

BOUNDARY SURVEYING AND HISTORY

By J. Richard Noland, Jr., PSM



Land Surveying to establish property boundaries and the history of a particular geographic area certainly go hand-in-hand. The history of the area in which the survey is to be conducted can provide valuable information to the land surveyor, and will assist in the difficult decision-making process to solve complicated boundary issues. If historic information was easily available for every survey marker uncovered in the process of performing a boundary survey, this would lead to fewer boundary discrepancies and fewer litigation cases for boundary disputes.

Each boundary survey performed should be preceded by a comprehensive research into the particular area's history. Land surveying to establish property boundaries began in Florida in the early 1800s, when the United States General Land Office commissioned surveyors to partition and field monument the Public Land Survey System (PLSS) (see CSI Consultants Update 3rd quarter of 2007). During that time in history, wood posts were used to monument the corners of the PLSS. Over the years, for multiple reasons, those wood posts have been replaced, and the question facing every surveyor since the original survey was performed is whether the original position of the wood post has been perpetuated or guesstimated. It is the history of each corner monument, subsequent to the completion of the original survey, which could be the most vital piece of information to possess or uncover in a surveyor's research.

There are a number of valuable resources for researching the history of PLSS and, subsequently, the monumentation that delineates the boundary corners in a particular area. Researching the historic information at the relevant County Surveying & Mapping department is an excellent resource. County Surveying & Mapping departments have been in existence for many years, and contain valuable historic survey records to assist in solving boundary line issues. In areas where a large land based industry may exist, similar to a phosphate mining operation or power company, these industries are another valuable resource. Florida Department of Transportation (formerly State Road Department) historic right-of-way maps may provide a snapshot in time.



An example of a favorite historic record located in Polk County, Florida is the "Boyd Survey Book". This book is located in Polk County micrographics or Surveying and Mapping sections of the county. W. Lacy Boyd was a Land Surveyor working in and for Polk County from 1910 to 1947. His record's accuracy, precision and integrity are impeccable for the period in time that he performed his survey work. According to the year accomplished, Mr. Boyd generally replaced the wood posts set during the original survey for the PLSS with sandstone concrete monuments; these monuments do not contain any metal. Due to the absence of metal in these monuments, the monuments are usually difficult and sometime impossible to find with conventional metal locators for the use of locating magnetic material. These metal locators are a common tool used by almost all surveyors today. The sandstone monument is more durable and is a better material than the wood post to defend against natural elements. The most valuable aspect of Mr. Boyd's records is the notations about each PLSS corner found. He gives a brief description of what was found at each corner or, if not found, how he re-established the location of each PLSS corner.

The ideal situation for each boundary corner involved in the boundary surveying process is to be able to create a timeline, commencing from the initial corner set during the PLSS survey (wood post) to the present day monument. In most situations, wood posts were replaced by sandstone monument by Mr. Boyd, which, in many situations have been replaced by a Permanent Reference Monument per County regulations for platting of a development or other type of monument used by modern day surveyors.

Chastain-Skillman, Inc. has been in business for over 60 years, and during this time we have accumulated an extensive library of survey records. This, together with our knowledge of the area, provides our clients with a valuable source of surveying history in central Florida.

Richard Noland serves as Senior Project Manager in Chastain-Skillman's Lakeland office and has over 21 years experience in the survey profession. He can be reached at (863) 646-1402 or Rnoland@chastainkillman.com.

