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## Georgia's Land Lottery

Today when people speak of the Georgia lottery, they are probably referring to one of the many state-sponsored gambling games. These "games" are widely recognized for the funding of the Hope scholarship program and many other educational programs. But Georgia's first lotteries came at the start of the 19th century and represented a much darker side of Georgia's history, for it was through these lotteries that land belonging to Creek and Cherokee Indians was distributed.

Seven times between 1805 and 1832 Georgia used a lottery system to distribute the land taken from the [Cherokee](#) or [Creek](#) Indians. These lotteries were unique to the state; no other state used a lottery system to distribute land. Lot size varied widely, even in the individual lotteries. The largest lots distributed were 490 acres in the 1805 and the 1820 land lottery. The smallest lots were the 40-acre gold lots distributed during the Gold Lottery of 1832.



The Georgia Land Lottery

Many people, including the state of Georgia, combine the Land Lottery of 1832 and the Gold Lottery of 1832 and represent it as a single lottery; however, both the enabling legislation and the drawings themselves were independent, hence there were seven lotteries, not six.

Prior to 1803 Georgia distributed land via a headright system. Designed to prohibit corruption, the system actually encouraged it. During early administrations the government abused this system and created what today is generally known as the [Yazoo Land Fraud](#). These abuses led to the adoption of the lottery system in May, 1803 under governor John Milledge. The first lottery under the new system occurred in 1805.

Almost  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the land in present-day Georgia was distributed under this lottery system. During the 27 years that land was distributed under the system the rules and the methods of the lottery remained virtually unchanged. Applicants could be white males over 18 (or 21 depending on the lottery), orphans, or widows. Fees depended on the lottery and the size of the lot won, but in general they only covered the cost of running the lottery. The state did not profit from allocating these lands. Fractional lots were sold in each of the lotteries and some lands, especially those near major rivers, was exempt from the lottery. These were distributed by the state using alternate, frequently corrupt, methods.

For each person subscribing to a lottery a ticket was placed in the barrel. Since each lottery was over-subscribed, blank tickets were added to compensate for the over-subscription. According to the state archives, no record remains of the people who drew the blank tickets after the 1805 lottery.



George Parrish, Jr.  
Georgia Archives

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- **1805 Land Lottery**

This encompassed Creek Indian lands just west of the Oconee River ceded to the state in 1802 and a small strip of land in the southeast section of the state.

- **1807 Land Lottery**

Included additional Creek lands.

- **1820 Land Lottery**

After the Creek War (1814), Andrew Jackson demanded the secession of the southern third of present-day Georgia. A second section of land in northeast Georgia was included. This defined the eastern end of the Cherokee Nation for 12 years.

- **1821 Land Lottery**

Further Creek cessions

- **1827 Land Lottery**

Signaled the end of the Creek Indians in Georgia.

- **1832 Land Lottery**

This lottery, along with the 1832 Gold Lottery, gave the Cherokee Nation to Georgia settlers. Sparked the "[Trail of Tears](#)."

- **1832 Gold Lottery**

By the time of the gold lottery Georgia's Gold Rush was winding down. The state did not guarantee that gold existed on the lot.