

## Land Surveying in the United States:

The founding fathers realized the importance of Land Surveying. Many of the earliest efforts of our country were directed to the laying out of the Public Lands and distribution to private owners. Leaving the public with a great gift: an orderly system of land division. These benefits the public enjoys today without much consideration.

George Washington was one of the first Land Surveyors of this country. Thomas Jefferson was also a Land Surveyor.

## Rectangular Survey System

### United States Rectangular System of Surveying:

The first “standardized” public land surveys in the United States were made in **Ohio in 1786** under an ordinance of the Continental Congress passed **May 20, 1785**. Though modified since its adoption, the act is still the basis for all surveys of United States public lands, except private land grants. This system provides for surveying and describing land by reference to **Principal Meridians** and **Base Lines**.

The need to provide for the orderly settlement of public land was recognized early in American history. In 1785 the Congress of the Confederation enacted a Land Ordinance for the public lands northwest of the Ohio River. The law provided for the survey of public lands into **Townships 36 square miles in size**.

This Public Land Survey System (PLSS) is a **legal reference system** designed to ease the description, inventory and transfer of land. Land in 30 States was established by what is known as the “Rectangular Survey System”, which divided land into the familiar “**Section**” units, most approximately **one mile square, or 640 acres**.

**Monuments** were commonly placed at the **corners** of Sections and Townships, the **midpoints** of Section lines (Quarter Section Corners) and on Section lines at the intersection of meandered bodies of water (**Meander Corners**). Original Public Land Survey (PLS) corners control distance and/or direction, but **no Section of land is exactly square, or exactly 5,280 feet** (one mile) on a side. To ensure the continuity and reliability of the PLS system over time, **courts have ruled that the corners of the original public land survey are controlling and unchangeable**.

The **primary purpose** of the PLS was to **locate and define lands for sale to bring revenue** into the Treasury of the Federal Government.

The “Public Land Survey” corners are **still used today** for surveying purposes and in descriptions of public and private boundary lines. A great majority of land transactions in Minnesota are **described with by Township, Range and Section**.