The United States Public Land Survey was established by an act of Congress in 1785 in order to dispose of lands in the Western Territory of the new nation. In Alabama, two different surveys were used to subdivide parcels of land. In the northern half of the state, the Huntsville survey’s origin was established by the Huntsville Meridian and Base Line. In the southern half of the state, the St. Stephens survey’s origin was established by the St. Stephens Meridian and Base Line. The Freeman Line, as noted on the map to the left, is not a base line, but rather where the Huntsville and St. Stephens surveys meet. From the origins, grided lines were established at 6 mile intervals. The east-west lines are called townships and the north-south lines are called ranges. The intersection of the grided lines form rectangles of 36 square miles, also called townships. Each township is subdivided into 36 sections of approximately one square mile, and may be further subdivided into halves, quarters and the like. The same system of subdividing land is used on County Highway Maps produced by the Alabama Department of Transportation and U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute quadrangles.