

I'm in the process of reviewing Mr. Irvine's work for Sunde Land surveying, who are in the process of scanning it. He did a lot of work and we have a lot of his surveys. Most of them are hand drawn ink on cloth or vellum.

His field notes are on 8 ½ x 11 sheets of paper and show what he found, the measurements, and how he did the survey.

It is not only the amount of surveys that are impressive, but the quality of the work.

In my home office I have a photo of John B. Irvine sitting at a roll top desk with the young Paul McLagan standing in the background. It was given to me by Paul's grandson, Clinton McLagan and I prize it. Clint also has stories to tell about his grandfather working for Mr. Irvine.

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The Survey of the City of St. Paul and the Standard Maps

In December of 1998 I met with Don Ernster, L.S. 6598, a past St. Paul City Surveyor to talk about the city survey and the standard maps. Don started with the City in 1961 under Irv Forsberg, L.S. 1734.

Don had published an article in Dis-Closures discussing the use of the standard maps for ground control for aerial photography in 1969. They needed 1 in 5,000 accuracy and the standard maps hit close enough to do it. The article goes on to state in part:

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St. Paul was incorporated in 1849. The rectangular survey (township section) in the St. Paul area was completed between 1845 and 1855. The City occupies part of four townships and the corner common to these four townships is near the center of the City. There are approximately fifty-five sections within the boundaries of St. Paul. The rectangular survey was the base for all surveys within the City and the notes and maps from this survey were the first recorded documents of St. Paul's survey records.

The government survey placed wooden hubs at the section and quarter section corners.

There are more than 5,000 survey notebooks in the files of the Public Works Department. If one were to page through them chronologically and trace the survey lines on a City map, the order of development of the City would unfold before him. The information in these books is very valuable and City Surveyors use it to establish street centerlines and property lines. Private surveyors use this information to locate lot and block corners and as evidence in court cases.

February 17, 1871

NOTES FROM CITY COUNCIL PROCEEDINGS

The following communication from the City Surveyor was referred to the Committee on Legislation:

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To the Honorable the President and Common Council of the City of St. Paul:

GENTLEMEN: I desire to briefly call your attention to the protest of Messrs. Boyle and VonMinden against the passage of a bill legalizing the monuments set during the past year, as permanent landmarks, and to set forth some of the facts in the case.

They do not claim any personal knowledge of the location of said monuments, and admit the positive benefit of permanently marking points correctly ascertained, &c.

In the first place, at my request, the committee on streets were appointed to superintend the location and setting of said monuments and to fully attend to all the details connected therewith. It was agreed upon by the committee to first set corners that were known and easily proven, and I was authorized and required to get the best possible authority in establishing the required corners, which I have done to the satisfaction of the committee who have thoroughly investigated the matter.

I have consulted Messrs. S.P. Folsom, J.T. Halsted and F. McCormick, (old surveyors who have surveyed and laid out most of the additions in the city) as well as many of the old landed proprietors, and the government surveys, as the best authority so far as the monuments have been set. In Winslow's and Leach's Additions, where there has been a great deal of discrepancy in the lines of different surveyors, the monuments have only been set to mark the legal subdivisions of the section, with the view of making a complete survey and taking all the evidence obtainable before connecting the lines of streets and additions with the subdivision lines of the section, and it has been the sole purpose and aim of the committee and myself to correctly and equitably establish the corners, which we claim has been strictly carried out.

Messrs. B. and V. think that a committee of competent persons should be employed to ascertain the correctness of these monuments while I claim that they have thus far been established upon the most undisputable authority.

Competency in establishing old landmarks does not consist so much in high scientific engineering ability, as in the personal knowledge of the exact location of corners, and in many cases, unprofessional citizens are better authority than even the engineers who are so fearful of disastrous legislation.

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I have been engaged in surveying the city almost exclusively for nearly fifteen years, and have spent much valuable time each year in securing the position of the old corners, many of which are now removed. I have been willing and glad to give the public the benefit of these notes, and have endeavored so to fix those monuments as to do away with their "convenient pegs on which to rest innumerable lawsuits." It is the almost universal wish of the property holders that these corners be permanently established.

If the public is to be subjected to endless litigation from the use of rolling stones and loose pegs in locating property, to gratify the caprice and whims of surveyors, let the blame rest where it belongs.

Very respectfully, J. I. CURTIS

1885
 One Hundred and forty-two additions have been accepted by the Common Council during the year. The "boom" in the real estate market has resulted in the rush of real estate dealers and property owners to put their property into lots and throw them upon the market.

1914

In 1849 when the village of St. Paul was incorporated, property ownership was based on claim lines. In 1853, the United States completed the subdivision of the territory now covered by the City, and since that time subdivision lines have been based on these township and section lines, excepting where claim lines existed.

Between the years 1885 and 1890, all of the section lines within the city limits were re-run with transit and steel tape, and all section and quarter section corners were marked with granite monuments. At the same time all streets were re-surveyed and monumented, so that a complete survey of the then existing laid out portion of the city's entire area was made and mapped on a scale of 100 feet to one inch.

All existing platting was shown on these maps with record distances, and also the re-surveyed distances with monuments. These maps were called Standard maps and were made on mounted eggshell, each map covering one mile east and west and one-half mile north and south. There is a total of 118 of these maps. They were public records and were used continually by outside surveyors, real estate men, etc., as well as by employees of the City Engineer's office. As they became badly worn, an attempt was made in 1902 and 1903 to trace them, but it was found impractical as so many of the lines had been obliterated by use and furthermore, a great many errors had been made in the filling-in, in the original platting. It was then decided to redraw them from the original notes on heavy, detail paper, trace these drawings and blue-print them; the blue-prints were to be used by the public and the original drawings to be preserved.

1927

During this year, a determined effort has been made to complete the standard city maps and other records which have been behind for a number of years. This work is proceeding with all possible speed and within the coming year should be well up. With the increase in the volume of records, this Department is becoming very cramped for filing and vault space and arrangements should be made to increase the filing capacity of our present vault, so that valuable records of this Department may be protected against fire or other loss.

2008

Mike Murphy, L.S. 41001, a past City Surveyor for the City of St. Paul, states that the 5' x 3' standard maps have been given to the Ramsey County Historical Society and some of the standard maps have more than one book for them.

The bulk of the field books are from the 1870's. Mike only found one from the 1860's, possibly by Curtice.

He does not recall any bill passing the state legislature legalizing monuments as permanent landmarks in St. Paul as noted in the letter of 1871 by Curtice.