

Land for Sale *(cont.)*

Historical Background Information

After the American Revolution, the General Assembly of Georgia wanted to encourage more people to move to their state. They decided to use the headright system, which had been successful during colonial times. This system gave a land grant to anyone who would come to the colony and settle there. In a 1783 land act, each man who came to Georgia was given 200 acres of land. He could purchase, at a very low cost, an additional 50 acres for each family member. The land grant could not exceed 1,000 acres.

Other land grants gave bounties, or land as reward for service, to men who served in the militia during the American Revolution. These land grants were made based on the size of one's family and slave holdings. The families had to live on the land for one year and farm at least 3 percent of the land. Full ownership of the land was then granted for a small purchase price.

The problem with all these land grants was that American Indians had lived in Georgia long before the settlers arrived. Conflicts over who had claim to the land were often violent. There were other problems, too. In 1795, the legal boundary of the state of Georgia was the Mississippi River. The lands in western Georgia were called the Yazoo lands after the river that ran through them. The Creek and Cherokee tribes inhabited that land. Georgia officials wanted to open up the Yazoo lands to white settlers and push out the American Indians. Land speculators, or men who wanted to make money from the sale of land, came up with a plan that would make them rich. But it also made plenty of people angry.

The land speculators formed companies. They offered bribes to Georgia legislators. In exchange for money, Georgia legislators passed a law that allowed the companies to buy millions of acres of land for only two cents an acre. Georgia Governor George Matthews signed the Yazoo Act into law on January 7, 1795.

Land speculators bought the land at an extremely low price. Then they sold the land at a very high price. They also tried to pay for the land with old colonial currency that was now worthless. This made Georgians angry. Their government was corrupt. They voted most of the men involved out of the legislature. Georgia's U.S. Senator, James Jackson, resigned and came back to Georgia to help make things right. He and his supporters gained control of the legislature. In 1796, the Georgia legislature cancelled the Yazoo Act. They burned all records of the Yazoo deal.

