

# How the USA Grew: From 13 Colonies to 50 States

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## Narrator

On July 4, 1776, leaders of the 13 colonies in North America met in Philadelphia and declared their independence from Great Britain and King George III. The new United States of America was born. Thirteen states. Today there are 50. How did the country grow so big? How did the state you live in become a part of the United States of America?

If you look at the map of the country you can see that it's like a big jigsaw puzzle.

So let's take a close look at that puzzle. And then we'll see how the country grew—piece by piece, territory by territory, and state by state. We'll start—where else?—with the original 13 states.

## The 13 “United” States

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed a new country—the United States of America. Think about what that name really means. It means that 13 separate and independent states joined together—united—to make one country. Okay, so what were the original states that declared independence and united? Starting at the top, they were: Massachusetts—which was first settled by the Pilgrims in 1620. As you can see, at that time Massachusetts included the present state of Maine. We'll talk more about that later.

The next three states—New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Connecticut—began as offshoots of Massachusetts. They were all first settled in the 1630s.

New York was founded as the Dutch colony of New Netherlands. It became British in 1664 when the Duke of York drove out the Dutch.

New Jersey was established the same year, 1664, by friends of the Duke of York.

Pennsylvania means “Penn’s Woods.” King Charles II gave the land to the William Penn family in 1671 to repay a debt to his family.

Delaware was first settled by Sweden, then captured by the Dutch, then taken over by the Duke of York, and finally given to William Penn as part of Pennsylvania. In 1703 Penn allowed the three most southern counties to establish their own assembly. In 1776, it became the state of Delaware.

Maryland was founded in 1632 by Lord Baltimore as a haven for Roman Catholics who were being persecuted in England.

Next is Virginia. This is where the first permanent English settlement was established in 1607 at Jamestown. On the maps of the original United States, Virginia didn't look like this. It was much bigger. That's because it included the present state of West Virginia. More about that later.

South Carolina and North Carolina were originally one colony. That was in 1663. They separated in 1729.

And Georgia was founded in 1732 as a refuge for debtors.

The first 13 United States of America...do you know what the 14th is? It's Vermont. The Green Mountain State. Vermont became the country's 14th state in 1791 after a long dispute between Massachusetts, New York, and New Hampshire over who owned what land. When all three gave up their claims, Vermont entered the Union.

Now let me finish the stories I mentioned before. Maine, as I said, was originally a part of Massachusetts. It became an independent state in 1820. But it wasn't until 1842 that the state's present-day northern boundary was established. It's really an interesting story. Here's a short version.

After the Revolution, there were a few boundary questions that remained unsettled. One was the boundary between Maine and Canada. Once Maine became a state, the new legislature let people settle along the Aroostook River. The British—they owned Canada—said this land belonged to them. The two sides tried to work out a compromise, but didn't.

Then during the winter of 1838, Canadian lumberjacks set up camp along the river. The governor of Maine called out the militia. So did the Canadians. Things got even hotter. President Martin Van Buren sent General Winfield Scott to Maine and Congress prepared for war. Fortunately, General Scott managed to quiet things down and got both sides to agree to present the dispute to a commission. The boundary was finally settled by a treaty in 1842. So Maine and Canada never went to war.

But another war—the Civil War—brought about the creation of West Virginia. Here's how that happened. In 1863, Virginia voted to secede from the Union and join other southern states in creating the Confederacy. So people in the western part of the state who wanted to remain loyal to the United States organized a separate government. And so the state of West Virginia was born.

### **To the Mississippi**

In 1783, when the United States and Great Britain signed the Treaty of Paris officially ending the War of Independence, these were the boundaries of the new nation: the Atlantic Ocean on the East; the Mississippi River on the West; Canada on the North; and Spanish Florida on the South.

As we can see, that included much more than just the original 13 colonies. It included territory known as the “western lands.”

Great Britain had won this land from France at the end of the French and Indian War. In 1763, when the war ended, France lost all of its territory in North America. Great Britain acquired French Canada, as well as the rich lands of the Ohio River Valley.

American colonists moved right in. Native Americans living on the land attacked the settlers, and the British sent in troops to protect them. This was very costly. So the British issued the Proclamation of 1763 stating that there could be no settlements west of the Appalachian Mountains.

The colonists were furious. Things got worse when the British imposed new taxes on the colonists to pay for the soldiers that they had to send to the western lands. All of this led directly to the Declaration of Independence. So, when America won the Revolution, it also won all the British lands south of Canada and east of the Mississippi.

The new United States now had to decide what to do with this land. At first, the states were given control. But that didn't work, so a new plan was developed. The plan was called the Northwest Ordinance of 1787.

Under the Northwest Ordinance, once the population of an area totaled 5,000 free males who owned at least 50 acres of land, the people could elect an assembly and establish their own government. When the territory had 60,000 people, it could apply to become a new state.

From all this territory came the states of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, and Wisconsin. A part of Minnesota was also in the territory. Kentucky was originally a western county of Virginia. It became a separate state in 1792.

In 1796, Tennessee became the 16th state. The last two states in the original territory of the United States—Mississippi and Alabama—joined the Union in 1817 and 1819.

### **Crossing the Mississippi: The Louisiana Purchase**

In 1800, this is what the United States of America looked like. It spanned half the continent—from the Atlantic Ocean to the Mississippi River. The Mississippi was the major highway for settlers living in the western lands. Crops and other goods would be shipped down the river to the port of New Orleans and from there to markets along the east coast. Nothing was more important than free navigation of the Mississippi and free access to New Orleans.

New Orleans had been founded in 1718 and was the capital of New France. But all that changed after the French and Indian War. Remember, that was the war in which France lost all of its territory east of the Mississippi to the British. Well during the war, France signed a secret pact with Spain. In exchange for their support against the British, France gave the Spanish all the land they controlled west of the Mississippi to the Rocky Mountains—the Louisiana Territory.

For a while, everything was fine. Spain allowed American farmers to use the river and store their goods in New Orleans duty free. Then things changed. By 1800, Napoleon Bonaparte was in control of France. Napoleon had visions of reestablishing a French empire in North America. So, he arranged for Spain to give the land back to France.

Americans became afraid. Even before the transfer took affect there was a taste of what might come. Spain announced that New Orleans would no longer be open to American shipping. Western farmers demanded war.

President Thomas Jefferson believed that there was no place on earth more vital to the interests of the young nation than New Orleans. So he came up with a plan. He offered 2 million dollars to buy New Orleans from France!

By this time, Napoleon was embroiled in a long and costly war with Britain and the offer of money was appealing. So, when the American minister in Paris offered 2 million dollars for New Orleans, the French minister asked how much the United States would be willing to pay for all of Louisiana!

In April, 1803, the deal was struck. And for 15 million dollars—roughly 3¢ an acre—the United States doubled in size.

There were a few problems. First of all, President Jefferson wasn't certain the Constitution allowed him to make this kind of purchase. He wanted to wait and ask Congress to propose an amendment that would give him the authority. But others persuaded him not to wait.

One other problem was that no one really knew the exact boundaries of the territory. When asked, the French minister said, "I can give you no direction. You have made a noble bargain for yourselves and I suppose you will make the most of it."

Make the most of it the United States certainly did. All or part of 13 states came from the Louisiana Purchase: Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, Kansas, Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota, North Dakota. And parts of Oklahoma, Minnesota, Montana, Wyoming, and Colorado.

The Louisiana Purchase has been called the greatest land deal in history. And one of the most amazing things about it is that it all happened with the stroke of a pen. Not one shot was fired. That would not be the case with the next land deal.

### **Florida**

By 1803, the United States shared much of the continent of North America with Spain. The first permanent settlement in what would become the United States was established by Spain in 1565. That was St. Augustine in Florida. And today St. Augustine is the oldest city in the United States. But it took a while for it become a part of the United States. Here's the story.

As you can see from this map, Florida was actually two provinces. West Florida and East Florida. The United States and Spain had an on-going disagreement over the boundary of West Florida.

East Florida though clearly belonged to the Spanish. And it became a refuge for run-away slaves, pirates, and especially Seminole Indians who raided and threatened settlements in Georgia.

In 1817, President James Monroe sent General Andrew Jackson to Florida to stop the Seminole raids. Jackson was told he could cross the border into Florida, but should not attack any Spanish forts. Jackson had another idea. He sent Monroe a letter saying that if the President wanted, he—Jackson—could take all of East Florida in 60 days.

The President didn't answer. So, Jackson marched into Florida, deposed the Spanish governor, and installed one of his officers in his place.

To settle the matter, President Monroe gave the Spanish two choices—they could either do a better job of patrolling Florida and assure that there would be no more raids across the border—or they could give Florida to the United States. And that's what they did.

In 1819 a treaty was signed in Washington. East Florida went to the United States and Spain gave up all its claims to West Florida. Florida—the Sunshine State—joined the Union in 1845.

### **The Lone Star Republic**

Even though the Spanish lost Florida, they still controlled a lot of territory including the colony Tejas. Because the population of Tejas was very sparse, Spain offered land grants to anyone willing to settle there—as long as they agreed to obey Spanish law.

Moses Austin from Missouri took up the offer. But he died before he could establish his colony. So his son Stephen took over the claim. Stephen Austin arrived there in 1821, just as Mexico—and Tejas—won independence from Spain. By 1827, nearly 300 families had moved to Austin's colony.

When news of the rich lands and grassy plains spread, other settlers arrived in droves—almost all of them from the United States. The greatly outnumbered Tejanos—Texans of Spanish heritage—resented the Americans, and the Americans, in turn, disliked Tejanos.

Tensions grew, so Stephen Austin went to Mexico City to meet with the Mexican President Antonio Lopez Santa Anna. Austin proposed that Texas be made an independent state within Mexico. Santa Anna did not accept the proposal. Instead, he lead an army of 6,000 north.

In response, a group of Texans declared Texas a free and independent republic. They named Sam Houston to lead their army.

In reality it wasn't much of an army. It was two small forces. One, a band of 420 men stationed at Goliad in southeast Texas. The other, a small group of volunteers, occupied the Alamo—a fortress mission in San Antonio. The Texans were also supported by a band of 25 Tejanos led by Juan Seguin.

On February 23, 1836, Santa Anna's army surrounded San Antonio. The next day he attacked the Alamo. The Battle of the Alamo has become one of America's greatest stories. About 187 volunteers, including legends such as Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie, held off the Mexican army for 12 days until, on the 13th day, they ran out of ammunition. The Texans refused to surrender. None of the men survived.

When Sam Houston heard of the defeat at the Alamo, he ordered the 420 men at Goliad to retreat. But they were captured by Santa Anna; 300 were executed. The massacre only spurred the Texans on.

In April 1836, near the San Jacinto River, Sam Houston's Texans faced Santa Anna's men. Half of the Mexican army was killed in the first 18 minutes. Santa Anna was forced to sign a treaty declaring the independence of Texas.

In September of 1836, Texas raised the Lone Star flag and Sam Houston was elected president of the new republic. But most Texans were Americans and they wanted to join the Union. So Texas petitioned Congress for statehood.

After much wheeling and dealing, in 1845 Texas was admitted as the 28th state. It was the first—and only—independent republic to join the Union.

### **Manifest Destiny and Oregon**

In 1845, when Texas became a state, there was a growing belief among Americans that nothing could stop the United States from reaching the Pacific Ocean. John O'Sullivan, a newspaper editor, gave a voice—and a name—to that belief when he wrote that it was "our manifest destiny to overspread and possess the whole of the continent." To O'Sullivan, and to many others, it was perfectly clear—"manifest"—that the United States was "destined" to expand.

The President at the time—James K. Polk—believed in the doctrine of Manifest Destiny. In fact, he had based his presidential campaign in 1844 on the principle of American expansion. A centerpiece of that campaign was the Oregon Territory.

The northwest boundary between the United States and British North America had long been an open question. In dispute was the territory between the 42nd parallel and this line—at 54 degrees, 40 minutes North latitude. So in 1818, Great Britain and America agreed to joint occupation. At various times the United States proposed settling the line at the 49th parallel, but the British always refused.

As more and more American settlers moved into the territory and the notion of Manifest Destiny took hold, a cry went up to claim all of Oregon. The 1844 Polk campaign slogan proclaimed "54/40 or Fight." And the next year, President Polk proposed ending the joint agreement with Britain. Expansionists rallied to the call: "54/40 or Fight." But a fight never became necessary. In 1846, in a peaceful negotiation, Great Britain and the United States agreed to put the boundary where it is today—at the 49th parallel.

From the Oregon Territory came the states of Washington, Idaho, and of course Oregon.

### **The Mexican Cession**

The northwest border was settled without a fight, but it would take a war to settle the southwest border. It began with Texas.

Mexico never officially recognized the independence of Texas. Therefore, Mexico considered its annexation by the United States in 1845 to be an act of war. In addition, Mexico disputed the southern boundary. Texans said the boundary was the Rio Grande River. Mexicans put the boundary at the Nueces River—a difference of thousands of miles of territory.

When Mexico threatened to go to war over the boundary, President Polk sent an ambassador south to try and find a peaceful solution. The ambassador—John Slidell—was authorized to offer Mexico payment not only to settle the boundary with Texas, but to also buy California and New Mexico. The Mexican government refused to even see Slidell. He ordered General Zachary Taylor to take up a position on the north shore of the Rio Grande.

Mexican troops stationed on the south shore saw this as an invasion of their country and fired on the Americans. When the news reached Washington, the President sent a message to Congress. “Mexico,” he said, had “shed American blood on American soil.”

Now that wasn’t exactly true. The land was in dispute and the President had provoked the fighting by sending in American soldiers. Still, Congress saw an opportunity to gain more territory. On May 13, 1846, the United States declared war on Mexico.

Two days later, General Stephen Kearny marched west from Kansas. Without firing a shot, Kearny occupied Santa Fe, and claimed New Mexico for the United States.

In the summer of 1846, American settlers in Northern California, led by John C. Fremont, staged the Bear Flag Revolt. It’s called that because of the flag they raised. Under that banner, they proclaimed the birth of the Republic of California. By Fall, American troops arrived and took all of California for the United States.

From his position in Texas, General Taylor moved south from the Rio Grande into Mexico. In February, 1847, Taylor’s army met Santa Anna at Buena Vista. Meanwhile General Winfield Scott took an army into southern Mexico. In September, 1847, Scott marched into Mexico City.

The war officially ended in February, 1848. By the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico recognized that Texas belonged to the United States and accepted the Rio Grande as the boundary between the two nations. The other provision of the treaty is called the Mexican Cession. In return for a payment of 15 million dollars, Mexico ceded roughly half its territory to the United States.

From the Mexican Cession came the states of California—which still flies the Bear Flag—Nevada, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico, as well as parts of Wyoming and Colorado.

The United States also bought one more piece of territory from Mexico—this section along the border of New Mexico and Arizona. That happened in 1853. It’s called the Gadsden Purchase. The land was needed for construction of the Southern Transcontinental Railroad. It was a peaceful transaction. And Mexico did much better this time. They got 10 million dollars for this small stretch of land.

The United States now stretched from sea to shining sea.

## Alaska and Hawaii

With the end of the Mexican-American War, the United States stretched across the continent—from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific Ocean. But people didn't want to stop there. They saw expansion as an opportunity for the United States to become more powerful and important.

One early believer in this kind of expansion was William Seward. Seward was Secretary of State under presidents Abraham Lincoln and Andrew Johnson. In 1867, the Russian Minister to the United States made Seward an interesting offer. He asked if America wanted to purchase a colony that Russia didn't really want any more. The colony was Alaska. The price was 7.2 million dollars.

That was a lot of money and many people thought the idea of buying what some newspapers called “a polar bear garden” was ridiculous. But Seward saw more than ice and polar bears. He saw the incredible rich natural resources of Alaska. And so he pushed through a treaty by which the United States purchased this vast territory from Russia. Alaska laughingly became known as “Seward's Folly” and “Seward's Ice Box.” But the laughter changed when gold was discovered there in 1896. It turned out that 7.2 million dollars was quite a bargain.

Alaska was largely unknown to Americans in 1867. That wasn't the case with the kingdom of Hawaii. The United States had long been interested in Hawaii because it was an important stepping stone for ships and traders traveling across the Pacific to Asia. In 1887, America was granted the right to set up a naval station at Pearl Harbor, the finest port in the Hawaiian Islands.

By that time wealthy American sugar planters controlled most of the country. They had even aided a revolution that brought in a government they could control. Then two things happened to change the situation. In 1891 a new Queen came to the Hawaiian throne. Queen Liliuokalani wanted to limit the power of the American planters. And, at just about the same time, Congress passed a law making sugar grown on American soil cheaper than foreign-grown sugar. To protect themselves, the planters needed Hawaii to become an American territory.

So in 1893, aided by the United States Marines, they overthrew the Queen and established their own government. Then they sent a treaty to President Benjamin Harrison asking that Hawaii be named an American territory. Harrison favored the idea and sent the treaty to the Senate. But before it could be approved, a new president—Grover Cleveland—was elected. Cleveland was not an expansionist. So the treaty was withdrawn.

Then in the election of 1896, Cleveland was replaced by a strong expansionist—William McKinley. And two years later, during the Spanish American War, Hawaii was formally made a United States territory. In 1959, Alaska and Hawaii became the 49th and 50th states.

So there you have it. The 50 United States of America. But, you know, there's one place we haven't mentioned. It's not a state and it was never a territory. We didn't acquire it from anyone, or buy it, or gain it by treaty, but it's the one place in the United States that belongs to all Americans no matter where you come from. And that's our nation's capitol, Washington, D.C.



### **Washington, D.C.**

Right from the start, the leaders of the new United States realized that there should be a national capitol different from any city that already existed. A provision to establish a national city was even written into the Constitution.

In 1790, President George Washington chose the site himself. This spot between Maryland and Virginia. And he chose the man who would design it—Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant—a French engineer who had served under him in the Revolution.

One of the unique things about our national capitol is that it was the first city in history expressly designed and built to serve as the seat of government. President Washington didn't live to see it become the official capitol in 1800, but every other President has lived there.

Today our nation's flag—displaying 50 stars for the 50 states—proudly waves over the city named in George Washington's honor. Maybe you never realized it, but each star on the flag represents a state. And over the course of our nation's history, the flag has changed along with the map. So as the country grew, so did the flag ... from 13 Colonies ... to 50 States.

**The End**