Florida

FLORIDA: A Brief History

Early Human Inhabitants

People first reached Florida at least 12,000 years ago. The rich variety of environments in prehistoric Florida supported a large number of plants and animals. The animal population included most mammals that we know today. In addition, many other large mammals that are now extinct (such as the saber-tooth tiger, mastodon, giant armadillo, and camel) roamed the land.

European Exploration and Colonization

Written records about life in Florida began with the **arrival of the Spanish explorer and adventurer Juan Ponce de León in 1513**. Sometime between April 2 and April 8, Ponce de León waded ashore on the northeast coast of Florida, possibly near present-day St. Augustine. **He called the area la Florida, in honor of Pascua florida ("feast of the flowers"), Spain's Eastertime celebration.** Other Europeans may have reached Florida earlier, but no firm evidence of such achievement has been found.

On another voyage in 1521, Ponce de León landed on the southwestern coast of the peninsula, accompanied by two-hundred people, fifty horses, and numerous beasts of burden. His colonization attempt quickly failed because of attacks by native people. However, Ponce de León's activities served to identify Florida as a desirable place for explorers, missionaries, and treasure seekers.

In **1539 Hernando de Soto** began another expedition in search of gold and silver, which took him on a long trek through Florida and what is now the southeastern United States. For four years, de Soto's expedition wandered, in hopes of finding the fabled wealth of the Indian people. De Soto and his soldiers camped for five months in the area now known as Tallahassee. **De Soto died near the Mississippi River in 1542**. Survivors of his expedition eventually reached Mexico.

No great treasure troves awaited the Spanish conquistadores who explored Florida. However, their stories helped inform Europeans about Florida and its relationship to Cuba, Mexico, and Central and South America, from which Spain regularly shipped gold, silver, and other products. Groups of heavily-laden Spanish vessels, called plate fleets, usually sailed up the Gulf Stream through the straits that parallel Florida's Keys. Aware of this route, pirates preyed on the fleets. Hurricanes created additional hazards, sometimes wrecking the ships on the reefs and shoals along Florida's eastern coast.

In 1559 Tristán de Luna y Arellano led another attempt by Europeans to colonize Florida. He established a settlement at Pensacola Bay, but a series of misfortunes caused his efforts to be abandoned after two years.

Spain was not the only European nation that found Florida attractive. **In 1562 the French protestant Jean Ribault explored the area.** Two years later, fellow Frenchman René Goulaine de Laudonnière established Fort Caroline at the mouth of the St. Johns River, near present-day Jacksonville.

First Spanish Period

These French adventurers prompted Spain to accelerate her plans for colonization. **Pedro Menéndez de Avilés** hastened across the Atlantic, his sights set on removing the French and creating a Spanish settlement. **Menéndez arrived in 1565 at a place he called San Augustín (St. Augustine) and established the first permanent European settlement in what is now the United States.** He accomplished his goal of expelling the French, attacking and killing all settlers except for non-combatants and Frenchmen who professed belief in the Roman Catholic faith. Menéndez captured Fort Caroline and renamed it San Mateo.

French response came two years later, when Dominique de Gourgues recaptured San Mateo and made the Spanish soldiers stationed there pay with their lives. However, this incident did not halt the Spanish advance. Their pattern of constructing forts and Roman Catholic missions continued. Spanish missions established among native people soon extended across north Florida and as far north along the Atlantic coast as the area that we now call South Carolina.

Pedro Menendez de Aviles

The English, also eager to exploit the wealth of the Americas, increasingly came into conflict with Spain's expanding empire. In 1586 the English captain Sir Francis Drake looted and burned the tiny village of St. Augustine. However, Spanish control of Florida was not diminished.

In fact, as late as 1600, Spain's power over what is now the southeastern United States was unquestioned. **When English settlers came to America, they established their first colonies well to the North–at Jamestown (in the present state of Virginia) in 1607** and **Plymouth (in the present state of Massachusetts) in 1620.** English colonists wanted to take advantage of the continent's natural resources and gradually pushed the borders of Spanish power southward into present-day southern Georgia. At the same time, French explorers were moving down the Mississippi River valley and eastward along the Gulf Coast.

The English colonists in the Carolina colonies were particularly hostile toward Spain. **Led by Colonel James Moore, the Carolinians and their Creek Indian allies attacked Spanish Florida in 1702 and destroyed the town of St. Augustine. However, they could not capture the fort, named Castillo de San Marcos.** Two years later, they destroyed the Spanish missions between Tallahassee and St. Augustine, killing many native people and enslaving many others. **The French continued to harass Spanish Florida's western border and captured Pensacola in 1719, twenty-one years after the town had been established.**

Spain's adversaries moved even closer when England founded Georgia in 1733, its southernmost continental colony. Georgians attacked Florida in 1740, assaulting the Castillo

de San Marcos at St. Augustine for almost a month. While the attack was not successful, it did point out the growing weakness of Spanish Florida.

British Florida

Britain gained control of Florida in 1763 in exchange for Havana, Cuba, which the British had captured from Spain during the Seven Years' War (1756–63). Spain evacuated Florida after the exchange, leaving the province virtually empty. At that time, St. Augustine was still a garrison community with fewer than five hundred houses, and Pensacola also was a small military town.
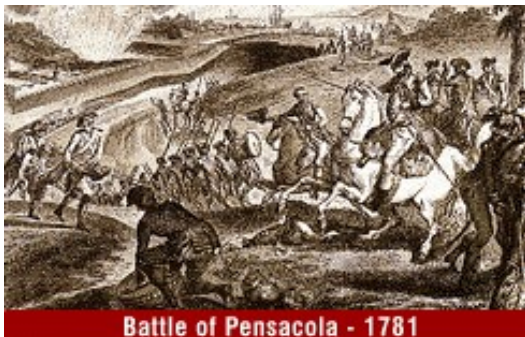
Battle of Pensacola - 1781

The British had ambitious plans for Florida. First, it was split into two parts: East Florida, with its capital at St. Augustine; and West Florida, with its seat at Pensacola. British surveyors mapped much of the landscape and coastline and tried to develop relations with a group of Indian people who were moving into the area from the North. The British called these people of Creek Indian descent Seminolies, or Seminoles. Britain attempted to attract white settlers by offering land on which to settle and help for those who produced products for export. Given enough time, this plan might have converted Florida into a flourishing colony, but British rule lasted only twenty years.

The two Floridas remained loyal to Great Britain throughout the War for American Independence (1776–83). However, Spain–participating indirectly in the war as an ally of France–captured Pensacola from the British in 1781. In 1784 it regained control of the rest of Florida as part of the peace treaty that ended the American Revolution.

Second Spanish Period

Andrew Jackson

When the British evacuated Florida, Spanish colonists as well as settlers from the newly formed United States came pouring in. Many of the new residents were lured by favorable Spanish terms for acquiring property, called land grants. Others who came were escaped slaves, trying to reach a place where their U.S. masters had no authority and effectively could not reach them. Instead of becoming more Spanish, the two Floridas increasingly became more "American." Finally, after several official and unofficial U.S. military expeditions into the territory, **Spain formally ceded Florida to the United States in 1821, according to terms of the Adams-Onís Treaty.**

On one of those military operations, in 1818, General Andrew Jackson made a foray into Florida. Jackson's battles with Florida's Indian people later would be called the First Seminole War.

Territorial Period

As a territory of the United States, Florida was particularly attractive to people from the older Southern plantation areas of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, who arrived in considerable numbers.

Andrew Jackson returned to Florida in 1821 to establish a new territorial government on behalf of the United States. What the U.S. inherited was a wilderness sparsely dotted with settlements of native Indian people, African Americans, and Spaniards.

As a territory of the United States, Florida was particularly attractive to people from the older Southern plantation areas of Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia, who arrived in considerable numbers. **After territorial status was granted, the two Floridas were merged into one entity with a new capital city in Tallahassee. Established in 1824, Tallahassee was chosen because it was halfway between the existing governmental centers of St. Augustine and Pensacola.**

As Florida's population increased through immigration, so did pressure on the federal government to remove the Indian people from their lands. The Indian population was made up of several groups–primarily, the Creek and the Miccosukee people; and many African American refugees lived with the Indians. Indian removal was popular with white settlers because the native people occupied lands that white people wanted and because their communities often provided a sanctuary for runaway slaves from northern states.
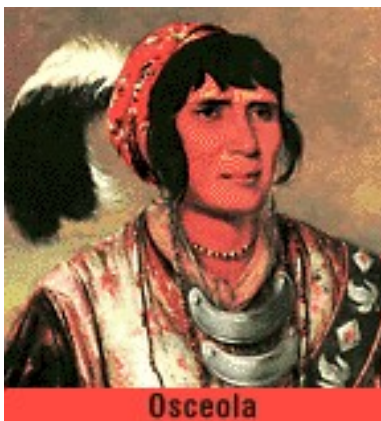
Osceola

Among Florida's native population, the name of Osceola has remained familiar after more than a century and a half. Osceola was a Seminole war leader who refused to leave his homeland in Florida. Seminoles, already noted for their fighting abilities, won the respect of U.S. soldiers for their bravery, fortitude, and ability to adapt to changing circumstances during the **Second Seminole War (1835–42). This war, the most significant of the three conflicts between Indian people and U.S. troops in Florida, began over the question of whether Seminoles should be moved westward across the Mississippi River into what is now Oklahoma.**

Under President Andrew Jackson, the U.S. government spent $20 million and the lives of many U.S. soldiers, Indian people, and U.S. citizens to force the removal of the Seminoles. In the end, the outcome was not as the federal government had planned. Some Indians migrated

"voluntarily." Some were captured and sent west under military guard; and others escaped into the Everglades, where they made a life for themselves away from contact with whites.

Today, reservations occupied by Florida's Indian people exist at Immokalee, Hollywood, Brighton (near the city of Okeechobee), and along the Big Cypress Swamp. In addition to the Seminole people, Florida also has a separate Miccosukee tribe.

By 1840 white Floridians were concentrating on developing the territory and gaining statehood. The population had reached 54,477 people, with African American slaves making up almost one-half of the population. Steamboat navigation was well established on the Apalachicola and St. Johns Rivers, and railroads were planned.

Florida now was divided informally into three areas: East Florida, from the Atlantic Ocean to the Suwannee River; Middle Florida, between the Suwannee and the Apalachicola Rivers; and West Florida, from the Apalachicola to the Perdido River. The southern area of the territory (south of present-day Gainesville) was sparsely settled by whites. The territory's economy was based on agriculture. Plantations were concentrated in Middle Florida, and their owners established the political tone for all of Florida until after the Civil War.

Statehood

Florida became the twenty-seventh state in the United States on March 3, 1845.

William D. Moseley was elected the new state's first governor, and David Levy Yulee, one of Florida's leading proponents for statehood, became a U.S. Senator. **By 1850 the population had grown to 87,445, including about 39,000 African American slaves and 1,000 free blacks.**

The slavery issue began to dominate the affairs of the new state. Most Florida voters—who were white males, ages twenty-one years or older—did not oppose slavery. However, they were concerned about the growing feeling against it in the North, and during the 1850s they viewed the new anti-slavery Republican party with suspicion. **In the 1860 presidential election, no Floridians voted for Abraham Lincoln, although this Illinois Republican won at the national level. Shortly after his election, a special convention drew up an ordinance that allowed Florida to secede from the Union on January 10, 1861.** Within several weeks, Florida joined other southern states to form the Confederate States of America.

Civil War and Reconstruction

During the Civil War, Florida was not ravaged as several other southern states were. Indeed, no decisive battles were fought on Florida soil. While Union forces occupied many coastal towns and forts, the interior of the state remained in Confederate hands.

Florida provided an estimated 15,000 troops and significant amounts of supplies— including salt, beef, pork, and cotton—to the Confederacy, but more than 2,000 Floridians, both African American and white, joined the Union army. Confederate and foreign merchant ships slipped through the Union navy blockade along the coast, bringing in needed supplies from overseas ports. Tallahassee was the only southern capital east of the Mississippi River to avoid capture during the war, spared by southern victories at Olustee (1864) and Natural Bridge (1865). **Ultimately, the South was defeated, and federal troops occupied Tallahassee on May 10, 1865.**

Before the Civil War, Florida had been well on its way to becoming another of the southern cotton states. Afterward, the lives of many residents changed. The ports of Jacksonville and Pensacola again flourished due to the demand for lumber and forest products to rebuild the nation's cities. Those who had been slaves were declared free. Plantation owners tried to regain prewar levels of production by hiring former slaves to raise and pick cotton. However, such programs did not work well, and much of the land came under cultivation by tenant farmers and sharecroppers, both African American and white.

Beginning in 1868, the federal government instituted a congressional program of "reconstruction" in Florida and the other southern states. During this period, Republican officeholders tried to enact sweeping changes, many of which were aimed at improving conditions for African Americans.

At the time of the 1876 presidential election, federal troops still occupied Florida. The state's Republican government and recently enfranchised African American voters helped to put Rutherford B. Hayes in the White House. However, Democrats gained control of enough state offices to end the years of Republican rule and prompt the removal of federal troops the following year. A series of political battles in the state left African Americans with little voice in their government.

Florida Development

During the final quarter of the nineteenth century, large-scale commercial agriculture in Florida, especially cattle-raising, grew in importance. Industries such as cigar manufacturing took root in the immigrant communities of the state.

Potential investors became interested in enterprises that extracted resources from the water and land. These extractive operations were as widely diverse as sponge harvesting in Tarpon

Springs and phosphate mining in the southwestern part of the state. The Florida citrus industry grew rapidly, despite occasional freezes and economic setbacks. The development of industries throughout the state prompted the construction of roads and railroads on a large scale.

Beginning in the 1870s, residents from northern states visited Florida as tourists to enjoy the state's natural beauty and mild climate. Steamboat tours on Florida's winding rivers were a popular attraction for these visitors.

The growth of Florida's transportation industry had its origins in 1855, when the state legislature passed the Internal Improvement Act. Like legislation passed by several other states and the federal government, Florida's act offered cheap or free public land to investors, particularly those interested in transportation. The act, and other legislation like it, had its greatest effect in the years between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I. During this period, many railroads were constructed throughout the state by companies owned by Henry Flagler and Henry B. Plant, who also built lavish hotels near their railroad lines. The Internal Improvement Act stimulated the initial efforts to drain the southern portion of the state in order to convert it to farmland.

These development projects had far-reaching effects on the agricultural, manufacturing, and extractive industries of late-nineteenth-century Florida. The citrus industry especially benefitted, since it was now possible to pick oranges in south Florida; put them on a train heading north; and eat them in Baltimore, Philadelphia, or New York in less than a week.

In 1898 national attention focused on Florida, as the Spanish-American War began. The port city of Tampa served as the primary staging area for U.S. troops bound for the war in Cuba. Many Floridians supported the Cuban peoples' desire to be free of Spanish colonial rule.

By the turn of the century, Florida's population and per capita wealth were increasing rapidly; the potential of the "Sunshine State" appeared endless. By the end of World War I, land developers had descended on this virtual gold mine. With more Americans owning automobiles, it became commonplace to vacation in Florida. Many visitors stayed on, and exotic projects sprang up in southern Florida. Some people moved onto land made from drained swamps. Others bought canal-crossed tracts through what had been dry land. The real estate developments quickly attracted buyers, and land in Florida was sold and resold. Profits and prices for many developers reached inflated levels.

The Great Depression in Florida

Florida's economic bubble burst in 1926, when money and credit ran out, and banks and investors abruptly stopped trusting the "paper" millionaires. **Severe hurricanes swept through the state in the 1926 and 1928, further damaging Florida's economy.**

By the time the Great Depression began in the rest of the nation in 1929, Floridians had already become accustomed to economic hardship.

In 1929 the Mediterranean fruit fly invaded the state, and the citrus industry suffered. A quarantine was established, and troops set up roadblocks and checkpoints to search vehicles for any contraband citrus fruit. **Florida's citrus production was cut by about sixty percent.**

State government began to represent a larger proportion of its citizens. **Female citizens won the right to vote in 1920, when the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution became law**. In 1937, the requirement that voters pay a "poll tax" was repealed, allowing poor African American and white Floridians to have a greater voice in government. **In 1944 the U.S. Supreme Court outlawed a system of all-white primary elections that had limited the right of African Americans to vote.**

World War II and Post-War Boom

World War II spurred economic development in Florida. Because of its year-round mild climate, the state became a major training center for soldiers, sailors, and aviators of the United States and its allies. Highway and airport construction accelerated so that, by war's end, Florida had an up-to-date transportation network ready for use by residents and the visitors who seemed to arrive in an endless stream.

World War II Training Camp, Miami

One of the most significant trends of the postwar era has been steady population growth, resulting from large migrations to the state from within the U.S. and from countries throughout the western hemisphere, notably Cuba and Haiti. Florida is now the fourth most populous state in the nation.

The people who make up Florida's diverse population have worked to make the Sunshine State a place where all citizens have equal rights under the law. Since the 1950s, Florida's public education system and public places have undergone great changes. African American citizens, joined by Governor LeRoy Collins and other white supporters, fought to end racial discrimination in schools and other institutions.

Since World War II, Florida's economy also has become more diverse. Tourism, cattle, citrus, and phosphate have been joined by a host of new industries that have greatly expanded the numbers of jobs available to residents. Electronics, plastics, construction, real estate, and international banking are among the state's more recently-developed industries.

Several major U.S. corporations have moved their headquarters to Florida. An interstate highway system exists throughout the state, and Florida is home to major international airports. The university and community college system has expanded rapidly, and high-technology industries have grown steadily. The U.S. space program—with its historic launches from Cape Canaveral, lunar landings, and the development of the space shuttle program—has brought much media attention to the state. The citrus industry continues to prosper, despite occasional winter freezes, and tourism also remains important, bolstered by large capital investments. Florida attractions, such as the large theme parks in the Orlando area, bring millions of visitors to the state from across the U.S. and around the world

Today, Floridians study their state's long history to learn more about the lives of the men and women who shaped their exciting past. By learning about our rich and varied heritage, we can draw lessons to help create a better Florida for all of its citizens.

Note:

- 1845 - Florida becomes the 27th state.
- 1861 - Florida secedes from the Union and joins the Confederacy.
- 1868 - Florida is readmitted into the Union.

The Capitol - Tallahassee, FL

The State Capitol, 1824
Photo courtesy of Florida State Archives, photograph of a replica built in 1924.

in Florida's Capitol over the years have reflected the growth of the state. In the early 1820s, legislators transferred government business from St. Augustine to Pensacola for alternating sessions. Travel was hazardous and took almost twenty days - clearly an unsatisfactory arrangement. As a result, Tallahassee was chosen as the capital of American Florida in 1824, primarily because it was the midway point between the two principal cities.

Three log cabins served as Florida's first Capitol. In 1826, a two-story masonry building, 40' X 26', was built. It was to be the wing of a larger sturcture planned for the future. Although this larger portion was started, it was never completed due to financial problems.

The State Capitol, 1830
Photo courtesy of Florida State Archives

As Florida moved toward statehood, the needs of government grew. There arose a demand for a suitable state house or public building for the use of the Territorial Legislature. On March 3, 1839, Congress appropriated $20,000 for the erection of a new Capitol. The old structure was razed immediately, and Florida's government temporarily moved into rented quarters.

The State Capitol as it appeared between 1891 and 1901
Photo courtesy of Florida State Archives

The brick Capitol was completed in 1845, just prior to the installation of the new State government. This structure remains the core of the Old Capitol to the present day.

The capitol remained virtually unchanged during the Civil War years when Tallahassee was the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi to avoid capture by Federal troops.

By the 1880s, Florida suffered growing pains caused by an economic boom and expanding population. By 1891 the Capitol needed thorough repair. The building was repainted, a small cupola was added, and plumbing was installed.

The State Capitol, 1845
Photo courtesy of Florida State Archives

he first major alteration to the Capitol came in 1902 when the addition of two wings provided more room for the growing State government, and the familiar dome was added. This was the last time Florida's government operated under one roof. By 1911 State government was moving to other buildings. Further additions to the Capitol were made in 1923, 1936, and 1947.

Florida's population continued to grow as did its need for government services. In 1972 the Legislature authorized money for a new Capitol Complex to include House and Senate chambers and offices, along with a twenty-two-story executive office building completed in 1977.

Restoration of the old Capitol became an issue in 1978 with the then Governor Reubin O'D. Askew and House Speaker Donald Tucker favoring outright demolition. Luckily, the old Capitol building was saved and refurbished, being reopened to the public in 1982.

SOURCE: www.floridacapitol.myflorida.com

Florida Quick Facts

Geographical facts

- Total Area - **58,560 square miles**
- Total land area - **54,136 square miles**
- Total water area - **4,424 square miles**
- Rank among states in total area - **22nd**
- Length north and south - **447 miles (St. Marys River to Key West)**
- Width east and west - **361 miles (Atlantic Ocean to Perdido River)**
- Distance from Pensacola to Key West - **792 miles (by road)**
- Highest Natural Point - **345 feet**
- Geographic Center - **12 miles northwest of Brooksville, Hernando County**
- Coastline - **1,197 statute miles**
- Tidal shoreline (general) - **2,276 statute miles**
- Beaches - **663 miles**
- Longest River - **St. Johns, 273 miles**
- Largest Lake - **Lake Okeechobee, 700 square miles**
- Largest county - **Palm Beach, 2,578 square miles**
- Smallest county - **Union, 245 square miles**
- Number of lakes (greater than 10 acres) - **about 7,700**
- Number of first-magnitude springs - **33**
- Number of islands (greater than 10 acres) - **about 4,500**

Historical facts

- First permanent European settlement - **1565, St. Augustine, by Spain**
- Acquired from Spain as a U.S. Territory - **1821**
- Admitted as 27th state of the U.S. - **March 3, 1845**

Current facts

- Capital - **Tallahassee**
- Population 2020 (estimate) - **20,216,600 (Rank 4th)**
- Population 2015 (estimate) - **19,421,200 (Rank 4th)**
- Population 2012 (estimate) - **19,074,434 (Rank 4th)**
- Population 2010 - **18,801,310 (Rank 4th)**
- Population 2000 - **15,982,378**
- Population 1990 - **12,937,926**
- Population growth rate 2010-2015 (estimate) - **3.3%**
- Population growth rate 2000-2010 - **17.6%**
- Most populous metropolitan area 2012 - Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Pompano Beach: **5,657,804** (estimate - Ranked 8th in the US)
- Most populous metropolitan area 2010 - Miami-Ft. Lauderdale-Pompano Beach: **5,564,635**
- Most populous County 2020 - Miami-Dade County: **2,722,900 (estimate)**
- Most populous County 2015 - Miami-Dade County: **2,600,900 (estimate)**
- Most populous County 2010 - Miami-Dade County: **2,496,435 (estimate)**
- Number of counties - **67**
- Form of government - **Governor and cabinet consisting of Attorney General, Chief Financial Officer and Commissioner of Agriculture**
- State sales tax - **6%**
- State income tax - **None**
- Legislature - **120 house districts, 40 senate districts, 25 congressional districts**

Florida State History   *simplified version*

Native Americans

People have inhabited the land of Florida for thousands of years. When Europeans first arrived, Native American tribes lived throughout the land. Some of these tribes included the Apalachee in the Florida panhandle, the Calusa in the south, the Mayaimi who lived around Lake Okeechobee, and the Tocobaga who lived in the middle of the state. Many of these original tribes died out due to diseases brought by the Europeans.

Europeans Arrive

The first European to visit Florida was Spanish explorer [Juan Ponce de Leon](#) who arrived in 1513. He was searching for the legendary Fountain of Youth. He returned again in 1521 with around 200 settlers hoping to establish a colony. However, he was attacked by the local natives and died later from a wound in his leg. Other Spanish explorers followed hoping to discover gold in the region including Panfilo de Narvaez in 1528 and Hernando de Soto in 1539.

Early Settlers

The first European settlement in Florida was established by French Protestants in 1564. They were led by French explorer Rene de Laudonniere and built Fort Caroline near current day Jacksonville. A year later, in 1565, the Spanish built a fort at St. Augustine. St. Augustine is the oldest permanent settlement in the United States. From there, Catholic priests began to build missions throughout Florida.

Britain and Spain

The Spanish ruled Florida up until 1763. After the Spanish lost the Seven Years' War to the British, they gave up control of Florida. The British ruled the land for the next 20 years until the end of the American Revolution in 1783. At that time Spain regained control of Florida as a result of the Treaty of Paris.

Seminole Wars

In the 1800s, the [Seminole](#) Indians of Florida fought a number of wars with the United States Army. The First Seminole War took place in 1817 when [Andrew Jackson](#) led an invasion into Florida against the Seminoles. The invasion was partly in response to the Seminoles helping runaway slaves escape from their owners. After this invasion the United States took control of part of Florida.

The Second Seminole War was fought from 1835 to 1842 and the Third Seminole War from 1855 to 1858. These wars were fought because the Seminole did not want to give up their lands and move to Indian Territory.

Becoming a State

The United States took control of Florida from Spain as part of the Adams-Onis Treaty of 1819. In 1821, the Territory of Florida was established and Andrew Jackson became the first governor of Florida. Florida's population grew over the next several years and soon it was large enough to become a state. However, [slavery](#) was allowed in Florida and many northern states did not want another slave state to join the Union. As part of a compromise, Iowa was admitted as a free state at the same time and, on March 3, 1845, Florida became the 27th state.

Civil War

When Abraham Lincoln became president in 1861, Florida seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy. During the Civil War, Florida served as a supply route for the Confederate Army. Although there were few major battles in Florida, there were many smaller skirmishes as the Union attempted to blockade the state to prevent supplies from reaching the South. The only major battle was the Battle of Olustee fought in 1864. After losing the Civil War, Florida was readmitted into the Union in 1868.

Florida Timeline

- 1513 - Spanish explorer Juan Ponce de Leon is the first European to visit Florida.
- 1539 - Hernando de Soto explores the region searching for gold.
- 1565 - The city of St. Augustine is established as the oldest permanent settlement in the United States.
- 1763 - The British gain control of Florida as a result of the Seven Years' War.
- 1783 - The Spanish regain Florida as part of the Treaty of Paris.
- 1817 - The First Seminole War occurs.
- 1819 - The United States gains control of Florida through the Adams-Onis Treaty.
- 1821 - The Territory of Florida is established.
- 1835 - The Second Seminole War begins.
- 1845 - Florida becomes the 27th state.
- 1861 - Florida secedes from the Union and joins the Confederacy.
- 1864 - The Battle of Olustee is fought.
- 1868 - Florida is readmitted into the Union.
- 1961 - NASA's first manned spaceflight takes off from Cape Canaveral.
- 1971 - Disney's Magic Kingdom theme park opens in Orlando.
- 1986 - The [Space Shuttle Challenger explodes](#) shortly after take off.
- 1992 - [Hurricane](#) Andrew destroys much of southern Florida.

Old City Cemetery – Tallahassee, FL

Most of the material in this overview of the Old City Cemetery is taken from a series of publications of the former Historic Tallahassee Preservation Board. In the early 1990s, The Board undertook an evaluation and restoration (assisted by Sass Conservation, of New York City, and the Center for Historic Cemeteries Preservation) of many of the cemetery's treasures.

Early History

Old City Cemetery is the oldest public cemetery in Tallahassee. It was established in 1829 by the Territorial Legislative Council and acquired by the city in 1840. The ground was laid out in its system of squares and lots in 1841 when a violent yellow fever epidemic swept the city and regulations were required to assure order and sanitation to protect the public.

When the cemetery was established, it was located outside the City boundaries on the far side of a 200-foot-wide clearing that surrounded the town to protect it from Indian attacks. Today, Old City Cemetery is one of Tallahassee's most distinctive historic sites. It is the final resting place for many of the men and women who contributed to the development of Tallahassee and the state of Florida. Because it was Tallahassee's only public burying ground (nearby St. John's Episcopal Cemetery was established for its congregation in 1840), Old City Cemetery represents a cross-section of Tallahassee's people during the 19th century -- slaves and planters, governors and store clerks, veterans of wars and victims of yellow fever are all buried here.

Segregated Burials

When established, the cemetery was segregated. White burials were restricted to the eastern half of the ground (ironically, along what is now known as Martin Luther King, Jr., Boulevard), and slaves and free people of color were buried in the western section (along present-day Macomb Street). After the Civil War Battle of Natural Bridge, Union casualties were buried in the colored section, and Confederates in the white.

The segregation was not only physical, but administrative. The ordinance establishing the cemetery (published August 21, 1841, in the Florida Sentinel) said:

It shall further be the duty of the superintendent to keep two separate books, in one of which he shall fairly and accurately register the interment of white persons, and in the other the interment of all negroes and persons of color in this burial ground.... The latter book... shall distinguish between free persons of color from slaves, and stating the date of interment, the name of the person interred, and if a slave, the owner's name, the age, place of nativity, time of residence in the city, and the disease or casualty of which the person died.

At present a pathway about six feet wide indicates the old dividing line between the white and colored sections of the cemetery. A former caretaker of the cemetery, Mr. Sneed Hall, once

recalled that in the 1950s a hogwire fence (partially screened from view by plantings of camphor trees and bamboo, some of which still remain in the southern section) ran from north to south down the center of the burying ground.

(For further information about segregated burial practices in Tallahassee, some of which persisted well into the 20th Century, see the history of Greenwood Cemetery.)

Various religious denominations had designated plots, although today there are few indications of the Presbyterian and Catholic areas. The Jewish section was originally established in 1890 in "the first 2 lots north of the main Eastern entrance"; however this section turned out to be unsuitable and it was relocated to the western edge of the northeast quadrant of the cemetery, near the crest of the hill. There is a large obelisk there with the Star of David over the inscription, but it is believed that most of the burials at the turn of the century were later moved to Jacksonville.

Cattle and Hogs

The cemetery seems to have been a desolate place during the Territorial and early statehood years. Contemporary newspaper accounts from the period remark about cattle and hogs running over the graves and often complain of the rough and unkempt appearance of the site. In 1834, one Tallahassee resident was so dismayed about the way burials were conducted that he wrote a letter to the editor suggesting that the City Council provide a one-horse hearse to replace "the custom of bringing the coffin in a rough cart."

The same writer also deplored the "very insecure and objectionable manner of lowering the silent tenant to his last sad dwelling, by merely slipping ropes underneath the coffin. This practice must always result in distracting the attention from the solemn services of the grave, in exciting painful anxiety for the living and the dead, and sometimes in accidents agonizing to the mourners and appalling to the spectators."

Grave Markers

Tallahassee was a frontier town during its first years and residents had to "make do" with what was available to them. Many early graves were marked with wooden head and footboards, which deteriorated over time.

The grave markers in Old City Cemetery are memorials to those buried here. They are also artistic expressions that reflect changing cultural attitudes toward death and resurrection. The early markers that have survived are of marble and usually have simple designs and inscriptions that express grief and mourning. Later markers reflect the Victorian period's interest in classical art and architecture. Unfortunately, because of the difficulty and expense of maintaining and repairing these historic markers, no stone rubbings are permitted in Old City Cemetery.

SOURCE: https://www.talgov.com/realestate/res-coc-oldcity.aspx