Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund History, Interesting Articles, Field Notes & Letters to Surveyor General

Division of State Lands Survey & Mapping Title & Lands Records
BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF THE INTERNAL IMPROVEMENT TRUST FUND

A Brief History

Florida became a state on March 3, 1845 and by right of its sovereignty gained title to the waterbottoms of all the navigable waterways within the state's boundaries.

There were several federal land grants to the State of Florida in the years after statehood. The major grants are as follows:

Act of Congress dated September 4, 1841, granted to every new state admitted to the Union 500,000 acres of "Internal Improvement Lands Proper" for purposes of internal improvement, i.e., transportation and communication (roads, railroads, and canals). The governing body established in 1851 to administer these lands was the Board of Internal Improvement. Also, by virtue of statehood, the Act of Congress dated March 3, 1845 granted 52,160 acres of "Seminole Lands" to be used for two seminaries of learning, one east of the Suwannee River, and one west (present day University of Florida and Florida State University, respectively). The state was granted approximately 1,000,000 acres consisting of every sixteenth section in every township as "School Lands Proper," to be used by the inhabitants of each township to support a school. A separate government body administered these lands, and eventually it was called the State Board of Education, and later the State Department of Education. Lastly, in the same Act of Congress, eight sections of land were granted to the state for the purpose of fixing a seat of government. The State of Florida was granted 20,438,253.17 acres of Swamp and Overflowed Lands by Act of Congress dated September 28, 1853. These lands were determined by the U.S. surveyor to be "wet and unfit for cultivation," that is, they were described as over 50% "swamp in character." The Governor selected the lands, and when approved, the federal government patented the lands to the state.

In 1851, another Board of Internal Improvement was established to administer all the swamp and overflowed lands. Finally in 1855, both boards were replaced by the new Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund, today's Board of Trustees of the Internal Improvement Trust Fund of the State of Florida (BOT) consisting of the Governor and Cabinet, to administer the internal improvement lands, as well as the swamp and overflowed lands and the resulting monies from the disposition of same.

Act of Congress dated May 17, 1856, granted 2,220,799.02 acres of land to the State of Florida for the purpose of aiding in the construction of railroads. This grant included every alternate section of land designated by odd numbers, for six sections in width on each side of each railroad line and branch mentioned in said Act.

Title to sovereignty submerged lands was granted by the State Legislature in 1913, 1915, 1917, and 1919 to the BOT with authority to sell and convey.

The Butler Act of 1921 invested title and other interest in certain submerged lands lying in navigable waters adjacent to uplands in the direction of the channel, without obstructing said channel, dependent upon filling or permanently improving said lands by the riparian upland owner. Later repealed.

The Murphy Act of 1937 authorized statutory forfeiture of lands for non-payment of taxes. The lands, described in the resulting county tax sale certificates that had not been redeemed by June 9, 1939, were vested in the State of Florida with the BOT administering the sale of lands.

The Bulkhead Act of 1957, among other things, repealed the Butler Act of 1921 for Dade and Palm Beach Counties.
History of Florida Land Acts 1820 - 1993
OUT WITH THE OLD AND ... A NEW PRIME MERIDIAN MARKER: REFLECTIONS ON A NEW HISTORY

BY DR. JOE KNEITSCHE, ROBERT BECK P.L.S. AND LARRY EVERS P.L.S.

In case you have not heard, the Chandeleur Island, where the original Prime Meridian and Base Parallel marker is located, is getting a new location. As part of this renovation, the monument set in 1925 has been removed and is now located in the FSMS office. There will be a new Prime Meridian Marker put in its place which will feature the names of the U.S. Surveyors and the Surveyors General of Florida. This recognition of these brave and resilient men is long overdue. Given the struggles they faced on the Florida frontier, complete with brawling Native Americans, allegations, malaria, yellow fever and a myriad of other issues and risks, it is just their custom that the surveys were completed with the most part, relative accuracy. As every property owner should realize, it is this very work that led to the land we live on today. The face-to-face with the residential area and the new monument should become a center piece to any Talahassee visit by our colleagues and friends.

Back in 1858, J. H. Hayes, one time principal clerk in the General Land Office in Washington, was named as one of the Members of United States Surveyors. The main ingredients to establishing an initial point for all surveys, he wrote: "The first step in proceeding to establish a meridian and base line, will be to select some prominent natural land mark convenient to the locality where the earliest surveys will be needed, for an initial starting point. At some well-defined mountains, or the point of confluence of two rivers, alluvial land are objects for the purpose indicated. If these are not to be found, some other prominent natural object should be sought out." Well, Talahassee has no major rivers flowing through it and mountains are in short supply in Florida generally so the site near the St. Augustine Bench down the hill from the new established capital was chosen instead. From all indications the first marker was made of native wood, most likely cedar or cypress. There is no mention of a stone or rock monument in the earliest records. As noted in the latest 2020 article in The Florida Surveyor, the first monument was set by George Walton, then the military surveyor for the territory. The first governor, William Pope Duval, was in St. Marks negotiating with the local Native Americans and Robert Butler, the first Surveyor General, who recently appointed him and still in Tennessee at the time. It is from this point that Benjamin Clemens was charged with running the Prime Meridian and the Base Parallel to the west. Charles C. Stone was contracted with to take the East Parallel to the east from the initial point. Both Stone and Clemens were very experienced surveyors.

Of course, there have been a few myths and lots of stories about the establishment of the Prime Meridian Marker and the initial lines run from it. One of the favorites of Talahasseeans is that the stone marker on top of the wagon defacing it at least two inches south of its destination. As noted above, this is highly unlikely since the original marker was probably made of double wood and no mantel of course markers is made in the corner. Another story was reported in the June 1929 issue of the Florida Land 74th Anniversary which has C. C. Stone running the line counter clockwise. This story is not an accurate account by this reporter to the notation that Benjamin and John Moneta extended the line to the western side of the bay. The bay is not named after the Townships because the waters of Choctawhatchee Bay not Pensacola Bay. Stories such as these simply add confusion to the above physical markers and danger of losing it. In the end, the elegans were enough to elevate the most important items. We owe these brave and resilient men a debt of gratitude for their work.

In conclusion, Talahassee 1924, kilometer 54, is known as a gem in the state of Florida. This is the last survey produced by the government and it was the result of hard work and dedication of the Florida Surveyors. A stone was driven in the ground at the location of the Kilometer 54 marker, and the surveyors who worked on the project will be remembered. The new monument is a reminder of the hard work and dedication of the Florida Surveyors.
Dr. Col.

The enclosed letter from Genl. Houston has this moment been handed me by Mr. Patton Anderson, and I take the liberty to enclose it to you for your information.

I am sure Col. Martin of Williamson would not recommend a young Gentleman who was not deserving, however I believe you recall Col. Martin, he was with us on the Seminole campaign & I believe at Orleans he was with you in the Creek Campaign. I have great confidence in him as a man of truth.

I am respectfully your friend

Andrew Jackson
August 13th 1824

Col. Robert Butler

Dr. Col.

This will be handed you by Leroy May Esqr. who will apply to you to obtain employment as a surveyor in Florida. Mr. May has been employed as a surveyor under Col. Anderson & Genl. Coffee. The enclosed letter is from Judge Leake, a prosecutor friend of mine & is now a member of Congress. The Judge is a man to be relied on, and all he has said in favor of Mr. May I have no doubt but he meant it. Should you not have engaged all your deputies. I am certain from information, the Mr. May can be relied on as a correct surveyor and as such I introduce him to you. I am Sir being respectfully

yr friend

Andrew Jackson
Saturday July 17th 1824

Col. Robert Butler

Note: This is an unofficial transcription of the letter on file in vault.
March 2010 - Kathy Milhous
Nashville
13th Aug. 1824

Dear Sir,

The bearer W. Patton Anderson has been recommended to me by Col. William Martin of Williamson, in whom I have unbounded confidence; W. Anderson wishes to obtain the situation of Deputy Surveyor under you. I am informed that he is well qualified and that he has been engaged Surveying under W. Bright of Fayetteville Tenn.

W. Anderson is a young man without resources, except those depending upon his qualifications and industry: If it is practicable for you to render him any service consistent with your arrangements I am aware that you have every disposition to patronize young men without fortune.

I am truly your friend
Sam Houston

Col Robt Butler
ALLIGATORS

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Page 51

W. L. Apthorp states, "Yd mile East on S. 84°
Sec. 33 (T 47 S., R 26 E.)...45:59 to round pond
surrounded by hay and uprooted trees, impassable
area. Dead bull of nuisance alligator.

Counts fifty and stopped--Killed unhilled line."

Dated 1872.

INDIANS (Problems With)

Vol.--Field Notes, Vol. 27
Page 324

R. B. Ker reports in the survey of 1885, SSE dated
11:35 while surveying the East line of Sec 37
running south: "54.30 measured SSW, 24.90 X
scrub 1.38 X. At this place a party of Indians
shot at me & my men. Viper 0.750 in. 1851
---they had previously threatened to shoot me if
I did not quit surveying there. A ball struck a
tree, against which I was standing at the time,
while my compass, (parallel) was sitting, not 6
inches from me. 02.88 same to lake Ker and
marked a form of cabbage palmetto..."
Joe Wright speaks of Ochlocknee Swamp:

"Look down into nature,
To the range of Planets and subterranean spheres,
And think of man of the Ochlocknee Swamps,
For man is a wild and untamed creature.
Do not equal them;
Language bears inferiority,
Pulled to express.

George Mackay reports in his notes in the 1844 survey of South Boundary of TBA, OBA, "Gentle on Cold may be refreshing breeze delightful bath—"\n\nmain rocks & space—planks—barrels and bottles"
Joseph Wright - Choctawhatchee
Volume 87 Page 284

George Mackay - Horsefly
Volume 84 Page 154
General Land Office Primer of Instructive Information Relative to Legal Subdivisions & Plats of Public Land Surveys
Instructions & Links to Lands Records Websites

BTLDs (Board of Trustees Land Document System) Website:
Access at http://thldlsweb.dep.state.fl.us/ or via www.myflorida.com by the following steps:
1. Click on “Find an Agency” tab
2. Click on “Environ. Protection”
3. Click on Website: www.dep.state.fl.us
4. Choose “State Lands” from the Programs drop down list;
5. Click on “Division of State Lands”
6. Click on “Links and Resources” under Quick Links
7. Click on Board of Trustees Land Document System (BTLDs)
   (Agenda Documents, the BTLDs GIS map site and access to LABINS are available here)

BTLDs Land Document Search
Choose DOCUMENT TYPE: {Drop down categories such as: ANY or a specific document type if known}
You can search for several types of instruments by: the instrument (i.e. deed) number; the date of the document; grantor/grantee name; Section-Township-Range; and/or county recording book or volume Number & page number.
Under “FAQ” the abbreviations to the document types can be found. If you should experience any technical problems with the site, or find any errors in the data please see Contact Us.
You may also contact Samantha Mercer of Title and Land Records Section at (850) 245-2788 with questions concerning the documents.

LABINS (Land Boundary Information System) Website
Access at http://data.labins.org/2003/ or via www.labins.org by the following steps:
1. Under “Survey Data”
2. Click on “Land Records”
3. Click on “General Land Office (GLO) Early Records (Township Plats, Survey Notes & Survey Instructions)”