

The Historic Huntsville Quarterly

Volume 12 | Number 3

Article 4

3-21-1986

Summary of the 16th-Section Land History

James Record

Follow this and additional works at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly>



Part of the [Historic Preservation and Conservation Commons](#), and the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Record, James (1986) "Summary of the 16th-Section Land History," *The Historic Huntsville Quarterly*: Vol. 12: No. 3, Article 4.

Available at: <https://louis.uah.edu/historic-huntsville-quarterly/vol12/iss3/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by LOUIS. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Historic Huntsville Quarterly by an authorized editor of LOUIS.

Summary of the 16th - Section Land History

by James Record

Time and again, any study of education in Alabama encounters references to the sixteenth section in every township. Townships in every county are six miles square, containing thirty-six sections, each of which is one mile square, or 640 acres. Congress, in 1819, provided the first federal grant to Alabama with these sections of land - number 16 in every township.

A Congressional Act of March 2, 1819 gave the sixteenth section in every township "to the inhabitants of such townships for the use of schools." This was provided once the inhabitants of the territory of Alabama formed the State of Alabama and adopted its constitution.

The Alabama Constitutional Convention was held in the City of Huntsville in 1819 and the adopted constitution was sent to Congress. The State of Alabama was then admitted to the Union on December 14, 1819.

The fledgling state of Alabama, as had Congress, took action to aid education. The 1819 constitution stated in part: "the general assembly (legislature) shall take measures to preserve from unnecessary waste or damage, such lands as are or hereafter may be granted by the United States for the use

of schools within each township in this state, and apply the funds which may be raised from such lands . . ."

According to Albert Burton Moore's **History of Alabama**, provisions of a state legislative act of January 1, 1823 included: "Two administrative units, the township and the school district, were established and incorporated. At the head of the township organization was a board of three school commissioners, whose duty it was to administer school lands, establish schools, and disburse money to them in proportion to the number of students enrolled, and to examine and certify teachers. Each school was to be governed by three trustees elected by the people of the district. It was their duty to cause a schoolhouse to be built, to employ teachers, to purchase books and stationery for the use of the school, and to regulate the admission of students, designating specifically, after a thorough examination, those who should be admitted without tuition fees. . . The law required that a complete report on school lands and school activities should be made to the legislature each year." - (THE EDITOR).

Subsequent laws authorized various means of utilizing the sixteenth-section lands, including sale, particularly as authorized by Alabama law, as shown on page 31 of the 1827-1828 Acts of the Alabama Legislature.

Various ways were offered legislatively and administratively over the years to manage and utilize the so-called sixteenth-section school fund. . . Many funds were invested and lost in an ill-fated State Bank.

The state tried in various ways through different agencies to manage sixteenth sections and money, but never too successfully. The sixteenth section, however, as intended by Congress and by the Alabama Constitution, did serve a very useful purpose in the never-ending attempt to provide adequate money for public schools, including those in Huntsville.

