

The Short Cut Method

I began my quest to become a land surveyor many years ago in Nebraska. I had the good fortune to have had a job wandering around the state retracing mile after mile of GLO surveys. These large scale boundary surveys offered all sorts of learning experiences. One of the object lessons came from repeated encounters with the Short Cut method in western Nebraska. Somewhere along the line I had acquired a poor photo copy of Robert Harvey's Instructions to County Surveyors. I studied this small book and it influenced how I searched for GLO corners. The practical insights recorded in this book resulted in the recovery of original corners that might have otherwise gone undiscovered and then treated as though they were lost. In Nebraska only the County Surveyor could restore lost corners. This arrangement may seem cumbersome, but ultimately it makes surveyors better at finding evidence and the site of a corner does not end up becoming a testament to boundary location confusion.

To some extent, all surveyors leave a professional legacy. Some of it is memorialized by monuments and records of surveys. Then there is the knowledge that one surveyor imparts to another that contributes to their personal and professional development. This is the part of the process by which the surveying profession extends its body of knowledge and perpetuates its community of practitioners. For example, Mr. Penry's efforts help perpetuate that of Mr. Harvey and in the process adds something to it. This accumulation of knowledge is commonly called progress. This type of progress is distinctly different from technological progress, although both involve the production of new knowledge. Both are vital to the future of surveying. One tends to invent the future and the other tends to translate the past in ways that make it relevant for the present and possibly future. Surveying is a technical profession that is driven by technological innovation.

The challenge for surveyors has always been to deploy new technology in ways that respect existing arrangements made in the past. Surveyors who are engaged in making improvements in the present must often contend with historical precedents. Sometimes these precedents are memorialized in word, and sometimes they are simply artifacts on/in the ground that are waiting to be discovered and interpreted. Both situations require historical knowledge in order to address issues correctly. The absence of this historical knowledge can lead to using modern technology to efficiently and accurately solve the wrong problem. This typically results in turmoil and a net economic loss. We know this because these kinds of foibles are memorialized by historical artifacts. It seems to me the work of a professional surveyor can be characterized as integrating the past with the present so the future will be better.

Kudos to Mr. Penry for another fine piece of research and writing.

Penry responds:

Every once in a while the right person comes along at the right time and thankfully Nebraska had Robert Harvey. Our GLO records were in disarray, incomplete, and were being shuffled around to dark corners of basements in government buildings. Harvey's passion for the surveying profession consumed his life to the extent that he began using his personal time to seek out missing records in Washington. Beyond his expertise with records, Harvey set a firm example in the field in monument recovery. Most importantly, he desired to share his knowledge with others. His book was written with the field surveyor in mind and avoided the usual classroom curriculum that was often useless during retracements. Harvey's life should be an inspiration for all surveyors to take that extra step and be recorded for the effort. His book has been reprinted and can be found at: www.BlueMoundPress.com ■

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Shawn Billings, PS	Wendy Lathrop, PS
C. Barton Crattie, PS	John Matonich, PS
James J. Demma, PS, Esq.	Michael J. Pallamary, PS
Dr. Richard L. Elgin, PS, PE	Jerry Penry, PS
Chad Erickson, PS	Walt Robillard, Esq., PS
Linda Erickson	Fred Roeder, PS
Jason E. Foose, PS	Angus W. Stocking, PS
Gary Kent, PS	

The staff and contributing writers may be reached via the online Message Center at amerisurv.com

GRAPHIC DESIGN LTD Creative, LLC
WEBMASTER Joel Cheves

OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR Becky Sadler
AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT Edward Duff
ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE Richard Bremer

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