



Above: This plaster model of Adolf A. Weinman's statue of Gov. William C. C. Claiborne is on display at the Old Mint. The finished statue is in the State Capitol.

Lagniappe

As a citizen of Kentucky, Governor Claiborne had helped write that state's 1799 constitution.

Louisiana Becomes a State

As you read, look for:

- Louisiana's entrance into the Union, and
- vocabulary term **privateer**.

More and more settlers moved into Louisiana. Some began pushing for statehood as soon as they arrived. But the law stated a territory must have at least 60,000 residents before it could become a state. By 1809, the Territory of Orleans had enough people, and the territorial legislature sent a request for statehood to Congress. Governor Claiborne did not support this petition because he believed the Creoles were not ready for citizenship. He wanted more Americans to move into the territory before it became a state. Congress took no action on the 1809 petition, but by 1811

Congress agreed to admit Louisiana as the eighteenth state. The statehood bill was signed by President James Madison on February 16, 1811. The official date for statehood was set for April 30, 1812. The Territory of Orleans would become the state of Louisiana.

Louisiana's First Constitution

Before it became a state, Louisiana had to write a constitution. The constitution of Kentucky, written in 1799, was used as a model. Louisiana's constitution provided that the legislature would select the governor from the two leading candidates in the popular election. Only white male property owners could vote or hold office.

Julien Poydras of Pointe Coupee was the president of the constitutional convention. In his speech following the signing of the constitution, he described his new American government as "the most perfect the human mind has hitherto framed." The Creoles were ready to be Americans.

New Orleans continued as the capital of Louisiana. The first election for governor lasted three days, as required by the constitution. William C. C. Claiborne was elected as the new state's first governor, surprised that he was asked to

lead the “ancient Louisianians.” He had not expected to have the support of the former colonists, the Creoles.

Early Problems

Statehood did not end the conflicts between the Creoles and the newly arrived Americans. Language and cultural barriers increased the distrust. Matters were made worse when a Philadelphia newspaper printed Governor Claiborne’s private comments with his concerns about the Creoles becoming Americans.

Claiborne also had to deal with the Caddo Indians. The tribe tried to continue farming in Louisiana after statehood, but white settlers were crowding their land. Governor Claiborne negotiated a treaty to buy the Caddo land near the Red River; the tribe then moved west to Texas.

Smuggling was another problem. Colonial officials had often ignored smuggling because it was the only way people could get necessary goods. Smuggling had become an accepted part of the economy and continued after the Americans came.

The largest band of smugglers operated from a base along the Gulf Coast at Barataria Bay. These **privateers** seized goods from Spanish and British ships, sailing under the name of countries that were at war with Spain or Great Britain. Jean Lafitte led these Baratarians.

Claiborne tried to stop Lafitte’s operations and his illegal smuggling of slaves. Finally, he offered a \$500 reward for Lafitte’s capture. The bold Lafitte posted notices around New Orleans and raised Claiborne’s \$500 reward to a \$5,000 reward for the governor! The story of Claiborne and Lafitte took an interesting turn when the War of 1812 reached New Orleans.



Above: Jean Lafitte, shown here gambling with several pirates, was the leader of the privateers and smugglers known as the Baratarians.

Lagniappe

Privateers sailed with the approval of and under the flag of a country. *Pirates* did not have the approval or protection of any country.

Check for Understanding ✓

1. Who was allowed to vote?
2. How was the first governor chosen?
3. What were three problems faced by Governor Claiborne after statehood?