

Alabama State Research Guide



Family History Sources in the Cotton State

Alabama History

Alabama shares the rich cultural history of the Southeastern region. From 1519, when the first Spanish explorer, Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, navigated Mobile Bay, the state was claimed, explored, and then settled by the Spanish, French, and British.

With the Treaty of Paris in 1763, the French ceded most of Louisiana to Great Britain. When Spain declared war on Great Britain in 1779, the American Revolution came to Alabama. In 1780, Bernardo Galvez captured Mobile from the British. The Treaty of Paris in 1783 ceded to Spain the British holdings in the Mobile region.

The area that would become part of Alabama was added to Mississippi Territory in 1812. Later counties were created as more white settlers moved into ceded native lands until Alabama Territory was created on 3 March 1817. Alabama became a state on 14 December 1819 and, in 1835, the last native lands were ceded. Massive waves of settlement from both Europeans and African Americans came with the opening of this territory as federal lands.

During the early years of statehood the most significant genealogical event was the opening of lands formerly held by Native Americans to white settlers between 1802 and 1838.

Alabama suffered economic and agricultural problems in the 1840s and 1850s. The financial panic and depression that swept across the United States in 1837 resulted in banking problems that caused many Alabamians to lose their savings. Crops were ruined by drought, and several epidemics of yellow fever brought added suffering.

When compared with other Confederate states, Alabama, with the exception of the Mobile area, experienced relatively little military action. However, the conflict devastated the economic, political, and social life of the state. The state was readmitted to the Union on 25 June 1868, though the Reconstruction period led to deepening poverty and mass migration. In the 1860s and 1870s, 10 to 15 percent of the entire white population of Alabama migrated, with a third of these migrants going to Texas.

Railroads were built across the state in the 1870s, expanding the industry of mining of Alabama's rich mineral deposits of coal, iron ore, and limestone. By 1880, steel, iron, lumber, and textile industries were rapidly expanding, creating the cities of Anniston, Birmingham, and Cullman.

This section is from *History of Alabama* in the Ancestry.com Wiki, and was originally published in *Red Book: American State, County and Town Sources*, edited by Alice Eichholz, Ph.D., CG, Alabama chapter Robert S. Davis and Mary Bess Paluzzi.



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Alabama Census Records

Alabama became a state in 1819. Pre-statehood censuses have been reconstructed through the use of other sources, including an 1810 census which was taken from the Mississippi Territory enumeration. Early Spanish censuses and fragments of state censuses also exist for random counties for various years.

Federal census records for Alabama were taken every ten years beginning in 1820. The 1820 census records for Alabama were lost or destroyed; however, County assessor's lists have helped reconstruct the 1820 census for the counties of Baldwin, Conecuh, Dallas, Franklin, Limestone, St. Clair, Shelby, Wilcox, and portions of Lawrence.

Surviving Federal census records begin in 1830 for Alabama and continue through the present. The 1890 U.S. Federal Census was destroyed, and only portions of Perryville (Beat No.11) and Severe (Beat No. 8) of Perry County survive for Alabama.

Alabama state censuses were taken in 1855 and 1866, though they are not considered complete.

Related Censuses Available on Ancestry.com:

- [Alabama State Census, 1820-1866](#)
- [U.S. Census Reconstructed Records, 1660-1820](#)
- [Alabama, Compiled Census and Census Substitutes Index, 1810-90](#)
- [Selected U.S. Federal Census Non-Population Schedules, 1850-1880](#)
- [Alabama Census Returns, 1820](#)
- [Census records and Cherokee muster rolls](#)

Alabama Vital Records

State-level registration of births and deaths in Alabama began January 1st, 1908. However, compliance was intermittent until the mid-1920s.

- [Alabama Department of Public Health – Vital Records](#): Holds records of births and deaths since 1908; marriages since 1936; and divorces since 1950. Some earlier records may be available at the county level; however, many records are not complete due to intermittent reporting compliance and courthouse fires.

<i>Population</i>	
1800	1,250
1810	9,046
1820	127,901
1830	309,527
1840	590,756
1850	771,623
1860	964,201
1870	996,992
1880	1,262,505
1890	1,513,401
1900	1,828,697
1910	2,138,093
1920	2,348,174
1930	2,646,248
1940	2,832,961
1950	3,061,743
1960	3,266,740
1970	3,444,165
1980	3,893,888
1990	4,040,587
2000	4,447,100
2010	4,802,740

Birth and Death records are closed for 125 years except to family. Marriage and divorce records are not confidential.



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Alabama Vital Records on Ancestry.com

- [Alabama, Select Marriages, 1816-1957](#)
- [Alabama, Marriage Collection, 1800-1969](#)
- [Alabama, Deaths and Burials Index, 1881-1974](#)
- [Alabama Deaths, 1908-59](#)
- [Alabama Marriages, 1809-1920 \(Selected Counties\)](#)

Alabama Military Records

- [U.S., Confederate Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#)
- [Alabama, Confederate Pension and Service Records, 1862-1947](#)
- [U.S., Union Soldiers Compiled Service Records, 1861-1865](#)
- [Alabama Civil War Muster Rolls, 1861-1865](#)
- [Alabama, Texas and Virginia, Confederate Pensions, 1884-1958](#)
- [Alabama, Military Card Files, 1917-1918](#)

Alabama Immigration & Travel Records

- [Alabama, Homestead and Cash Entry Patents, Pre-1908](#)
- [Web: Alabama, Voter Registration Records, 1867](#)
- [Alabama, Convict Records, 1886-1952](#)
- [U.S., Tennessee Valley, Family Removal and Population Readjustment Case Files, 1934-1953](#)

Alabama Immigration & Travel Records

- [U.S., Southeast Coastwise Inward and Outward Slave Manifests, 1790-1860](#)
- [Alabama, Naturalization Records, 1909-1991](#)

Other Collections

- [U.S. City Directories, 1821-1989](#) (Use the browse box in the upper right corner to determine what directories are available for your ancestor's area. If they lived in a rural area, check to see if that area was included with a larger city in the vicinity.)
- [U.S. School Yearbooks, 1880-2012](#)
- [U.S. General Land Office Records, 1796-1907](#)
- [Freedman's Bank Records, 1865-1871](#)

[See all Alabama Collections](#)

Help and Advice

- [Alabama Family History Research](#)
- [Counties of Alabama](#)

Other State Resources

The organizations listed below provide information about Alabama history and genealogy. In addition to these state-level resources, many counties and towns maintain important genealogical collections in local libraries, genealogical societies, or historical societies, so check for a local resource when researching.

Statewide Research Resources

- [Alabama Department of Archives and History \(ADAH\)](#): The Research section of the website provides information on the Research Room in Montgomery, and includes a tutorial on family research at ADAH. The catalog of the Archives' extensive holdings is available on the [Collections page](#), which also includes links to digital collections.
- [Alabama Genealogical Society, Inc.](#): The Society publishes the *AGS Magazine* and holds two annual seminars. The website contains searchable resources, including names indexed from selected books and records.
- [Alabama GenWeb](#): Provides historical information and guidelines for genealogy research in Alabama and includes links to county genealogy pages, local genealogical societies, and digital archives.
- [RootsWeb Alabama Resources](#): Contains links to Alabama genealogy resources, including state- and county-level websites; societies and organizations; and personal and miscellaneous web sites related to Alabama research.
- [Alabama Mosaic](#): This digital archive provides a single point of access to digital collections about Alabama people, places, history, and culture. Collections containing text and photographs from universities, public libraries, archives are included.
- [Bureau of Land Management \(BLM\) General Land Office Records](#): The BLM administers Federal Land for public land states, including Alabama, and maintains records of land patents which granted land from the Federal Government to individuals. Use the Land Patent Search to locate records of land grants by name. Many record images are available on the web site. See the FAQ for more information on how to locate and use land patents.
- [National Archives at Atlanta](#): Holds records covering Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. The holdings include census, land, military, immigration, naturalization, and court records.

Specialty and Regional Research

- [Birmingham Public Library](#): The Library's [Genealogy page](#) describes the resources available in the Southern History department, including local indexes and a list of surnames in the family files. The Library's Digital Collections also contain information of interest to genealogists, including digitized newspapers, yearbooks, and maps.
- [Mobile Public Library – Local History and Genealogy](#): specializes in the history of Mobile, Alabama along the coast from Pensacola to Pascagoula, and in genealogical records for the southeastern U. S

[View all Alabama collections on Ancestry.com](#)

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Significant Dates (through 1944)

- 1519 – Spanish explorers explored the Gulf of Mexico.
- 1702 – French colonists founded Mobile.
- 1712 – Fort Luis de la Mobile, a settlement on the Mobile River was moved to present day Mobile.
- 1724 – Slavery was institutionalized by the French Code Noir.
- 1780 – Spanish captured Mobile during the American Revolutionary War.
- 1795 – Pickney Treaty with Spain gave the U.S. all of West Florida above the 31st parallel; this did not include Biloxi or Mobile.
- 1798 – Mississippi Territory, which included Alabama, was organized.
- 1799 – The boundary between the U.S. and Spanish West Florida was surveyed and the 31st parallel was marked.
- 1802 – Land around the 31st parallel was ceded by Georgia.
- 1805 – White settlements of Indian lands began.
- 1812 – U.S. captured Mobile; Spain ceded West Florida portion of Alabama which became the District of Mobile.
- 1814 – Andrew Jackson defeated the Creek Indians; their lands were ceded to the U.S.
- 1817 – Alabama Territory was created.
- 1819 – Alabama became the 22nd state on December 14, 1819; the first constitution was adopted.
- 1820 – River trade via steam boat was opened between Montgomery and Mobile.
- 1821 – First laws written and patterned after Mississippi laws.
- 1826 – State capital moved to Tuscaloosa.
- 1830 – Indian Removal Bill treaties were signed.
- 1832 – The first railroad opened.
- 1846 – Montgomery was selected the state capital.
- 1849 – Capitol destroyed by fire.
- 1852 – Marriage settlements were required to be recorded.
- 1861 – Alabama was the fourth state to secede from the Union.
- 1861-1865 – Civil War: Alabama sent 120,000 men to fight for the Confederacy
- 1868 – Alabama was admitted back into the Union.
- 1881 – Women under 18 who were to be married had to post a bond with the county probate judge; judge required to issue marriage licenses; all births and deaths were required to be registered with county.
- 1908 – Mandatory registration of births and deaths with state required as of January 1, 1908; marriage laws require a man had to be at least 17 years of age and a woman had to be at least 14 years of age. If the man was under 21 or the woman under 18 and as yet unmarried, the parent/guardian consent required.
- 1909 – Boll weevils entered the state and destroyed the cotton crop.
- 1937 – State sales tax levied to fund education.
- 1944 – Dixiecrat Convention met in Birmingham; Strom Thurmond placed on presidential ballot; Harry Truman left off.



Library of Congress, "[Scenes from Alabama...](#)"
digital TIFF file, Carol M Highsmith, 2010