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John S. Burt. *They Left Their Mark: William Austin Burt and His Sons, Surveyors of the Public Domain*. California: Landmark Enterprises, 1985. Pp. vii, 188. \$35.00.

The lodestone of William Austin Burt's life was his invention of the solar compass in 1835. Until then surveyors used the relatively unreliable magnetic compass. The significance of Burt's invention is hard to grasp today because we are so far distanced from the era when surveyors were crucial players in opening the North American continent. That, though, was the setting in which W.A. Burt traversed the uncharted hills, swamps, and forests of the Old Northwest where he provided astonishingly accurate descriptions of the townships and ranges of Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin.

For Michigan and the whole enterprise of iron and steel production, Burt's discovery of the vast iron ore deposits of Marquette County have marked his career with more romance than his meticulous concern for rectilinear precision would ordinarily suggest. When he discovered the iron ore deposits of Negaunee, Michigan, in 1844, the stage was set for the struggles and achievements which absorbed the energies of his son John and other prominent leaders such as Peter White and the Mather family of Cleveland. Furthermore, the iron-rich hills of the Upper Peninsula attracted a vast array of working men and women who toiled around the mines, blast furnaces, and steel mills or on the great ships which continue to slip through the Sault Ste. Marie locks.

Though the wake of Burt's discovery was wide and persistent, he sought no career in it. Instead, he pursued his craft and became its acknowledged expert in Michigan where he was engaged to correct faulty surveys and establish uncharted geographical boundaries. Though he held several public offices, Burt did not seek a public career. Only his inventive skills drew him from his surveyor's lines and then he etched plans for the first American typewriter (the

typographer), as well as the nautical equatorial sextant. Neither of these inventions was widely useful, but Burt's solar compass became a standard surveyor's instrument and also gained him a prize medal at the Great Exposition of London in 1851.

W.A. Burt's immediate legacy to his sons endowed each of them with the tools and skills of good surveying. One son, John, became a prominent leader in Marquette. There, he provided crucial leadership in constructing the Sault Ste. Marie Canal and in linking the iron mines by rail to Marquette Bay and Bay de Noquette.

The author of this book, John S. Burt, writes of his ancestors with pride and enthusiasm. Yet with few exceptions, the author provides an objective treatment of his subject. The book's chronological organization does, at times, disrupt the narrative flow. Nonetheless, this volume provides an informative and generally well-written account of an important figure in Michigan and Mid-Western history.

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