

Survey Your Own Backyard

With the purchase of the Louisiana Territory from the French in 1803, the United States doubled in size overnight. Few parcels of this new land had been marked off using the American land survey method. This method divides land into square tracks. Two surveyors, Prospect Robbins and Joseph Brown, were sent out to survey the land around Arkansas in October of 1815. Brown began at the mouth of the St. Francis River and traveled west. Robbin started at the mouth of the Arkansas River and tracked north. On November 10, 1815, Robbins eventually crossed the baseline Brown had laid out – hence establishing the Initial Point for surveying the American West. This initial point is commemorated by Louisiana Purchase State Park, the site of the Initial Point. Arkansas would not be totally surveyed until statehood in 1836.

<https://encyclopediaofarkansas.net/entries/louisiana-purchase-survey-2204/>



In the window of the Hinderliter Grog Shop you may notice a collection of 19th century survey equipment. Historic Arkansas Museum is proud of this place in our states the history. Surveyors in 1815 began drawing the map of the entire western United States starting right here in Arkansas. When you look at map you will see a couple of things. A compass, marking North, South, East, and West. You will see a square grid pattern. These are called quadrants. Each square measures a specific unit of measurement. In the 1800's survey chains mapped quadrants 66ft at a time. Each side of the square on the map of the Louisiana Purchase was 66ft long. Inside each quadrant surveyors would mark and draw features within that squares, like trees, paths, rivers, streams, and more.

In this activity your challenge is to survey your own back yard. You will first need a compass, and a tool for measuring distance. Start by measuring the length of your yard at the back of your house and length of one side of your yard. Once you have a "L" shaped measurement, you can develop a square unit of measurement to mark and draw the features within your backyard.

