

The Articles of Confederation

The Critical Period

1781 - 1789

The First State Governments

- 1776 - Congress recommended colonies form state govts.
- By 1780 - all 13 had written constitutions
 - Most contained bills of rights
- All based on popular consent
 - Legislatures given more power than executive (PA & GA had no executive)
- Suffrage limited to male land owners but requirements lowered
- Slavery continued everywhere except NE and Some Middle States

Economic Problems

- American merchants faced reduced trade - British ports closed to U.S.
- Increased unemployment in cities
- Soldiers unpaid for service
- Lack of uniform currency among states
- No control of trade

Political Disunion

- Delegates of the Cont. Cong. knew in 1776 that they needed a constitution to bind all of the states together
- 1st U.S. constitution known as the Articles of Confederation
 - Adopted 1777 & ratified 1781 (delayed because of western land disputes between MD, VA, and NY)
 - Drafted by John Dickinson (PA)
- Created loose alliance of states

Articles of Confederation

- Reserved to each state:
 - “Its sovereignty, freedom and independence”
- Articles of Confederation created a “firm league of friendship”

Articles of Confederation

- One house Congress
 - Each state = 1 vote
- Adopt legislation = 2/3 vote
- Amend Constitution = unanimous vote
- National government given specific and limited powers over the states
- Fundamental weaknesses made it a poor governing document

Weaknesses of the Confederation

- Power resided with states, not the central government
- Passage of laws difficult
 - Delegates of more than 10 states rarely present at one time
- Amendment required unanimous vote

Weaknesses of the Confederation

- No chief executive
 - enforcement of laws left to states
- No central courts to settle issues between citizens of different states
- Congress could not control interstate commerce
 - states aggressively competed using taxes, tariffs, etc.

Weaknesses of the Confederation

- No national power to levy taxes
 - > only to request
 - 75% of requests denied
- Congress could issue \$ but could not prevent states from making their own

Weaknesses of the Confederation

- Congress could not control foreign trade
- Congress commanded little respect abroad & had difficulty in diplomacy
 - Particularly with Britain and Spain
 - Use of ports
 - Violations of US Territory

Weaknesses of the Confederation

- Congress had no power to raise an army - could only request troops from states
 - States rarely provided men
 - Shays' Rebellion highlights this problem
- ***How could the central govt. protect the country if it could not raise an army?***

Shays' Rebellion

- 1786-87 - armed uprising of Massachusetts farmers led by Daniel Shays
- Wanted relief from debt and farm foreclosure
- Seized courthouses & tried to take a U.S. arsenal
- Had to be put down by Massachusetts state militia
- Significance: showed weakness of Confederation government

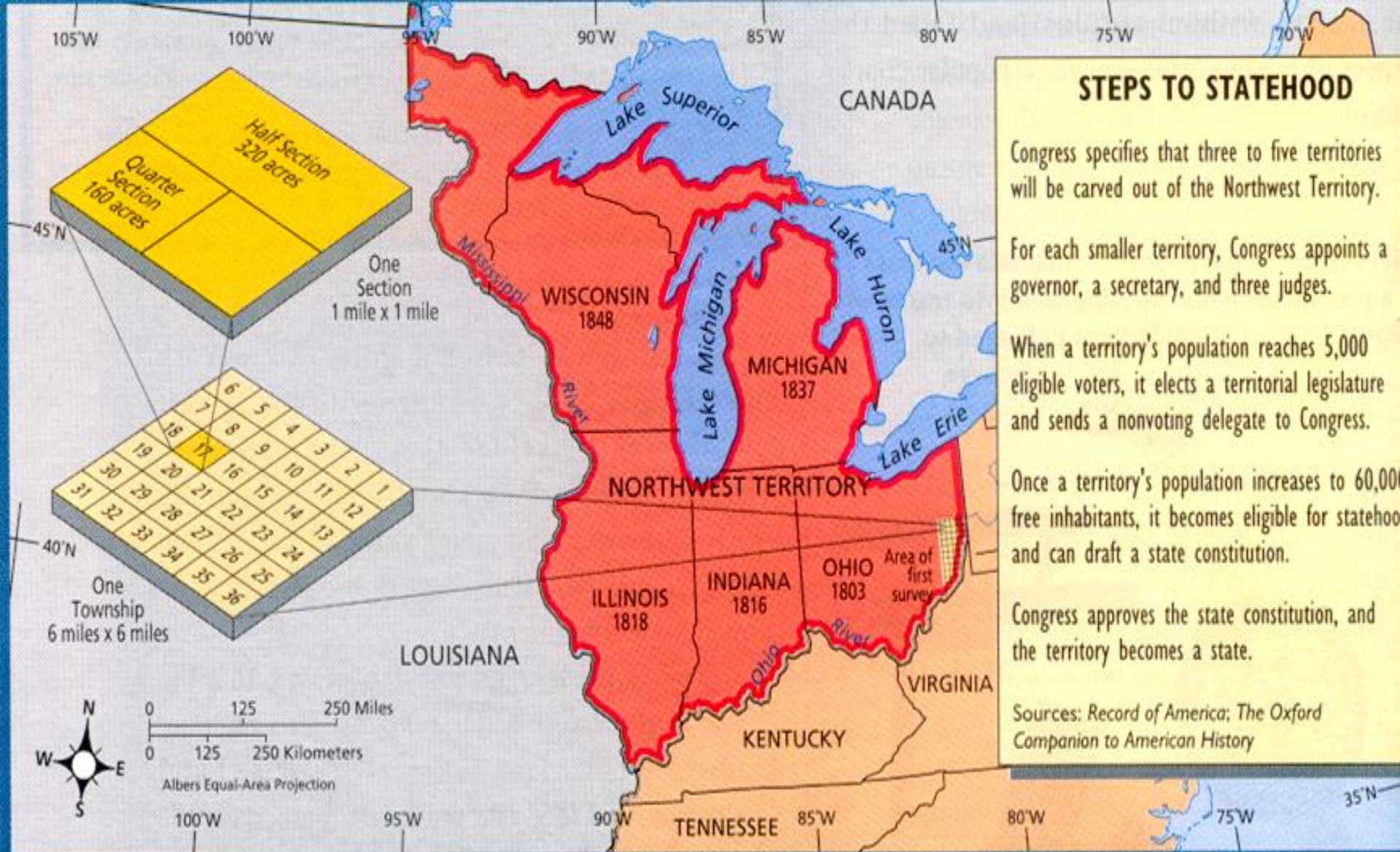


Achievements of the Confederation Government

- Revolution brought to an end by Confederation govt.
- Treaty of Paris (1783) signed by Confederation govt.
- States united (at least in name) during the "Critical Period"
- Passed Land Ordinance (1785) and Northwest Ordinance (1787)

Land Ordinance of 1785

- Surveyed & divided land to be sold to pay national debt
- Divided territory into townships (36 sq. miles) & subdivided into 36 one sq. mile sections
- Sale of sections supported schools
- Orderly way to divide & sell land



The Northwest Territory

SUBDIVIDING THE NORTHWEST TERRITORY In accordance with the Land Ordinance of 1785, the Northwest Territory was divided into townships. Each township was 6 miles square and divided into 36 sections of 640 acres each.

Northwest Ordinance of 1787

- Orderly formation of new states
 - Territories given equal status with original states
- Gradual progression from territory to state based on population growth
 - Citizens of territory could write a state constitution and apply for statehood
- Territories permitted to elect a legislature
- Slavery outlawed in NW Territory

Reconsidering the A of C

- Advocates of a stronger central govt.
 - recognized that the A of C was a weak tool for governing the U.S.
- Delegates at the Annapolis (MD) Convention (1786) to improve trade relations between states petitioned Congress to fix weakness of the A of C
 - Delegates included Dickinson, Madison, Hamilton
- Congress called for a convention in Philadelphia to revise the A of C