

## Free Suffrage <sup>[1]</sup>

### Free Suffrage



Governor David S. Reid, ca.1861, in front of State Capitol, was instrumental the free suffrage movement. Image courtesy of the [William S. Powell](#) <sup>[2]</sup>, 2006North Carolina State Archives; N-55-10-16. <sup>[3]</sup>

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](#) <sup>[4]</sup>. In the gubernatorial campaign of 1848, however, candidate [David S. Reid](#) <sup>[5]</sup> accepted the proposal of leaders of his [Democratic](#) <sup>[6]</sup> Party that this limitation on the franchise be removed, making free suffrage a key issue in his campaign against [Whig](#) <sup>[7]</sup> candidate [Charles Manly](#) <sup>[8]</sup>. 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](#) <sup>[9]</sup> for several sessions until it finally became a reality in [1857](#) <sup>[10]</sup>, 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:  
<http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=%2Fp249901coll22&CISOPTR=177740&CISOOP1=exact&REC=0&CISOBOX=vote> <sup>[10]</sup>

#### Image Credit:

Governor 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/> <sup>[3]</sup> (accessed September 20, 2012).

#### Subjects:

[Reconstruction \(1865-1876\)](#) <sup>[11]</sup>

[Law and legal history](#) <sup>[12]</sup>

#### Authors:

[Powell, William S.](#) <sup>[13]</sup>

#### From:

[Encyclopedia of North Carolina, University of North Carolina Press.](#) <sup>[14]</sup>

**Source URL:**<https://ncpedia.org/free-suffrage>

**Links**

[1] <https://ncpedia.org/free-suffrage> [2] <https://ncpedia.org/biography/powell-william> [3] <https://www.flickr.com/photos/north-carolina-state-archives/2432212442/> [4] <https://ncpedia.org/history/colonial> [5] <https://ncpedia.org/reid-david-settle-research-branch> [6] <https://ncpedia.org/democratic-party> [7] <https://ncpedia.org/whig-party> [8] <https://ncpedia.org/manly-charles-research-branch-nc> [9] <https://ncpedia.org/general-assembly> [10] <http://digital.ncdcr.gov/cdm4/document.php?CISOROOT=%2Fp249901coll22&CISOPTR=177740&CISOOP1=exact&REC=0&CISOBOX=vote> [11] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/reconstruction> [12] <https://ncpedia.org/category/subjects/laws> [13] <https://ncpedia.org/category/authors/powell-william-s-0> [14] <https://ncpedia.org/category/entry-source/encyclopedia->