

"The Right to Trial by Jury" Flint River Steamboat Case



Since the earliest years of the state, the Supreme Court of Florida has protected the right to jury trial. In 1848, three years after statehood, the Court confronted a state law authorizing a judge to order seizure and public sale of vessels plying the Apalachicola River system (above) for payment of the owners' debt. The statute made no mention of trial by jury and a case inevitably arose in which a judge without benefit of a jury verdict ordered the sale of a steamboat. Appealed to the Supreme Court, the case involved the sale of the steamboat *Magnolia* because of debts owed by the Flint River Steam Boat Company. In striking down this law, Chief Justice Thomas Douglas wrote that "the right of trial by jury has ever been cherished and preserved by our Anglo Saxon ancestors, and by the Fathers of the revolution of 1776."