

10 Amazingly Helpful Tips for Surveyors

1. When setting up the instrument in precarious situations, remember to hold on to the tripod legs for stability.
2. Avoid dangerous high-speed traffic when closing a lane – have someone else place the cones.
3. Always show your expertise to fellow crew members when setting up over a property corner by placing at least one tripod leg directly on the property line.
4. Be sure to use heavy-duty iron rebar or pipe for all property corners you set, so they won't be deterred by underground obstacles such as boulders, power lines or water pipes.
5. The hot summer sun can cause skin cancer – always make sure your instrument setups are in the shade.
6. Protect landowners from substandard work by always setting your monuments in the correct location next to those of your predecessors. This proves the previous error and your validity.
7. Keep your crew chief happy with quick setups – as long as the bubble is touching the black circle on the vial, you are golden.
8. Avoid confrontations with wildlife – equip your crew members with walkie-talkies so they can alert you of wildlife incidents. Encourage them to provide updates while you wait for clearance in the truck or at a nearby coffee shop.
9. Protect yourself and your equipment from scary rain by applying the ten-drop rule; when you see 10 drops of rain on the windshield, pack it up and go home.
10. Avoid dehydration by always carrying a chilled six-pack of beer with you to every job site.

Rectangular Land Surveys in Territorial Minnesota

1847-1858

My lineage as a Surveyor

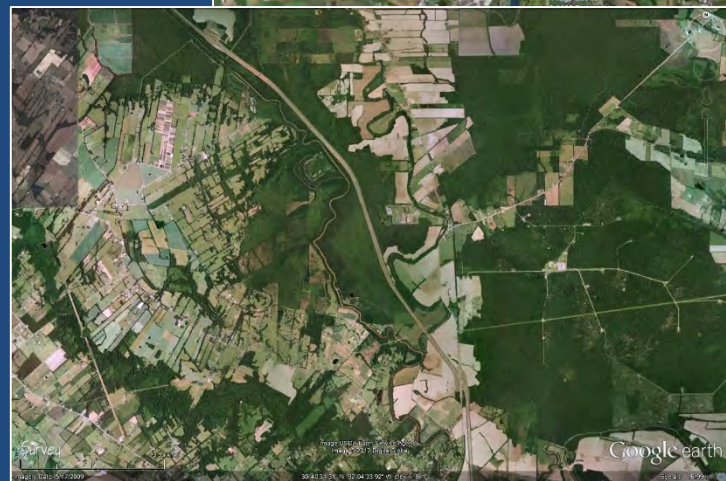
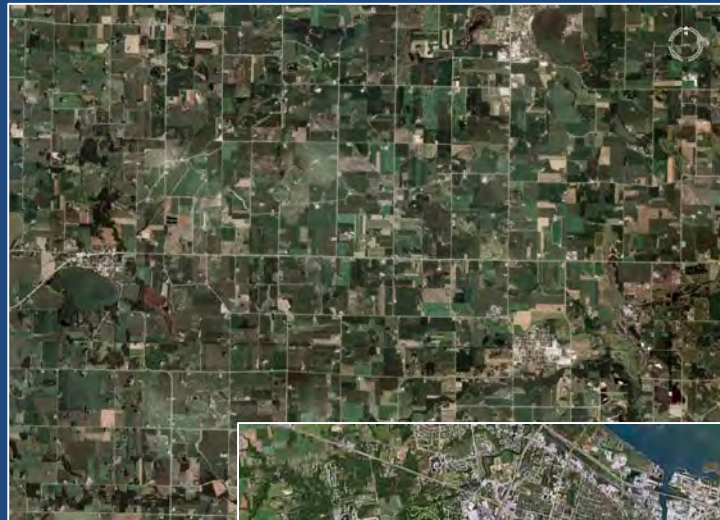
My lineage as a Surveyor



My lineage as a Surveyor



The rectangular public land survey net is one of the most visible yet least understood cultural landscape features in the United States



"It is the grid not the eagle or the stars and stripes, which is our true national emblem."

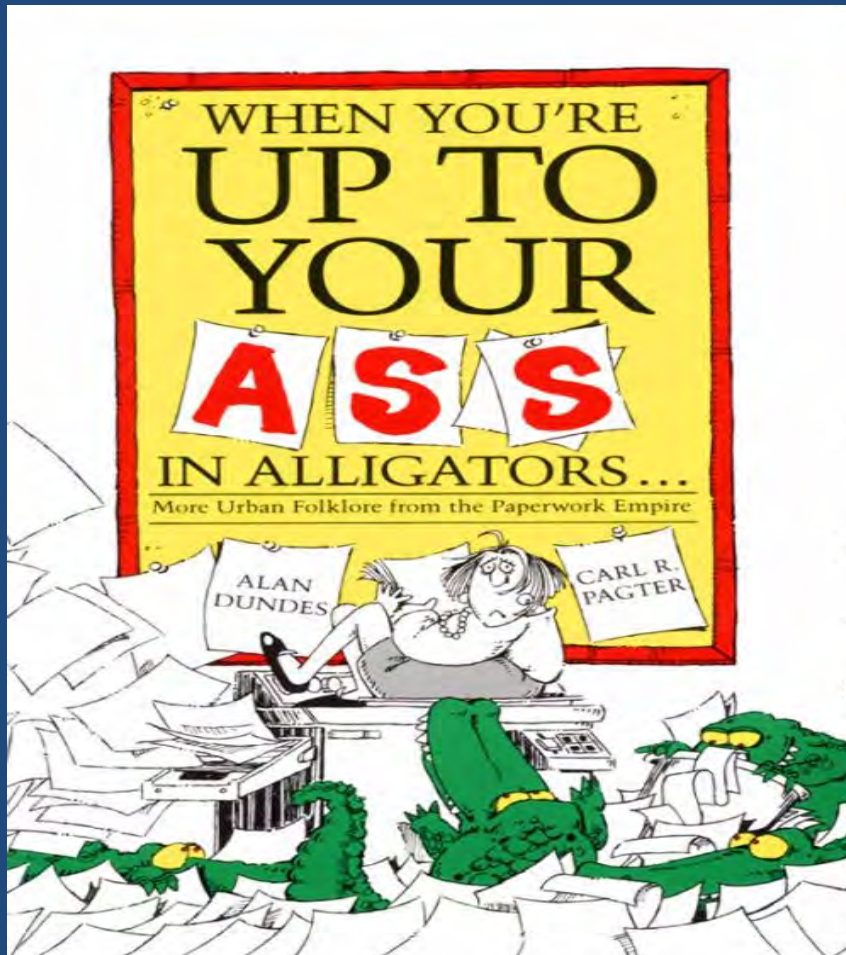
The history of the public land surveys "a record of the American frontier spirit blended with the concept of government for the people."

"The security of title emanating under this system greatly contributed to the rapid settlement of the public lands."

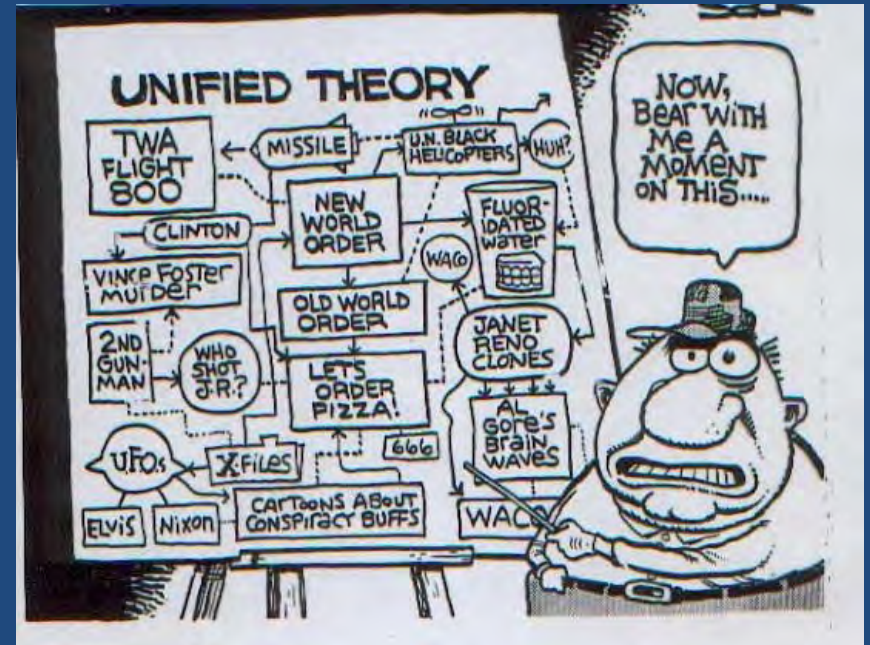
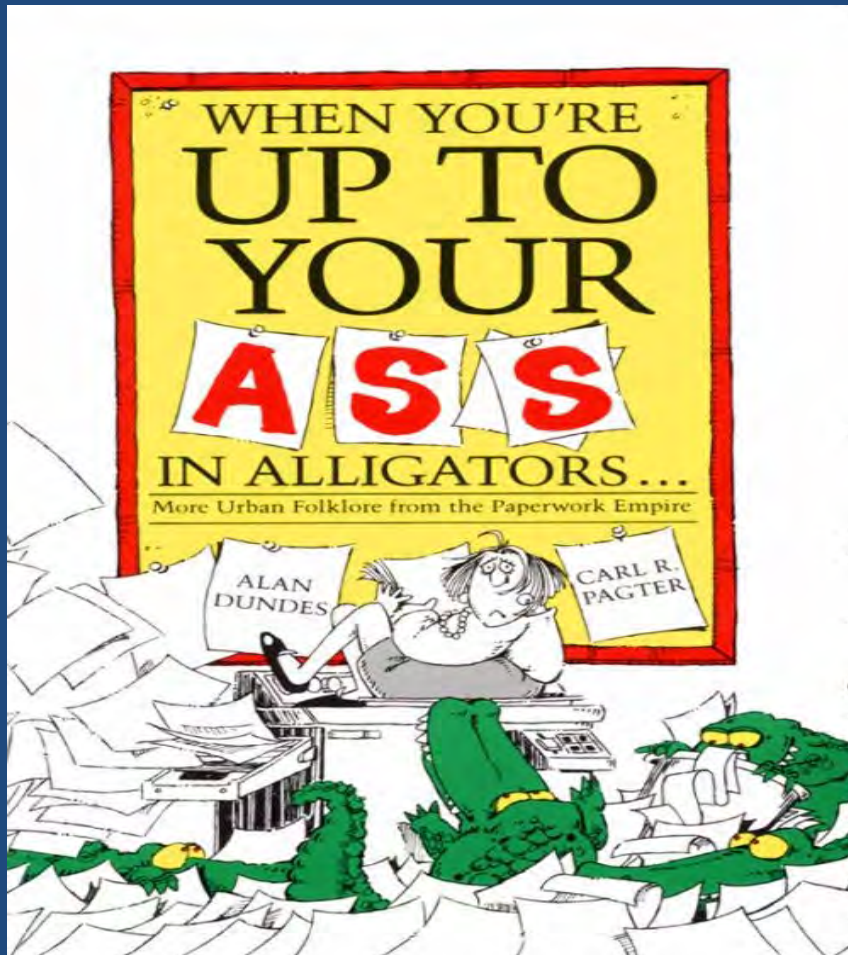
How did the public land survey lines spread?
What geographies can be constructed?

I have developed Intellectual Schizophrenia

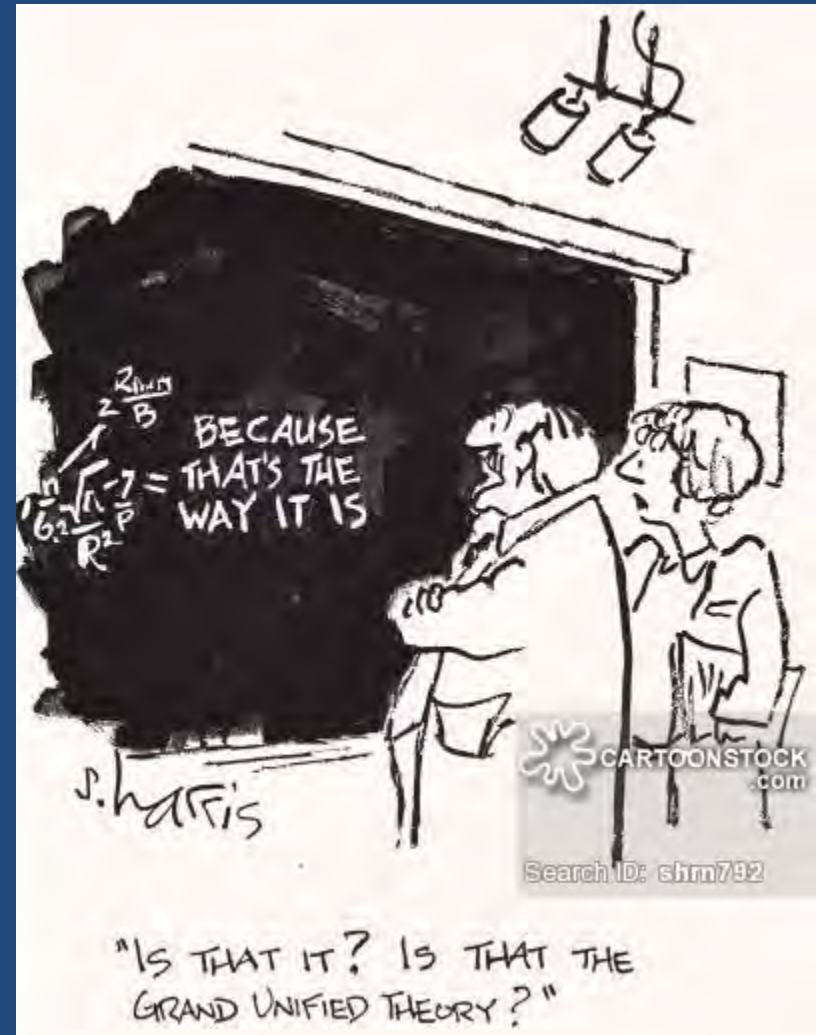
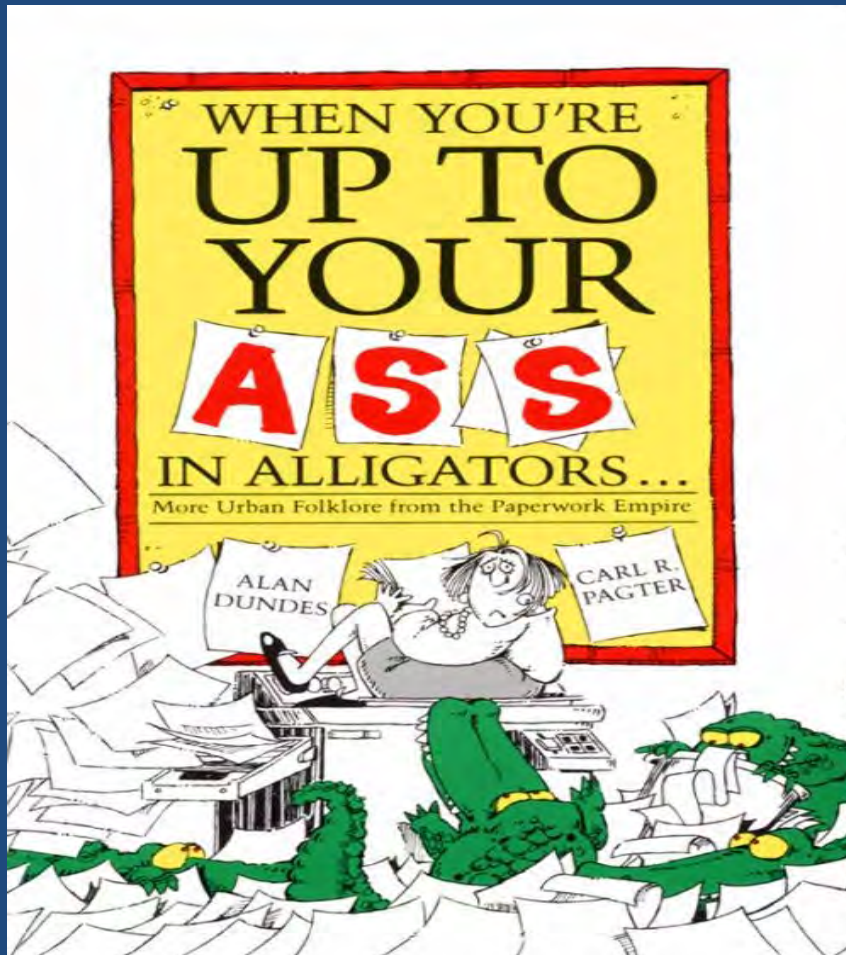
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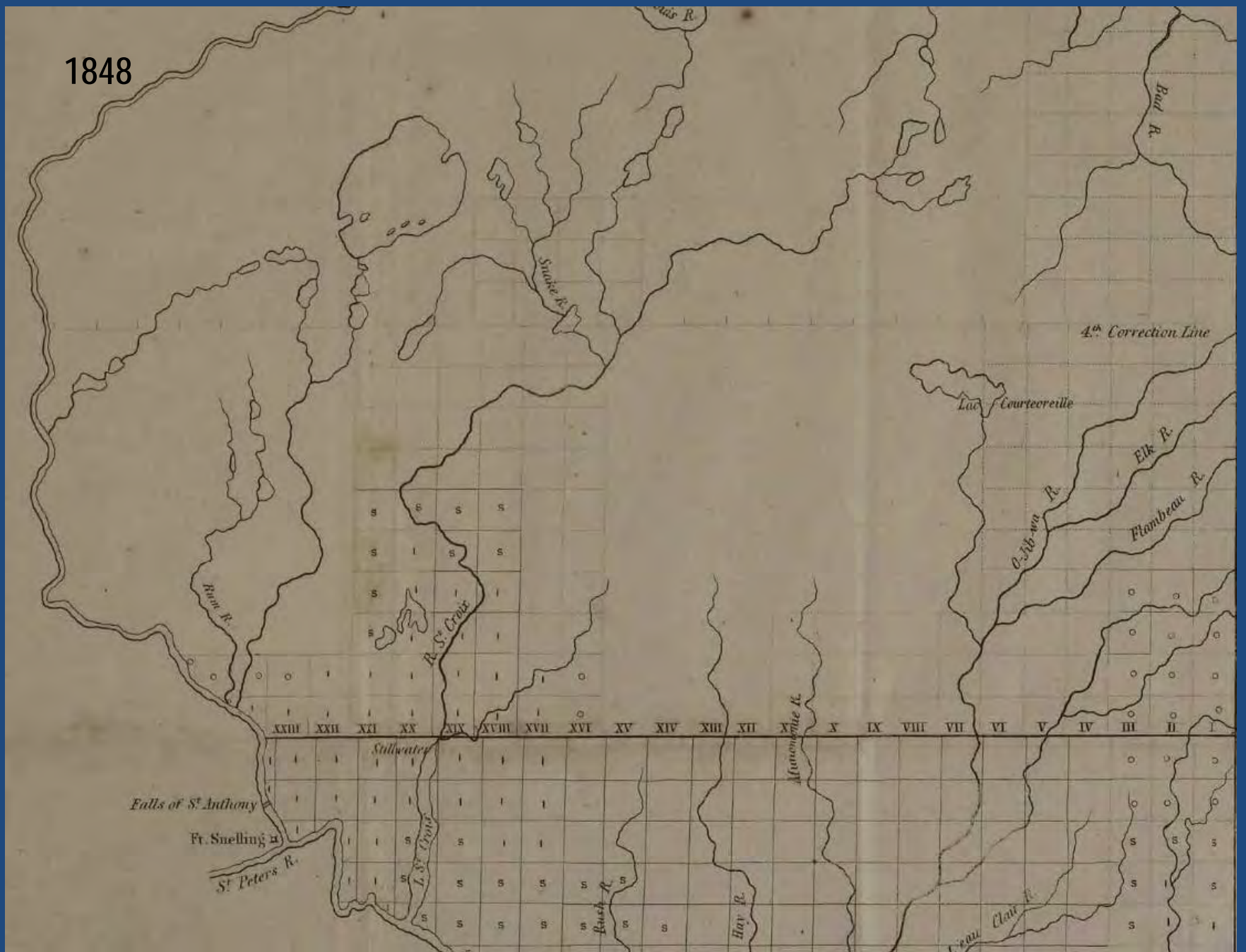
Talk will demonstrate this Schizophrenia

To connect the various spatial scales that have occupied my attention

Provide an overview of the public land surveys in Minnesota 1847-1858

Give the surveys in Minnesota an appropriate context

1848



A

SKETCH
OF THE
PUBLIC SURVEYS
IN
WISCONSIN

Scale 18 miles to an inch.

NOTES.

- Townships that have been surveyed and the field notes platted transcribed and recorded marked c.*
Townships that have been surveyed and the field notes platted but which are not transcribed and recorded marked v.
Townships that have been surveyed and the field notes returned to this office but not platted marked n.
Townships now under survey marked s.
Townships only the exterior lines of which are run marked o.
Townships, the exterior lines of which are now being surveyed are those without a letter.
Surveys recommended are indicated by dotted lines.

My Perspective

Detail necessary to describe and explain the public land surveying process to my primary audience – land surveyors of Minnesota – of limited geographical applicability

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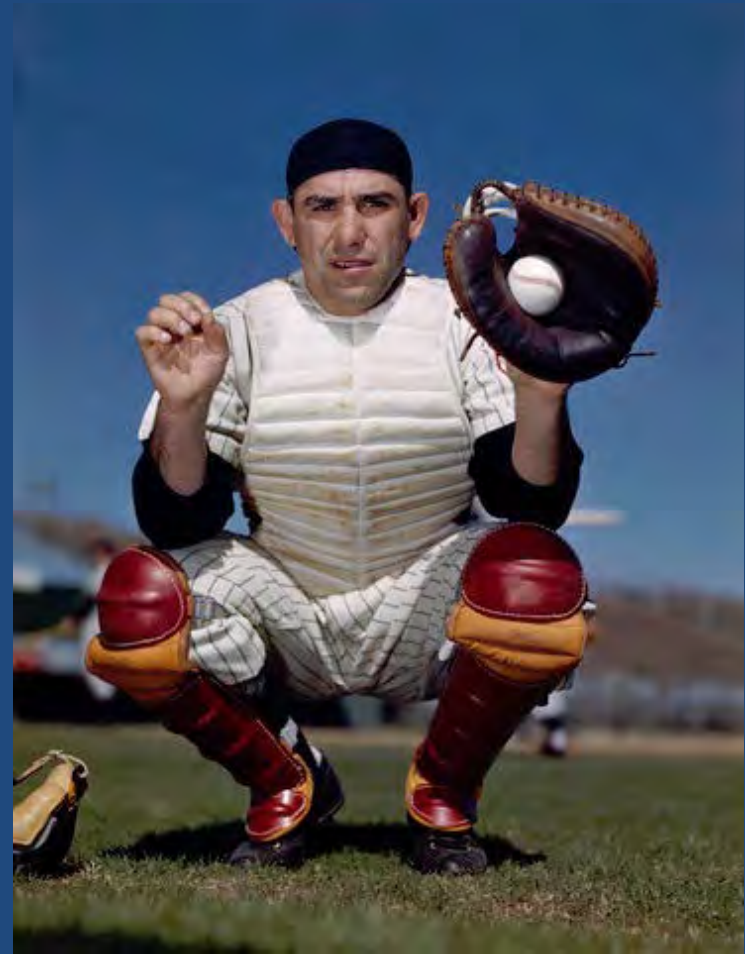
Generalizations to provide an overview of the surveying effort throughout the United States 1785-1925 to non-surveyors

- many of whom take the surveying efforts for granted
- many of whom are only interested in the outcomes of the surveys
- some of which is useful to the surveyor

A Text

Three amateur baseball umpires were discussing their philosophy

- The lawyer said, "I call 'em as they are"
- The geographer said, "I call 'em as I see 'em"
- The surveyor said, "They ain't nothing till I call 'em"



Uncomfortable “Truths”

The surveys spread across the lands owned by the United States expediently

Some characteristics of the surveys makes no geographical sense today

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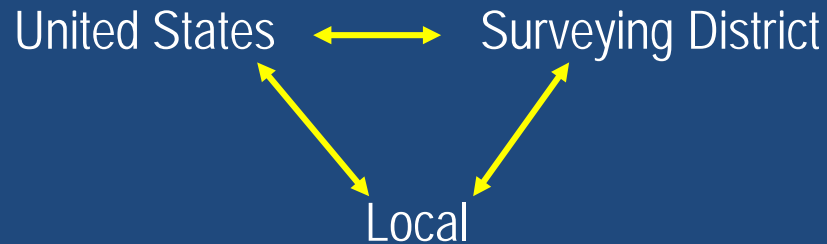
Concatenating geographies of the public land surveys in the United States

Uncomfortable “Truths”

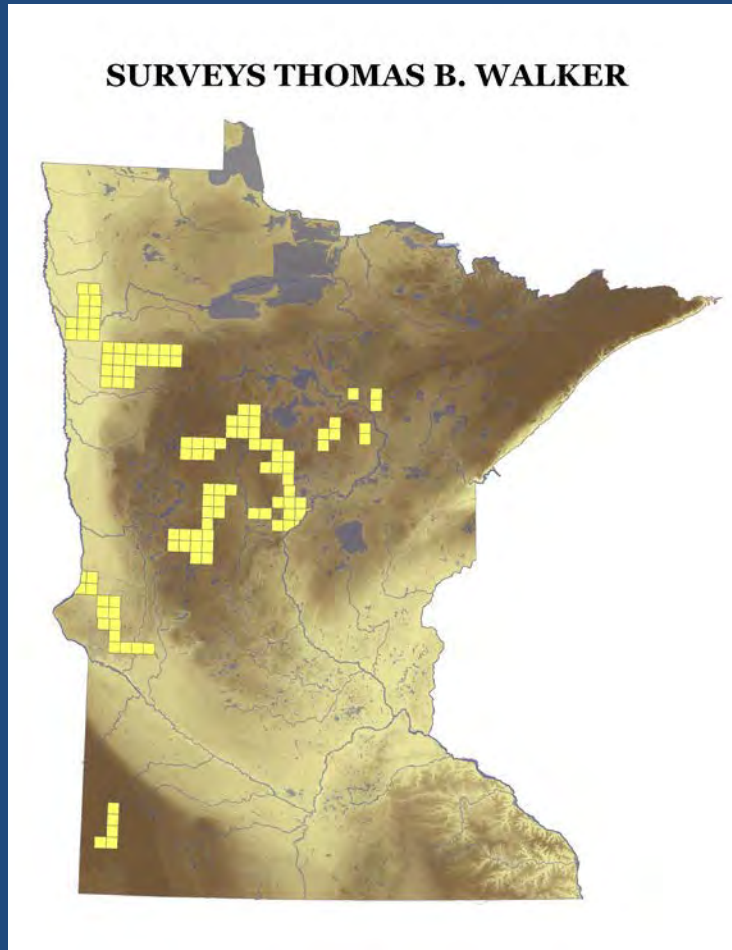
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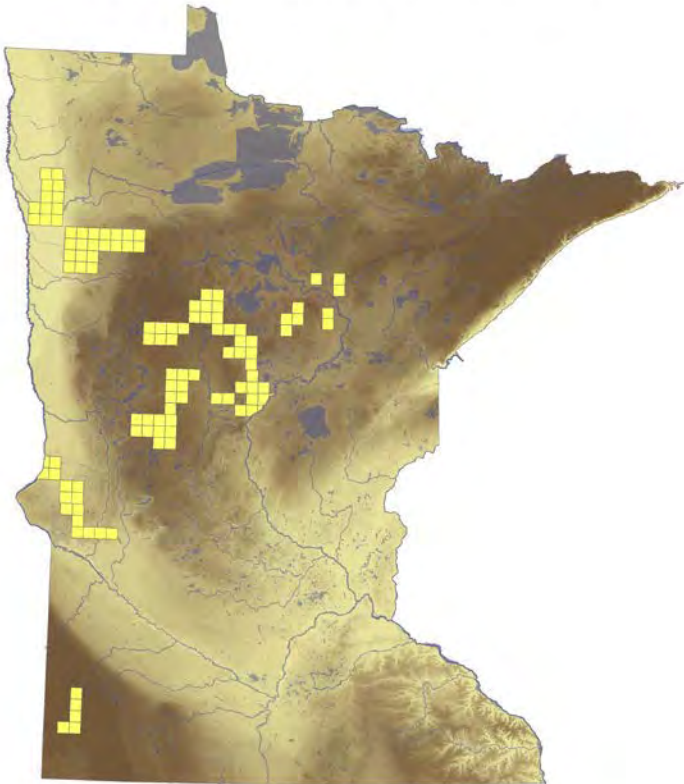
Detail



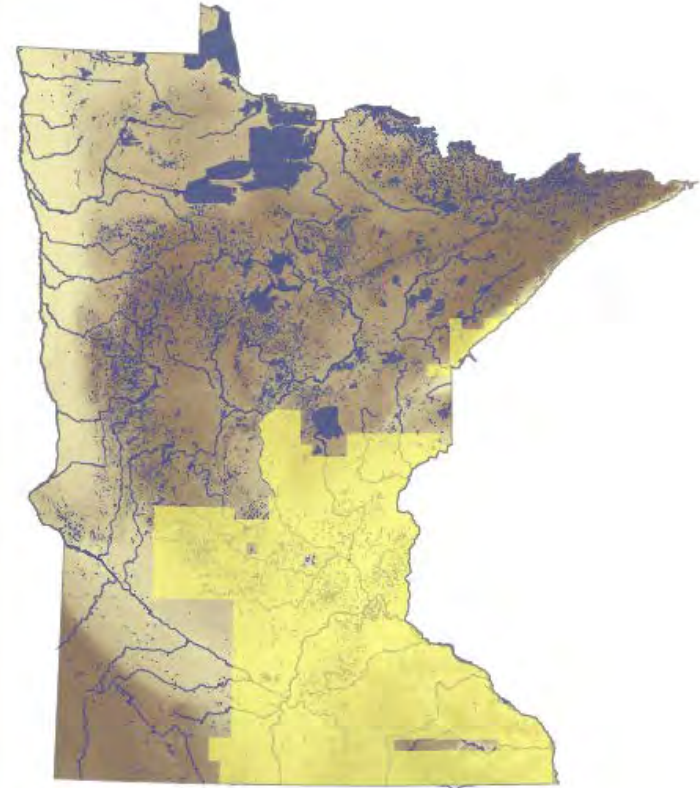
How did Walker carry out his surveys?

Detail

SURVEYS THOMAS B. WALKER

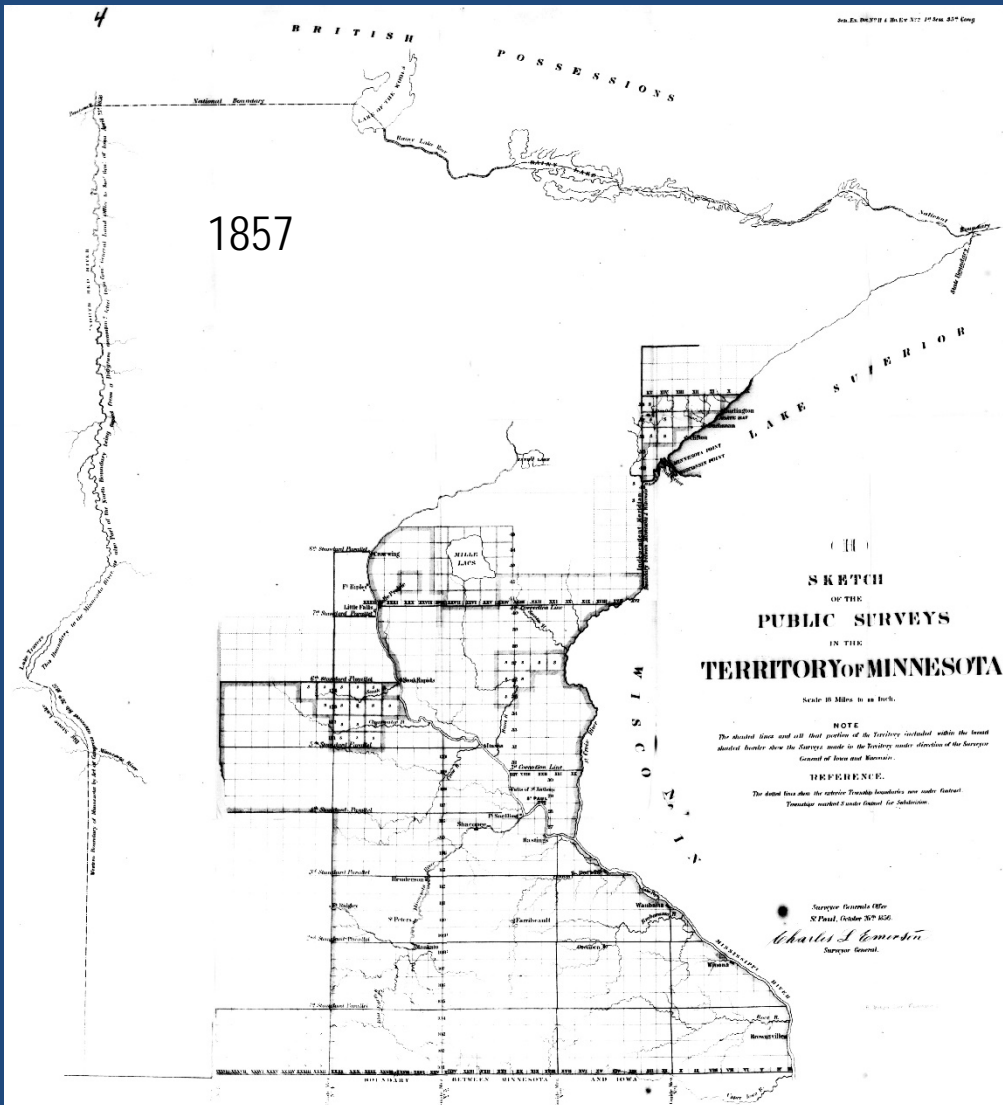


How did Walker carry out his surveys?



Area surveyed 1847-1857

Detail





RESEARCH

2008-05

An Inventory of the
Public Land Survey Records for Minnesota:
The Special Instructions



CENTER FOR
TRANSPORTATION STUDIES
UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

R E S E A R C H R E P O R T

The Public Land Survey Records in Minnesota: An Inventory
and Description of the Deputy Surveyor Contracts in the
Minnesota Historical Society Collections

UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

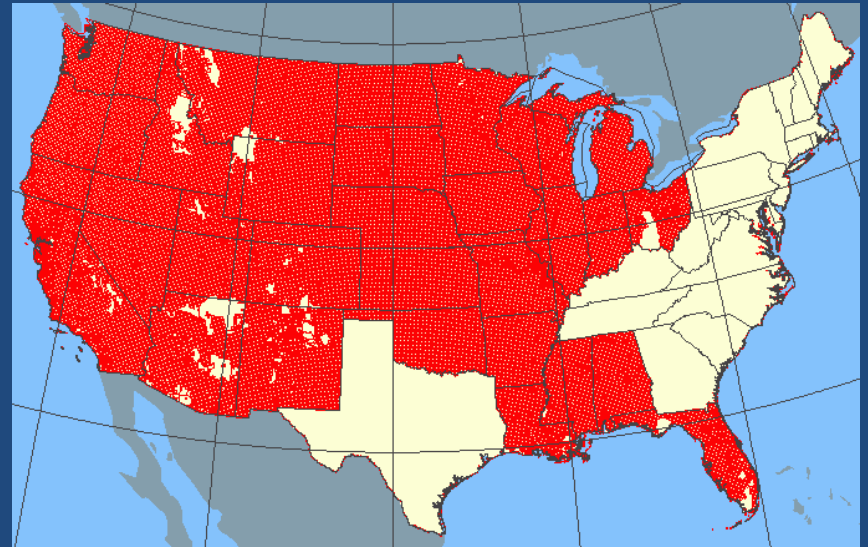


Reconciling the Public Land Surveying Records in Minnesota

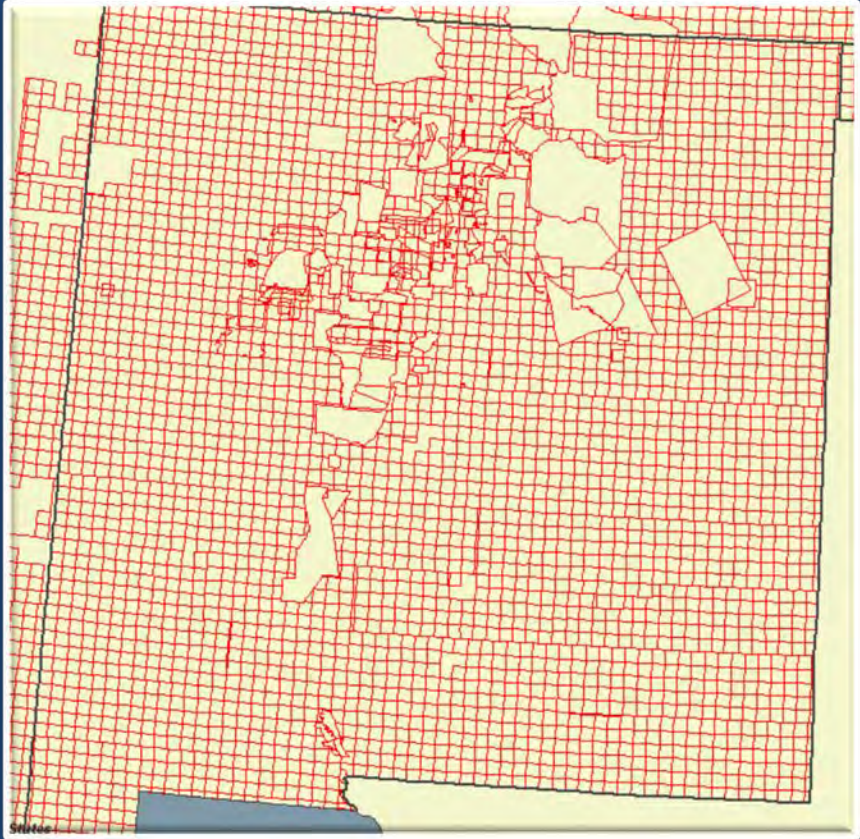
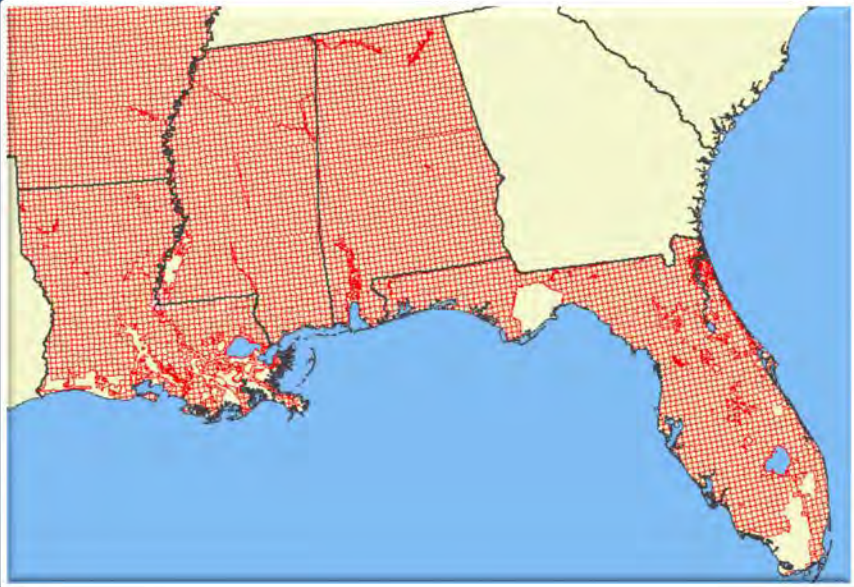
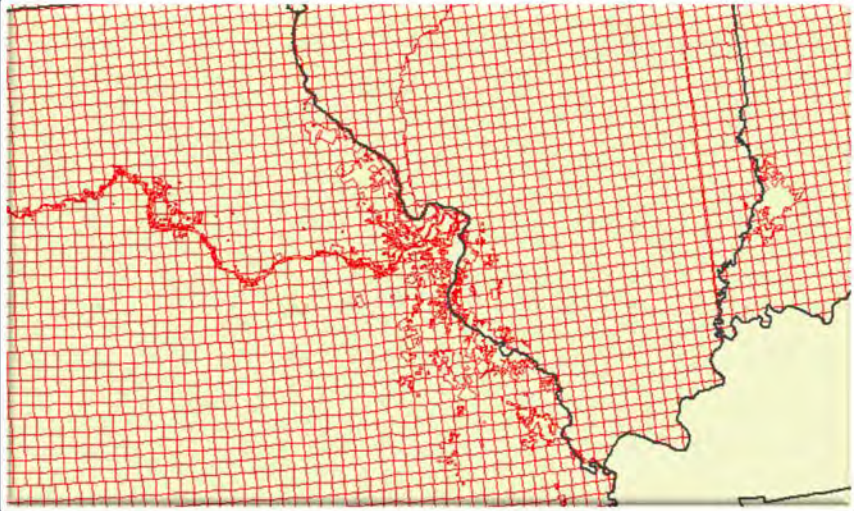
Final Report

Generalizations – Historical Geography of the Rectangular Land Surveys

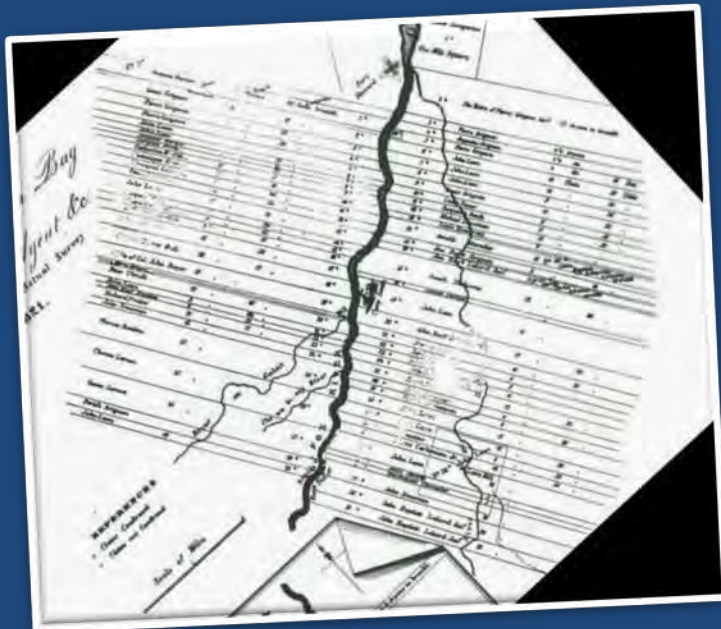
How the survey lines spread across the United States?



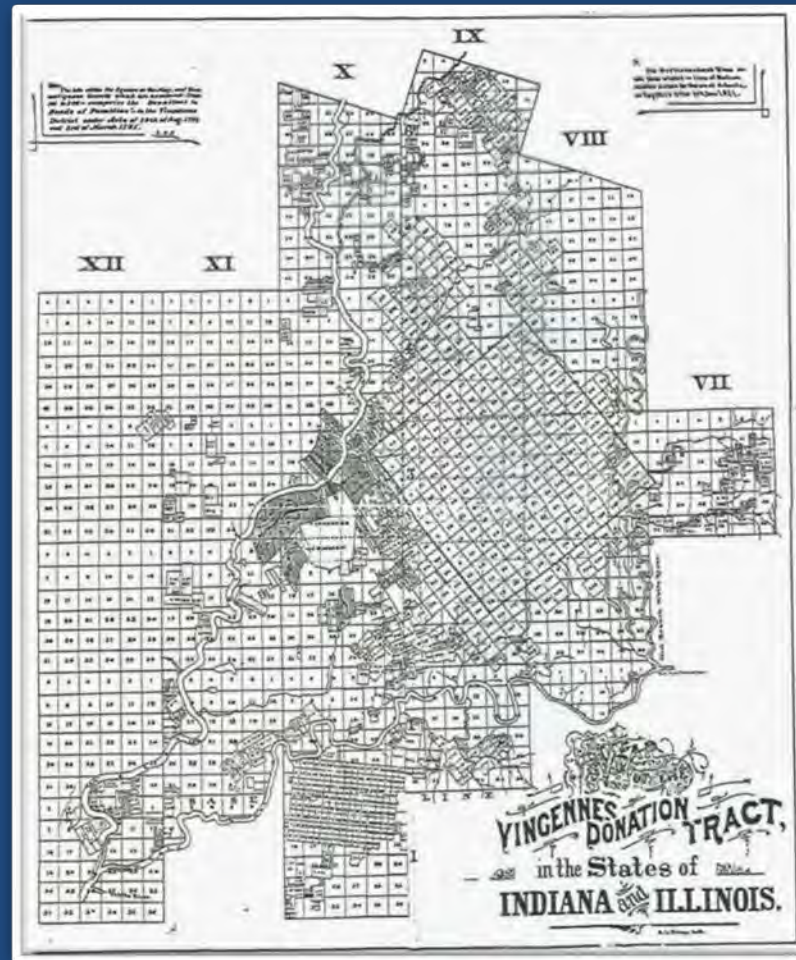
Gaps in the Net



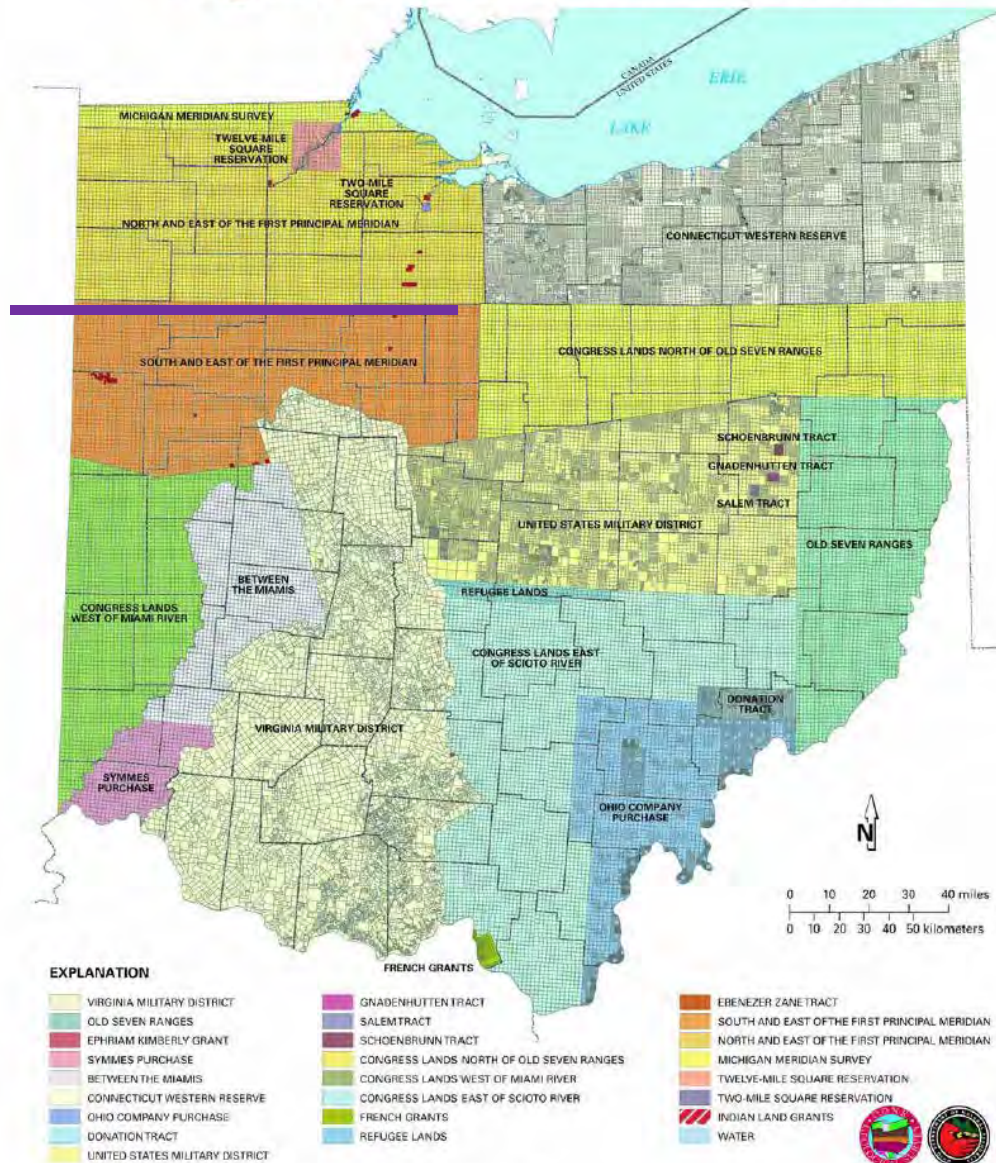
Green Bay



Private Land Claims



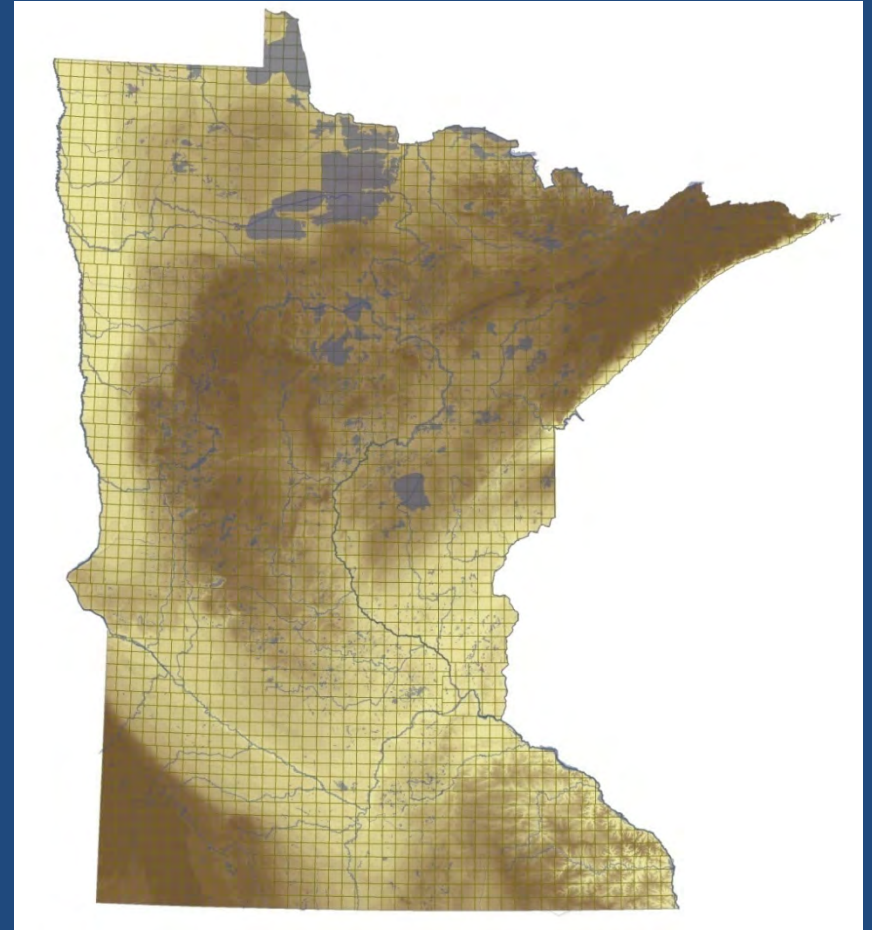
Original Land Subdivisions of Ohio



From *Original Land Subdivisions of Ohio: Ohio Division of Geological Survey*, compiled by James McDonald, James W. Wright, Christian D. Steck, Lawrence H. Wickstrom, Brian D. Gara, and Lap Van Nguyen. 2003. MG-2. 1:500,000 scale, 1 plate and GIS files.

Generalizations – Historical Geography of the Rectangular Land Surveys

How the survey lines spread across Minnesota?



The modern relevance of the rectangular survey lines and points (corner monuments) stems from their historical relevance

Continuing Relevance of the Points and Lines

Land Act of February 11, 1805 (2 Stat. 313)

All the corners marked in the surveys, returned by the surveyor-general ...shall be established as the proper corners, of the sections, or subdivisions of sections, which they were intended to designate

The boundary lines, actually run and marked in the surveys returned by the surveyor-general ...shall be established as the proper boundary lines of the sections, or subdivisions, for which they were intended

The Rectangular Land Surveys were key to the privatization of the lands over which the United States acquired jurisdiction



Federal Policy

The policy rested on two features

- A. The creation and development of a **land system** in which the federal government
- created land parcels, and
 - created landowners, and
 - conveyed titles to individuals, corporations, and states

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- A. The creation and development of a **land system** in which the federal government
 - created land parcels, and
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- B. The evolution and spread of a **legal system** – a legislature, executive and judiciary – creating jurisdictions – providing the guarantees for landownership to exist

Land System

Native American Land Cessions



Public Land Surveys



Public Land Conveyances



Landowners 1848

Legal System

Northwest Territory



Michigan Territory



Wisconsin Territory

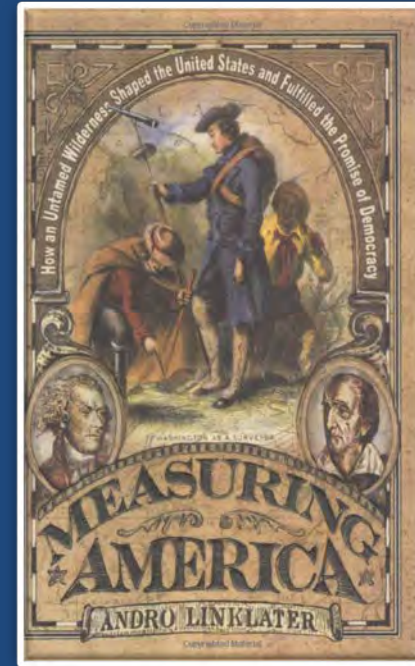


Minnesota Territory 1849



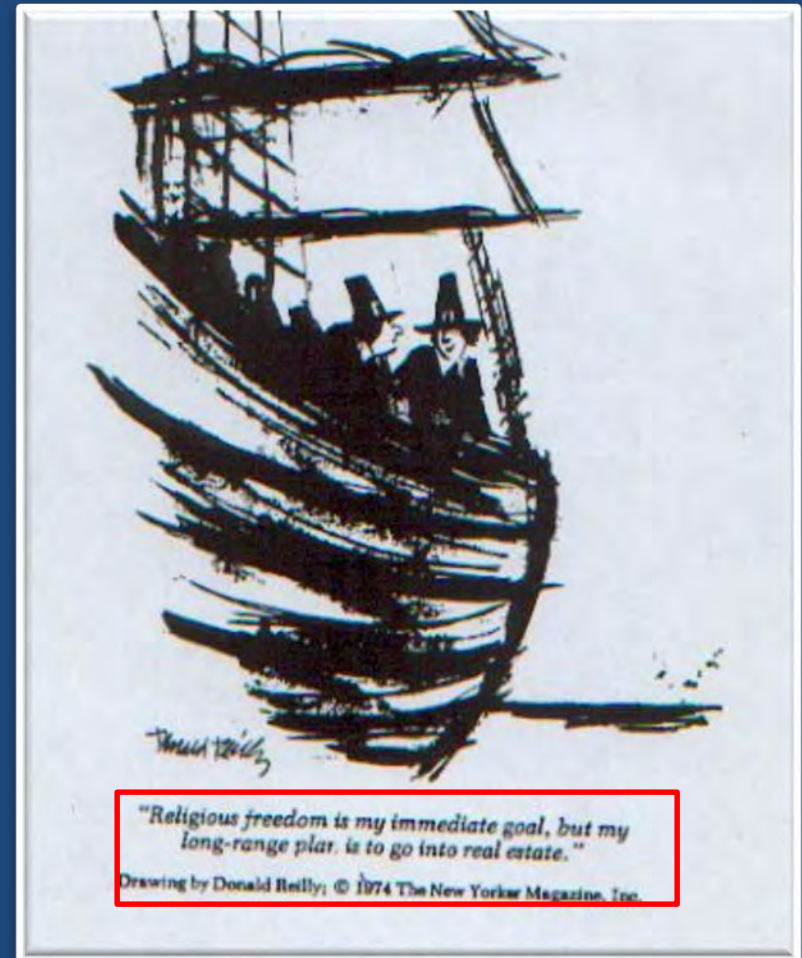
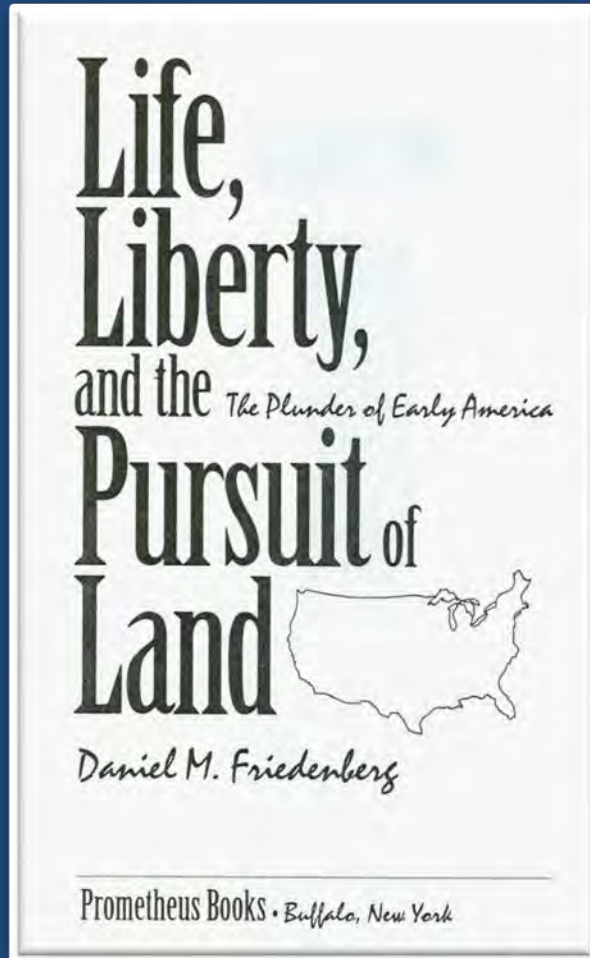
Landowners in Minnesota

“What drew people from the eastern states and from around the world was the desire for the soil magically transformed from wilderness to property by the act of measurement and mapping”



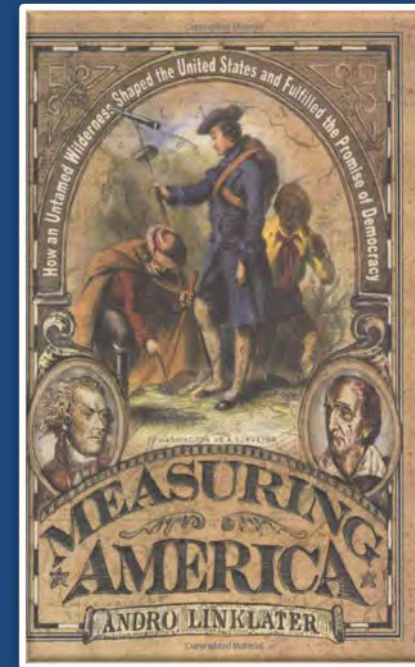
”

Land – the First and Last Frontier

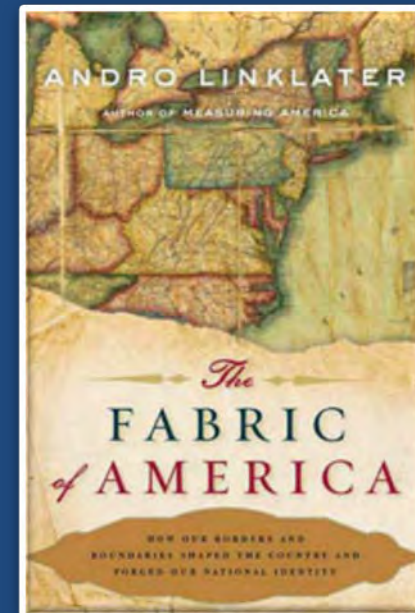


"Religious freedom is my immediate goal, but my long-range plan is to into real estate"

“What drew people from the eastern states and from around the world was the desire for the soil magically transformed from wilderness to property by the act of measurement and mapping”



“The fact that the grid could ... subdivide a continent into minute, graph-paper squares might appear to be simply a triumph of the mathematician’s art, but the ease with which it made land available to anyone who went west in search of it had an almost incalculable influence on the development of the American psyche and the American economy”



Two Basic Ordinances

The Land Ordinance, 1785

Established two general principles

- Lands north and west of the River Ohio ceded by Native Americans would be subdivided in an orderly manner
- The United States would convey title to these lands to individuals and corporations



Thomas Jefferson (Library of Congress)

Two Basic Ordinances

The Northwest Ordinance, 1787



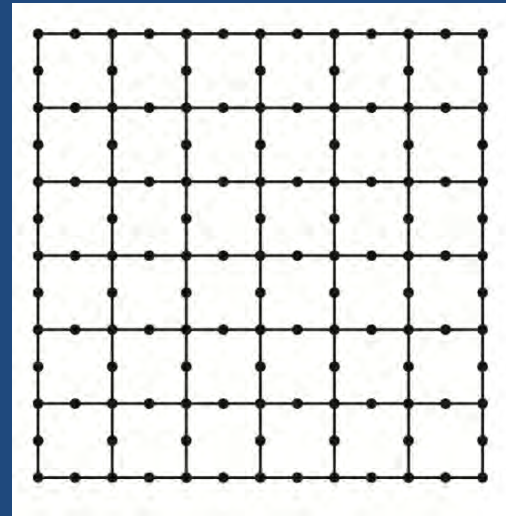
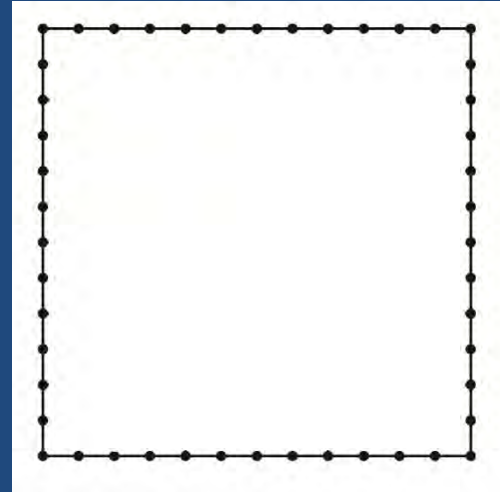
Territorial evolution of the United States
(Wikipedia)

- Jurisdiction over individuals and title to lands in the Northwest Territory would be vested in a national government
- Provided individuals who settled in the Territory with a government, hence some guarantee of their rights
- Established how the Northwest Territory would be divided – into sovereign states

The Rectangular Land Surveys (in Minnesota)

Established legal descriptions, creating places from space

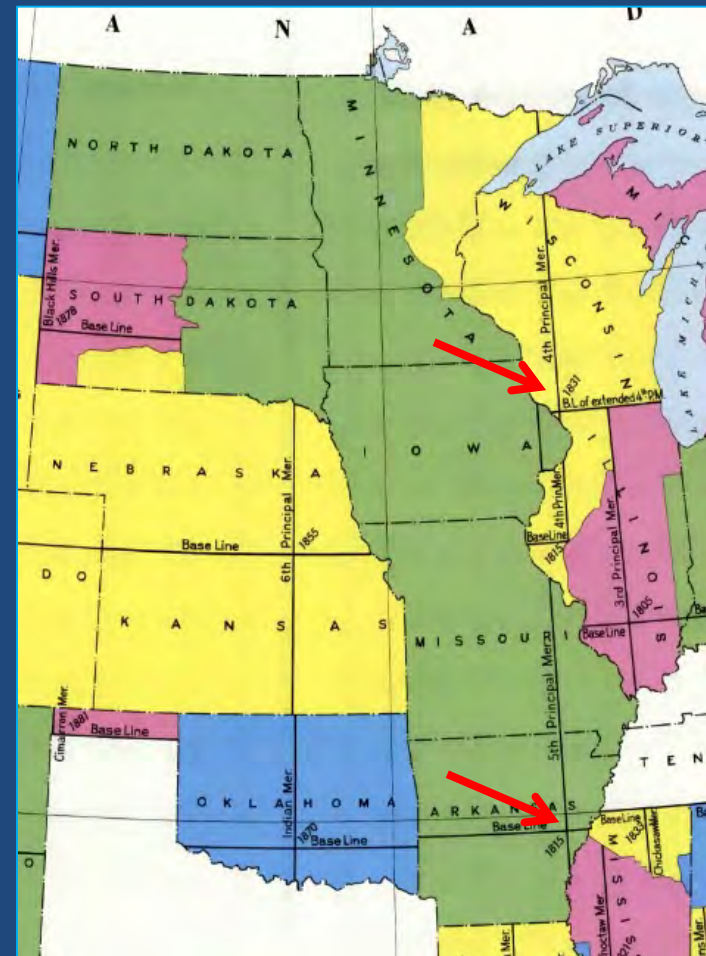
- established **boundaries** of a parcel of land to be privatized
 - Lines spaced every mile
 - Monuments spaced every $\frac{1}{2}$ mile
 - Lines protracted between $\frac{1}{4}$ section corners



The Rectangular Land Surveys

Established legal descriptions, creating places from space

- established the **location** of a parcel of land to be privatized



The Rectangular Land Surveys

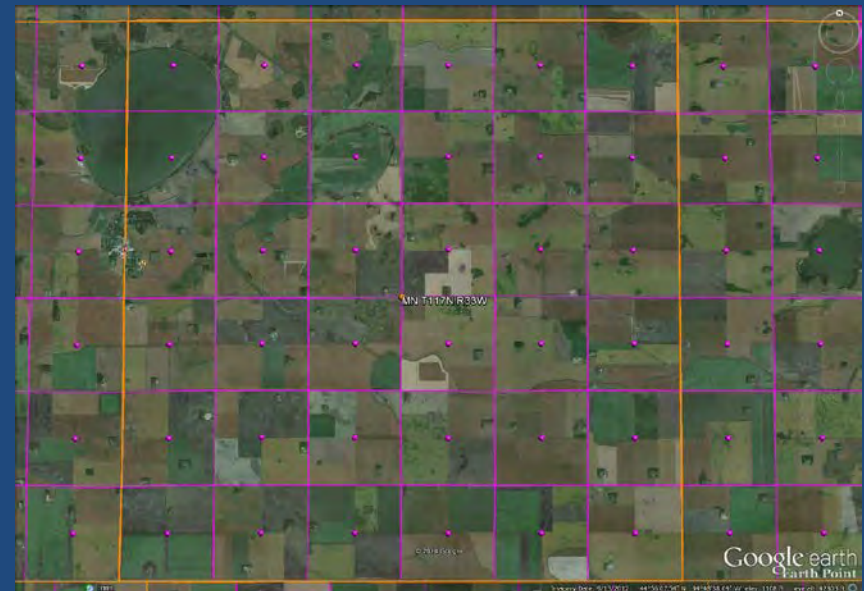
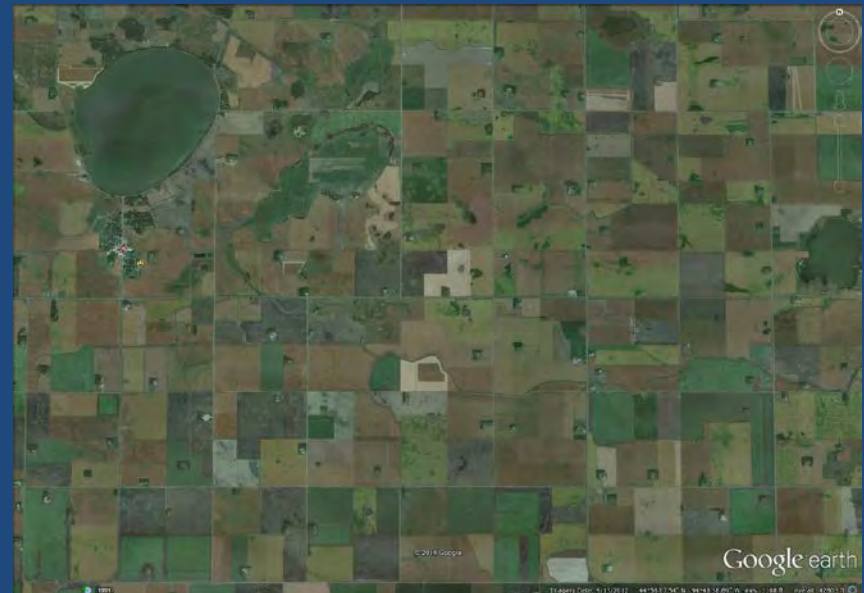
Transformed "formless wilderness into a remarkable national geometry of squares and rectangles"



The Rectangular Land Surveys

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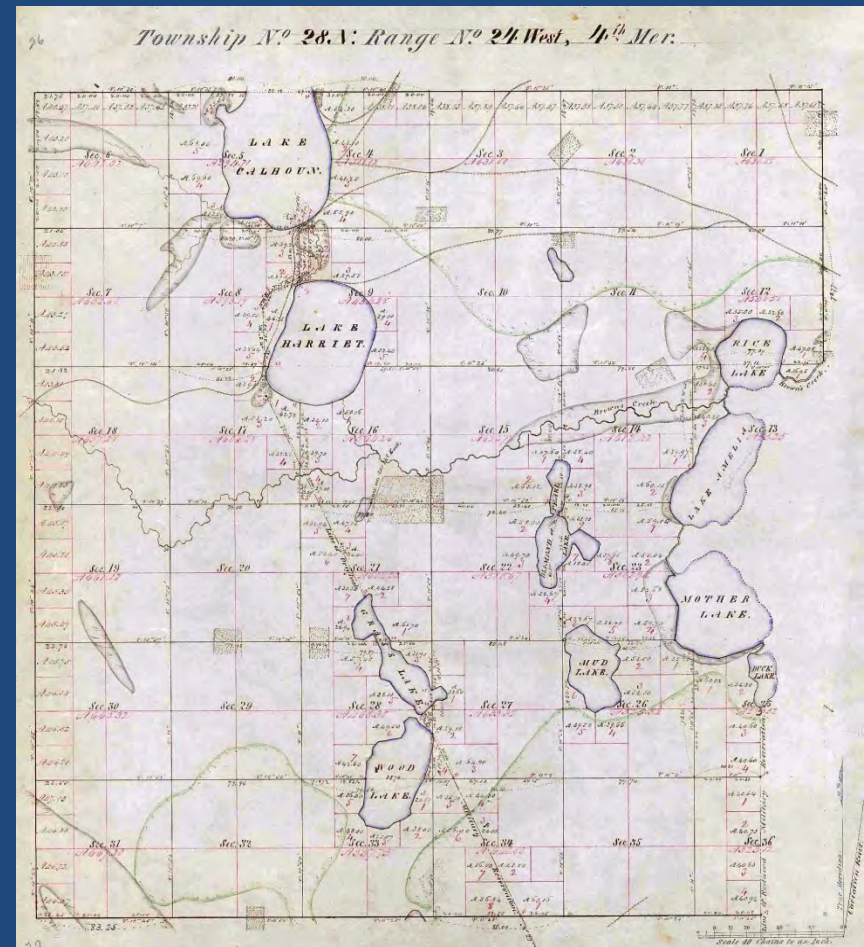
Imposed a particular spatial frame of reference on virtually all human activities in the United States – it formed part of a democratizing effort (Linklater, Measuring America)



The Rectangular Land Surveys

Provided

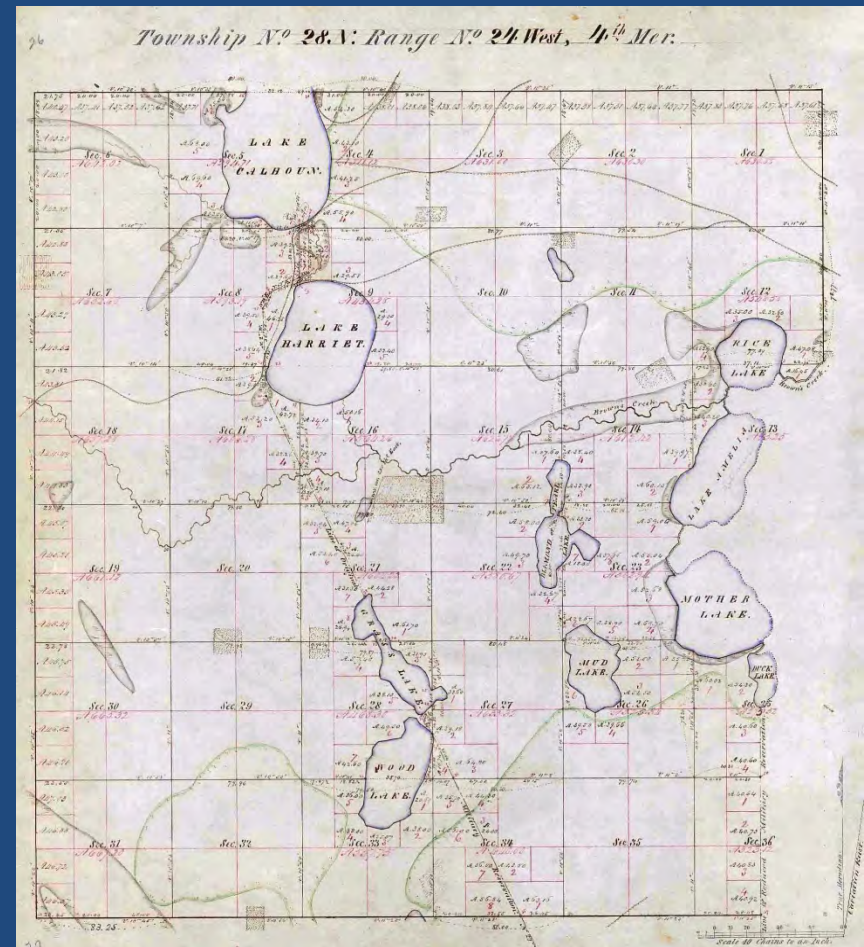
- the first large scale maps of the United States 1:126,720
- a graphical representation of what the deputies did



The Rectangular Land Surveys

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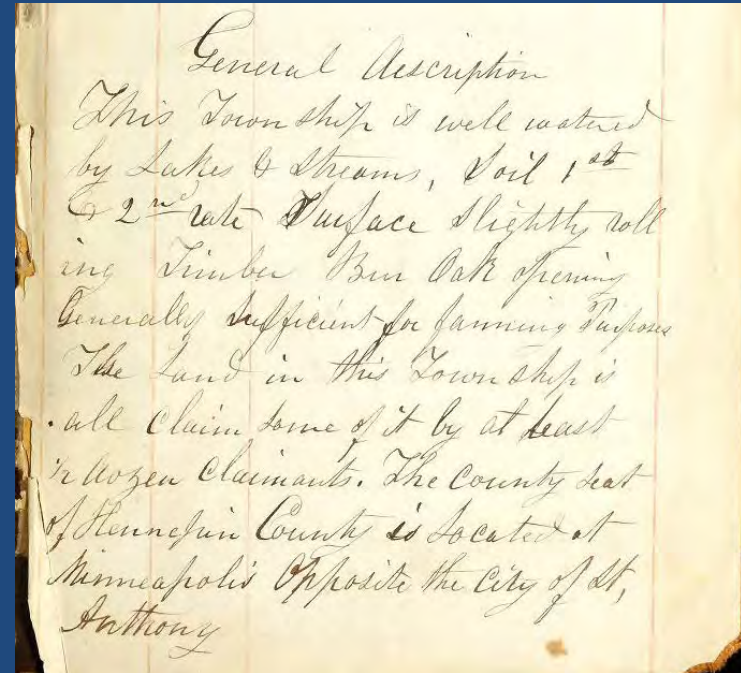
- the first large scale maps of the United States 1:126,720
- a graphical representation of what the deputies did
- an advertisement for the parcels depicted



The Rectangular Land Surveys

Provided

- A written inventory of those surface features thought important to prospective landowners



Objects and data to be embraced by your field notes. You are to enter in their proper places in the field notes of your survey, a particular description and the exact location of the following objects" (1846 instructions)

SUMMARY of objects and data required to be noted:
(1851 instructions)

A Relative Locational System

Throughout the United States;

- Each initial point – intersection of a Principal Meridian and its Baseline – somewhat arbitrary

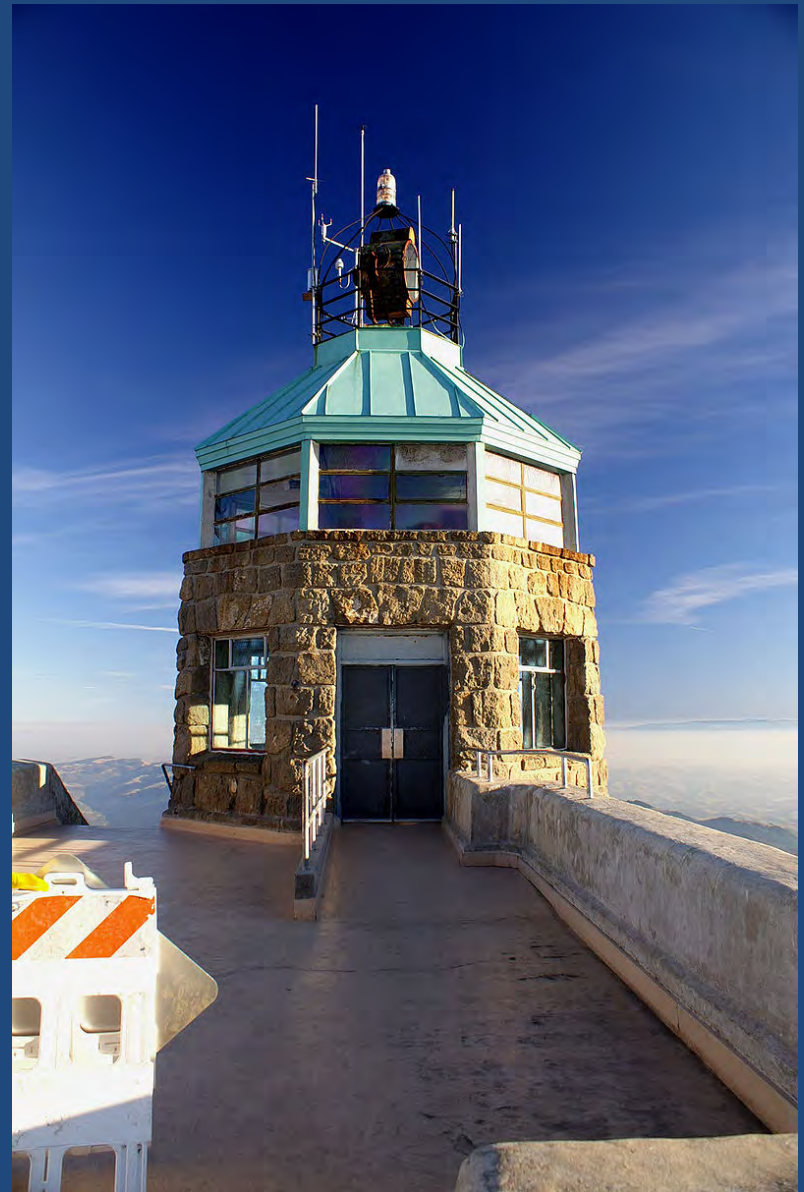
Meridian	Longitude	Associated Baseline	Latitude	Adopted
First principal	84°48'11"W		40°59'22"N	1819 ^[2]
Second principal	86°27'21"W		38°28'14"N	1805 ^[2]
Third principal	89°08'54"W	Centralia	38°28'27"N	1805 ^[2]
Fourth principal	90°27'11"W	Beardstown	40°00'50"N	1815 ^[2]
Fourth principal (extended)	90°25'37"W	Illinois–Wisconsin border	42°30'27"N	1831 ^[2]
Fifth principal	91°03'07"W		34°38'45"N	1815 ^[3]

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Copper River	145°18'37"W		61°49'04"N	1905 ^[8]
Fairbanks	147°38'25.949"W		64°51'50.048"N	1910 ^[8]
Gila and Salt River	112°18'19"W		33°22'38"N	1865 ^[9]
Humboldt	124°07'10"W		40°25'02"N	1853 ^[10]
Huntsville	86°34'16"W		34°59'27"N	1807 ^[6]
Indian	97°14'49"W		34°29'32"N	1870
Kateel River	158°45'31.014"W		65°26'16.374"N	1956



A Relative Locational System

In each township;

- Each half-mile line segment begins and ends at a corner monument

A Relative Locational System

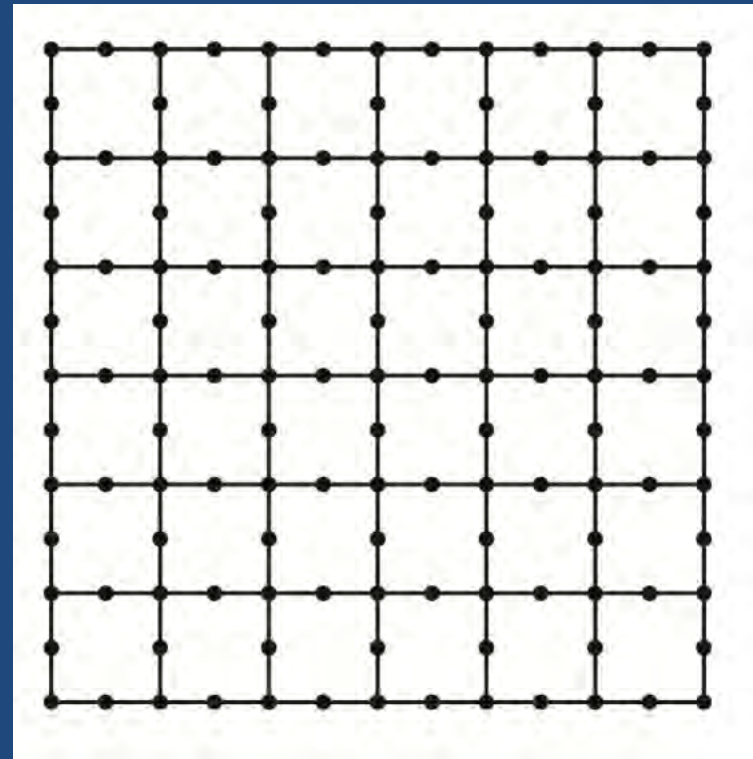
In each township;

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- Each corner monument – quarter section, section, or township – is a certain distance in a certain direction from another point

A Relative Locational System

In each township;

- Each half-mile line segment begins and ends at a corner monument
- Each corner monument – quarter section, section, or township – is a certain distance in a certain direction from another point
- P.S. It's really a regular metes and bounds system



“The segments of all rectangular survey lines, ran from an established point in a certain direction for a certain distance.
The ending point of a line segment was a previously established corner point, an existing boundary line, or a water course.
Any segment of a line was therefore relative to other segments of that, and other, lines.
The notes for a particular line segment must be placed in context, a point I have raised several times in previous articles, most explicitly in the two articles describing the rectangular surveys lines in Carver County.”

(Opening the Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota: Part 3 16)

“The sequence in which the line segments were run and the corners established by individual deputies, each operating under instructions contained in their contracts, is a neglected feature of the historical geography of the rectangular land surveys in Minnesota.

Anyone interested in the lines and corners in an area, or even a particular line segment or corner, should be aware of the sequence in which the lines were run and the corners monumented.”

(The Public Land Survey Lines in Carver County; Township Exteriors 19)

A National Context

The public land surveys were carried out in separate localities

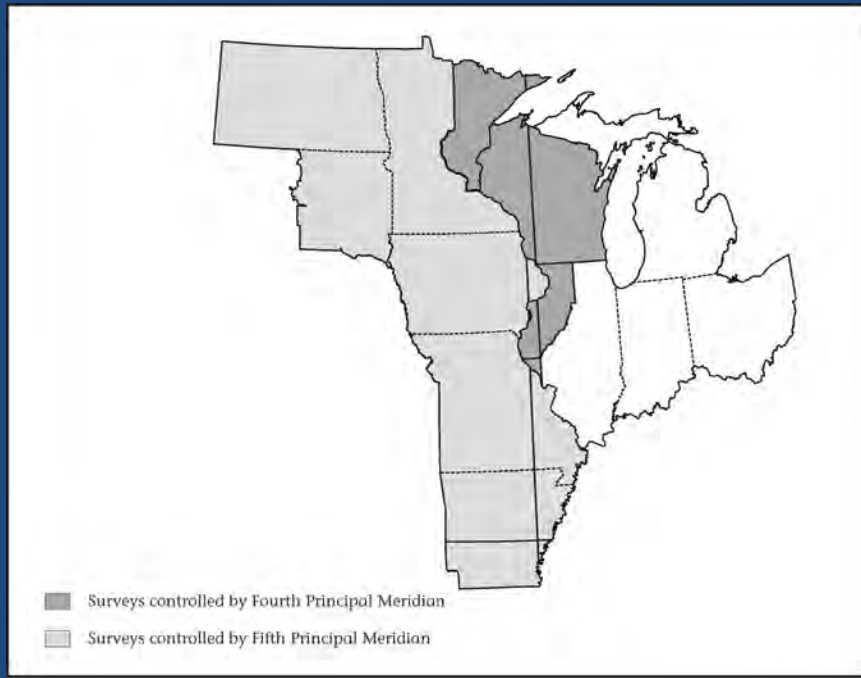


A Spatial Framework

Two characteristics allowed the surveys to be carried in widely separated localities but ensured the lines would form a national geometric net

1. **A technical element – a locational system**, independent of the other details of the rectangular net that provided basic surveying and locational control – *established when necessary*

Characteristics of all Principal Meridians and Baselines

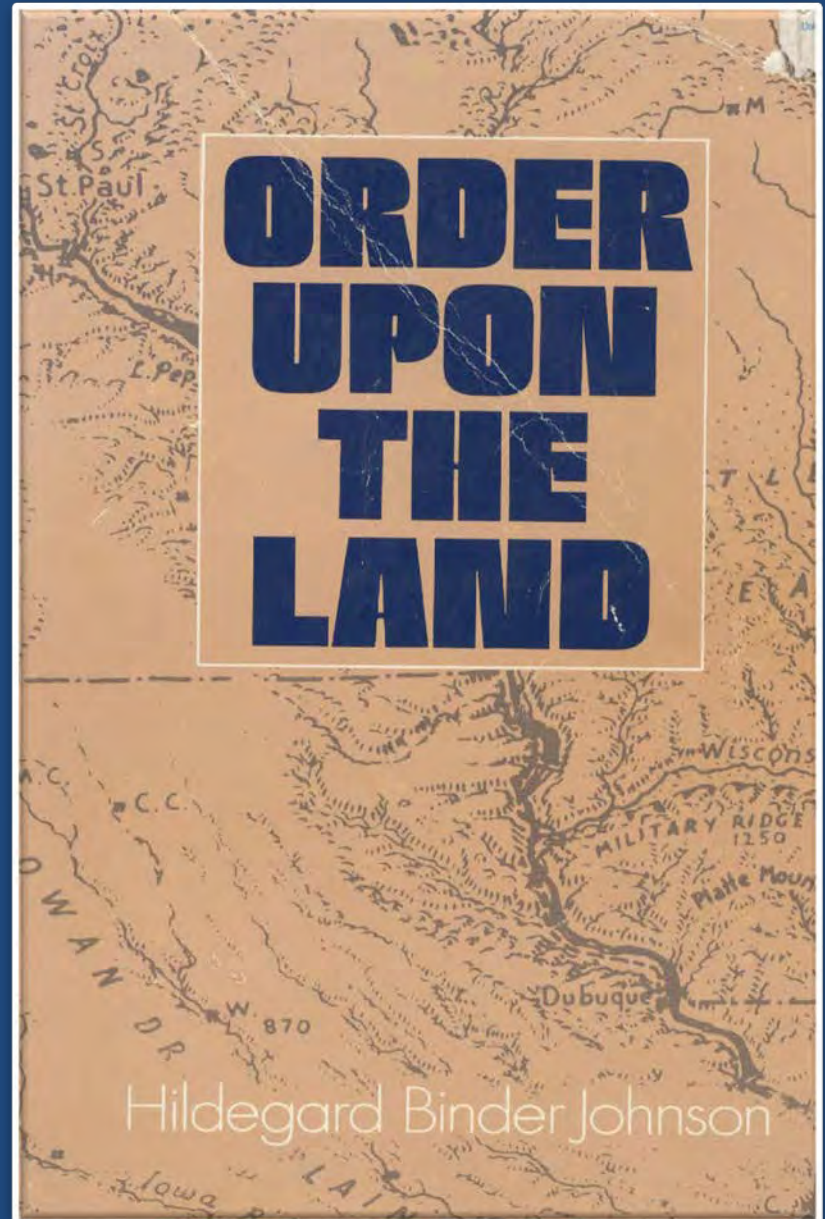


The Principal Meridian and its associated Baseline were independent of each other

- Where did the lines start and finish?
- What direction was each run?
- When was each run?
- How was each run?
- Where did they intersect?
- What area did they control?
- Where did the lines using particular P.M. and B.L. close?

Why there and not somewhere else?

"the distribution of principal meridians and baselines in the United States reflects **no system** but is the result of historical and geographical forces, such as settlement before the survey(s), westward migration along certain routes, and the cession of Indian lands"



Principal Meridians and Baselines



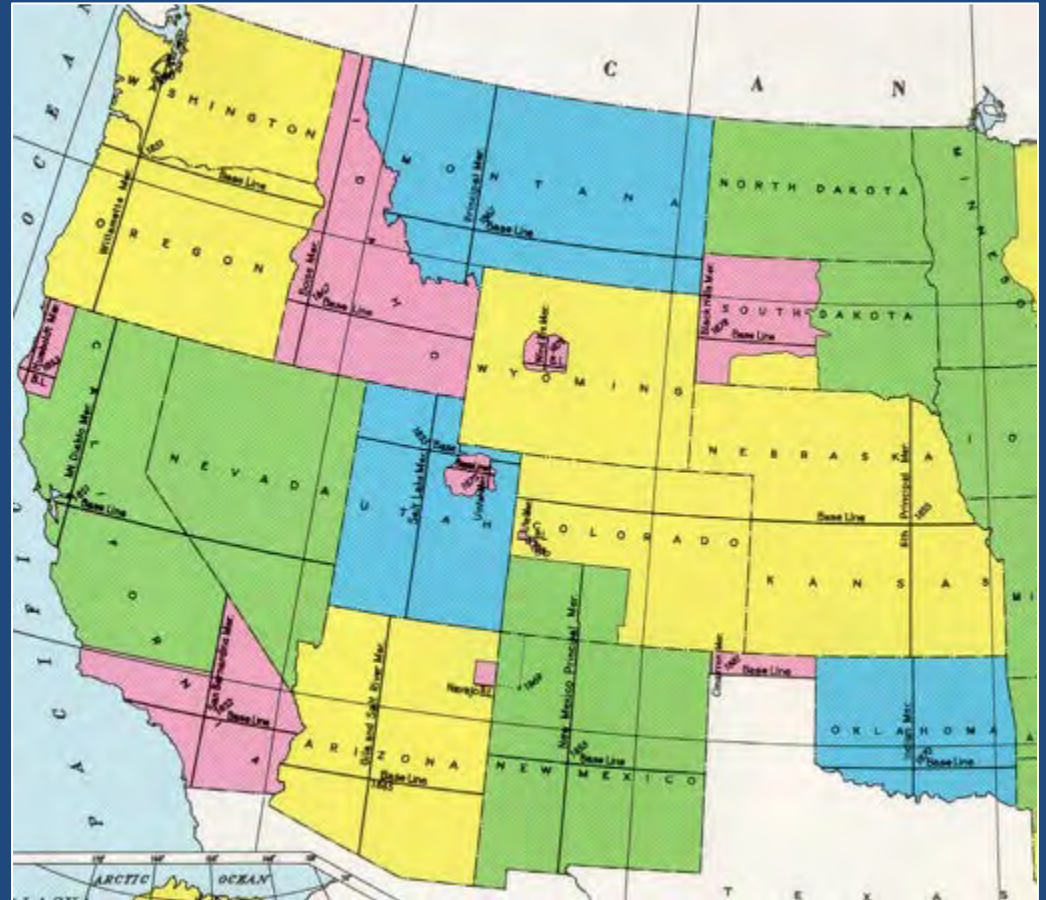
www.flickr.com/photos/caveman_92223/3279909967/

A Spatial Framework

2. **An administrative system** comprising statutorily defined surveying districts and Presidentially appointed surveyors general – **established when necessary**
 - Considerable independence from each other
 - Annual appropriations from Congress
 - Funds apportioned by the Commissioner of the General Land Office to each surveyor general, along with “annual instructions”

A Spatial Framework

Pacific Surveys 1851-1925



A Spatial Framework

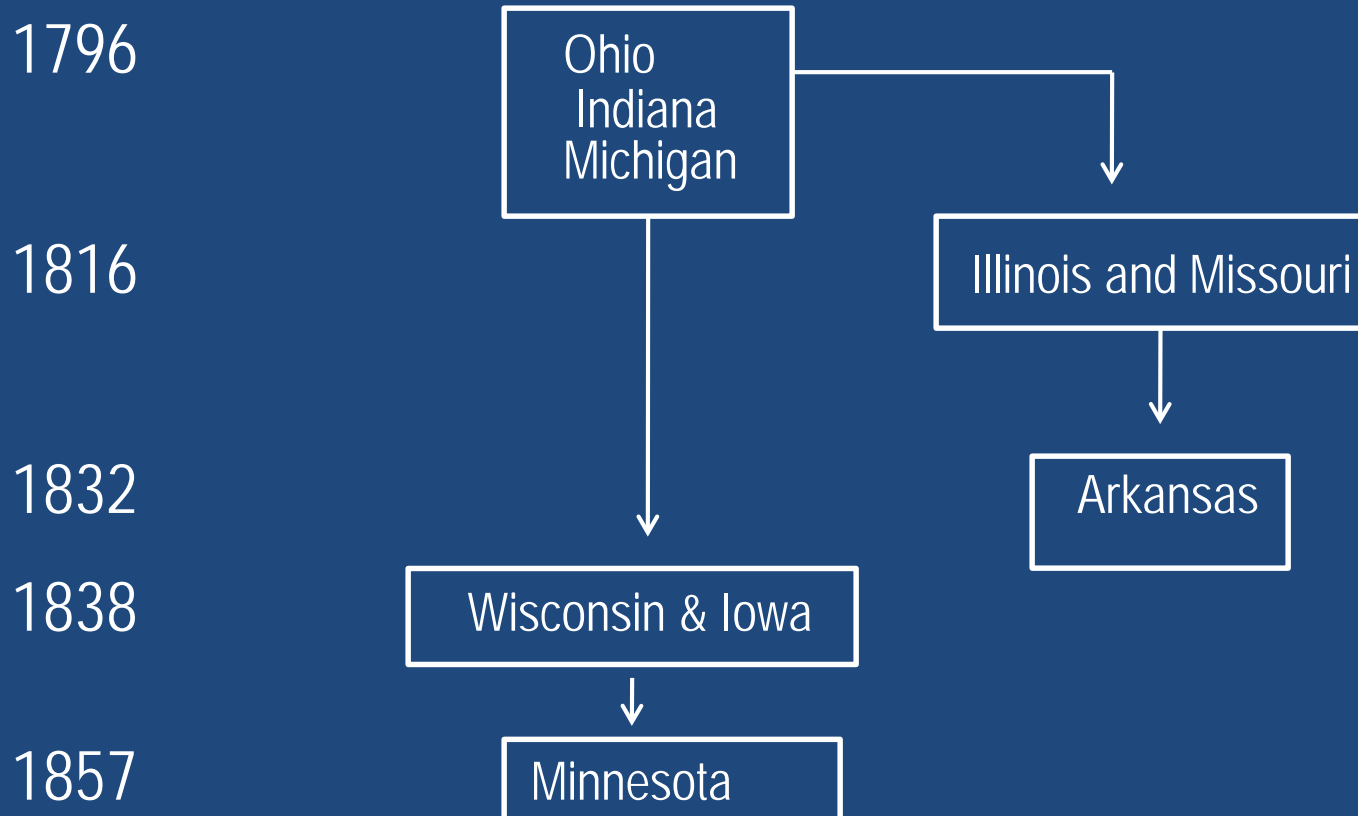
North Atlantic

- Surveyor General of the Northwest (1796-1857)
- Surveyor General of Illinois and Missouri (1803-1863)
- Surveyor General of Arkansas (1832-1859)
- Surveyor General of Wisconsin and Iowa (1838-1866)
- Surveyor General of Minnesota (1857-1908)



North Atlantic Surveys

Related administratively through the Office Surveyor General of the Northwest

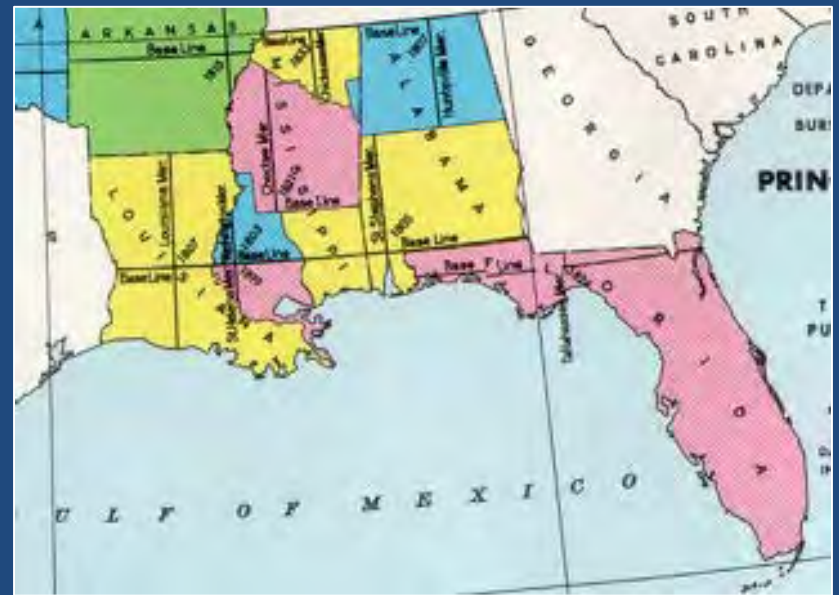


A Spatial Framework

South Atlantic

Surveyor of the Lands South of the State of Tennessee (1803-1849)

- Surveyor General of Alabama (1817-1849)
- Surveyor General of Florida (1824-1908)
- Surveyor General of Louisiana (1831-1909)



A Temporal Framework

Period A. Surveys under the administration of the Secretary of the Treasury

1785-1796. Early efforts under the provisions of the Land Ordinance

1796-1812. Surveyor General and contracted deputies

A Temporal Framework

Period A. Surveys under the administration of the Secretary of the Treasury

1785-1796. Early efforts under the provisions of the Land Ordinance

1796-1812. Surveyor General and contracted deputies

Period B. Surveys under the administration of the General Land Office

1812 – 1836. Autonomous surveyors general – separate instructions

1836 – 1851. General Land Office exerting more control

1851 – 1908. General Land Office issued instructions

Minnesota 1847-1858

Surveys in the Minnesota Territory 1847-1858

A. 1836 -1851. General Land Office exerting more control - surveys under the administration of the Surveyor General of Wisconsin & Iowa

- 1847-1849 Surveys in western Wisconsin Territory – 1846 instructions
- 1849-1852 Surveys in Minnesota East

Surveys in the Minnesota Territory 1847-1858

A. 1836 -1851. General Land Office exerting more control - surveys under the administration of the Surveyor General of Wisconsin & Iowa

- 1847-1849 Surveys in western Wisconsin Territory – 1846 instructions
- 1849-1852 Surveys in Minnesota East

B. 1851-1908. General Land Office issued instructions

- 1852-1857 Surveys in Minnesota East and Minnesota West
- 1857-1908 Surveys under the administration of the Surveyor General of Minnesota

Surveys in the Minnesota Territory 1847-1858

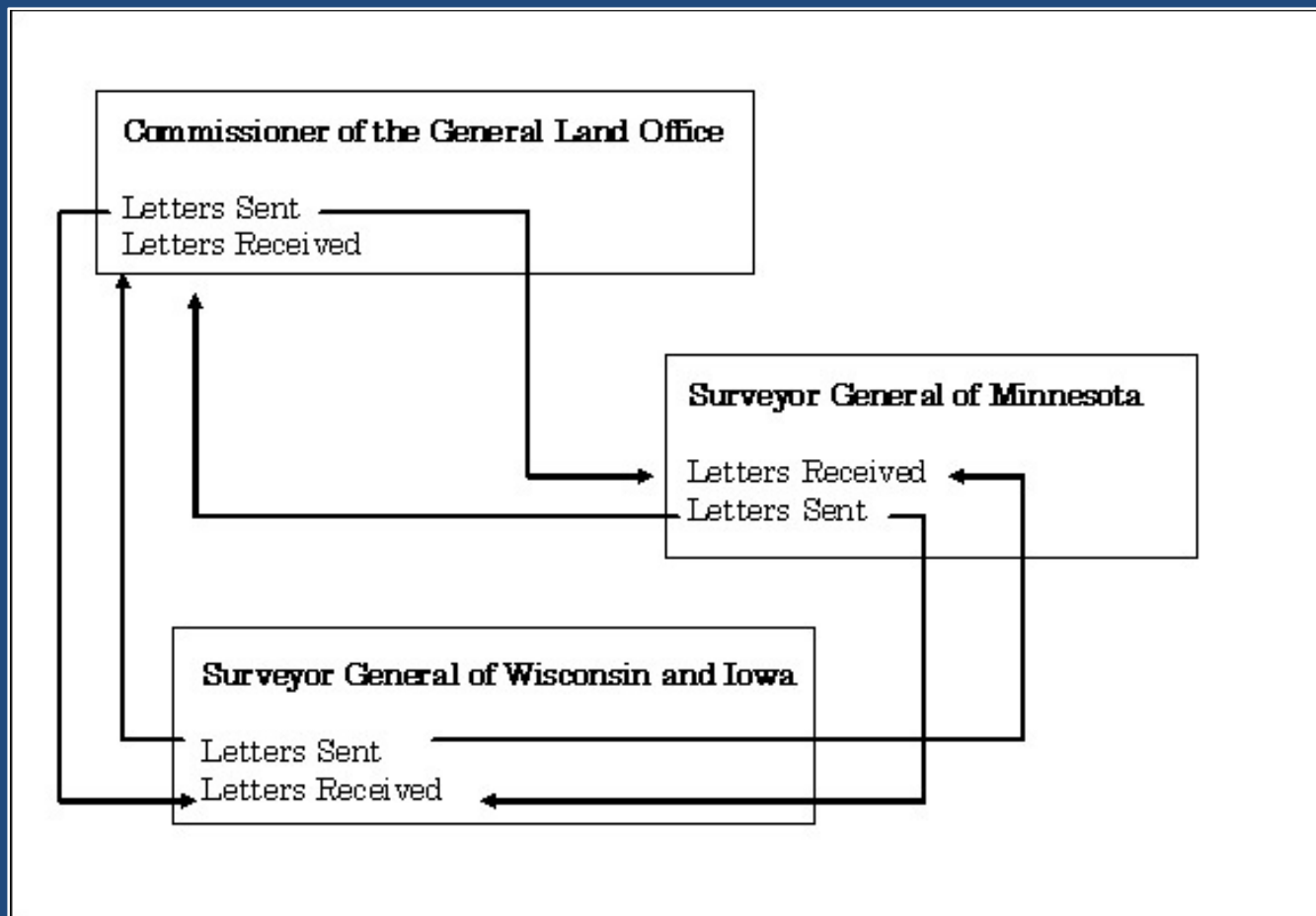
A. 1836 -1851. General Land Office exerting more control - surveys under the administration of the Surveyor General of Wisconsin & Iowa

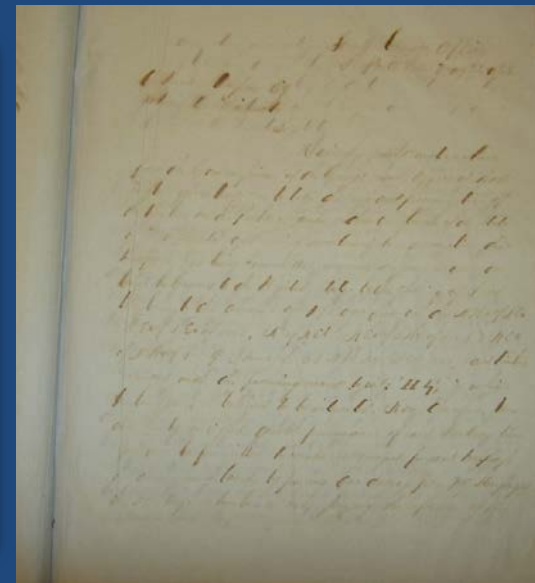
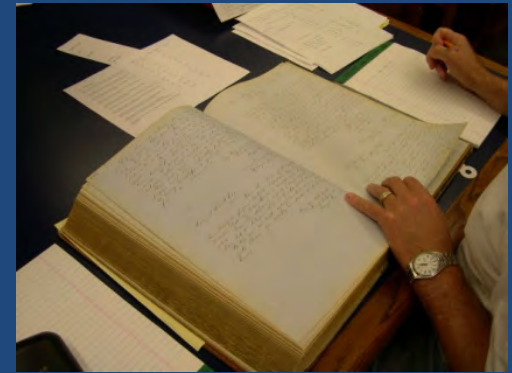
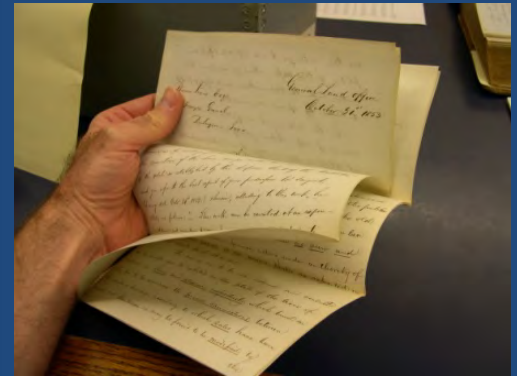
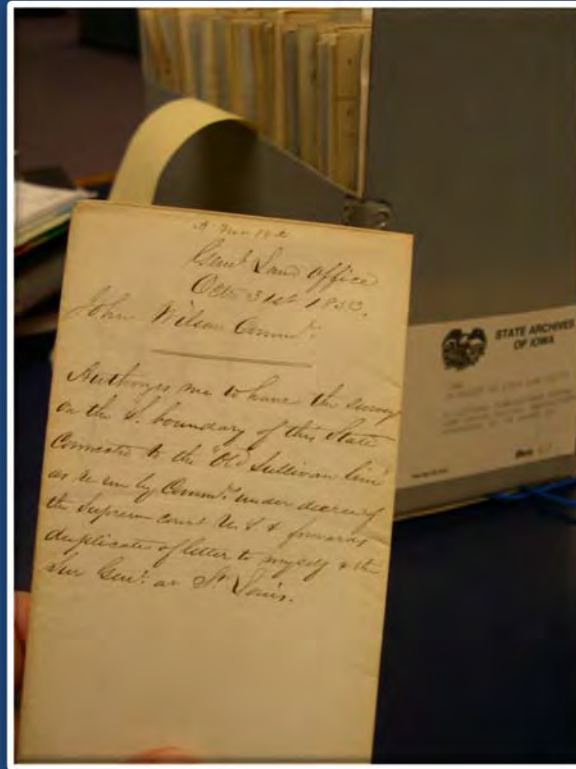
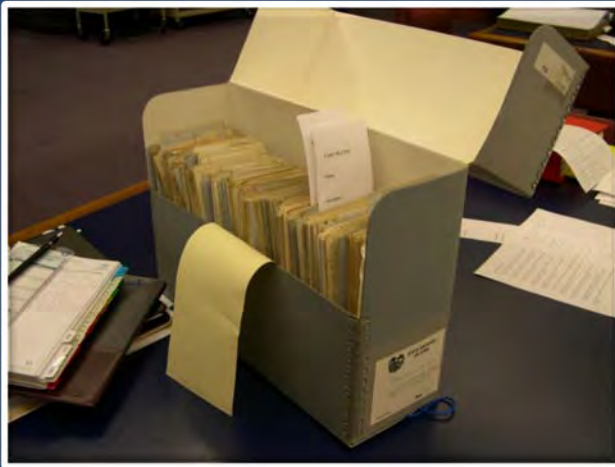
- 1847-1849 Surveys in western Wisconsin Territory – 1846 instructions
- 1849-1852 Surveys in Minnesota East

B. 1851-1908. General Land Office issued instructions

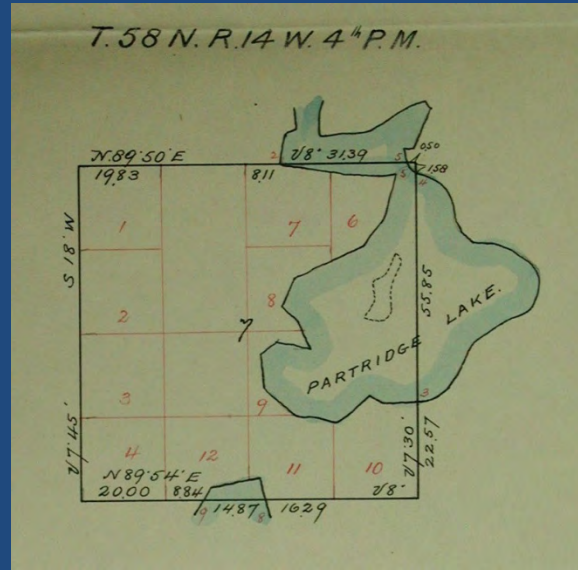
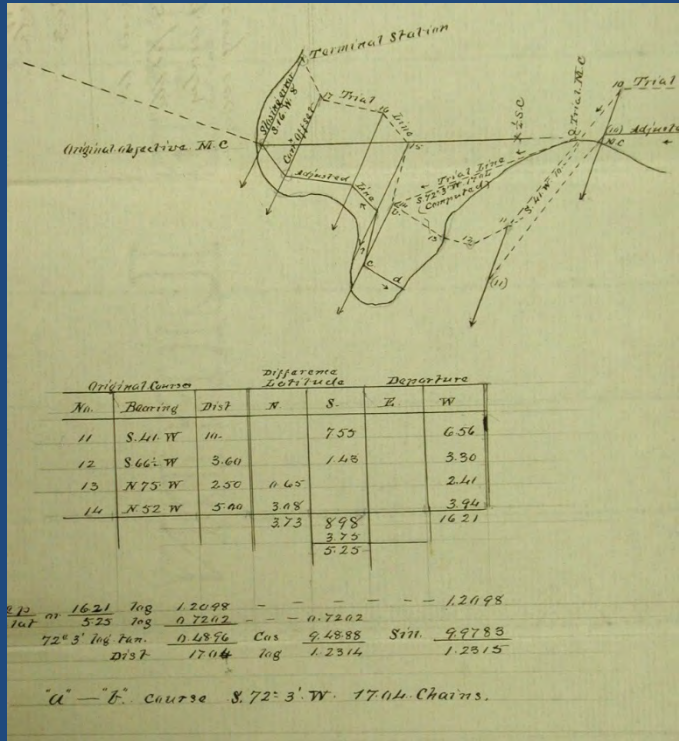
- 1852-1857 Surveys in Minnesota East and Minnesota West
- 1857-1908 Surveys under the administration of the Surveyor General of Minnesota

????? 1851 Instructions issued by the Surveyor General of Wisconsin & Iowa
(White, [A History of the Rectangular Survey System](#) p.385)

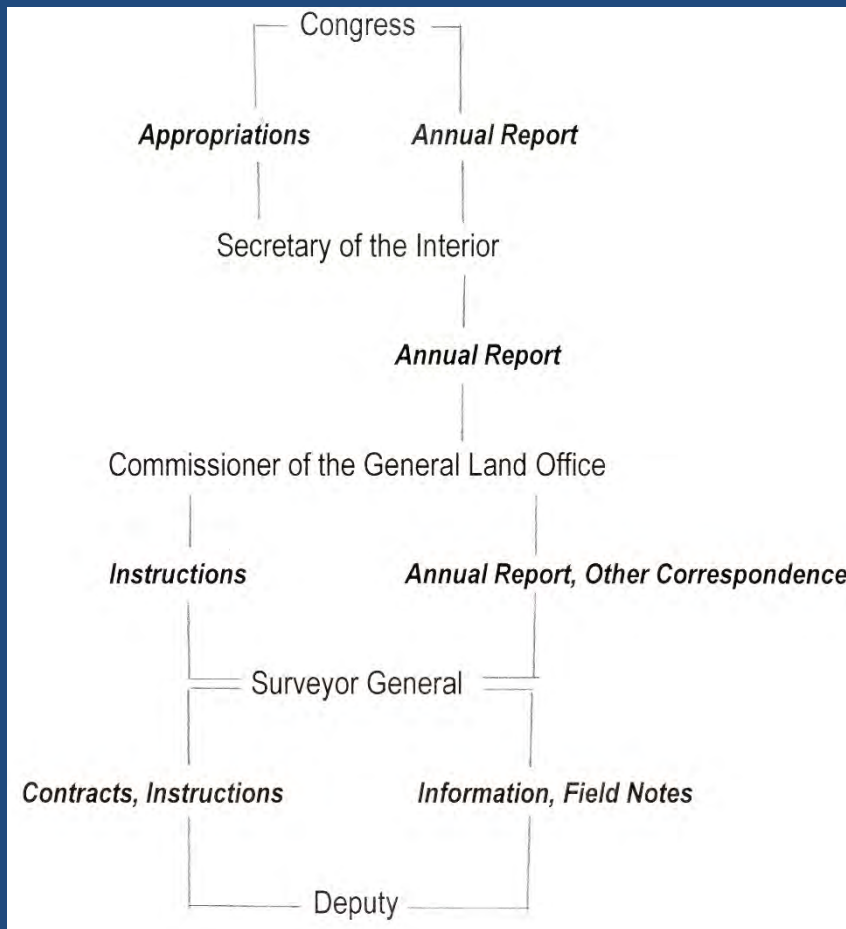




Hidden Gems



The Paper Trail



Correspondence between the stakeholders - includes annual reports, instructions, and circulars

The Paper Trail

The surveys were carried out by a cadre of deputy surveyors under contract with the Surveyor General

- Individual applied for a contract

- Awarded contract – made required oath, bond etc. – **given instructions**
- Contract, oath, and bond sent to Commissioner GLO
- Correspondence between Surveyor General and Commissioner
- Correspondence between Surveyor General and deputy
- Field notes and diagrams received by Surveyor General

x2 or x3

- Field notes of townships transcribed and Township Plats compiled
- Township plat and Township descriptive lists sent to land office
- Township plats, Township field notes, and request for payment sent to Commissioner Treasury Department transmitted payment

Field Notebooks

Described what the deputy surveyor did and what he saw

Raw data from which the plats were drawn and descriptive lists made

Answers question "How did the deputy carry out his work?"

As the deputy carried out his work he made an inventory of the surface, describing the features that were thought to be relevant to prospective landowners

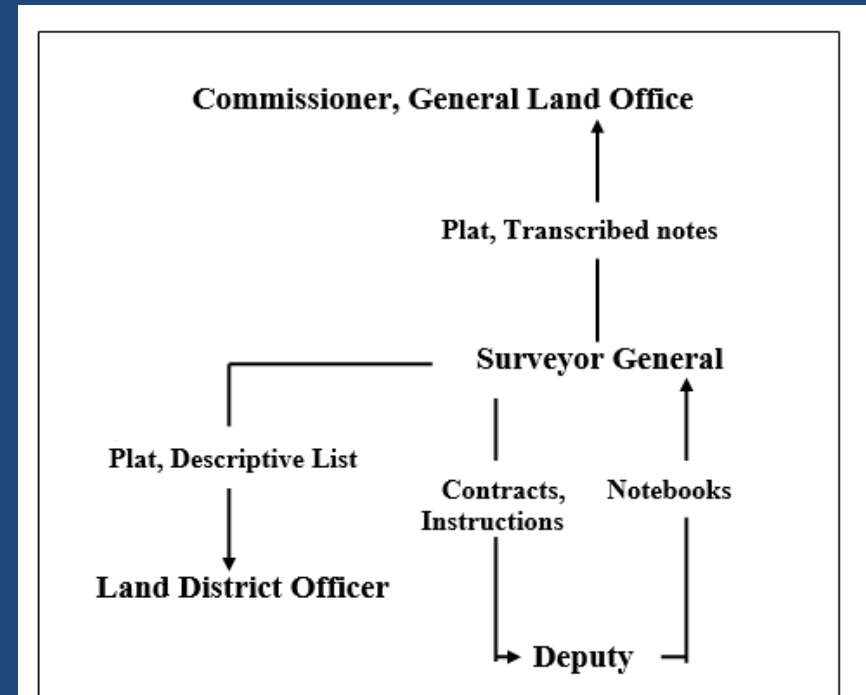
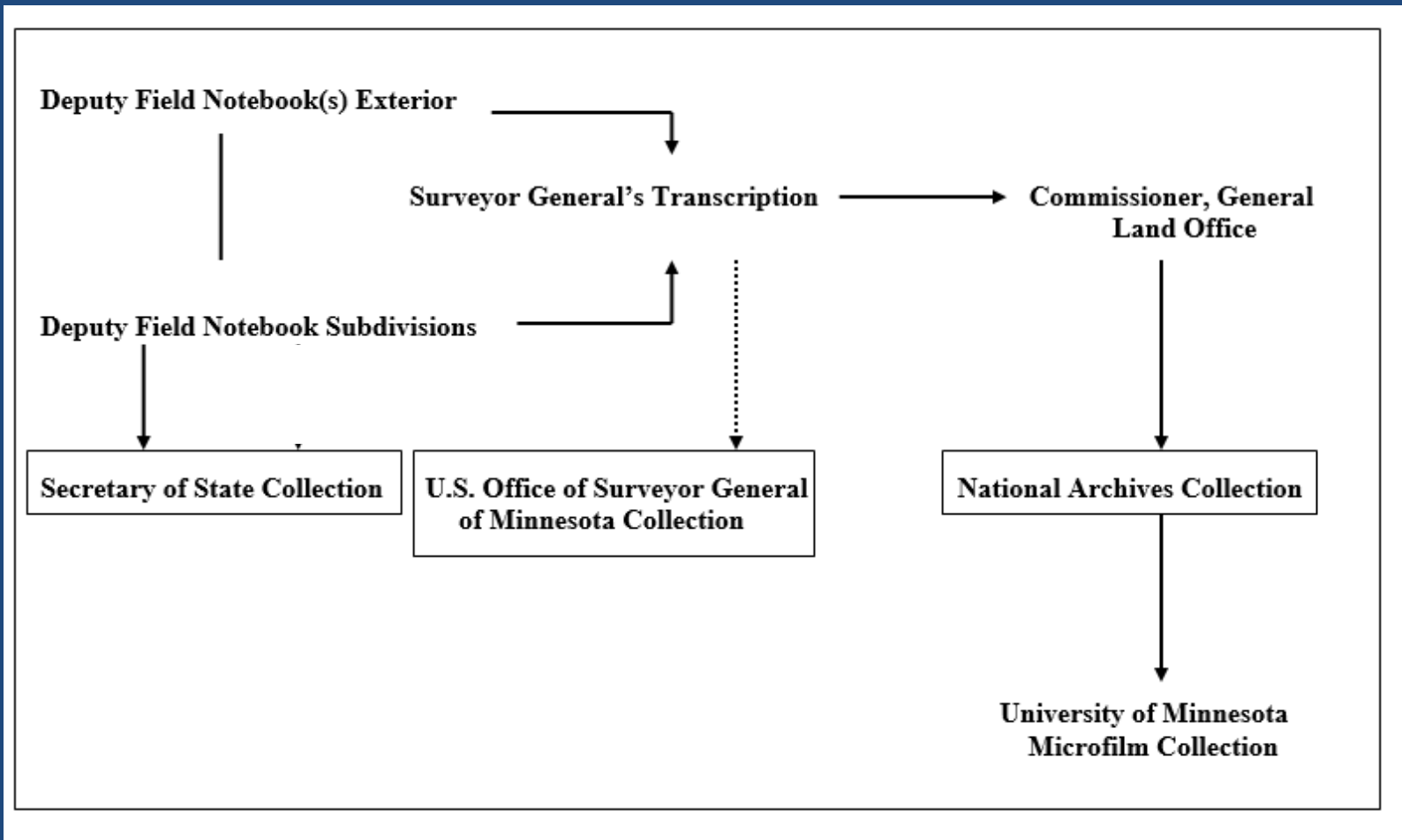
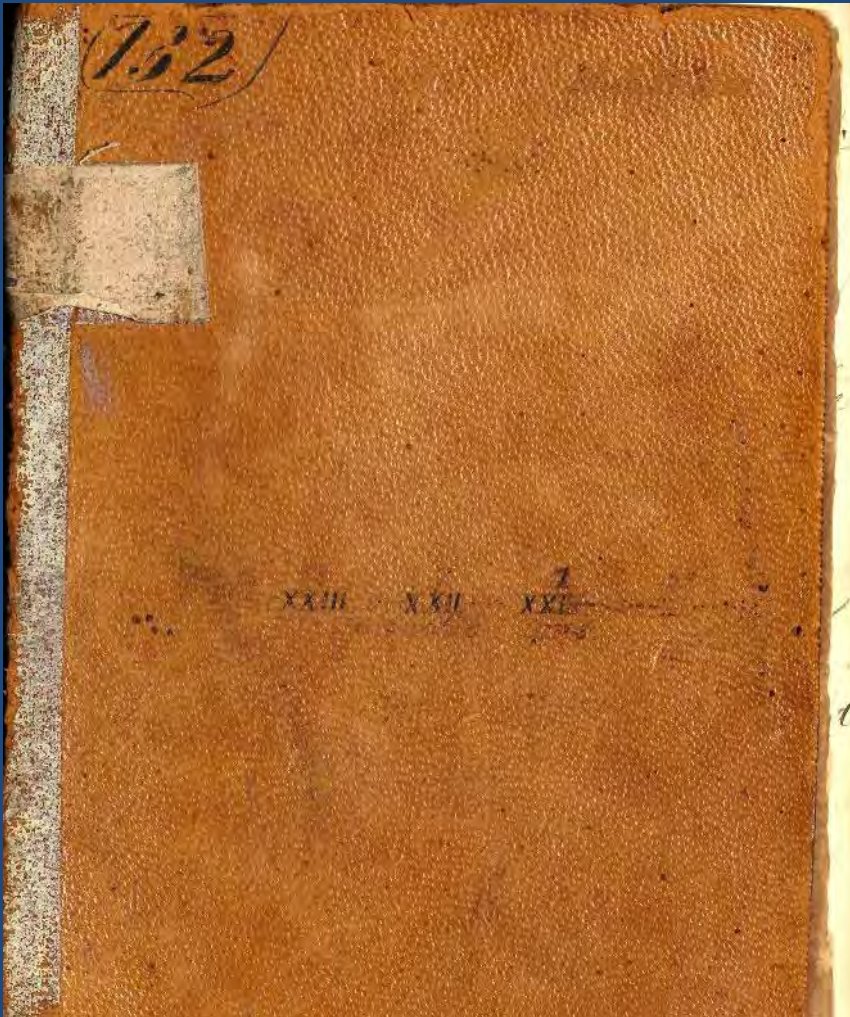


Figure 1 The flow of information contained in the field notebooks

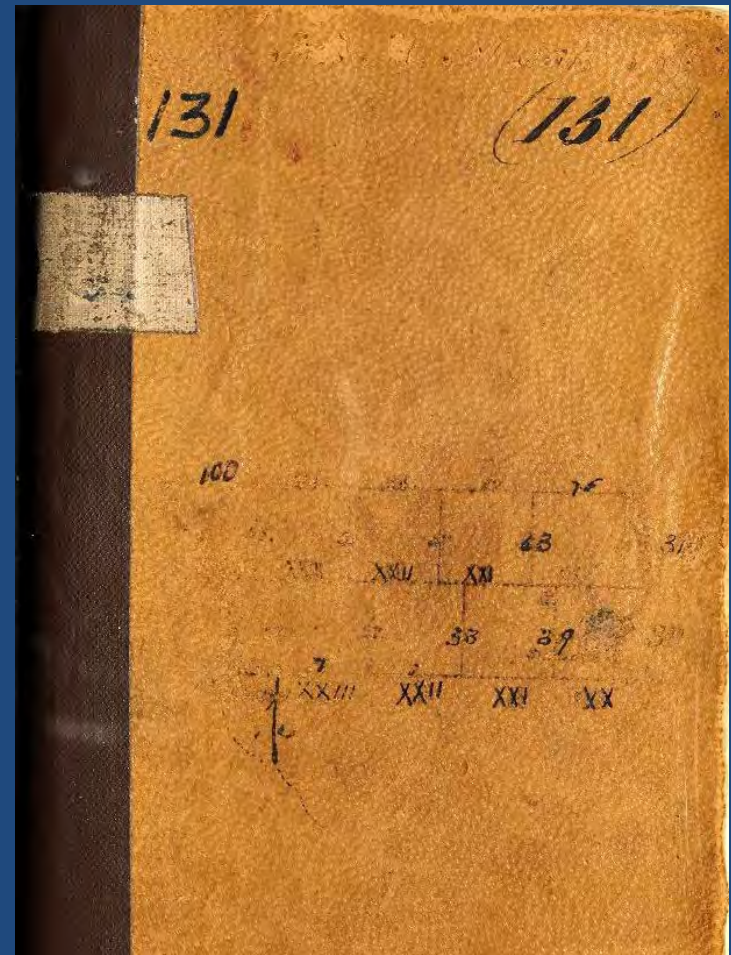
Still a Lot to be Learned about Notebooks – Contents & Indexing



Exterior Line Notebooks

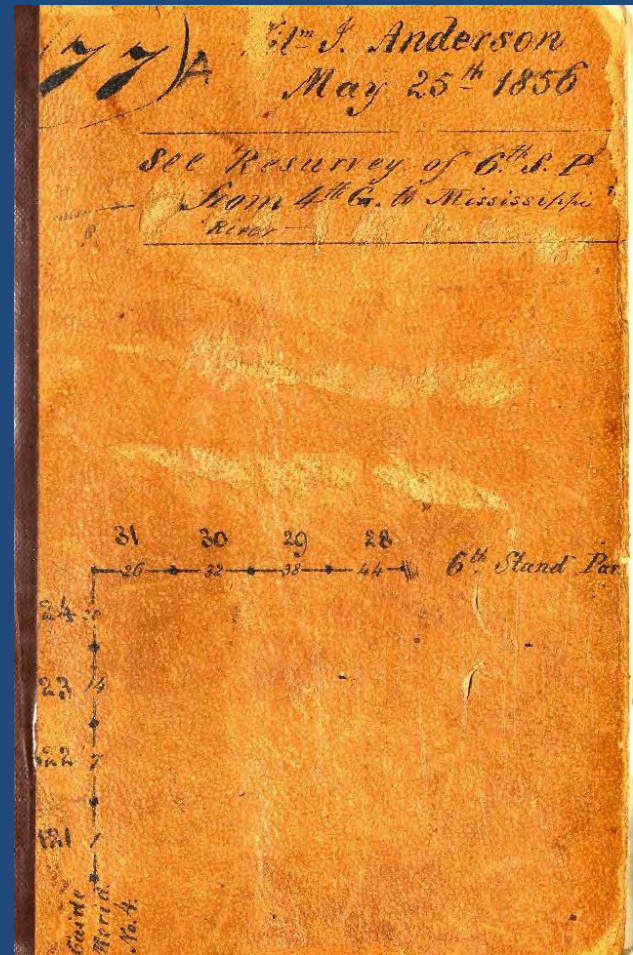
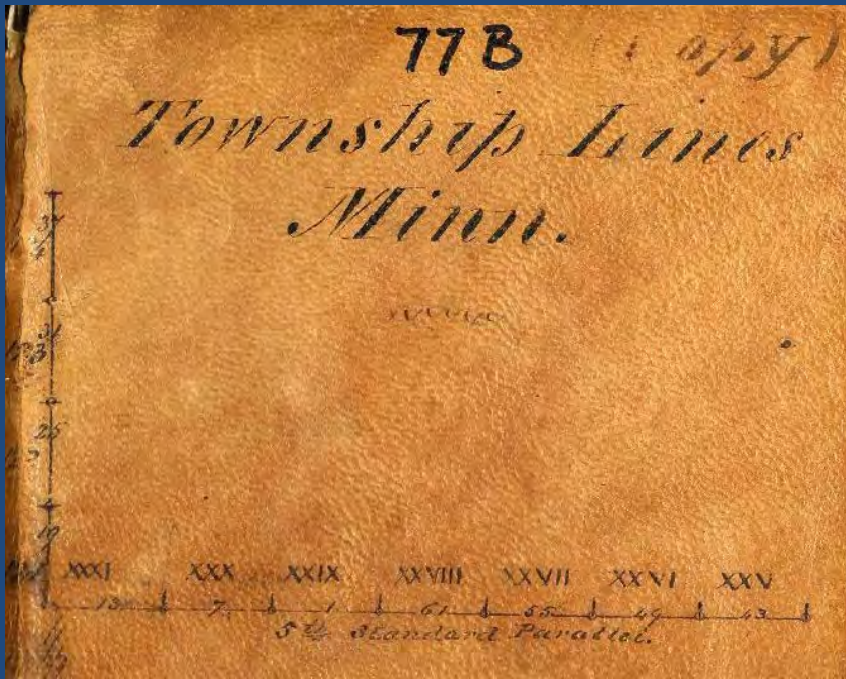


Wiltse



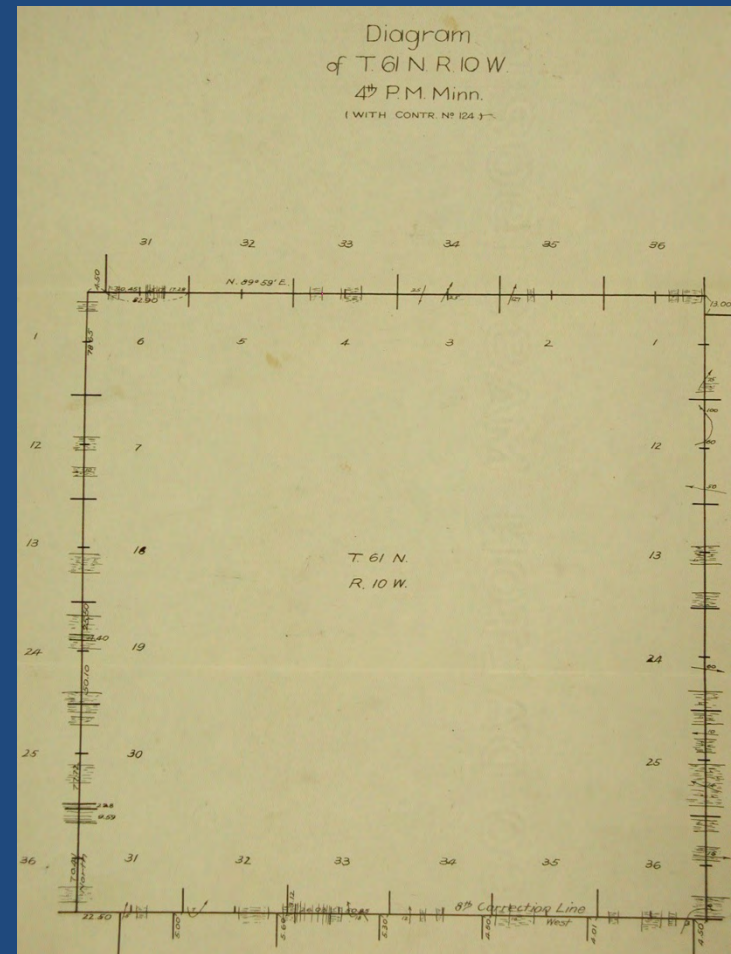
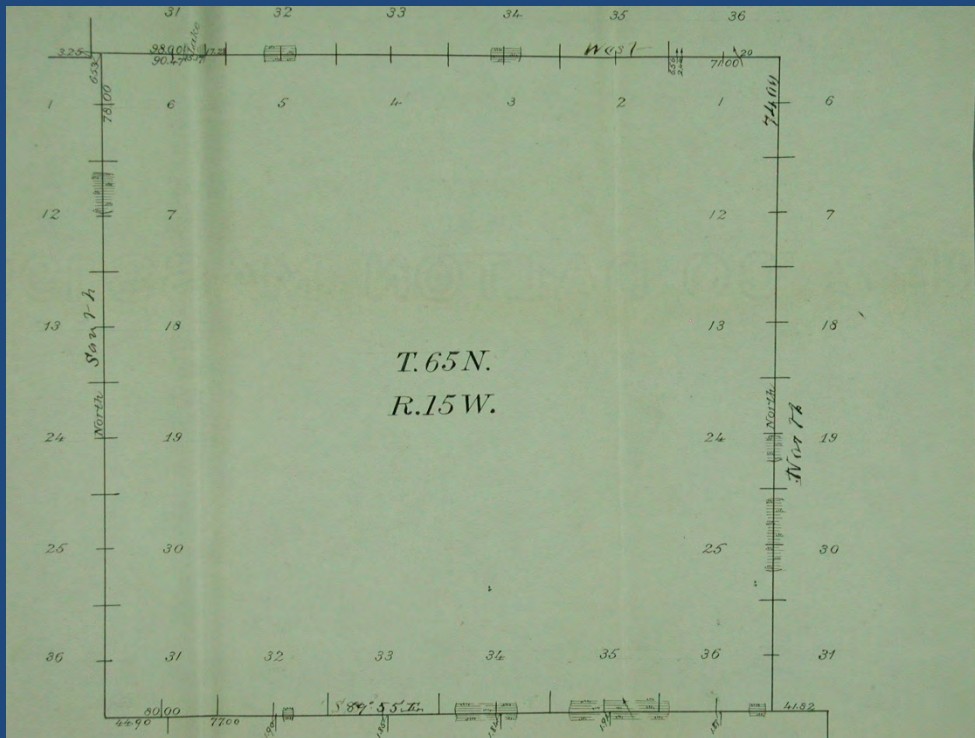
Marsh

Exterior Line Notebooks

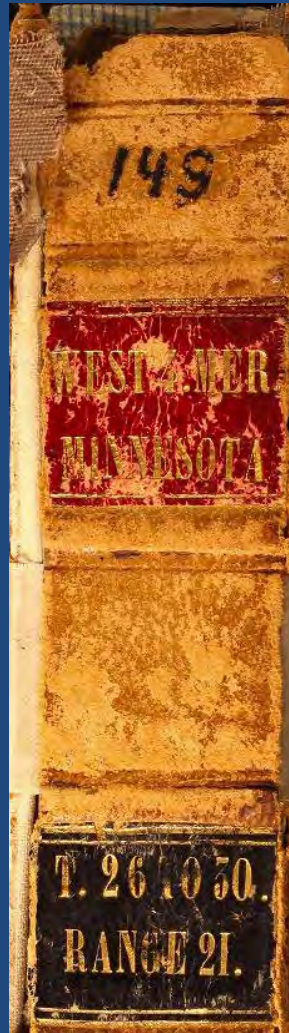


US Surveyor General Land Survey Field Notes - contains Field Notes of Survey
Examiners

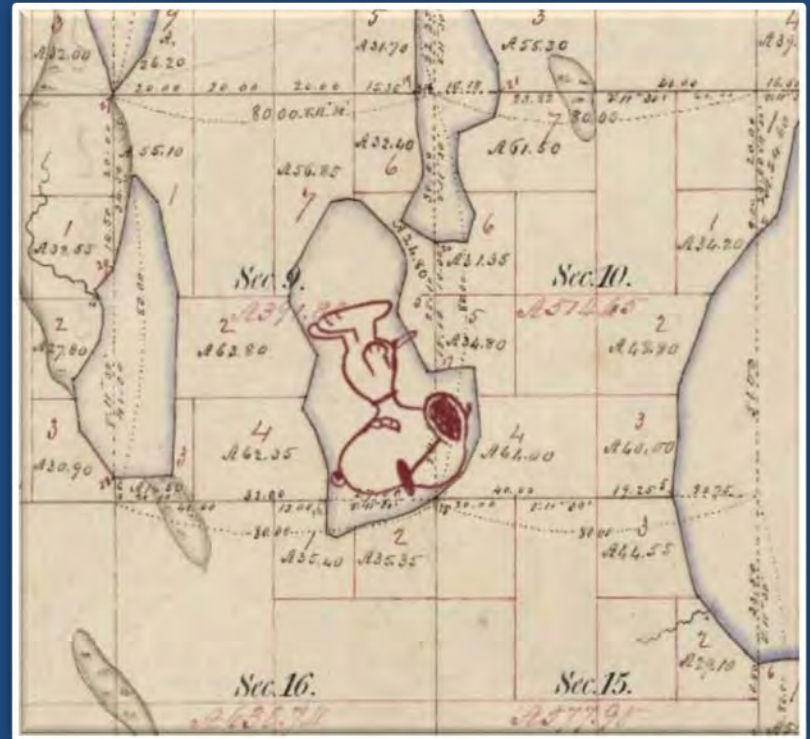
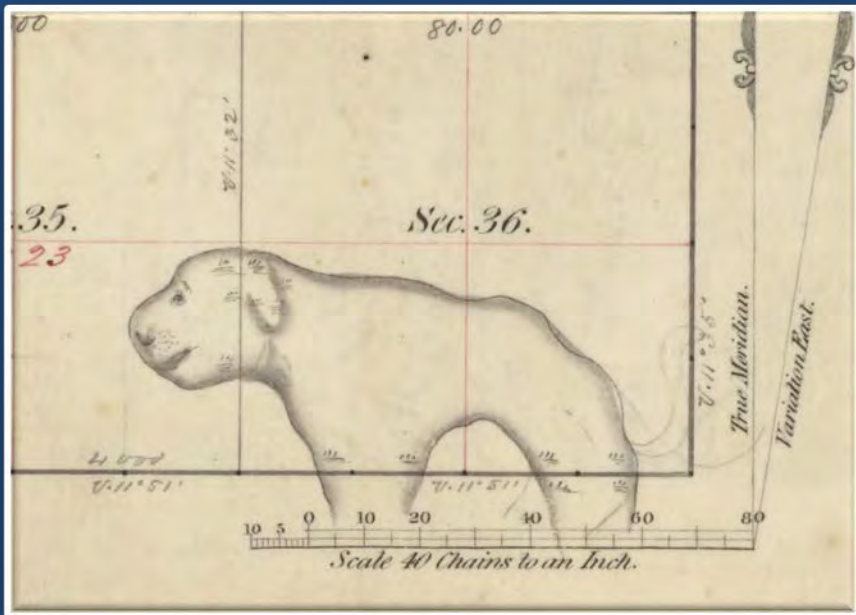
Township Exteriors diagram – given to subdividing deputy?



Subdivision Field Notebooks



Well?

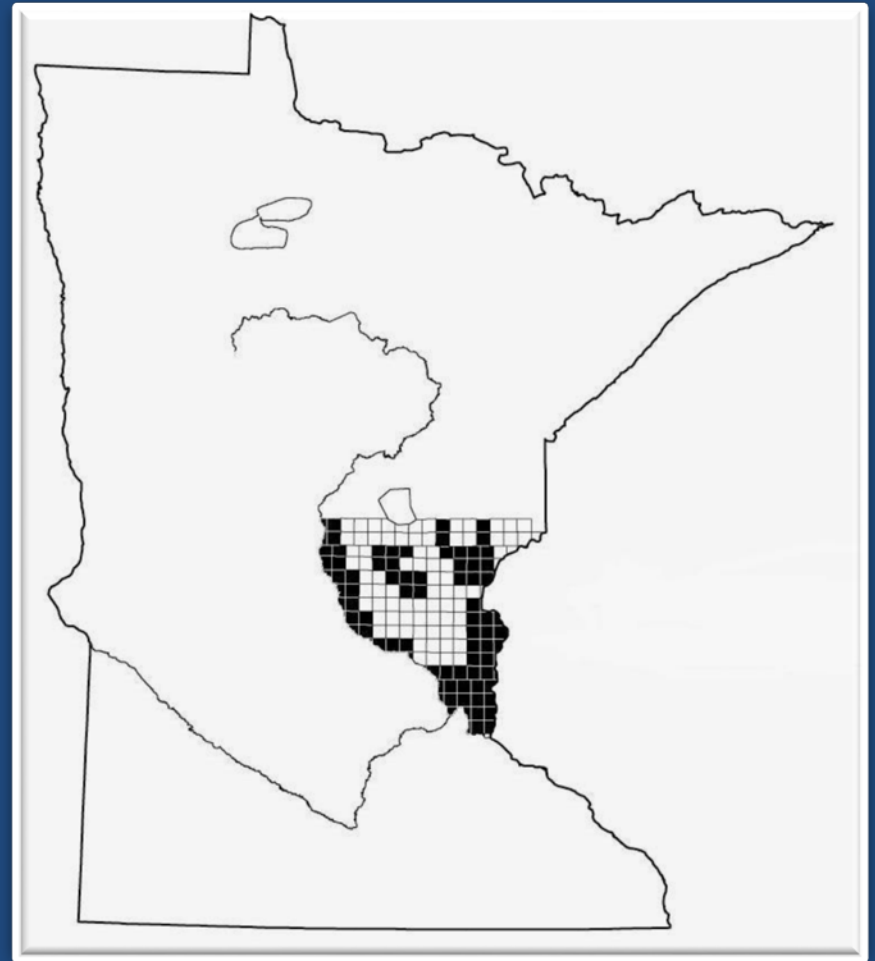


Surveys 1847-1852

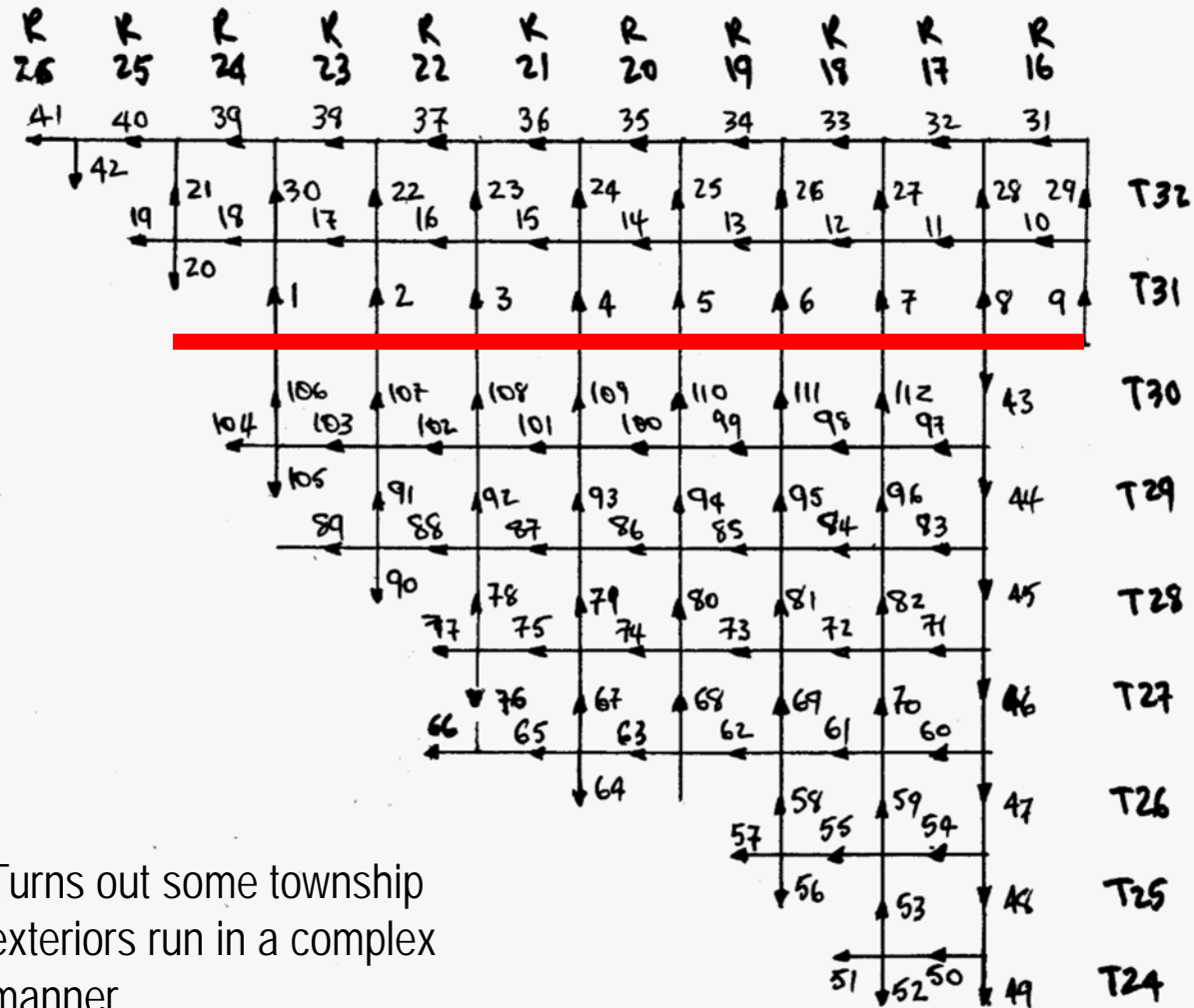
1847-1852 survey lines run across area

- Ceded in 1837 between the St. Croix and Mississippi rivers
- Using 4th Principal Meridian
- Under instructions issued in 1846

Extension of the surveys that spread across Wisconsin



James M. Marsh contract dated May 28, 1847



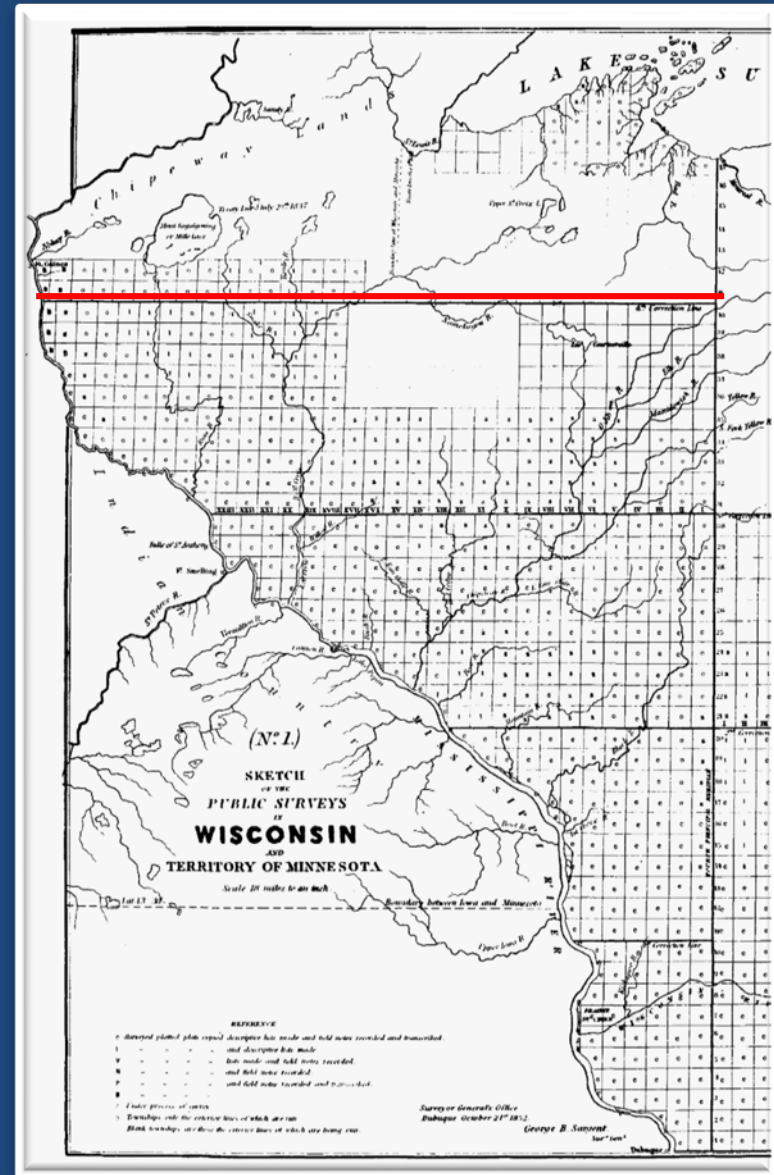
Turns out some township exteriors run in a complex manner

4th Correction Line

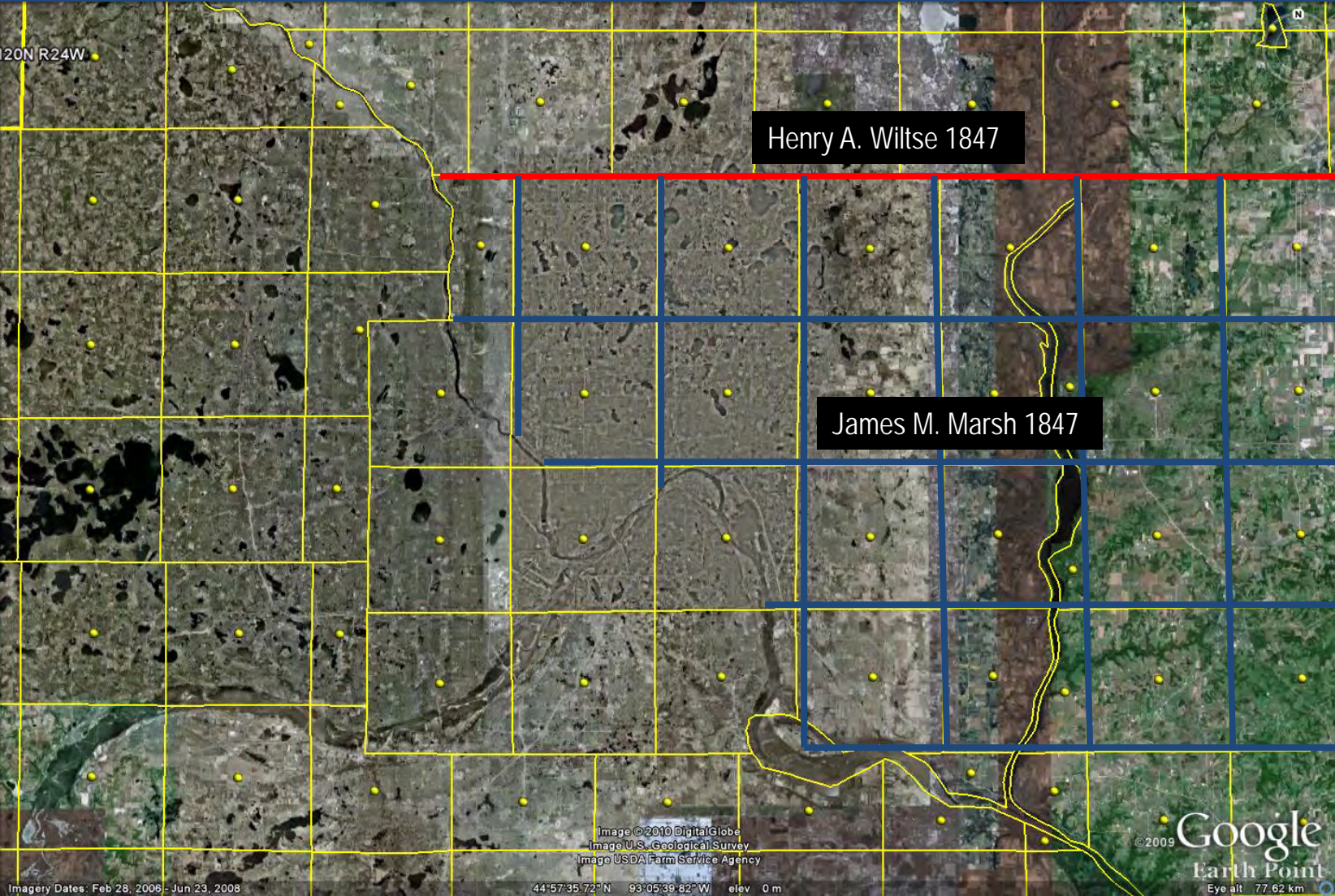
Theodore Conkey contract July 28, 1848

Dahl John R United States General Land Office Historical Surveying Instructions and their Influence on Surveys of the 3rd and 4th Correction Lines, 4th Principal Meridian, Minnesota MS (St Cloud State University 2006)

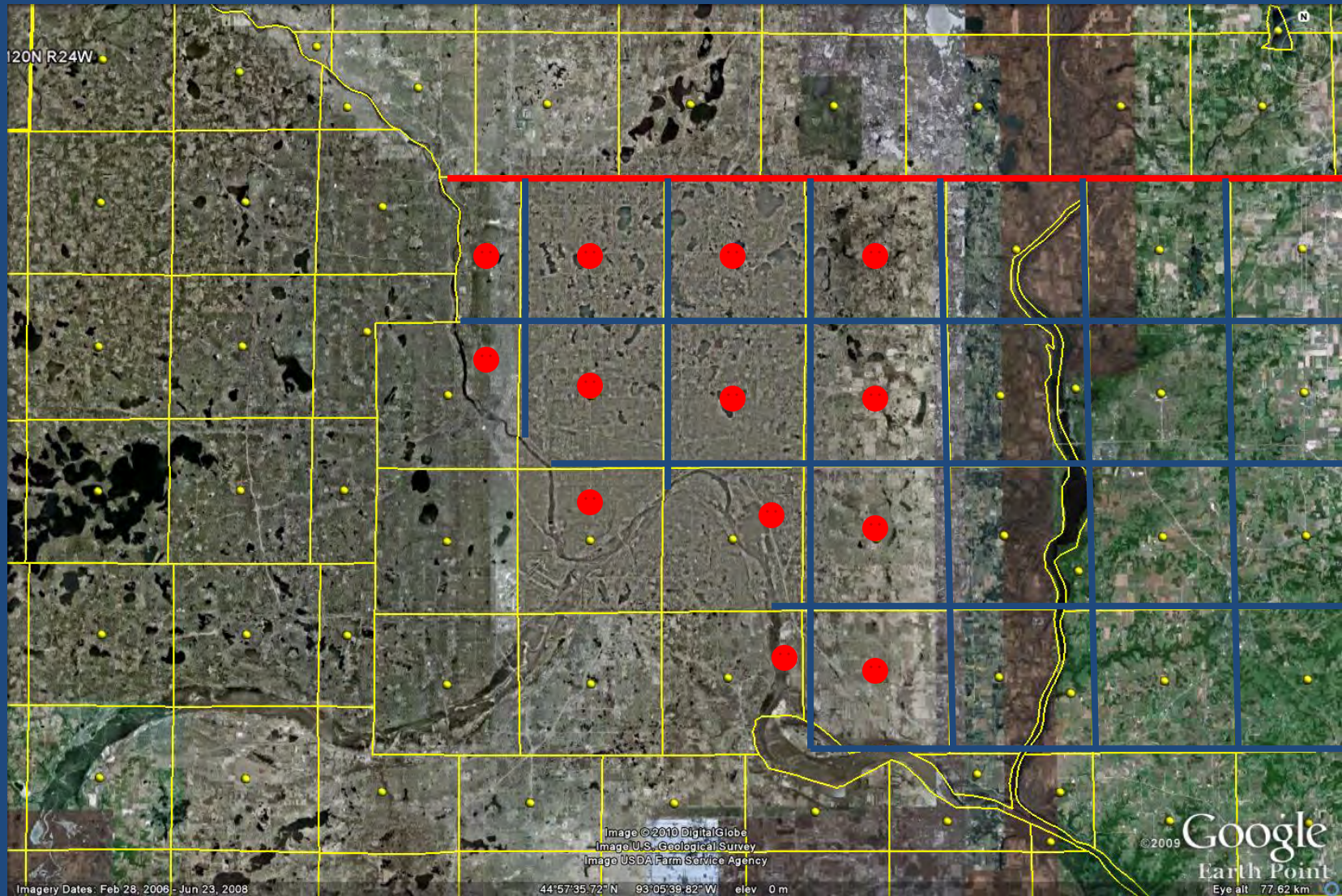
http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.mnsurveyor.com/resource/resmgr/imported/Thursday_Dahl.pdf



Township Exteriors East of the Mississippi



Townships Subdivided by Isaac N. Higbee East of the Mississippi

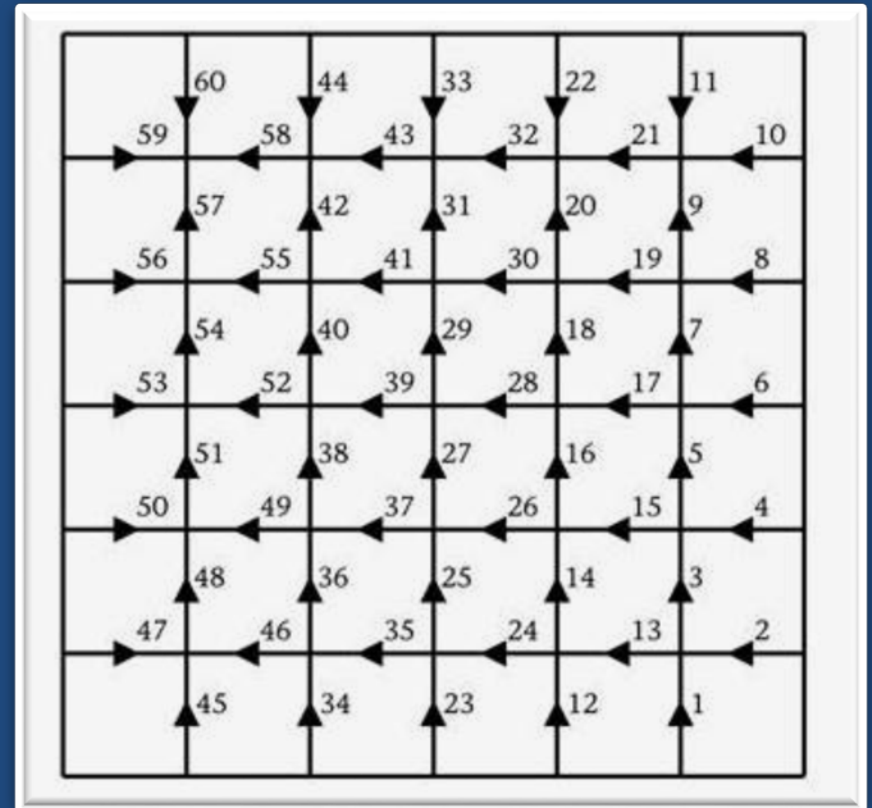


Subdivisions

1846 instructions

“The first mile, both of the south and east boundaries of each township you are to subdivide, is to be carefully traced and measured, before you enter upon the subdivision thereof.

This will enable you to observe any change that may have taken place in the magnetic variation, as it existed at the running of the township lines, and will also enable you to compare your chaining with that upon the township lines”



Special Instructions issued by the Surveyor General to Isaac Higbee contract September 3, 1847

Several township of the district of subdivisions assigned to you under contract of this date, are rendered fractional by the Mississippi river. In subdividing these townships, you are to regard the main channel of the said river as the boundary of your district upon the South and West, consequently you are to meander all islands in the said river within the said district, which are valuable either for their soil or timber

You are to measure the left bank of so much of the Mississippi river as adjoins the district aforesaid. In executing this portion of your work you will please, as often as once in each of the said fractional townships ascertain by triangulation or otherwise the width of the said river and enter the same in its proper place in your meander notes



BLM Original

May 19, 1848, the Surveyor General wrote,

In compliance with part of your communication of the 6th Inst., requiring me to indicate the connections of the public surveys with the Military reservation at Fort Snelling, I beg leave to transmit, for your examination, the enclosed diagram. **The sketch of the said Reservation accompanying instructions from your office, dated 29th July, 1839, was not the result of a survey, and gives neither course nor distance (?Map of May 6, 1839)**

ThereforeI have ventured to propose a boundary made to conform to regular subdivisional lines. The boundary follows very nearly upon the track of the one originally proposed, and comprises, as nearly as can be ascertained, an equal amount of land. Its upper point of intersection with the Mississippi river is precisely the same, and its lower point of intersection with the river, the same within five chains

On June 30 the Commissioner responded to his actions, stating,

Yours of the 19th inst. has also been received enclosing a diagram of that portion of the Military Reservation at Fort Snelling which is situated in Wisconsin. In the absence of marks or monuments in the field, showing the boundaries of this Reservation, the course pursued by you in tracing it along the boundaries of legal subdivisions was perfectly proper. You will please forward a copy of the diagram to the Register

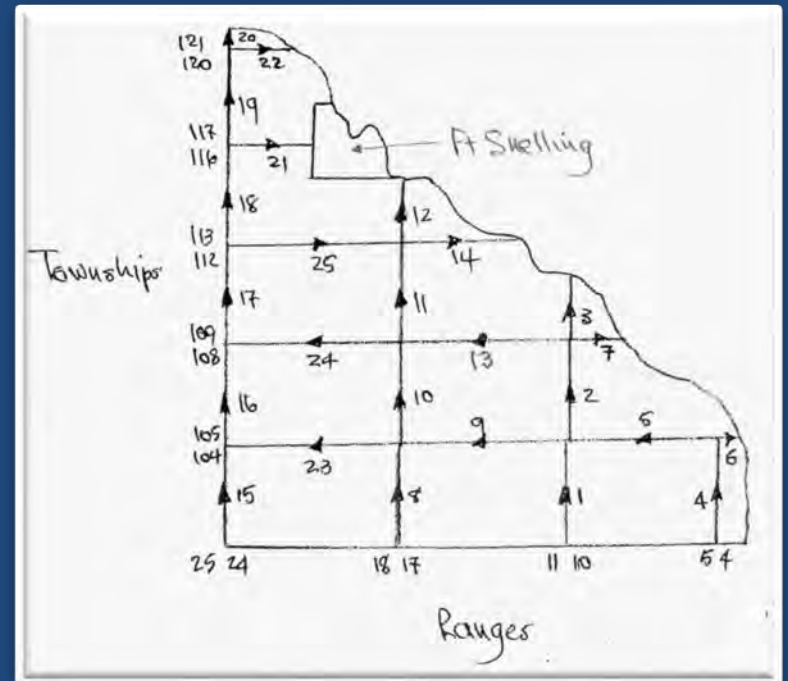
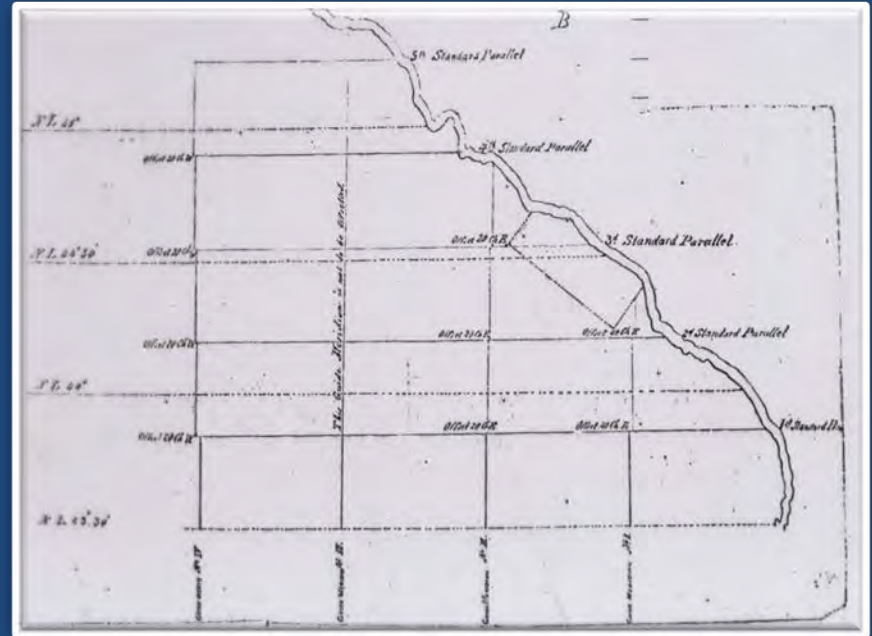
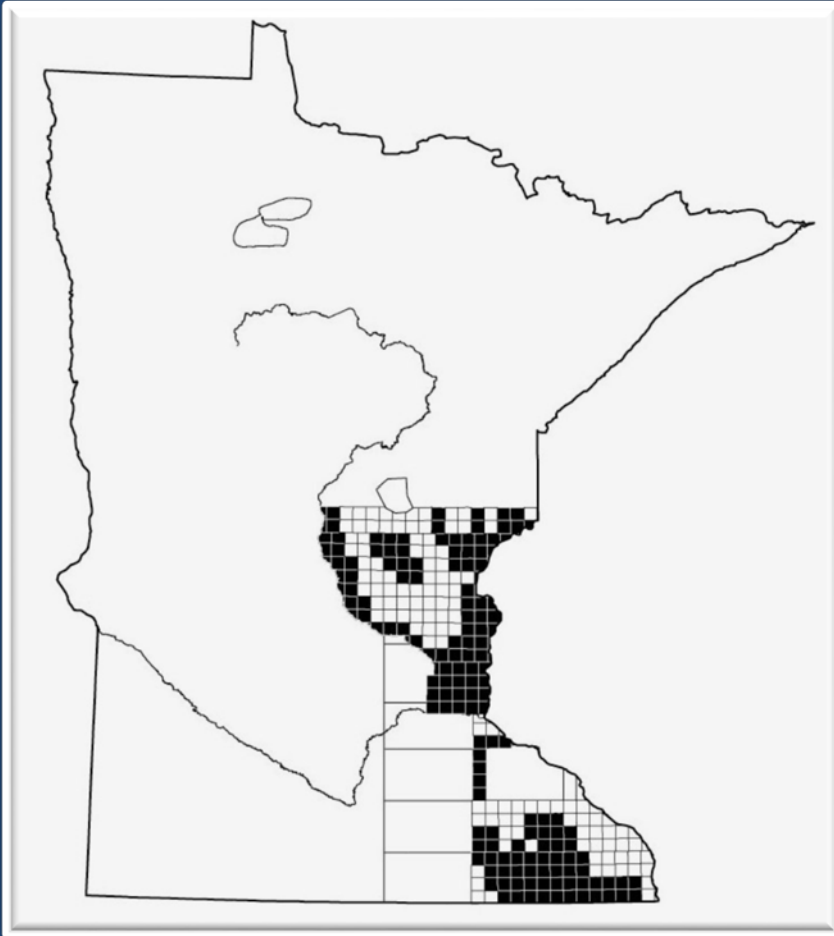
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1853-1908 survey lines run across area variously ceded – under instructions issued in 1851, reissued in 1855 and periodically after

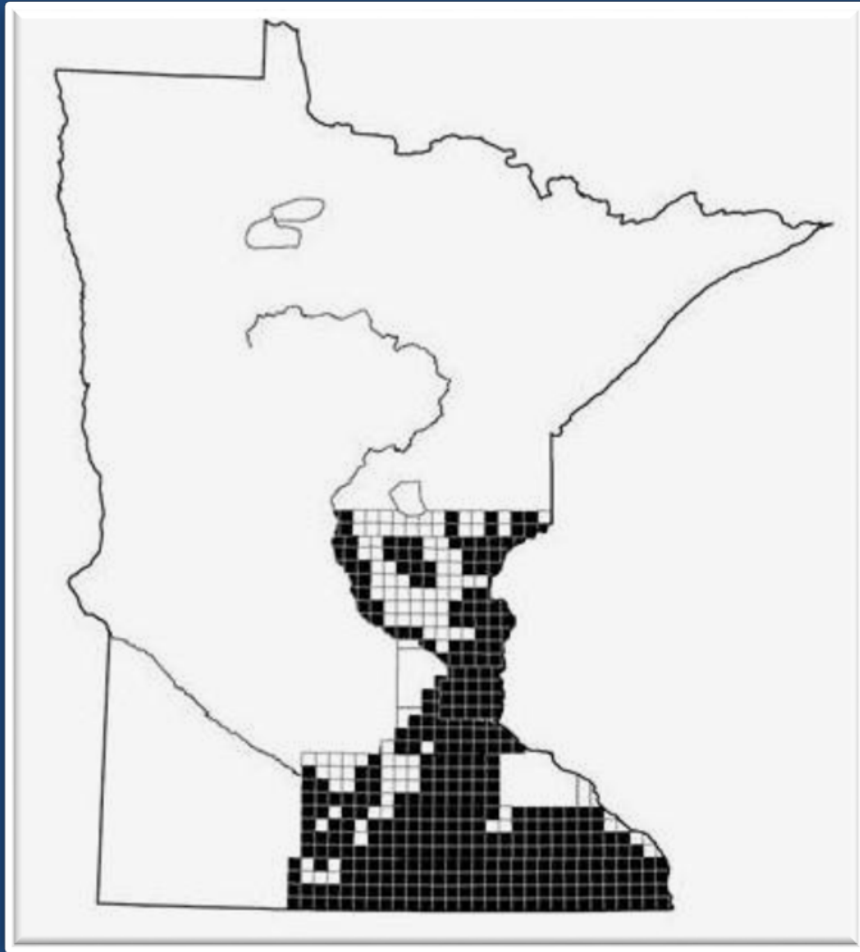
- East of Mississippi & 3rd Guide Meridian using 4th Principal Meridian
- West of Mississippi & 3rd Guide Meridian using 5th Principal Meridian – extension of surveys that spread across Iowa

1853

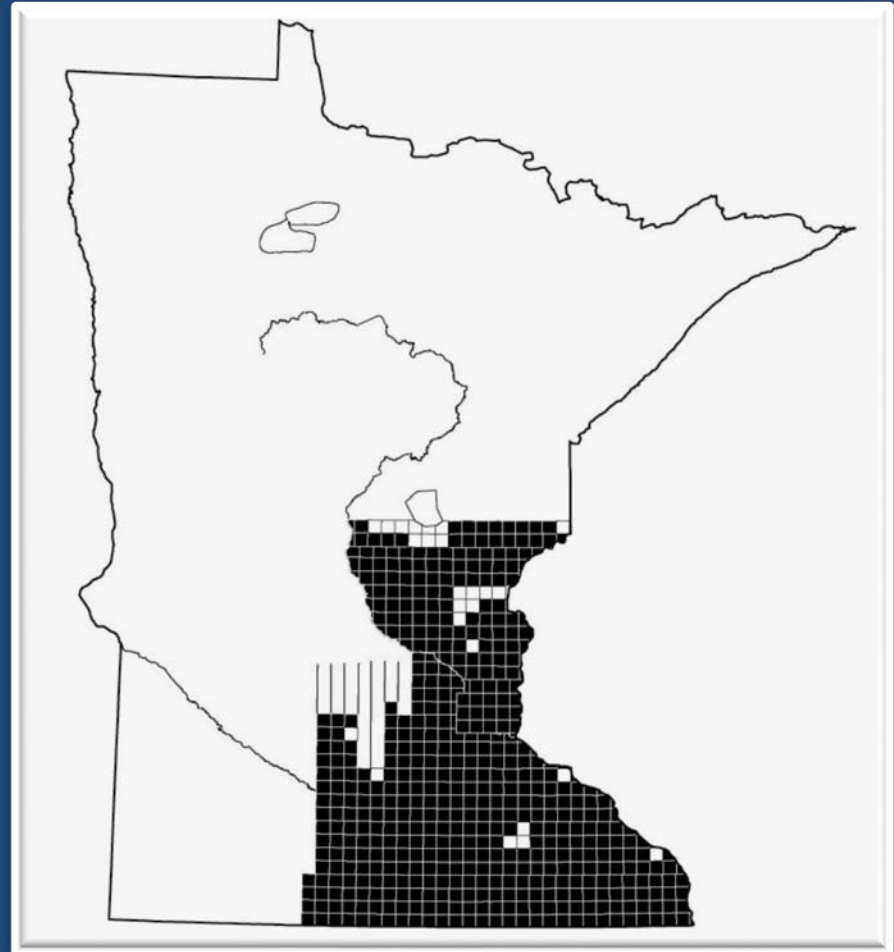


Commissioner John Wilson to SG Warner Lewis May 16th 1853
Commissioner John Wilson to SG Warner Lewis June 16th 1853
SG Warner Lewis to Deputy Elisha Norris July 28th 1853

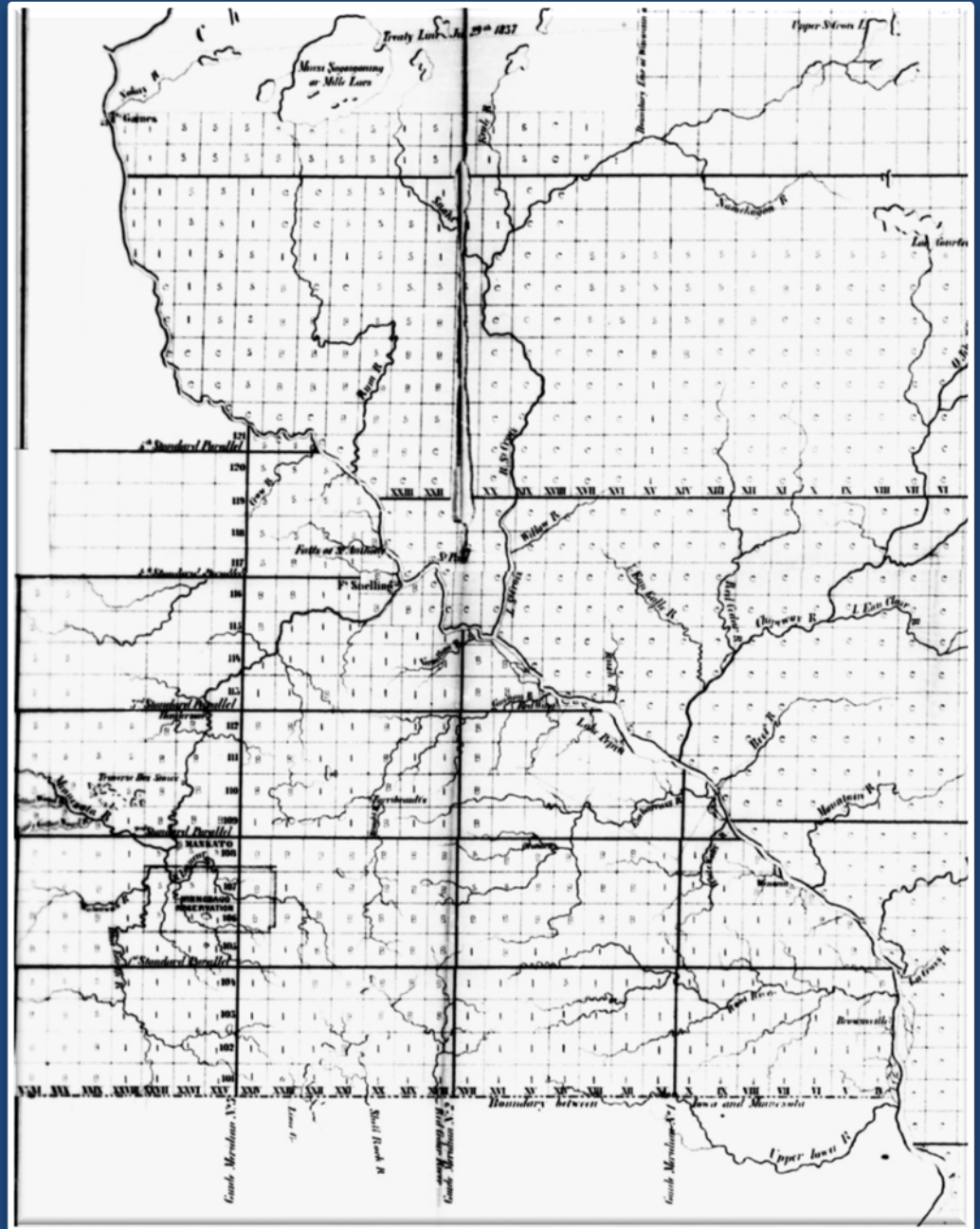
1854



1855

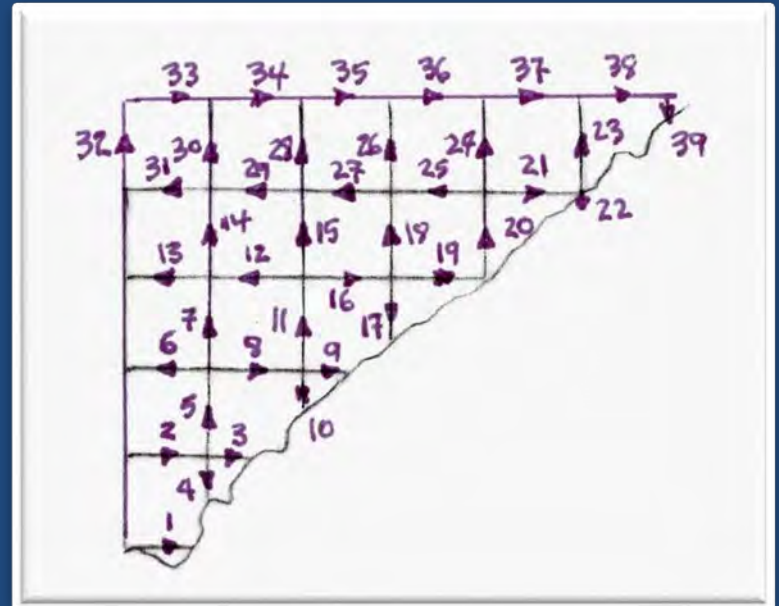
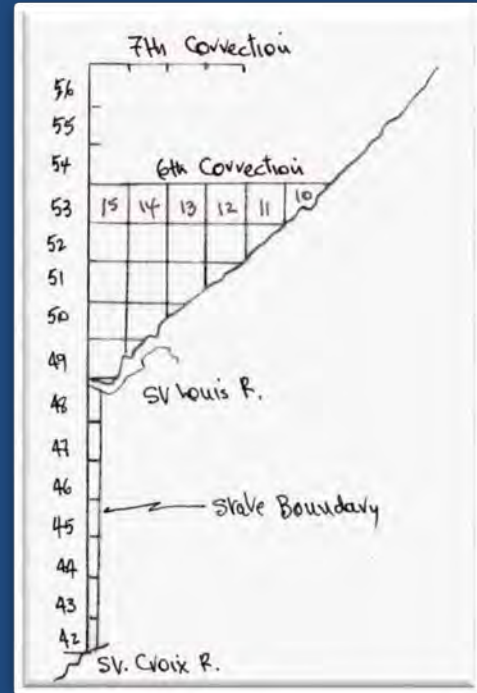
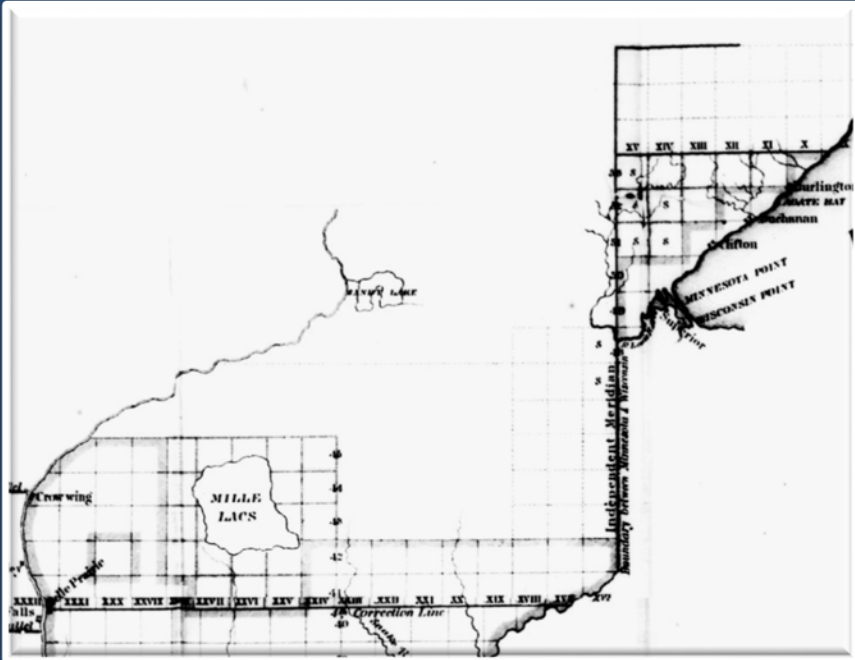


1855



William Burt contract May 21, 1856

Independent Meridian, 5th and 6th correction lines, and subdivisions



1857 – Opening of Office of Surveyor General of Minnesota

Surveyor General Charles L. Emerson

- Closing office of Surveyor General of the Northwest in Detroit
- Transferring completed records of surveys in Michigan to Michigan officers
- Transferring incomplete records of surveys in Michigan to St. Paul
- Coordinating opening office in St Paul with Surveyor General of Wisconsin and Iowa
- Transferring completed records of surveys in the Minnesota Territory from Dubuque to St Paul
- Contracting with deputies to carry out surveying duties



MINNESOTA Summer 2017 Volume 25 • Number 3

SURVEYOR

Opening the Office of Surveyor
General of Minnesota: Part 1



MINNESOTA Fall 2017 Volume 25 • Number 4

SURVEYOR

Opening the Office of Surveyor
General of Minnesota: Part 2



MINNESOTA Winter 2018 Volume 26 • Number 4

SURVEYOR

Opening the Office of Surveyor
General of Minnesota: Part 3

White p.126

He actually replaced Chapman on April 12, 1857, and closed the Detroit office on May 11. He opened the Minnesota office in St. Paul on May 23, 1857 and he transferred most of the Michigan records to the State at that time.

After bringing all arrears up to snuff, he completed transfer of the Michigan records in May 1858.

He received the Minnesota survey records from Lewis in Dubuque and continued the Minnesota surveys without any particular trouble

Secretary of State

Land survey summary sheets. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/gr00506.xml>

Land survey plats. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/gr00508.xml>

Land survey field notes. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/gr00507.pdf>

U.S. Surveyor General of Minnesota

Plats of township boundaries. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/ussg09.pdf>

Land survey plats: Worksheets. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/ussg02.pdf>

Land survey field notes. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/ussg06.pdf>

Letters received and sent. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/ussg07.pdf>

Contracts for surveys. <http://www.mnhs.org/library/findaids/ussg04.pdf>