

the curt brown chronicles



Surveyors Model Registration

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In 1956 at the annual PSD [Property Survey Division] meeting in Washington a motion was duly made (by me) seconded and passed that PSD of ACSM prepare a Model Registration Law. After some discussion by Gordon E. Ainsworth (then Chairman), Victor Ghent (then Secretary of the Division) and others, it was passed. A few months prior to the next meeting, I was appointed to chair the committee, and it was not until 1958 that general agreement of the committee was reached. By this time, Phil Bill was Chairman of PSD.

It has been said that no army can stop an idea whose time has come. With the degrading of surveying by the universities, especially by the engineering accreditation teams, it became obvious that it was only a matter of time until licensed surveyors would be forced into defensive activities or extermination. Adoption of the model law is a shift from a defensive position to an offensive position that has long been needed.

Is land surveying civil engineering? To me the only question is whether civil or other engineers are qualified to do land surveying. Licensing laws are for the protection of the public from the unqualified; they are not a device to give one group an exclusive franchise to make money on surveys.

If engineers are qualified, they should be given every opportunity to prove so by proper examination procedures. They should not be given the privilege by self-proclamation or by tradition. I have been around colleges enough, both as a professor and as an observer, to realize that the substantial majority of civil engineering graduates have little or no training in land

surveying. In fact, other colleges (geology, forestry, etc.) have as many or more students taking the subject than do the engineering colleges.

The argument that most of the present licensed land surveyors could not pass an examination directed to the subject matter permitted under the new model law is without merit. If you were to ask all of the presently licensed engineers to take the recent engineering examination,

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most would fail. Knowledge required today is never equivalent to what was required yesterday, nor will it be equivalent to what will be required tomorrow. Ninety percent of all scientists who ever lived are alive today; it can only be expected that discovery and advancement will be much more rapid in the future than it was in the past. I can remember when knowledge of electronic distance measurement devices, photogrammetry, and electronic computers was not necessary for surveyors; these methods had not been invented yet. But does this mean that present day surveyors do not need knowledge in these areas? All examinations within a profession should reflect advancements in the areas of

knowledge required; adoption of a model law with added requirements can mean only one thing - the examination to follow will be more difficult and more complex. I can well remember my college course in calculus that I had difficulty with; my son took it in high school. One thing is certain about the future: it will be different from the past; i.e., it will be more difficult.

I said I did not care whether land surveyors were classified as engineers or

not. It would be wonderful if engineers were qualified land surveyors. But, as a group, they are not. Further, the situation gives no sign of improving. Hence, as of now, I see no other alternative for surveyors than to drop the last rudiments of the myth “surveying is engineering,” and adopt the Canadian, Australian, South African, and New Zealand approach wherein surveying is treated as an entity of its own. ■

Author **Michael Pallamary** has compiled the writings and lectures of the late Curt M. Brown. These works are published in *The Curt Brown Chronicles*.