

Out, standing in the field

Surveying is a precise activity carried out in the most imprecise of places. The earth is not round, only roundish (an oblate spheroid), and uneven of surface. Making accurate measurements on the ground was made more difficult by inclement weather, stinging insects, and the possibility of encounter with native people who saw this activity as a threat to their very way of life.

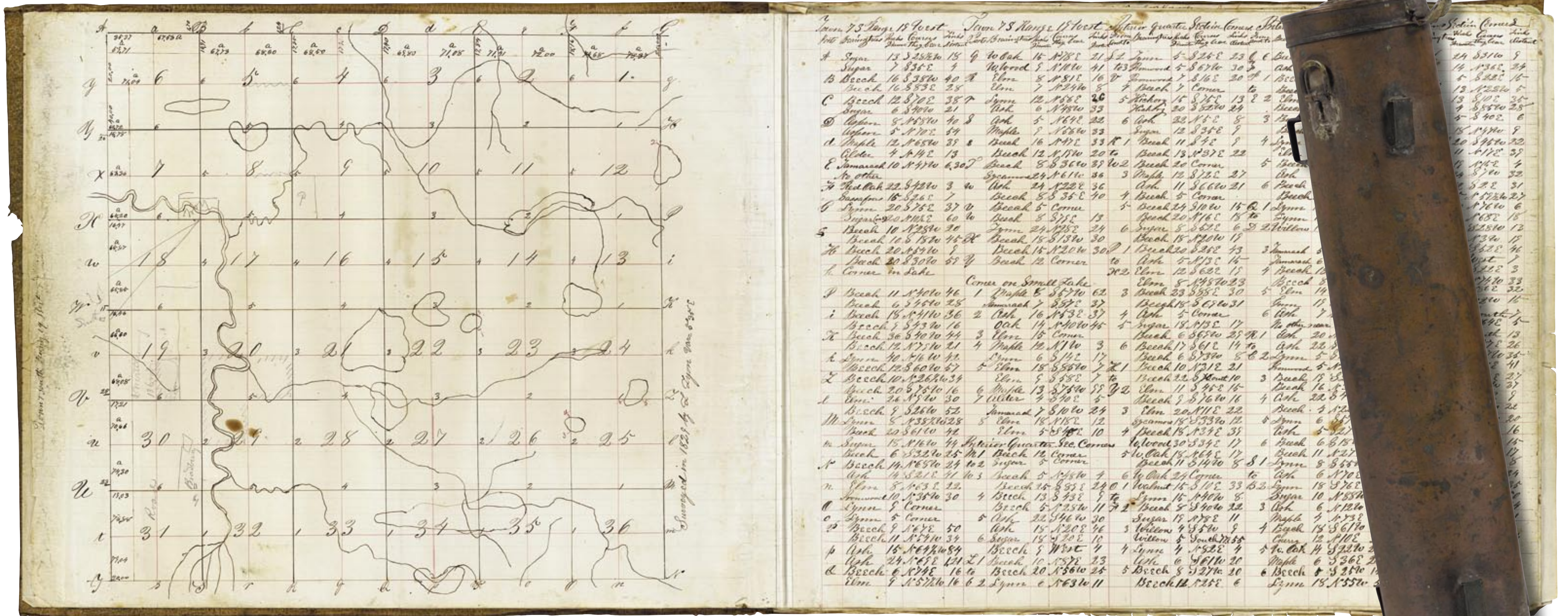
In the heavily wooded eastern portion of the country, public land surveys up to 1850 typically used wooden posts as corner monuments. In the midwest, stones made more durable monuments. Further west on the plains, however, section corners had to be marked with pits and mounds of dirt.

Town 7 South, Range 19 West.

Lucius Lyon, 1829.

Lucius Lyon began surveying public lands in Michigan in 1821. Some of his original field manuscript notes are shown here. Showing a part of Berrien County, Michigan, in the southwest corner of the state, these sketches were made as part of the extensive Michigan-Indiana boundary survey that preceded Michigan's entry into the Union in 1837. Lucius Lyon would become Michigan's first U.S. Senator that same year, and surveyor general for Michigan, Ohio, and Indiana in 1845.

Used as bounds, trees are listed by species and size in the map's accompanying table. The map on the left shows sections, quartersections, and land owners. The pages of the manuscript are bound in a hand-sewn sheepskin cover that was then rolled into a copper canister for easy transport in the field, carried over the shoulder with the now missing leather strap.



“... it requires not the spirit of prophecy to foretell, that when surveyed and offered for sale, the whole country will within a few years attract and sustain a numerous and thriving population.”
 Lucius Lyon in a letter to President Andrew Jackson, January 29, 1833.