

the formation of the Republican Party (trading in slaves had already been abolished in 1808).

When Abraham Lincoln became the first Republican president in 1860, Florida responded by withdrawing from the Union and joining other southern slave states in the Confederacy. Though the Civil War hardly touched south Florida, most of the towns in the north – with the exception of Tallahassee – were captured by the Union. There was only one major engagement: the Battle of Olustee in February 1864, which proved to be one of the last Confederate victories. But on 10 May 1865, federal troops entered Tallahassee and the US flag flew once more. Slavery was abolished, a new state constitution adopted, and Florida was readmitted to the Union in 1868.

LAST STOP, PARADISE

The 1862 Homestead Act promised 160 acres of land free to any citizen who would stay for five years and effect improvements. One taker was Edmund Beasley, who, in 1868, moved to the bayside area now called Coconut Grove. Two years later, William Brickell bought land on the

south bank of the Miami River; Ephraim Sturtevant acquired the area now known as Biscayne. In 1875, his daughter, Julia Tuttle, visited and was smitten. She didn't return for 16 years, but would eventually change history.

Yet Miami would never have become a major city had it not been for one of America's great entrepreneurs. Henry Flagler, who made a \$50 million fortune with John Rockefeller in the Standard Oil company, first came to Florida in the 1880s, thinking the warm climate would help his wife's frail health. After moving south, he entered the railroad and hotel business and, starting in St Augustine, built a new railroad.

Flagler and his teams slowly worked their way down the east coast, building a plush hotel in each town. With the newspapers extolling Florida's weather – so warm that citrus fruits could be grown – it soon became a tourist destination for the wintering rich. When another railway magnate, Henry Plant, built the Atlantic Coastline Railroad, which linked Jacksonville to Tampa on the west coast, a deluge of investors and visitors followed.

The sound and the fury

Hurricane Wilma.



Florida may be known as the Sunshine State, but it's also a hurricane magnet. Of the 170 hurricanes that struck the US during the 20th century, more than a third landed here. Floridians are resigned to the fact. Every year, during hurricane season – from June to November – locals board up their windows, tie up their boats and get out of the way.

The rest of the nation, meanwhile, stays glued to their television. CNN might as well be renamed the Hurricane channel, as news is replaced by weather porn: shots of bending palm trees, pounding surf and flying debris. Golden boy Anderson Cooper plays intrepid reporter, donning rain gear, shouting into his microphone and trying to look rugged. Meteorologists, too, become celebrities as they give round-the-clock reports on the storm's particulars. War in Iraq? Forget about it: America wants to know the barometric pressure and wind speed of Wilma.

Indeed, the curious phenomenon of naming storms adds a frisson of excitement. When forecasters describe the ferocity of Donna, Betsy or Gloria, the personification of mother nature adds to the drama, giving new meaning to the phrase 'Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned' (in the name of equality, storms are now named after men too). The