Surveying in Missouri

To understand survey requirements in the State, we must begin with surveying in the early days of our nation. In 1779, Thomas Jefferson proposed every Virginia county be divided for school-supported purposes into townships 5 or 6 miles square. In 1784, he proposed public land surveys in units of "hundreds"; that is 10 miles square based on the decimal system (later replaced by townships 6 miles square, each with 36 square mile parcels called "Sections" of 640 acres.

In 1785, an Ordnance established the Land Office and rectangular survey of public domain land. Roughly all lands northwest of the Ohio River and west of the Mississippi River, to include the States of Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida; excepting Texas, in the "backlands of the United States to be subdivided into townships 6 miles square. The Ordnance also provided the sale proceeds of Section 16 in each Township set aside for maintenance of public schools.

In 1796, Rufus Putnam was appointed the 1st Surveyor General on Oct. 1. He instituted contract surveying.

In 1800, the Act of March 1 specified that **section corners set by deputy surveyors as true corners, even if later surveys indicated that they were placed incorrectly.**

Another Act in 1805 decreed each Section should be considered to be size measured by General Land Office (GLO) surveyors; **monuments installed have precedence over measurements in field notes.**

In 1812, the GLO was established in the Department of Treasury.

Early in 1814, William Rector was named Surveyor General for Illinois, Missouri, and Arkansas. On Oct. 1, Rector was replaced by Edward Tiffin.

In 1815, Surveyor General Tiffin required deputy surveyors to us a "good compass of Rittenhouse construction" and "a two-pole chain of 50 links". **(50 links = 33 ft., as 1 chain = 66 ft.).** Surveying began in Central Arkansas for the **5th Principal Meridian (P.M.)**. On Oct. 27, 1815, Deputy Surveyor Joseph C. Brown began survey of the **Baseline for the 5th P.M.** at the confluence of the Mississippi and St. Francis Rivers, and ran due west. On the same day, Prospect C. Robbins began **survey of the 5th P.M.** at the confluence of the Arkansas and Mississippi Rivers and ran due north. On Nov. 10, Robbins intersected the Baseline in the 58th mile of the P.M., approximately 26 miles west of the Mississippi River. **This initial point for the 5th Principal Meridian controlled surveys in all of Arkansas, Missouri, Iowa, North Dakota, and most of Minnesota and South Dakota.**

In 1816, a GLO Land Office opened in Edwardsville, Illinois. John C. Sullivan surveyed the northern limits of the Osage Cession. This nearly east-west Sullivan line later became the state border between Missouri and Iowa.

During 1820 and 1821, Townships were subdivided into Quarter Sections. Quarter Section corners were established. Quarter corners on the west sides of townships along Range Lines and on the north side of sections on the Township Lines **were not established**. Research of the GLO field notes in the southeast area of the State of Missouri shows that corners were established with a **wood post**. To get an insight of the timber resources, open, park-like stands of Shortleaf Pine were so large as to require long distances of up to 2 chains (132 ft.) to mark adequate witness (bearing) trees. In many cases, the diameters of the witness trees approached **24 inches at breast height**. All corners, other than the Section and Quarter corners mentioned above were left for later local surveyors to establish.

In 1824 General William Clark (of Lewis and Clark) was appointed Interim Surveyor General of Missouri and Illinois at St. Louis from October until May, 1825.

In 1830, the Act of May 29 made it illegal to obstruct surveys of public lands, and called for protection of government surveyors in the discharge of their official duties.

In 1833, the average rate paid to contract Deputy Surveyors was $3.00 per mile surveyed and rate for Township lines was $3.50 per mile, with Section lines paid for at the rate of $2.75 per mile.

In 1834, the Surveyor General in St. Louis required 4 bearing trees for Section corners and 2 bearing trees for Quarter corners, "each of the kind and size which experience teaches will be the most permanent and lasting". Where there were no trees within 10 chains (660 ft.), mounds of earth covered with sod were to be erected. Deputy Surveyors were required to blaze each bearing tree with the number of the tier, range and section in which it stood. Generally, GLO surveys progressed from east to west, and then north to south until the contract area was completed.

These corners and bearing trees are STILL THE OFFICIAL POSITIONS of all LAND

CORNERS, and evidence of these bearing trees still exits in many of the more remote parts of the State. Whenever this evidence is located today, the corners are perpetuated with guidelines from the State of Missouri Land Survey Authority.

Article by Fred Fris, Consulting Forester

Submitted by Peter Maki, Forestry Communication Specialist, Top of the Ozarks RC&D