A Filing System for Records, Maps, Field Books, Etc.

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Most surveyors are careless in recording both legal and private surveys. When surveys are fully recorded, they are valuable for future reference. We who are in office and have been for some time are somewhat slack in showing all the data on these surveys. We are so familiar with the various starting points and also the points of new surveys that are being made that we neglect going into detail on these records. Of course, we are handicapped by the lack of help in our offices. As you all know, the members of the county council in going over our appropriations are not fully informed as to why we should have more help, or why these records should be kept properly. I believe if we would ask for more help to complete these records and explain fully to the council the reasons why more help is needed, we might be able in a great many instances to have the needed money appropriated.

In making a survey in a town, it is very important that we have a permanent starting point, preferably the starting point of the original layout or platted portion of the town. Many of the additions which have been platted and recorded in the plat book in the recorder's office are lacking in information in that they do not specify a certain distance from a given point. I am sure some of these plats of additions have been laid out on paper rather than by courses and distances of the platted area itself. This alone causes a great deal of confusion in later surveys.

In laying out a new addition, I give the starting point a definite position from one or two permanent markers and then proceed to give the courses and distances of the area to be platted. Then we plat this parcel of land into lots, giving their numbers, and mark in the streets and alleys, with the exact width of each lot, street, and alley to correspond with the original outline.

In the Marshall County Surveyor's Office we have a number of records of private and legal surveys dating back to 1851 which give in detail the various surveys that have been made by former surveyors. The main difficulty with these early surveys is that they gave us witness trees, hedge fences, water edges, etc., to tie in with the points
mentioned. Many of these trees and fences have been removed and water lines have changed, and for that reason we are unable to find the exact location of the original survey.

On our records at present, whenever possible, we give the distance from a permanent starting point. At this point, we generally drive a 1″ or 1¼″ pipe into the ground. The length of this pipe should be no less than three feet, so that it cannot be readily removed. In the record itself we describe these points, giving the location and description of the point—whether it is a 1¼″ well point, 1″ pipe, or concrete marker. Occasionally we have to use a cross on a sidewalk or curb which, of course, is permanent only until the sidewalk or curb is removed. In this case a second witness should be indicated by some permanent object. If this is not done, a new surveyor must go back to the original point and establish a place of beginning, which causes a great waste of time.

Ditch Records

I believe we have about as complete records of petitioned ditches as will be found in any county. Before about 1928, all proceedings on ditches petitioned in circuit court were copied in large volumes by the county clerk. We have twelve large volumes of these proceedings in our office. All proceedings of petitioned ditches that were filed in commissioners’ court were also copied by the county auditor in large record books, of which we have ten. All these records are indexed in the name of the petitioner and give the township in which the ditch is situated.

We find this very helpful whenever anyone seeks help in repairing these various drains. When someone comes to the surveyor’s office and asks for the repair of a ditch, the first thing the surveyor asks is, “Is this a petitioned ditch?” If it is and he finds no record thereof in book form, he must hunt through box after box in some remote corner of the courthouse, trying to find a record of the ditch. Upon finding the name asked for, he may discover that that ditch is in some other township; then he must try to find out the official name of the ditch. In the end he may discover that it is not a petitioned ditch, and that all his searching has been in vain.

We have a list in our office of all ditches in our ditch records, indexed according to township, name of ditch, starting point, sections through which the drain runs and direction, and ditch or lake into which the ditch discharges. This is very helpful when someone does not know the name of the drain about which he is seeking information. If he can tell us in what section it starts, the general direction it
flows, and where it terminates, we can find the name of it and then locate it in our ditch records.

Since 1928, for some reason, our county clerk and auditor have not kept up the records of the various petitioned ditches. I do not know whether the law requires them to keep these ditch proceedings in book form or not. They have an index of the box for the particular ditch under the name that it was petitioned, and one must search through these boxes in order to get the information desired. To complicate matters more, in ditch cleanouts we find the ditches listed under new names instead of the names of the original ditches. Sometimes these ditches have been petitioned for reclean three or four times since the original ditch petition and each time under a different name. One must be familiar with the various names in order to associate them with the original petition. We keep in our office a duplicate copy of the ditches petitioned for reclean so that we can refer to them without going to the clerk or auditor's office.

**Field Notebooks**

We have a large number of field notebooks in our office which I believe will be very valuable to a new surveyor going into office. In these field notes is a great deal of data on elevations, locations, etc., which in later surveys gives valuable information for checking elevations with those of a former surveyor. These are also valuable when a farmer asks concerning the original depth of a ditch at a certain point. He may want to know whether he would have adequate drainage if this ditch were cleaned out to the original specifications. He may want to petition for a cleanout, in which case he will ask that the ditch be cleaned out to the original specifications. If this does not give proper drainage, he may ask for the widening and deepening of the drain in order to give him the drainage needed.

We all could be more thorough in keeping our records if we would only take the time. This would result in a great help to the incoming surveyor and to the public in general. After all, the county surveyor is a servant of the public.