Ancient Verbosity
Wendy Lathrop’s word-by-word dissection of the grant clause of a deed [THE AMERICAN SURVEYOR, June 2018] is the clearest, most thorough and detailed analysis of legal language I have ever had the pleasure of reading. She has shown how parsing the specific wording of a document permits the reader to understand the underlying transaction that the long-dead principals intended to memorialize. Although she is apparently not a lawyer, she puts experienced lawyers to shame with her skill at communicating legal complexities to layman. My hat’s off to her!
—Andrew Alpern
Via the Internet

Lathrop responds:
You are correct—I am not a lawyer. My mother instilled a curiosity about words in me very young when she would never tell me how to spell anything but instead made me look things up in the dictionary. After the usual wail of “How can I look it up if I can’t spell it?” routine, it would take a long time to find my word because I got caught up in reading the definitions and sources of other words along the way. What a complex language English is! At any rate, I appreciate your kind words, and thank you for taking the time to respond.

Lathrop responds:
Thank you for taking the time to write, as it is always reassuring to know that we have readers out there! And I’m glad to meet a fellow word detective.
Agreed that while more words meant more money at a certain point in time. But there is present-day carry over of the language and meanings and it is helpful to know the origins. I find it interesting that there are still suits about deed language, such as Michie v. National Bank of Caruthersville (558 S.W.2d 270, 1977), discussing the difference between “grant, bargain, and sell” versus “bargain, sell, and convey” (and referring to Missouri statute §442.420).
If nothing else, being familiar with the old words makes it easier to decipher the old handwriting when recognizing a particular group of letters, to begin cracking the code of that particular scrivener’s scrawl.

Got some feedback?
Contact us via www.amerisurv.com, or send a letter to: The American Surveyor, 7820-B Wormans Mill Road, #236 Frederick, MD 21701. We reserve the right to edit letters for clarity and length.

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