note to Researchers: To request materials, please note both the location and box numbers shown below.

Abstract of Preemption Declaratory Statements, January 1882 – January 1891. 1 volume.

An incomplete series of abstracts of preemption declaratory statements (numbers 2871-3158 only) filed in the Stillwater Land District under provisions of the General Preemption Act of 1841.

The Preemption Act of 1841 recognized the claims of those settlers or "squatters" who had settled on public land before it had been offered for sale. This act enabled the settler to purchase the claim at the minimum price rather than having to bid for it at public auction. The preemptor was required to file a declaratory statement within three months after the local land office had received the survey plat of the township in which the claim was located or within three months of making settlement. The declaratory statement, which gave the date of settlement and detailed the improvements made to the property, was used by the land office to determine the validity of the claimant's preemption, and it established the priority of his claim against those of other claimants.

When the land office announced that an area of land was to be offered for sale, the preemptor had to pay for his land before the date of the sale or risk losing it to the highest bidder. For land that was open to private entry, the preemptor had to make payment within one year of filing a declaratory statement. In 1854, preemption rights were extended to settlers on unsurveyed land.

The abstract for each declaratory statement gives statement number, date of settlement, date the declaratory statement was filed, name of preemptor, legal description of the tract preempted, and occasional remarks on the eventual disposition of the tract.

Related materials: United States: General Land Office: Original Entry Tract Books (cataloged separately) cite the type and number of the certificate issued on the preempted parcel; the parcel can then be located in the appropriate register of entries. A photocopy of the Register [Abstract] of Declaratory Statements nos. 206-2032 (1853-1856), made from the original in the National Archives, is in Box 5 of the Fort Snelling Papers (manuscripts collection P333).

Arrangement: Numbered chronologically by date the statement was filed.

Location	Box	
114.H.2.8F-2	---	Abstract of Preemption Declaratory Statements, 1882-1891. 1 volume.

Contest Docket, 1883-1893. 1 volume.

A summary record of official proceedings in contests brought against land entries in the Stillwater land district.

The docket entry for each contest case gives names of plaintiff (contestant) and defendant (entryman), type and number of the entry being contested, date the entry was made, legal description of the parcel covered by the contested entry, summary of actions taken on the case, and citations to decisions of the register and receiver or the commissioner of the General Land Office.

Arrangement: Entries are chronological by date the contest was filed.

Indexing-Note: The volume is indexed by name of entryman and contestant.

Location	Box
114.H.2.7B-1	--- Contest Docket, 1883-1893.

Correspondence: Letters Received from GLO, 1848-1893. 4.0 cu. ft. (4 boxes).

Letters received by the register and receiver of the Stillwater land district from the commissioner of the General Land Office. They include letters of transmission and acknowledgment, instructions to the register and receiver, decisions of the land commissioner and secretary of the interior in contested cases, and notices of approval or rejection of land entries.

The letters forwarding decisions of the commissioner and the secretary of the interior contain the most significant information. They generally include a summary of the facts in the case, giving information on the date of settlement and entry, improvements made on the claim, and biographical information on the contestants and witnesses. Some of these letters include transcripts of testimony and affidavits relating to the case.

Among the subjects discussed in the other letters are preemption, homestead, military bounty land warrants, and cash entries; townsite locations; state land grants; land grants of the Lake Superior and Mississippi, St. Paul and Duluth, Northern Pacific, and other railroads; public land sales and the disturbances surrounding them; sale of the military reserve around Fort Snelling; Chippewa half-breeds eligible to enter land (February 1869); the Mille Lacs Indian reservation; timber trespass; and the general operation of the land office.

Arrangement: Arranged chronologically.

Related materials: United States. General Land Office. Original entry tract books (cataloged separately) include citations, by date sent, to letters received from the commissioner of the GLO regarding specific parcels of land.

Location	Box	
107.C.12.3B	1	April 1848 - July 1849 (Falls of the St. Croix). May 1849 - November 1858 (Stillwater). December 1858 - June 1860 (Cambridge). July 1860 - September 1861 (Sunrise City). October 1861 - 1863 (Taylors Falls).
107.C.12.4F	2	1864 - 1879 (Taylors Falls).
107.C.12.5B	3	1880 - 1889 (Taylors Falls).
107.C.12.6F	4	1890 - 1893 (Taylors Falls).

Correspondence: Receiver's Letters Sent, 1848-1893. 0.5 cu. ft. (2 volumes).

Handwritten copies of letters sent by the receiver of the Stillwater land district in his capacities as receiver of public money and government disbursing agent.

Principal correspondents are the commissioner of the General Land Office, secretary of the treasury, and comptroller of the Treasury Department. The letters include transmittals of monthly and quarterly reports of accounts current and estimated office expenditures; inventories of office supplies and records; requests for information on procedural matters; responses to inquiries from the General Land Office or the Treasury Department about office receipts and expenditures; and reports on public auctions and the general operation of the land office. Occasional letters relate to contested entries. There is considerable overlapping of subject matter between the Receiver's Letters Sent and the Register's Letters Sent/

Arrangement: Arranged chronologically.

Location	Volume	
114.H.2.7B-2	[1]	July 4, 1848 - October 31, 1878.
	[2]	<i>[missing]</i>
114.H.2.7B-2	[3]	January 5, 1883 - December 29, 1893.

Correspondence: Register's Letters Sent, 1848-1893. 1.7 cu. ft. (5 volumes).

Handwritten and letterpress copies of outgoing letters of the register of the Stillwater land district. They are written primarily to the commissioner of the General Land Office, with some additional letters to federal and state officials and private citizens. Some letters of the receivers are also included.

Letters to the GLO fall into two broad categories: routine interoffice communications, and letters relating to imperfect or contested entries. The routine administrative correspondence includes letters of transmittal and acknowledgment, monthly and quarterly reports of entries made, records of patents delivered, requests for record books and forms, inquiries on procedural matters, and general commentary on the operation of the land office.

The letters relating to contested entries include reports of the decisions of the register and receiver, accompanied by summaries of the facts and witnesses' testimony for those cases that were appealed to the commissioner of the GLO. In addition to naming the rival claimants and giving the legal description of the contested parcel, these letters often cite the date of settlement

and entry, describe the improvements made—sometimes in great detail—and give biographical information on the contestants and witnesses in the case.

The letters concerning imperfect entries are usually responses to requests from the commissioner for additional information needed to approve an entry. This most often related to the entryman's naturalization, change in name, witnesses' testimony, or procedural matters.

The series includes occasional letters to registers of other land offices and to the U.S. Surveyor General, and a few letters to the Minnesota governor or state land commissioner relating to state land grants.

Letters to private individuals consist primarily of notices of hearings set, appeals forwarded, or decisions rendered in contested cases; requests for additional information or testimony; and procedural instructions necessary to perfect an entry.

Among the topics covered in the letters sent are: homestead and preemption claims, military bounty land warrant entries, railroad land grants, Sioux half-breed scrip entries, townsite locations, public land sales and accompanying disturbances, timber trespass, swamp land grants, and state land grants.

Arrangement: Arranged chronologically.

Location	Volume	
114.H.2.6F-1	1	August 1848 – November 1, 1860.
114.H.2.6F-1	2	November 7, 1860 – February 21, 1873.
114.H.2.6F-2	3	February 24, 1873 – December 1882.
114.H.2.6F-2	4	January 1883 – December 1890.
114.H.2.7B-1	5	January 1891 – December 1893.

Proof of Right to Preemption, 1871. 1 folder.

Proofs of right to make preemption entries filed on land in the Mille Lacs Indian reservation. These proofs were rejected and the entries canceled by the commissioner's letter of January 24, 1872.

The preemption proofs give the name of the preempting settler, description of the tract settled, and date settled. The statements of two witnesses testify to the preemptor's residence on the tract and the extent of the improvements made on the claim.

Arrangement: Arranged chronologically.

Location	Box	
107.C.12.6F	---	Proof of Right to Preemption, 1871. 1 folder.

Record of Patents Delivered, August 1884 – December 1893. 1 volume.

A record of patents delivered to patentees or their agents for land entered in the Stillwater land district.

The record gives the type and number of entry, person to whom the patent was issued, date the patent was issued, volume and page where the patent is recorded in GLO records, and name and address of the person to whom the patent was delivered.

Arrangement: Roughly chronological by date delivered.

Indexing-Note: Indexed by name of patentee.

Location	Box
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114.H.3.1B-2	---	Record of Patents Delivered, 1884-1893. 1 volume.
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Register of Agricultural College Scrip Entries, 1864-1872. 1 volume.

An abstract of land entries made in the Stillwater land district with agricultural college scrip under provisions of the Agricultural College Act of 1862.

The Agricultural College Act, commonly referred to as the Morrill Act, granted each state 30,000 acres of land for each of its United States senators and representatives. The proceeds from the sale of this land were to be used for the benefit of colleges of agricultural and mechanical arts in the state. Those states in which public land was still available for private entry selected their grant from the public land within their boundaries. Those states without sufficient public land received scrip of equal value, which could be redeemed for public land in the western states. The states receiving scrip could not enter the land directly but were required to sell the scrip to second parties, who then either used it to locate land or resold it.

The abstract for each scrip entry gives land office entry number, scrip number, the date a scrip certificate was issued, to what state the scrip was issued, acre value of the scrip, legal description of the tract located with the scrip, date located, and by whom located, with occasional added remarks.

Arrangement: Entries are chronological by date the scrip was located (a certificate was issued).

Location	Box
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114.H.2.7B-2	---	Register of Agricultural College Scrip Entries, nos. 1-179, March 1864 - September 1872. 1 volume.
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Register of Certificates to Purchasers, 1875-1893. 1 volume.

An incomplete abstract of certificates (nos. 6586-8037 only) issued by the register of the Stillwater land district for land entries made by cash purchase, scrip, or warrant. The certificate established the buyer's legal claim to a parcel of land pending issuance by the GLO of a patent that formally transferred title.

The abstract for each certificate gives certificate number, date issued, name of purchaser and county of residence, legal description and acreage of the parcel purchased, price per acre, and total purchase price. Most abstracts are annotated with the date the patent was issued and the volume and page in which it is recorded in GLO patent records. A few include citations to letters from the commissioner of the General Land Office.

Arrangement: Arranged by chronologically assigned certificate number.

Related materials: See also the district's Register of final homestead certificates and Register of homestead entries.

Location	Box	
114.H.3.1B-2	---	Register of Certificates to Purchasers, nos. 6586-8037, 1875-1893. 1 volume.

Register of Final Homestead Certificates, 1868-1893. 0.75 cu. ft. (2 volumes).

An abstract of all final certificates issued for homesteaded land in the Stillwater land district.

The abstract for each final certificate gives certificate number; date the certificate was filed; legal description of the tract homesteaded; name of applicant and county of residence; number of the original homestead application (recorded in the separately cataloged Register of Homestead Entries); commissions and fees paid; price per acre (commissions were based on the appraised price per acre); and various remarks relative to delivery of patents, citations to letters from the commissioner of the General Land Office, and citations to the Register of Certificates to Purchasers (cataloged separately) if the acreage of the parcel originally entered was in excess of the applicant's homestead eligibility.

Arrangement: Numbered chronologically by date the final certificate was issued.

Related materials: Final certificates for homestead entries proved up after December 20, 1893, are recorded in the St. Cloud register.

Location	Box	
114.H.3.1B-1	1	Nos. 1 - 2170, January 1868 - May 1888.
114.H.3.1B-1	2	Nos. 2171 - 2508, June 1888 - December 1893.

Register of Homestead Entries, 1863-1893. 1.25 cu. ft. (3 volumes).

An abstract of all applications to acquire land under the provisions of the Homestead Act of 1862 that were filed in the Stillwater land district.

Individuals seeking to acquire land under the Homestead Act first filed an application or "declaratory statement" with the local land office, thereby establishing their claim to a particular tract of land. They were then required to live on and improve the land for five years, after which time they presented the local land office a "final proof" of their compliance with the provisions of the Homestead Act. If the land office accepted the proof, it issued a "final certificate." The final certificate was then turned in to the General Land Office, which issued a patent formally transferring title to the homesteader.

The abstract for each homestead entry gives number of the application or declaratory statement; date of application; name of the applicant; legal description of the parcel entered; and remarks on the issuance of a patent, cancellation, or other disposition of the entry, with citations to relevant letters from the commissioner of the General Land Office.

Arrangement: Arranged by chronologically assigned application (entry) number.

Related materials: See also the district's Register of final homestead certificates and Letters received.

Location	Box	
114.H.2.8F-1	1	Nos. 1 - 2288, January 1863 - December 1874.
114.H.2.8F-1	2	Nos. 2289 - 4187, January 1875 - September 1892.
114.H.2.8F-2	3	Nos. 4188 - 4310, October 1892 - December 1893.