



BACKSIGHTS

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They Left Their Mark: William Austin Burt and His Sons, Surveyors of the Public Domain

by John S. Burt

Rancho Cordova, CA:

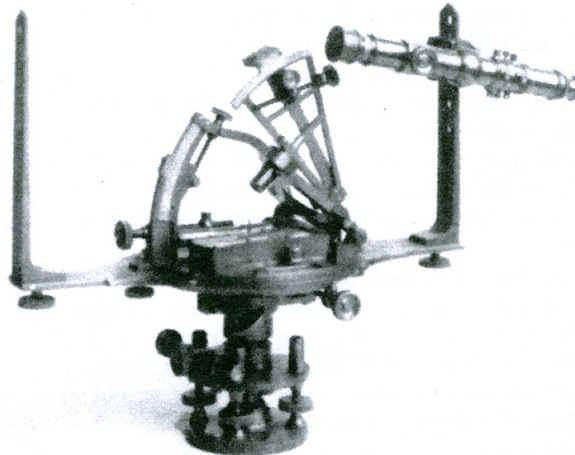
Landmark Enterprises, 1986, \$50

Reviewed by Mary M. Root

Great-great-great grandson John S. Burt spent ten years combing through family records, government archives, and research libraries to compile the first-ever biography of William A. Burt. Laid out chronologically, the work details Burt's family life, his surveying career, and of course, his invention of the Burt Solar Compass. In the Foreword, writer John D. Voelker states: "William Burt was probably one of the best of our neglected native geniuses."

A largely self-taught man, Burt's creative problem-solving led to his invention of better tools for measuring public lands, most notably the Solar Compass, for which he never received a dime, but also including an astronomical compass, an equatorial sextant, a new type of sun dial, and even the world's first typewriter.

Scholars and researchers will appreciate the author's extensive reference notes, and the appendices which numerate W. A. Burt's government surveying contracts.



Lucky owners of a Burt's Solar Compass will appreciate the documentation of the instrument's early usage and subsequent rise to fame among Public Land surveyors, and the concise directions for determining a True Meridian. ■