

The following is a transcription of a document by William Roy Bandy. The original, a typewritten carbon copy, was found in the materials sent to Glenn Borkenhagen by Bandy's grandson Dirk Reith during August 2019. It has not been determined which article it was to precede.

INTRODUCTION to an article following

We have all read numerous exciting stories about how the glorious West was won by the hardy pioneer prospectors and home-seekers who early migrated into the great unknown wilderness seeking home and fortune. However, little has been said about the all important role played by the plodding Government Land Surveyors who also worked their way westward surveying that land so the settlers following them could obtain title to tracts of it for their very own.

This rush westward all began with the acquisition of the first big block of public domain land by our young nation in 1783 with the purchase of the Northwest Territory. Obtaining this undeveloped land by the Federal Government presented an urgent need for a practical, comprehensive system of surveys whereby it might be marked off into tracts suitable in size for disposition to prospective settlers. To meet this demand, none other than our own Thomas Jefferson arose to the occasion, and in consultation with that experienced and famous land surveyor, George Washington, and with other prominent leaders of the day invented and initiated our present Rectangular System of Public Land Surveys, which has so admirably served its purpose over the years. This simple and fool-proof system, often referred to as the best in the world is described briefly as follows:

“That the land be divided into townships six miles square; each township containing thirty-six sections one mile square bounded by lines running in cardinal directions. Provision was also made for subdividing the sections into aliquot parts, even down to square tracts containing only two and one-half acres each if desirable. Permanent corners were to be established at half-mile intervals around each section.”

Armed with this plan in detail the Government Land Surveyors working under instructions from the U.S. General Land Office began their arduous task of executing those surveys where most needed beginning at the Ohio River. The importance of this survey is seen when one learns that title to each and every acre of land in private ownership in the states covered by this rectangular system of survey, from the largest ranch to the small town lot is based upon a plat of this Government Survey.

Since this wild and untrodden land must be surveyed before title could pass to private parties it is evident that the Government surveyors must keep far ahead of the settler. He thus became the real pioneer, and in some instances a sort of explorer. Always in the vanguard, he often must blaze new trails far beyond the settled communities. Leading a nomadic life, often living off the country, the tent was his home, and blankets rolled out on the ground his bed. Used to roughing it, he was lulled to sleep by the coyote's song, and awakened early by the cheerful call of the friendly meadow lark. Shod with hobnailed boots, carrying a canteen of water, with a sandwich tied to their belts, the crew members were prepared to surmount every obstacle. Obstacles were not uncommon for the section lines must be run straight, leaving no chance for the surveyman to pick an easier way around a cliff, or across a canyon. However, to bolster up his morale he could always look forward to seeing a brand new landscape as he topped every hill. Even the most forbidding badlands are beautiful when their multicolored, jagged slopes are viewed from the shaded sanctuary of a stunted pine.