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How Did Measurements Originate?

Do you know the relationship between the ground on which your home is built and 16 men coming out of church one Sunday morning 400 years ago? It's one of the many fascinating oddities on which our present units of measurement are based, according to the Pennsylvania Land Title Association.

The length of the left feet of the first 16 men out of church on a given Sunday four centuries ago established the length of the rod as we know it today. It takes 160 square rods to make one acre which is one of the more common units of measuring ground.

The first known standards of measurement were established around 6000 B. C. by advanced races along the Nile and on the plains of Chaldea. The prime measurement they developed was the cubit, which is referred to frequently in the Bible. The cubit was the bent forearm from the point of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger of the outstretched hand — about 18 to 19 inches. In 4000 B. C. the cubit was standardized at what is now 18.24 inches.

The cubit was used in building all of the pyramids. Each side of the pyramid measures 500 cubits, and all measures are in multiples of fractions of cubits or half of the meridian mile.

Egyptians also used the span, which was the length between the tips of the thumb and little finger of the

outstretched hand. The span also represents half a cubit.

Other small measurements used during this time were the palm, the digit and the foot. The palm was the breadth of four fingers, which was a sixth of a cubit or about three inches.

The digit, one twenty-fourth of a cubit, was the breadth at the middle of the middle finger, or three-quarters of an inch. The foot, which was adopted about the time the pyramids were being built, equaled two-thirds of a cubit, four palms, or 16 digits and measured about 12.16 inches.

Significantly, the ancients' knowledge of astronomy and land measurement was so accurate that even modern science cannot improve too much on meridian measurements made in Egypt and Chaldea some 6000 years ago, says the Pennsylvania Land Title Association.

The meridian mile, the unit still used throughout the world today, was already established by 5000 B.C. as 400 cubits or 1000 Egyptian fathoms. The fathom was an ancient Egyptian measurement equal to the length of the outstretched arms, which is about six feet. It is still used internationally

in nautical measurement.

The inch was invented by the ancient Romans. Originally called the "thumb-breadth," the inch divided the foot into twelve units. Later there were other ways of measuring the "inch". In 1150 King David I of Scotland decreed that the inch was the mean measure of the thumbs of three men. In 1324, King Edward II of England ruled that three barley corns taken from the middle of the ear and placed end to end equalled an inch.

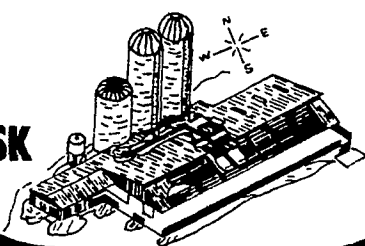
Things became so confused that by the 13th century all English land measurements were made in accordance with the foot measurement store in St. Paul's Church and with the iron "ell" in the king's palace. Even today the standard measurements of length can be found imbedded in many old public buildings in England as a means of settling measurement disputes.

Another measurement oddity concerns the poppyseed. During the 1700's, the inch was divided into three barley corns. Each corn equalled four poppyseeds and each poppyseed equalled twelve human hairs.

What Do You Think?

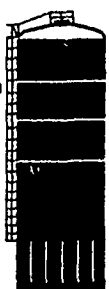
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