

Summary: Florida Enters the Union

The Road to Statehood

By 1840, more than 50,000 people lived in the Florida Territory. Florida's government offered free land to new settlers. Most settlers moved to the rich farmland of Tallahassee. Others settled in East Florida around St. Augustine. West Florida grew slowly.

Many settlers wanted Florida to become a state. That way, they could buy large areas of land from the federal government. The government would also give money for land improvements and railroads. Florida would have representatives who could vote in the federal government.

Florida did not have enough people to become a state. Florida leaders met anyway to write Florida's first constitution. When it had enough people, Florida became the twenty-seventh state in the Union.

The Twenty-Seventh State

Florida and Iowa both became states in 1845. At this time, half of the Union's states allowed slavery. They were called "slave" states. The other half did not allow slavery. They were called "free" states.

People wanted to keep this balance. Florida entered the Union as a slave state and Iowa as a free state. The balance stayed the same. If only one of these states had joined, that side would have had more votes in the federal government. That side could have passed laws to force other states to accept their ideas about slavery.

In Florida's first elections, voters chose James D. Westcott and David Levy to represent them in the federal government. Florida's government had three main parts: the legislature, the governor, and the courts.

Voters chose William D. Moseley to be Florida's first elected governor. The governor enforced the laws. The courts made sure that the laws were fair and followed the state's constitution.

Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

federal *adjective*, describes a national government which shares power with smaller regions, or states

representative *noun*, a person chosen by a group to speak or act for them

constitution *noun*, a written plan that explains the purposes of government and tells how it works

election *noun*, a vote in which people choose a person to represent them

legislature *noun*, the group of people who make laws

After You Read

REVIEW Why did Florida want to become a state?

Highlight the paragraph that tells the answer.

REVIEW How did Florida and Iowa's entry into the Union keep the balance in the United States

government? What would have happened if only one of the states joined? Underline two sentences that tell the answer.