

Land Surveyors Form Professional Associations

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1880 – The Association of Manitoba Land Surveyors

The first surveyors sent into the West to survey lands for the dominion government were qualified provincial land surveyors from the older provinces. By 1872 their numbers included twenty-eight surveyors from Ontario, twelve from Quebec, three from New Brunswick and three from Nova Scotia. The Dominion Lands Act of 1872 gave them the qualification of Deputy Land Surveyor, and provided for the establishment of a board of examiners to assess the future candidates. These men differed from Canadian surveyors of the past in that they had a point of contact; they assembled in Winnipeg at the commencement of each field season, and many moved to Winnipeg permanently to rid themselves of the horrors of the long journey east and west each year. They also had shared the same employer, and encountered the same working problems.

A group of 11 of these surveyors met on April 27, 1874 in Winnipeg, and passed a motion that “it is advisable that Land Surveyors resident in Manitoba and the North West Territories form themselves into an Association for the better organization of the profession and that the Association be composed of Deputy Surveyors employed under instructions from the Dominion Lands Office and duly qualified Land Surveyors from any of the Provinces of the Dominion”.

The members of the meeting also sent a telegram to Surveyor General J. S. Dennis stating “Land Surveyors formed Association. If the Lands Act is before Parliament please propose to change Deputy Surveyor to Dominion Land Surveyor.” Several years later, when the opportunity arose, Dennis responded to the telegram and the

designation Deputy Surveyor was changed to Dominion Land Surveyor.

A committee of this initial meeting was instructed to draft a bill to regulate surveys in Manitoba and to authorize incorporation. The officers elected at this meeting were: Amos H. Vaughan, president; John L. Reid, vice-president; F.A. Martin, secretary; George McPhillips, treasurer; and Charles-J. Bouchette, A.L. Russell, O.B. Davidson and D. Sinclair, committee members. Other surveyors attending this meeting were J. W. Harris, John Grant and C.P. Brown. The next day the draft constitution was approved, with the name of the association shown as “The Association of Land Surveyors of Manitoba and the North-West Territory.” The aims of the association included the establishment of a uniform rate of charges, and the passage of a bill to regulate matters concerning the survey of land within Manitoba. Annual fees were set at \$5.00 a member and \$2.00 a pupil.

The diaries of J. W. Harris for 1874 and 1875 indicated his attendance at committee meetings dealing with the

wording of the proposed act, and Wednesday, May 5, 1875, he recorded that the bill had passed, but evidently it was never carried into law. There is no mention of a survey association for several years after this. In 1878 an act respecting land surveyors and the survey of lands in the province of Manitoba was passed in the Dominion Parliament, and one of the provisions was that persons acting as surveyors should be Dominion Land Surveyors as defined in the Dominion Lands Act. This amended the former definition of “Deputy Surveyor” in the Dominion Lands Act of 1872.

On November 18, 1880, a preliminary meeting was held to begin the reorganization of the association. Those present were Amos Vaughan, J.S. Dennis Jr., William Pearce, T. Drummond, A. McFee, and J.D. Vaughan. A committee of Dennis, A. H. Whitcher and Robert Bourne were asked “to draft a constitution for an Association of Provincial Land Surveyors for the Province of Manitoba” and to report what steps they deemed



From left to right: Ken Yerex, MLS, Dewey Hoplock, MLS, Samuel Doyle, MLS and Gary Fraser, MLS (July 4, 2005)

advisable to place the profession on as favorable a basis as possible within the said province.

The first official meeting of the reorganized association was held on December 16, 1880 in the Dominion Lands Office, with Amos H. Vaughan as chairman and Robert Bourne as secretary. The draft constitution was read, discussed, amended and adopted. Amos H. Vaughan was elected president; J.S. Dennis Jr. vice-president, and Robert Bourne, secretary-treasurer. The executive committee included Hon. C.P. Brown, George McPhillips and J.W. Vaughan. Others present at this meeting were William F. King, John McLatchie, G.B. Bemister and Duncan Sinclair. This meeting marked the official beginning of what was later to be known as the Association of Manitoba Land Surveyors.

On January 30, 1881, at a meeting held in the office of J.S. Dennis Jr., the bill of incorporation as prepared by the committee was read, amended and adopted. A number of practicing surveyors were proposed for membership and accepted. The back of the first minute book listed 33 paid-up members. At this meeting, J.W. Harris and Wilson arrived late, and were promptly proposed and accepted for membership.

The April 18, 1881 meeting was most productive: Approved printing of 100 copies of the Constitution. Elected Members. Elected Honorary Members. The Act of Incorporation was read, and amendments proposed by the Dominion and Local Governments mentioned. Agreed that Vice-President Dennis be empowered to have any dealings that might be necessary with the Dominion Government as to the proposed amendments. Agreed that the election of officers be proceeded with at once and that the Executive Committee be empowered to make such amendments to the Act as to make such officers the Legal Officers for the ensuing year of the Association's existence. Moved that the newly elected Executive have power to alter the Bill as deemed expedient. Moved that the Executive Committee

draw up a curriculum for the examination of candidates and a percentage mark be specified. Honorary Members elected were Lt. Col. J.S. Dennis Sr., Lindsay Russell and Hon. C.P. Brown.

The Act of incorporation was safely piloted through the next the next sitting of the Manitoba legislature and became law on May 25, 1881. Section V, under the heading "Election of Officers," named those officers elected on April 18, 1881 to "be the officers up to the third Monday in June next, or until others are elected in their place as provided under this Act."

At the annual meeting on June 20, 1881, held at the association's rooms, the following officers were elected: J.S. Dennis Jr., president; George McPhillips, vice-president; J.W. Harris, secretary-treasurer and William Wagner, T. Breen, Joseph Doupe and A. McFee, committee members.

Vice-president George McPhillips caused an uproar in the association when he inserted a clause in the amendments passing through the house, without the knowledge of the remainder of the executive, that permitted apprentices who had served their full term of three years to be entitled to a commission without examination. There were immediate applications for commissions from three such apprentices, but they were refused. President J.S. Dennis Jr. was arrested and sent to jail for refusing to sign such a commission, but was bailed out after a few hours. He appeared before Chief Justice Wood, who dismissed the case, saying the association would not be compelled to issue diplomas without examination. The verdict enabled the association to proceed until the act could be amended. The vice-president resigned before the next annual meeting.

At the annual meeting on April 16, 1883, the report of the executive committee regarding this incident was distributed to the members, together with a report of the board of examiners. A draft copy of the proposed amendments to the act was read, considered, and adopted by the association. J. W. Harris, secretary-treasurer of the asso-

ciation for a record 23 years, was pleased with the reception accorded this report and noted in his diary that "everything moved off quietly and in order." The offending clause was removed by the legislature on July 7, 1883.

The first candidates examined for commissions were: William Crawford, PLS, who wrote law and practice only, on February 17, 1882; A.O. Wheeler, PLS who also wrote law and practice only, on May 8, 1882, and R. E. Young, the first to qualify by writing the full final examinations on May 8, 1882.

In 1884 the association experienced difficulties with an amendment to the Land Surveyors Act, which provided that the lieutenant governor should select the seven-member board of examiners from a list of twelve members elected at a general meeting of the association. The 12 members were elected at the 1884 meeting, and the names were forwarded on January 21, but the selection of the board was delayed so long that the next examination was not held until June 1885.

The membership of the association quickly rose to 80 in 1883, and consisted almost entirely of men who were also Dominion Land Surveyors. However, only 14 members were added during the remaining years of the century.

Having members in the legislature was a distinct help and, in 1887, President C.P. Brown reported that he had secured amendments to the Registration Act of 1883, which had stated that the terms Provincial Land Surveyor and Dominion Land Surveyor were synonymous, which was in conflict with the Provincial Land Surveyors Act of the same year. His efforts were strongly approved.

Amendments to the Land Surveyors Act, effective March 1, 1904, changed the name of the association to the "Association of Manitoba Land Surveyors." The association celebrated its 50th and 100th anniversaries with special meetings, details of which can be found in *The Canadian Surveyor*, January 1930 and December 1980.

