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## The First Message of Gov. William P. Duval

William P. Duval

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**The First Message of Gov. William P.  
Duval.**

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*To the Legislative Council Assembled in Tallahassee,  
Florida, 1824.*

Gentlemen of the Legislative Council.—I congratulate you on assembling for the first time at our new seat of government. This event so ardently desired by every intelligent and impartial citizen, was strongly demanded by the true interests of this extensive territory. Located in the centre of a beautiful and extensive body of high, fertile land, finely watered and blessed with a salubrious atmosphere, we may confidently expect that talent, population, enterprise and wealth will render it in a few years a delightful residence.

The report of the commissioners, who were appointed under an act of the late council, to select a proper site for our seat of government, will, in due time, be submitted to your inspection. It is believed that few situations in this region of country can be found combining so many advantages as the one we now occupy.

During the recess of the council a treaty has been concluded by the United States with the Florida Indians by which the whole country is surrendered, except a few small tracts reserved for particular chiefs, and a tract of land lying in the Peninsula between the Atlantic and the Gulf, on which the Indians are to be concentrated. The location of the Indians in that quarter was indispensable to the settlement of Florida and to a free communication between the east and west of the Territory, and, although this desirable object has been unavoidably delayed, yet no exertion has been wanting on my part to carry the treaty into effect. It affords me pleasure to add, after many difficulties, this is on the eve of being accomplished.

GOVERNMENT GRANT.

Congress has passed an act giving to us one-quarter section of land for our seat of government, and empowering the Executive of the Territory to select three other quarter-sections adjoining, and I have received official information from the Commissioner of the general land office, that the Surveyor-General of Florida has been directed to survey immediately twenty townships around our seat of government, which will be brought into market as early as practicable. It is desirable that the city should be laid out and the lots advertised for public sale as early as practicable, in order to create a fund to enable us to erect some of the most necessary buildings. I therefore submit to your judgment three of several plans for the city, which have been drawn by my direction, believing that the Council would approve of the motive which influenced me in having the plans prepared for their inspection.

No returns have as yet been received from several counties of the Territorial tax. It will, however, be found, when the whole amount is collected, to be too inconsiderable to afford any valuable service to the Territory. That some equal and reasonable tax should be laid to meet the obvious expenses of our local government cannot be doubted, and I recommend the subject to your consideration.

COURT REFORMS.

Some reform is loudly called for in our local judiciary. The County Courts do not meet under the present law as frequently as the public interests demand, and I submit whether it might not be proper, in amending this law, to deprive these courts of the power to assess any tax in their counties which shall exceed two-thirds of the Territorial tax, except where jails and courthouses are to be built, when a greater levy might be allowed for these special objects. A general division of our statutes, it is thought, will be found worthy of your particular

attention; many of them require amendment, and as they are intended for the great body of the people, they should be plain and concise.

If an act was passed authorizing the Judges of the Superior Courts to sit at any time for the trial of criminals, and in the event of the absence, sickness or death of either of the Judges, if a Judge of another district should be permitted to preside, it would save much expense and tend greatly to expedite business. In chancery proceedings the Judges of the Superior Courts should possess the same power of trying causes as it recommended in criminal matters; this will often save the parties much expense and tedious litigation.

GOVERNMENT ROAD.

Among many important acts of Congress passed for the special relief and benefit of this Territory, none will prove more advantageous than the law appropriating \$23,000 for opening a high road from Pensacola to St. Augustine, a distance of near 375 miles. I state from my own view of the route between the two cities just mentioned that no portion of the United States for the same distance can afford so fine a road for so little expense and labor. It is true that the sum appropriated to accomplish this work must be managed with the best judgment, economy and arrangement; backed by the utmost industry and perseverance, and it is fortunate for the interests of the United States and our Territory that the vigilance of the War Department has confided the command of this important work to Capt. Daniel E. Burch, an officer whose known ability and enterprise peculiarly qualify him for bold and arduous duties.

Through our delegate (Hon. R. K. Call) many of our pressing wants have been relieved by Congress. His knowledge of the situation, resources and value of our country have enabled him to give to Florida her true character, and his talent and devotion to her interests will obtain for us all that we can justly or reasonably expect. Congress has, during the late session, granted

much to our Territory. We have shared largely with other sections of the Union its bounty and parental kindness. If all we desired has not been accorded to our wishes, still, we should be grateful for the liberal favors bestowed.

The citizens of most Territories are apt to suppose themselves neglected by Congress, when perhaps, they expect more than the wisdom of the enlightened body can with justice to the nation grant.

FEDERAL ADMINISTRATION.

The purity with which our Federal Government is administered, the protection which it affords to the most remote parts of our great empire, its vigilance in watching over the various and minute interests in every quarter of the Union, all conduce to prove that the national happiness, prosperity and glory of our country are the first objects of our enlightened statesmen. Let us hope that no feverish anxiety at once to realize our wishes will ever excite us to idle and fretful complaints. Whenever real evils exist among us of a character that can be removed by the legislative interposition of Congress we may confidently calculate that its wisdom and justice will extend to us ample relief.

If we preserve union and harmony among our citizens and are willing nobly to sacrifice private interest and ambition to public good, a plain, honest and manly appeal to the great council of our nation will never fail to secure the attention which our situation may demand. Divisions among ourselves and discord in our councils will render us feeble at home and contemptible abroad. The first State in the Union with all her talents, wealth and population weighs but as a feather in the national balance if her own party divisions have palsied her powers.

FLORIDA'S VALUE TO THE NATION.

It is for us to unite and develop to the nation the value of Florida—until lately no part of North America was so little known as the interior of this country. Visitors who have taken a transient view of the extremes of

east and west Florida had pronounced it a bank of sand not worthy the money paid for it. Ignorance is commonly the cause of misrepresentation; now it is believed by many that Louisiana has not more valuable land than this territory. The lands on the banks of the Apalachicola river are as fertile as the banks of the Mississippi, and the climate is better adapted to the culture of sugar and Sea Island cotton. The greater part of the extensive country between the Suwannee and Apalachicola rivers is extremely rich and valuable, and will sustain a population of many thousand souls, while the rich lands of Alachua east to the Suwannee and of Chipoli west of the Apalachicola will unquestionably render Florida at no distant period a rich and powerful State.

FLORIDA RIVERS.

The bold and navigable rivers which run through our territory will be of more value than mines of gold. Besides the rivers already mentioned several others are equally navigable. The St. Johns can be ascended by vessels of considerable burthen for one hundred and sixty or seventy miles. The Ocklockony is navigable for large boats, as are also the St. Marks and Wakulla rivers. The Choctawatchie and Escambia rivers are now navigated into the State of Alabama. A few years will demonstrate the value of Florida to the United States, and thousands of Southern planters will realize in this country that wealth for which, hitherto they have toiled without success.

Gentlemen, I will cordially unite with you in promoting the happiness and interests of our country. On the judgment, prodence and independence of the Council will greatly depend our prosperity, and I pray under the direction of Divine Providence and the kindly influence of mild and equitable system of laws the population of our Territory may so increase as soon to entitle us to take our rank among the States of the Union.

Your fellow-citizen,

Tallahassee, Nov. 10, 1824.

WILLIAM P. DUVAL.