

# AICP STUDY GUIDE

Podcast

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## Episode 7: Now That We Have Land, What Are We Gonna Do With It

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And welcome, friends, to the seventh episode of the VERY UNofficial AICP podcast. I'm Jonathan Miller, and really, thank you so much for joining. I hope everyone enjoyed their short week this week after Labor Day.

To recap, last week, we talked a little bit about colonial planning; mostly William Penn's Philadelphia Plan, the planning of Savannah and its wonderful squares, a little bit about the stereotypical components of colonial planning, and how the Great Fire of London in 1666 played a part in all of it.

This week, we're switching gears a little bit. Before we get too far into the progress of planning, and planning theories, and planning laws; we should probably cover how the land all of this planning happens on initially got all sliced and diced, and why it got sliced and diced.

Enter the Land Ordinances of 1784, 1785, and 1787.

This is obviously ridiculous to cover all of it, So we'll stick to the important parts in terms of planning, and the AICP exam.

### **(01:24)**

So, there's really no other way to go about it than chronologically. Because another way would be, well, dumb. So let's set the stage.

The year is 1784, just after the Revolutionary War officially ended with the Treaty of Paris in 1783. Britain then gives up control of the region. Having done so, the area west of Appalachia, north of the Ohio River, and east of the Mississippi goes into flux with no one really knowing who controls what.

Settlers are moving in, Native Americans said it was theirs, some of the states even claimed ownership - mostly that was Connecticut and Virginia - basically, it was a shit mess.

At the same time, the U.S, or at that time, the Confederation Congress as it was called, was flat out broke - as you know, most newly found countries that just poured all of their collective resources into a war to gain independence would be. Unfortunately, the articles of confederation - the first real agreement between the states - didn't allow the government to tax people very easily; they were pretty anti-taxation for some reason at this point in time.

That said, while they were trying to work out the shit mess of who had what land, they worked with what they had: the land, and plenty of it. So, they went out and wrote an ordinance. Sorry, the Ordinance of 1784 which said, among other things, that this land, "west of the Appalachian mountains, north of the Ohio River and east of the Mississippi," would become states after they spent some time as territories, and once they had enough people. But, once they did become states, they could be states forever.

Now what does this all have to do with planning and the land we operate with? Really not so much yet. The problem with the Land Ordinance of 1784 - while noble - was that it didn't include any set uniform way to divvy it all up. This is where the Land Ordinance of 1785 comes in to play. Apparently it didn't take too long to realize that they left something out.

**(03:53)**

So, a long one year later, the Congress of the Confederation got together again. This time, they settled on a way to actually measure and divide the land they put up for settlers to buy; among other things of course.

I should mention, previous to this ordinance, they actually measured properties using rocks, trees, streams - basically just natural resource features that really could disappear or move in a moment's notice. Anyways, this method of dividing up the land - in this ordinance - the Ordinance of 1785 - established the Public Land Survey System, and that is something you do need to know.

**(04:40)**

So, the Public Land Survey System, or PLSS as you probably see it, set up how all of the newly acquired land from the revolutionary war was going to be identified in order to give away and sell sections of property to war veterans and settlers.

So how did they do this? If anyone's ever seen a map of county subdivisions or townships, you know it's just an integrated series of squares, but let's look at it a little more specifically.

The surveyors ended up creating a grid system which identified areas of land by referring to the range number, township number, and section number. For our purposes here, we'll skip over the details surrounding the meridians and the parallels that were used as the baselines, so just know that when the surveyors initially set out, they did create an initial grid to reference the survey townships.

So basically, when you read the location descriptor, the range number indicates how many survey townships to the east or west of the range line, where the township number tells us how many survey townships to the north or south we are from the township line.

Now, all of the survey townships are uniform for the most part. They are all 36 square miles - 6 miles long on each side - which ended up creating, if you didn't guess already, 36 squares or sections; each one of those is 1 square mile, or 640 acres.

Now The way that they numbered each of these sections is also interesting. They started in the north eastern most section with the number one, and counted west in what they called a boustrophedonic pattern. That's really just a fancy word for alternating directions or a snake pattern, like most drafts for fantasy football if you're into that like me, but whatever.

These sections then, were subdivided again into quarters that were a half mile by a half mile, or a quarter square mile if you're bad at math. If you remember though, I mentioned that the survey townships were all uniform, for the most part.

The 'for the most part' is because, well, it was the late 1700's and they didn't exactly have majorly precise equipment like we do today. Measurements back then were done with chains and links, or what I like to call the most unintuitive way to measure anything. So, here's the rundown.

One chain was 66 feet long which equated to 4 of what they called rods. Anyways 80 of these chains made up 1 mile. Basically, they quite literally had one guy hold the one end, while the other walked out along a bearing with the other end.

For what should be ridiculously obvious reasons, this method of measurement created some errors because of things like slopes, obstructions, curvature from the earth, etc. But for our purposes here we won't get into that.

And that's the PLSS in a nutshell, so back to the ordinance of 1785.

**(08:02)**

So now that we know how they measured it all out, what was the other significance of the Ordinance of 1785? Was it just measuring out land to sell to pay off debts from the revolutionary war?

In regards to planning, not even close. Probably the most important contribution to planning that came out of the Ordinance of 1785 was the dedication of land. Remember how each survey township was numbered? Well, Section 16 of each survey township was reserved for public education; that would allow each township to have a centrally located school, and more importantly, provide funding for that school. Also, Sections 8, 11, 26, and 29 were kept by the U.S. government to give the veterans of the Revolutionary War land as their payment for service.

As for the rest of the sections? Yes, they sold off for money to pay off debts from the way. Each section was auctioned off over time. And the minimum bid for each of those sections was a measly 640 bucks, or one dollar for one acre. So I'm pretty sure whoever bought those up made out like a bandit.

So, now we know what we wanted to do with this land, and we know how to chop it up, but what happens when it's purchased? How are states going to be made out of this?

Enter the Land Ordinance of 1787, or more affectionately called: The Northwest Ordinance.

### **(09:38)**

First and foremost, this ordinance said outright that land that was purchased was theirs and theirs alone forever. It basically stated what the hierarchy would be of who gets it if you died, and gave you the power to sell it to whoever you wanted, and gave you the power to buy whatever you wanted from someone else.

But, the ordinance also required that a territory must have a public university to be eligible for statehood, and essentially created the concept of what we know as the public domain. There's a section in there where they stated certain lands were to remain free and open to all forever.

The rest of it essentially outlined the operating procedures of the territories, and outlined the pathway to statehood would be. It even went so far as to delineate some boundaries for states and population thresholds, they declare freedoms of religion, and prohibited aggression towards Native Americans - which obviously didn't go so well.

The ordinance also prohibited slavery in the new territories, which would eventually play a particular role in - oh, I don't know - the early 1860's, but that's definitely out of our scope here.

### **(11:15)**

And that about wraps it up I guess; so there you have it. All you ever wanted to know about the Land Ordinances of 1784, 1785, and 1787; at least as far as the AICP exam might be concerned. If you want to know more, I'm sure there's some Land Grant University somewhere that has an American History class which might cover it.

For those of you who tuned in to the last episode, the answer to our question, "William Penn's Philadelphia Plan was the very rough, physical planning part of his vision for the area. What did he call this overall effort?" The answer to that is the Holy Experiment.

For those of you playing along this week, your question is going to be, "What was the system of measuring and dividing property that was setup under the Land Ordinance of 1785 called, and what was Section 16 in this system reserved for?"

Well thanks again everyone for tuning in; it really, really, really does mean a lot to me. And I hope this is at least some help for you guys, and I hope it isn't too boring or excruciating either. I know I have fun with it and I hope you all do too.

As always, all of the links that I used for references can be found in the show notes. If you have any questions that you want to follow-up on, feel free to reach out to me at [theveryunofficialaicpguide@](mailto:theveryunofficialaicpguide@)

gmail.com, or you can follow along and send me a message on our newly created social media accounts.

That would be The VERY Unofficial AICP Study Guide Podcast on Facebook. Instagram limits the characters, so it's just The Very Unofficial AICP Podcast there.

Also, don't forget to subscribe to this podcast on whatever platform you use for podcasts, or on the show's website, so you can follow along with future episodes, help prepare for the exam and supplement all of your other study regimens.

Make sure you tune in next week as we continue to set the stage a little bit by covering the Erie Canal and National Road, and mostly what they did in terms of their impact to the planning of the westward expansion.

Thanks again everyone, really, 'till next time.

### **Links:**

Land Ordinance of 1784:

[https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Ordinance\\_of\\_1784#:~:text=The%20Ordinance%20of%201784%20was,west%20of%20the%20Ohio%20River.&text=The%20Congress%20hoped%20to%20sell,government%20and%20pay%20its%20debts](https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Ordinance_of_1784#:~:text=The%20Ordinance%20of%201784%20was,west%20of%20the%20Ohio%20River.&text=The%20Congress%20hoped%20to%20sell,government%20and%20pay%20its%20debts)

<https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1700s/Ordinance-of-1784/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land\\_Ordinance\\_of\\_1784](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_Ordinance_of_1784)

Land Ordinance of 1785:

<https://u-s-history.com/pages/h1150.html>

[https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Land\\_Ordinance\\_of\\_1785](https://ohiohistorycentral.org/w/Land_Ordinance_of_1785)

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land\\_Ordinance\\_of\\_1785](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_Ordinance_of_1785)

Public Land Survey System:

<https://dnr.wi.gov/topic/forestmanagement/documents/plsstutorial.pdf>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public\\_Land\\_Survey\\_System](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Public_Land_Survey_System)

Land Ordinance of 1787:

[https://billofrightsinstitute.org/founding-documents/primary-source-documents/northwest-ordinance/#:~:text=Northwest%20Ordinance%20\(1787\)&text=The%20United%20States%20claimed%20the,The%20law%20accelerated%20westward%20expansion](https://billofrightsinstitute.org/founding-documents/primary-source-documents/northwest-ordinance/#:~:text=Northwest%20Ordinance%20(1787)&text=The%20United%20States%20claimed%20the,The%20law%20accelerated%20westward%20expansion)

<https://history.house.gov/Historical-Highlights/1700s/Northwest-Ordinance-1787/>

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest\\_Ordinance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northwest_Ordinance)