



MINNESOTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY
STATE ARCHIVES DEPARTMENT

345 Kellogg Boulevard West, St. Paul, Minnesota 55102-1906 (651)259-3260

Government Records Information Leaflet No. 1 Township Records

Many historically important records remain in the custody of Minnesota townships and town officials. This statement identifies some of the most valuable series of town records. Many townships will have examples of all these records series; others may have very few. Transfer of such records to a historical agency, public library, or museum is allowed with the permission of the State Archives.

CLERK'S BOOKS, including minutes of supervisors' meetings and clerk's financial records; clerk's books are sometimes separated into minute books and volumes entitled Clerk's Financial Records; early volumes may be called "Town Records".

TREASURER'S BOOKS: in later years sometimes called Treasurer's Register of Receipts and Disbursements.

BIRTH and DEATH REGISTERS: kept by the town clerk until 1953. Some of these records have been transferred to the court administrator or county recorder. Others have been retained in the towns.

BURIAL PERMITS, or permits to remove bodies, frequently found with the death certificates.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE DOCKET BOOKS: sometimes divided into civil and criminal dockets. Docket books may contain a record of marriages performed by the justice. This function is no longer performed at the town level.

WOLF BOUNTY, tree bounty, gopher bounty, grass-hopper bounty, and crow bounty records.

ROAD RECORD BOOKS and petitions for road improvements.

EARLY REAL and PERSONAL PROPERTY ASSESSMENT BOOKS and tax lists, especially those before 1902.

LAND TAX, road tax, and poll tax lists and warrant books, especially before 1913.

ELECTION RECORDS: only the register of electors (or poll lists) and the final abstract of votes need be preserved. Ballots, flag certificates, absentee voter certificates, judges' oaths, etc., can be destroyed one year after the election.

TREASURER'S ANNUAL STATEMENTS: compiled in preparation for the town's annual meeting, these summaries should be kept or transferred to the Archives unless they are duplicated in the clerk's book.

BOARD OF AUDIT minutes and reports.

CLERK'S MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL MEETING: recorded on a special form for use by clerks throughout the state, this summary should be kept unless it is duplicated in the clerk's book.

CHATTEL MORTGAGE RECORD BOOKS and INDEXES: recorded by the town clerk until 1913, when function was transferred to the county register of deeds (recorder). Some townships turned in these books to the county. Others retained them in the towns.

Some townships will have early *correspondence* files, petitions, etc. Much of this loose paper will not be kept permanently, but frequently selected items of interest are found.

Many townships have in their custody important records of **CLOSED RURAL SCHOOLS, RURAL TELEPHONE COMPANIES, CEMETERIES**, or other **COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS**. These records, if no longer needed, may be eligible for transfer to the State Archives.

The preservation and orderly disposition of records of Minnesota townships are governed by Minnesota Statutes 138.17, Subdivision 1. No records of the townships can be destroyed or removed from agency custody without signed authorization by the Records Disposition Panel as constituted by the statute. Further information and forms on which to request permission to destroy records on a one-time basis are available from the State Archives, Minnesota Historical Society, at the address and phone number shown above. Information about the establishment of a records retention schedule giving on-going permission to dispose of government records is available from the Minnesota Association of Townships (MAT), at <http://www.mntownships.org/>.

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