

HOW DID ARIZONA BECOME A STATE?

Kaely Monahan

Today is a very special day. A day for celebration, flowers, and cake – a day to celebrate what you love.

Of course I'm referring to Statehood Day. On February 14th, 1912, the Territory of Arizona became the State of Arizona, and the final continental state to join the Union.

This is the [same year](#) that the Girl Scouts of America was founded, the Titanic sank, and Louis Armstrong dropped out of school at the age of 11 and started singing in a quartet of boys.

[Clip of Louis music, instrumental]

But Arizona's path to statehood started much earlier.

[Careful blend of Theme MX w/ Louis Armstrong mx]

Welcome to Valley 101...a podcast that explores metro-Phoenix and our state through history, arts, sciences, infrastructure and more. We answer the questions *you* have about the Valley of the Sun.

I'm your producer Kaely Monahan.

Today, we look back on how Arizona became a state, and what Admission Day looked like.

[THEME MX UP]

Part of the land that would become Arizona was annexed to the United States at the end of the Mexican-American War in 1848. In the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, Mexico was forced to cede 55-percent of its territory,

which included Arizona. The Gadsden Purchase, annexed much of what would be Southern Arizona, was finalized in 1854.

During this time, Arizona was actually a part of the New Mexico Territory. It wasn't until 1862, 14 years *after* the war with Mexico, that then President Abraham Lincoln [signed the Arizona Organic Act](#). This separated Arizona from New Mexico, making each its own territory.

Before this, the Arizona territory was previously recognized and claimed by the Confederate States of America during the Civil War. However, the boundaries of that territory were not identical to the Arizona Territory that Lincoln signed into existence.

History buffs will also note that the only Civil War confrontation [in Arizona](#) was a skirmish at Picacho Peak – but that's a story for another time.

For nearly 50 years, Arizona remained just a territory. Conversations about making it a state did happen, but the Eastern and Midwestern states in Congress were not keen on accepting Arizona.

Heidi: Congress said that you only needed 60,000 inhabitants to become a state,"

This is Heidi Osselaer, an independent historian specializing in Southwestern history. She is also the director of the Arizona History Convention.

"And Arizona had reached twice that population by 1900 and still wasn't admitted because a lot of people in the East, especially members of Congress, believed we were more of a foreign territory than one that looked like Anglo-Americans. They thought too many people here didn't speak English. There were too many transient men in the state. They spent more time in brothels and saloons than they should. And now, of course, they're

referring to the large mining population in Arizona. The copper mines were in full upswing. But also, many foreign workers were here not only from Mexico, from China, from Europe.

In fact, A delegation from D.C. was sent to Arizona to do some “fact-finding” about the territory. And what they saw didn’t impress them.

[Wild West MX]

Heidi: *When Senator Albert Beveridge of Indiana came with his committees on the territories in 1902, he just made a point of saying this. This was a place that just wasn't ready to be part of the United States.*

Arizona, in their minds, was an uncivilized frontier....an image many Arizonans resented.

That prejudice kept Arizona from achieving statehood sooner.

But why become a state anyway?

You might think – “well of course you’d want to be a part of the United States,” plus there was all that “Manifest Destiny” mentality going around.

And, just in case you forgot your history lessons, Manifest Destiny was the belief by the Eastern, Anglo-Americans that expanding the US throughout the North American continent was not only just but inevitable.

But the mood of the other states clearly didn’t feel that inevitably towards Arizona.

But back to the question – why become a state?

Here’s Heidi again.

Heidi: We were really controlled not only by eastern politics because we were just a territory and didn't have voting rights, but also controlled by big eastern and European corporations, mining companies and railroads. And because of that, the average person here did not feel like their vote counted for anything.

At the time, Arizonans didn't have a say on how the state was run nor did they get a voice in Congress.

There was a brief moment in the early 1900s when Arizona could have become a state, but it wouldn't have looked like the Arizona we know today.

Heidi: There was a vote in 1909 to admit us jointly with New Mexico. We would have been one big state with the capital, probably in Santa Fe. And they put that to public vote here in Arizona and New Mexico. It passed in New Mexico. Obviously, they were more populous, so they had a lot of votes for it. But the overwhelming vote here was against it, and that just killed the bill. And then they realized in Congress after that, OK, if we're going to admit them, we're going to have to admit them as two separate states.

The politics and demographics of New Mexico were just too different from Arizona's at the time. New Mexico was Republican and Arizona was Democrat. Congress was majority Republican.

Now, it is important to note that the two parties were different from how we know them to be today. At this time, the Republican party had more liberal leanings than the Democrats. This was, after all, the Republican party of Lincoln who signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

[Find clip of someone reading the Proclamation]

The progressive side of the Democratic Party that we know today didn't really develop until the Great Depression in the 1930s and Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

But early Arizona was more liberal than other states during that time. There was a strong backing for labor unions, direct democracy, and women's suffrage.

Heidi: One of their most important sympathizers was George Hunt, even before he was governor.

George Wylie Paul Hunt. Born on November 1, 1859.

Dave Berman: He was born in Huntsville, Missouri, which was named after his grandfather.

This is historian and ASU professor emeritus Dave Berman. He's written 10 books, one of which is a deep look into George Hunt, the man who would become the state of Arizona's first governor.

I caught up with Dave on the phone.

Dave Berman: There was wealth in the family, but not in his particular family. And he was raised on a farm outside of Huntsville subsistence living. They pretty much depended on the food that they grew in order to survive. And he had a number of siblings, and by the time he was 18, he had enough.

Hunt followed the adage of the day...

[Clip from the song "Go West, Young Man]

Looking for gold, he ended up in the Rocky Mountains in Colorado before making his way south to Globe, Arizona in 1881. At the time the town was nothing more than a mining outpost.

***Dave Berman:** He started off as a waiter. Then they joined the firm that sold goods to miners. And he got to know a lot of the miners, and he became very much attached to them. He was already a fairly liberal Democrat and interested in politics, but he was very much impressed with the working conditions of miners and had thought that they needed help. So he became very developed, with very close ties to labor.*

He got a job at the Old Dominion Commercial Company at the age of 31. Then he worked his way up to secretary and eventually became the company's president. By 1904, he became the mayor of Globe, and set off into a life of politics.

Hunt's name became increasingly recognized in political arenas. He served on the Arizona Territorial Legislature and then the Arizona Territorial Council, where he was president in 1905 and in 1909.

Then in 1910, he presided over the Arizona Constitutional Convention that laid the groundwork for Arizona's admission into the United States.

Hunt was instrumental in getting Arizona's Constitution put together.

***Dave Berman:** He was a politician, and of course, he thought that it was extremely important that he get elected. And so he did whatever politicians do to get elected.*

Suffice to say Hunt had big ideas for what Arizona should look like and he wanted to be at the helm. But despite his ambitions, he was very well regarded. So much so that Arizonans kept electing him.

Dave Berman: *He became the first governor elected in 1911, and he took office on February 14, 1912.*

But he was elected seven times altogether. The first one in 1911. And then it went six more times after that, back down to the 1930.

[MX BREAK]

Heidi: *I'd say he was the one that we call the father of Arizona's constitution.*

This is Heidi again.

Heidi: *And what he did was form our constitution that was very popular here in Arizona, but maybe not so popular with President Taft and some of the leaders in Congress because it was much more progressive and liberal than most state constitutions at the time.*

Congress did eventually accept Arizona, but President Howard Taft vetoed the admission.

Why?

Heidi: *It's the recall of public officials, and specifically he was against the recall of judges.*

Taft had aspirations of sitting on the Supreme Court, and he did, in fact, sit on the bench between 1921 and 1930. He is the [only person in American history](#) to be both president and a Supreme Court judge.

In his mind, it was inconceivable that judges could be removed from office by the public. To him, the judicial branch was above politics – nearly sacred. What he didn't understand, perhaps, was that Arizona allegedly had many corrupt judges.

Heidi: And he said he indicated he would not approve it. So they amended it at the constitutional convention.

But after admission, Arizonans voted that provision back in. Another provision which didn't make the initial draft but was later voted into the constitution was the right to vote for women.

Heidi: Even though women's suffrage leaders like Frances Willard Munns and Pauline O'Neil all testified before the constitutional delegation. They were voted down on their amendment. And so what they did is they waited till statehood and they could put a ballot on the fall, and they won with almost two thirds of the male votes in the state, which was the largest margin of victory for women's suffrage in U.S. history.

Eventually, both President Taft and Congress did approve Arizona's admission to the Union. And there was much excitement among the denizens.

Sativa: Arizonans are very excited about statehood because the large majority of them will this year for the first time in their lives, cast a vote for the president of the United States.

That's Sativa Peterson. She is the news content program manager at the State of Arizona Research Library.

***Sativa:** And then the Tombstone Epitaph really lays this out,*

Sativa has the really cool job of preserving and cataloging Arizona's old newspapers. She pulled several papers from Admission Day on February 14, 1912.

***Sativa:** It says "Beginning today, for the first time in its history, the people of Arizona are governed by men of their own selection. Here to for the appointment of the men who ruled over us has been in the hands of the president. And while the appointees have, with but few exceptions, been conscientious and capable, the people chafed under a system that did not give them a voice and the choice of their own officials."*

Now the Governor of this new state, George Hunt wanted it to be a solemn affair with much dignity and humility. He started the ceremonies by walking to the capitol. Here's Dave again...

***Dave Berman:** Hunt was a Progressive and Progressives went on all the way to minimize the pomp and ceremony of the being governor. And they they opened their doors to anybody one, they came in to see them. But the idea that they're walking, they're not being there in a carriage, you know, that they can wave to them, but they were walking and he didn't walk that far.*

[Stately music]

***Sativa:** The next morning,*

This is Sativa.

Sativa: *If we go and look at the front page of the Arizona Republican on February 15th, of course we see, you know, on the masthead right up there at the top, you know, "bright folds of Old Glory. Have a new star." You know, and in there it says that, you know, "George W. P. Hunt takes oath of office. Ceremony was strikingly simple." We also have cheers greet, joyful news of statehood.*

For all the stately seriousness that Governor Hunt wanted to portray, the rest of the new U.S. citizens were ready to celebrate:

Sativa: *Phoenix is wild with enthusiasm over the statehood proclamation.*

[CHEERING NATS]

And in Bisbee, they reported that the hills reverberated with shrieks from the numerous mine whistles and deafening roar of cannons in honor of statehood.

[CANNON NATS]

And Douglas, the news here was heralded by blowing of every whistle in the city. And also Tombstone, the signaling of the statehood proclamation was the signal this morning for prolonged wringing of fire bells blowing of mine and locomotive whistles and numerous dynamite sticks being lit.

[Bells, whistles nats]

The occasion was enlivened by the presence of a number of cowboys from the ranges who punctured the air with pistol shots. So what happens is it's, you know, it's February 14, 1912. It's a Wednesday. The weather is really fair and nice. And quite early in the day, just

after eight o'clock in the morning, a telegraph arrives from Washington that President Taft has signed the proclamation of admission.

[CELEBRATORY MX BREAK]

And so, Arizona became the 48th state to join the Union, and the last continental state. The rough and tumble image was tamed enough for Congress to finally accept Arizona 110 years ago today.

And this is only skimming the surface of Arizona's statehood story.

[THEME MX SNEAK]

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