

FLORIDA'S OWN prime meridian

By: Josh Goodman, Ph.D., Archives Historian,
State Archives of Florida

Every day, knowingly and more often unknowingly, we cross boundaries. We drive from one county into the next, we step across property lines, and we move in and out of the corporate limits of cities and towns. Visitors to Tallahassee's recently renovated Cascades Park frequently cross a very important Florida boundary, now marked with an impressive new monument. It's Florida's own prime meridian, the initial point in the grid on which virtually all land surveying in the Sunshine State is based.

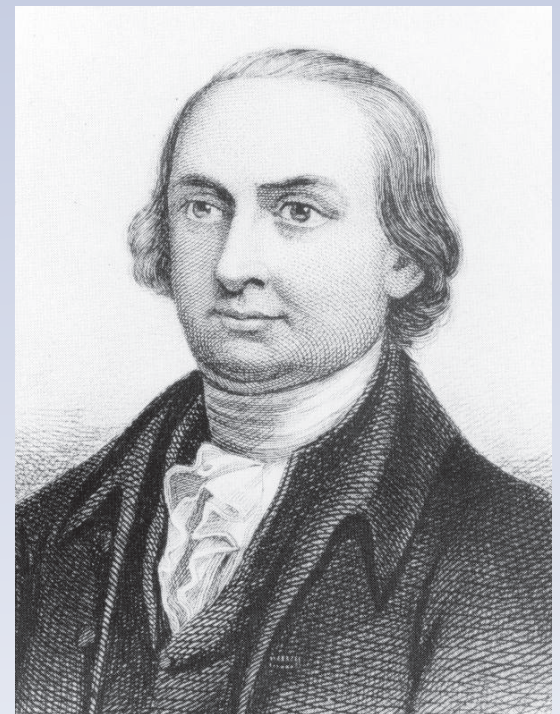


Brass plate marking the exact point at which Florida's prime meridian crosses its base line. All of the six-mile square townships comprising the state's land survey system are named in relation to this point. The point is located in Cascades Park, Tallahassee (photo 2014).

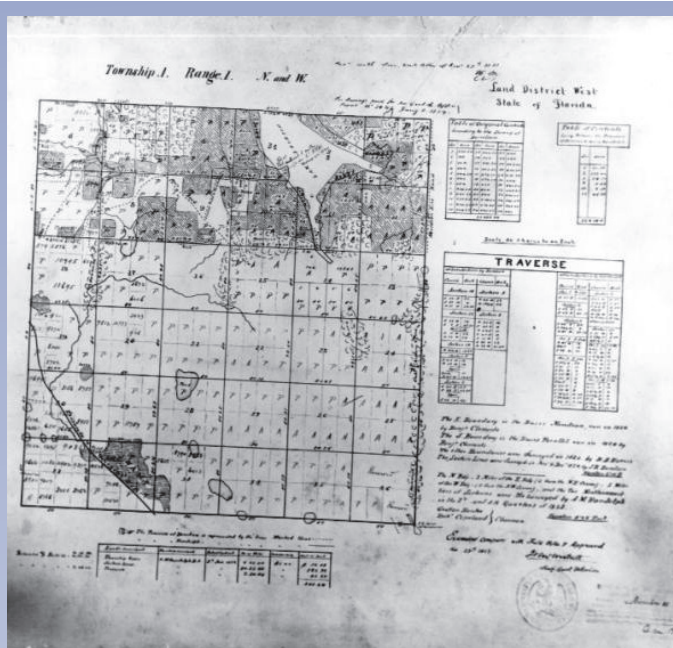
Initiating a system for identifying and selling land was a high priority for Florida's earliest leaders. Settlers would be unlikely to take a chance establishing themselves in the new territory if there wasn't a way to ensure the security of their title to the land they purchased. By the time Florida became a U.S. territory, the federal government already had a go-to method for measuring out new land.

Called the Public Land Survey System, it called for the new territory to be divided into six-mile squares called townships, which were each further divided into 36 smaller one-mile squares called sections. Land grants for businesses, homesteaders, or government entities could then be sold off by the section or parts thereof.

The first step in laying out a township grid was to select a spot for it to start. When the order came down in 1824 for the surveying process to begin in Florida, the Surveyor General appointed for the territory, Robert Butler, had not yet arrived. Furthermore, territorial governor William Pope Duval was away from Tallahassee in conference with local Native Americans. Territorial Secretary George Walton, then, had the honor of selecting the location.



George Walton II, son of the George Walton who signed the Declaration of Independence. He served as Florida's first Territorial Secretary (circa 1821).



An early map of Township 1 North, Range 1 West, encompassing much of western Tallahassee. The map delineates the 36 one-mile square sections within the township, as well as numerous individual parcels of land that had already been purchased (1853).

How he made his selection is not precisely known, although some interesting stories have emerged over time. Probably the most popular version holds that while transporting a stone monument to the designated site it fell off its wagon about 200 yards short of its destination. Because of its immense weight, the legend explains, the stone was too heavy to put back onto the wagon, and consequently it was left where it fell and that became the point of beginning for Florida's township grid. The story has a nice ring to it, but evidence suggests that the point was originally marked with a wooden stake, not a stone.

After the original point was established, surveyors began the lengthy process of establishing a north-south meridian and an east-west base line, dividing the territory into quadrants. The southeast quadrant contains the vast majority of Florida's territory, as it includes the entire peninsula. As more townships were surveyed out in relation to these lines, the General Land Office began granting land to homesteaders and other buyers. The original point of beginning for the grid remained fairly obscure for the rest of the nineteenth century.

In 1891, the City Commission of Tallahassee passed a resolution asking the General Land Office to establish a more elaborate monument marking the spot. The GLO gave orders for such a monument to be installed, and a local surveyor named John Cook identified a point on which to set it. This monument, however, for some reason appears never to have been placed. The one that existed before the Cascades Park renovation was erected by the Florida Legislature in 1925.



Right: The 1925 prime meridian marker in Cascades Park (1955).

Proposed Monument

To be erected over present Tallahassee
Base and Meridian Monument &
Watering

Top plate
Basaltic

Base plate 7/8 in thick x 10 in
Circle letters raised 1/4 in.
Furnish 4-1/2" brass anchor
rods

**THIS MONUMENT IS
ERECTED OVER AND TO
PERPETUATE THE ORIGINAL
GOVERNMENT MONUMENT
MARKING THE INTERSECTION
OF THE GUIDE MERIDIAN
AND THE BASE PARALLEL
FOR FLORIDA**

**AUTHORIZED BY ACT OF
LEGISLATURE CHAPTER
1925 SESSION**

COMMITTEE	
SENATE	HOUSE
W. C. HODGES CH.	G. W. GREEN CH.
S. A. HENRY	PETER JENDRIEK
	W. T. HENDRY

ERECTED A.D. 1925

BRONZE PLATE
Base Plate

Brass plate letters raised 1/4 in.
Furnish 4-1/2" brass anchor rods

A large map of Florida is laid out on a brick-paved ground. The map is white with black outlines of the state's counties and major cities. A blue rectangular box is drawn on the top left corner of the map, highlighting a small area. The map is oriented with the top of the state towards the top of the image. The brick pavement is reddish-brown. In the background, there is a green grassy area and a blue sky. The map is partially covered by a white cloth or paper. At the bottom of the map, there are two small white labels: "HOMES" and "HOMES".

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