

# Professional Surveying Societies,

## What are they there for?

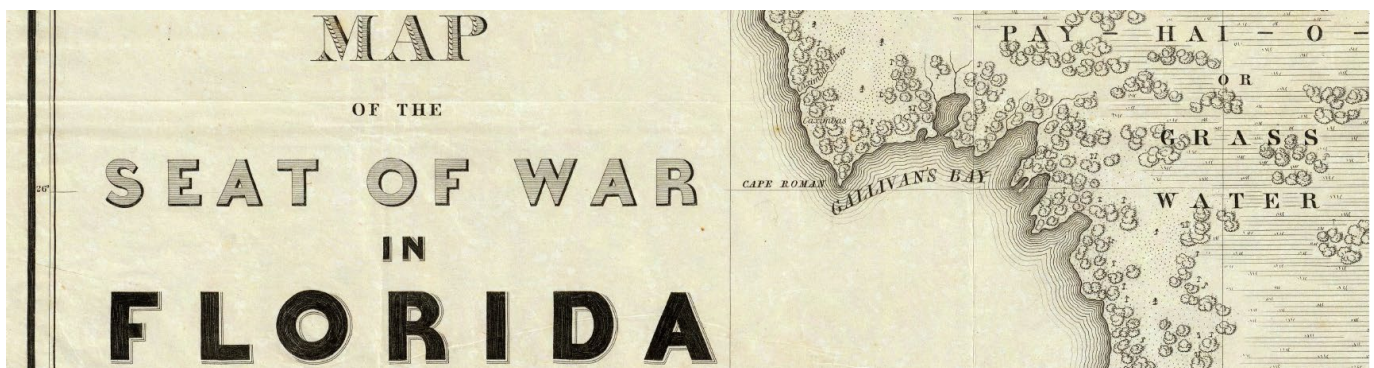
My journey and involvement with the Florida Surveying and Mapping Society (FSMS) has been something of a work-in-progress for over 40 years now. I've been planning to put my thoughts together on this issue for some time – I just haven't had the initiative to write it down. But as I get closer to retirement from the profession, it's been nagging at me: more and more, I see a lack of interest in being involved with our profession – a profession which has served to enlighten and enrich, not just my life, but so many others. It has enabled us to hold onto this... unique love of what we do. So, here is some of my background – and my thoughts – on Surveying in general, and what a Professional society is all about. And, of course, how I came to realize its importance.



### *Background:*

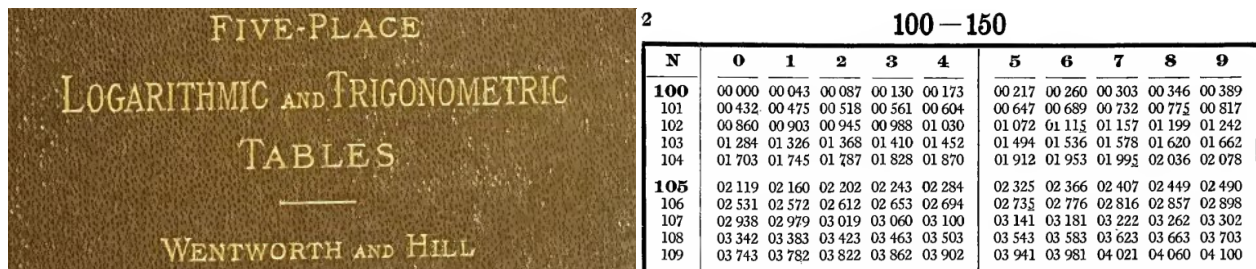
As someone who came into Surveying by complete accident over 50 years ago – and having been licensed for 40 of them – I have come to realize that we in the Surveying profession really do need each other. Overlooking our love of maps, history, applied mathematics, technology, and the outdoors, we're really a stubborn bunch – especially when it comes to asking for help when we start out. I suppose it's just the nature of wanting to figure it out on your own. Once we get over that hump (which usually happens when we're stumped on a particular boundary issue) and ask another surveyor, that's usually when the light comes on – and a whole new world opens up. There is a plethora of other surveyors just like yourself that – if asked – will bend over backwards to show off their work. Why? Well, I not-so-secretly believe that we're all proud of the work we do, the notes we keep, and the maps and surveys we produce. But I also believe we all hope they'll agree with us.

In my experience, to *really* prosper in Surveying, you must have that stubborn backbone, that burning desire to figure out puzzles, and that willingness to work long hours – scratching your head, beating it against a wall – deciphering what was found and how it fits together. More importantly: the ability to read and comprehend the writings, notes, and old maps from a variety of different sources of those adventurers that came before us, will lead you in the right direction and adventures of your own. Old maps are a particular favorite of mine – I'm fascinated by the artwork, as well as the historical details they often contain.

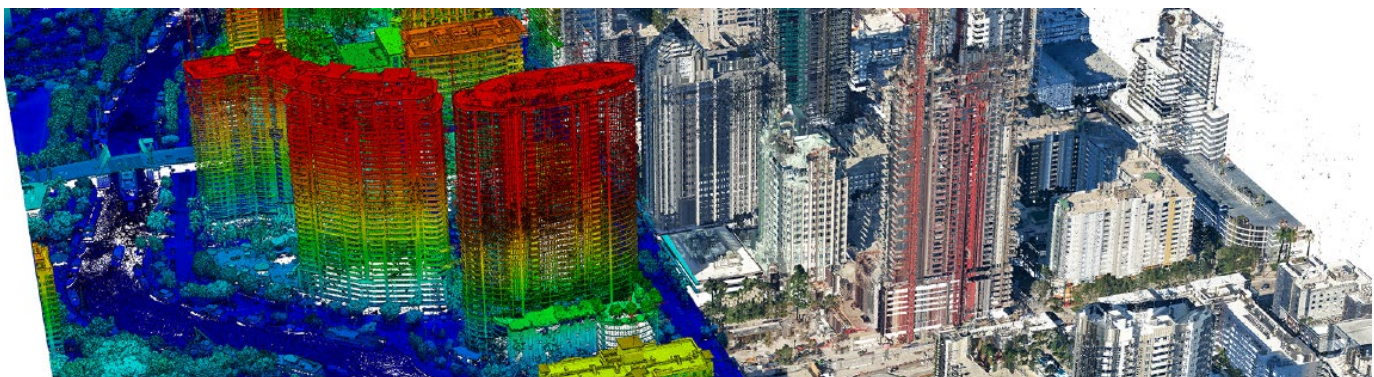




The math involved with everyday boundary and topographic surveying doesn't have to be complex: a good working knowledge of geometry and trigonometry will get you through 90 percent of everything you come across – and if you need help, you have more resources than ever nowadays. Definitely more so than when I started out – carrying books on 5-place logarithmic and trigonometric tables, working with a slide rule. A university degree in Geomatics is one way to gain this knowledge, but that education is only the beginning. Your real knowledge comes *after* school, when you start working in the geospatial world. True knowledge and understanding only comes after the academic world, both through mentors and through your own research.



Even if I hadn't been advocating for the adoption of the new geospatial technologies myself, they are taking over both our everyday lives, and our profession. This means you should be constantly learning new skills and developing your capabilities. Professional training and classes are important, and you should pursue those – costly though they can be – but I find self-investigation and individual research to be the most important avenue. Getting out of your comfort zone and pushing the limits of your knowledge will give you the boost you need to remain interested and focused. The most important new geospatial technologies – the ones you should be most focused on – are Geographic Information Systems (GIS), remote sensing, and all forms of LiDAR (terrestrial, mobile and aerial). Aside from the new technologies, datums – both horizontal and vertical - will become a key factor in your future as a Surveyor. And above all: when you do learn something new, pass it forward. Become the teacher, not just the user.



## *Professional Surveying Societies:*

While technology plays a very important role in what we do and how we perform adjustments, calibrate networks, and make final decisions on boundaries, it really is secondary; the more important skill is being able to read and decipher descriptions, and to interpret field data, in order to make a decision. Where to look, how to look for it, and when to stop looking: these issues cannot be taught even in a comprehensive college or university environment, and certainly can't be learned just from a book. So where does it come from?

An early mentor – who eventually became a lifelong friend - invited me to a local chapter meeting after I had been in Surveying for about 5 years, splitting my time between office drafting and field work. I really didn't think I had time to go to this when I had what I considered more important work to do the next day, but I relented and went. What I witnessed that night was indelibly imprinted in my memory. Well-known surveyors from around the area were concentrated in one place, and there was plenty of alcohol flowing on this night. I was introduced to several of them and was welcomed warmly. Once the meeting started, there were discussions about the different types of surveying and how it should be done, and a couple of items about state laws on surveying. However, the two most prominent surveyors got into a heated debate on surveying methods. They were very determined to get their point across and extremely forceful and loud and stood their ground and several in the audience also started getting into the heated discussion. I stood back and listened and watched waiting for the fists to come out, it was quite a spectacle. But in the end and to my amazement cool heads prevailed, and after it was all over, they shook hands, and we all had a beer to finish the evening. It was an amazing experience, and something I had never experienced before. I came to several more meetings after that, which weren't as entertaining, but that meeting - and all the meetings afterward - have helped guide me through my career. It got me to know these characters and what they stood for.

It still took me years to join the chapter as member, but in 1981 I finally made the leap. I was getting close to being able to take the test for my license and it became clear that these Surveyors could help me get there. I have never regretted that decision, and - looking back now - it was probably one of the most important things I did for myself.

I believe one of the main reasons for belonging and participating in your professional societies is to gain knowledge and insight from the collective experiences of your peers.

Another important reason is, after you've spent time in the trenches of surveying and gained knowledge and personal experiences, sharing that is one way to give back to the profession; the profession which has helped you grow and prosper into who you are today. For those new to the profession, the society acts as a support group from which you can gain new ideas and assistance from those who have already gone through the process. I've found that most of those who attend the meetings and participate will become lifelong friends and colleagues; people who are more than willing to help out any problem you run into.

The Society also serve as that ever-important watchdog to our profession, keeping an eye on both the Legislature, and on other professions, who want to chip away at what has always been considered under the realm of the Surveyor. They serve a very important role: keeping our Profession



from being attacked or blindsided from things that we might not even know about until it was too late. Politics, like it or not, plays a significant role in governing what we can and can't do. The Society acts as a go-between for both Surveyors and Surveying firms and the legislators, with the help of our Political Action Committee ([FSM PAC](#)) and our lobbyist. We couldn't do this alone, which means membership in the Society and our contributions to the PAC are important.

There are probably good-ole-boy clichés out there in several local chapters within the State Societies, but I would say those who actually become the officers and directors have a desire to serve and give back to their profession and want to help elevate it. We need young men and women coming into the profession, and we should be actively pursuing them.

Let's face it, we of the older generation are set in our ways, and that hampers our ability to adopt the emerging technologies – which is a problem the younger generation doesn't have. That said, experience matters: those same young people need direction and mentors, just as the majority of us had early in our careers. It is the intermixing of experience and of new perspectives, rather than one or the other, that we need. We need the older generation participating in the Society to pass on the experience they've learned, to give back to the next generation of surveyors so they can take it to the next level.



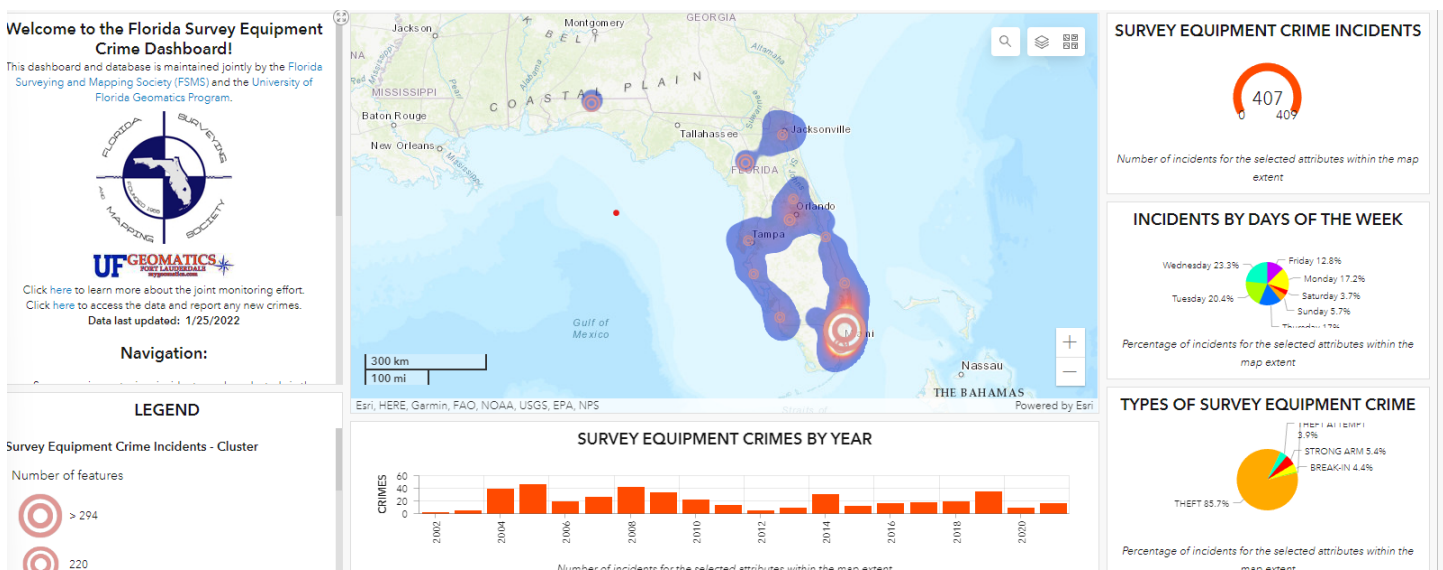
## FLORIDA SURVEYING & MAPPING SOCIETY

*“The Association for Geospatial Professionals”*

The [Florida Society of Surveyors and Mappers \(FSMS\)](#) just like many other Survey societies, strives hard to help the membership stay informed on issues affecting the profession; especially laws and legislative issues affecting Surveyors. We also take great pride in providing low cost continuing education, and we have committees constantly looking for ways to add both new classes and new ways to deliver them to our members (i.e., online).

When the Profession started coming under attack from thieves stealing Survey equipment back in 2002, FSMS established a Theft Committee, and helped to set up a Crime database; with this we have tracked crimes against Surveyors across the State and has assisted Law enforcement as well. One of our most recent and largest thefts involved a company office that was broken into and over \$200k of equipment stolen. With a combination of new technology, GIS, and aggressive law enforcement efforts, we were able to recover over 75% of the equipment. Our Trimble rep was able to access the equipment through the cloud and track the equipment getting location pings every minute. I was able to take that data and create maps for law enforcement showing the complete route the thieves took which helped in the identity and ultimate arrest of the criminals involved.

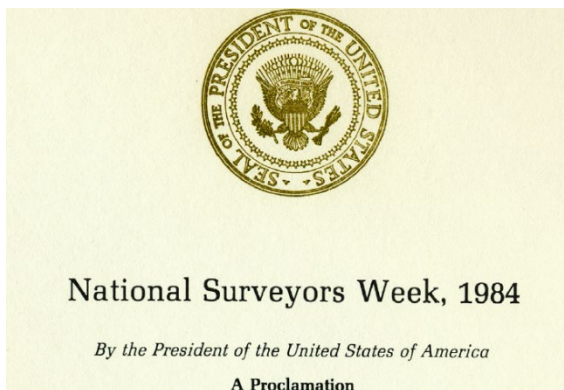
### [Survey Equipment Crime Incidents in FL \(arcgis.com\)](#)



One of the more important things that Professional societies do is to stay in touch with other state societies and our National Organization ([NSPS](#)), so that we keep informed and involved on the national level. We would never have had National Surveyor's Week proclaimed by President Ronald Reagan and Congress in 1984 if it weren't for the dedication in our national organization. They did whatever was necessary to bring to the attention of Senators and Representatives the importance of what role the Surveyors had in the development of the United States. Now that the remaining Member Organizations (NSPS, AAGS, & CaGIS) of the original ACSM have separated into individual societies, [NSPS](#) has become stronger for it, and much more focused on our profession and leading it into the future.



Our State Society celebrates [National Surveyors Week](#) every year by having the chapters going to their State, County and Municipal governments, and getting proclamations recognizing the importance of the Surveyors and National Surveyors Week. I don't see other Professions out there that have that National recognition, and we should be proud of it.



In recognition of the significant contribution made by surveyors to the United States, the Congress, by Senate Joint Resolution 44, has authorized and requested the President to designate the week beginning on March 11, 1984, as "National Surveyors Week."

NOW, THEREFORE, I, RONALD REAGAN, President of the United States of America, do hereby proclaim the week beginning March 11, 1984, as National Surveyors Week. I urge the people of the United States to observe this week with appropriate ceremonies and activities paying tribute to professional surveyors and their contribution to society. I invite all Americans to look back at the historic contributions of surveying and look ahead to the new technologies which are constantly modernizing this honored and learned profession.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 13th day of Feb., in the year of our Lord nineteen hundred and eighty-four, and of the Independence of the United States of America the two hundred and eighth.

*Ronald Reagan*

We will always need leaders in our profession to keep us a profession. The State and National Societies fill that role and provide a platform from which we can continue to gain respect and fight when we need to; without them, we would surely become just another trade organization.

I challenge those out there who complain about their societies, and yet have never served or participated beyond coming to meetings: you need to become involved. To paraphrase Plato, if you aren't involved in the society, the profession will always be governed by your inferiors.

I know for a fact that most that have taken that step, and - having served - come away with a much better understanding and respect for what a professional society is, and its purpose. Yes, it's a lot of work, and the people who give up their time and energies to voluntarily serve and promote our profession probably feel like they are going crazy sometimes.

I certainly do.

However, just sit back and think about where we would be right now without them, would there even be a profession.

My regards to all my peers and future peers out there. It's a Great Profession but remember there is strength in numbers. Even though we are all independent while doing our work, we are also all connected by our past, with those that we still walk in the footsteps of.

*Richard D. Pryce, RLS/PSM*

Vice President, Survey & G.I.S.

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