

the curt brown chronicles



What Should Be the Education for Land Surveying?

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The subject of land surveying if taken in a broad sense would include photogrammetry, geodetic surveying, mine surveying, planning and route surveys, and even hydrographic surveys. In a narrow sense many of us think of property line surveyor as being the land surveyor. Since my primary interest is with the property line surveyor, many of my early remarks will be directed at his problems.

Historically the property line surveyor has been a part of civil engineering. But as civil engineering has become more complex, surveying has been pushed to one side to make room for newer subjects. The thinking of many engineers is illustrated by a recent incident that happened to a fellow surveyor. When applying for associate membership in the American Society of Civil Engineers he was asked by one of the membership committee what work he was doing. To his reply that he was a land surveyor, the remark was made, "I know that you are a land surveyor. I mean what have you done in engineering?" The attitude of many engineers is that surveying is not engineering, that it is sub-professional work to be handled by technicians. But is it? Too many of us think of the land surveyor as being the technician who operates a transit and only knows how to measure, not what to measure.

I think of boundary surveying as including many technical levels and also a professional level. We must distinguish among the chainman, instrument man, technician, and the professional surveyor. The doctors have laboratory assistants who are called technicians, not doctors. Unfortunately, the

professional surveyor has many assistants who are often thought of and are considered by many to be surveyors.

Many people have attempted to define the word "profession." Like all good words it has been overworked and extended to apply to such words as "professional boxer" and "professional soldier." A similar situation exists with the word "engineer" as adopted by the A. F. of L. in their "operating engineers"

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union. The better term would have been "engine operators," since that is what they are.

When I speak of the professions I mean the higher sense, such as lawyer, clergy, doctors, and educators. To be a professional man certain requisites are often present, among them:

1. Superior knowledge in his field;
2. Ability to express learned opinions
3. Remuneration for his services;
4. Liability for errors.

Thus the attorney listens to his client, gathers all available facts, and from his superior knowledge of law expresses an opinion on what to do. For his effort, he collects a fee. And upon occasions he can be held liable for his mistakes. The doctor makes measurements, observations

and tests on his patient, and from these observations, combined with his superior knowledge of medicine, he expresses an opinion on the type of treatment to be followed. A fee is charged. And for neglect in his duties he can be held liable.

The property surveyor is given a deed and told to mark it on the ground. He makes measurements, observations and sets markers in accordance with his opinion, and he

charges a fee. The only correct location for a boundary line is in that position that a court of competent jurisdiction will uphold. Thus in setting his property marks the surveyor is giving his opinion of where he thinks the court would uphold him. It takes superior knowledge to know where and how to set property lines. And if the surveyor fails to set his boundaries in that position that a reasonably prudent surveyor would, he must pay the damages. He is a professional man. ■

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