
5.1 History of Tallahassee/Leon County

Leon County, originally part of Escambia County and later a part of Gadsden County, was created by the Territorial Legislature in 1824. Named for Ponce De Leon, Leon County was one of the most populous and prosperous counties in ante-bellum Florida.

Tallahassee, named for the "old fields" that it once encompassed, earned the title early in the 16th century from the Apalachee Indians who inhabited the area. Legend says that the final spelling was chosen by Octavia Walton, daughter of the territorial governor of Florida. Today, Tallahassee exemplifies not only the influence of the Indian, but also that of the Spanish, French and English who occupied the area in succession.

The City of Tallahassee, the county seat and only incorporated city in Leon County, was established in 1825, following a decision by the legislature to locate the capital of the new Florida Territory midway between the population centers of St. Augustine and Pensacola.

The following outline represents a brief historical sketch of the area:

500- 1528 Apalachee Indians flourish in the area, settling into villages and displaying a flair for agriculture, trading and pottery.

1528 An expedition under Panfilo de Narvaez become the first Europeans to come into contact with the local Indians.

1539 The Hernando de Soto expedition winters in an area that is within one mile of the present Capitol building and celebrates the first Christmas in Tallahassee.

1528-1607 Contact with Spanish invaders decimates the Apalachee population through disease and warfare.

1607 Apalachee Indians ask the Spanish Governor to send missionaries into the area.

1633 The Spanish establish a mission chain from St. Augustine to Tallahassee (Fort San Luis).

1704 Spanish missions are destroyed by combined Creek Indians and British forces; Apalachee Indians leave the area.

1725 Creek Indians enter the area from Georgia and Alabama. These and other Indians in the area later become known as Seminoles (runaways).

1763 The Tallahassee area becomes a British possession when Spain cedes Florida to England in exchange for Cuba.

1783 Spain regains possession of Florida.

1818 General Andrew Jackson invades Florida and drives the Seminole Indians from Leon County.

1819 Florida is ceded by Spain to the United States.

1822 The Territory of Florida is created by an act of Congress.

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1824 Leon County is created by the Territorial Legislature with Tallahassee as the County seat and State Capital. The first land survey of the area is made. The City of Tallahassee was incorporated the following year.

1834 The Tallahassee-St. Marks railroad is constructed (reported to be the third oldest railroad in the United States).

1845 Florida becomes the 27th State.

1853 The West Florida Seminary is established; it later becomes the Florida State College for Women; today it is the Florida State University.

1861 Florida secedes from the Union.

1865 Federal troops are repelled at the battle of Natural Bridge in southeast Leon County, leaving Tallahassee as the only Confederate capital east of the Mississippi River not captured during the Civil War.

1887 The Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University is established.

1919 The Legislature passes a new city charter for Tallahassee, authorizing a Commission-Manager form of government.

1931 The Lively Vocational Technical School is established.

1966 The Tallahassee Community College is established.

1997 Tallahassee citizens select their first directly-elected Mayor since 1919, replacing the system of yearly rotation among the City Commissioners.

2002 The citizens of Leon County voted to make Leon County a Home Rule Charter County. The charter provides citizens more direct participation in county government.