

25th CONGRESS,
3d Session.

Doc. No. 29.

HO. OF REPS.
Treas. Dept.

OPERATIONS OF THE GENERAL LAND OFFICE, 1836, &c.

LETTERS

FROM

THE SECRETARY OF THE TREASURY,

TRANSMITTING

A Report of the Commissioner of the General Land Office of the Operations of said office during the year 1837 and part of the year 1838.

DECEMBER 19, 1838.

Read, and laid upon the table.

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,

December 18, 1838.

Sir: I have the honor to transmit, herewith, a report from the Commissioner of the General Land Office to this Department, dated the 17th instanc, with the documents therein referred to, having regard to the operations of the General Land Office during the year 1837 and part of the year 1838.

I have the honor to be, respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

LEVI WOODBURY,

Secretary of the Treasury.

Hon. Speaker of the House of Representatives.

GENERAL LAND OFFICE,

December 17, 1838.

Sir: I have the honor to submit the accompanying documents, exhibiting the operations of the several land offices during the year 1837, and the first, second, and third quarters of 1838, (statements A and B;) from which it will appear that the quantity of public lands sold during the year first mentioned, amounted to five million six hundred and one thousand one hundred and three acres and twelve-hundredths; the purchase-money of which amounted to seven million seven thousand five hundred and twenty-three dollars and four cents; and that, during the first three quarters of the current year, the quantity of land sold amounted to one million three hundred and eighty-eight thousand seven hundred and thirty-three acres and forty-eight-hundredths; of which the

Thomas Allen, print.

of the selection formerly made, which, from vagueness or uncertainty of description, did not receive the final sanction of this office. As soon as the obstacle occasioned by the failure of the State to finish these selections is removed, it is contemplated to put the lands into market.

As the large amount of twenty-five million four hundred and twelve thousand eight hundred acres was under contract for survey at the date of the last annual report, of which about thirteen and a half millions then remained to be executed in the field, the estimates submitted at the last session of Congress, for an appropriation for additional surveys, were restricted to those regarded as indispensable. But few surveys, comparatively, were ordered, therefore, during the present year.

These included the following, viz :

The lands in *Indiana* ceded by the Miami under the treaty concluded in 1834, and ratified February 16th, 1838; which the Surveyor General states, in his report, will be completed by the 15th February next.

The lands in *Michigan* ceded by the Chippewas of Saginaw, under the treaty concluded in 1837, and ratified on the 2d of July last.

Certain tracts in *Wisconsin*, including improvements, and lying west of lake Winnebago, ceded by the treaty with the Menomones of September 3d, 1836; the running of the township lines of so much of the other cessions, under that treaty, as lies within that Territory; and the subdivision into sections of all the fractional townships within those cessions which are situated on Green bay, and on the Fox, Wisconsin, and Menomonic rivers, so far as they are navigable.

The townships in *Missouri*, which include the improvements made by the missionaries at Harmony, to which the title has been recently extinguished by virtue of the 4th article of the treaty of 1835 with the Cherokees.

Instructions were also communicated on the 12th instant for the survey of the township lines of the tract of country bounded on the east, south, and west by existing surveys and the Missouri river, and on the north by the line dividing townships 64 and 65, extended west to the same river; and to subdivide so much of the same into sections as will comprise about two townships in depth on the river.

These surveys will embrace portions of Ray and Clay counties, and what is usually known as the Platte-river country.

The Surveyor General of Louisiana has been engaged, in compliance with instructions from this office, in making the necessary examinations of the errors in the location of private land claims in the Greensburg (formerly St. Helena) district, mentioned in the last annual report, with a view to their ultimate correction, which, it is hoped, will be effected at no distant period.

By the report of the newly-appointed Surveyor General of Mississippi, it is seen that his office has been engaged in the examination of the errors in the old surveys in that State, and in ascertaining the extent of the injury or loss of the field-notes. As that examination has not extended to all the errors known to exist, and as his report was received too late to enable this office to give the requisite attention to the subject in all its connections, the decision, as to the proper course to be pursued to remedy the difficulties, is necessarily deferred for the present. If, on further examination, it is found advisable, a special communication and estimate

for an appropriation for this object will be submitted to Congress at its present session.

The office at Cincinnati, in addition to a heavy amount of work performed under the regular appropriations for this year, has, under the act of last session creating the new district of Wisconsin and Iowa Territories, completed, with commendable diligence, the necessary protractors and transcripts from its files, and transmitted the same to the new office, which may now be regarded as in full operation.

The new mode of compensating the clerks and draughtsmen in the offices of the Surveyors General, under the instructions from this office referred to in the last annual report, by proportioning their compensation to the amount of work actually done, instead of fixed salaries, as was formerly the usage, has, in its beneficial results, surpassed the most sanguine expectations. Such has been the degree of activity imparted under the operation of this rule, in the disposal of the arrearages in that branch of the service, that the expenditures for that object in the first two quarters of the present year exceeded the appropriation for the same period. The deficiency thus occasioned, however, (except that in the Mississippi office, for which an estimate has been submitted,) will be supplied by a corresponding reduction of the expenditures during the fourth quarter.

The propriety and importance of this rule, as a measure of economy, and (what is of equal moment) in producing greater efficiency and promptitude in the despatch of business, have been already satisfactorily tested.

A circular of instruction of the 9th of July last, addressed to each Surveyor General, calling for the usual information and estimates, and the copies of the reports of those officers, with the exception of those of Arkansas and Missouri, (which it is regretted have not been received,) are appended, (document H.)

The colored diagrams accompanying these reports will afford full information as to the progress and condition of the surveys authorized by former instructions. Several important errors, found to exist in the diagram forwarded last year by the Surveyor General of Florida, have been corrected in that herewith furnished.

Document I is the estimate of the expenses of the General Land Office for the year 1839, and that marked K exhibits the estimated appropriation required for the surveying department during the same term. In consequence of the unusually small amount of the appropriation for the public surveys made at the last session of Congress, the estimates now submitted for that object during the ensuing year necessarily constitute an aggregate, in addition to former unexpended balances, of thirty thousand dollars; one moiety of which is designed to meet the peculiar exigencies of the service in Louisiana.

In this estimate no item has been inserted for the construction of an office for each Surveyor General, containing a fire-proof vault for the preservation of the records. This has been omitted, because the measure was before Congress at the last session as a substantive proposition. As the bill had not been reached for final action at the time of adjournment, it is presumed that the subject will again be before that body at its present session. I respectfully refer to my last annual report, and to the special communication on this subject of the 26th March last, for the reasons in favor of this measure. I will merely add, that subsequent reflection, so far from lessening my convictions of its expediency, has rather strengthened

P38
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can be engaged to do it for the compensation authorized. The continued high water of Lake Erie has hitherto prevented the connection of the northern boundary-line of the State with the lines of a few sections on the west side of Maumee bay, which are mostly submerged by the waters of the lake.

In Indiana, the tracts of land ceded to the United States by the treaty with the Miamies of 23d October, 1834, are now in progress of survey, and will be completed by the 1st of February next. A few islands in the Wabash river remain yet to be surveyed. With the exception of these, and the Miami cessions above mentioned, the whole of the public lands in this State have been surveyed.

In Michigan, our field operations, I regret to say, have advanced rather tardily during the present year. This is owing chiefly to the unfavorable character of the country for surveying; the great difficulty and expense of transporting provisions through a trackless wilderness, over some parts of which a packhorse cannot be taken; the difficulty of procuring and retaining hands in the service; and the length and severity of the winters, and in summer the great annoyance from the swarms of mosquitoes. On this subject I beg leave to refer you to the communication from this office of the 18th of December last, and the papers enclosed therein.

The exterior township boundaries have been extended as far north, only, as the line between townships 23 and 24 north, on the west side of the principal meridian; and on the east side, to the line between townships 27 and 28 north: making about 2,400 miles. A contract has lately been made for the survey of about 162 miles more, on the west side of the peninsula. On the east of the meridian the subdivisions into sections have been completed up to the second correction line, (between townships 20 and 21, comprising about 20 townships;) west of the meridian about 110 townships have been subdivided: making in all 130 townships.

Contracts have been made for the subdivision of 90 townships more on the west, and about 30 townships east of the meridian: making 120 townships. The triplicate skeleton maps accompanying this report, colored in the manner directed by you, will exhibit a view of the state of the work in the field, as above detailed.

It has hitherto been found impracticable to contract for the running of the standard lines, and the exterior standard boundaries, in the northern portions of the State, on account of the alleged inadequacy of the compensation offered, (\$4 per mile.) That description of work is usually given to none but the most experienced and skilful deputies. This work has been offered to several of these surveyors, all of whom have declined unless the compensation would be increased. Unremitted efforts, however, shall still be made to put those surveys under contracts, and to prosecute the work throughout the remainder of the State conformably to your instructions of the 8th and 30th of May, 1837.

To defray the expenses of executing these surveys, assuming that they will be completed in the ensuing year, and including about ten townships of Indian cessions in Indiana, I present the following estimate:

For surveying the public lands in 1839, in Michigan	\$73,000
in Indiana	2,000
	\$75,000

Although the Territories of Wisconsin and Iowa have been separated from this surveying district, and erected into a new one, yet the amount of office duty growing out of the current surveys, and the heavy arrears of recording to be brought up, will still require an undiminished force in this office. It is important that these records, which have now been entirely suspended for nearly fifteen years, should be brought up as early as may be practicable, consistent with the current demands upon this office. And if it be still desired to continue the work of transcribing the field-notes of the surveys for preservation at the General Land Office, a specific appropriation should be made for that purpose, in addition to the allowance per act of the 9th of May, 1836; especially as no provision has been made by Congress for building offices with fire-proof vaults for the Surveyors General, as recommended in your report on that subject of 26th of March last. If that very important proposition should fail to receive the sanction of Congress at the approaching session, it will, in view of the fearful risk from fire, be necessary at least to provide for this office a set of small portable cases for our files and books, to be so constructed that they may be conveniently and speedily removed in case of fire. In that contingency, therefore, I earnestly recommend a small appropriation for this purpose.

For several years past the items of expenditure by the Surveyor General, for office-rent, fuel, and hire of a laborer to make fires and perform the duties of a messenger in the office, have been so heavy as to result in a virtual reduction of nearly one-fourth of the amount of his annual salary; a result which surely could not have been contemplated by Congress at the organization of the office forty years ago, with the same salary that is now allowed, and when those expenditures were comparatively trifling. I consider it but just and right that an allowance should be made for these expenses, and I shall accordingly ask an appropriation for that purpose. In accordance with these views, I submit the following estimate for the ensuing year:

Salaries and contingent expenses of the office.

For compensation to the Surveyor General	\$2,000
For compensation to clerks, per act of 9th May, 1836	6,300
For compensation to extra clerks to transcribe field-notes	4,500
For stationary, postage, and printing	1,000
For office furniture (portable cases)	300
For office-rent and fuel	400
For laborer (or messenger)	150
	Total, \$14,650

Agreeably to your instructions, there are transmitted with this report a General statement of disbursements for surveying, up to the 29th of September ultimo, marked (A;) and a tabular statement of the contracts, marked (B,) which embraces those which remained unfinished at the date of the last annual report, as well as those entered into since that time. I am, very respectfully, sir, your obedient servant,

Hon. JAMES WATSON,
Commissioner of the General Land Office, Washington.

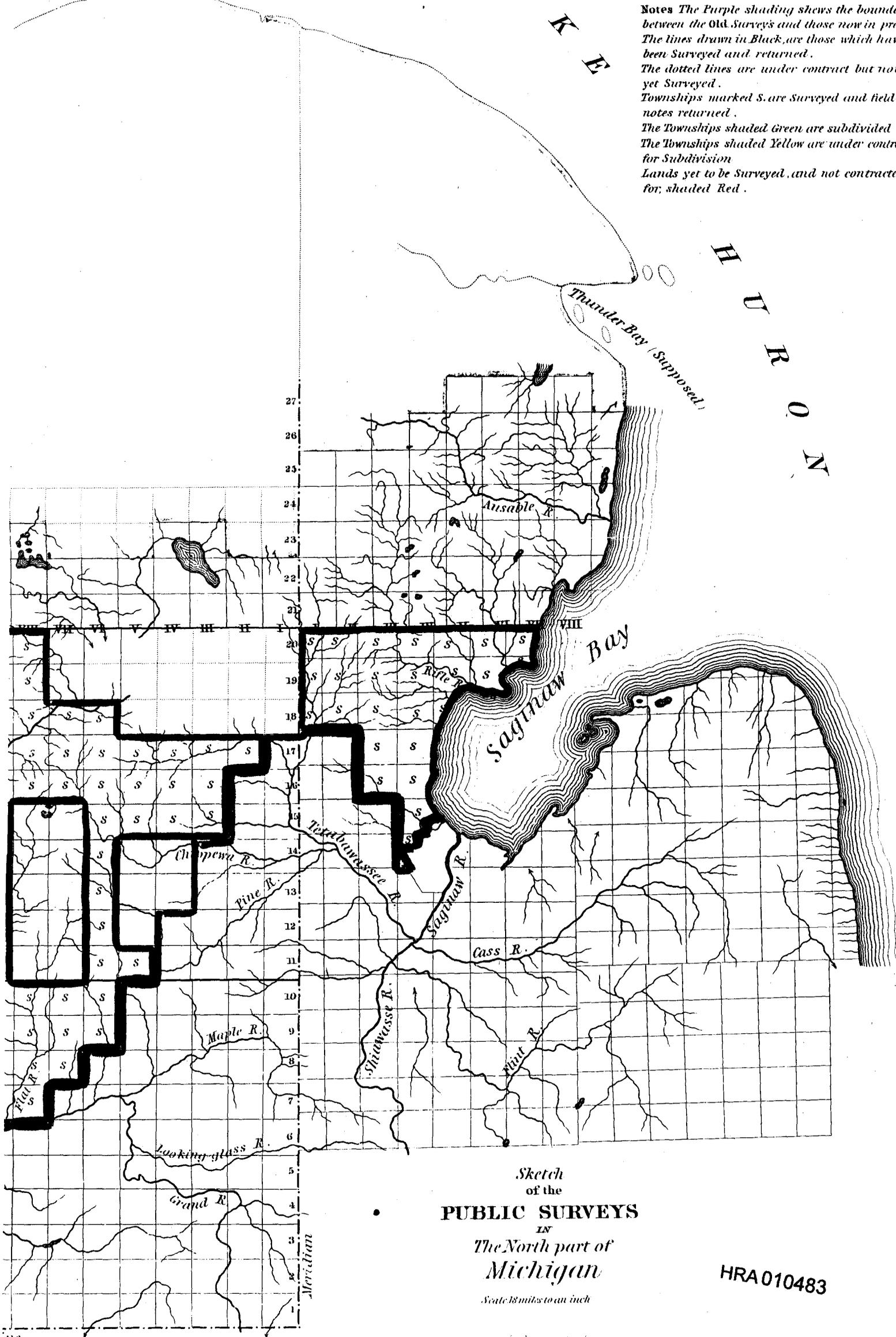
E. S. HAINES, Surveyor General.

Straits of Mackinaw LAKE

25 Con. 3. Sec.
S. Doc. 17. 331.

Notes The Purple shading shews the boundary between the Old Surveys and those now in progress. The lines drawn in Black, are those which have been Surveyed and returned. The dotted lines are under contract but not yet Surveyed. Townships marked S. are Surveyed and field notes returned. The Townships shaded Green are subdivided. The Townships shaded Yellow are under contract for Subdivision. Lands yet to be Surveyed, and not contracted for, shaded Red.

Series 1 No. 345, Doc No 29 (Appended section)
Map in its entirety at p. 18



Sketch
of the
PUBLIC SURVEYS
IN
The North part of
Michigan

Scale 18 miles to an inch

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