

The Public Lands Survey System

A Dependable Network for Land
Ownership



Wisconsin County Surveyors Association

“This Land is Your Land”

PLSS Forum - April 18, 2019
Darlington, Wisconsin

BRYAN MEYER – LA CROSSE COUNTY
SURVEYOR



WARNING

Audio books = 150-160 words per minute

Bryan = Clocked at 192 words per minute
(gusts in excess of 200 words per minute)

Name that National Monument





MOUNT RUSHMORE

The sculpture features the 60-foot heads of Presidents George Washington (1732–1799), Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919), and Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865). The four presidents were chosen, respectively, to represent the birth, the growth, the development, and the preservation of the United States.

Land surveyors have a
different name for that
monument



National **Surveyor's** Monument


Lincoln = Surveyor

Jefferson = Surveyor

Washington = Surveyor

3 Surveyors and some other guy





For your convenience, many of your questions and comments have already been incorporated into this presentation.

“Dude, what exactly qualifies you to talk about the Public Land Survey System?”



June 1976

Sunday Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday Saturday

		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24	25	26
27	28	29	30			

H. A. Sime and Associates
Tomah, Wisconsin

Historian
Mathematician
Cartographer
Lumberjack
Archeologist
Interpreter
Writer
Thinker
Moderator



H. A. Sime and Associates
Tomah, Wisconsin

28½ years

PRIVATE PRACTICE
SURVEY WORK



DECEMBER 2008

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7		8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20	21	22	23	24 Christmas Eve	25 Christmas Day	26
27	28	29	30	31 New Year's Eve		

November 2008

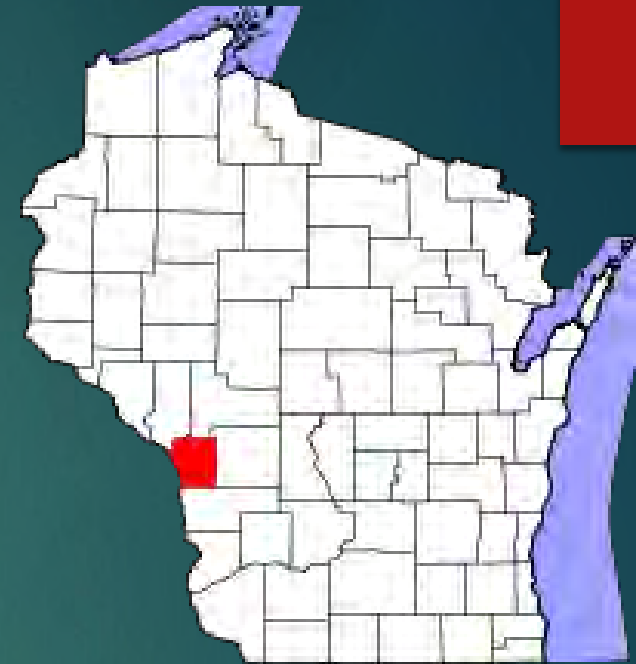
S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30						

January 2009

S	M	T	W	Th	F	Sa
						1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31					

Notes:

www.vertex42.com © 2007 Vertex42 LLC



LA CROSSE COUNTY
 Exceptional services. Extraordinary place.



I ❤️
MY
JOB



43

YEARS

The thing about my job that I am most passionate about is remonumentation of the Public Land Survey System



“So, just what is the Public Land Survey System?”

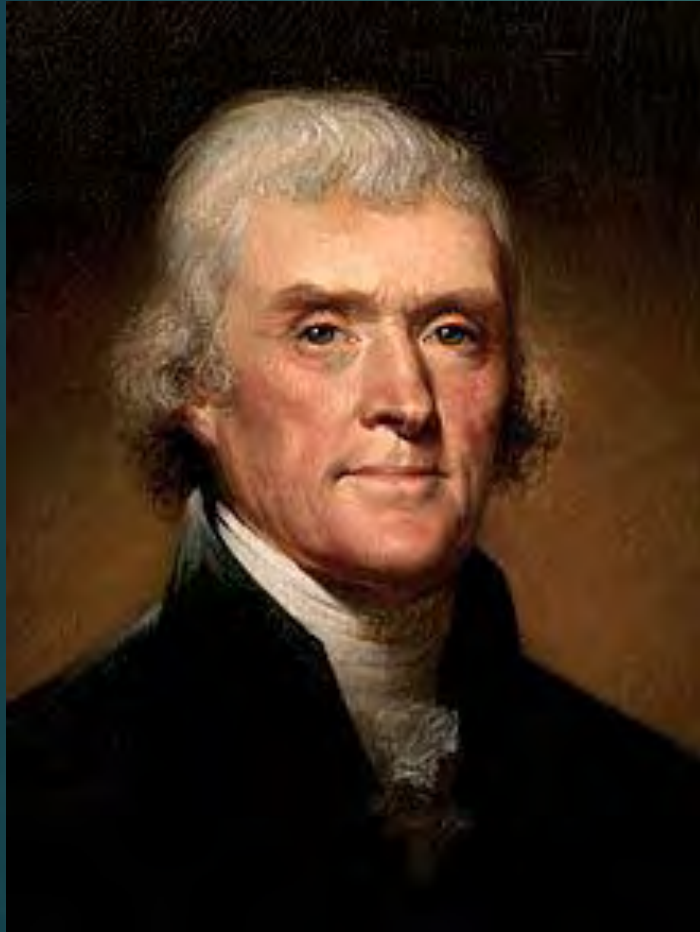


PUBLIC LAND SURVEY SYSTEM

The Land Ordinance of 1785 was adopted by the United States Congress of the Confederation on May 20, 1785.

Set up a standardized system whereby settlers could purchase title to farmland in the undeveloped west

Congress at the time did not have the power to raise revenue by direct taxation, so land sales provided an important revenue stream.

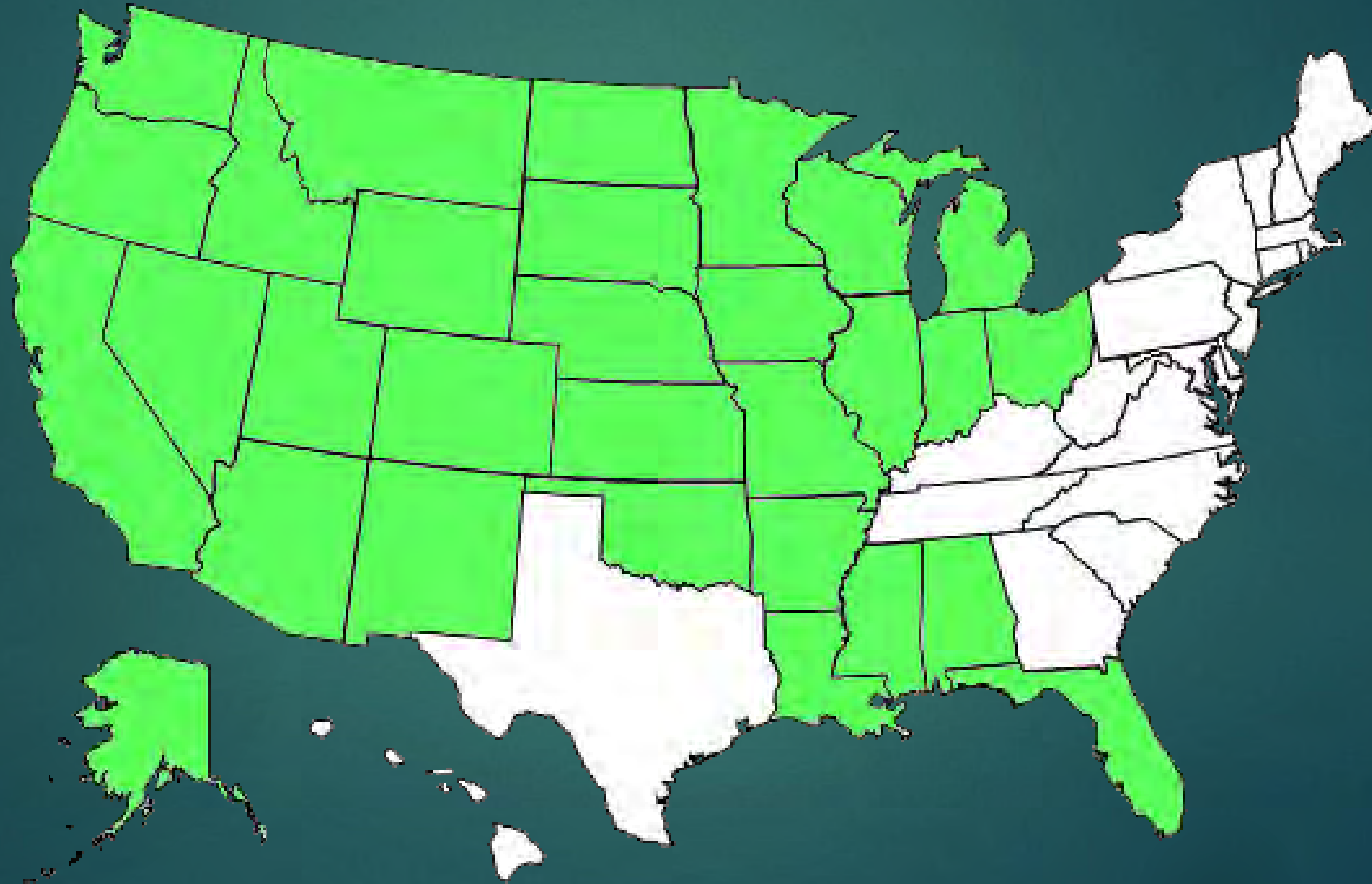


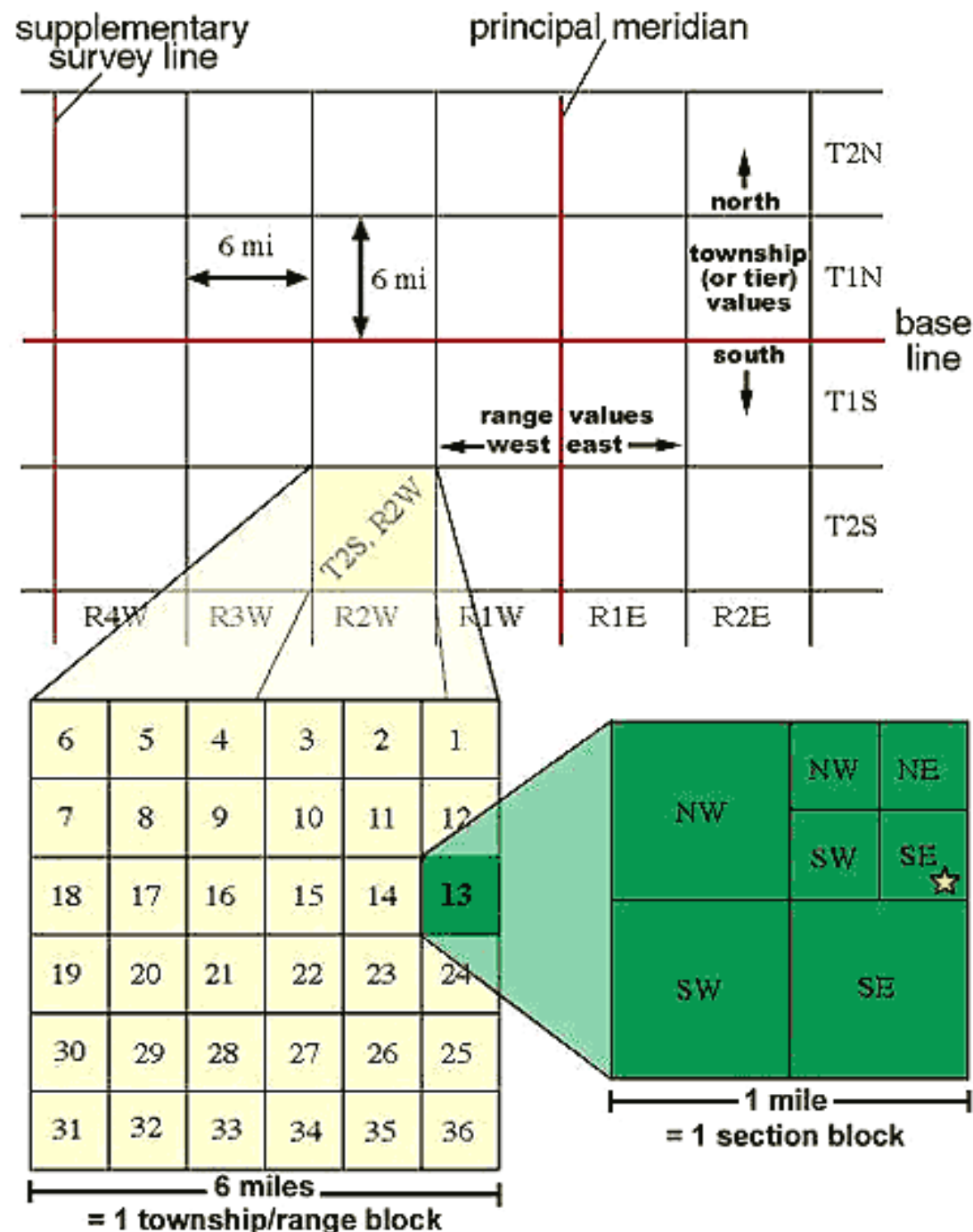
Championed by Thomas Jefferson

Yeoman farmers

160 acres

Public Lands Survey System (PLSS)






PLSS AT A GLANCE

Townships =
Roughly gridded 6 by 6
mile squares.

Sections = Roughly
gridded 1 by 1
mile squares.



The PLSS is the fundamental way that almost all of the state's land was first systematically marked, divided, and described, and remains the basis for that real property today.



The Public Land Survey System (PLSS) has a profound affect on how society operates in Wisconsin; however, it is such an underlying factor that most of us are unaware of it on a daily basis.

Public Land Survey System (PLSS)

Wisconsin's first man-made

INFRASTRUCTURE

in·fra·struc·ture

the basic physical and organizational structures and facilities (e.g. buildings, roads, power supplies) needed for the operation of a society or enterprise.





Infrastructure that protects
land ownership rights



Markers set in the ground as
reference points and guides

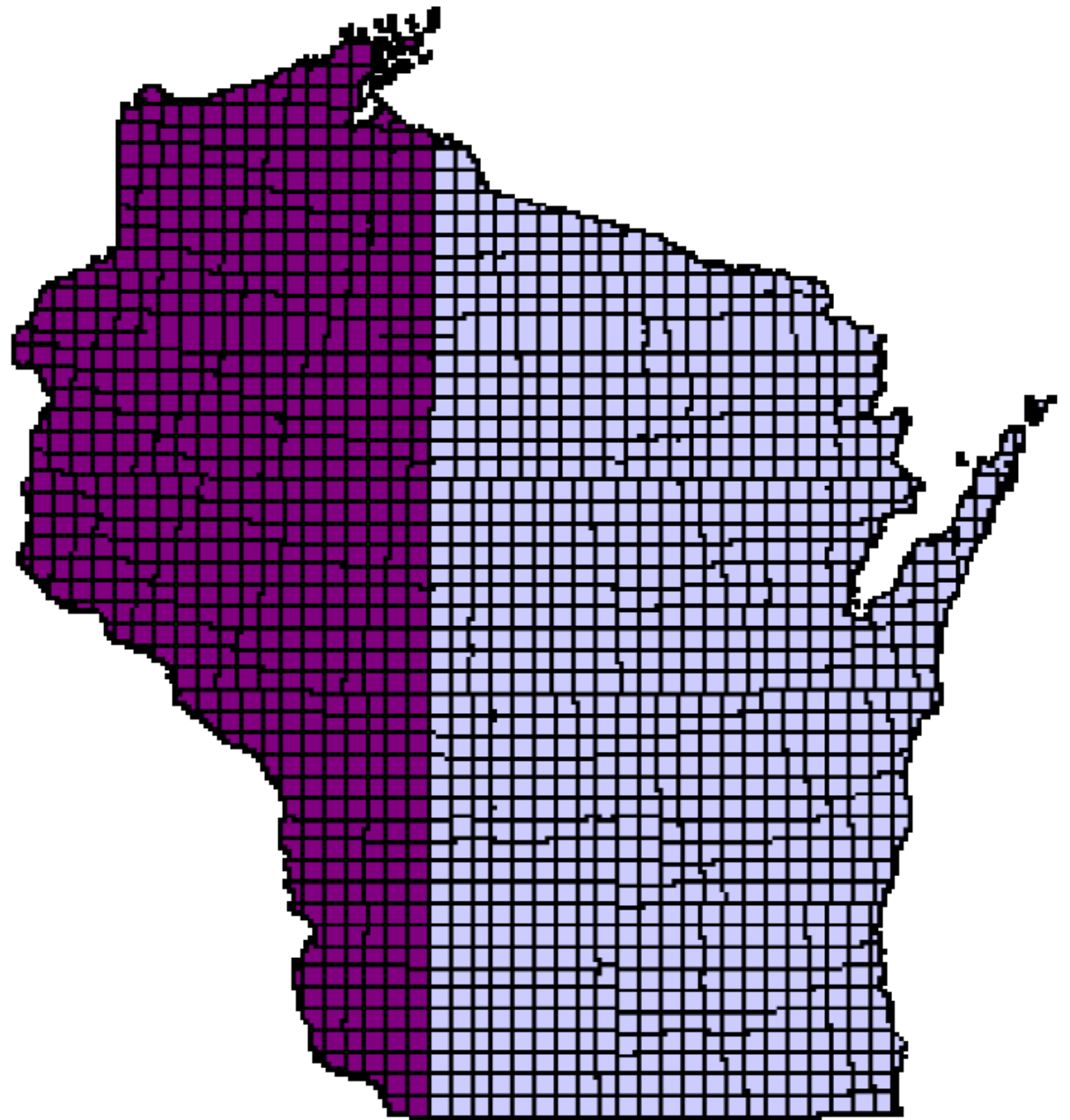


In Wisconsin,
the Original
Government Survey
took place
between
1832 and 1866





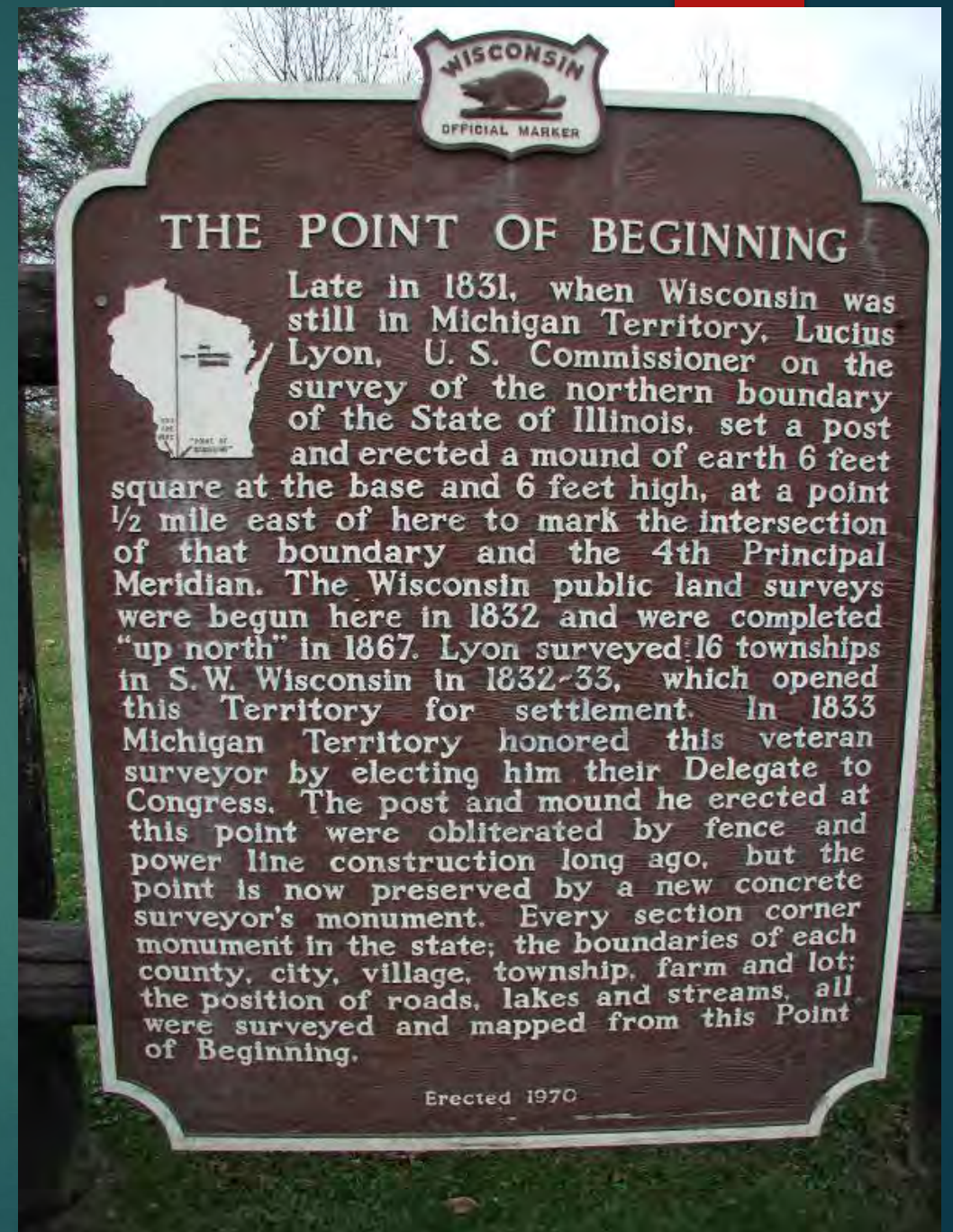
Base line and
Principal Meridian





Initial point

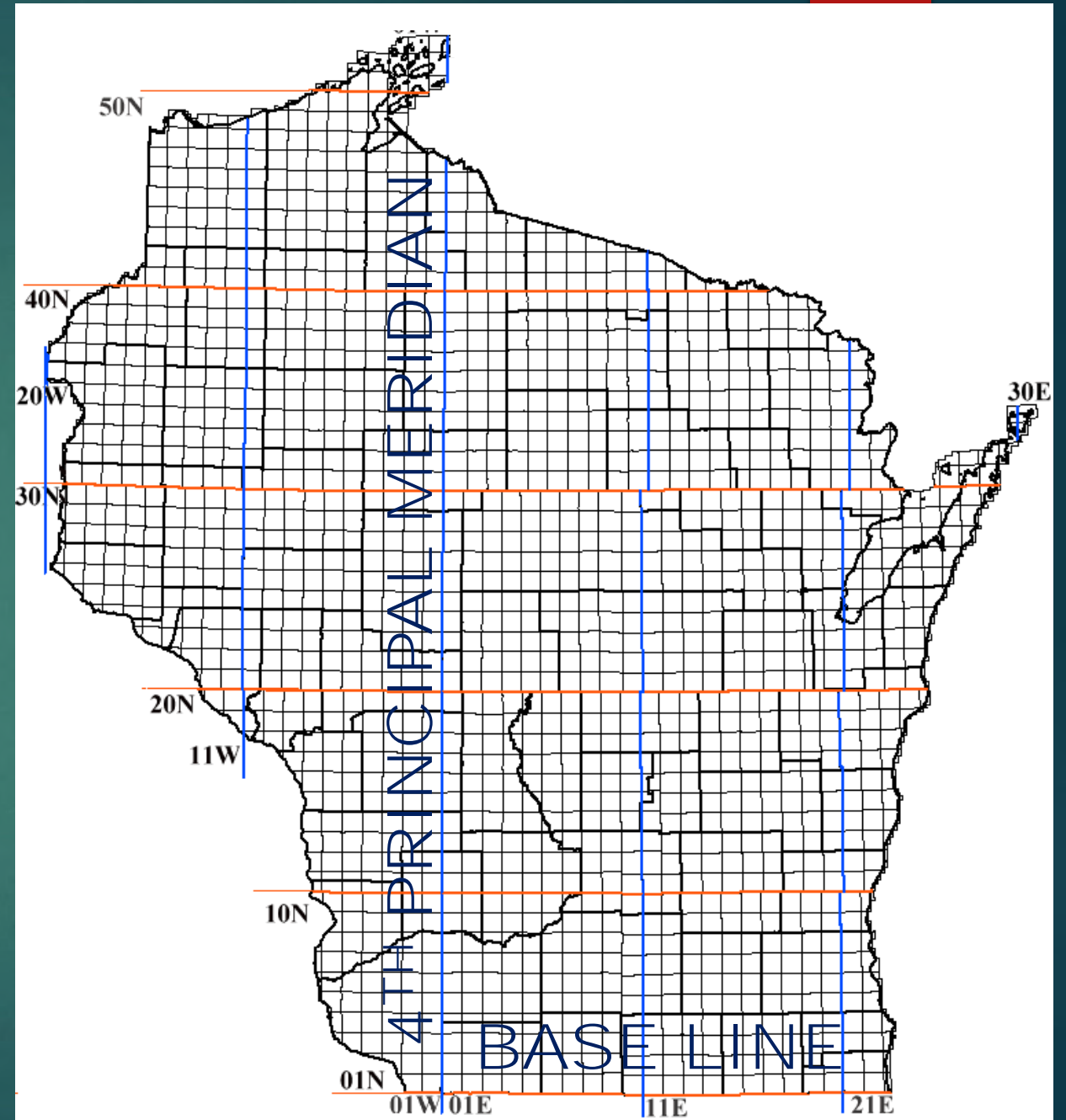
“Every section corner monument in the state; the boundaries of each county, city, village, township, farm and lot; the position of roads, lakes and streams, all were surveyed and mapped from this Point of Beginning.”

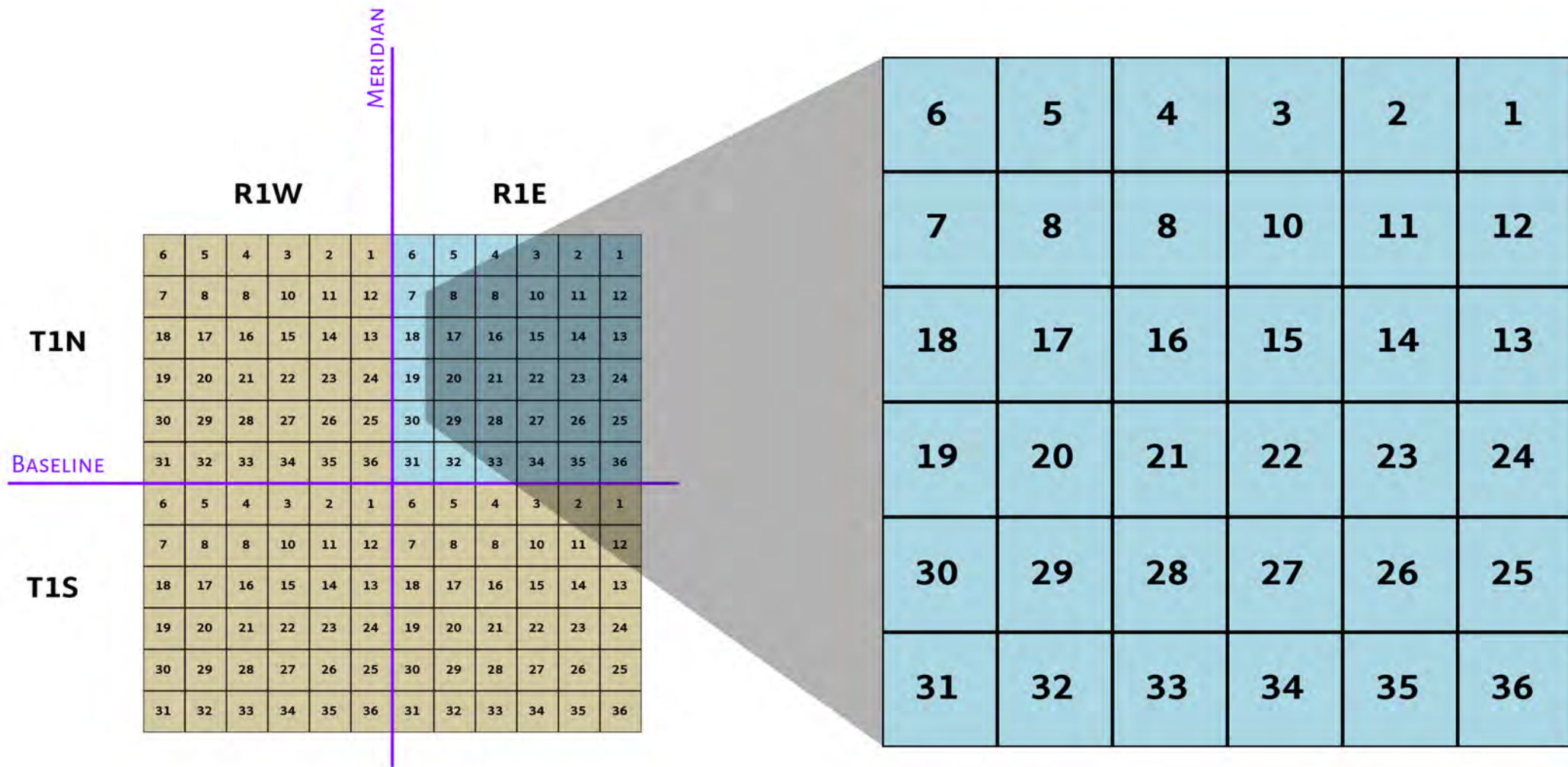


PLSS

Townships across Wisconsin

6 mile by 6 mile squares



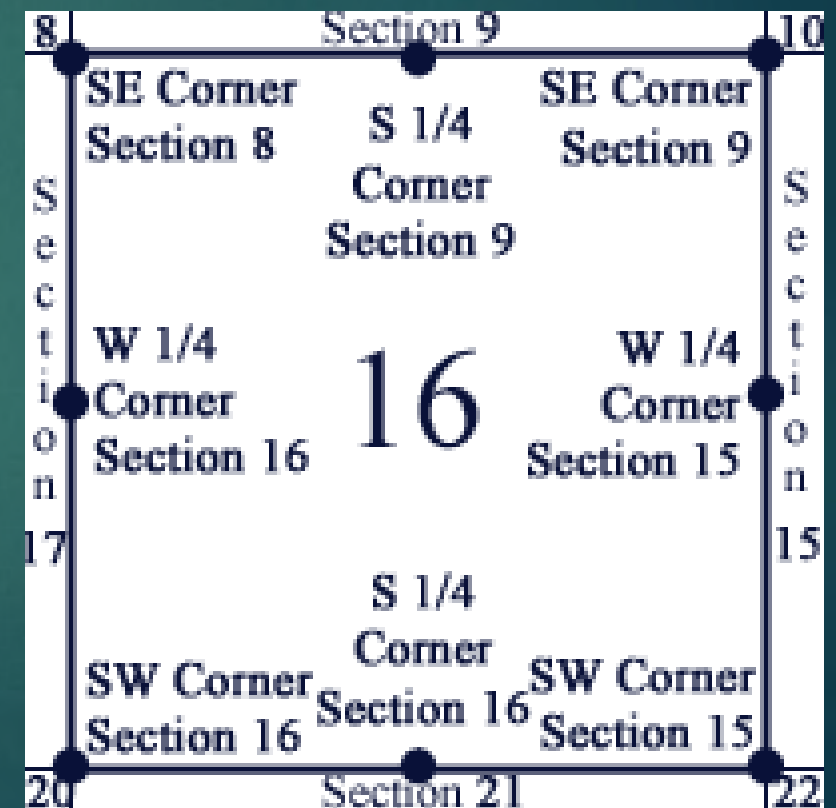


1 township = 6 miles
1 township = 36 sections

Corners established by the PLSS

6	5	4	3	2	1
7	8	9	10	11	12
18	17	16	15	14	13
19	20	21	22	23	24
30	29	28	27	26	25
31	32	33	34	35	36

A corner marker set every half mile on the exterior of every Section.



“School Section”

Land Ordinance of 1785

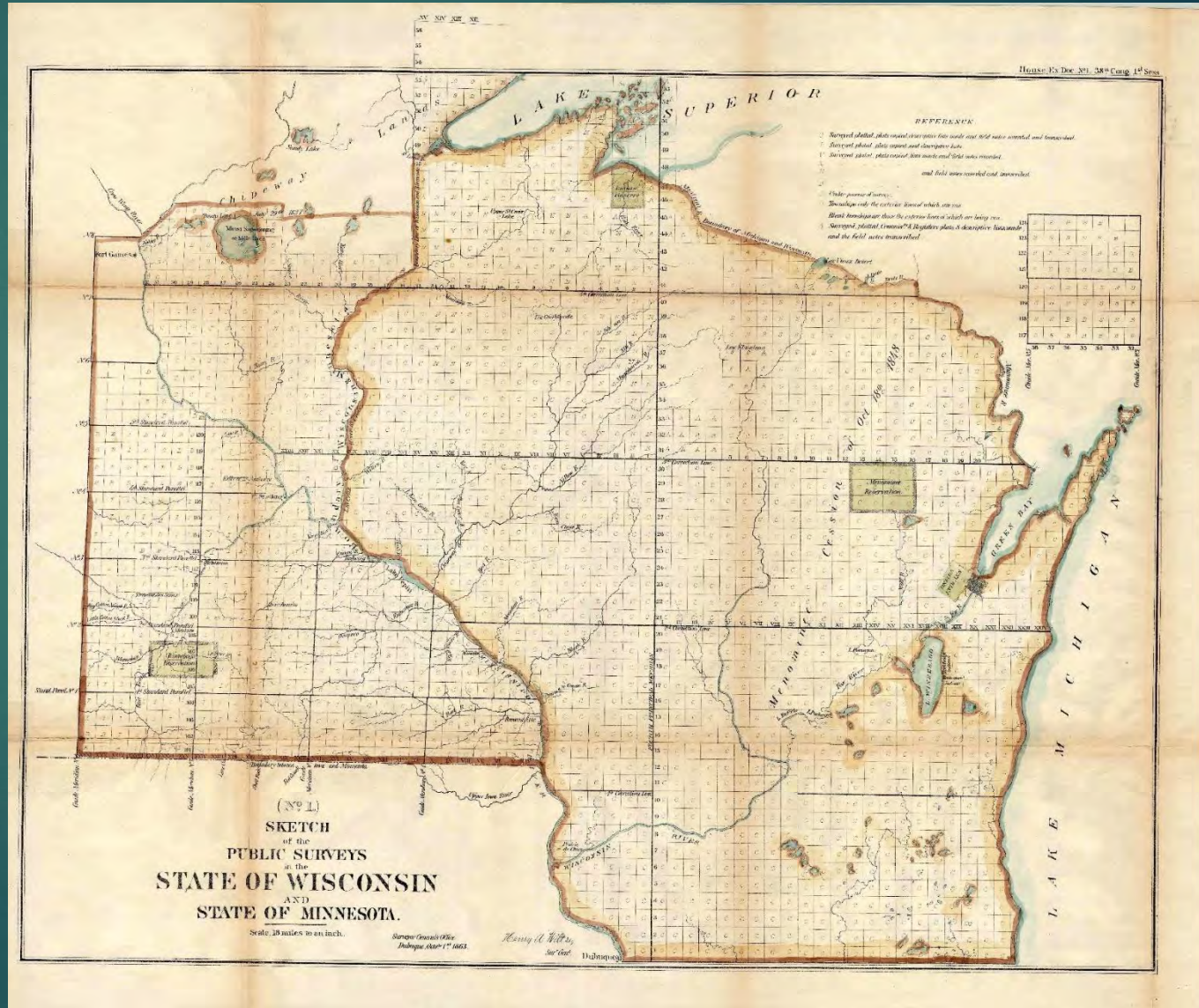
The ordinance was also significant for establishing a mechanism for funding public education.

Section 16 in each township was reserved for the maintenance of public schools.

"There shall be reserved the Lot No. 16, of every township, for the maintenance of public schools within said township."

Wisconsin's first man-made infrastructure

Markers set
basically
every half mile
across
the entire state
which
serve as reference
marks for land
ownership.

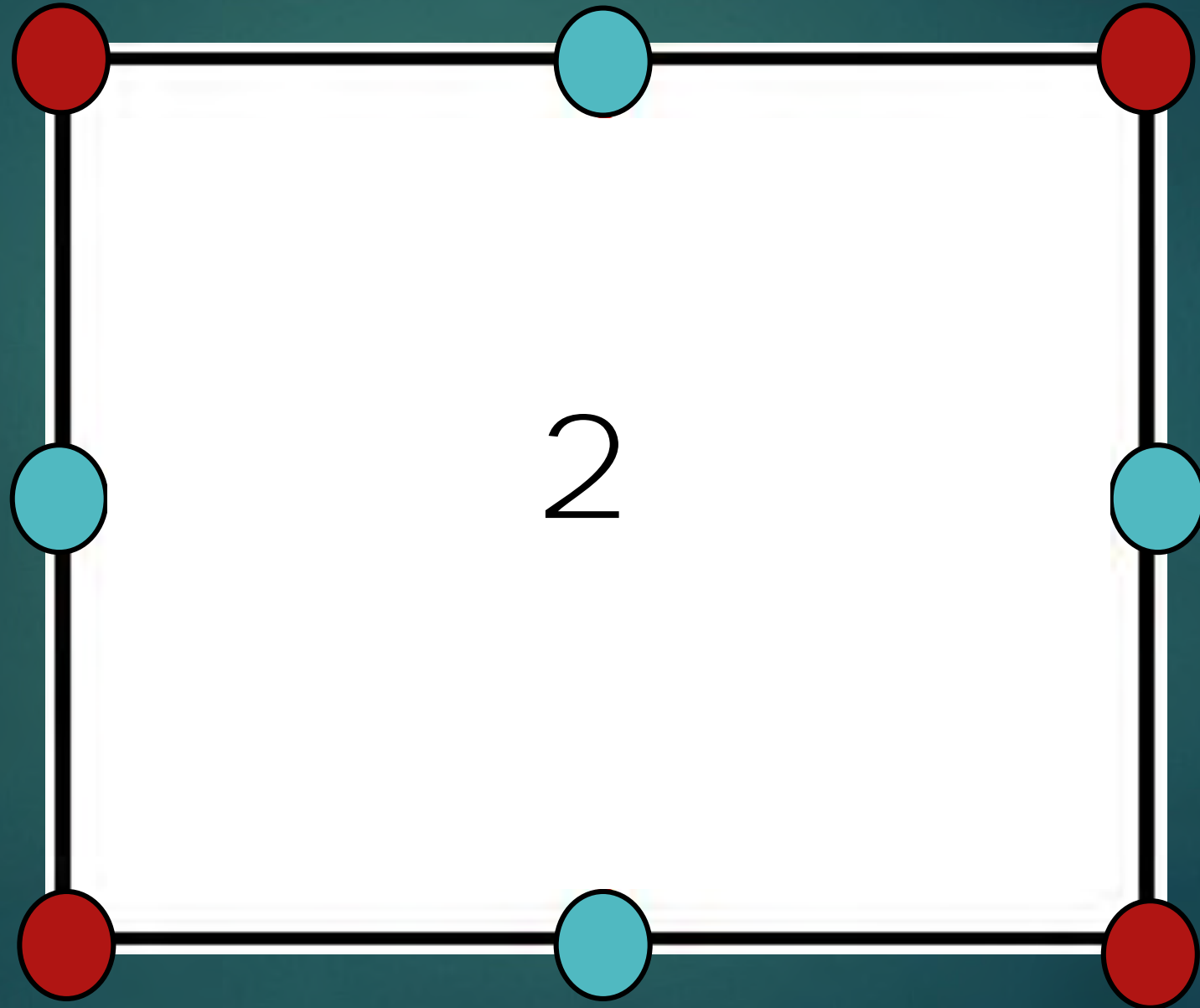


Corners established by the PLSS

SECTION CORNERS AND QUARTER CORNERS

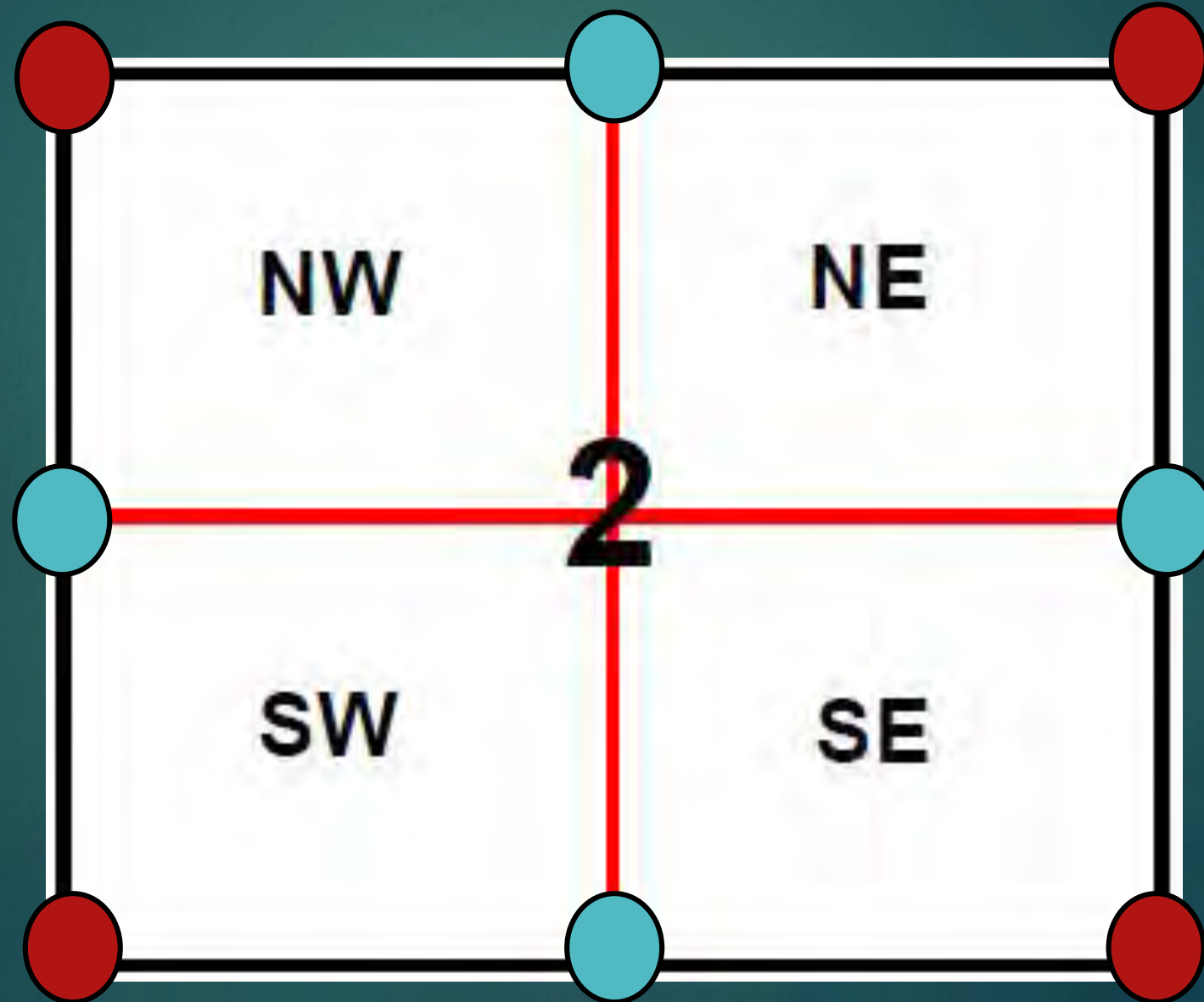
● = SECTION CORNER

● = QUARTER CORNER



● = SECTION CORNER

● = QUARTER CORNER



Original Government Notes

- Measurements
- Corner established (wood posts typ.)
- Bearing trees
- Terrain
- Assessed timber and soils

39 SB TOWNSHIP No. 19 NORTH Var. 80° 15'

C.L.

West along SB of Sec. 32

12.86 B Oak 12 in dia

40.00 Set post for sect. cor

Run 8 N 37 1/2 E 19

do 7 N 83 1/2 W 54

47.00 Leave dry land and enter
alder swamp South

80.00 Set post cor of Sec. 31 and 32

R Oak 12 N 29 1/2 E 14

Aspen 8 N 70 1/2 E 12

Land E of swamp Same as
last mile - west of mile
Alder, Tamarack, Maple and
Aspen Swamp

Dec 1845

40 RANGE No. 17 4TH MERIDIAN N.T. Var. 80° 15'

C.L.

West along SB of Sec. 31

4-90 Creek 15 L South and enter
prairie N. S.

17.00 Enter timber N. S.

40.00 Set post for sect. cor.

W Oak 24 N 1 E 17

do 24 N 67 1/2 E 43

51.10 W Oak 12 in dia.

70.60 Intersected NB 54 the North of
Temporary cor. and set post cor
of Is 18 & 19 N. Co. 1-2 N.

W Oak 11 S 37 N 30

do 12 N 31 N 32

Land E of creek alder swamp
West of mile rolling and level
mostly well timbered. W & R
Oak and aspen.

Original Corners of the PLSS



Wood posts
(most
cases)



Bearing trees





“Wait”

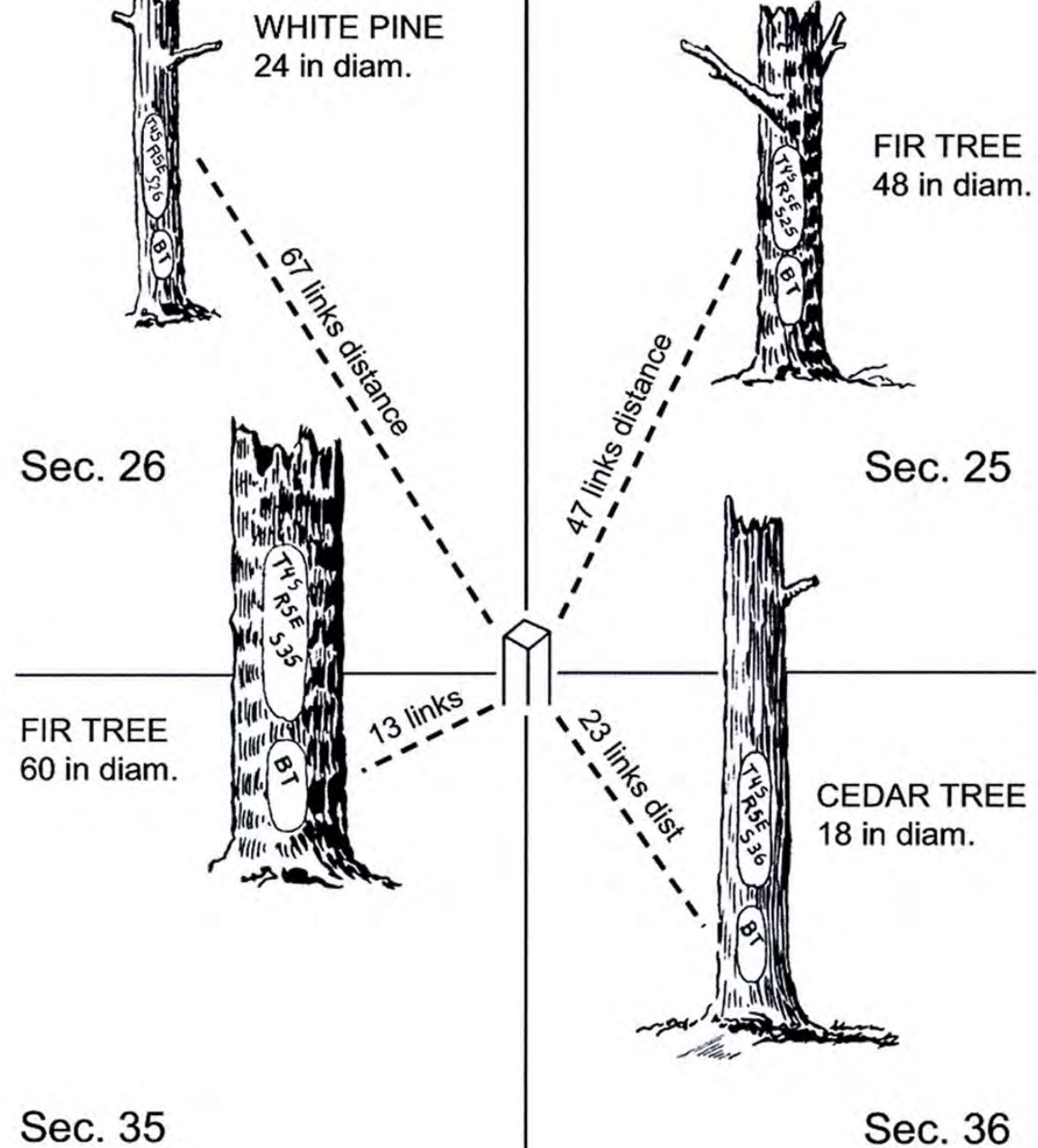
“Wood posts?”

“Trees?”

Marking the Corners

Wood posts were typically set for the corners

Bearing trees or witness trees





“Hey Bryan, do you have any examples of the equipment or wood posts from the PLSS?”

If you own land in Wisconsin, these corner monuments effect you and your property ownership rights!





“If these corner locations are so important, shouldn’t we be taking steps to recover them and get them back in the ground?”



YES.

In order to protect landowner rights,
these corners are absolutely necessary!



“Sounds tricky, how do you
find or re-establish
those corner locations?”



Look at the evidence

Original Government Survey Evidence

Subsequent survey work done after the OGS

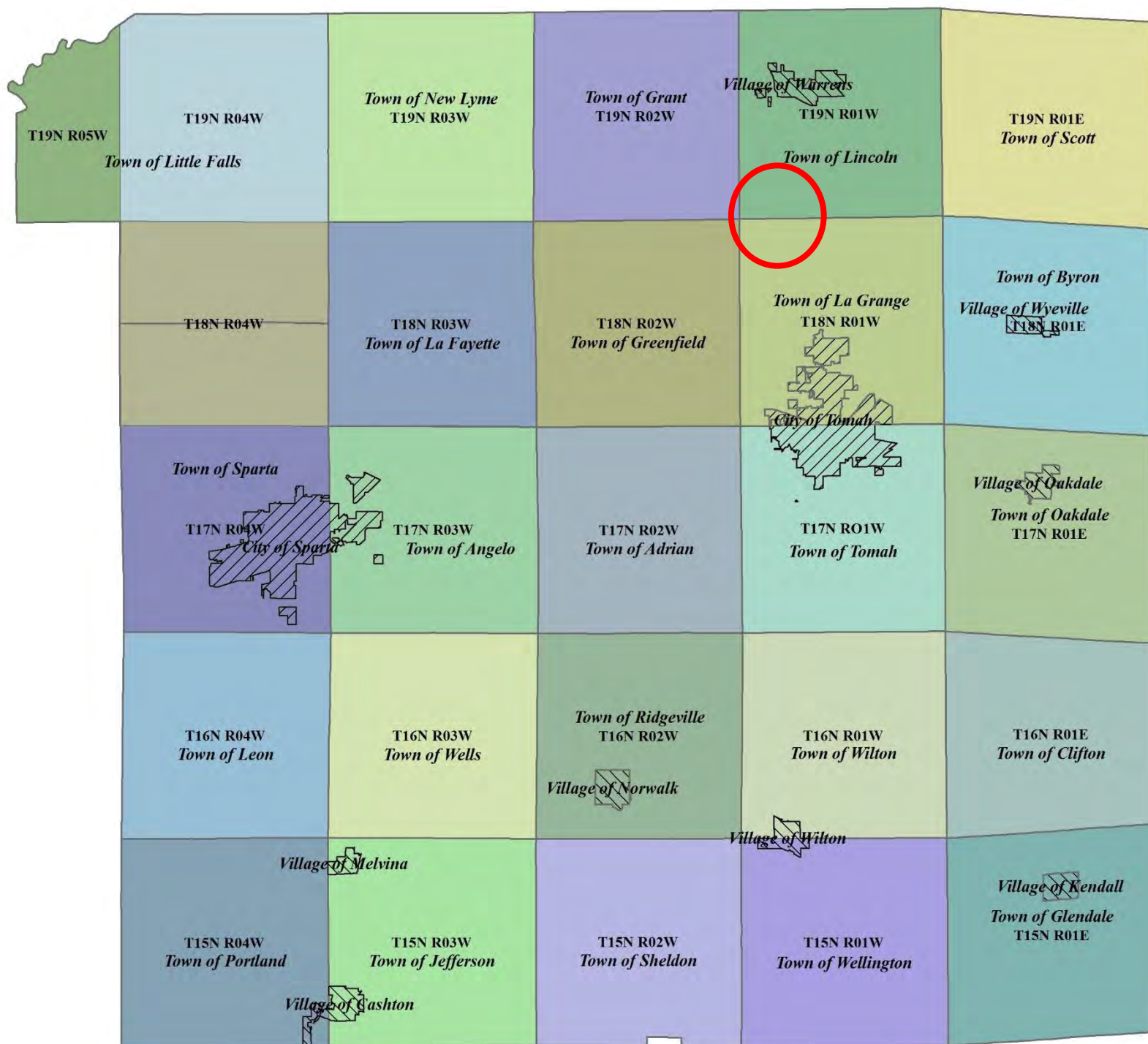
Fence corners and fence lines

Witness testimony



MONROE COUNTY





C.L.

Nov 80/18

West along SB of Sec. 32

12.86 B Oak 13 in dia

40.00 Set post for spec. cor.

Pine 8 N 37 19

Do 7 N 83 7 54

47.00 Leave dry land and enter
alder swamp South

80.00 Set post cor of Sec. 31 and 32

R Oak 12 N 29 7 14

Aspen 8 N 70 6 12

Land E of swamp Same as
last mile - rest of mile
Alder, Tamarack, Maple and
Aspen Swamp

Dec 1845

C.L.

Var. 80/18

West along SB of Sec 31

4.90 Creek 15 L South and enter
prairie N. S.

17.00 Enter timber N. S.

40.00 Set post for spec. cor.

H Oak 24 N 16 17

Do 24 N 67 7 43

51.00 H Oak 12 in dia.

70.60 Intersected NB 54 the North of
Temporary cor. and set post cor
of Is 18 & 19 N. Co. 1 & 2 N.

H Oak 11 S 37 7 30

Do 12 N 31 7 32

Land E of creek alder swamp
rest of mile rolling and level
mostly well timbered. H & R
Oak 2nd rate.

$12.86 \times 66 = 848.76'$

West along SB of Sec. 32
B Oak 12 in dia

$40 \times 66 = 2640'$

40.00 Set post for sec. cor

Pine 8 N 37 1/2 19

do 9 N 83 1/2 54

$19 \times 0.66' = 12.54'$

$54 \times 0.66' = 35.64'$

$47.00 \times 66 = 3102'$

47.00 Leave dry land and enter
alder swamp South

$80 \times 66' = 5280'$

80.00 Set post cor of Sec. 31 & 32

R Oak 12 N 29 1/2 14

Aspen 8 N 70 1/2 12

$14 \times 0.66' = 9.24'$

$12 \times 0.66' = 7.92'$

Land E of swamp Same as
East mile - rest of mile
Alder, Tamarack, Maple and
Aspen Swamp

Land E of swamp Same as
last mile - rest of mile
Alder, Tamarack, Maple and
Aspen Swamp

SECTION CORNER



2178.00'

2640'

SWAMP
|
DRY LAND

462.00'

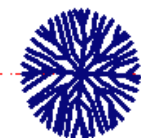
5280'

1/4 CORNER



1791.24'

2640'



12" Black Oak
(LINE TREE)

848.76'

x



SECTION CORNER

5

32

**GUESS
WHAT?**



Corner # 1212

Joseph P. Houghton Bearing Tree
September - 1855
10" Norway @ N59°E, 118.8'

Steve Waak
Washburn County



Corner #653


John P. Houghton Bearing Tree
October - 1855
10° W.Pine @ N47° E, 9.2'

Steve Waak
Washburn County

Corner # 1643

Edgar Sears Original Post
May - June 1856

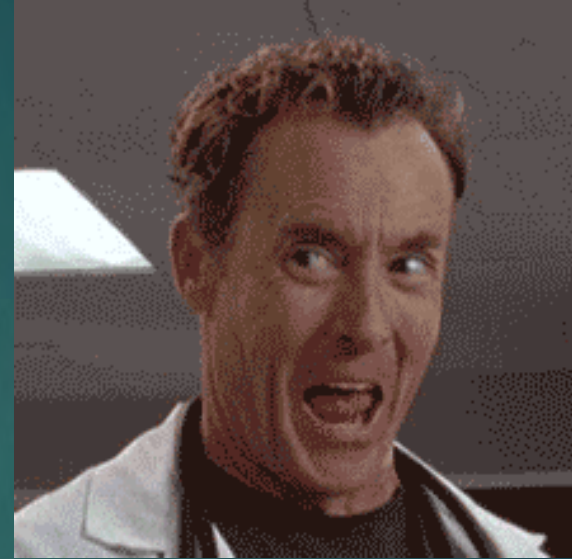
Steve Waak
Washburn County



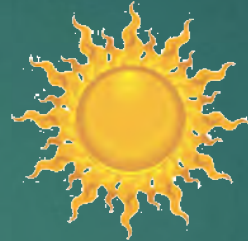
Corner #495

Henry Maddin Original Post
October - November 1853

And when we find evidence of the Original Government corner, surveyor's reactions go something like this....



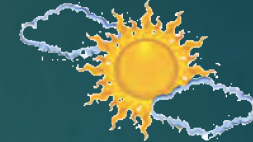
Time and the elements took their toll on the initial system.



Sunny



Partly Sunny



Partly Cloudy



Sun & Rain



Raining



Thunderstorms



Snowing



Cloudy



Windy



Rainbow



Tornados / Hurricanes



Clear





Over the years, the vast majority of
PLSS evidence was

LOST

"What if the original government survey evidence is gone?"

Then what?

