

Free Suffrage ^[1]

Free Suffrage



Govenor David S. Reid, ca.1861, in front of State Capitol, was instrumental the free suffrage movement. Image courtesy of the

by [William S. Powell](#) ^[2], 2006North Carolina State Archives; N-55-10-16. ^[3]

Free suffrage was a political concept heatedly discussed among North Carolinians in the mid-nineteenth century. The ownership of 50 acres of property or the payment of taxes had been a prerequisite for voting in certain instances since the [colonial period](#) ^[4]. In the gubernatorial campaign of 1848, however, candidate [David S. Reid](#) ^[5] accepted the proposal of leaders of his [Democratic](#) ^[6] Party that this limitation on the franchise be removed, making free suffrage a key issue in his campaign against [Whig](#) ^[7] candidate [Charles Manly](#) ^[8]. Although Manly won a narrow victory, free suffrage had become important to many North Carolinians. In the 1850 governor's race, Reid won handily over Manly and the Democrats captured control of the state legislature. A free suffrage constitutional amendment continued to be debated in the [General Assembly](#) ^[9] for several sessions until it finally became a reality in 1857 ^[10], when it won in a popular referendum by a wide majority of 50,007 to 19,397. Estimates from the era indicate that 125,000 North Carolinians gained the right to vote with the state's adoption of free suffrage.

References:

Lindley S. Butler, ed., *The Papers of David Settle Reid* (1993).

Paul D. Escott, *Many Excellent People: Power and Privilege in North Carolina, 1850-1900* (1985).

Additional Resources:

1857 Session Laws, North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources Digital Collections:

<https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-laws-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-1856-1857/1952705?item=2020771> ^[10]

Image Credit:

Govenor David S. Reid, ca.1861, in front of State Capitol, was instrumental in the free suffrage movement. Image courtesy of the North Carolina State Archives; N-55-10-16. Available from <https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/2432212442/> ^[3] (accessed September 20, 2012).

Subjects:

[Law and legal history](#) ^[11]

[Reconstruction \(1865-1876\)](#) ^[12]

Authors:

[Powell, William S.](#) ^[13]

From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) ^[14]

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Links

[1] <https://www.ncpedia.org/free-suffrage> [2] <https://www.ncpedia.org/biography/powell-william> [3] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/2432212442/> [4] <https://www.ncpedia.org/history/colonial> [5] <https://www.ncpedia.org/reid-david-settle-research-branch> [6] <https://www.ncpedia.org/democratic-party> [7] <https://www.ncpedia.org/whig-party> [8] <https://www.ncpedia.org/manly-charles-research-branch-nc> [9] <https://www.ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [10] <https://digital.ncdcr.gov/Documents/Detail/public-laws-of-the-state-of-north-carolina-passed-by-the-general-assembly-1856-1857/1952705?item=2020771> [11] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/laws> [12] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/subjects/reconstruction> [13] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/authors/powell-william-s-0> [14] <https://www.ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->