

**BRIGHTON AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

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## First the Surveyors Then the Settlers

When the first settlers: Elizabeth Cushing, Elijah Fitch, Anthony Gale, Maynard Maltby, William Noble, etc. began coming to the Brighton area, in 1831, they didn't just start blindly walking west out of Detroit. Trails had been blazed through the forests, swamps and streams and had been crossed by those first men with the title of surveyor.

The signing of the Treaty of Ghent, following the War of 1812, confirmed again the land claimed by the United States in 1783 following the Revolutionary War from the Atlantic to the Mississippi River. Land west of the Ohio and east of the Mississippi became known as the Northwest Territory.

In order to put the land on the market the Ordinance of 1785 committed the federal government to the surveying of land to assure the provision of legal title. The Ordinance also described the procedure by which these public lands were to be surveyed. These surveys would determine precise locations, the description and designation to be registered with federal authorities.

Base lines running east to west and prime meridian lines running north to south were the most important lines to be fixed. The base line is located at 42 degrees, 26 minutes and 30 seconds north latitude. This line, today (21st century), is the northern boundary of Wayne, Washtenaw, Jackson, Calhoun, Kalamazoo and Van Buren Counties. The meridian line is located at 84 degrees, 22 minutes and 24 seconds west longitude running north from Defiance, Ohio. These intersect near the northeast corner of Jackson County and the northwest corner of Washtenaw County. Following the determination of these lines the surveyors were to mark township lines; each township to be six miles square and subdivided into 36 sections of 640 acres. These sections to be numbered from the northeast corner of the township beginning with 1, proceeding west to #6, then numbering east until #36 was in the southeast corner of the township.

The War of 1812 interfered with conducting these surveys. It was 1815 before surveying could begin running the base and meridian lines. By then the Michigan Territory was organized separate from the

Northwest Territory.

The first government land office in which to register land sales was located in Detroit in 1818. Work was begun first in lower southern Michigan; those lands most likely to attract settlers. Each purchaser had an accurate systematic permanent record of his or her acreage along with a map and surveyor's notes. By 1851, all of Michigan was surveyed.

The surveyor's party included axemen, chainmen, hunters and packers, often a party of 8-10. Equipment included axes, chains, compasses, corner posts, pencils, pens, paper, ink and metal pins with a ring with a strip of red flag to note corners of each section (1 sq. mile). Witness trees were often used as markers. Early on the surveyor depended on a magnetic compass set on a tripod. C. 1840, he was also required to use a solar compass. To run a straight line one needed two chainmen and one axeman to clear brush and mark corners at each section corner and to drive a hardwood stake into the ground with one foot above. A survey party worked at least four months, requiring the surveyor to prepare skillfully and amply.

The legal description of the piece of land on which this writer lives begins: "A part of the Northeast fractional (1/4) of Section three in town One North (Green Oak Township which southern boundary is Eight Mile Road, the Base Line), range Six East (East of Meridian Line), Michigan and described as follows: Commencing at the North 1/4 post of said Section: thence, etc., etc.,....."

(Compiled by Marieanna Bair from: "Surveys and Surveyors in Frontier Michigan" by Alan S. Brown; "First Land Owners Livingston County" by Milton Charboneau. Additions/corrections requested. 810-229-6402.)