



Mapping Services Manager, Ted Nunley, points out Ohio's Virginia Military District

COUNTY LAND DESCRIPTIONS TIED TO HISTORY

If you were offered land for sale "between the Miamis," would you be surprised to learn it's over a thousand miles from the nearest palm tree? Or, if your property deed contained the word "perches," that it was not referring to fish?

Actually, these are just a few of the hundreds of often contradictory terms Sidwell tax map technicians must know when drawing new county maps.

Land descriptions used to convey property have their beginnings rooted in history. Nowhere is this more evident than in Ohio.

Land ceded from English land grants

In the early 1700's, the State of Ohio was carved out of vast wilderness territory lying northwest of the Ohio River. By 1786 most of Ohio's land had been ceded from the original English land grants to the United States Congress. To ensure the orderly sale of land in this frontier area, the Congress enacted the Land Ordinance of 1785. This ordinance established the rectangular system of land survey which gives us the checkerboard land patterns we're used to seeing today.

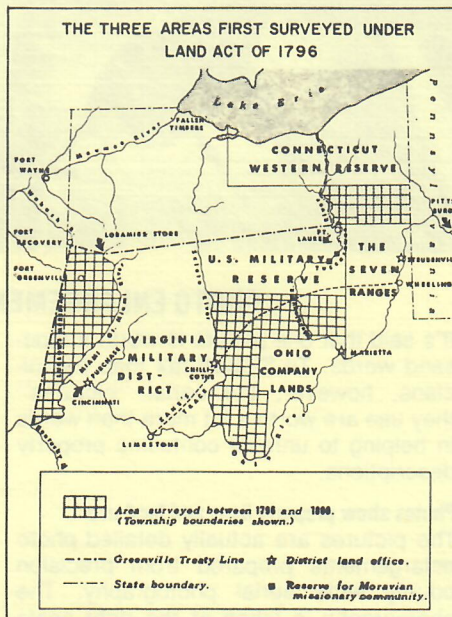
Surveys by metes and bounds

What makes Ohio so unusual is that it is covered by eighteen different land grants, some of which were never completely ceded to the U.S. Government. Surveys in these districts were done using the old metes and bounds method. Many of the other districts were used to test the new rectangular survey system, often with chaotic results.

One of the earliest of the land grants was the Virginia Military District, occupying over four million acres along the Ohio River. The name was derived from the fact that the land was parceled out to Virginia soldiers as payment for fighting in the Revolutionary War.

Since this land was not under the Congress' jurisdiction, it was allocated by metes and bounds—an inaccurate method used in Virginia and the other thirteen colonies.

General George Washington was one of the more famous soldiers who received allotments in this district.



"Crazy-quilt" property shapes

There were few restrictions on surveys; and the first person in an area usually staked out the best farmland, letting the topography determine the shape of his property. It wasn't long before a "crazy-quilt" pattern developed.

At this same time, the Federal Government began surveying the most accessible land along the Ohio River using the new rectangular survey system. The first area, located in the southeast part of the state, was known as the "Seven

Ranges." It was named this because federal surveyors stopped surveying after laying out only seven rows or ranges of townships.

Serpentine numbering started in 1796

This area, like others found in the state, used a section numbering system which starts in the southeast corner of the township and proceeds from the south to north in each succeeding row of sections. The Land Ordinance of 1796 changed this numbering sequence to the present "serpentine" pattern used today.

In addition to the unusual numbering schemes, there are parts of central Ohio subdivided into 5x5 mile square townships instead of the usual 6x6 mile townships.

Unraveling deed descriptions from colonial times is not easy, however, for Sidwell's experienced Data Group personnel, it's all in a day's work.

For example, in Warren County, a recently completed Ohio tax mapping project, deeds were used from four different survey systems to draw the maps.

Peculiar words of land grants

Ohio may have the largest number of land grants, but other states have their peculiarities. St. Clair County, Illinois, for example, contains numerous French land grants established before the Louisiana Purchase. Sidwell technicians who prepared the tax maps for St. Clair County had to become familiar with terms such as "vara" and "arpent."

One of these grants near East St. Louis is known as the Cahokia Common Fields. Like other areas of this type, the Common Fields has an interesting history.

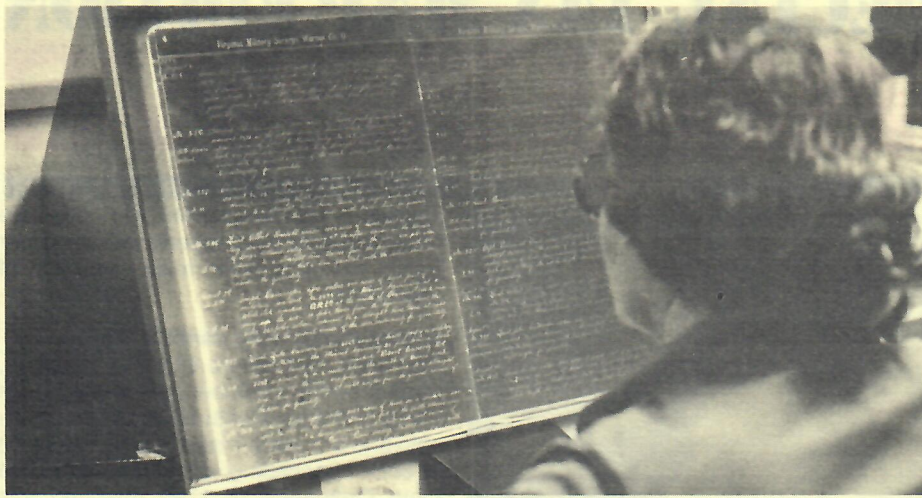
Parcel shapes reflect Indian raids

The parcels of land located here are laid out like long, narrow rectangles pointing at an angle toward the Mississippi River. Historians tell us the unusual patterns were created for defense purposes. The pioneer farmers would line up at one end of their elongated properties and begin plowing "en masse" toward the river. Since each person was within shouting distance of his neighbor, it was relatively easy to defend against raiding Indians.

Of course, not all mapping projects get as involved as the examples given here. However, when the need arises, Sidwell's experienced personnel can handle the tough ones.

Win a land survey map

Readers interested in testing their knowledge of land descriptions can receive a free 16" x 20" Land Survey Map for correctly identifying the terms "perch" and "arpent." Please send all entries to Department MN, c/o The Sidwell Company. The correct answers will be given in the next issue of MAP NEWS.



Data Group technician studies microfilm image of property deed

DEED RESEARCH ESSENTIAL FOR ACCURACY

Property records being what they are, it's not surprising to find numerous cases where abbreviated legal descriptions are not precise enough to locate property boundaries.

Sidwell technicians face this problem daily while preparing new county tax maps. As a consequence, they have become adept at deed research.

Survey plat is a graphic picture of the deed

Deeds are the only legal conveyance describing the location, shape and size of a person's property. Plats of survey done by a land surveyor represent a graphic picture of the deed. However, this occasionally only serves to emphasize a faulty legal description which then requires judicial interpretation.

Tax map is a picture of assessment roll

The tax maps prepared by Sidwell also represent a graphic picture . . . in this case, a picture of the county's assessment roll. Although the maps are essential for proper assessing, they are not considered legal documents for transfer of property.

Accurate placement of property lines important

Legal or not, accuracy is of the utmost importance. During the parceling stage, Data Group personnel research deeds to determine the accurate placement of property lines that are questionable. Sometimes this search goes back through several owners before the problem is resolved.

Usually the county supplies deed copies for problem parcels. In other cases, the deeds are on microfilm which is stored at Sidwell during the project.

As anyone who has tried knows, reading deeds takes some practice. It also helps if you can remember some of your high school Latin; and, depending on the section of the country, you're likely to encounter outdated Old English, French and Spanish terms for area and distance.

"Starting at the cottonwood tree . . ."

Still other deeds, especially those located in areas not covered by the Federal Rec-

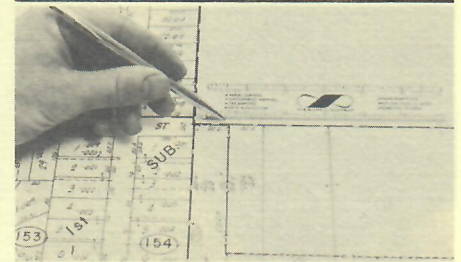
tangular Survey System, can lead the reader on a colorful walking tour of the property "starting at the cottonwood tree by the river, thence . . ."

Sidwell technicians find that being part draftsman, part historian and having lots of common sense will usually unravel even the toughest deed description.

EXPERIENCE COUNTS

Experience is a great teacher. In fact, when it's all said and done, experience is probably the single most important factor in the success or failure of any job.

For experience in tax mapping, it's hard to beat the record being compiled by Sidwell personnel. They have just passed the four million, two hundred thousand mark in the number of parcels mapped.



MAP RULER AVAILABLE

A plastic ruler, printed with four map scales at 100', 200', 400' and 600' to the inch, is available at no charge from Sidwell. The six-inch ruler is useful in the office or field for making quick measurements on maps or aerial photos and for making drawings to scale. Rulers may be obtained by writing to: Dept. MN.

Data Group technician uses aerial photo to check the accuracy of property lines for new tax map

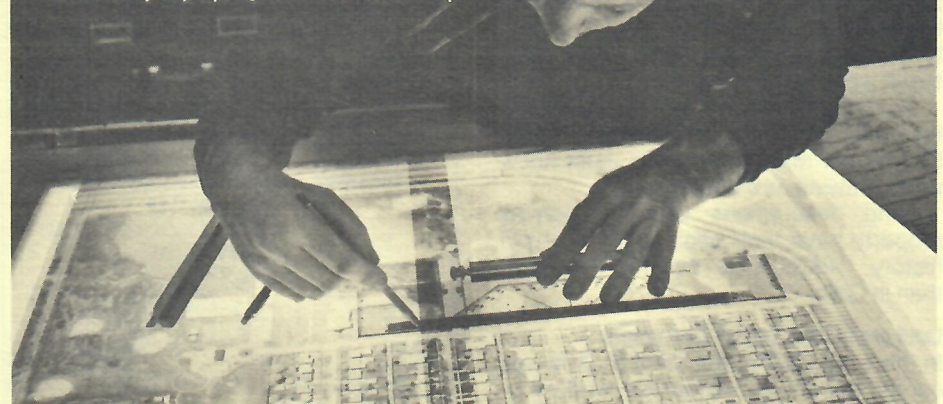


PHOTO ENLARGEMENTS UNCOVER ERRORS

It's said that one picture is worth a thousand words. To Sidwell tax map technicians, however, the aerial "pictures" they use are worth a lot more than words in helping to unravel confusing property descriptions.

Photos show property lines and land use

The pictures are actually detailed photo enlargements prepared from precision county wide aerial photography. The photography is taken at the right scale and during foliage-free times of the year so that property line indications and land use are clearly visible.

Landmarks become map framework

These accurate enlargements are used from the start of a mapping project to determine the location of roads, railroads, streams and other landmark features which become the framework for development of the map.

During final drafting, the location of individual property lines is constantly checked against the detail shown on the photo base. This often uncovers problems in deed descriptions and occupancy.

Buildings located over property lines

According to Drafting Supervisor, Marv Knopp, "There have been cases of houses and garages being built over property lines, access roads established on the wrong property and a substantial increase or decrease in the size of properties where they border a river or lake."

In addition to making the maps more accurate, the photo enlargements provided with every Sidwell mapping project help assessment officials inventory improvements, check land use and determine the extent of tillable and nontillable areas.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON ANY SIDWELL MAPPING SERVICES . . .

Write to The Sidwell Company, 28W240 North Avenue, West Chicago, IL 60185 or phone (312) 231-0206