

## A State is Born

By 1820, Missouri stood at a crossroads. For 17 years, Missouri had been a territory, administered by appointed governors, with no voice or vote in national affairs. The people were impatient with the second-class status of territorial rule, the time had come for Missouri to move to the next level, full-equality with the 23 states that formed the union. The time for state-hood had arrived.

This is the Missouri House of Representatives. It's where bills are written, debated, and voted on by your representatives.

What a building--architecture, art--this building is really a fantastic place to carry out the business of governing ourselves. But it wasn't always this majestic. Back in 1820, things were quite a bit different.

This is the first state capitol building in St. Charles. It's been restored to look like it did in the early 1820's, a wild time when Missourians took hold of the reigns of government, and ran with them.

In 1820, St. Charles was designated as the seat of government for our new state. The site was a hotly debated topic, but the offer of free rent and three rooms above the peck store, apparently sealed the deal. Before Missouri could truly begin to govern herself, a couple of important items of business needed to be taken care of. First, Missouri would need a governor to lead the state in this critical period. Second, Missourians needed to convince the United States congress to accept them into the union. Both were important events and both would have serious implications in the future.

William Clark, the same Clark of Lewis and Clark fame, and for the past six years, the appointed territorial governor of Missouri, was a candidate for the first elected governor. But, his years as territorial governor might have worked against him. New settlers to the state were not swayed by his powerful reputation. They thought him too friendly with the Indians and too close to the old French merchants. Clark's opponent, Alexander McNair, was a bit more in touch with the feelings of the new settlers. McNair campaigned vigorously, talking to the common man at taverns and public houses throughout the state. The mood of the people was changing; they wanted to elect their own man. On August 28, 1820, the voters of Missouri, that is, free white men over 21, voted to decide who would ultimately sit in this room, the governor's office here at the first state capitol. As seen in the newspapers of the day, this election was as hotly debated as the ones today.

The truth is, that Governor Clark has rendered himself obnoxious to this party by several official acts. They do not support McNair on account of any arrangement...

I understand that a letter has been received in St. Louis stating that Colonel McNair is an emancipator, and that he will use his influence to prevent congress from receiving...

No man can have a higher interest in the welfare of Missouri than Governor Clark, his own personal fame is identified with the very name "Missouri" which so well....

He admits Colonel McNair's correctness in deciding on preemptions, and performing the other duties of register, but as might be expected, he takes occasion to gratify his fame and feed his malignancy by throwing it over an air of ridicule....

Clark was defeated, and McNair received an amazing 72% of the vote. The old guy was out, and a new era of representative government had begun.

Before Missouri could be admitted into the Union, the issue of slavery had to be addressed. This is where the Missouri Compromise comes into play. It was really quite simple, but it led to the division of the country, which eventually led to the civil war. Here's the story:

In 1820, the country looked like this. Eleven states where slavery was permitted in the south, and eleven states where slavery was prohibited here in the north. So, along comes Missouri wanting to be a state, a slave state. Slavery had long been permitted in the territory, and many of the wealthy, influential men of the state-owned slaves. Permitting Missouri into the union as a slave state, would have upset this fragile balance. After much debate, some of it quite heated, a compromise was reached. Missouri would come in as a slave state; Maine would be admitted into the union as a free state, the boundary between slave and free states in the future would be determined by this line. Of course, no one asks the opinion of the one out of every seven Missourians that were slaves. On August 10, 1821, Missouri entered the union, unaware of the coming storm. We've been involved with democracy and elections for a long time. A lot of us might take participating in our government for granted—these men didn't. They were passionate about this new thing called representative government.

It all happened here in these rooms. The House of Representatives met over here, and the Senate met right over there. They at least had their own tables and chairs. Pretty simple, huh? Have you ever seen the capitol in Jefferson City? Big difference.

This is Dave Clystermeyer who is the site administrator for the first state capitol building. Dave, tell us a little bit about the men who made up our first government.

Well, it's hard to imagine, you know, what kind of life these people had, I learn a little more every day. You know, you come into work in the morning, you sort of imagine what went on in these empty rooms, and they came up with a great constitution, I think it's a constitution that any state would envy. It established a lot of checks and balances, that we still use today. I think they'd make a very effective state government. Most of them were very dedicated to inventing the government of Missouri at their time. We hear a lot of talk these days about reinventing government, well, they invented government for the state. They were very dedicated to the laws that they established at the time, they believed in it very much.

It took a lot of commitment to serve as a legislator in the 1820's. By 1826, the permanent capitol of Missouri had moved to here, to Jefferson City. That building burned ten years later. A second capitol building was constructed in the 1840's. That building burned in a spectacular fire in 1911. This building, the third state capitol in Jefferson City, was completed in 1924. It's built mostly of Missouri limestone—doesn't burn. Meanwhile, back in St. Charles, the Peck Store had reverted to civilian duties, and began to slowly deteriorate. We could have lost this building, but in 1961, an effort was begun to save this historic structure. Today, it is operated as a state historic site and is a valuable resource for teaching about Missouri's first legislature.

Have you ever heard of living history? That's where individuals try to recreate what life was like in order to help people actually experience a bit of the past. Every year, the folks here at the first state capitol, put on a historic children's festival. And it happens right here.

They're all twisted up...they're granddaughters.... This is our Historic Children's Festival, and it's mainly to give modern day children a taste of what childhood was like in the 1820's; you've got a lot of hands-on activities to show the type of games and entertainment, and crafts and skills children at that time would participate in. We've got people here in costumes showing what kind of dress they wore...ah, I think sort of compare that to the more complex games of today.

...play with fire. Oh, baby leopard thought fire...

Looks like fun. I guess history isn't only about speeches, laws and politics. It's about real people, people who had the same needs and desires as we have today. The first State Capitol in St. Charles—check it out! It's a part of your Missouri heritage.