

1944

Inaugural Address of Governor Moseley, June 25, 1845

William Dunn Moseley



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Recommended Citation

Moseley, William Dunn (1944) "Inaugural Address of Governor Moseley, June 25, 1845," *Florida Historical Quarterly*: Vol. 23 : No. 4 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/fhq/vol23/iss4/5>

INAUGURAL ADDRESS OF
GOVERNOR MOSELEY

Senators, Representatives and Fellow-Citizens:

I should do injustice to the best feelings of my heart were I not, on *this* occasion, to express a becoming sense of gratitude for the *enviable* and *honorable* distinction, so recently conferred upon me, in elevating me to the supreme Executive authority of the State—a distinction the more highly prized from the *flattering* circumstances under which it was conferred. An expression of public sentiment through the suffrages of freemen, for an office within their gift, for which it was my earnest *personal* desire *not* to be a candidate.

I feel fellow-citizens, a proud consciousness of the truth of the remark, when I assert, in the presence of my assembled countrymen, that this honor I have never sought, nor could it have been acceptable to me, but as the *voluntary offering of freemen*. Under such circumstances, I do not feel myself at liberty to permit this opportunity to pass without adverting to a consciousness on my part of the want of experience, to a satisfactory discharge of a trust, the duties of which are alike arduous and responsible ; nor would I do justice to my feelings, if I failed to express the deep sense of painful solicitude which is felt for the performance of them; in a manner at once acceptable to my fellow citizens and to myself.—They are entered upon, however, with a confident reliance upon the co-ordinate departments of the government, in the inception and consummation of such measures, as a proper regard for the best interests of the people may suggest, and which, if consummated, may at once insure the happiness, the prosperity and the glory of our common country. Custom has sanctioned the usage which has ever re-

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ceived my cordial approbation, that public functionaries, entrusted with executive authority, when about to enter upon the discharge of the duties assigned them, should give at least an outline of the leading political principles which may be deemed proper to be observed in the execution of the trust confided to them.

It is now, in obedience to this usage, thus sanctioned by time, and with a becoming respect for public sentiment, that I proceed publicly to declare those principles, so far, at least, as they may be connected with the administration of the national government; or as they may be the basis of measures whose final action may come within the scope of the Executive department of the State Government.

In relation, then, to our Federal Government, I feel myself at liberty to remark that I believe it to be a government of strictly limited powers, a government formed and established through the agency and by the express authority and assent of the States, as independent sovereignties, by ceding, through a written Constitution, portions of that sovereignty for certain enumerated and specified purposes, which could not be so rapidly and happily effected by the States, as separate, independent communities; that the rights, powers and privileges, *not* thus transferred, were reserved as the rights of the States and of the people. That the exercise of any powers by the government thus established, other than those thus enumerated, or of such constructive powers as may be necessary and proper to carry into execution the enumerated powers, would be an usurpation of the rights of the States and of the people: a violation of the letter and spirit of the Constitution at once subversive of the compact of the rights of the States and of the people.

That among the most important and highly cher-

ished of the reserve rights, is the right of State *interposition*, under its constitutional authorities, as the *legitimate* remedy for such an act of usurpation on the part of the National Government.

The history of the Convention which formed the Federal Constitution, leaves not a reasonable doubt of the fact, that a portion of the members of that distinguished body, advocated a strong central government, of consolidated powers at the expense of State Sovereignty.-Such at least was the tendency of their measures. Another portion of the same body was for withholding those constructive powers from the government, *them* about to be established.

"It was the advocating or opposing these measures, in the formation of the constitution, that gave distinctive names to the parties, that then divided the Union ; and the principles then avowed, and the measures issuing from them, have, from that to the present time, kept up the *same political* division." The *one* claiming for the Federal Government the unlimited exercise of the constructive powers, the *other* denying that right, and insisting upon confining it to such matters exclusively, as were of National importance ; and in the success of which, the general welfare of the country was immediately and directly concerned. At the head of the former division was Mr. Hamilton, of the latter was Mr. Jefferson.

It was this illegitimate exercise of constructive power, that established the first National Bank, and gave birth to a system of political log-rolling, under the specious name of Internal Improvement-to a tariff for protection, with revenue as an incident, and to the distribution among the States, of the proceeds of the sales of the Public Domain. All of which measures, I take *this* occasion to declare, as the deliberate convictions of my judgment, to be infractions of the Constitution, as usurpations of the

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rights of the States; and apart from the Constitutional objection, as unwise, inexpedient and impolitic. The Constitutionality and expediency of these, and kindred measures, I do not, however, deem it proper, nor is it my present purpose, to discuss.

With regard to the protective policy, however, I feel myself at liberty to remark, (with due deference and a proper respect for the intelligence and patriotism of those who think differently), that if there be *any one* measure, (more than all others), the offspring of constructive powers, which should be met with uncompromising hostility by the advocates of reserved rights and strict construction, it is that odious policy. It is an excrescence of the Constitution, maintained at the expense of the day-laborer, the mechanic, the mariner, the merchant, the planter: in fine, at the expense of every species and class of industrial pursuits known to our country, but to the directors of the power-loom, and the lord of the spinning-jenny. It operates upon every other species of industry, as it does upon the agricultural - it raises the price of the *necessaries* of life, and subjects *labor*, which is their *capital*, to the competition of the rich capitalist. - It is a tax upon every species of industry, *not* for the support of the government, *economically administered*; but to administer to the "pagency of soulless monopolies," and to add to the overgrown fortunes of a favored and haughty aristocracy.

I solemnly believe it to be a violation of the National compact, of the rights of the many for the benefit of the few; and that, too, without the plea of necessity, and, therefore, without even the merit of this plea, whom the cravings of hunger have impelled to an act of larceny. Permit me in conclusion, upon this trite subject, to remark, that it would

seem, that the conclusion is strictly logical ; that whenever duties on imports are *not* prohibitory, the *duty* constitutes a part of the price, and is consequently a tax, and unnecessary burthen upon the consumer, *especially* when *such* tax is not required for the support of the government. The conclusion is also equally irresistible, that when such duties *are* prohibitory, foreign competition must cease, commerce must wither, and finally disappear, under its blighting, deadly influence; the sails of our merchantmen that now whiten every ocean, and are unfurled to every breeze, will be unfurled no more--an *indirect* revenue will no longer flow into the common treasury. - *Direct taxation*, for the support of the government, is then the *only* alternative: a state of things which, I earnestly hope, may never be adopted as the settled policy of our young, and still increasing confederacy--now the pioneer of free government, in its onward move, for the advancement of human rights, and human freedom, throughout the world; in opposition to the unjust, oppressive, and iniquitous demands of legislative monopolies, and to the arrogant, impudent, and unblushing extortions of hereditary aristocracies.

In making this public avowal, 'tis hoped that I may not be understood as making indiscriminate proscription of that portion of my fellow-citizens who entertain different views in relation to the powers of the government, and the great national measures that have so long divided our country. Such an opinion, if entertained by any one, would do injustice to every act of my public life. For my political principles I cherish a lively and abiding attachment and devotion, from the conviction that if honestly administered, they are best calculated to promote successfully our republican form of government. -- Entertaining this opinion, (as I most cer-

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tainly do), any abandonment, of those principles for selfish purposes, or for an imaginary, *temporary convenience*, would not only be an act of moral treason as to *them*, but would properly subject me to the scorn and contempt of all honorable men. The same liberal indulgence for liberty of opinion, however erroneous, and the same charitable construction for honesty of purpose, and purity of motives, which I claim as an act of justice from others, common charity and a generous magnanimity, will ever prompt me to extend to them, under similar circumstances.

In relation to our young State, now about to become a member of the great family of States, to you as the representatives of the people, delegated by their authority, as a co-ordinate branch of the Government, now for the first time assembled-to you is confided the important, and responsible trust of developing her resources, and of giving character to her institutions, by a liberal, enlightened, and patriotic public policy; and of establishing for her a permanent and enviable rank as one of the members of a confederacy, whose brilliant career and proud preeminence, in all that is great and useful; in the simplicity and purity of its civil institutions; the martial achievements of its heroes; the fervid eloquence of its orators, and the practical wisdom of its statesmen-challenge the wonder, the admiration, and the rivalry of all Christendom: a confederacy whose dominions, increasing with colossal strides, already extend from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the sunny regions of the tropics, to the icebound possessions of the Autocrat, of the north.

To all, therefore, it must be obvious, that upon the policy *now* adopted, depends in a great measure, the

reputation, the prosperity, the happiness, and the *Glory* of our common country.

With such incentive before them, the patriot, philanthropist and statesman will enter the lists with eager delight, with united energies, a common effort, and a generous emulation and self-devotion, to effect results so desirable.

It is not my purpose on *this* occasion to enter into specific enumeration of all such measures as would, if perfected, effect the attainment of our utmost wishes; but I feel called upon, by a sense of duty, to allude, in an especial manner, to the necessity of a sound constitutional currency; to the preservation of the public credit; to a well regulated system of Common Schools and the School Fund; to the finances of the State, and to the promotion of "virtue, science and knowledge," all of which are deemed *essential* to the purity and preservation of our Republican Institutions, and which cannot be *entirely* disregarded, without a violation of the injunctions of the Constitution. Those subjects, being deemed of vital importance to the ultimate success of our government, and to the happy condition of the people, *individually*, shall, at all times, receive such assurances of Executive approbation as may come within the constitutional scope of authority, of that department of the government.

To the same department is entrusted, the high responsibility of seeing that the laws are faithfully and impartially executed; nor is the obligation of this duty in any way lessened by any *supposed* inexpediency of the law, the execution of which he may be required to enforce. This high, important and responsible duty I expect *faithfully* and *promptly* to discharge, from a well founded and deliberate conviction, that, a few wise laws, faithfully and im-

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partially executed, are the best security for life, liberty and property.

And now, Senators and Representatives, I approach, with a trembling solicitude, the discharge of the duties assigned me, relying upon your *support* in the *discharge* of them, whenever my official conduct may command itself to your favorable consideration ; and invoking the aid of the Father of the Universe in our attempt at self-government, that He would be in the midst of our Councils, guiding and directing them for the common good ; and appealing to Him for the sincerity of my motives, and the rectitude of my intentions in the performance of my duty, to my country and to myself; I take upon me the high, responsible and solemn obligations enjoined by the Constitution, with the anxious wish and fervent hope, that my administration may be as successful, in promoting the best interests of our beloved country, as my fellow-citizens have been kind, indulgent generous and confiding.