

MSPS 58TH ANNUAL MEETING

HISTORIES OF LAND SURVEYORS AND A REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE SURVEYING COMMUNITY IN 2009

This session will cover the following:

1. Excerpts from an interview with Peter Blethen
2. The remonumentation of Carver County with information provided by John Freemyer, the Carver County Surveyor, and excerpts from interviews with Harry Dahlin and John Larson.
3. Excerpts from an interview with Lavayne Dupslaff.
4. A review of the economic health of the surveying community and Sunde Land Surveying.

EXCERPTS FROM PETER BLETHEN, L.S. 17367, INTERVIEW

After graduation, from Mankato High School in 1973 Pete went to the University of Colorado, in downhill ski country, for a year. Pete started as a Chemistry Major.

Pete took a year off in 1974 to shake off parental control and do some growing up by himself, taking the liberty to learn through his own decisions, right or wrong. He hitch-hiked through Europe for three months with a friend. His hair was a lot longer and the attitudes of the 1970's were prevalent. It was a great learning experience for him and a life highlight.

He went back to the University of Colorado in the mountains, in ski country, and graduated in 1978. He studied environmental conservation out of the geography department, getting a major in geography and a minor in geology and biology. He liked college and felt he got a good education there.

The placement service was a bit lacking for the needs of a graduate physical geographer. The only job they could find was studying districts of people in New York City. There was no outdoors work in Colorado.

Pete was married to Nancy Boyum of Mankato in 1977.

Pete took a job with the U.S. Forest Service out of Boulder, Colorado, a wonderful job. He was on a cadastral survey crew delineating boundaries between forest service and private property. He worked as a sawyer (chain saw operator) for three months and became a crew chief in six months. They used H.P. 3800 and 3805 EDM's, and didn't tape much. The crews surveyed from rock outcropping to rock outcropping above the forest and then tied to section corners. He worked there a year and a half.

One memorable event was the crew coming across a mountain lion sitting on a rock while they were carrying equipment.

The U.S. Forest Service was also in charge of the National Grasslands. They managed Pawnee Buttes, written of as Rattlesnake Butte in James Micheners book of Colorado.

They camped in Arroyos to get out of the wind. On July third of 1980 the Party Chief woke them up at four a.m. because he'd heard thunder. They grabbed everything they had as fast as they could and threw it in their vehicle and got out of the Arroyo to an adjoining hilltop. The Arroyo filled with thirty feet of water from bottom to top. They spent the rest of the day surrounded by water waiting for it to recede, better bored than drowned.

In the federal surveying community the Bureau of Land Management was regarded as the ultimate working area for surveyors. Pete applied at the BLM office in the Denver service center and was accepted for training after the one month training session. He was assigned to a crew in Breckenridge, Colorado.

The Old Guard Crew Chief was not thrilled with some young punk college student coming in at his same pay grade. He did what he could, which was considerable, to force Pete off his crew. He was then assigned to a similar crew in the desert of southeast Colorado. Another Old Guard Party Chief threatened Pete with an axe when Pete held a range pole from the side rather than directly behind it. That was his last day with the Bureau of Land Management. He quit and started looking for intelligent life in the surveying community.

THE REMONUMENTATION OF CARVER COUNTY

John Freemyer, L.S. 18419, the present Carver County Surveyor contributed the following information on Johan Oswald Brunius and the first remonumentation of Carver County.

John Oswald Brunius was born in 1824 at Apelsater, Sweden. In 1850 he immigrated to New York and then moved to St. Louis, Missouri, where he worked for the County Surveyor, copying maps and then surveying. In 1856 Johan and his wife, Bertha Freeze, moved to Carver County, Minnesota where Johan Oswald became a Surveyor from 1874 to 1884 for the county and for private parties. He fought in the Civil War and died in 1897.

Johan O. Brunius had been a U.S. Deputy Land Surveyor in Minnesota. From 1854 to 1860 he surveyed the interiors of 51 Townships in Minnesota; including 2 in Carver County where he resided. Prior to that he surveyed 8 townships in Northern Iowa.

The Chaska Weekly Valley Herald of August 5, 1880 ran this editorial, labeled Corner Posts.

The Board of County Commissioners adopted the following resolution at their last session:

“Resolved, that the proposition of Mr. J. O. Brunius to place the monuments of each section corner for the sum of \$3.50 a piece, be and is hereby accepted.”

The law makes it the duty of the commissioners to establish permanent monuments to indicate the section corners as located by the United State Survey, and while this provision of law is a wise one, and the work contracted for by the commissioners one which will be of very great benefit to the citizens of the County, still we are very much afraid that the commissioners in this instance have unwittingly burdened the County with a much larger bill of expense than is necessary.

We are informed that several competent surveyors stand ready to do the work called for by the contract between the commissioners and Mr. Brunius, for just ONE HALF of the price which the commissioners have agreed to pay Mr. Brunius, and if such is the fact, the County is certainly a loser by the contract made. We understand that the number of posts to be established throughout the County is somewhere in the neighborhood of five or six hundred, and will require an outlay of nearly or quite two thousand dollars, (\$2,000.) We think it would

have been much wiser for our commissioners to have carefully investigated the actual cost of the job before entering into a contract involving such a large expenditure as this, without inviting public bids for the work.

It is but doing commissioner Kugler, justice to say, that he voted against the measure, saying that he wished more time to investigate the amount of expenditure it would involve and the advisability of the measure at this time.

We shall refer to this subject hereafter.

The township surveyed by J.O. Brunius from 1854 to 1960 are shown on part of The Township Subdivision of the Public Land Survey in Minnesota map prepared by Ronald Olson, L.S. 11009 and Robert Sales of MNDot in 1974.

LATER REMONUMATION OF CARVER COUNTY BY JAMES LINDSEY.

James A. Lindsey, P.S. & L.S. 2716, prepared a paper on section corner remonumentation sometime after 1963, as follows:

A cooperative remonumentation program was undertaken as a pilot study in the summer of 1961 by Jesse E. Fant, professor of Civil Engineering and Surveying, University of Minnesota, and Jim Lindsey for Carver County. It was to be the first modern controlled re-survey of section corners in the county. The original government surveys for Carver County were from 1854 to 1856 with some re-survey of section corners by various county surveyors up to about 1890. Very little remonumentation had been done since then.

Monuments found or set, were to be tied to known coast and geodetic reference points and a network of points was traversed across the county. The first year resulted in 38 section and quarter section corners found or set in Chaska and Chanhassen Township.

In 1962 the County Board declared the office of the County Surveyor vacant and appointed Jim Lindsey to be its designated County Surveyor. Under Minnesota Law (MSA 389.01) a one-half mill levy was established for operation of the office.

Distances were obtained using a geodimeter model 4-B, one of the first in Minnesota and angles obtained with a Wild T-2.

A good part of the paper extols modern science and surveying techniques which have combined to provide the tools for rapid accurate and reliable re-survey of government corners.

It does not appear that Mr. Lindsey was aware of the J.O. Brunius remonumentation of section corners and meander corners of 1881.

A certificate of location for government corner of the north quarter corner of Section 6, Township 117, Range 25, Carver County is included in Jim Lindsey's paper. It is a bit loose on what was found, how it was set and its relationship to other corners. It is dated July 26, 1962 for corner establishment and filed February 4, 1963.

LATER CARVER COUNTY REMONUMENTATION BY CARLISLE MADSON AND SCHOELL AND MADSON

EXCERPTS FROM THE HISTORY OF HAROLD (HARRY) DAHLIN, L.S.
8414

In 1956 Carlisle Madson and Bill Schoell, a Professional Engineer, had formed a firm of Professional Engineers and Land Surveyors, Schoell and Madson, and Harry was their first employee. They stayed at 3 employees for 3 weeks. Howard Lake was the next employee and Howard never took the Surveyor Licensing Exam. The firm gradually got bigger. The first office was in St. Louis Park and a year later they moved to a second site in St. Louis Park. Two years after that they moved to an office in Hopkins – Two floors of an entire building. They were there for about 10 years and then moved to a new office building along T.H. 394 in Minnetonka.

Harry was a Party Chief and only did land surveying, re-surveys and subdivisions.

Carlisle Madson was appointed part time County Surveyor for Carver County in 1970 and held that position until 1985. Ted Kemna, L.S. 17006, was County Surveyor until 1990 when the county appointed John Freemyer, L.S. 18419, as the full time County Surveyor. James Lindsey, L.S. 2716, was the part time County Surveyor prior to Madson.

Most of Schoell and Madson's surveying at that time was in Hennepin County and then in Carver County.

Carl Madson did 90% of the office research at the courthouse. Carl had found survey books that had been hidden back in storage rooms in the court house for many years. These were surveys done by elected County Surveyors in the late 1800's and early 1900's. There were some excellent surveys done.

Carl Madson also found atlas's printed every 15 years since the original government surveys showing ownership. They could trace ownership of lands back quite a ways.

Harry recalls that John Brunius was the first County surveyor. In 1881 the county had a remonumentation program and Mr. Brunius was hired to restore the original Government corners with limestone monuments. The county didn't have enough money to replace the quarter corners, so only the section corners and meander corners were replaced. The whole county, 8 or 10 Townships, was done. The monuments were about 2 feet high with an 8" base and a 6" top. They were square, all limestone and weighed 60 to 70 pounds.

The worst part of restoration was that the quarter corners were not monumented. They stayed as original oak stakes. Problems started after Mr. Brunius was done. It was left up to private surveyors to locate and/or reset the quarter corners.

Harry feels that the surveyors in the 1940's and 1950's and their educators mostly worked in Hennepin County where the county had set the monuments. The county would restore lost monuments. Howard Perkins was the County Surveyor.

There was not much knowledge of retracement or restoration work. Harry felt that was true for most counties. He used the Manual of 1947 and also the Manual of 1851.

Carver County was mostly wooded with plenty of oak trees to whittle stakes from. The Deputy Surveyors mostly set oak posts with bearing trees in Carver County. There were plenty of trees to use.

Farming knocked out a lot of bearing trees. Harry only found one bearing tree for sure, on a bluff going down to the river, in the ten to fifteen year period he worked in Carver County. It was an old oak tree and still had the scars.

The surveyors coming after the Government Surveyors used mostly manufactured wooden stakes, which were difficult to find. Township roads were all gravel and most likely knocked out the original stakes. Not many were found by Harry.

Harry and Howard Lake used the physical monuments and lines of occupation available: Roads, ditches, fences, and a lot of testimony.

Testimony was taken by Harry and Howard Lake, both Deputy County Surveyors. The affected land owners were interviewed. Some families dated back to the 1880's, or the original Government surveys.

Most of the land owners knew where the corners were by long time occupation of land lines. In most cases it was found that with proper retracement work done (testimony and evidence of occupation), they could restore the majority of all quarter corners.

All the limestones were excavated. Most of them were at the intersection of the centerlines of roads. They dug at every corner where there was a chance of any physical evidence of the monument being there.

The first year they used a jackhammer to dig in the winter, which took too long and became expensive. After that they went to summer excavation only.

They had more than one monument in place for many of the quarter corners, and also at the section corners where surveyors had not dug down the necessary two to six feet to find the limestone monument.

Some corners had been replaced by land owners.

The equipment Schoell and Madson used was EDM and a Wild T-2 Theodolite at the end of the program. Most retracement was done with a 100 foot long steel tape through the woods. Their main concern was to find evidence of a corner or the corner, by whoever set it.

Change of ownership would cause a survey. Some lands were fenced early on, or had a plow line or drainage ditches to denote occupation. The soil mixture was sand and clay.

Certificates of location of government corner were filed for each corner. The history was on one side and the ties and map on the other. They were placed in a field book, then typed out and placed in spiral book form at the County Recorder's Office.

The retracement was expensive. It took quite a few years to complete. Harry said they would spend all day interviewing, trying to do one township at a time.

The part time County Surveyors prior to Carlisle Madson, educators and most of the surveyors in the county tried to straighten out the lines between section corners and call the position lost if no monument could be found. This was the practice under Jim Lindsey. The educator was Jesse Fant of the University of Minnesota and the MinnDot SPAR program. Most surveyors thought Lindsey was doing a great job.

There were four to five sections of land that were especially troublesome in the Jonathan area of Carver County. One monument was set on line and split in the middle of a pig pen, with 100 year old fences nearby.

Plats were prepared by Egan Field and Nowak in this area for the McKnight family using cast iron monuments set by Jim Lindsey for Government corners which ignored old land lines. The sections were subdivided based on Lindsey's corners.

Carlisle had found a pamphlet made in the 1880's exposing the fallacy of surveyors restoring corners by lost methods.

Some corners Schoell and Madson worked on took one day to five days to retrace in both sections.

There were no records filed of corner monuments set in the 1940's and 1950's. Harvey Cartwright, L.S. 1983, of Cartwright and Olson, and Clayton Jackson, L.S. 3600, (Francis C. Jackson), didn't file corner certificates or surveys at the county.

Harry was licensed as a Land Surveyor in the 1960's.

Carlisle had an erratic disposition. Harry knew him pretty well, but it took a few years. He wasn't the friendliest of people.

Harry brought in some problems that Carl didn't know what to do with. Some corners were changed by the Carver County Courts.

Report No. 1 on the Public Land Survey in Minnesota was done in 1970. It was done by Jesse Fant, L.S. 3230, in February of 1970 in cooperation with the Minnesota Land Surveyors Association. Jesse wanted to do surveys on where the corner was supposed to have been put, not where it was put.

Scott County had sandstone monuments. There are some Government corners common to Scott and Carver Counties. Some of these were replaced by a surveyor who had little evidence and just assumed a lost position.

Harry found a limestone monument down about 3 feet in a driveway. Lindsey hadn't found it. The limestone was 15 feet from Lindsey's monument. The quarter corners were set in the lost position from erroneous section corners.

Harry retired in 1985. He feels that the surveyors of his time didn't get adequate education on remonumentation.

Jim Lindsey learned from Jesse Fant. Back in the 1970's Harry gave classes at Dunwoody to candidates filing for licensure. Bob Bakka, L.S. 7093, was the teacher at Dunwoody. Harry was comfortable with 7 or 8 person classes.

The Lindsey corners caused a lot of litigation. Carl Madson was a very competent and thorough researcher. He mostly did office work.

In July of 1970 Harry Dahlin set a cast iron monument for the northwest corner of Section 23, Township 116, Range 23, Carver County by obliterated methods at a fence corner, based on parol evidence. Jim Lindsey had set the corner lost previously 52 feet east and 26 feet north of the Dahlin corner. Brunius and Van Krevlen had used the corner previously and Dahlin was within a foot, more or less of their distances.

EXCERPTS FROM THE HISTORY OF JOHN LARSON, L.S. 19828 WORKING WITH HARRY DAHLIN

John moved back to Minnesota after getting out of the service in 1973 and got a job working with Schoell and Madson, an Engineering and Land surveying firm, as a member of Harry Dahlin's field crew. Harry was the Party Chief and John Gallagher (future L.S. 20260) and John were the helping technicians. John started at \$1.60 per hour. They used Gurley Transits (a one minute and a 20 second Gurley), steel cut tapes, a Zeiss automatic level and a Schoenstedt metal locator. Also in the van was the \$700.00 H.P. calculator which one could add or subtract on and which didn't leave the van. Other equipment was a slide rule, log books and a trig table.

The bulk of the work for Schoell and Madson was with the city of Minnetonka on utility lines. Harry's crew did Carver County remonumentation and boundary surveys, a step up from the sewer rats on engineering staking.

Harry Dahlin was all work at work and all play when it was time to play and a very smart surveyor.

Being a beginner on Harry's crew was not the easiest of times. He was a very demanding, no nonsense type of guy and quite blunt. He knew his business and kicked out a lot of work. His crew's wages were always higher than the other crews for that reason. Patience was not his strong point.

The first week John worked with Harry. Harry yelled himself hoarse in 3 days. But Harry was also a teacher. He wanted his crew to know what was going on and how to do it. It was business all day. Between jobs there was work to do setting up other jobs or doing math or doing whatever had to be done.

They did a lot of remonumentation work in Carver County. They had copies of the original field notes of the deputy U.S. Surveyors who worked in the county and which had the history of each township on the back for the time of the Government Survey. They also had a copy of the Government Plats for each township.

As part of their job they interviewed the local property owners and people who had lived in the area a long time.

One gentleman in his late 80's told them of finding a stone in the field with his brother, a limestone monument, digging it up and bringing it to their dad to show him. He gave them both a whipping and made them take it back and replace it. It was one of the monuments set for the County in 1881 by John Brunius.

Another gentleman living in Carver County, but close to the McCloud County line where the crew was looking in the swamp for a meander corner by a lake, told the crew that in the drought years of the great depression he would stand on that stone and fish. The crew did recover it and again it was one of those set in 1881 by John Brunius. No original wood stakes were recovered, nor were any original U.S. bearing trees found that they could be sure of.

A lot of their time was spent excavating with a shovel and pick in the gravel roads.

The scariest time they ever had was when they drove down a road in the boon docks and stopped by an old building constructed quite near the road. An old lady came out and said beware of the dog, with a little Heinz 57 yapper jumping around her feet and barking at them. They saw little to beware of there. They started chaining along a fence past the old house and when they got to the back of the house a huge St. Bernard charged out at them with fangs bared and really vicious snarls and growls. It came full speed until it hit the end of a log chain attached to a steel post. It was then that John Larson and John Gallagher dropped the steel tape and started running.

When the crew found evidence of a government corner, or one of John Brunius' monuments, they would remove the stone monument, bust it up and replace it with a cast iron monument. They would tie out the corner to major trees where available, tying to the face of the tree and blazed the tree. They tied to anything they could that would stay a while. The ties were usually within 100 feet of the corner. Their remonumentation was for Carver County where Carlisle Madson, L.S. 4374, was the County Surveyor.

John worked at Schoell and Madson from 1973 to 1978, mostly on Harry's crew. He moved up the survey crew ladder from Chainman to Instrument Man, learning a good bit from Harry. John was working 100% in the field and felt that he never wanted to work in the office.

EXCERPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH LAVAYNE DUPSLAFF.

At age 16 (1956) LaVayne was hired by Milner W. Carley, L.S. 855, to care for his 100 show bantam chickens and 200 laying hens. Then he took on the additional duty of janitor for the surveying office. That led to becoming a Rodman on a survey crew.

He was out of high school in the spring of 1958 and joined the Navy in 1959 because Jim Kurth, L.S. 5332, made it sound so bad that LaVayne just had to check it out. Prior to going into the Navy, Milner Carley wanted to send him off with a crate of chickens so he wouldn't get lonely.

When LaVayne got out of the Navy he went back to Carley's at about \$2.00 per hour as a Rodman on a field crew and was again the janitor.

Milner Carley called him Del. LaVayne had 14 years of being called Del by Carley and his employees. Milner couldn't get a handle on the name LaVayne so he called him Del: LaVayne looked like a Del to him.

LaVayne picked up Land Surveying experience from Jim Kurth, L.S. 5332 and later Thatcher Peterson, a Party Chief from 1953 to retirement.

Thatcher Peterson was an excellent Party Chief. He never forgot a backsight. He was down-to-earth, practical, patient, a good teacher and life-long friend.

LaVayne took a lot of Jesse Fant's, L.S. 3230, night school courses at the University of Minnesota. He recalls driving down to the U to park in a parking ramp with canoe racks on top of his van and taking out all the lights in the ramp. It could have happened to anyone.

LaVayne felt that Fant could teach and they were good classes. He didn't think Jesse could make a living at it though. Rollie Anderson, L.S. 5715, the Anoka County Surveyor, gave a course on description writing using the book Land Survey Descriptions by William and Gurdon Wattles, which LaVayne attended.

While in Shoreview one day a big transmission tower fell down and killed 7 people working on it. LaVayne and his crew, driving to a work site, saw it fall. They drove to the site with the dust still in the air. LaVayne later did the forensic survey of the fallen tower to determine what happened. The problem was with the welded joints connecting the legs of the tower. They located every piece of steel and twisted guy wire and tower.

Milner Carley didn't lay anyone off in the winter. They came into the office and drafted, if they could. He found work for them. LaVayne worked mostly in the field, but was spending more and more time in the office on computations and drafting under the tutelage of Kenneth R. Ostlund, a Civil Engineer.

In 1975 LaVayne went to work for Don Hult, L.S. 6617, in Forest Lake. The transition from a Land Surveying and Engineering firm in an urban area to a Land Surveying firm in a rural area was a tough adjustment. Also Hult had more modern equipment – tripods with adjustable legs.

LaVayne got a job at Tolz King Duval Anderson in 1976 and became licensed while working there. Once he got licensed TKDA didn't want to put Licensed Land Surveyor on a business card. TKDA didn't want to do anything connected with Land Surveying. They worried about the liability of employing a Licensed Land Surveyor.

LaVayne felt he might do just as well for himself. So he called his old mentor, Jim Kurth, who said, "Don't quit TKDA." Once again wrong way Dupslaff went against common sense and Jim Kurth's advice. After working for TKDA from 1976 to 1979 he took the big jump.

LaVayne took out a \$25,000.00 loan on his home and went into business as Landmark Surveying, Inc. in 1979. He bought a complete set of surveying equipment from Leo Tosel of Brunson Instruments, the same type of equipment he'd bought previously when working for TKDA. He got a Wild T-1 (5") Theodolite, a Lietz B-1 auto level, no EDM, an H.P. 97 printing calculator with little plastic strips of programming, an H.P. 35 calculator, a steel tape, a fiberglass tape and 2 tripods and a Schoenstedt metal locator for the field. For the office he got an ammonia printer (Diazo), rapidograph pens and a Leroy lettering set. Later on he knew he had it made when he bought a third tripod.

He started working out of his house in rural Scandia, and converted a bedroom into his office. He kept a paper cutting board under the bed in his bedroom and cut the paper on top of the board on the bed, using a 4 foot long stainless steel straight edge and a box cutter. He used his personal van for a survey vehicle, switching from survey equipment during the week to fishing and camping equipment on weekends. Jobs came in and he had some busy years. He had a lot of word of mouth advertising. Later he moved to an office in downtown Marine on St. Croix and then finally bought a building for an office in uptown Scandia.

He also worked as a Surveying Consultant for TKDA. He did preliminary work for a large Levee project in Winona and River Cross sections for flood control surveying. He also did airport work for TKDA.

Early on in private practice one morning at 7:30 LaVayne, still in his underwear, got a call from some out of state guy about doing some airport survey work. The guy wanted to know if LaVayne had the resources to do a job like that. Of course he did, so with his son on the rod and his wife taking notes, they located anything that didn't move on part of the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport. He hand drafted twelve 24" by 36" mylars, working by the hour.

In 1987 Bill Selb started working for LaVayne. Bill had been a Washington County Party Chief. He was good at everything, mathematics, remonumentation and field and office work. Bill was LaVayne's long time right hand man until LaVayne retired in 2004, selling his company to Bill and Joel Anez, L.S. 13775.

A REVIEW OF THE ECONOMIC HEALTH OF THE SURVEYING COMMUNITY AND SUNDE LAND SURVEYING

August 12, 2009

I've been requested to review the present business situation of Sunde Land Surveying and the surveying community and place it in perspective. As a former President of an engineering and surveying firm, and someone who has been in this business for more years than many of you have lived, I bring an extensive volume of good and bad experience to that review.

I've worked more than 55 years in this business. I've never seen it this bad, or this bad for so long. I was born in the middle of the Great Depression and was 10 years old at the end of World War II. My Grandfather was on the line at the Teamsters Strike of 1934 in Minneapolis. My Grandmother worked in the striker's soup kitchen. My wife's Uncle was shot in the arm by the cops at that strike and a friend of his was shot five times by the cops and lived through it. It was a time of adjustment between labor and management and often quite violent. It was a time when workers were pushing hard for a living wage and a reasonable work week, and they slowly got them. It was a time when management's top wages were far closer to the workers than they are now. It was one of many steps to the good times we've enjoyed for so long.

During the Great Depression, which was worldwide, it's a fact that one year in a province of Canada, the average cash income for a farm was \$10.00. I had a relative, better off than most of my family, who worked as a clerk for the Minneapolis Police Department. When the City ran out of money the employees were paid in I.O.U's which were redeemed at some future time. This family made it through the Depression on the wages of his mother-in-law who had a job four days a week washing and ironing clothes alongside my Grandmother, her sister, for a rich family in Wayzata. A teacher in the depression asked a very thin and tired looking young girl where her lunch bag was. She was told "it was her sister's day to eat". Be glad it's not the 1930's.

The worst I ever saw it at Comstock and Davis, where I worked for 50 ½ years, was a week when we were 25 employees one day and 12 the next day. Those who were working on projects that brought in money were kept on and the others were let go.

The land surveying business has been mostly on a gradual rise since World War II, with work to do and a modest income to be made. As time went on benefits such as paid vacations, overtime, sick leave, unemployment insurance, social security, retirement funds and health insurance became available to the industry. They were not available to those strikers in 1934. If one was good at one's job and worked hard there was a place for that person. We think of those benefits as mandatory – they aren't.

But in 2006 hard times hit our industry. Starting then the housing market overflowed with houses and buildable lots and the mortgage market overflowed with greed and irresponsible practices. The stock market went to hell and lingered there a while, taking many economic futures with it, causing this nation an economic paralysis. Big banks had to be bailed out by the government at cost to the taxpayers. We are in an upset economy.

There is an acknowledged 10% unemployment in Minnesota. There is close to 20% unemployment in Detroit. As solid an industry as the automobile industry has been over the years, it's in big trouble, as is the surveying industry. Sixty to seventy percent of the surveying work force in this state, from stake pounders to licensed land surveyors are unemployed. And once lost, those jobs are difficult to regain. To place this in perspective the unemployment in the Depression hit 25% of the total work force. We aren't that bad off yet.

I talk to a lot of land surveyors. I'm doing histories of many of them. This is a part of what I've gathered:

One firm had 2 ½ million dollars of outstanding billing, mostly from one client, who couldn't pay and they both went out of business. Another firm hasn't collected for its services for over 3 months and hasn't paid its employees. A small firm in Washington County works two days a week. A family owned firm in Anoka County is down to two employees working part time. Some surveyors have closed their offices and work out of their home. Engineering and surveying firms have cut their staffs to a bare minimum and have sometimes cut out surveying entirely. Technicians and land surveyors who have been laid off are not getting work, no matter how competent they are. Across the state I estimate the surveying community is down to 30% or 40% of its 2005 personnel.

There is a lack of funds being placed into the work area occupied by land surveyors. The money just isn't flowing as it used to. A steady stream is now a trickle. There is a lack of work. That lack of work is reducing the number of hours land surveyors can work. It has also brought about a competition for

projects with firms trying to stay existent with bids extremely low, low to the point where there is no profit and only a hope to make minimal wages and benefits. Less work means less hours for the employees. Irresponsible competition for work means lower fees, which means lower wages and a lessening of benefits for employees. For the owners they mean increased risk, minimal profits, and more time on the job trying to make a go of it.

It appears to me, and I certainly get no enjoyment in saying it, that what we are going to see is a decrease in wages to adjust to the available business income. We are probably going to see a decrease in benefits to adjust to that lessened income. There will probably be further decreases in the work force and more firms going under. But worse yet, with wages and benefits being drastically reduced, it will most likely take years to build them back to the standards of 2007. Realize that all those years of improved wages and benefits, brought on by your hard work and abilities, by a responsible surveying firm and a kindly economy will be greatly reduced. That is a hard, hard position to be in for everyone.

Sunde Land Surveying is as good a firm as there is in this state. It's strength has been in its management and its dedicated, intelligent employees. From 38 employees at the start of 2008 the firm is down to less than 20 now. Reducing the work force which has been built up so carefully over the years, and in which the firm took so much pride, has been very difficult. All of the adjustments the firm has had to make to stay in business have been very difficult.

Sunde is doing less than 40% of the business it did in 2008, and is doing the jobs for 40% of the 2008 fees. The combination of 40 % less work at 40% of last years fees means hard times for the employee and the owners. This winter could be very tough.

In the Fall of 2008 and the Spring of 2009 Sunde Land Surveying put together a strong business development program. Experienced people did the best they could to get business in the door. They found out that the funds necessary to conduct business at private and government levels were frozen. They found out that many of the people we've worked with for years have very little going on or have been laid off. More innovative efforts to bring in business are planned for the near future.

This is the busy season and we aren't busy. Few are. What will winter bring? It probably won't be good news. Some of the present employees probably won't be employed through the winter. Length of employment, ability and will to work may not be able to be as big a factor in permanent employment now. Management's first duty is to keep the business going, as best they can.

Things would change if there was a massive infusion of work, putting all the surviving firms back to work. If that occurs and there is more work than can be done by the surviving firms, it would create an urgent need for services and wages and benefits may be able to go back to 2007 levels. At present there are few indicators for this.

So I want to tell all of you, hard times are here. We won't have another Great Depression because previous political administrations have installed barriers to that; social security, unemployment insurance, medicare, federal insurance on some banking, bankruptcy laws, and so forth. There is more the government can do for its work force if it will just do it.

For some of you unemployment is the way to go. For most of you it would be extremely wise of you to be very frugal. There are questions you should ask yourself about priorities.

Be aware that hard times are here and act wisely.

- Ron Murphy –
Previous Owner of Comstock & Davis

Would you all raise your hand if you feel this area of research should be backed by MSPS.

Are there any questions?