

WESTWARD STOP AND GO

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North Wind Picture Archives

Pioneers from the thirteen original colonies packed up their belongings in horse-drawn wagons and traveled west to settle the Northwest Territory.

THE DESIRE TO MOVE WEST and settle open territory was a driving force in the growth of the United States. Rapid expansion in the western territories raised many questions about governing and statehood. The Ordinance of 1784 and the Land Ordinance of 1785 helped sort out some of the answers and became the foundation for the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

Establishing Settlements

By the 1740s, English settlements had pushed to the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains in Pennsylvania, Virginia, parts of North and South Carolina, and Georgia. Virginia took the lead in crossing the mountains by attempting to purchase land from the Native Americans.

Pioneers left behind the thirteen original colonies and traveled westward across the Mississippi Valley. They gradually began to

settle along rivers in what is now eastern Tennessee and on Native American hunting grounds in the Bluegrass Region of Kentucky. Small settlements also emerged along the Ohio River and in the Illinois area and the Great Lakes region. By the 1780s, it was thought that America's population would surpass England's.

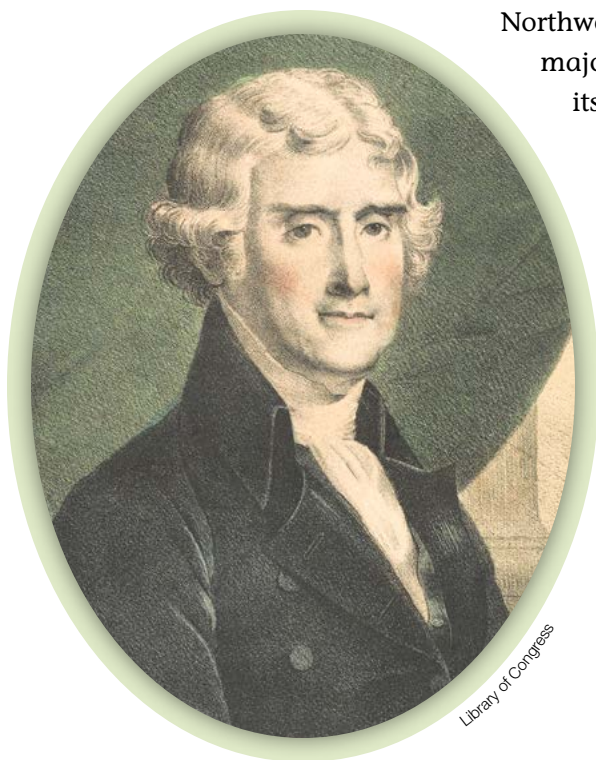
Jurisdiction means authority or control.

Cession is the giving up or surrendering of a possession, such as a territory.

The enormous western territory was placed under the **jurisdiction** of Congress in the first plan of the Union, the Articles of Confederation. The creation of this new government, however, was delayed by the fact that four of the original colonies—Virginia, Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut—held claims to land in the Northwest Territory. Virginia, the state with claims to most of the territory, objected to giving the new government its land. Provisions for the **cession** of lands, therefore, were removed from the Articles of Confederation in 1777. Maryland, however, a state without western land claims, refused to ratify the Articles of Confederation until the western territory was ceded to Congress.

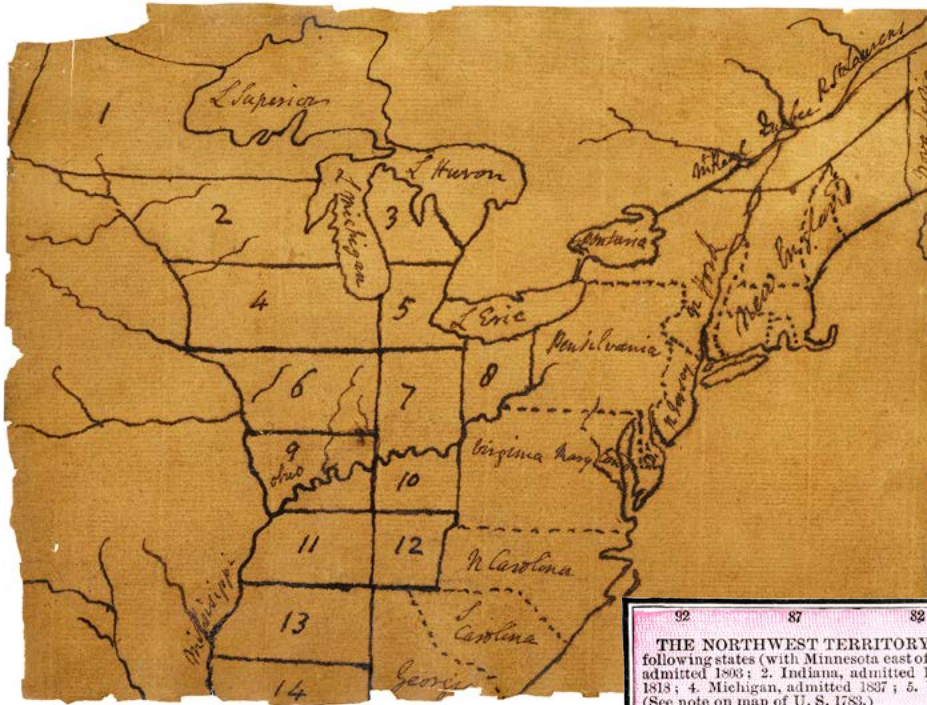
Defining the West?

On March 1, 1784, Virginia agreed to cede its land to the government. On that same day, Thomas Jefferson, the man who would become the third president of the United States, submitted a proposal to Congress for a temporary government in the Northwest Territory. The Ordinance of 1784 was the first major attempt by the national government to organize its vast western region.



Thomas Jefferson was the chief author of the Ordinance of 1784—the first major attempt to organize a temporary government in the Northwest Territory.

In the Ordinance of 1784, Jefferson and his committee drew on principles outlined in the Declaration of Independence. They wrote of equality, stating that “the territory ceded or to be ceded by individual states to the United States . . . shall be divided into distinct states. . . .” Jefferson proposed the creation of sixteen states that eventually would govern their own affairs and be incorporated into the Union on an equal status with the original thirteen states. When the population of an individual western territory reached twenty thousand, citizens could draft their own constitution. When the population equaled that of Delaware, the smallest existing state (fifty-nine thousand, at that time), it could then be admitted to the Union as a state. (Jefferson also included a statement prohibiting slavery in the territory, but this ban was stricken from the final document by one vote.)



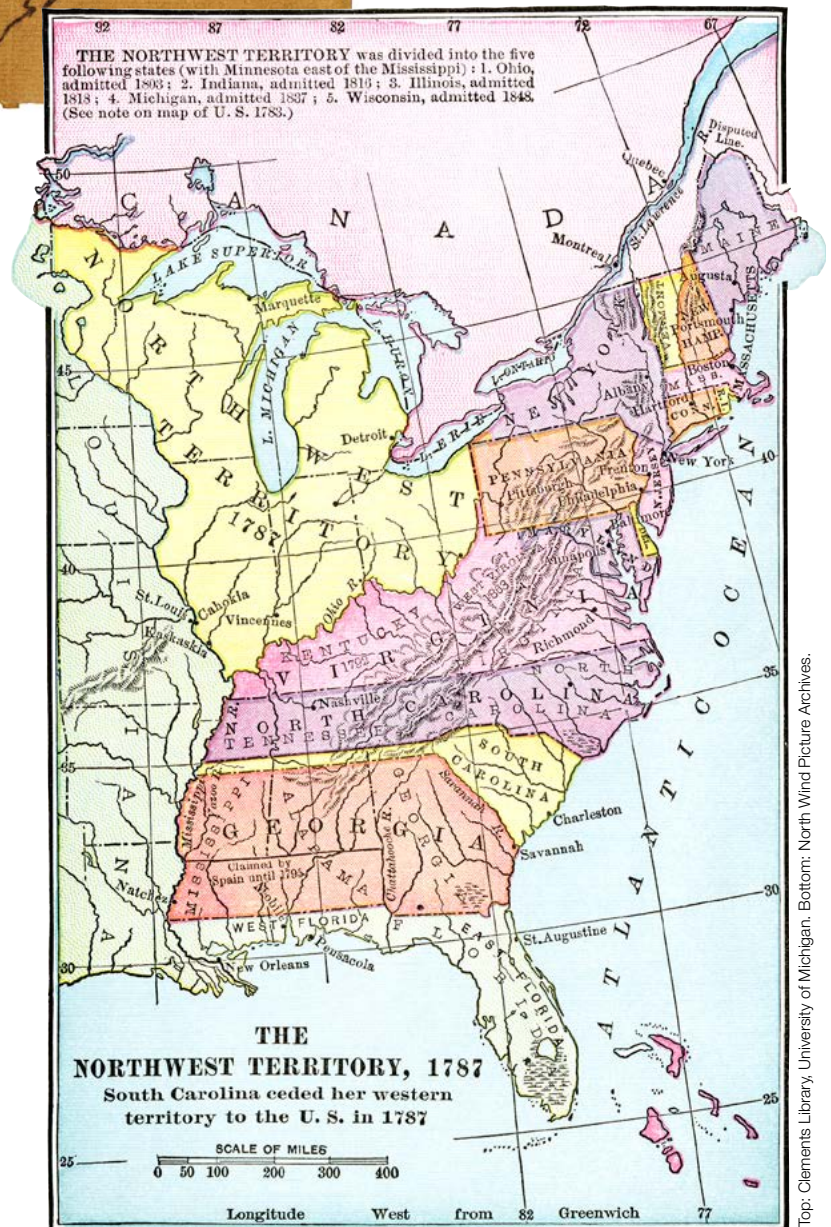
The map at left outlines Jefferson's proposal for the Northwest Territory. The map below shows the location of the Northwest Territory in the United States in 1787.

Creating a Patchwork

The Ordinance of 1784 never went into effect, primarily because Congress delayed setting up a survey of the territory so that the lands could be "offered for sale." The Land Ordinance of 1785 aimed to correct that problem. It called for the division of western land into a **geometric grid**. Land was broken up into **townships** of six miles square with lines running north and south and east and west at right angles. The Land Ordinance of 1785 allowed settlers to survey and establish clear title to their land, but progress enacting it was stalled by the presence of Native Americans in the territory. The survey of the first area, in eastern Ohio, was only half complete by the time the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 was passed.

A **geometric grid** is a pattern or arrangement with fixed points or lines.

Townships are subdivisions of counties, which are subdivisions of states.



Top: Clements Library, University of Michigan. Bottom: North Wind Picture Archives.

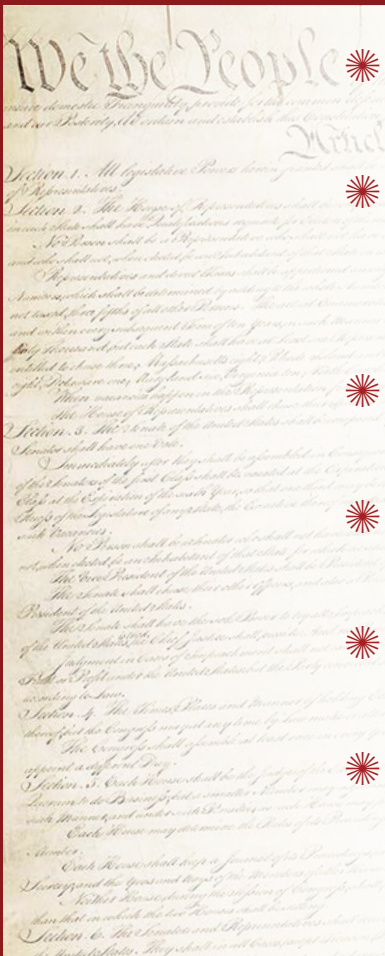
The vision of a rapidly populated western territory motivated American leaders to focus on issues involved in settlement. George Washington thought the West would “settle faster than any other [territory] did,” but no one anticipated the problems involved in governing unsettled territory. Although replaced by the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, the earlier ordinances established the foundation upon which new states could be admitted to the Union.



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This contemporary aerial view of the American Midwest shows the patchwork of fields that resulted from the Land Ordinance of 1785.

Facts to Remember



- ✿ The original federal constitution of the United States was the **Articles of Confederation**, ratified in 1781. The **Constitution of the United States**, ratified in 1788, replaced the Articles of Confederation.
- ✿ The **Continental Congress** was the federal legislature of the thirteen original colonies under the Articles of Confederation. The first Continental Congress met in 1774 and the second met in 1775. **Congress** is the legislative branch of the federal government established in 1789 by Article I of the Constitution of the United States.
- ✿ A **settlement** is the establishment of people in a new region. A **colony** is formed by a group of emigrants who settle in a nonself-governing region and are controlled by a distant country.
- ✿ A **territory** is a portion of a country’s land that is given limited self-government while preparing for statehood. A **state** is an internal, independent portion of land that is self-governing and part of a union.
- ✿ The **Ordinance of 1784**, drafted by Thomas Jefferson and his committee, provided a plan for a temporary government and the admission of states in the Northwest Territory. This ordinance never went into effect.
- ✿ The **Land Ordinance of 1785** provided for use of a square grid system to divide the land. This effect still is visible today: From the air, you can see a lined patchwork of fields below. The **Northwest Ordinance of 1787** created a plan for governing the Northwest Territory and for creating new states.

Land Can Not be Sold

BLACK HAWK MAKATAIMESBEKIAKIAK
SAUK

Black Hawk, Chief of the Sauk and Fox Indians, led a resistance movement in the Northwest Territory that became known as the Black Hawk War of 1832. He dictated an account of his life the following year, through the interpreter Antoine Leclair.



Library of Congress

Black Hawk

My reason teaches me that Land cannot be sold. The Great Spirit gave it to his children to live upon, and cultivate as far as is necessary for their subsistence, and so long as they occupy and cultivate it, they have the right to the soil—but if they voluntarily leave it, then any other people have a right to settle upon it. Nothing can be sold but such things as can be carried away.