



THE FLORIDA SURVEYOR



Bill Keith

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There is a hidden beauty about human nature that gets revealed during a time of crisis. Our normal routines are interrupted, and we are shaken out of our daydreams to see the critical needs of others around us. Showing up for others to lift them in encouragement and ensure they are nourished is one of the most basic tenets of life.

After the initial sting of a crisis subsides, most of us go back to our routines. Yet there are those who persist during times of calm, understanding the lull does not mean that all is well and remaining keenly aware of the hardships others continue to endure.

Long before the coronavirus pandemic inspired current humanitarian efforts, and previous to social media campaigns being a vehicle to help philanthropic causes gain momentum, William “Bill” Keith was a beacon of hope for many people in his community, using what many of us underestimate as a valuable resource: time. He used his time to listen, to lead, and to serve others in every aspect of his life. Bill spent his life working towards the development and improvement of the south Florida community as a whole.

Born in Miami on December 18, 1936, to Frederick William Keith, a merchant Marine who worked in the shipyards, and Anne Gloria Keith, a cafeteria worker, Mr. Keith grew up knowing the value of honest, hard work.

The family moved to Fort Lauderdale when Bill was two years old. There he attended St. Anthony’s Catholic School for his elementary and middle school grades. He then attended Central Catholic High School, now known as St. Thomas Aquinas High School.

His first job was on a survey crew for Broward County Engineering. His interest in surveying was sparked further when Bill met Mr. McElfresh, an engineer, and Mr. B. Wiggins who was a local engineer and surveyor in Fort Lauderdale.

South Florida was largely undeveloped at that time, and Bill’s love of the outdoors and nature fit his career choice of Surveying and Mapping.

He married Elizabeth in 1957 they remained married until his death on October 4, 2006. Over the years, they were proud to welcome the births of four daughters, Jenny, Dodie, Celeste, and Heather. They also have ten grandchildren: Colleen, Matt, LeeAnn, Jamie, Nicholas, Alex, Toni, Elizabeth, Kristin, and Keith.

Commitment to Surveying

Bill received his Professional Surveying License, LS# 1856 on February 2, 1963. He blossomed in his career at McElfresh Engineering, which later became known as McElfresh & Wiggins.

After Mr. McElfresh’s death in the ‘60s, a new firm was created, called Wiggins, Keith & Associates. Mr. Wiggins was the engineer and Mr. Keith was the surveyor at the firm. Over time, Mr. Keith decided he would like to work for himself and grow his own survey company. He left Mr. Wiggins and teamed up with Tom Schnars, PLS to open Keith & Schnars, PA in 1972. Mr. Schnars was also a surveyor, so they chose to be a 100% survey firm.

“He really enjoyed building his own company. It let him forge his own destiny. And he enjoyed choosing the projects that he wanted to engage in,” says his second daughter, Dodie Keith-Lazowick, PLS.

In the late ‘70s, Broward County was just starting to be developed. There was very little development west of Interstate 441, and Keith & Schnars landed the extraordinary opportunity to develop the Western Broward area. They did a lot of the Western Broward re-surveys in collaboration with longtime friend and fellow surveyor, Mr. Gene Stoner of Williams, Hatfield & Stoner.

The Western Broward re-surveys proved to be a major undertaking. It would require one of the first high level accuracy least square adjustment calculations for townships of lands of its kind.

James Stoner, who first met Mr. Keith in the early '70s when his father, Gene Stoner hosted several Florida Society of Professional Land Surveyors (FSPLS) meetings at their home, can attest to the challenges.

“During the late 1970(s) Williams, Hatfield & Stoner and Keith & Schnars teamed up to perform the Stoner/Keith Resurvey No. II of all of Township 50 South, Range 40 East. The goal of this project was to recover all of the Section Corners and Quarter Section Corners within the Township and establish State Plane Coordinates for each monument. This was before the widespread use of the GPS so all of the monuments would need to be tied together by an extensive traverse meeting NGS Second Order Class II Standards for accuracy. In order to achieve the desired results all of the primary traverse angles would be measured at night to avoid heat distortion.

I was assigned to this survey after the crew chief that started the project left for a new job. The daily field work was being run from Keith and Schnars office located in Fort Lauderdale about a mile from Williams, Hatfield & Stoners location. It was during this project that I had the opportunity to work with Bill in the field on a couple occasions,” said James Stoner.

“Before beginning night operations, a meeting was held with Bill presiding, to go over the various activities and to run down the various problems that may be encountered. Bill told us to check out equipment, batteries, flashlights and radios. He made sure that we all knew where we had to be and who would be with who. Night angulation was to be a carefully choreographed event maximized to get the most results.

During the meeting Bill said to expect stuff to happen and basically to adapt and overcome whatever it was so we wouldn't lose time. One of the last things that he emphasized was to not get the truck stuck. Getting the truck stuck would be a bad thing.

Night work began in earnest and did have the normal issues that are encountered when first starting out with new procedures. After a couple of nights things were moving along quite nicely. At that time Broward County still had some rural areas and one of these is where the Sawgrass Mills Mall is now located. The area was a large cow pasture with a shallow water filled marshy area located in the middle of it. Nearby was a traverse point that could only be accessed by entering a gate and driving carefully around the marshy area to avoid getting stuck.

About 10 p.m. I got a call on the radio and it was Bill Keith. He was coming into the pasture to check on us and wanted to know the route to us. I explained that he needed to come through the gate and bear to the left around the marsh area. Some time passed and no Bill. I did not really give it much thought and we broke down our setup and headed for the next setup. As we came around the edge of the marsh there was Bill dressed in a suit and tie, standing in the muddy water up to his ankles with his truck stuck. Apparently, he had decided on a spur of the moment visit and was not expecting to get stuck. After an hour or two we were able to get the truck out after some good-natured ribbing about the importance of not getting stuck he headed home. To his dying day he swore that I had tricked him into going the wrong way and caused him to get stuck,” says Mr. Stoner.

Another friend who benefited from Mr. Keith's gracious mentorship was John "Jack" Breed, P.L.S. of CivilSurv Design Group.

"I was in the UF Land Surveying Program from 1978 to 1982 with Bill's daughter, Dodie Keith. In 1984, Bill recruited me to re-open his firm's Lakeland Office. Ultimately, I became a partner in his firm, and I am forever indebted to him for giving me the opportunity and mentoring me every step of the way. Now, thirty-six years later, I'm sitting at the same desk, in the same office, as the successor firm to Keith and Schnars, P.A."

"Bill was a highly respected Surveyor. If it was his survey, rest assured, it was the Gold Standard. When the Everglades / Sugar Industry lawsuits were in high gear in the early 90's, we were contracted to field-measure a coast-to-coast cross section. This was a tough, nasty job, eating up men, equipment and airboats. Bill insisted on working a crew day on the airboat with me, in the August heat. We picked him up smoking a cigar on a dike off the Sawgrass Expressway. Late in the day, a violent thunderstorm caught us, and Bill directed us to flee to a friend's hunt camp, where we rode out the storm, absolutely soaked," says Mr. Breed.

Though his surveying skills were based on by-gone methods, he proved to be quickly adaptable to the evolving field. He and his partner Tom Schnars were very excited about a new machine.

"When they did the big Western Broward Re-Surveys, it's the first big survey that was done, maybe in the whole state of Florida where they used a Least Squares Adjustment. We had to buy a fancy computer that they would run and crank out the adjustments. It was a lot of night work with night measurements. They would come in and plug it into this big machine. It was a noisy thing. And it would clunk and clunk and clunk. They were very excited about this computer and to be one of the first Firms to have it," says Dodie.



L. Levine

Commitment to Growth

When Mr. Keith was licensed as a surveyor in 1963, there were no electronics to aid him in the field. That generation of surveyors had to be scrappy and sharp, typically doing complex calculations in their heads or on bits of paper.

"They used regular old steel field chains and transits, a regular level, logbooks, and slide rule," says Dodie.

They liked to use the old vs. new methods and compare the results. There was a profusion of new technology, but they learned to adjust quickly to modern methods. "There was a lot of discussion in our offices about the accuracies and what the difference was. There was a lot of talk about being the first ones to do this or that," says Dodie. "I think we were the first ones in the state to get a T4 Theodolite which was one of the best first order precise micrometer theodolites made when they first came out by Wild Heerbrugg Instruments. So, they were very big on trying to stay ahead of technology."

Mr. Keith said it best in his President's Message Fall 1971, "We all realize the Land Surveying Profession has a far distant heritage; however, today a paradox is present. While heritage compels us to retrace the footsteps of our forefathers, the prerequisites of today's complex society dictate that we explore and chart the coasts of unknown horizons. Hence, the Profession is old and new in the same moment of time.

Progress is ever demanding and to look steadfastly to the past would be a detriment. We cannot waste those small fragments of valuable time. Tomorrow very soon becomes yesterday, which is but another bygone in which we may or may nowt have contributed...I trust your professional contribution today will aid your fellow man tomorrow."

His firm helped plan Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport and bought the land and developed the route for the Sawgrass Expressway. The firm was responsible for planning Parkland and the redevelopment of Deerfield Beach, Pompano Beach and Boca Raton. It surveyed 390 miles from Florida to Georgia and bought 4,000 parcels of land for a Florida Power & Light transmission line.

*"In 1981 the State issued rules under the authority given by law in Chapter 472 of Florida Statutes the rules were called "Minimum Technical Standards." In more recent times the standards are referred to as "Standards of Practice." (David A. Melvin, PLS, CFM)

Finally, in 1998, after Mr. Keith had already founded two engineering/surveying firms in the past, then enjoyed a brief retirement, he launched the firm that still exists today, KEITH.

According to the KEITHteam.com site, "His idea was simple, be a "boutique" firm offering civil engineering and surveying services with a personal approach, getting to know each client individually. The idea, and the firm, took off.

Bill made a large impact to many in Broward County – to acknowledge his philanthropic efforts, officials at the City of Fort Lauderdale and City of Pompano Beach have dedicated a park and a preserve in his name. His legacy is our challenge to find the essential balance between growth and preservation."

Commitment to FSMS

Bill was a long-time member of FSMS, serving in numerous leadership roles. Most notably, he was the FSMS President from 1970-1971.

He recognized the importance of having high standards for the profession. Dodie says, "He was part of the group that helped write and implement the Minimum Technical Standards (MTS)* for surveying in the state of Florida.

Mr. Stoner says, "Bill was the kind of individual that you took an immediate liking to, he was a natural leader with a dynamic personality. Over the years I was able to get to know Bill better and he always encouraged me and made me feel a part of the surveying community. I am sure he had the same effect on others as well. He was an active advocate for surveying and was instrumental to helping to write and lobby for many of the laws that govern land surveying as we know it today."

His group was also instrumental in passing the four-year degree requirement.

Bill was so involved with FSMS, that it became a family affair. His wife, Elizabeth (Betty) worked for free as the FSMS Executive Director in the '80s. The Society didn't have much money, so they got creative envisioning ideas on how to make money.

For one conference, Betty drew three large ink-sketches drawings in the likeness of Bill, like a caricature of a surveyor. They took them to the conference and auctioned them off to raise money for the Society.

While the dollar amount raised from these sketches is unknown, their reputation has taken on a life of their own. For a while, the sketches whereabouts were in question.

One day, Mr. Keith's oldest daughter, Jenny who was working at D.P. DeBarry Associates in Stuart, Florida noticed an ink sketch behind her boss' desk. Upon inspection, it turned out to be one of the ink-sketches of Bill.

Seeing how pleased she was to have located one of the sketches of her father, her boss decided to gift it back to the Keith family upon his retirement. This original sketch now hangs in Dodie's condo on loan from her sister as long as it hangs.

After obtaining one of the original sketches, Dodie went on a mission to find the other two by reaching out to the surveying community.

It turns out that Paul Brewer in Coral Springs has one of the sketches hanging behind his desk! Since Paul has owned it for over twenty years, it has become a staple of his office decor and he is understandably not ready to part with it. He and Dodie have a friendly agreement. "Paul has a note on the back of it, should something happen to him, somebody needs to contact Dodie Keith because she's buying this painting," Dodie says.

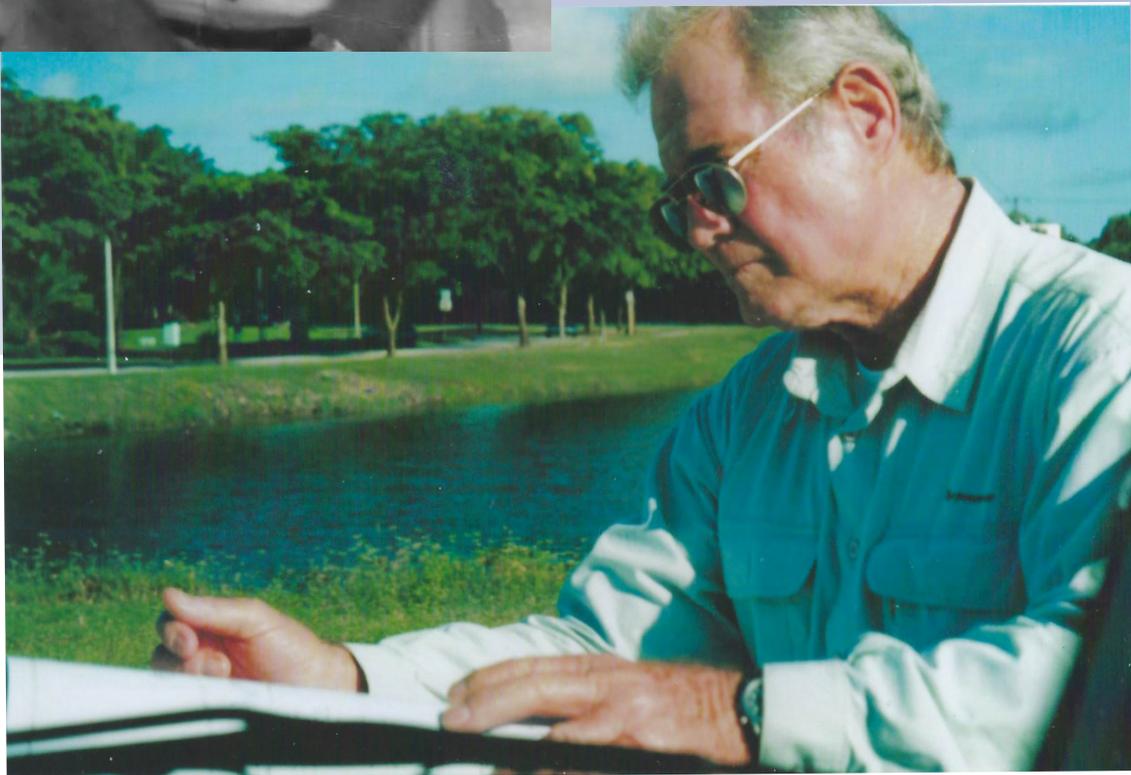
"I never found the third one. If you're a surveyor, it's just something unique that you're not going to throw out. But somebody's got it somewhere."

If anyone knows who might own the last sketch, we'd love to get a copy of it for the Keith family.



The Last P.I. sketch by Betty Keith





All photos of Bill Keith courtesy of the Keith family

Commitment to Community

Despite having a busy professional and family life, Mr. Keith was resolute on using his time and monetary resources to give back to his community.

His daughter Dodie believes his work ethic and tireless service to others was a result of his upbringing. "He always considered himself very fortunate; he was raised a very poor man. Those were the surveyors of old. They just had a certain class about them. I think they took very little for granted and they always assumed they had to earn something."

Mr. Keith's steadfast commitment to non-profits and charities spanned his entire adult life. Not only did he contribute his time and money to Broward Urban River Trails Association (BURT), Ducks Unlimited, Port Everglades Seafarers House, and the Boys and Girls Club, among countless others, but he was also the founding chair of the Broward Partnership for the Homeless.

As evidenced by the many heartfelt condolences left after his passing, his love of community influenced many people.

"He probably gave away more money than he saved. He was everywhere helping out," said Former Mayor John Rayson of Pompano Beach, a longtime friend.

"Since I worked with him at the homeless center, I have always regarded him as a mentor and friend. So many times, his inspiration and good humor turned challenges into opportunities. The world is certainly better because Bill walked on it," said Ezra Krieg of Delray Beach.

"The world has lost a great advocate who worked for those who needed a voice," said Phil and Kathy Gonot of Deerfield Beach.

"He instilled in me the importance of putting community interest above self-interest, this was a value he lived by example. He cared so deeply and passionately about his community, I can only hope that the community will pay him the tributes that he so deserves," said Walter Fluegel of Fort Myers.

Tom McDonald, who owns the engineering firm of Craven Thompson, said Mr. Keith was a tough competitor, but one he admired. "Of all my competitors, he was the one I looked up to," McDonald said. "He was always involved with charities, always giving back to the community."

Bill has received numerous accolades during his life, including Downtowner of the Year in 1998, Leadership Broward's Leader of the Year in 1999 and Ft. Lauderdale Citizen of the Year in 2000.

When Mr. Keith was not working or volunteering his time, he enjoyed traveling, sometimes tackling trips that much younger men would shy away from. In 1998, he climbed Mount Kilimanjaro in Africa with Norman Ostrau, a lawyer and former state representative. They got to 17,000 feet and walked across the plains of Africa on a 3-week expedition. In 2000, the two men steered a dog sled at the Arctic Circle and got temporarily lost in a whiteout caused by huge snowstorm. He loved fishing, hunting and anything outdoors.

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BILL KEITH

Commitment to Action

When William Keith traveled around Broward County, he went through a world he helped create, past a city carved out of the Everglades, on an expressway he fashioned, past power lines, shopping centers and condominiums he planned.

While we live in uncertain and troubling times, our civilization has routinely been challenged with overcoming overwhelming obstacles.

Today, Mr. Keith's daughter Dodie leads the firm holding fast to the ideals her father put forward. KEITH is now transitioning Dodie's son Alex Lazowick, PE, to serve as the third generation professional at KEITH. "Committed to the values his grandfather and mother have instilled in the firm, Alex will lead KEITH in consistent hands from growth to evolution advancing and anticipating the needs for the next generation of development," according to the KEITHteam.com site.

The enduring legacy of Mr. Keith is one of action. We have the option to look away from others' hardships because we are enduring our own, or we can look that pain head-on and choose to invest our humanity in others.

Mr. Keith recognized how essential we are to one another and chose to be a beacon of hope and humor in his personal and professional endeavors. "There are dozens of the very best Surveyors in Florida that call their Point of Beginning the late great Billy Keith," says Jack Breed.

Let's choose to enrich our profession and surveying community with our knowledge. Let's choose to show up for our communities. Let's learn a great lesson from Mr. Keith and continue his legacy of acting on that duty to do what's right, even when the lull arrives, and the needs of others are shrouded behind our hurried days.

"We are faced with the realization that the envisioned ideas of the past are today, here and now, knocking on our front door for their inclusion within the practicing elements of our profession. With God's help and a few more cups of coffee, I trust that we will continue to reap the benefits of our far-out thoughts of today and accept them with the reality of their time. Decisions cannot be based on present events alone, but we must also carefully consider the potential of things yet to come. The progress we have experienced, the crystallization we anticipate, the envisioned ideas that are here and now, and the challenge to keep abreast of the days of rapid change thrust out as the point of the spear of our future.

However, as the point needs the shank of the staff for its true support, so does your Board of Directors need the support of you, the rank and file, the bread and butter member of our society. I salute you for your participation and

acceptance of this need for support." Bill Keith, President's Message, Winter 1970.



All photos of Bill Keith courtesy of the Keith family