

Back in 2015, Karen Tilton & I presented a half-day short course on ROW Mapping case studies. I titled my portion "The older I get, the less I know." Today I'm happy to report that I have apparently reached that point where I now know nothing at all. And this morning's discussion of Small Tract ROW should make that revelation painfully clear.

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# Small Tract ROW 1938 Small Tract Act (Alaska in 1945) "Jack Rabbit" Homesteads (5 ac. or less) 1954 Alaska's most popular disposal type Includes ROW for Roads & Utilities 33' or 50' along one or more boundaries 5,600 Small Tract patents issued in Alaska Other disposal types include: Homesteads, Homesites, HQ Sites Trade & Manufacturing Sites Townsite Lots, Mining Claims Native Allotments

Small Tracts typically in rectangular blocks – the only express statement of access right in a federal land disposal patent.

- ROW that served other types of disposals
  - Townsites street dedications
  - RS-2477 (Mining Law of 1866)
  - ANCSA 17(b)(2) easements
    - Generally to other public lands
    - Also protects valid existing rights
    - Stewart IBLA 84-148 Mining Claim
  - FLPMA Sec. 701(a) existing rights

We had taken comfort in Small Tract ROW. They were expressed in black and white: width, location & interest defining an access right. What more was necessary.

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### **Small Tract ROW**

- Patent similar to a quitclaim deed
- Prior Existing Rights patent "subject to"
- Small Tract Patents were "subject to" a specific road & utility <u>right-of-way</u>
- Right-of-Way?: The right to pass along a specific route through another's land.
- Unless otherwise stated, a ROW is considered to be an easement interest

Terms & Definitions – Patent is not "perfect" or pure conveyance of title. Bruce & Ely: "Subject to" implies "existing right" but because of erroneous use, may be used to create rights.

- Easement Defined: A nonpossessory interest in another's land that entitles the holder only to the right to use such land in the specified manner.
- What was meant by the term "right-ofway" in the Small Tract Patent?

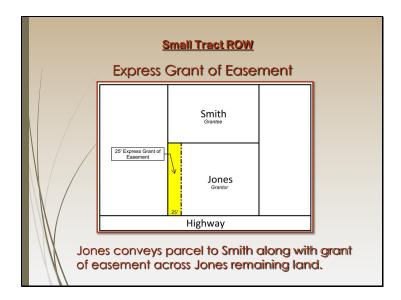
Nonpossessory interests include easements, profits, restrictive covenants & licenses (permissions). The land crossed by the easement is in the possession of another.

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### **Small Tract ROW**

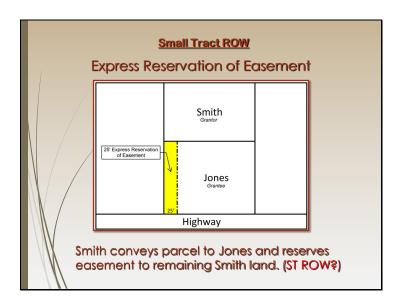
- Easement Appurtenant
  - Servient Estate: Parcel burdened by easement
  - Dominant Estate: Parcel benefiting from easement
  - Passes with the land
- Easement in Gross Personal to holder
  - No dominant estate
  - Does not run with land
  - Assignable i.e. Utility Easements
- How are easements established?

Appurtenant requires both a servient and dominant estate.

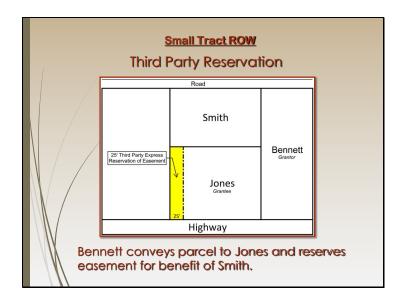


Clearly an easement appurtenant. Runs with the land.

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Another easement appurtenant. Runs with the land. This is what we always thought was happening with Small Tract "subject to" rights of way.



Some states do not recognize this type of reservation as the servient estate (Smith) is not a party to the transaction. Alaska does.

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# Dedication: An appropriation of land by the owner for the benefit of the public. Requires an Offer and an Acceptance. May be: Express (Clearly stated) or Implied (by factual evidence) Statutory Dedication Conforming to provision of statute Certificate of Dedication Certificate of Acceptance

Previous easements were private transactions. A dedication is a grant to the public. Express or Implied – Statutory or Common Law

- Common Law Dedication (ST ROW?)
  - Owner's offer of Dedication
  - Acceptance of offer by the public:
    - Acceptance by official Act
      - (1923 RS-2477 Acceptance)
      - Local Government policy
    - Acceptance by public use
      - Public maintenance
      - Photo/Map evidence of use
  - The rule in Unorganized Borough prior to DNR platting authority in 1998 -

Was the "subject to" clause a Common Law dedication? Unorganized Borough prior to DNR platting authority – plat may provide "express offer" but not "express acceptance".

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### **Small Tract ROW**

- What was intended in the Small Tract Patent?
- Was the ROW an Express Reservation of Easement or Common Law Dedication?
- When a court determines a deed to be ambiguous – they will interpret the intent of the parties.

- Alaska Supreme Ct. 3-step process:
  - Look first to the four corners of the deed – can the intent of the parties be determined unambiguously?
  - If ambiguous determine the intent
    - Examine the deed
    - Extrinsic evidence
- Rules of Construction Ambiguities found
  - In favor of government
  - In favor of grantee
  - In favor of land free of easements

If the legal description is in reference to a plat, the examination for ambiguity must include the plat.

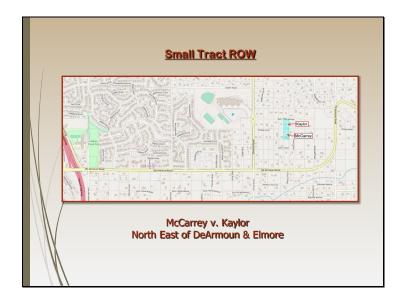
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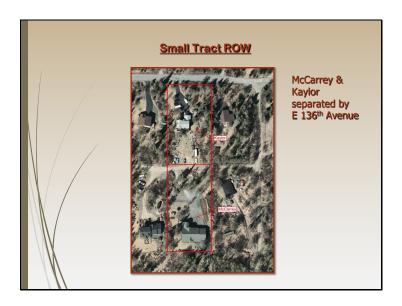
### **Small Tract ROW**

- McCarrey v. Kaylor Alaska Supreme Court - March, 2013
  - McCarrey Small Tract 50' ROW along north boundary - E136th Avenue
  - Kaylor parcel adjoins to the north
  - E136th signed gravel road/driveway but not maintained by Municipality

- Kaylor uses ST ROW to access south portion of lot to park motorhome, boat and other vehicles.
- McCarrey proposes fence with locked gate on common boundary – must have 72-hour notice to open ~
- 2010 Superior Ct Kaylor filed injunction and claim of prescriptive easement: Court agrees ~

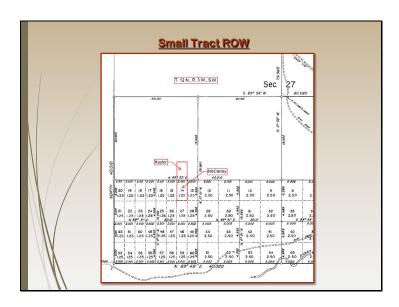
Angry neighbors!



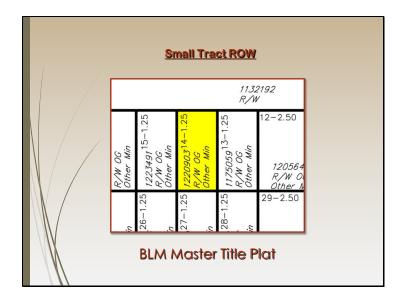


See vehicles on south side of Kaylor lot. Rental unit increased traffic along McCarrey frontage.

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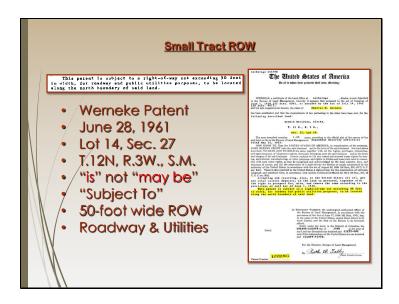


McCarrey had Small Tract while Kaylor lot was from subdivision of a homestead.

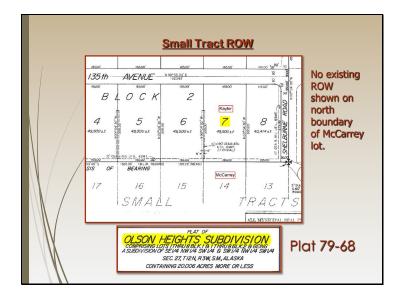


This was a "small" Small Tract, only 1.25 acres.

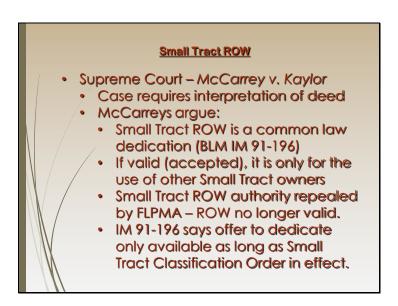
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If blocks of adjoining Small Tracts acted similar to a subdivision, then it made sense to ensure public road and utility access through the block.



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BLM Instructional Memo 91-196: "It is generally accepted that small tract rights-of-way are common law dedications to the public..." "...unless the common law rights-of-way were actually used for a road or public utilities to serve a small tract, the dedication disappeared with the termination of the classification."

- Supreme Court says:
  - Small Tract ROW "subject to" is clearly a common law offer of dedication.
  - While FLPMA terminated the Small Tract Act, it did not act as a blanket termination of ST classification orders.
  - FLPMA could not revoke or terminate the ROW in question because FLPMA did not apply to private property.
  - The dedication, if accepted is a public ROW available to all parties.

When FLPMA ended the Small Tract Act, ST ROW validly accepted by use were not automatically vacated.

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### **Small Tract ROW**

- Supreme Court did not rule on:
  - Prescriptive easement no argument.
  - Acceptance of dedication no evidence provided.
- Remanded to Superior Court to determine if offer had been accepted ~

- Superior Court Sept. 2013 Round 2
  - McCarrey argues against acceptance by either formal official action or public use.
  - McCarrey then argues if it was accepted the dedication is limited to the physical footprint (30') which leaves a gap between the dedication and the common lot line.

McCarrey argues that there exists a strip of his land between the 30' road footprint and the north lot line.

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### **Small Tract ROW**

- Kaylor argues:
  - Use of E136th for more than 15 years
  - Municipal code recognition of "double fronted" lots constitutes an official acceptance of dedication.

- The Rest of the Story:
  - September 11, 2013 Superior Court issues Stipulation for Dismissal with Prejudice
  - The Court issued no judgment regarding common law acceptance of E 136<sup>th</sup> Avenue.

Court View ends with "stipulation" and no explanation.

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### **Small Tract ROW**

- McCarrey contact May 2018
  - Dismissal was result of a settlement.
  - Agreed to a 30-foot ROW.
  - Was to be recorded but was not.
  - Acceptance of common law dedication never determined.
  - Parties continued to disagree over the terms of the settlement.
  - McCarrey agreed the issue was never resolved.
  - Kaylor passed in 2017 at age 75

McCarrey said both the courts and attorneys failed to recognize that all he wanted was a fence. By this point everyone was tired of arguing.

- What did we learn?
  - A Small Tract ROW is the offer of a common law dedication and not an express reservation.
  - The offer must be accepted by official act or public use.
  - Offer must be accepted prior to termination of ST classification.
  - FLPMA did not vacate ST ROW's.
  - FLPMA did not end ST classifications.
  - A Small Tract ROW is a public ROW.

"Everything we know is wrong..."

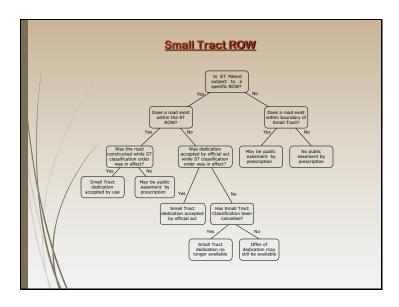
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While McCarrey is an important decision regarding Small Tract ROW, it will fly right by most property owners and title reports. Most will continue to believe that if it is stated in the patent, it is real.

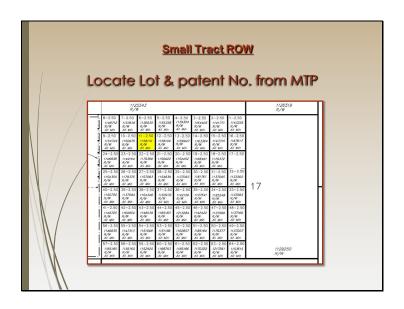
- Research Methods
  - You are assigned to survey & map GL-11 Section 17, T1S, R1W, F.M. located to the north of Davis Road in Fairbanks.
  - Given the results of McCarrey v. Kaylor, how do you determine whether a common law dedication has been accepted or whether the offer to dedicate is still available for acceptance?

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Decision Flow-chart. Can a ST patent be issued with no reference to "subject to" ROW? Yes, see GL-6, Section 17, Davis Road. Slide 33



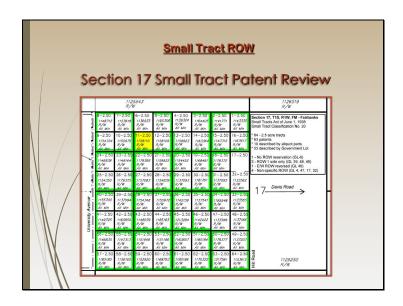




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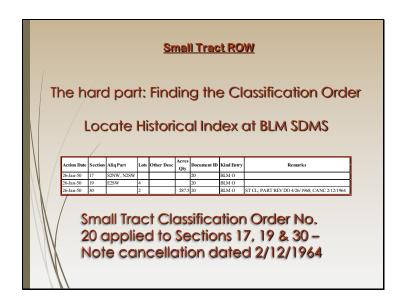
Small Tract ROW	
Select "Patent Image" tab and download	
	Patent Identifier  Accession #: Serial Patent  BLM Serial Nr:
	This retact is subject to a right-of-way not exceeding 33 foot in whith, for reel-way and poblic willities purposes, to be located along the west and south boundaries of eath land.

This provides an image of the original patent.



Note Small Tract ROW issues noted in right column.

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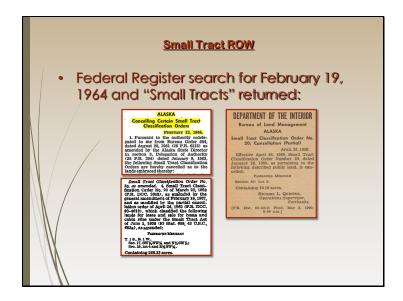


Cut & past SDMS HI to Excel spreadsheet and sort by Section.

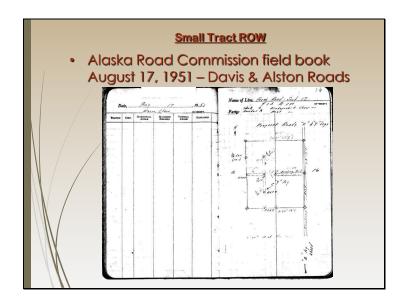


But the two STC\_20 orders on SDMS did not include the cancellation order dated 2/12/64.

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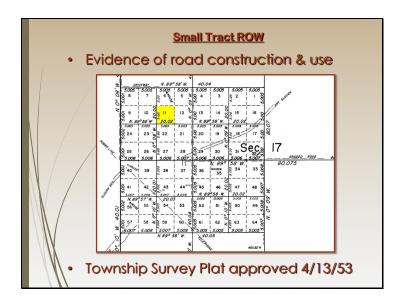


A bit more tedious to search Federal Register but it is possible.

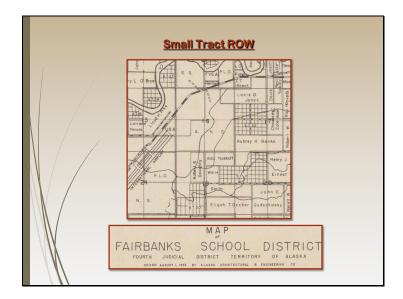


ARC Field notes for Davis/Alston roads – Used to support PLO over ST ROW assertion.

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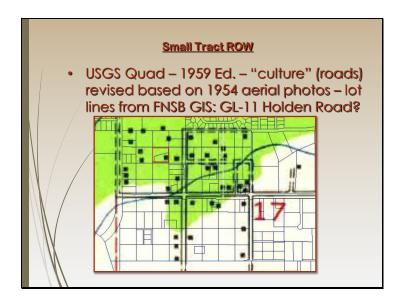


Note that patents prior to Approved Township Survey plat used aliquot part descriptions. Note existing graded road east-west (Davis) and improved road north/south (Alston). The GL-11 abstract indicates that the application to lease on 7/21/52, a field report on 11/15/54 and patent issued on 3/19/56. Evidence of access construction and use may be revealed with a review of the BLM case file from the National Archives.

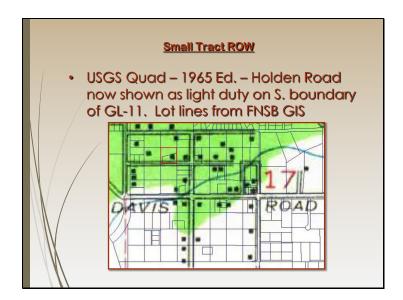


The School District acted as an early Platting Authority in Fairbanks. They developed this map showing homestead patents and Small Tract areas.

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The topo was based on 1949 photography and updated with 1954 photography. Davis & Alston are shown as existing but Holden is not clearly shown. But the home owner got there somehow.



The 1965 edition of the USGS Quad shows Holden Road along south boundary of GL-11. The Classification Order was terminated by February of 1964. Public use before termination? Note GL-11 home location. Note GL-11 home location. FNSB Assessor records indicate GL-11 construction dated 1964 and GL-22 (south of GL-11) construction of 1960. Some form of access would have been in place.

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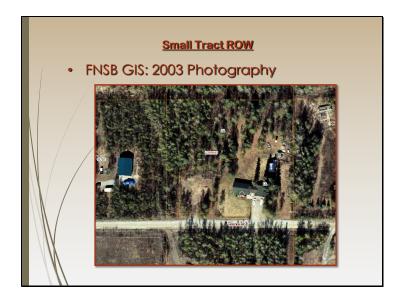
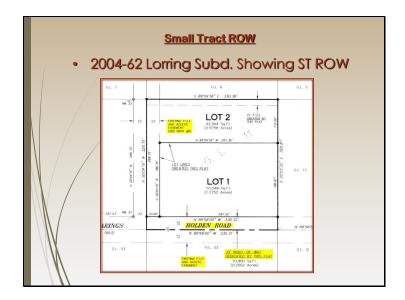
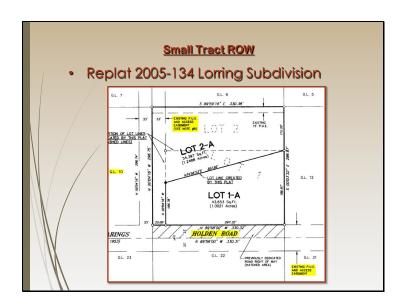


Photo prior to subdivision but imposed by GIS. No development along W boundary GL-11 or E boundary GL-10 where there are 33-foot ST ROW.

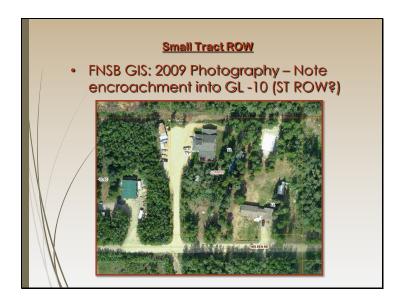


Note: Holden Road STROW is dedicated by plat; W Boundary GL-11 STROW is shown as existing 33-foot ROW as is E boundary of GL-10. Access to Lot 2 is secured by flag lot. STROW not required.

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Replatted why? Encroaching well or septic system?



Does owner of GL-10 know about encroachment – or did Lot 2A owner consider 33-foot STROW as available for parking? (But it wasn't accepted by use before STO termination so it doesn't exist.

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# Small Tract ROW Conclusion: ST ROW Classification Order No. 20 Terminated February 1964. ST ROW for Holden on GL-11 S. bdy. likely valid by use prior to termination and also by plat dedication. ST ROW on GL-10 E. bdy. not valid. ST ROW on GL-11 W. bdy. not valid by use. Plat calls "existing". Valid by plat dedication/reference?

33-foot STROW may not be valid by plat dedication/reference as it was not necessary to provide access to Lot 2. The intent of the parties to the subdivision was to show the existing ROW, not create one where it did not exist.



