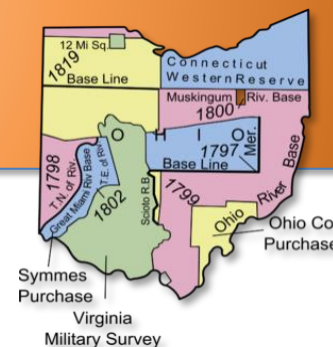


Early Land Distribution & Ownership in Ohio

By Jan Joyce, DBA, CG, CGL, AG



(Source List located at end of document.)

The State of Ohio is a confusing combination of rectangular survey as well as metes and bounds land transactions. Even within the rectangular survey system different areas used different measurements. For example, townships in the Connecticut Western Reserve are five square miles instead of the more typical six square miles. In the Virginia Military District land was measured using the metes and bounds survey system. But as new counties were formed, Virginia Military District lands could be located in counties that also used the rectangular survey system.

Thus beware! An Ohio genealogy researcher must not make assumptions about many things regarding land. Because there are so many systems of measurements, we must always check to ensure we are employing the right one. For example, even though the standard rectangular survey system is employed, the numbering convention may be different. In one area the first section may begin in the Northeast while in another it may begin in the Southeast.

Distribution of land within the United States' early history was completed mainly through two systems. One is called Federal Land and the other State Land. Typically, a state implemented just one of these systems. However, Ohio genealogists are fortunate to learn about and apply both in their research. As a matter of fact, thirteen maps exist which depict the districts and land office changes between 1784 and 1876.¹ Additionally, within the Federal Land Grants, there were many distribution and measurement methods, described briefly in the pages to follow. But don't let this document be your only source of information; after identifying your county and/or townships, seek specific knowledge about its land distribution which could include more than one of the systems mentioned below, and/or have other systems administered.

1) **Federal Land**

The term Federal Land refers to the lands that were distributed by the United States government. These "public lands" helped the government and/or people in three ways:

- First, selling land created revenue that assisted in supporting the government after the Revolutionary War.
- Second, Revolutionary War soldiers were rewarded for their service with land, not money.
- Third, it expanded the westward development of the nascent country in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Several steps were typically involved in obtaining federal land grants, including a claim file, survey warrant, registration, payment, surveys, proofs, testimonies, and a final patent certificate.

In Federal Lands, meridians are used to measure distances. Meridians are divided into tracts of approximately twenty-four square miles. Sixteen townships are within a tract, usually the townships are six square miles.

¹ E. Wade Hone, Land and Property Research in the United States, (Salt Lake City: Ancestry Incorporated, 1997), 448-460.

From a principal meridian, a township number is counted in a north-south direction from the baseline. The range is east-west. Within townships are pieces called sections and thus, each type of land description will have a Range, Township, and Section. A section is one square mile which contains 640 acres. Thus, a township has thirty-six sections, though there are exceptions to this general rule. Sections are often divided into quarters of 160 acres, described by their location such as the North East Quarter, and then may be divided further from there.

Sample land description for the Federal Land system:

“...the North half of the West half of the South East quarter of Section eleven, Township nineteen, in Range fifteen in the district of lands office for sale at Wooster in the State of Ohio containing forty acres...”²

The term “township” is used in two ways. One, mentioned above, is called a congressional township and considered a part of the meridian grid system. The other is a civil township which may be the same as the congressional township in whole, or part, and may include a city(s). This distinction is critical for genealogists to understand; a census township is not necessarily the same as numbered township as associated with it in a deed.

2) State Land

Part of Ohio’s land applies what is termed “State Land.” This term originates from the concept that a state (or in Ohio’s case, only a portion of the state) managed the distribution of their land when it became a part of the United States, as opposed to giving it to the federal government for disbursement.

In this system, the measurements and markers are determined by metes and bounds. Measuring by metes and bounds begins with a starting marker (typically a landmark of some kind such as a type of tree or post). It then uses a series of straight lines and draws the boundaries of the land until returning to the starting point. Surveys were completed with a compass. The lines after the starting point use measurements of chains, rods (aka perches or poles) and links.

Sample land description for the State Land system:

“...the following described premises...situate in Willoughby Township Number nine in tenth Range of Township in the Connecticut Western Reserve in the State of Ohio and which is also in the County of Lake and known by a part or lot number three in Tract number eleven and bounded and described as follows...beginning in center of the road at the North East corner of lot no 2 in lot no three, thence along the North line of lot no 2 in lot No 3 twenty five chains and 36 links to the west line of said lot, thence North one degree west 3 chains and 64 links, thence East to the center of the road, thence south 1 degree east 3 chains and 36 links to the place of beginning containing nine acres...”³

Major Ohio Land Divisions

The major land divisions in Ohio are described briefly below. There are additional, smaller land divisions, not described herein.

² Holmes County, Ohio, Deeds, vol 2, p 578-579, George Shearer to John Knox (1833), Recorder’s Office, Millersburg.

³ “Lake County, Ohio, Deeds, 1840-1950” database with images, *FamilySearch* (www.familysearch.org : accessed 17 Feb 2022), Deed records, v E-F 1846-1849, p 9, Thomas Atkinson & others to Martha Ferguson, 1845.

Congress(ional) Lands

- *History* – These lands were in the Northwest Territory and sold by the United States government. Several large tracts were sold to private companies such as the Ohio Company, Scioto Company, and to John Symmes. The land which was not sold to private companies was distributed by the U.S. government and sold to individuals.
- *Eligibility* – Varied.
- *Type* – Federal Land.
- *Measurement System* – 4-section townships (not thirty-six); 1st section begins in the NE corner.



Virginia Military District

- *History* – Virginia claimed some lands covering what is now Ohio. They gave some up after the American Revolution but retained about 330,000 acres.
- *Eligibility* – Soldiers who served in the Continental Line in Virginia.
- *Type* – State Land.
- *Measurement System* – Metes and Bounds



Connecticut Western Reserve

- *History* – After the Revolutionary War, Connecticut claimed these lands in Ohio to compensate the military.
- *Eligibility* – Those Connecticut soldiers who served in the American Revolutionary War.
- *Type* – State Land.
- *Measurement System* – 4-section townships (not thirty-six) sections per; 1st section in SE corner. Townships are five square miles, not six.



➤ Firelands

- *History* – The Firelands were a part of the Connecticut Western Reserve. During the American Revolutionary War, the British destroyed a large area of Connecticut by fire. To compensate these Connecticut residents (not soldiers), the state legislature designated 500,000 acres of the Western Reserve for Connecticut residents.
- *Eligibility* – Those Connecticut residents and their heirs, whose land was destroyed.
- *Type* – State Land.
- *Measurement System* – Same as Connecticut Western Reserve.



The Ohio Company of Associates (not affiliated with ‘The Ohio Company’)

- *History* – A group of men founded this real estate company to purchase a large quantity of Land in Ohio, to then sell privately. 1,500,000 acres were agreed upon, but the company ultimately only purchased 964,285 of those.
- *Eligibility* – Land sold to whomever wanted to buy.
- *Type* – Federal Land.



- *Measurement System* – Standard: 36-section townships with 1st section beginning in NE corner; sections of one square mile or 640 acres.

➤ Donation Tract

- *History* – Congress gave the Ohio Company of Associates 100,000 acres to help settle the area, specifically to create a barrier of sorts between the American Indians and the other Ohio Company lands.
- *Eligibility* – Males over twenty-one years willing to live in this area were given 100 acres.



United States Military District

- *History* – The United States reserved this land for veterans of the American Revolution. Soldiers were granted different quantities of land based on their rank during the war.
- *Eligibility* – Continental Army soldiers from the Revolutionary War.
- *Type* – Federal Land.
- *Measurement System* – Standard: 36-section townships with 1st section beginning in NE corner; sections of one square mile or 640 acres.



Seven Ranges

- *History* – This area of Ohio was the first to be surveyed by the government and began the application of six-mile square townships in Ohio. The government hoped to sell the land to assist in paying for the Revolutionary War, but sales were slow. Eventually the government sold it in large tracts to private investors to then sell to individuals.
- *Eligibility* – N/A
- *Type* – Federal Land.
- *Measurement System* – 36-section townships with 1st section beginning in SE corner.



Symmes Purchase (Miami Purchase)

- *History* – A congressman and judge from New Jersey, John Symmes purchased land in the Northwest Territory. Originally Symmes requested one million acres. Congress allowed he and his company to purchase 330,000 acres. Ultimately though, they purchased only 248,250 of those allotted acres.
- *Eligibility* – Symmes sold to whomever wanted to buy.
- *Type* – Federal Land
- *Measurement System* – 36-section townships with 1st section beginning in SE corner.



Land Between the Miamis – Ludlow’s Survey

- *History* – John Symmes originally hoped to have this ~670,000 acres of land as a part of his purchase. When Congress didn’t allow that, the land was sold to other companies and individuals by the government.
- *Eligibility* – N/A
- *Type* – Federal Land
- *Measurement System* – 36-section townships with 1st section beginning in SE corner.



Source List

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