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Florida History Timeline

Important Dates, Events, and Milestones in Florida History

Offers a chronological timeline of important dates, events, and milestones in Florida history.

Florida, which joined the union as the 27th state in 1845, is nicknamed the Sunshine State and known for its balmy climate and natural beauty.

Indians entered Florida from the north 10,000 to 12,000 years ago, and had reached the end of the peninsula by 1400 BC. As they grew in number, the Indians developed more complex economic and social organization. In northeastern Florida and nearby Georgia, they apparently invented pottery independently about 2000 BC, some 800 years earlier than any other Indian group in North America.

In north Florida, an agricultural and hunting economy organized around village life was typical by this time. South of Tampa Bay and Cape Canaveral, Indians lived mostly along the coast and relied heavily on wild plants and on a large variety of aquatic and land animals for meat. The southern groups did not practice agriculture until about 450 BC, when they began to plant corn in villages around Lake Okeechobee.

15th Century Florida History Timeline

1497-1514 Europeans see Florida for the first time. A Spanish map of 1502 depicts a peninsula like Florida. Peter Martyr writes in 1514 of a land near the Bahamas with water of eternal youth.

16th Century Florida History Timeline

1513 - In 1513, Spaniard Juan Ponce de Leon became the European to explore Florida. He claimed the region for Spain but was unable to establish a colony due to Indian attacks.

1539 - Hernando de Soto landed in the Tampa Bay. He explored central and northern Florida on his way to the Mississippi River.

1542 - De Soto died near the Mississippi River. Survivors of his expedition eventually reached Mexico.

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.

1564 - French missionaries settled Fort Caroline near present-day Jacksonville in 1564. The following year, Spanish troops arrived and drove the French out of Florida. They established St. Augustine, the first permanent European settlement.

18th Century Florida History Timeline

1763 - 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.

1783 - During the Revolutionary War, Spanish troops entered Florida and repossessed the land. Settlers attempted revolution several times against Spain.

19th Century Florida History Timeline

1812 - During the War of 1812, Spain allowed Britain to use Pensacola as a naval base.

1814 - American troops captured the base in Pensacola.

1818 - 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.

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

1822 - the Florida Territory was organized and settlers entered by the thousands. The US government offered land in Oklahoma to the Seminole Indians who lived in Florida. Some refused to leave and fought for their lands.

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.

1858 - The Seminole Wars killed many of the Indians and forced all but a few out of Florida.

1845 - Florida was admitted to the Union as a slave state on March 3, 1845.

1861-1865 - Conflict over states rights led to the Civil War (1861-1865). Florida seceded from the Union and joined the Confederacy.

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.

1864 - Although most of Florida's coast was captured, Confederate troops won the Battle of Olustee in 1864 and protected Tallahassee and Florida's interior region. After the war ended, Florida was placed under military control.

1868 - Florida was readmitted to the Union with a new state constitution guaranteeing civil rights and giving blacks the right to vote.

20th Century Florida History Timeline

1912 - Florida grew immensely during the early 1900s. Railroads expanded to Key West in 1912, opening new land for development. Swamps were drained and the growing tourist industry attracted people from all over the world. Citrus groves expanded throughout northern and south-central parts of the state. Florida's population grew considerably at this time.

1920 - Depression hit the economy in Florida during the 1920s. Hurricanes swept through the state destroying property and killing hundreds of people.

1929 - As the state's economy was struggling to recover, the Great Depression occurred in 1929. Banks closed, tourism stopped, and thousands lost their jobs. The US government helped to provide jobs by developing Florida's natural resources.

World War II (1939-1945) provided several government jobs as military bases were established along the coast of Florida. After the war, many who had served in the military remained in Florida. Tourism continued as the state's leading industry and new industries diversified the economy, such as chemical, computers, electronics, and oceanography.

1945 - 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 US Senator.

1950 - Cape Canaveral became a space and rocket center.

1954 - The US Supreme Court ruled segregation of public schools unconstitutional.

1959 -

- Racial problems increased. Florida began integration.
- Fidel Castro takes over as leader of Cuba and the exodus of Cuban refugees to Miami begins.

1960 -

- - Thousands of Cubans fled Cuba and settled in Florida. By the late 1960s, most public schools had integrated and several new universities were built.
- The Federal census ranks Florida 10th in the nation with a population of 4,951,560.

1961 -

- The Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba fails.
- There is a successful launch of astronauts from Cape Canaveral: Navy Commander Alan Shepard on May 5 and Air Force Capt. Virgil Grissom on July 21 for suborbital flights down the Atlantic Missile Range. The Cape is selected as the launching site for a manned lunar landing program. The Census Bureau ranks Florida ninth in population.

1962 - The Space Age spreads out from Cape Canaveral's launching base, and influences the state in many ways higher education and industry being among the most important.

1963 - President Lyndon Johnson changes the name Cape Canaveral to Cape Kennedy and renames the installation the John F. Kennedy Space Center in honor of the late president. The Constitution is amended to authorize sale of state bonds to construct buildings at universities, colleges and vocational schools. Voters also approve issuance of bonds to purchase land for conservation purposes. Election of governor and Cabinet is shifted to off-year from Presidential election.

1964 - First classes are held at Florida Atlantic University, Boca Raton, and the University of West Florida is the name given to the institution established at Pensacola. Hurricane Cleo causes property damage estimated at \$115,320,000 but no life is lost.

1965 - The Board of Regents composed of nine members with ultimate nine-year terms, takes over policy-making for the state's institutions of higher learning from the Board of Control. The first US launch of two-man spacecraft with Majors Edward H. White and James McDivitt orbits the earth 62 times.

1966 - The \$700 million Walt Disney World, to be built in the Orlando area is announced. Claude R. Kirk, Jr. is elected the 36th governor of Florida. Kirk is the first Republican governor since Reconstruction. GOP nominees also win three of Florida's 12 seats in the US House of Representatives. Voters approve early-start Legislature with Senate and House organizing on the Tuesday following the November general elections. Previously the Legislature organized in April.

1967 - Repeated efforts by the Legislature to devise an acceptable plan of apportionment ends when a three-judge Federal court draws the boundaries of Senate and House districts and orders new elections. Republicans capture 20 of 48 Senate seats and 39 of 119 House seats.

1968 - The Legislature submits and voters ratify three amendments which combine to give the state an almost new Constitution. The Republicans hold their national convention at Miami Beach the first national gathering of a major political party ever convened in Florida. The first Republican ever elected by popular ballot is sent to the US Senate. There is a statewide teacher walkout.

1969 - With the office reestablished by the revised Constitution the first lieutenant governor since 1889 is appointed. The Legislature reorganizes state government so that over 170 separate agencies become 22 operating departments. On July 16 Apollo 11 lifts off from Cape Kennedy to carry the first men to the moon.

1970 - Democrat Reubin Askew is elected Florida's 37th governor, defeating incumbent Republican Governor Claude Kirk in his bid for a second term. His running-mate Secretary of State Tom Adams, becomes the state's second lieutenant governor under the revised Constitution of 1968.

1971 - Apollo 14 plagued with many troubling incidents, touches down on the Moon 108 hours after blast-off from the Kennedy Space Center. Capt. Alan B. Shepard is in command. President Richard M. Nixon orders a halt to the Cross Florida Barge Canal after \$50 million has been spent on the 107-mile structure. Amtrak begins operation of service into Orlando. Apollo 15 astronauts explore the Moon for three days in a record-breaking flight of 12 days originating from Kennedy Space Center. Walt Disney World opens October 1st. Estimated cost of the facility is between \$500 and \$600 million.

1972 - Apollo 16, despite a guidance malfunction, lands on the Moon for three days of exploration and returns to Earth without further incident. Tropical storm Agnes roars out of the south Atlantic to cause heavy damage along the eastern seaboard northward from Miami. Paula Hawkins becomes the first woman elected to the Florida Public Service Commission.

1973 -

- Miami Dolphins complete undefeated season and win Super Bowl.
- Despite fuel shortages in the latter part of the year, Florida sets an all-time record for influx of visitors, when 25.5 million people visit the Sunshine State. After seven and one-half years and nearly 260,000 refugees, the "freedom flights" from Cuba come to an end on April 7th. The airlifts, bringing refugees into Miami at the rate of 48,000 a year, help transform the ethnic makeup of Dade County by adding at least 100,000 Cubans to the 150,000 already there.

1974 - Reubin Askew becomes the first Governor to be elected to successive four- year terms. The Legislature creates an ethics commission to oversee public officers and employees. It also enacts legislation for collective bargaining by public employees.

1975 - The state jobless rate hits a 25-year high in January at 8.3 percent and eventually unemployment reaches 9.3 percent. Governor Askew appoints Joseph W. Hatchett to the Supreme Court, the first black justice in the court's history.

1976 - Former Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter tops Alabama Governor George C. Wallace and 10 other Democrats in Florida's Presidential Preference Primary, giving Carter's campaign impetus which leads to his party's nomination for president. In the same primary, Florida Republicans prefer President Gerald R. Ford over former California Governor Ronald Reagan. Carter garners 51.93 percent of Florida's general election vote.

1977 - Severe cold devastates citrus and vegetable plants. This causes President Carter to proclaim 34 counties disaster areas. The US Corps of Engineers recommends against resumption of construction on Cross Florida Barge Canal.

1978 - Jesse J McCrary, Jr. is appointed Secretary of State by Governor Reubin Askew on July 19, the second black to serve as Secretary of State and as a member of the Cabinet. Miami businessman and former State Senator Bob Graham wins election as Florida's 38th governor.

1979 - Miami Beach reports a record resort tax collection for its fiscal year. Taxes received from hotel rooms, food and beverages reach a record high of \$3,727,380. It is the twentieth anniversary of Busch Gardens in Tampa. The grand opening of the Museum of Botany and Fine Arts at the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota marks the first time science and art are combined in such a setting.

1980 -

- Race riots tear apart city. The Mariel boatlift brings 140,000 Cubans to Florida.
- The Miami Seaquarium celebrates its 25th Anniversary. Tampa opens its own \$6.2 million water theme park, Adventure Island. A bill raising the drinking age from 18 to 19 is passed, however, all military personnel are excluded.

1981 - The first manned space shuttle launches are made from Kennedy Space Center, with launch schedules to increase in the year ahead. Unmanned rockets with payloads are scheduled approximately every month by NASA from the KSC launch pads.

1982 - The Florida Legislature completes a difficult reapportionment after an extended session. Gov. Bob Graham is reelected for a second term. The \$800 million EPCOT Center opens at Walt Disney World.

1983 - The space shuttle Challenger launches its first 5-member crew and the first American woman, Sally Ride, into space from Kennedy Space Center. Thirty-eight overseas highway bridges from Key Largo to Key West are completed under the Florida Keys Bridge Replacement Program.

1984 - The Sunshine Skyway Bridge over Tampa Bay is under reconstruction. It is expected to be completed in 1986 at a cost of \$215 million. Donald Duck's "50th Anniversary Celebration" is held in June at Walt Disney World. Busch Gardens celebrates its 25th anniversary. The Miami Metro Rail, the only inner city, elevated rail system in Florida, begins service in May.

1985 - Florida's state park system marks its 50th anniversary. Begun during the Depression with nine parks, the system now includes 92 park and recreation areas. DeSoto Trail was officially dedicated during May in Inverness. The Kennedy Space Center's Visitor Center is renamed Spaceport USA. Two well-preserved, intact human brains are discovered by Glenn Doran, archaeologist at Florida State University when he uncovered the 7,000-plus-year-old skulls in the swamps near Titusville.

1986 - The Kennedy Space Center witnesses America's worst space tragedy when the space shuttle "Challenger" explodes after takeoff. All seven astronauts aboard are killed. Treasure hunter Mel Fisher continues to salvage vast amounts of gold and silver from his discovery of the Spanish galleon "Nuestra Senora de Atocha" which sank in 1622 during a hurricane off Key West. The television series "Miami Vice" continues to capture the nation's imagination, revitalizing interest and tourism for South Florida. Walt

Disney World breaks ground for a major movie and television production studio to be constructed in Orlando.

1987 - Bob Martinez is the first person of Spanish ancestry to become governor of Florida. Calvin Jones, state archaeologist finds what is believed to be the site of Hernando de Soto's 1539-40 camp in Tallahassee. US Census Bureau estimates indicate that Florida has surpassed Pennsylvania to become the fourth most populous state in the nation. The ranking will not become official until the Bureau publishes its report in early 1988. It is predicted that Florida will be the third most populous state by the year 2000.

1988 - Florida once again becomes the center for America's space program. Regular space shuttle flights resume in October for the first time since the "Challenger" disaster in 1986. Two Republicans capture posts in the Florida Cabinet in the general election. Jim Smith is elected Secretary of State and Tom Gallagher takes over as State Insurance Commissioner. This is the first time since the Reconstruction Era of the 1870s that Republicans have won any statewide office other than governor. Floridians now have a state-operated lottery which gives away some of the largest prizes in the nation. An international team, using experimental technology, completes the world's deepest cave-diving expedition at Wakulla Springs in north Florida.

1989 - US Representative Claude Pepper, dies in May. Genetic testing reveals that a Wauchula hospital a decade ago accidentally switched babies belonging to Sarasota and Pennsylvania couples, setting off a legal battle. Devastating cold front hits state in December, closing airports and interstates and causing statewide power outages.

1990 - Panama's governor Manuel Noriega is brought to Miami in January for trial on drug charges. Joe Robbie, Miami Dolphins founder, dies in January. Flooding Panhandle rivers in March force evacuation of 2,000 homes. Owners/players contract dispute delays spring training baseball season. St. Petersburg's Suncoast Dome opens in March. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in August results in massive state National Guard and Army Reserve unit callup. Lotto in September awards record \$106 million jackpot. State gasoline prices in September soar to seven-year high. Democrat Lawton Chiles soundly trounces Republican incumbent Bob Martinez in governor's race. Outgoing Governor Martinez in November was named the nation's drug czar. In December, Tampa is awarded franchise team in the National Hockey League.

1991 - Lawton Chiles in January is sworn in as state's 41st governor. Miami-based Eastern Airlines in January announces closing due to financial losses. Former Governor LeRoy Collins, 82, dies in March. US Senator Bruce Smathers in April donates record \$20 million to University of Florida library system. In May Legislature approves \$29.3 billion state budget, including \$164 million in new taxes. At Governor Chiles' request Legislature in May creates new Department of Elderly Affairs. Also in May, Queen Elizabeth II visits Miami and Tampa, and confers honorary knighthood on Tampa resident Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf. Five Navy bombers found by treasure salvagers are determined not to be the "Lost Squadron" of Bermuda Triangle fame that went down in 1945 off the coast of Florida. Miami and Denver are awarded new national major league baseball franchises. The 1990 Federal Census puts Florida's population at 12,937,926, a 34 percent increase from 1980.

1992 -

- Homestead and adjacent South Florida are devastated on August 24 by the costliest natural disaster in American history, Hurricane Andrew, demanding billions in aid. There were 58 deaths directly or indirectly related to Andrew. The hurricane destroyed 25,000 homes and damaged 10,000 others. Twenty-two thousand Federal troops were deployed. Shelters housed 80,000 persons.
- First elections since Florida gained four additional seats in the US House of Representatives saw Cubans and Afro-Americans seated. Lincoln Diaz-Balart, Cuban-born, joined Ileana Ros-

Lehtinen, the first Cuban, elected to the Florida House in 1982, the Florida Senate in 1986, and the US House in 1989. Among Afro-Americans elected to Congress was Carrie Meek of Miami. Sixty-six in 1993, her political career saw her elected first to the Florida House of Representatives, the Florida Senate, and the US House of Representatives.

1993 - Janet Reno, State Attorney for Dade County (Miami) for 15 years named Attorney General of the US by President Bill Clinton, the first woman to so serve in US history. Although a pro-choice Democrat she managed to win reelection four times in a conservative stronghold, the last time without opposition

1996 -

- Miami turns 100.
- Recently, Florida continues to be one of the fastest growing states in the country. The economy still depends greatly on tourism, but expanding industries in business and manufacturing are strengthening its growth potential. State leaders are working on problems created due to huge population increases and environmental concerns.

21st Century Florida History Timeline

2000 -

- Six-year old Elian Gonzalez taken from relatives' home by federal officers; reunited with his father and returned to Cuba;
- Florida Supreme Court ordered recount of presidential election ballots, George Bush declared winner

2001 -

- Racer Dale Earnhardt killed in accident at Daytona 500
- anthrax bacteria found at offices of Florida magazine publishers

2003 -

- Space Shuttle Columbia destroyed upon reentry, all seven crewmembers killed;
- Tampa Bay Buccaneers won Super Bowl;
- plane hijacked in Cuba landed in Key West;
- boiler on cruise ship exploded, killed four, injured 21;
- Marlins won World Series;
- Orlando Seals won Atlantic Coast Hockey League President's Cup

2004 - Four hurricanes struck Florida causing extensive damage, killed at least 19

2005 -

- Florida struck twice by hurricanes; after long delay the Discovery space shuttle launched
- Miami Heat won NBA finals
- FBI arrested seven people in Miami who were planning to blow up Chicago's Sears Tower

2007 - Severe thunderstorms and tornado killed 19, caused major damages

2010 - Boat used for human smuggling capsized off Florida coast, 10 killed, unknown number missing

2011 - Space shuttle Atlantis final launch lifted from Cape Canaveral

2012 - Shooting death of unarmed black teenager sparked protests, demands for shooter to be arrested

2013 April 2 - Viva Florida 500, the celebration of 500 years of European discovery by Ponce de Leon