

# Missouri's Statehood

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After President Thomas Jefferson bought Louisiana from the country of France in 1803, many people came to settle on this land. As the population grew, a portion of the Louisiana Purchase land was sectioned off and named the Missouri Territory in the year 1812. Still extremely popular from his famous expedition, William Clark was chosen as the first governor of the Missouri Territory.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the next few years the population of the Missouri Territory continued to grow. At the same time, the practice of slavery was a hotly debated topic throughout the United States. Many people in the northern portion of the country believed that slavery was wrong and should be outlawed for the entire country. Others in the southern portion of the country believed that each state should be able to decide on their own laws, including the right to own slaves. This belief was called states' rights. The belief in slave labor was very strong in the South at this time because their very way of life depended on it. Large plantations, or farms, in the Southern states required many hours of hard labor for their necessary upkeep. They felt that slave labor was the most inexpensive way to carry out all of the difficult work on the plantations.

<sup>3</sup> While the arguing over slavery was still taking place, the population in Missouri reached over 60,000, a level that made it possible to become a state. In 1818,

Missouri applied to the United States government for statehood. However, this posed a new problem for the country. At this time, there were eleven slave states in the South and eleven free states in the North, an even number. If Missouri were to become a state that allowed slavery or did not allow slavery, it would tip the balance either way. Citizens on both sides of the argument would not have this. Therefore, Missouri's statehood was debated for two whole years.

<sup>4</sup> Would Missouri ever become a state? Many Missourians were skeptical. Finally, Henry Clay, a United States Senator from Kentucky, proposed a plan to settle the statehood argument. Under his plan, Missouri would become a slave state, allowing people to own slaves within its borders. Maine, another territory applying for statehood, would become a free state and not allow slavery. Therefore, the United States would be able to keep an even number of free states and slave states. Also under Clay's plan, called the Missouri Compromise, an imaginary line running along Missouri's southern border was established. Owning slaves was outlawed in the Louisiana Purchase area above that line, except for Missouri.

<sup>5</sup> After many years of waiting, Missouri became a state on August 10, 1821. Some wonder why the year 1820 is written on the state seal when it did not become a state until the next year. The answer is that those from Missouri thought that it should have become a state much earlier, for instance in 1820.