

BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

P.O. Box 481

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The following is Part 2 of the article on researching deeds. We wish to thank Tim Bennett for researching this article and others and submitting them to the society so we can share these tips with our many readers. Tim is the sixth generation owner of the Warner Homestead farm, located on Buno Road.

RESEARCH TIPS -- DEEDS -- Part 2

Surveys of Michigan delineated areas of land using a rectangular system laid out in a grid pattern of counties, townships, and sections. Townships are designated by two numerical values, a township number (north or south) and a range number (east or west) that refers to the distance from the vertical meridian and horizontal baseline that intersect southeast of Mason. Brighton Township is designated township 2N range 6E as it is the second township north of the baseline and sixth east of the meridian. Townships were then further divided into one mile squares (for the most part) called sections. Each section, containing 640 acres, is numbered and Brighton Township has 36 sections.

It may come as no surprise that some of the early deeds exhibit "inconsistencies". Land transactions occurring before county governments were formed were recorded in adjacent counties. Before Livingston County was officially organized in March 1836, deeds were recorded in Oakland and Washtenaw counties. Records from these counties were eventually copied to the books of Livingston County, known as transcribed records (TSR). These early records are not currently available online through genealogical services. However, researchers can view the online indexes of adjacent counties for records on land transacted in Livingston County or visit the Register of Deeds office.

Even after Livingston County was officially formed, though, some deeds still continued to be recorded in adjacent counties. A forty-acre parcel in Brighton Township was sold to Hiram Olds on October 25, 1836 but was recorded in Oakland County. Another deed recording a sale of property in township 2N range 6E (Brighton) as late as 1837 was recorded in the correct county, but mistakenly listed the description of the property as located in Oakland instead of Livingston.

Familiarity on the formation of townships is also useful to understand some of the early deeds. For example, a deed dated June 25, 1835 for land in section 30 of township 2N range 6E from Robert Bigham to William Noble Jr. lists the township as "Green Oak" instead of "Brighton". Although township 2N range 6E refers to Brighton Township on the government survey, the deed description is correct for that time as Brighton Township didn't split from Green Oak until December 1837. Relying on the reference to the section, township, and range numbers will avoid confusion with changing areas of named townships.

A handy reference for quickly finding the properties owned by an ancestor was compiled by Milton Charboneau in his Early Land Owners & Settlers of Livingston County, Michigan. This book is available for reference at the Livingston County Register of Deeds and a number of libraries.