

METHODS FOR DISTRIBUTING GEORGIA'S LAND

Headright System

Georgia's offer of free land to early settlers was generous and fair. The head of a family was granted two hundred acres of land, together with fifty additional acres for each member of his family and for each slave up to ten. However, no family would be granted more than a thousand acres of farm land. This system of distributing farm land in Georgia was known as the Headright system.

During the Revolutionary War, Georgia also offered farm land to men who would come to the defense of the struggling state. In 1776, the offer was one hundred acres for each soldier who enlisted for three years. To those who should remain in the service until the end of the war, two hundred and fifty more acres were granted.

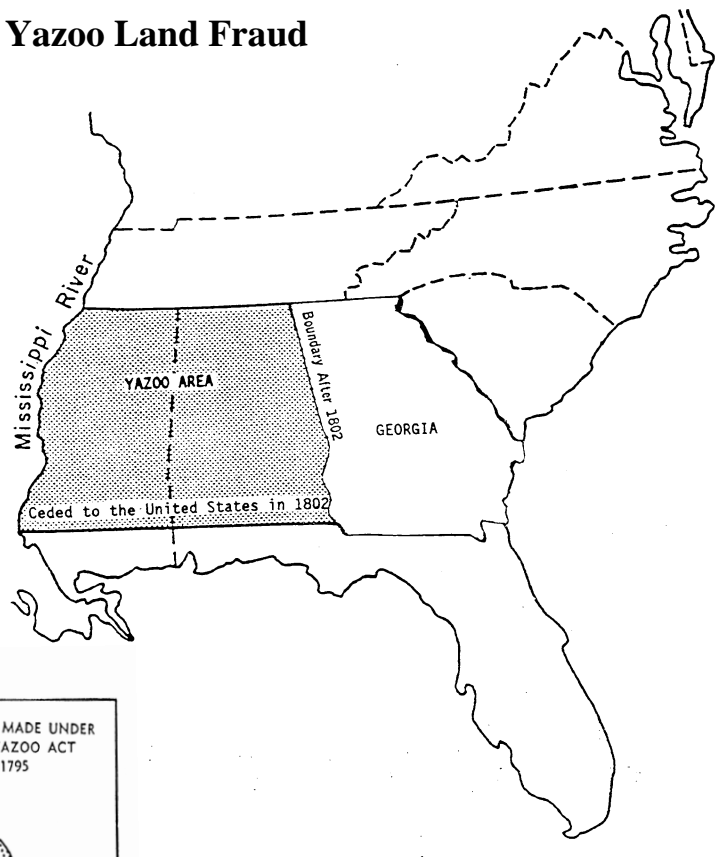
After Georgia was rid of its foreign enemies in 1783, it also granted land as rewards to many men who had fought during the Revolutionary War. Some of these men were prominent leaders. They received grants ranging in size from a thousand to twenty thousand acres. Elijah Clarke, Count d'Estaing, Nathaniel Greene, Anthony Wayne, and many others were given such grants.

Yazoo Land Fraud

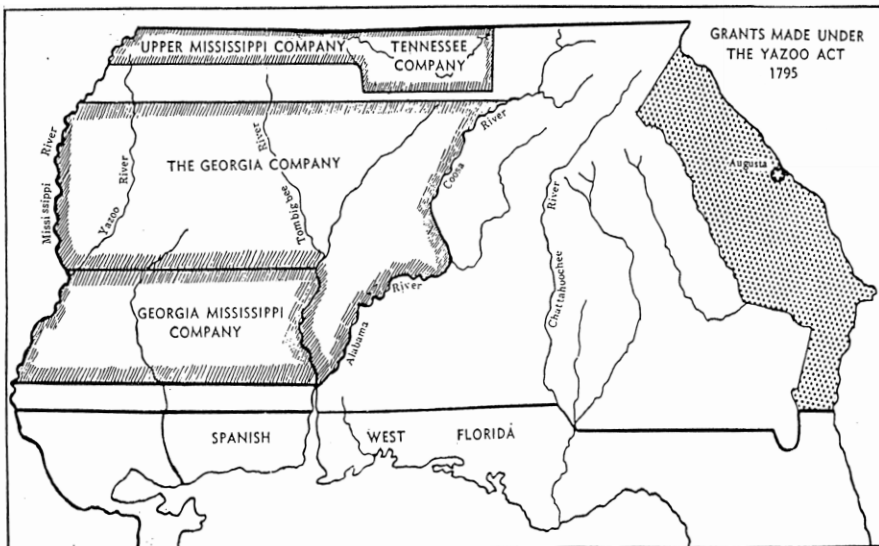
In 1794, the General Assembly passed the Yazoo Act authorizing four land companies to buy Georgia's land west of the Chattahoochee. By bribing the members of the legislature, the companies were authorized to purchase over 30 million acres of land for about 1 1/2 cents per acre.

As the citizens of Georgia learned of this fraud, they grew angry and elected new members to the legislature who promised to repeal the act. The Legislature repealed the Act by passing the Rescinding Act of 1796 and regaining the land. Controversy still swirled around the Yazoo Land; so, in 1802, an agreement was worked out between the state of Georgia and the United States' government.

Yazoo Land Fraud



Grants Made Under the Yazoo Act 1795



This agreement stated that Georgia would cede to the United States its land west of the Chattahoochee in exchange for \$1.25 million and removal of the Indians remaining in the boundaries of Georgia.

Land Lottery System

In 1802, land-hungry men pushed the Indians out of the land west of the Oconee River. The state wanted good citizens to settle the western lands and gave tracts away freely. The land was laid out in lots of 202 acres each.

In 1803, a new system of granting farm lands called the land lottery was begun. Each piece of land was given a number. Each lot number was placed on a piece of paper. These pieces of paper, all of the same size, were put in a box. Other pieces of paper without numbers were added to the box since there were always more citizens desiring free land than there were tracts of land available. All pieces of paper were thoroughly mixed. Then the drawing began. Some men drew blank pieces of paper and got no land at that drawing. A man who drew a paper with a lot number received as a farm the piece of land bearing that number.

This lottery system proved to be a good means of dividing Georgia's land among those who wanted to start farm homes.

The land lines of many farms in Georgia today still show marks of the two systems of granting farm lands to the original settlers. Going north or west from Savannah where the Headright System was used, land lines often are irregular and difficult to follow. On the other hand, the land lines of farms where the lottery system was used are straight and farm corners have right angles.

It is evident that Georgia started out to convert its vast areas of land into farms as rapidly and as fairly as possible. Because of bad use of the land laws in some cases, however, dishonesty prevailed for some years. Some state officials ignored the farm limit of a thousand acres as set by law. Certain families were granted ten-thousand acre tracts. Land speculation became common.

Land speculation was an easy means by which those who had money could buy a large quantity of land when the price was low, and hold it until the price rose. They could resell it later for extravagant prices and thereby increased their own bank accounts at the expense of the poor. The worst political scandal in Georgia's history occurred as a result of this type of evil doing. It was called the Yazoo Land Fraud because the lands involved extended to the Yazoo River.

Nevertheless, even with some corruption in the distribution of Georgia's lands, the tracts of land sold rapidly. One reason was that the cotton gin increased land value by giving the people an important money-making crop, cotton. As a result, the state's population increased tremendously during this period, rising from 162,686 in 1800 to 516,812 in 1830.



Cherokee land lots were parceled out to white Georgians in one of the two state land lotteries held in 1832. The state conducted a total of eight lotteries between 1805 and 1833. Sketch by George I. Parrish Jr., circa 1832.

Artwork by George I. Parrish Jr. Courtesy of Cindy Parrish, Maryville, TN in *The New Georgia Encyclopedia* (www.newgeorgiaencyclopedia.com)

Source: Changing Culture - Georgia History, Atlanta Public Schools, 1971, pp. 104 – 105