

# Why We Love our Monuments

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The greatest joy for a surveyor is recovering a long-lost boundary marker. It is like finding the Holy Grail. Courts have found that natural and artificial monuments have the highest priority as evidence. To find the tip of an old wooden post with black glass under a pile of stones, one must retrace the steps of the original surveyor.

Our plans are so authoritative and clear, they can be mistaken for the real surveys they represent. Surveys exist as physical realities on the ground; not on paper, not in a computer database, not in a Registry Office.

In this digital age, accurate geographic information is readily available, even on our cell phones. The fabric of property lines has been transferred into computer generated drawings. How “real” is this data? Why not dispense with monuments altogether? Because we need to maintain our connection to the physical reality.

N.W.J. Hazelton wrote in *Why Does Surveying Exist*: “... rather than deal with real objects, we create “tokens” that are used as representations of whatever it is we want to deal with... The reason that surveying, as a profession, exists is to guarantee the connection between tokens based on spatial measurement, and the spatial reality those tokens represent”.

It is interesting to reflect that the girl in the photograph leaning on the Trent Canal monument is named Maya, the Vedantic term for “the illusion of reality experienced through the senses”. In fact, the work of surveying is essentially empirical, in that we come to know things through direct experience through our senses.

One might say we learn of natural objects empirically by the appearances they present to our senses. This is what surveyors do when they follow the performance standards and “carry out a thorough field investigation for the best available evidence of all lines, boundaries and corners of land under survey...” O.Reg 42/96 S. 3.(b)

There is a national initiative to integrate legal surveys into a geodetic mapping framework. Our own Association is drafting regulations to set the standard of care for its profes-

sional members in order to serve the public interest in this regard.

It is possible today to make surveys measured strictly from Global Positioning System (GPS) satellites. In their wisdom, the Integrated Surveys Committee and the Council of the Association of Ontario Land Surveyors think that “digital reality” is not “real enough”. The proposed practice standards require that integrated surveys be tied to nearby coordinated monuments.

This way, in the language of Hazelton, we maintain the fidelity between “tokens” and reality. The boundary will be tied not just to a “bright spot” on a computer screen, but to a network of monuments that are prominent, permanent, stable and defined.

Another initiative of the Association is the recently created Monument Protection Task Force, chaired by Susan MacGregor O.L.S. in response to an outcry from the public to preserve monuments being destroyed by road widenings and other construction activities.

Heraclitus stated: “Nothing is permanent but change”. Geology tells us that mountains can be washed away by water, and rise again in the sea beds. Fortunately we are not discouraged by the transitory nature of physical reality, because we went right ahead and built “permanent” monuments from

the Washington Monument to the Pyramids, and from the CN Tower to the Eiffel Tower. Land surveyors in Ontario have planted millions of survey posts.

Monuments are persistent and give us security, reliability and repeatability. They embody cultural memory, as generations have lived up to them. They give us a sense of place and identity, and define the limits of our influence. Monuments have ancient origins, such as Neolithic and Bronze Age milestones, avenues, menhirs, runestones and sites like Stonehenge and Avebury. Monuments create social order by giving us the knowledge that our foundations will not shift and our sacred ground will be preserved. They endure. We do not. That is why we love them. They connect us to our past, our present and our future.



Maya Brubacher rests her head and contemplates a monument that has stood undisturbed since 1916; comforted by the legacy of the two surveyors she trusts the most: her father, David and her grandfather, Wayne.