

## **RECOVERY #26**

### **“A surveyor’s final point”**

#### *A report on the activities of the Colvin Crew In the Town of Minerva, Essex Co. and the Town of North River, Warren Co. April 27, 2013*

In the early spring of this year, the now late Bill Brannon, PLS, had contacted me seeking help in locating the division line common to Lot 14 of “Ponds Survey” to the west with Lot 25 of “Bailey’s Patent” to the east in the Totten and Crossfield’s Purchase. In particular, Bill wanted to recover the stations marking this line where signal towers were erected on the ridges of Moxam and Dutton mountains. It was Bill’s intention to obtain GPS coordinate’s on these points and thereby be able to perform a direct stakeout to search for the intermediate points along said line in the valley located between these peaks.

At this time, it was my intention to support Bill’s request in a research capacity only and move the “crew’s” spring recovery to a different part of the Adirondacks. However, with Bill’s sudden and un-expected passing, I felt that a recovery of one of these points in Bill’s memory would be a fitting tribute to a surveyor who truly “followed in the footsteps” of our namesake on a daily basis.

To this end, I concentrated my efforts on one of the two locations Bill was interested in (Dutton Mtn.) and began the necessary research for this worthy endeavor at the offices of the N.Y.S. Department of Conservation in Albany, wherein I was extended every courtesy in obtaining Colvin’s field notes and sketches that would make this recovery possible.

#### **-----An incomplete history of V. Colvin’s activities -----**

Due to the loss of the original marks along this line, the exterior boundaries of the 14<sup>th</sup> township were in dispute between the State of New York and private concerns. Colvin realized that anything less than a full and complete re-survey of the entire township would be inadequate. Considerable time and expense over a number of years was expended by his office in completing this survey.

The following excerpts give us some insight into his later work and thoughts at the time. Namely, the tedious nature of the work in retracing the original surveys, the lack of original field evidence and the funds needed to perform such work.

*“--- the successful accomplishment of this work in all of the different sections mentioned, has only been secured by great labor and persistence in the face of many obstacles. The difficulties encountered have been those against which this department has given warning for many years. During the period of twelve years following 1883, no means were given the department to preserve the ancient boundaries protecting the forests upon the public lands. Now this work – which was already difficult in 1883 – has become in many places almost impossible. Parties, whose plans were foreign to the interests of the people of the state, succeeded in impeding the work of survey, as enormous quantity of timber was cut from the lands – and then forest fires, sweeping over disputed territories, largely obliterated important boundaries, especially those adjacent to the lower settlements upon the headwaters of the Hudson River and its tributaries.*

*Fortunately, the work was never abandoned; and during the twelve years mentioned, various surveys were carried forward in these sections by the Superintendent personally and permanent marks were set by him at important points.*

*In this way evidence has been preserved and error prevented: for out of the confusion of deforested and burnt lands, these fixed points render it possible in many cases to find the true boundaries and substitute certainty of property rights for doubt and confusion---”.*

*“---The reports of this survey on such routine technical work may not be entertaining – the details of such work are, necessarily, chiefly of interest to those having charge of the lands and to the surveyors of the future who may be called upon to use these lines and monuments---”<sup>1</sup>*

I found that the line in question was re-traced by a George S. Burt under Colvin’s direction in August of 1896. It appears from reading Mr. Burt’s field notes that this section of the township line (between the Fourteenth Road and the Hudson River)<sup>2</sup> was found to contain only three trees having marks dating to the original survey. During the course of this 1896 traverse, Mr. Burt had a small signal tower erected over traverse station 34A that would provide for a tie to other interior traverse stations and to Colvin’s primary geodetic triangulation marks on nearby mountain peaks. Observations were taken to nine distant peaks and four interior traverse stations with an instrument reading to the nearest 10” horizontally. Some of the peaks mentioned are ones that we have previously visited, namely Apia (Beaver), North River and Ruby. Additionally, a 1920 survey map prepared by noted state surveyor Albert T. Davis was found to cover a portion of the area we would be searching.

----- Recovery Notes of the “Colvin Crew” -----

The day’s recovery was split into two separate trips:

1. A hike to the ridge line of Dutton Mtn.
  2. A car trip to North River to continue our search for the elusive Bolt 132 along Rt. 28 in North River.
- The crew would expend six+ hours in pursuit of this recovery.



The crew assembling on Fourteenth Road

Saturday April 27, 2013

Dutton Mtn.

Seventeen members of the Colvin Crew, including the superintendent, assembled at Sporty’s Iron Duke Saloon in Minerva at 8:30 am. The weather was cool with a slight overcast making for perfect hiking conditions. Thanks to a scouting report by fellow crew member Jim Jennings, we were able to drive all the way in to our starting point on the Fourteenth Road. Our search for the line would start in the vicinity of where Fourteenth Road crosses Deer Brook. The crew quickly found the line in question and the Superintendent took a GPS location to set the “zero” mark for our hike. We then entered the woods following the remains of

a woven wire fence labeled as “new” on the 1920 Davis survey. Seven “traverse station” bolts were easily discovered as each one was under a small cairn. At a distance of 47.51 chains (3,136’±) from the Superintendent’s zero mark, a standard stake and stones was found marking the corner common to lots 8 and 9 in “Ponds Survey” of Lot 14 with the westerly bounds of Lot 25 “Bailey’s Patent”. From here on, no visible physical evidence of the line was found running northwesterly. We were on our own with compass and distance only. Pushing the bearing out and using a little bit of surveyor knowledge on where a traverse station would most likely be set as it pertains to topography, two more transit stations were recovered and we were now close to our objective of finding the Dutton Mtn. side line signal.



Station 42

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<sup>1</sup> Colvin’s 1897 report to the State Legislators for the year 1896 (page 60-62), emphasis added by me.

<sup>2</sup> A distance of 1.5± miles.

With the sounds of the Hudson River rapids drifting up to us from the valley below, a final bearing was taken by fellow crewmember Rich Bennett and when coupled with a distance from head chainman Todd Storey, a search area was identified. The metal detectors were unleashed and in short order four iron “ring” bolts complete with staples and wire were soon unearthed. Using the ring bolts as our template to determine a center location and after peeling back about 3” of duff, a drill hole was discovered containing a small brass plug with an “x” chiseled into it. **We had found it!** This mark resides slightly downhill of where the township line would cross the highest point of the ridge and was probably set there to get a better view to the South down into North River.



Lot 8 & 9 stake and stones

While the crew busied itself with lunch and exploring the surrounding ridge line, the Superintendent setup a GPS (L1) unit and began

logging an hour’s worth of data to use in obtaining more precise coordinates of the stations location.

Our newest member, Penny Watt from Ontario, Canada was welcomed into the crew and given her pin. After a brief tribute to Bill Brannon by crew member Shirley Ware, a stone cairn was placed over the mark and our decent began. We reached our vehicles about four and half hours after leaving them and it was on to our next search location.

### North River:

Upon arrival in the Hamlet of North River at the intersection of Route 28 with Thirteenth Lake Road the crew reassembled. We had abandoned our search for this point last year as it was nearing dark so with plenty of daylight left we began again. Using an old photo of the North River signal taken by V. Colvin, we began matching up the topography shown in the photo with today’s reality. Much has changed in this area since Colvin’s time including a road widening and the construction of the Tahawus run of the North Creek Rail Road. Crew member Bert Winnie, III was able to locate a Colvin transit station marker along the old County line and by projection of said line we were able to narrow down our search area to about a 50’ dia. area. Nothing was found and discussion ensued on if we were standing on a fill or cut of the original grade.<sup>3</sup>

With the afternoon moving along, the recovery was called and the crew broke up to return home around 3:00pm.



Our newest member Penny Watt, learning for the first time just what we really do on these trips

### Parting Notes:

This recovery was a fitting tribute to the memory of Bill Brannon and I was glad the Colvin Crew was able to help Bill find his last boundary marker. From a surveyor’s perspective, I can only imagine the joy Bill must have felt working with the Colvin Crew while recovering the bolt set by *an original* Colvin Crew member Orson P. Morse.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Additional research is needed as I feel we can do a limited tie-in to this line and thereby a direct stakeout to the bolts location.

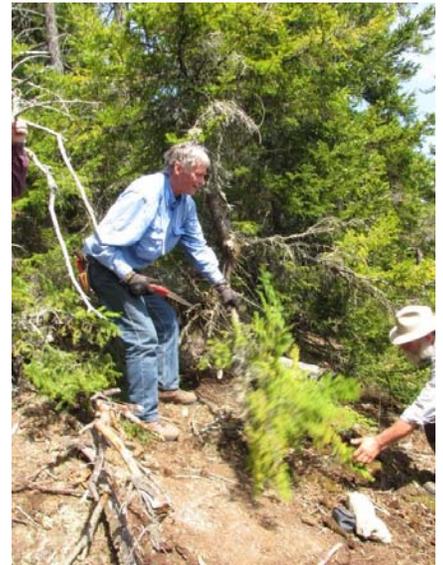
<sup>4</sup> Bill’s great grandmother Olive West (Olive Morse) was Orson P. Morse’s sister.



“The Final Point”  
Station 34A Dutton Mtn. side line signal mark



Orson P. Morse standing under  
the side line signal on Polaris  
Mtn. in 1895



Bill Brannon, LS uncovering side  
line Bolt “N” on Polaris Mtn. in  
2010 (see Recovery #20)



The “Crew” on Station 34A, Dutton Mtn. side line signal station:  
L. to R. Sitting: Jim Jennings, Dave Ware, Shirley Ware, Patti Brooks, Bert Winne, III,  
Patricia Wells, Penny Watt, Rob Harris.  
L. to R. standing, Arthur Carpenter, Gregg Pawlowski, Jim Schaller, Rick Brooks,  
Richard Bennett, Jeff Storey, Todd Storey, Kip Cassavaw

Respectfully Submitted,  
James M. Vianna,  
Superintendent, Colvin Crew

The COLVIN CREW is an honorable organization formed for the purpose of  
*perpetuating the Adirondack doings and dreams of that pioneer surveyor,*

**VERPLANCK COLVIN**

[www.colvincrew.org](http://www.colvincrew.org)