



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
Minnesota State Archives

U.S. SURVEYOR GENERAL OF MINNESOTA An Inventory of Its Letters Received and Sent

OVERVIEW OF THE RECORDS

- Agency:** United States. Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota.
- Series Title:** Letters received and sent,
- Dates:** 1854-1908.
- Abstract:** Correspondence relating to all aspects of the survey of public lands in Minnesota.
- Quantity:** 11.3 cu. ft. (11 boxes and 9 folders in partial box).
- Location:** See Detailed Description section for box locations.

ADMINISTRATIVE HISTORY OF THE U.S. SURVEYOR GENERAL OF MINNESOTA

The Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota, established by Act of Congress of March 3, 1857, was responsible for conducting the original government survey of the public domain in the territory and state of Minnesota.

The earliest surveys of land in Minnesota were conducted under the jurisdiction of the Surveyor General of Iowa and Wisconsin, headquartered at Dubuque, Iowa. These surveys, completed between 1848 and May, 1857, were primarily on land located between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers or in the southeastern corner of Minnesota. After the establishment of the Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota, copies of the field notes, plats, and other records relevant to these surveys were transferred from Dubuque to St. Paul.

The Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota continued in operation until December, 1907, when the survey of Minnesota was essentially complete. After 1907 the commissioner of the U.S. General Land Office served, *ex officio*, as Surveyor General of Minnesota, and handled any requisite surveying activities and questions. A congressional act of 1940 provided that the records of the Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota be turned over to the Minnesota secretary of state.

(An expanded administrative history is available in the Minnesota Historical Society.)

SCOPE AND CONTENTS OF THE RECORDS

Letters received by the surveyor's office in St. Paul (1857-1907), and copies of letters sent by the surveyor's offices in Detroit, Michigan (1854-1857) and in St. Paul (1857-1908). They relate to all aspects of the survey of public lands in Minnesota and in parts of Michigan, including appropriations and expenditures, surveyors' contracts and instructions, progress of survey work, contested surveys, availability of land for sale, railroad lands, illegal timber cutting, and Indian reservations. Correspondents fall into three major categories: U.S. General Land Office personnel, deputy surveyors, and private citizens and corporations.

ORGANIZATION OF THE RECORDS

These records are organized into the following sections:

Letters Received, 1857-1907.

Letters Sent, 1854-1908.

ARRANGEMENT OF THE RECORDS

The letters within each section are primarily chronological.

OTHER FINDING AIDS

Most of the volumes of letters sent are indexed by recipient.

U.S. General Land Office: Calendar of General Land Office Letters (cataloged separately) includes citations to many of these letters.

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:

Surveying--Minnesota.
Public lands--Minnesota--Surveying.
Public lands--Michigan--Surveying.
Railroad land grants--Minnesota--Surveying.
Indian reservations--Minnesota--Surveying.
Surveying--Minnesota--Accounting.
Land titles--Minnesota.
Timber trespass--Minnesota.

Organizations:

United States. General Land Office.

United States. Office of Surveyor General of Michigan.

Occupations:

Surveyors--Minnesota.

ADMINISTRATIVE INFORMATION

Preferred Citation:

[Indicate the cited volume and page or item and folder title here]. U.S. Surveyor General of Minnesota. *[Letters Received]* or *[Letters Sent]*. Minnesota Historical Society. State Archives.

See the Chicago Manual of Style for additional examples.

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DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE RECORDS

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

Letters Received, 1857-1907. 7.3 cu. ft. (7 boxes and 9 folders).

Letters received by the surveyor general's office in St. Paul.

General Land Office letters predominate. They deal with annual appropriations for survey work in Minnesota; instructions to the surveyor general and deputy surveyors; requests and authorizations for surveys of particular parcels; surveys of Indian reservations and railroad lands; hiring and payment of deputy surveyors and office staff; approval or rejection of completed surveys; illegal cutting of timber on public lands ("timber trespass"); contested surveys and land claims; and much routine office correspondence such as acknowledgments of reports transmitted and accounts paid.

Deputy surveyors' letters, often from field camps, report progress of survey work; ask the surveyor general for instructions, extensions of contractual deadlines, or payment on contracts; and request information on employment and the awarding of contracts.

Letters from the public and corporations consist of petitions to have particular parcels surveyed; allegations of inaccuracies in completed surveys; inquiries to the surveyor general on survey progress, preemption rights, and the availability of land; and applications for employment.

Other correspondents include registers and receivers of local land offices, county surveyors, private surveyors, and land agents.

Arrangement is primarily chronological (50 volumes). Also present are loose papers (3 folders) and subject files (6 folders and 1 volume). There may be additional letters relating to the subject files in the 50 volumes.

Note: The identification and location of volumes 1-43 of this set are unknown. They are believed to be in the Iowa Historical Society.

Location	Box	
111.E.8.10F	1	Volumes 44-51, 1857-1864.
111.E.9.1B	2	Volumes 52-59, 1865-1872.
111.E.9.2F	3	Volumes 60-68, 1873-1881.
111.E.9.3B	4	Volumes 69-75, 1882-1888.
111.E.9.4F	5	Volumes 76-80, 1889-1893.
111.E.9.5B	6	Volumes 81-86, 1894-1899.
111.E.9.6F	7	Volumes 87-93, 1900-1906.
111.E.9.7B	8	1857-1907. 3 folders.

Location	Box	
111.E.9.7B	8	Subject Files: Survey Bids, 1889, 1906. 1 folder. Executive Orders Withdrawing Land for Indian Reservations, undated and 1873-1883. 1 folder. Surveys of Indian Reservations, 1886-1900. 1 folder. Includes survey notes, correspondence, contract data, and a set of letters (1886-1887) challenging the award of a survey contract and illustrating the politics involved. Oaths and Surety Bonds, 1861-1907. 1 folder. Contested Survey, R17N T57W, 4 th Principal Meridian, 1895-1903. 1 folder. Certifications of Surveyors' Instruments, ca. 1880-1905. 1 folder, 1 volume.

Letters Sent, 1854-1908. 4.0 cubic feet (4 boxes).

Handwritten and letterpress copies of outgoing letters of the surveyor general's offices in Detroit (1854-1857) and St. Paul (1857-1908) relating to the survey of public lands in Minnesota and parts of Michigan.

Letters and reports to the General Land Office (GLO) form the largest part of the series and include annual reports on the progress of the survey; quarterly and annual accounts; transmissions of deputy surveyors' field notes and plats to the GLO for approval; pay vouchers for surveyors and office staff; responses to inquiries from the GLO concerning allegations of inaccurate surveys, contested land claims, and illegal timber cutting; reports and inquiries on surveying of Indian reservations and railroad lands; requests for authorization to survey particular parcels in response to petitions from the public; and much routine office correspondence.

Letters to the deputy surveyors concern the awarding of contracts; instructions for conduct of surveys; payment on contracts; extension of contractual deadlines; and allegations of inaccurate or improperly conducted surveys.

Letters to the general public include responses to petitions for the survey of particular parcels; to inquiries about the progress of the survey, preemption rights, and the availability of land; to allegations of inaccurate surveys and contested land claims; and to requests for employment.

Other correspondents include registers and receivers of local land offices, county surveyors, private surveyors, and land agents.

Arrangement is chronological within each of three subseries: Volumes J-Q, 1854-1889 (handwritten); Volumes 1-19, 1884-1908 (letterpress); and Chief Clerk, 1853-1869.

Most volumes are indexed by recipient.

Note: The identification and location of volumes A-I of this set are unknown; they are believed to be in the Iowa Historical Society.

Location	Box	
111.E.8.6F	1	Volume J. June 1854 – March 1858. Volume K. March 1858 – April 1860. Volume L. April 1860 – June 1865. Volume M. June 1865 – January 1872.
111.E.8.7B	2	Volume N. January 1872 – December 1876. Volume O. January 1877 – March 1882. Volume P. April 1882 – July 1887. Volume Q. July 1887 – November 1888. (Volume Q duplicates some letters in volumes 2-3, below)
111.E.8.8F	3	Volume 1. July 1884 – April 1886. Volume 2. May 1886 – October 1888. Volume 3. October 1888 – July 1890. Volume 4. August 1890 – August 1891. Volume 5. August 1891 – August 1892. Volume 6. August 1892 – August 1893. Volume 7. August 1893 – July 1894. Volume 8. July 1894 – September 1895. Volume 9. October 1895 – September 1896. Volume 10. October 1896 – November 1897. Volume 11. December 1897 – March 1899.
111.E.8.9B	4	Volume 12. March 1899 – December 1900. Volume 13. January 1901 – April 1902. Volume 14. April 1902 – February 1903. Volume 15. February 1903 – December 1903. Volume 16. December 1903 – December 1904. Volume 17. December 1904 – October 1905. Volume 18. October 1905 – September 1906. Volume 19. October 1906 – June 1907. Volume 20. July 1907 – November 1908. Chief Clerk, May 1853 – July 1875.