

# Surveyor Letter from Messers, Hendershott and Minor in Keokuk, Iowa, September 20, 1850

Supreme Court of the United States

December Term 1850

The State of Missouri vs. the State of Iowa: Original Bill  
and  
The State of Iowa vs. the State of Missouri: Cross Bill

...

And now, on this third day of January AD 1851, this cause came on for further order and decree therein when it appeared to the learnt that at the December term 1848 thereof, Henry B. Hendershott and Joseph C. Brown were appointed commissioners to run and mark the line in controversy between the States of Missouri and Iowa ...

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“To the Hon the Supreme Court of the United States ...

... While in St. Louis we obtained from Major M. L. Clark Surveyor General of the State of Missouri and Illinois a copy of the field notes of the survey made by John C. Sullivan in the year 1816 ...

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No precise trace of the “Old North West Corner” remained. The witness trees to it were on the margin of a vast prairies, and had apparently been destroyed by fire years ago, consequently its exact position could not be ascertained yet from the running of many experimental lines, diligently examing [sic] the evidences before us, together with the reports of the Surveyors, we became satisfied of its proper position and accordingly established it ...

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At the corner so determined we planted a large solid cast iron pillar, weighing between fifteen and sixteen hundred pounds, four feet six inches long, squaring twelve inches at its base and eight inches at its top. This pillar was deeply and legibly marked with the words (strongly cast into the iron) “Missouri” on its South side, “Iowa” on its North side and “State Line” on the East ...

The survey on the line was commenced running due West on said parallel of latitude to the Missouri River, as divided by this Honorable Court, and at its terminus as near the bank of said Missouri River, as the perishable nature of the soil would admit, we planted a monument similar in figure, weight, dimension, and inscription to the one planted at the “North West Corner” the words “State Line” facing the East ...

Returning to the "North West Corner" the survey of the line was commenced, extending Eastwardly

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from said "corner" to the Des Moines River, as run and marked by said Sullivan in 1816, from said corner to said river. On this line by close examination we discovered abundant blazes and many witness trees which enables us to find and re-mark the said line as directed by this Honorable Court ...

Near the bank of the Des Moines river where the line terminated, we planted a cast iron pillar, similar in weight, figure dimensions and inscriptions to those planted at the "N.W. Corner" and near the bank of the Missouri River, the words "State Line" facing the West.

Solid pillars of cast iron weighing each between three and four hundred pounds and minutely described as to figure and inscriptions in the report heretofore made to this Honorable Court by Messers Wells and Hendershott commissioners we caused to be planted at every ten miles in the due West line extending from said "N.W. Corner" to the Missouri River, and also at every ten miles in the line extending East from the "N.W. Corner" aforesaid to the Des Moines River ...

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We proceeded to search for the old corner, which was to be the basis of our future operations ... Time and the fires that annually spread over the prairies had destroyed the witness trees and every trace of both lines near the corner ...

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Near the supposed locality of the 99th mile corner on the North line, we found a decayed tree and a stump, which correspond in course, distance and description with the witness trees to that corner, and cutting into the tree we saw what we supposed to be the remains of an old blase upon which was preserved apart apparently of the letter M ...

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It is thirty-four years since [Sullivan's] line was run, and every vestige of the mounds and pits established in the prairie has disappeared ... Much of this description of timber has been destroyed by fire, forming in some instances, prairie, and in

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others, brushy barrens, destitute of trees; while in some places, an entirely new growth of young timber, principally hickory, has sprung up. In all such cases the witness trees and other remarks mentioned in Sullivan's field notes were gone, and thus it occurred that we frequently ran several miles without finding any traces of the line ...

We soon satisfied ourselves that the line run by Sullivan, was not only not a due East line, but that it was not straight. That more or less northing should have been made in the old line, was to

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have been expected from the fact that Sullivan ran the whole line with one variation of the needle, and that variation too great. This would account for the fact that the Northing increases as he progressed East. But there are great irregularities in the course of the line for which it is difficult to find a cause. Sudden deviations, amounting to form one to three degrees frequently occur, and it rarely happens that any two consecutive miles pursue the same direction ...

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Wm Davey

Surveyor on the part of Iowa

R. Walker

Surveyor on the part of Missouri