

Nevada State History

(in a nutshell)

Although Spain claimed the Nevada region during the 1500s, no exploration occurred until the early 1800s. Native Americans living there at that time included the Paiute, Shoshone, and Washoe tribes.

During the 1820s, trappers from the Hudson Bay Company explored the Humboldt River. Jedediah Smith traveled across the Las Vegas valley and William Wolfskill blazed the Old Spanish Trail into California. Complete exploration of Nevada occurred during the 1840s; John C. Frémont explored and charted the Great Basin and Sierra Nevada.

At the end of the Mexican-American War (1846-1848), the southwest came under U.S. control. In 1850, the Utah Territory, that included Nevada, was established. Some of the first settlers came to Nevada during this time. Genoa was established by Mormon pioneers and became a trading post for those traveling to California.

Some non-Mormons came to Carson Valley. They did not want to be part of the Utah Territory that was ruled by a Mormon leader. Without Congressional approval they established their own territorial government. In 1859, ore was discovered near what is now Virginia City and thousands came in search of gold and silver. With sufficient population in 1861, Congress could now create the Nevada Territory.

Nevada did not have a large enough population to become a state during the Civil War (1861-1865). However, President Lincoln saw that most Nevadans were anti-slavery and that the North was in desperate need of silver and gold to help pay for the war. On Oct. 31, 1864, Nevada became the 36th state of the Union with Carson City as its capital.

Timeline

1821—Mexico gains control of Nevada

1859—Thousands moved to Nevada as gold was discovered in Virginia City

1861—The Nevada Territory is created

1864—Nevada becomes the 36th state

1907—The Newlands Irrigation Project is completed

1936—Hoover Dam is completed

During the late 1860s, several miners settled the northwestern counties of Nevada. The following decade, mines closed as the value of silver dropped. Thousands of miners left Nevada looking for work, others turned to ranching. The 1880s brought even harder years on the economy. Unusually cold winters killed much of the livestock and mines near Virginia City stopped producing gold and silver.

During the early 1900s, new mines near Tonopah discovered silver. Gold was found in Goldfield and copper near Ruth and Mountain City. These discoveries provided new jobs and strengthened Nevada's economy. Railroad expansion opened new markets and the Newlands Irrigation Project made farming possible through irrigation.

After World War I (1914-1918), the value of copper and lead dropped dramatically, causing many mines to close. The Great Depression also left many without work. In 1931, gambling was legalized in Nevada. Casinos provided jobs and brought tourists to the state. The Hoover Dam Project also provided many jobs that year.

In 1950, the Atomic Energy Commission opened a nuclear testing center north of Las Vegas. During the late 1900s, tourism remained the largest industry in Nevada. Las Vegas alone attracted more than 15 million tourists a year. Reno also built large casinos and ski resorts were built at Lake Tahoe.

Nevada's population grew immensely during the late 1900s and water became a major concern. In 1963, the Supreme Court ruled on a water dispute of the Colorado River between Nevada and neighboring states. Later in 1983, the Water Project was created to provide increased water for expected growth within Las Vegas.

Recently, Nevada's government has worked on several other problems. More money was given to education and laws have been passed to decrease crime and pollution. Nevada has also improved both the airports in Las Vegas and Reno.