



Looking Back 100 Years

On the eve of celebrating the 100th anniversary of the Corporation of Land Surveyors of the Province of British Columbia, it may be a good time to take a look over our shoulder at the beginnings of the surveying profession in British Columbia.

The earliest surveyors were, of course, the early explorers, by sea and then by land. With the opening up of the colonies by these early explorers, it was necessary to start surveying parcels of land. Settlements started springing up on Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland.

Settlers coming from eastern Canada, England, and other countries—who had been land surveyors in those jurisdictions—began surveying without proving their competence to any authorized body, with the exception of the Royal Engineers. This body of men performed many of the early surveys throughout BC. On Vancouver Island and at the various Hudson’s Bay Company posts, surveyors working for the company performed surveys of their lands.

In preparation of the first *Provincial Land Surveyors Act* to be enacted in BC, the Surveyor General W. S. Gore published a list of land surveyors authorized to conduct surveys in BC. This list established the “LS Group” of land surveyors which, when finalized, numbered 141 members. This list served to grandfather these surveyors to be recognized by the new Statute.

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On April 20, 1891, the *Provincial Land Surveyors Act* became law, thus allowing a Board of Examiners to be appointed by government. The Board was made up of the Surveyor General and five other land surveyors appointed by the Lieutenant Governor in Council. Each member of the Board had to take an oath of office administered by a Judge of either the Supreme Court or a County Court.

The Board of Examiners was responsible for ensuring that anyone entering the profession from that day forward met an established standard. The

Act required a candidate to go through a three-year period of articles and then pass examinations set by this Board. This Act also enabled the Board to examine the credentials of surveyors from other parts of Canada and other parts of “Her Majesty’s Dominions,” allowing them to be recognized in BC if they met the standards established here.

It is interesting to note that even in 1891, those land surveyors from other areas were required to be examined on the “system of surveys of the Provincial lands of the Province of British Columbia.” At present, the Corporation has an Agreement on Labour Mobility for Land Surveyors in Canada with the professional survey associations from the other provinces, territories, and Canada; that agreement recognizes that surveyors coming to BC “demonstrate competence in and practical application of **local knowledge** by successfully completing a **professional examination** and/or a **professional survey project**.”

Upon completion of the examinations, the candidate was commissioned by the Board of Examiners on behalf of the government and was designated a Provincial Land Surveyor. Serial numbers for each surveyor so designated were assigned.

The first number was assigned to James Herrick McGregor, who performed boundary surveys of the Alberta/BC boundary and in the Kootenays, Peace River country, and the railway belt. He was later in partnership with T. S. Gore in a survey firm in Sidney, BC.

McGregor was elected President of the Corporation of the Land Surveyors of BC in 1908. He chaired the first meeting for the incorporation of Oak Bay on June 13, 1906, and served as councillor and acting reeve of the new municipality until his enlistment in 1914 with the Canadian Scottish regiment.

Truly a great man to start the new PLS surveyors list, he contributed significantly to surveying in BC. Following his death in the Great War at Ypres in 1915, the North Fork of the Fraser River was named the McGregor River; tributaries were named Captain Creek, J. Creek, and Herrick Creek. When a person reads the map, he or she sees Captain J. Herrick McGregor.

By 1905 there were 85 land surveyors in the PLS group and a number of land surveyors remaining in the LS group. With the growth in the profession, both the government and the existing land surveyors agreed the Statute should be amended to create a self-regulating body, providing more independence for the profession. On April 8, 1905, the *British Columbia Land Surveyors Act 1905* was enacted and came into force on the first day of June 1905. This Statute established the self-governing profession, the Board of Management, and the authority to establish bylaws.

The first person to receive his commission under the new Statute was Charles Harvey, also a Dominion Land Surveyor. Charles Harvey practised in the Kelowna area but, to the best of my knowledge, has never had a biography published. To this date, there have been 797 land surveyors commissioned under this Statute, with three more to be commissioned before January 1, 2005, bringing the total number to 800. The Corporation currently has on the roster 305 practising land surveyors, 22 life members, 36 non-practising land surveyors, and 71 retired land surveyors.

This past year, in keeping with the

government's desire to reduce regulations, the Corporation worked with government to make many changes to the *Land Surveyors Act*. Apart from providing the mechanism to have the survey profession responsible for the rules and standards for surveys, significant changes were made, removing many of the sections dealing with general meeting requirements and the processing of students. These requirements will now be moved into our by-laws, allowing more control for the Corporation.

One of the more significant changes is the renaming of our professional body. The name, Corporation of Land Surveyors of the Province of British Columbia, was established in 1905 with the new Statute of the day. This name has served us well but, in a more modern world, the word corporation has a more business-oriented meaning than in the days of 1905. Although the term corporation means "combination or group of persons regarded for legal purposes as a unit," using that word in the legal name has proven at times to be confusing to others.

As a result, the name of our profession will change January 21, 2005, the closing day of our annual general meeting. The new name will be the Association of British Columbia Land Surveyors. At a special ceremony, the Minister of Sustainable Resource Management, the minister responsible for our Statute, along with our incoming president, will introduce the changes and a new logo, which will be presented to the membership for the first time.

This will be a new start for our profession, which has seen many changes introduced in the past five years. Looking into the future is always a challenge. The profession is very busy at present and I believe that a bright future is in store. Yes, there will be changes but I believe we are in a great position to handle those changes and provide the best possible service to the public. ▲

Chuck Salmon, BCLS, is the Secretary, Treasurer, and Registrar of the Corporation of Land Surveyors of the Province of British Columbia.

chuck.salmon@telus.net