

**MANUAL OF INSTRUCTIONS FOR  
THE SURVEY OF THE PUBLIC  
LANDS OF THE UNITED STATES  
AND PRIVATE LAND CLAIMS,  
JANUARY 1, 1890**

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**VARIOUS**

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THE SURVEY OF THE PUBLIC  
LANDS OF THE UNITED STATES  
AND PRIVATE LAND CLAIMS,  
JANUARY 1, 1890**



*U.S. General Land Office*

**MANUAL**  
**OF**  
**SURVEYING INSTRUCTIONS**  
**FOR THE**  
**SURVEY OF THE PUBLIC LANDS**  
**OF THE**  
**UNITED STATES**  
**AND**  
**PRIVATE LAND CLAIMS.**

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Prepared in conformity with law under the direction of  
**THE COMMISSIONER OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE.**

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**JANUARY 1, 1890.**

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,  
GENERAL LAND OFFICE,  
Washington, D. C., December 2, 1889.

GENTLEMEN: The following instructions, including full and minute directions for the execution of surveys in the field, are issued under the authority given me by sections 453, 456, and 2398 United States Revised Statutes, and must be strictly complied with by yourselves and your deputy surveyors.

Very respectfully,

LEWIS A. GROFF,  
*Commissioner.*

TO SURVEYORS GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES.





## INTRODUCTORY.

The present system of survey of the public lands was inaugurated by a committee appointed by the Continental Congress, and consisting of the following delegates:

Hon. THOS. JEFFERSON, <i>Chairman</i> .....	Virginia.
Hon. HUGH WILLIAMSON.....	North Carolina.
Hon. DAVID HOWELL.....	Rhode Island.
Hon. ELBRIDGE GERRY.....	Massachusetts.
Hon. JACOB READ.....	South Carolina.

On the 7th of May, 1784, this committee reported "An ordinance for ascertaining the mode of locating and disposing of lands in the western territory, and for other purposes therein mentioned." This ordinance required the public lands to be divided into "hundreds" of ten geographical miles square, and those again to be subdivided into lots of one mile square each, to be numbered from 1 to 100, commencing in the *north-western* corner, and continuing from west to east and from east to west consecutively. This ordinance was considered, debated, and amended, and reported to Congress April 26, 1785, and required the surveyors "to divide the said territory into townships of 7 miles square, by lines running due north and south, and others crossing these at right angles. \* \* \* The plats of the townships, respectively, shall be marked by subdivisions into sections of 1 mile square, or 640 acres, in the same direction as the external lines, and numbered from 1 to 49. \* \* \* And these sections shall be subdivided into lots of 320 acres." This is the first record of the use of the terms "township" and "section."

May 3, 1785, on motion of Hon. William Grayson, of Virginia, seconded by Hon. James Monroe, of Virginia, the section respecting the extent of townships was amended by striking out the words "seven miles square" and substituting the words "six miles square." The record of these early sessions of Congress are not very full or complete; but it does not seem to have occurred to the members until the 6th of May, 1785, that a township six miles square could not contain 49 sections of 1 mile square. At that date a motion to amend was made, which provided, among other changes, that a township should contain 36 sections; and the amendment was *lost*. The ordinance as finally passed, however, on the 20th of May, 1785, provided for townships, 6 miles square, containing 36 sections of 1 mile square. The first public surveys were made under this ordinance. The townships, 6 miles square, were laid out in ranges, extending northward from the Ohio River, the townships being numbered from south to north, and the ranges from east to west. The region embraced by the surveys under this law forms a part of the present State of Ohio, and is usually styled "The Seven Ranges." In these initial surveys only the *exterior lines* of the

townships were surveyed, but the plats were marked by subdivisions into sections of 1 mile square, and mile corners were established on the township lines. The sections were numbered from 1 to 36, commencing with No. 1 in the *southeast* corner of the township, and running from *south to north* in each tier to No. 36 in the *northwest* corner of the township, as shown in the following diagram :

36	30	24	18	12	6
35	29	23	17	11	5
34	28	22	16	10	4
33	27	21	15	9	3
32	26	20	14	8	2
31	25	19	13	7	1

The surveys were made under the direction of the Geographer of the United States.

The act of Congress approved May 18, 1796 provided for the appointment of a surveyor-general, and directed the survey of the lands northwest of the Ohio River, and above the mouth of the Kentucky River, "in which the titles of the Indian tribes have been extinguished." Under this law *one-half* of the townships surveyed were subdivided into sections "by running through the same, each way, parallel lines at the end of every two miles, and by making a corner on each of said lines at the end of every mile," and it further provided that "the sections shall be numbered, respectively, beginning with the number one in the northeast section and proceeding west and east alternately, through the township, with progressive numbers till the thirty-sixth be completed." This method of numbering sections, as shown by the following diagram, is still in use :

6	5	4	3	2	1
7	8	9	10	11	12
18	17	16	15	14	13
19	20	21	22	23	24
30	29	28	27	26	25
31	32	33	34	35	36

The act of Congress approved May 10, 1800, required the "townships west of the Muskingum, which \* \* \* are directed to be sold in quarter townships, to be subdivided into half sections of three hundred and twenty acres each, as nearly as may be, by running parallel lines through the same from east to west, and from south to north, at the distance of one mile from each other, and marking corners, at the dis-

tance of each half mile, on the lines running from east to west, and at the distance of each mile on those running from south to north. \* \*

\* And the interior lines of townships intersected by the Muskingum, and of all the townships lying east of that river, which have not been heretofore actually subdivided into sections, shall also be run and marked.

\* \* \* And in all cases where the exterior lines of the townships thus to be subdivided into sections or half sections shall exceed, or shall not extend, six miles, the excess or deficiency shall be specially noted, and added to or deducted from the western and northern ranges of sections or half sections in such township, according as the error may be in running the lines from east to west or from south to north."

The act of Congress approved February 11, 1805, directs the subdivision of the public lands into quarter sections, and provides that all the corners marked in the public surveys shall be established as the proper corners of sections, or subdivisions of sections, which they were intended to designate, and that corners of half and quarter sections *not marked* shall be placed, as nearly as possible, "equidistant from those two corners which stand on the same line." This act further provides that "The boundary lines actually run and marked \* \* \* shall be established as the proper boundary lines of the sections or subdivisions for which they were intended; and the length of such lines as returned by \* \* \* the surveyors \* \* \* shall be held and considered as the true length thereof, and the boundary lines which shall not have been actually run and marked as aforesaid shall be ascertained by running straight lines from the established corners to the opposite corresponding corners; but in those portions of the fractional townships, where no such opposite or corresponding corners have been or can be fixed, the said boundary line shall be ascertained by running from the established corners due north and south or east and west lines, as the case may be, to the \* \* \* external boundary of such fractional township."

The act of Congress approved April 25, 1812, provided "That there shall be established in the Department of the Treasury an office to be denominated the General Land Office, the chief officer of which shall be called the Commissioner of the General Land Office, whose duty it shall be, under the direction of the head of the department, to superintend, execute, and perform all such acts and things touching or respecting the public lands of the United States, and other lands patented or granted by the United States, as have heretofore been directed by law to be done or performed in the office of the Secretary of State, of the Secretary and Register of the Treasury, and of the Secretary of War, or which shall hereafter by law be assigned to the said office."

The act of Congress approved April 24, 1820, provides for the sale of public lands in half quarter sections, and requires that "in every case of the division of a quarter section the line for the division thereof shall run north and south \* \* \* and fractional sections, containing 160 acres and upward, shall, in like manner, as nearly as practicable, be subdivided into half quarter sections, under such rules and regulations as may be prescribed by the Secretary of the Treasury; but fractional sections containing less than 160 acres shall not be divided."

The act of Congress approved May 24, 1824, provides "That whenever, in the opinion of the President of the United States, a departure from the ordinary mode of surveying land on any river, lake, bayou, or watercourse would promote the public interest, he may direct the surveyor-general in whose district such land is situated, and where the change is intended to be made, under such rules and regulations as the