THE EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE EARLY FEDERAL LAND ORDINANCES. TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY, CONTRIBUTIONS TO EDUCATION, NO. 118, PP. 1-136

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649555703

The Educational Significance of the Early Federal Land Ordinances. Teachers College, Columbia University, Contributions to Education, No. 118, pp. 1-136 by Howard Cromwell Taylor

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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PUBLISHED BY
Teachers College, Columbia University
NEW YORK CITY
1922

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Acknowledgment is due to so many that it is impossible to mention them all by name, but the writer's gratitude is none the less sincere. He is especially grateful, however, to Professors J. H. Coursault, W. W. Charters, and F. F. Stephens for their inspiration and guidance while he was a student in the University of Missouri, and also to Professors Henry Johnson and W. A. Dunning, of Columbia University. A special debt, which is gratefully acknowledged, is due Professor Paul Monroe, of Teachers College, for his sympathetic and helpful counsel and encouragement, both in the class room and in connection with this study.

H. C. T.

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CHAPTER I

THE ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE NORTHWEST

THE purpose of this study is to discover the educational significance of the early federal land ordinances and to show how these ordinances affected subsequent legislation with reference to education and the development of the public school system in this country. The problem suggests two less comprehensive but more definite questions: (1) To what extent were these early ordinances the work of land speculators? (2) Did the advocates of these measures have any broad or clearly defined educational policy in view?

In order to understand the early land ordinances it is necessary to review briefly some of the historical background with reference to the West and Northwest of the colonial period. Possession of these lands, in so far as France and England were concerned, was determined by the Seven Years' War. From that time on, the settlement and government of this territory was one of the important public questions. Some of the leading men of the time were personally interested in these western lands and projects of settlement in the frontier country. The correspondence of Washington and Crawford throws some light on the question.[1]

William Crawford lived in Pennsylvania, near the Virginia line beyond the mountains. For fourteen years, 1767–1781, he and Washington exchanged letters, largely concerning the land held by Washington in the West. The correspondence shows that Washington had employed Crawford to seek out quietly large bodies of good land along the Kanawha and Ohio rivers. In all, Washington accumulated more than thirty-two thousand acres. In September, 1767, he wrote Crawford that he would join him, as promised, in trying to secure land beyond the Proclamation Line of 1763, because he felt sure that that measure was only a blind to quiet the Indians and would soon be repealed.[2] This prolonged correspondence between Washington and Crawford

[1] *Washington-Crawford Letters.*
[2] *Ibid.*

relates almost exclusively to the details of locating and surveying the best lands available and to means of holding these lands against squatters. Washington's holdings in the western country were valued by him at approximately one hundred thousand dollars. He knew the West well and had great faith in its future. It is not surprising that he was greatly interested in the various plans of settlement and government of this region.

In 1774 Washington tried to form a company to develop the connection between the Potomac and Ohio rivers.[3] At that time, the city of Baltimore opposed the plan because it was feared that it would divert the western trade from Baltimore. Before this plan took any definite shape the war began and the scheme was abandoned for about ten years. With the surrender of claims to the western lands by the various states, especially the Virginia land cession of March 1, 1784, interest in opening an easy path for travel from tide-water to the Ohio country was revived. Two of the terms of this cession are of special importance.[4] One is the provision that these lands should be laid out into states, which should be admitted to the Union on equal terms with the original states. The other is the provision which reserved land for the soldiers who had conquered the Northwest. Undoubtedly, both of these provisions had their influence in the subsequent legislation with reference to the political development of the West and in the solution of the problem of paying the soldiers of the Revolution.

The fundamental problem at this time, however, was an economic one, in so far as the relation of the western country to the Union was concerned. It was generally felt that before any plan of political organization of the West could be put into operation it was necessary to bind the back-country to the sea-board by economic ties. Certainly the national leaders were aware of this necessity. In the same month that Virginia ceded her western lands to the Union Jefferson and Washington were in correspondence concerning the development of a water connection by way of the Potomac and Ohio rivers. Thus was Washington's plan of 1774 revived.

In a letter, dated March 15, 1784, Jefferson urged Washington to undertake this work of development. He said: ". . . I

[3] Sparks: *Writings of Washington*, IX, p. 31.
[4] *Journals of Congress*, IX, pp. 67 ff.

am confident that would you either alone or jointly with any persons you think proper be willing to direct this business, it would remove the only objection the weight of which I apprehend."[5] And farther on in the same letter, he said: ". . . When you view me as not owning, nor ever having a prospect of owning one inch of land on any water either of the Potowmac [sic] or Ohio, it will tend to apologize for the trouble I have given you of this long letter, by showing that my zeal in this business is public and pure."[5] It was Jefferson's opinion that Virginia should not undertake to hold more territory than she could govern well, and, for this reason, he believed that the western boundary of the state should not extend beyond the mouth of the Kanawha.[6]

It appears that Washington was in full accord with Jefferson with reference to what should be the policy of Virginia as regards the development of the western territory. In reply to Jefferson's letter, just quoted above, Washington wrote on March 29, 1784, in part as follows: "My opinion coincides perfectly with yours respecting the practicability of an easy and short communication between the waters of the Ohio and the Potomac, of the advantages of that communication and the preferences it has over all others, and of the policy there would be in this state and Maryland to adopt and render it facile."[7] While Washington also believed that it would be wise for Virginia to relinquish her claims to all lands beyond the meridian of the mouth of the Kanawha he expressed some doubt as to the popularity of such a policy and was of the opinion that it would meet with some opposition. In this connection he said: ". . . I am mistaken if our chief magistrate will coincide with us in this opinion."[7]

As the months went by interest in the western question developed. Governor Harrison and the General Assembly were realizing that some definite action should be taken at once. Harrison and Washington had some discussion of the problem. On the tenth of October, 1784, Washington wrote Governor Harrison of Virginia as follows: "I need not remark to you, Sir, that the flanks and rear of the United States are possessed by other powers, and formidable ones, too; nor how necessary it is to apply the cement of interest to bind all parts of the Union in indissoluble

[5] *Old South Leaflets*, VI, No. 127, p. 14.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 15.
[7] Sparks: *Writings of Washington*, IX, pp. 31 ff.

bonds, especially that part which lies immediately west of us, with the middle states."[8] In this same letter Washington expressed the opinion that "the touch of a feather" would turn the people in the West in any direction. He favored immediate internal improvements to bind the Ohio Valley to the United States and recommended to Governor Harrison the appointment of a commission to survey the James and Potomac rivers from tidewater to their sources. He showed in detail the great advantages in distance, topography, and political conditions Virginia had at that time, pointing out especially the fact that the British still held the important posts at Detroit, Niagara, and Oswego, which cut off New York from connection with the West. Washington further suggested in his letter to Governor Harrison that the State of Virginia encourage private corporations to develop the navigation of the James and Potomac rivers.

When the efforts of France to have the western boundary of the United States fixed at the Alleghany Mountains in 1783 and the subsequent plots and conspiracies to alienate the West from the Union, fostered by France and Spain, are taken into account, Washington's fear that the West might be lost unless strenuous and immediate steps were taken to hold it was, beyond question, well founded. The strong positions on the north held by Great Britain made it easily possible for British influence to control and dominate the economic development of the Northwest unless a direct and accessible connection between the Ohio country and the Atlantic sea-board was established.

The suggestion of Washington's as regards the encouragement of private corporations to develop the James and Potomac rivers was followed. The James River Company was incorporated by an act of the Virginia General Assembly, January 5, 1785, with a capital stock of five hundred shares at $200 a share.[9] On the day before, January 4, 1785, the Potomack Company was incorporated with a capital stock of five hundred shares at $444 4/9 a share.[10] By an act of the General Assembly, Washington was given fifty shares of stock in the Potomack Company and one hundred shares of stock in the James River Company.[11] In a letter to Washington, informing him of this action, Governor

[8] Sparks: *Writings of Washington*, IX, pp. 58–68.
[9] Hening: *Statutes at Large*, XI, p. 450.
[10] *Ibid.*, p. 510.
[11] *Ibid.*, p. 525.