

Louisiana Land Grants and the U.S. Public Land Survey System

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By the late 1700's the public lands of the United States extended westward to the Mississippi River. A source of needed revenue for the colonies was from the sale of public lands. It was desirable then to subdivide the public lands according to a system of squares prior to its sale to the public. The U.S. Public Land Survey System (USPLSS) was inaugurated in 1784. It provides for the public lands of the United States to be divided by lines running east and west intersecting lines running true north and south at right angles so as to form townships of 6 miles by 6 miles squares. The townships were subdivided into 36 sections, each 1 square mile containing 640 acres as nearly as may be. The sections could be further subdivided into quarter and quarter-quarter sections, thereby providing a means of specifically identifying property as they were conveyed to the public with reference to its location in a section, its section and township.

In 1803 the United States approximately doubled its public lands when it acquired France's claimed to lands west of the Mississippi River i.e., the Louisiana Purchase. France had dispensed land grants along the Mississippi River and many of the River's distributaries in the southeastern district of present day Louisiana. In extending the USPLSS westward from the Mississippi River, it was necessary to honor these land grants and thereby embed them into the USPLSS. Consequently townships involving land grants can have far more than 36 sections. This resulted in each land grant being designated as an individual section. This presentation will explain the USPLSS system and show the results of land grant embedment into the PLSS in the Thibodaux and surrounding townships.