

Summary: The Thirty-first State

Reasons for a State

When California became part of the United States in 1848, it did not become a state. The governor was a U.S. Army officer. Most of California's pueblos were still governed by the alcaldes appointed by Mexico's government. After the Gold Rush, newcomers greatly outnumbered Californios. Since many newcomers were from the United States, they wanted the same rights and freedoms they had in their home state. They wanted California to be a state, so they could vote for leaders to represent them in the U.S. Congress. Californios hoped the land would be declared an official territory. The governor agreed only that California needed a better system of government.

A Constitutional Convention

In 1849, the governor General Riley called for a convention to write a constitution. Americans and Californios voted for delegates to the constitutional convention. The delegates created a state constitution to outline how the people of California would be governed. They decided that only white men would have voting rights. Delegates also agreed to outlaw slavery. The new Constitution began with a "Declaration of Rights" that included the right to happiness and safety. California's Constitution included the rights of married women, not yet found in any other state. The delegates decided California's eastern border should be along the Sierra Nevada and Colorado River.

Statehood

When the new constitution was ready, the delegates sent a request for statehood to the U.S. Congress. At that time, there were 15 free states and 15 slave states in the United States. People from the southern slave states did not want California to come in and upset the balance. After almost a year, Congress reached the Compromise of 1850. The southern states accepted California as a free state. In return, northern states agreed to a law that made it illegal to help slaves escape to free states. The Compromise changed the lives of many former slaves. California became the 31st state on September 9, 1850.



Before You Read

Find and underline each vocabulary word.

convention *noun*, a meeting that brings people together for a common purpose

delegate *noun*, a representative chosen to speak or act for others

compromise *noun*, an agreement that gives something to both sides



After You Read

REVIEW Why did many people in California want to form a state? Draw a box around the sentences that tell why.

REVIEW What was the purpose of California's Constitution? Underline the sentence that explains why California needed a constitution.

REVIEW What were two rights included in the California Constitution? Highlight sentences that list a right given in the constitution.