

Land Ordinance Acts

Thomas Jefferson created, wrote and presented to the national Congress the **Land Ordinance of 1784**. His bill turned out to be too radical to be passed but it did set the stage for future bills regarding the expansion of the area known as the Old Northwest. (this area of land was northwest of the Ohio River, east of the Mississippi River, and south of the Great Lakes). Jefferson proposed that these new territories should be self-governing but the major obstacle that caused the bill to fail was his ideas for slavery. Jefferson believed that these new territories should not allow slavery. In addition, any new western lands, outside of the Old Northwest, should be slave-free after 1800.

The poster below was printed after the Ordinance failed. The comment at the bottom is very interesting. It reads *“Except for the classical names for states, note how prophetic the plan. Jefferson had never seen the West.”*

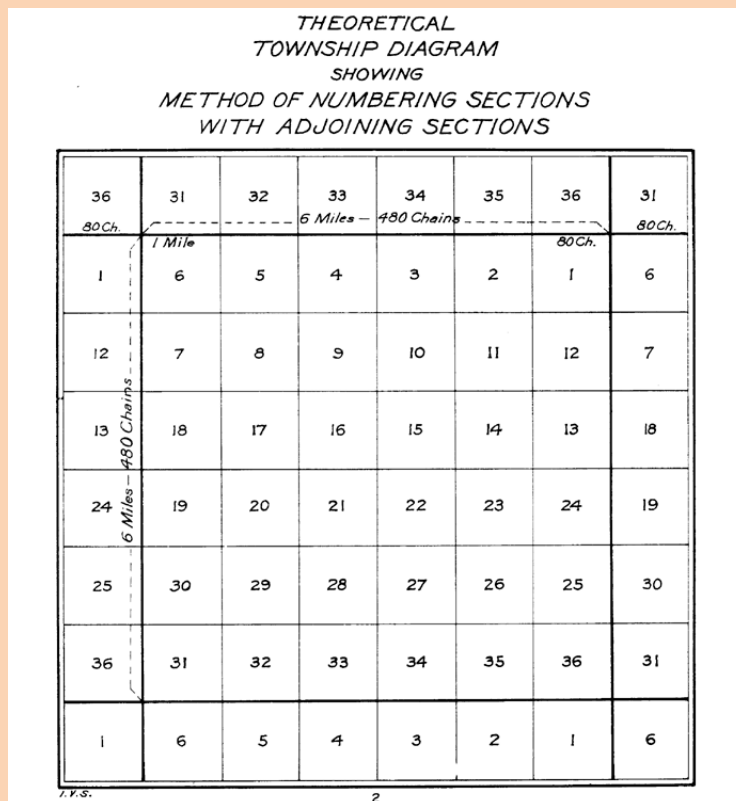
(Prophetic means visionary)



What was to follow was a revised version of Jefferson's original proposal, the **Land Ordinance of 1785**. The bill stated that the land in the Old Northwest be sold and the profits help pay off the national debt. The entire was first surveyed, an attempt to stop any confusion and future lawsuits.

The Old Northwest was to be divided into townships, each six square miles. In turn each six square mile area was to be subdivided into thirty six sections each one square mile. The sixteenth section of each township was to be for public schools.

Section 16 on the chart below was to be set aside to support schools. It was then subdivided into five segments. There was a half-section of 320 acres, a Quarter section of 160 acres and the remaining quarter section was split into three lots, one of 80 acres and two of 40 acres. The chart below is a sample of how a township was to be divided in 1785.



After the Land Ordinance Act of 1785 was passed Jefferson continued to amend and improve the terms of the Land Ordinance bills. He was one of the major proponents of the **Land Ordinance of 1787**. This law solved the problem of how these new areas would be admitted to the Union.

Step 1 – Temporary sponsorship and protection by the federal government.

Step 2 – Once a new territory reached a population of 60,000 people it was to be considered by Congress as a state. It would be granted all of the same privileges as one of the original thirteen charter members of the nation.

Jefferson's motion to forbid slavery was also accepted. No slaves were allowed in the Old Northwest; however the law exempted slaves already present in the area, and prior to the passing of the law.

The map below shows the new states formed in the Old Northwest under these provisions and the year that each section was granted statehood.

