

## Featured Article: Determining Property Corner History

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A critical step in every boundary survey is the determination of property corner history. In this article we will discuss why this process is important and how to perform it. Before we can get into the heart of this discussion, we need to understand the difference between a property corner, and a property corner monument.

### Corner Versus Monument

Although often used interchangeably, even by surveyors, the term "property corner" and "property corner monument" do not refer to the same thing. A property corner is an angle point or other defined point that controls a property boundary. A property corner monument is a physical mark or feature set to mark the location of a property corner.

With a little more analysis, we can logically understand the two terms can't refer to the same thing. A property corner may be marked by multiple monuments, or none at all, during its lifetime. In a similar way, a property corner may be set to represent the location of a property corner, but might not be located on the true corner at all. You can dig a property corner monument out of the ground and display it on your desk. You can't do that with a property corner. The monument is tangible and physical; the corner is intangible and abstract.

### Article Summary

In this article, we explain the difference between a property corner and a property corner monument. We then explain why it is important to determine property corner history and when during a boundary survey you should do it. When then layout a 4 step process for determining property corner history.

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## **Why is it important to determine property corner history?**

It is important to determine property corner history for some reasons:

- Unlike most natural features that control property boundary location, property corner monuments are subject to destruction, damage, and deterioration.
- Property corner monuments are changed more frequently by surveyors than other elements of a boundary resolution. (As a land parcel ages, the land description that controls it may not change at all, but the monuments that mark its location likely will.)
- The potential for error in a boundary resolution based on an incorrect or lack of understanding of property corner history is large.

## **When to Begin Determining Property Corner History**

When, during a parcel boundary survey, should you begin to determine property corner history? In my practice, I've found it beneficial to start this process as soon as I begin researching filed survey maps and deeds that help define my parcel boundary. It is certainly prudent to have a handle on the property corner history for each property corner that controls your parcel boundary before field work begins.

If you don't have this understanding, how will you

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properly search for, interpret, and locate evidence of the corner location during the field survey?

## The Process for Determining Property Corner History

What process can be used to determine a property corner history? I'll describe a four (4) step process in this section. The result of this process is a timeline for each property corner in the boundary survey.

### Step #1: Review each survey map and land description for the boundary survey.

During this review note the following information for each property corner shown or described in the document:

- The description (character) of the monument.
- If a monument was found, set, replaced, or repaired as shown or described in the document.
- If the property corner was established or created by the document. (A corner can be established or created without being monumented.)
- The surveyor or engineer who found, set, replaced, or repaired a monument for the corner.
- The identity, date and filing or recording information for the document form which the four elements above were obtained.

## Sidevar: Event Types In A Property Corner History

When you determine property corner history, remember to think about these 6 event types and their related questions:

### Corner Created

- When was this corner created?
- Who created the corner?
- How was the corner created?
- Was an original monument set at the time of creation?
- If an original monument was set at the time of creation, what were the methods used during the field survey?

### Corner Marked

- When was the corner marked?
- Who marked the corner?
- Was this a retracement monument or an original monument?
- Was the new monument a direct replacement of a found monument, or was it established at a record or calculated position?

**Step #2: Use the data obtained in Step #1 to create preliminary timelines for each corner.**

This can be done using a spreadsheet. Use a separate sheet in the spreadsheet document for each property corner. Each row on the sheet will store the data for the property corner obtained from a single map or deed. The sheet can then be sorted by the date of the document to produce the timeline.

**Step #3: Identify monument character gaps in the timeline.**

There are three (3) types of monument character gaps that you should look for.

The first, and most common, is a change in the record character of a monument that is not explained in the record. For example, one document shows a rebar and plastic cap being set to mark the property corner. A subsequent document shows a brass disk at the same location. No other documents in the record show when the rebar and plastic cap was replaced by the brass disk.

The second type of monument character gap occurs when a not reflected by the physical monument on the ground. For example, the last document in your timeline shows the property corner marked by a monument box containing a rebar and plastic cap, but you find an empty monument well. This scenario can happen when a land surveyor forgets or neglects, to set the property corner monument.

- How was the position of the new mark established?
- What were the methods used during the field survey?
- Did the location of the new monument set to mark the corner fit with measurements in other land records?

**Corner Recovered/Retraced**

- When was the corner recovered?
- Who recovered the corner?
- Did the recovering surveyor note a change in monument character?
- Did the recovering surveyor rehabilitate or replace the monument marking the corner?
- Did the recovering surveyor set witness corner monuments or corner accessories?
- How did the recovering survey establish his search area or the location of the corner if he set a new monument?
- What methods were used during the retracing field survey?
- How did the position established during the field survey fit with measurements in other land

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The third type of monument character gap occurs when there is a conflict about monument character in the record. For example, the first document in your timeline for a corner indicates a rebar and plastic cap was set. The second document in your timeline indicates this was replaced with an iron pipe and plug. The third document in your timeline identifies the rebar and plastic cap shown on the first document in the timeline. This scenario can happen because the chronology of the filing or recording of documents doesn't always correspond to the field surveys that locate the monuments.

**Step #4: Compare measurements from the subject corner to neighboring corners and identify positional conflicts.**

To the best of your ability, compare the measurements between the subject corner and neighboring corners. When you see differences, especially large ones, try to identify the logical cause if possible. Does the difference correspond to a major change in the monument character? Did the difference result on a document that established the property corner after the destruction of the monument marking the corner? Was the corner established using the appropriate method and in the correct location?

records?

- Did the survey establish this corner with measurements on his map without setting a physical monument?

**Corner Destroyed**

- How was the corner destroyed?
- When was the corner destroyed?
- Is the corner still important for the retracement of other corners?

**Monument Destroyed**

- How was the monument destroyed?
- Who destroyed the monument?
- When was the monument destroyed?
- How was the destruction of the monument discovered?
- When was the destruction of the monument discovered?