

Rural Property Inventories at the Archives of Michigan

Step 1: Where is the property?

Rural property inventories are organized by place. Collections are arranged alphabetically by county, township, then numerically by section number. Therefore, researchers should know the county, township, and section number before starting this research. Plat maps that show ownership are a great tool in finding a township and section number.

Below is a list of rural property inventory collections held at the Archives of Michigan or the Michigan Technological University Archives. The holdings for any given county may be incomplete. Rural property inventory maps that are associated with these records can be found in RG 94-438.

County	Dates	Record Group
Alcona	1938-1939	84-33
Alger (Limestone Township)	1938-1954	98-47
Antrim	1936-1942	72-76
Arenac	1936-1942	72-76
Barry	1939	89-25
Bay	1936-1942	72-76
Calhoun	1936-1942	72-76
Cass (Milton Township)	c. 1938	2014-139
Cass (Pokagon Township)	c. 1938	2003-44
Charlevoix (South Arm, St. James, Peaine, and Wilson Townships)	1937-1939	75-70
Cheboygan	1937-1939	94-380
Chippewa (Raber Township)	1938	94-381
Clinton (Ovid Township, Village of Shepardsville, Rochester Colony)	c. 1935-1942	95-139
Crawford	1936-1942	72-76
Dickinson	1936-1942	72-76
Eaton	1939	94-303
Emmet	1936-1942	72-76
Genesee	1936	81-52
Gladwin	1936-1942	72-76
Gogebic	1936-1942	72-76
Grand Traverse	1939-1939	84-55
Hillsdale	1939-1942	72-76
Houghton**	1936-1942	77-105
Huron	1939-1942	72-76

County	Dates	Record Group
Ingham	1936-1942	72-76, 83-88, 88-25
Ionia	1937-1938	54-10, 66-73
Iosco	1936-1942	72-76
Iron	1936-1942	72-76
Isabella	1935-1942	72-65, 72-76
Jackson	1935-1942	72-76
Kalkaska (Clearwater Township)	c. 1937	2000-70
Kalamazoo	1937	70-117, 76-17, 98-47
Keweenaw**	1936-1942	84-71
Lake	1936-1942	72-76
Lapeer	1936-1942	72-76
Lenawee (Ogden Township)	1938-1939	94-307
Livingston (Howell Township)	1938	2014-134
Luce	1936-1942	72-76
Mackinac	1936-1942	72-76, 84-70
Mason	1936-1942	72-76
Mecosta (Austin Township)	1936-1942	72-76
Menominee	1938	70-118
Midland	1936-1939	76-88
Monroe	1936-1942	72-76, 84-27
Montcalm	1938-1939	94-339
Montmorency	1936-1942	72-76
Newaygo	1936-1942	72-76
Oakland	1936-1942	72-76
Oceana	1936-1942	72-76
Ogemaw	1936-1942	72-76
Ontonagon	1936-1942	72-76
Oscoda	1936-1941	72-76
Osceola	1936-1942	70-112
Ottawa	1936-1942	72-76
Otsego	1936-1942	72-76
Presque Isle (Bearinger and Metz Townships)	1940	69-46
Saginaw	1937-1938	70-89, 71-146
Sanilac	1936-1942	72-76
Schoolcraft (Germfask Township)	1938	94-394
Shiawassee	1936-1942	72-76, 95-136
St. Clair (East China Township)	1938	64-13
St. Joseph	1938	72-76
Tuscola	1935-1938	70-113

County	Dates	Record Group
Van Buren	1935-1938	72-76
Washtenaw (Ann Arbor Township)	1939	2003-69
Washtenaw (Lyndon Township)	1938	90-283
Washtenaw (Northfield Township)	1937-1938	2000-69
Washtenaw (Pittsfield Township)	1938	70-87
Washtenaw (Superior Township)	1940	2005-23
Washtenaw (York Township)	1936-1938	71-139

**Records are held at the Michigan Technological University Archives.

Step 2: Reading through a card.

Each rural property card (about 8x10 inches) provides such facts as description, ownership, utilization, and improvements. The details revealed on each card provide a remarkably sharp picture of the character of Michigan country life in the 1930s. Data collected includes:

- Year of Inventory
- Name of village, township, county
- Owners name and post office address
- Means of communication
- Farm building details
- Lands
- School district
- Legal description of the land
- Building details (ex. year built)
- Sources of heat and light
- Fences
- Woodlands

The amount of acreage within certain classifications is denoted for lands. Classifications are “A” agricultural; “B” special agriculture; “C” swamp; “D” commercial orchard, vineyards and berries; “E” forest and timber areas, farm woodlot and cutover; and “Other” sugar bush, road, marsh, lake, waste and recreational.

Sketches of houses and general land areas are included. Building description includes type; year built or remodeled; dimensions in linear and cubic feet; condition and type of foundation; kind of exterior and roof; type of floor; and nature of utilities. Buildings of lesser importance—such as cribs, poultry houses, garages, fruit storage, and the like—are described by brief narrative. Farm fences are described by kind and condition of fence and posts. The “woodlot and forest timber tally” offers type, board feet, cord, stem cut and density. Valuations placed by board of review are occasionally included.

History

The Depression period found many surveyors, engineers, land appraisers, and other trained Michigan citizens out of work. At the same time, it became clear to tax administrators and government officials that the state needed a uniform set of data with which to establish assessment rates. In an effort to employ this unused skilled labor force, and to create a comprehensive source of

information about real and personal estates, the Rural Property Inventory was established. This undertaking, sponsored by the State Tax Commission in cooperation with the Works Progress Administration (WPA Project S-110), was started late in 1935. The Inventory was designed to prepare detailed descriptions of all 1,500,000 distinct parcels of land in the rural parts of Michigan (excluding Wayne County).