

THE FIVE CAPITALS OF ALABAMA



36"

24"

Alabama has had five capitals since it became a territory in 1817. A capital is a city or town where the business of state government is conducted. It is the place where the legislative, executive, and judicial branches fulfill their responsibilities to the public, and where records of those activities are held.



ST. STEPHENS 1817 - 1818

The U.S. Congress chose St. Stephens to be the capital of the Alabama Territory because the town was located in an area of early population growth. The territorial legislature met for two sessions in a hotel. A capitol building was never constructed. After its brief time as a boom town, St. Stephens was mostly abandoned by the Civil War. Today, St. Stephens is a popular park and the site of important archaeological excavations.

HUNTSVILLE 1819

The Tennessee Valley, at the northern end of Alabama, also grew rapidly. When the territorial legislature selected a southern site for the permanent capital, north Alabamians convinced legislators that Huntsville should be the temporary seat of government until the new capital was prepared. The 1819 constitutional convention and the first session of the state legislature took place in Huntsville, meeting in a cabinetmaker's shop.

CAHAWBA 1820 - 1826

The U.S. Congress granted Alabama an area of land where the Cahaba and Alabama rivers meet southwest of Selma. The territorial legislature decided it should be the permanent capital of Alabama, but in 1826 the state legislature voted to move the seat of government. Cahawba declined in population over the rest of the century and was largely abandoned by 1900. Today, it is an archaeological park. Recent excavations have uncovered the foundation of the state's first capitol building.

TUSCALOOSA 1826 - 1846

During the 1825-26 legislative session, residents along the Warrior and Tombigbee rivers and in north Alabama argued successfully for relocating the capital to Tuscaloosa. The legislature met there for the first time in 1826. Three years later, it occupied a newly constructed capitol building with Greek Revival and Federal styles. The building later housed the Alabama Central Female College. A fire destroyed the structure in 1923.

MONTGOMERY 1847 - Present

Alabama's eastern counties gained population following Indian Removal in the 1830s. Citing the need for a centrally located capital, the legislature voted in 1846 to move the seat of government to Montgomery. A new capitol building opened in 1847, but it burned in 1849 on the state's 30th birthday. Within two years, the current state capitol was completed on the same site.



200
ALABAMA
BICENTENNIAL