Surveyors Historical Society

Report to National Society of Professional Surveyors Board of Directors
2018 Fall Meeting – College Park, Maryland
October 18-20, 2018

RENADEVOUS 2018

Rendezvous 2018 was held September 12-15 at the Astor Crowne Plaza Hotel at the corner of Canal and Bourbon Streets in New Orleans, Louisiana. Approximately 120 people attended. Wednesday featured a Board of Directors meeting, a Welcome Reception and Orientation and the annual Surveyors Historical Society Membership meeting.

All of this year’s classroom sessions were held on Thursday and featured the following presentations:

- *Arpent Sections: Mississippi River Plantations* by Stephen Flynn
- *The Great Early Surveyors of New Orleans* by William Hyland
- *Jasper Bilby: Inventor of the Bilby Tower* by Bart Crattie
- *Initial Point Common to the Washington and St. Helena Meridians* by Milton Denny
- *Military and Flood Control Surveying and Engineering in South Louisiana* by Stephen Estopinal
- *Saints and Sinners: Surveying and Mapping in Louisiana* by Ralph Gipson

The Spouse/Guest Program featured a trip to the New Orleans School of Cooking. Friday featured a trip to Louis Armstrong Park to witness the reading of LaSalle’s Proclamation and demonstrations of the old French compass and “Beating the Bounds”. Friday afternoon featured a trip to the New Orleans Notarial Archive and a presentation of the historic New Orleans Collection at the Williams Research Center. In the evening, participants were invited to dress as a Saint or a Sinner for the Saints and Sinners Ball and Banquet. The annual auction to benefit the Surveyors Historical Society Special Projects fund was shelved this year in favor of a test run of a raffle format. The proceeds from the raffle were substantially the same as previous auctions, the bookkeeping was infinitely easier and most participants indicated a preference for the raffle so it will probably continue in the future.

Rendezvous 2018 wrapped up on Saturday morning with a Mississippi River cruise aboard the Creole Queen sternwheeler. The boat took participants upriver to Chalmette Battlefield, site of the January 8, 1815 Battle of New Orleans. On the return to New Orleans the group enjoyed a buffet lunch featuring Chicken & Sausage Gumbo, Louisiana Creole Jambalaya and all the fixin’s.
INITIAL POINT OF THE WASHINGTON AND ST. HELENA PRINCIPAL MERIDIANS

The Washington Principal Meridian and the St. Helena Principal Meridian share an Initial Point. Theoretically, the Initial Point lies on the 31st parallel, also known as Andrew Ellicott’s Line of Demarcation and the state line between Mississippi and Louisiana. The Washington Meridian runs north and controls public land surveys in southwestern Mississippi. The St. Helena Meridian runs south and controls public land surveys in eastern Louisiana.

The exact location of this initial point is in question. In his book *Initial Points of the Rectangular Survey System*, C. Albert White is pictured beside an iron pipe which he describes as being “in the vicinity of” the initial point.

In May, 2018, Milton Denny and I accompanied a group of local surveyors and the property owner along a track road, across a creek and then along a low ridge to the state line where we found the iron pipe pictured in the White book. We referenced the pipe and then dug the area looking for evidence of the original corner, described in the field notes as a cedar post, but found none.

We located Ellicott Mound #24 approximately 700 feet west of the iron pipe and set a concrete monument with an aluminum cap stamped #24 in the center. About two weeks later, Hunter Newman, a local surveyor, returned to the site and used survey grade GPS to record the positions of the pipe and the mound.

The plan moving forward is to locate township corners for 42 miles north along the Washington Meridian and 36 miles south along the St. Helena meridian. Once both meridians are delineated, they can be intersected with Ellicott’s Line of Demarcation. These two points of intersection will then define a search area and, assuming the area is not too large, an extensive archaeological search can be conducted.

Once all involved can agree on a single position, a proper monument will be set to mark the Washington/St. Helena Initial Point.

THOREAU THE LAND SURVEYOR

As part of the planning for Rendezvous 2017 in Concord, Massachusetts, the Rendezvous committee approached Thoreau Farm to determine if that entity could be incorporated into the Rendezvous activities. Initial contact with Thoreau Farm was in April, 2016 at which time the Rendezvous committee indicated a desire by Surveyors Historical Society to place an acknowledgement of Thoreau’s surveying career at the farm. Margaret Carroll-Bergman, Executive Director at Thoreau Farm, made numerous attempts to get approval for a memorial at the Farm. The Rendezvous came and went and the Thoreau Farm Board of Directors never made a decision on any of the proposals.
Following the success of the Thoreau Final Point installation at Sleepy Hollow Cemetery, David Ingram conceived the idea of a “Point of Beginning” as a supplement to the NSPS Final Point program. I attended the NSPS Foundation Board of Directors meeting in Las Vegas in February, 2018 and presented the proposal. Following some discussion, the Foundation Board approved the Point of Beginning concept.

Following approval by the NSPS Foundation Board, the concept of placing the first Point of Beginning marker at Thoreau Farm was presented to the Thoreau Farm Board and, following some negotiation regarding the form of the marker, approval was obtained to install a granite monument incorporating a sundial, the Point of Beginning marker, and a plaque explaining the purpose of the monument.

On June 5, 2018, David Ingram and I were joined at Thoreau Farm by NSPS Foundation Chair Wayne Harrison. We spent the day preparing a foundation for the Point of Beginning monument.

On July 11, 2018, the monument was delivered and installed by the monument company. David Ingram and I then installed the Point of Beginning disc, the explanatory plaque and a sundial provided by the Thoreau Farm Board of Directors.

On July 13, 2018, David Ingram and I spent the day at Emerson Playground in Concord, Massachusetts demonstrating 19th century surveying tools and techniques to participants at the Annual Gathering of the Thoreau Society.

On July 14, 2018, David Ingram and I gave a 2-hour demonstration of 19th century surveying tools and techniques under the auspices of Walden Pond State Reservation. Approximately 25 people attended over the course of the event.

On July 15, 2018, a ceremony was held at Thoreau Farm to dedicate the Point of Beginning monument. Many of the Thoreau Society Annual Gathering participants were also in attendance including 91-year-old Joseph Wheeler who was born in the same house Thoreau was born in on July 12, 1817. Remarks were offered by Margaret Carroll-Bergman, Executive Director at Thoreau Farm; Ken Lizotte, President of the Thoreau Farm Board of Directors; Robert Dahn, Secretary of the NSPS Foundation Board of Trustees and myself. It was obvious from the large number of enthusiastic compliments that the monument is considered a welcome addition to Thoreau Farm.
RENDEZVOUS 2019

Rendezvous 2019, sponsored by Surveyors Historical Society and the Utah Council of Land Surveyors, will be held at the Double Tree Salt Lake City Airport. 2019 is the 150th anniversary of a number of events relevant to surveying including:

- The Golden Spike ceremony at Promontory Summit, Utah
- The establishment of the USC&GS Latitude and Longitude station in Salt Lake City
- The partial resurvey of the Salt Lake Meridian
- The descent of the Green and Colorado Rivers by John Wesley Powell
- The beginning of the Wheeler Survey in the Great Basin

Dates for Rendezvous 2019 are September 18-21, 2019.

Richard Leu, Chairman
Surveyors Historical Society