



Introduction

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ON JULY 17, 1821, Spain transferred control of its colony of West Florida to the United States. In a similar ceremony a week earlier, Spain had turned over East Florida, ending over 300 years of Spanish influence in the territory that now belonged to the young American republic. The approaching bicentennial of this event in July 2021 presents an opportunity to explore how Florida has been governed over the last 200 years through the lives of the men who held the governorship from 1821 to 2019 (as of 2019, only men have served in the office). There have been numerous histories of the state and biographies of individual governors. In addition, such publications as *The Florida Handbook* and a few other reference works contain biographical sketches of most of the governors, including a recently published photographic study. There has never been, however, a published work devoted to an in-depth examination of all of Florida's chief executives. This volume attempts to fill that gap.¹

The question of scope was the first consideration in the conception of the work. Beginning with Pedro Menéndez de Avilés in 1565 and ending with José María Callava in 1821, there were approximately eighty-one full, acting, and interim Spanish and British colonial governors of Florida. When the

British acquired Florida in 1763, they divided the colony along the Apalachicola River into two colonies, East and West Florida, with separate governors for each area. When the Spanish returned in 1783, they kept the same administrative division. While the United States and American settlers had made significant inroads into Spanish East and West Florida before 1818, when Gen. Andrew Jackson conquered the Spanish colonies, the end of Spanish rule in 1821 divides Florida's colonial past from its American future. This division, the length and complexity of the colonial period, and the existence of a large number of expert histories of the era discouraged a combined history of Florida's colonial and American governors.

The next consideration was whether to begin the study in 1845, with Florida statehood and the state's first governor, William D. Moseley, leaving behind Florida's six territorial executives: Andrew Jackson (military commissioner and governor), William Pope DuVal, John Eaton, Richard Keith Call, Robert Raymond Reid, and John Branch. We included them. The careers and personalities of these men mark them as some of the most colorful and influential individuals in Florida's line of governors. Their decisions impacted the formation of Florida's territorial government and influenced the creation

of Florida's first state government embodied in the constitution of 1838.

What about acting governors? Should they be included? Before making that decision, we had to identify those who served as acting governors and what they did. The number of Florida's acting governors is difficult to determine, but at least thirteen men have served in that position: fifteen if you include two Reconstruction "acting governors" whose right to the office was contested. During the territorial period, the secretary of the territory served as acting governor in the governor's absence. Robert Butler was the first acting American governor in Florida. He oversaw the transfer of Spanish East Florida to the United States in a ceremony on July 10, 1821, in St. Augustine in the absence of Andrew Jackson, who carried out the transfer of West Florida in Pensacola on July 17. John R. Bell and William G. D. Worthington succeeded Butler as acting governors in East Florida. George Walton Jr., the secretary for West Florida, served as acting governor in Pensacola after Jackson returned to Tennessee in October 1821. He remained in that post until the arrival of Gov. William P. DuVal in June 1822, which marked the formal end of the dual administration of the territory. Under DuVal's long tenure, three territorial secretaries acted as governor in his absence: George Walton Jr., William M. McCarty, and James D. Westcott Jr. Two other DuVals, John P. DuVal, the governor's brother, and Thomas H. DuVal, the governor's son, served as territorial secretaries and acting governors for brief periods. In December 1835, Acting Governor George K. Walker mustered the territorial militia in reaction to the Seminole attack on the command of Maj. Francis Dade, an attack that launched what became known as the Second Seminole War.

During early statehood (1845–1865), when a governor had been removed from office, died, resigned, or was absent from the state (during the territorial period the governor's

absence from the capital could require an acting governor), the president of the Senate or the speaker of the House of Representatives, in that order, became acting governor. It fell to Abraham K. Allison to serve twice as acting governor during this period. As speaker of the House in 1853, he became acting governor from September 16 to October 3, when both Gov. Thomas Brown and Senate president Robert J. Floyd were out of state. In 1857, Senate president Philip Dell was acting governor while Gov. James E. Broome traveled to Washington, DC. Unlike Allison, who was sworn in as acting governor in 1853, Dell assumed the post without ceremony after a court ruling determined that the post did not require a separate swearing in; the Senate president was in position to act as governor if called on to do so in the governor's absence. Allison assumed the post again, this time as Senate president, on April 1, 1865, when Gov. John Milton died. The collapse of Confederate Florida on May 19, 1865, ended Allison's time in office. Under Union military administration, Florida did not have a chief executive until President Andrew Johnson's appointment of William Marvin as provisional governor on July 13, 1865.²

Florida did not create the office of lieutenant governor until 1865, when William W. J. Kelly became the first person to hold that office under the 1865 constitution. The 1868 constitution continued the position. Three men became or claimed to be acting governors under its provisions: Lt. Gov. William H. Gleason claimed the office in 1868 during impeachment proceedings against Gov. Harrison Reed, Lt. Gov. Samuel T. Day proclaimed himself acting governor in 1872 during another Reed impeachment crisis, and Lt. Gov. Marcellus L. Stearns became the legal acting governor from March 18, 1874, to January 2, 1877, after the death of Gov. Osian B. Hart.

The 1885 constitution did away with the office of lieutenant governor. It was not res-

urrected until the 1968 constitutional revision. There have been twenty lieutenant governors, three of them women. Only one person, Charley E. Johns, served as acting governor in the period 1885–1968. As president of the Senate, Johns became acting governor on September 28, 1953, when Gov. Dan McCarty died. Johns served as governor until January 4, 1955, when LeRoy Collins entered the office after being elected to fill out McCarty’s term. After 1968, the constitution required that the lieutenant governor become the governor and abolished the term “acting governor.” Therefore, even though he only served for three days after the resignation of Gov. Bob Graham on January 2, 1987, Lt. Gov. Wayne Mixson was an official governor, not an acting chief executive.

Given this background, the book devotes chapters to three acting governors: Allison, Stearns, and Johns. Both Stearns and Johns had terms of substantial length. Allison is included because of the dramatic circumstances of his entry into office—the violent death of Governor Milton and the fall of Confederate Florida. There are also chapters on Governors Mixson and Buddy MacKay, even though their time in office was fleeting: MacKay was in office from December 12, 1998, to January 5, 1999, and Mixson served from January 3 to January 6, 1987. Arguably, some of the acting governors performed more important acts in office than Mixson and MacKay, but the two executives are included as they were official governors and each had interesting political careers. MacKay, in particular, had an important working relationship as lieutenant governor with Gov. Lawton Chiles.

With the scope resolved, the next question was content. What information about each governor should be included in each chapter? Many of the governors have or deserve substantial biographies. Of course, as one of the nation’s most influential presidents, Andrew Jackson stands out as the

Florida governor who has been written about the most. There are also biographies on William P. DuVal, Richard Keith Call, Ossian B. Hart, Napoleon Bonaparte Broward, Sidney J. Catts, LeRoy Collins, Claude Kirk, Reubin Askew, Bob Graham, Lawton Chiles, and Jeb Bush. Buddy MacKay and Charlie Crist have written autobiographies. These governors are the exceptions. The majority of the governors do not have any published biographies beyond short encyclopedia-type pieces. While these brief biographies contain useful reference information, they in no way give a reader insight into what the governors were like as individuals or why they made the decisions they did. This volume seeks to address those aspects of each governor.

Each chapter devotes most of its coverage to the respective governor’s time in office because that is when their actions, with some exceptions, had the greatest impact on the state and the nation. However, the book does not exclude their earlier or later careers. Some governors had notable business and legal careers. Many served in the military and fought in wars. Several governors served as county and municipal officials. Most served in the territorial or state legislatures before their governorship. One governor, John Branch, Florida’s last territorial governor, was the governor of North Carolina before coming to Florida. Some governors were state judges and served on the Florida Supreme Court. Others held office in state or national cabinets. Many governors served in Congress (both the House and Senate), and one, Andrew Jackson, became president. Besides Jackson, three governors have sought the presidency: Askew, Graham, and Bush. With the exception of Albert W. Gilchrist, all of the governors were married at some point in their lives; almost all sitting governors had a first lady. Some governors were married more than once. Gov. James E. Broome holds the record with five marriages. And almost all governors had children, some of whom be-

came Florida politicians. In order to present the fullest possible picture of each governor's life within a limited format, each chapter gives some coverage (in many cases substantial) to the family and professional lives of the subject outside his time as governor.

Florida has been blessed with an inexhaustible reservoir of fascinating historical topics and episodes. During the territorial years (1821–1845), Florida experienced a banking crisis, the rise of political parties, and the Second Seminole War. During early statehood (1845–1865), slavery, the cotton economy, the Third Seminole War, secession, and the Civil War were the predominant issues. During Reconstruction (1865–1877), Florida's themes were political and racial violence, the struggle for African American rights, economic upheaval, and immigrants from the North. The years of Bourbon democracy (1877–1899) included land development, railroad expansion, political reform movements, fever epidemics, Jim Crow, and the Spanish-American War. During the Progressive era (1900–1920), the Everglades were drained; groups pushed for social reform, including women's rights; and the state sent soldiers and other personnel to serve in World War I. During the interwar years (1920–1939), the state experienced a land boom and bust, intensified racial violence, Prohibition, and economic depression. World War II (1940–1945) launched a new wave of economic growth and development. In the postwar period (1945–1965), Florida underwent population growth and development, its tourism sector grew, the civil rights movement expanded, and the Cold War shaped state politics. Issues in the last fifty years have included domestic and foreign immigration, a tourism boom, drugs, conservation, and constitutional and legislative reform. All of these topics and more are explored in the context of the governors whose terms were impacted by them.

As with US history in general, one sub-

ject has been the most controversial topic in the expanse of Florida history: race. As a territory and state tied to the racial ethos of the Deep South for much of its past, Florida experienced and in some cases surpassed the racial discrimination and violence that has been intrinsic to that region's history. In the form of slavery, Indian removal, the racial turmoil of Reconstruction, the convict lease system, lynching, and segregation, racism has had a long and horrific presence in Florida history. Like their gubernatorial colleagues in the rest of the South, most of Florida's governors, beginning with the territorial period and through the civil rights movement of the 1960s, played a role in perpetuating racial discrimination through executive decisions, legislation, or inaction. Racial injustice is a subject that haunts many of the governors and many of these chapters.

Another important element to consider in studying Florida's governors is the history of executive power in state government. Presidents appointed the territorial governors, territorial secretaries, territorial judges, and the territorial legislature until 1826, when the legislature became elective. Governors, who served at the president's pleasure for three-year terms (although they could be reappointed), appointed all territorial officers that were not presidential appointments. The governor was also the commander of the territorial militia. As a requirement for statehood, the territory had to create a constitution, which Florida did in 1838. Among the powers the constitution provided for the governor, who was limited to one four-year term, was the position of commander-in-chief of the state's armed forces, the power to appoint all state civil and military officers, and the power to convene extraordinary sessions of the legislature. The legislature elected the secretary of state, the attorney general, the treasurer, the comptroller, and, beginning in 1845, the register of public lands.

Beginning in 1848, three years after state-