

COUNCILLOR'S CORNER

BY BRYAN DAVIES

"THE SURVEYOR'S PARADOX"

This column is being written in the quiet time that follows the Annual Meeting or any other traumatic experience and this time it happens to be after sitting on a discipline hearing over the past week. This experience leaves all concerned feeling absolutely drained and as the decisions that the committee is required to make have such serious consequences, this quiet time seems to lend itself to reflections on our profession and why we are where we are at this particular time in history.

When our esteemed editor asked me to write this column I thought that he should make an appointment to see Dr. Sisters as his letter to me was full of paradoxes (paradoxi?). Andy suggested that the piece should be erudite, of suitable gravity, elevated in tone with many classical allusions, while at the same time be written in words of less than two syllables, hilarious, down-to-earth and liberally sprinkled with excerpts from "Penthouse" and "Lady Chatterley's Lover." In fact Mr. Gibson gave me about four days to have the article in his hands when he has known for months when the publication deadline was.

As I sat and pondered this situation I realized that surveying in Ontario, at this time and by the current membership is paradoxical in itself and in fact while starting out this treatise in a light-hearted fashion I do intend to be serious.

We Land Surveyors in Ontario have a rich and honourable tradition stretching back nearly two hundred years and we're as important as any single group or person in founding our province and in fact our country. "In the beginning was the Word" and the word was "Go Forth and Survey." With apologies to Genesis that is exactly what the early surveyors did. They opened up the land and were the most respected and perhaps the most important men in the country. They were forced to act quickly, carefully and honourably in the performance of their duties and while the conditions were most difficult we are constantly being amazed at the precision of their work. These surveyors were professionals in the true sense of the word in that they exhibited the qualities or typical features of their profession which were to use, demonstrate or advise people with their advanced learning or science. The surveyor was looked upon as the only professional in the division and demarcation of land and was trusted.

Today, unfortunately, our profession has fallen into disrepute. We have allowed ourselves to become nothing

more than sub-trades to the developers and the legal profession and there are very few of us who can still maintain the respect and confidence of our clients so that they will take our advice as professionals when it is offered as useful and constructive and not simply as a means to increase the account. Instead of being consulted on what type or extent of survey is required, we are often told what to do and what it should cost by people who have no idea what is involved and what risks the surveyor is taking when he signs his name.

We have become our own worst enemy. We wish to be considered professionals but sometimes appear to have a death wish. Surveying today abounds with paradox.

The profession is advancing technically in a geometric progression while many surveyors are enhancing their skills and knowledge in an arithmetic progression or not at all. Some surveyors seem to feel that "Continuing Education" means adhering to the current regulations and not attempting to learn new techniques.

Before you all start sending rude and threatening letters or cutting off my registry office privileges, let me hasten to point out that I am not suggesting that the majority of our members are incompetent, uncaring and totally intransigent when it comes to self-improvement. I am suggesting, however, that we do have a few incompetent members at one end of the scale and a larger number of members at the other end who have the interest and the time for continual self-improvement.

The majority of the membership, myself included, have all they can do to deal with everyday pressures of business or their position in Government or Industry. Our surveying education for the most part was slanted toward the acquisition of practical skills of the "Trade" with little regard to the problems of Business Administration, Estimating, Public Relations and the ever increasing "Bête-Noir" of consumerism with its attendant lawyer's letters written "Without Prejudice" but terribly frightening just the same.

We wish to be treated as professionals, but continually reject the suggestion that mandatory continuing education with some sort of examination be instituted. It is true that attendance at seminars is generally high, but of course is not compulsory and no quantitative analysis is possible.

We all wish to have the highest pos-

sible standards in our field work but are reluctant to employ skilled, certified technicians and technologists, either because of the cost factor or the fear for our image before our staff as educators in our profession. Should we really be expected to train employees in skills that we were never taught or that we have no aptitude to teach?

We continue to complain that we are not making enough money but do not educate our clients as to the real worth of the job. It has taken Bill Aronec of the Appraisal Institute of Canada and others to make us look at ourselves in the proper light. We sell ourselves short when pricing jobs for fear that it is only the lowest price that will get the job and ensure the return of the clients. It has been my experience that these people never come back but continue to search for that "Holy Grail" of the unprofessional - The Free Survey!

Another paradox concerns Liability Insurance. One might think that we are buying protection and of course this is true to a point. The fact is that now we are all insured we must strive even harder to become better surveyors. We cannot allow ourselves to become complacent and relax our vigilance. As the general public becomes aware of our insured status, we will come under more pressure to pay for errors, real or imagined. Now that we have coverage we must strive to re-educate and retain our staffs and ourselves, so that NO errors occur and NO claims are made. The insurance should only be necessary for catastrophes, not used for multitudes of relatively small claims that could have been avoided. The more claims paid out, the higher the premiums go. The A.O.L.S. Council, through its "Bulletins" and Education Program will be issuing aids to surveyors that will help us avoid claims on our insurance and of course become better surveyors.

The paradox of the value of the survey is also very evident. The survey is almost the first thing needed but the last thing ordered. Lawyers and Real Estate Agents get paid from the proceeds of the sale but surveyors very often are found vainly attempting to get paid from a third party long after the deal is closed and forgotten. Lawyers are continually telephoning every surveyor in the region to find a free copy of an old survey to use to transfer very valuable land or obtain large mortgages, while they would not dream of using a search that was five, ten or twenty years out of date. While I have no statistics to prove it, it seems to me that the most urgent time parameters are put on the most difficult or expensive projects and when the inevitable error occurs, it is usually very expensive. We must recognize the value of the survey and make our clients understand that it takes a certain amount of

time to do the job properly and do not allow yourself to be rushed into producing plans that are not properly checked. It is apparent that the client conveniently forgets the pressure that you were under to produce the results. The consequences of undue haste have proven to be enormous.

If we wish to return to our former days of respect and confidence we must act now! I believe that Helmut Piller made a most important observation last year at a meeting in Toronto when he said, **"We do not need fewer crews in the field but more surveyors in charge of crews."** While there is no question that not all crews need to be led by licenced professionals, we must ensure that the data that is brought back to the office from the field is the most accurate and complete that is possible. Our party chiefs must be competent and it is my opinion that this is an area that can well be handled by the certified technologist.

I believe that we must spend more time in the field making "Spot Checks" if we are going to accept the responsibility of signing a plan of survey. We must ensure that the plans accurately reflect the field notes and calculations and on certain types of surveys it is necessary to inspect the site in the field to check for obvious blunders. Mathematical

closures can provide some reassurance on legal surveys but there is little checking of a mathematical nature that will assist in avoiding showing field errors on a topographical survey.

We have to thoroughly review and in my opinion revise upward the fees charged for our services. An analysis of the percentages that Legal and Real Estate fees reflect of the worth of the transaction makes it obvious that we are prepared to settle for a fraction of that which we are taking responsibility for. Every time we draw and sign a plan showing the position of a dwelling or an area of land we are taking the full responsibility for its accuracy and removing the onus from the lending company. We must charge fees for our services that are commensurate with our risk. It is these low-cost surveys that cause the most trouble and illustrate clearly the "Surveyor's Paradox."

The client must be made aware of the time required to perform the survey. He must be advised of the estimated cost and must receive a report on the survey upon the presentation of the plans. In addition the client should be advised of any problems that arise during the survey that would increase the cost and he should receive approval to exceed the estimate.

It may seem, of course, that this is all known to us and why on earth are we being told what we already know. The question is, DO we all know? The Discipline Hearings for incompetence in the past three years and the few insurance claims that have been received to date, reveal that these are the ongoing problems and that these are the areas that must be attacked. The "Awareness" task force that is being created will assist in the re-education of the public and the "Standards Committee Bulletins," Training Seminars and other General Business Aids will enable the surveyor to eliminate many of the bad habits that he may have fallen into.

I realize that this will cost money and that we will have to charge more for our services: that is not only necessary but long overdue. It is this continual "Selling Ourselves Short" that is our biggest problem and that has contributed most to our diminution in stature within the community of professions and the community at large. I am convinced that if we all will accept the fact that we could use some amount of re-education, retraining, upgrading of our methods and the return to showing pride in our work we will once again be the highly respected, well paid leaders of our society that we once were. ●