

## **LINES ON THE LAND: Evidence of the Original Land Survey on the Western Reserve Landscape**

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In 1795, the State of Connecticut sold its nearly three million acre Western Reserve in what is now northeast Ohio to a private speculation firm, the Connecticut Land Company. Before the shareholders of the Company could realize an income from their investment, the land needed to be surveyed and divided. By agreement, each of the shareholders was to receive an amount of the land equivalent to the proportion of the purchase price which he had invested. The land was to be divided into square townships, five miles on a side. This land survey would prove to be an arduous task which would forever change the face of the landscape of the Western Reserve.

The division of the land of the Western Reserve began in the summer of 1796. General Moses Cleaveland led a party of six surveyors along with other crew members westward with the goal of running the township lines between the Pennsylvania border and the Cuyahoga River. They also planned to layout a town site at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River. The party divided into several crews to do their work. In normal conditions, each crew would consist of a surveyor with the responsibility of operating the compass and recording the survey in his notebooks, two chainmen to measure the lines, an axeman to clear the line and a flagman who was stationed in front the crew lead upon the direction of the surveyor.

Guided by a magnetic compass, the survey lines were run north / south and east / west. The distance of each boundary was measured using a 66-foot surveyor's chain which was stretched out 80 times for each mile. At the end of each mile, a wooden post was set in the ground to mark the progression of the survey. Along the way, the surveyor recorded the landscape features which he encountered in his notebook. The survey was hampered by illness, shortages of supplies and difficult terrain. Nevertheless, by mid-October of 1796, when the surveying party left the Western Reserve to return to Connecticut, almost half the township lines had been established and a town named Cleaveland had been laid out at the mouth of the Cuyahoga River.

Another party of surveyors returned to the Western Reserve in 1797 to complete the townline survey east of the Cuyahoga River. After drawing lots for townships, the individual shareholders subdivided their land into salable sized lots. Once the Native American claims to the Reserve lands west of the Cuyahoga River were extinguished in 1805, that area was surveyed into townships and subdivided. By 1820, 177 townships had been delineated in the Western Reserve with over 10,000 miles of township and subdivision survey lines laid out.

While the surveyors' lines remain the basis for land ownership descriptions in northeastern Ohio, their records have taken on an importance unforeseen by their authors. The descriptions recorded by the surveyors working in the Western Reserve provide an invaluable glimpse of the landscape as it appeared prior to the extensive

