



## angle points

# The Lost Art of Land Surveying

I like reading books. I think has something to do with the feel of the paper or the smell of the binding. And then there's the process of flipping pages, moving from one to the next, to see where the story is going to take me. There is also the subtle aesthetic of placing a book alongside your bed and opening it the next night. A book is a wonderful thing.

Although there are a great many technical devices you can use to read with, they are not books. Don't get me wrong, I own a Kindle and an iPad and other modern devices. All of them are loaded with classic literature and other documents I hope to read someday.

In addition to reading, I enjoy writing as it brings me great joy and this can be a powerful learning tool. As many scholars know, one of the tricks for memorizing a poem or a song or great literature is to write it down. There is something about processing the words and images in one's head that leaves an impression. With a good book, you can open a page and suddenly remember the characters and the story.

I cannot remember the number of times I have examined and studied the field notes of a good surveyor to know what they did, where they were, who they were with and what the weather was like when they conducted their survey. There is something visceral about a good set of field notes, ones that include valuable information such as hand drawings, sketches and diagrams. As with a good book and a good story, a good set of field notes can tell a story in seconds, revealing the description of found monuments and the relationship between other monuments, control lines, features, whether or not a traverse closed, GPS and



otherwise, the size and shape of a structure, a depiction of the features observed and any other pertinent information observed in the course of a survey.

What were the temperature and weather conditions on the day of the survey? These are all important observations that can serve as a reminder of what went on and who was there. As any experienced surveyor will confirm, the true test of surveying is the ability to reconstruct the field work five, ten, fifteen or twenty years later. It is not enough to point to the completed drawing and declare, "There it is." It is one thing to locate a structure and then try to assemble the feature back at the office based upon projections or some form of collected data, a lazy trait practiced by far too many measuring people today. It is another thing to view a sketch where the important features were noted and to remember—"I touched that wall and I was leaning on the building corner when I did it, when I saw that and measured that."

There is only so much information once can derive from a coded description of a pipe or a stone or a building.

One of the tests of a competent Land Surveyor is understanding the difference between a tool and a technique. Far too many people abandon older methods of surveying in favor of fancy new tools and equipment and eventually they learn an important lesson—the hard way—after they have been sued and are unable to remember what they did.

As I have said time and time again, satellites and data collection devices are wonderful tools but they don't teach you how to survey. If you want to learn how to survey, than that is what you should do; learn how to survey and use the right tools and methods. ■

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