



Bonnema Surveys

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Building a boundary mound at a Section Corner on the U.S.-Canadian border.

What is a “SECTION CORNER”?

By Duane A. Bonnema

The position of your property lines on this earth are totally dependant on the location of the section corners placed over 130 years ago during a massive project called the United States Rectangular Survey System. These section corners were placed originally by the United States Government Land Office Surveyors around the year 1870.

There were over 300,000 of these corners placed in Minnesota soil. The proper location of only twenty-five percent of these 300,000 section corners has been preserved. Seventy-five percent of these section corners remain buried under 120 years of road building, sedimentation, and change in landscape. Some corners have been permanently destroyed, however, most are still there, and they just need to be recovered. Typically, these government surveyors drove a charred oak stake into the soil and then built a mound of earth and sod around the oak stake. The government surveyors did this at each section corner and also at the half-mile points on all four sides of every section. The mound shown in the picture above was built on the US-Canadian border. Similar mounds were built to mark the corners of your section, but they were much smaller.

The county surveyor did additional surveying in many sections between the years 1890 and 1910. However, many sections haven't had any surveying done since the U.S. Government Surveyors came through.

When surveying your land, my task is to find the location where these oak stakes were driven into the ground 130 years ago. This can be a real challenge. The courts have determined that the true position of the section corner is the location where the government surveyor originally placed the stake.