

# This Day in History... December 14, 1819

## Alabama Becomes 22nd State

On December 14, 1819, Alabama was admitted to the Union as the 22nd state.

As far back as 8,000 years ago, American Indian groups lived in the area that is now Alabama. Much later, Cherokee, Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw Indians moved into the region. After white settlers arrived in the area, they referred to these Indians as the "Civilized Tribes," as they adopted many European customs.

The Spanish explorer Alonso Álvarez de Piñeda reached Mobile Bay in 1519. Hernando de Soto, also a Spaniard, led an expedition into Alabama in 1540, making him the first European to explore the interior of the region. In 1559, Tristán de Luna ventured into Alabama searching for gold. He organized settlements around Mobile Bay and near today's Claiborne, but these were soon abandoned after De Luna was relieved of his command and had to return to Mexico.

In 1699, a group of Frenchmen and French-Canadians sailed to Dauphin Island in Mobile Bay. They founded Fort Louis along the Mobile River in 1702. Later, Fort Louis became the capital of the French colony of Louisiana. Flooding in 1711 forced Fort Louis to be relocated 27 miles south, to the current location of Mobile. This became the first permanent white settlement in Alabama. Renamed Fort Condé in 1720, the settlement remained the capital of French Louisiana until 1722, when New Orleans took its place.



*Issued for Alabama's 200th anniversary in 2019.*

In 1763, the French gave up most of the colony of Louisiana to the British in the Treaty of Paris, which concluded the French and Indian War. The Spanish declared war on Britain in 1779. Bernardo Gálvez captured Mobile in 1780. The 1783 Treaty of Paris gave the Mobile area back to Spain.

Thomas Pickney of the US negotiated the Treaty of San Lorenzo in 1795. This treaty fixed the US border along the 31st parallel of north latitude, which meant all of Alabama, except the Mobile area, was part of the US. This area was made part of the Mississippi Territory in 1798. During the War of 1812, the US seized the Mobile area from Spain. In 1813, Upper Creek Indians massacred several hundred opposing Lower Creek and white militiamen and settlers at Fort Mims, near today's Timsaw.

William Weatherford, also known as Chief Red Eagle, who was of mixed European and Native American ancestry, led the Upper Creek. US forces under General Andrew Jackson defeated them in the Battle of Horseshoe Bend in 1814. In 1817, the Alabama Territory was organized. Saint Stephens became the capital city.

In 1819, a convention was held in Huntsville. This convention produced the territory's first constitution. On December 14, 1819, Alabama entered the Union as the 22nd state. Huntsville served as the capital city, but a little more than a year later it was moved to Cahaba. The capital was moved to Tuscaloosa in 1826, due to extensive flood damage in Cahaba, and finally Montgomery in 1846.

Alabama's economy suffered many economic setbacks from the 1840s until the Civil War. A state bank had been created during the 1820s. Poorly managed, the bank soon ran into trouble. During the 1840s, Governor Benjamin Fitzpatrick began closing the bank. Many Alabamians lost all their savings. Drought and an outbreak of yellow fever also caused economic difficulties for residents of Alabama.

In 1848, the state government adopted the "Alabama Platform," which declared the US government did not have the right to bar slaves from new territories. On January 11, 1861, Alabama withdrew, or seceded, from the Union. It declared itself the Republic of Alabama.

Alabama's Ordinance of Secession invited representatives from "the slaveholding states of the South" to a convention in Montgomery. On February 8, 1861, this convention established the Confederate States of America, with Montgomery as its capital city. This earned Montgomery the nickname, the "Cradle of the Confederacy." In May 1861, Richmond, Virginia, became the capital of the Confederacy.

Several Civil War battles were fought in Alabama. However, most of the state escaped the damage that devastated much of the South. Alabama was readmitted to the Union on June 25, 1868. During Reconstruction, the state's debt grew rapidly – from \$8 million in 1866 to \$32 million in 1873. A new state constitution was adopted in 1875.

Alabama entered a period of rapid growth and prosperity after Reconstruction. During the 1870s, the expansion of railroad service and the creation of new steel manufacturing techniques were major factors in this economic growth. Other important industries included lumber and textiles. Alabama's economy grew even faster during World War I with shipbuilding emerging as an important source of revenue. The state's farmers increased their production of cotton and food crops to meet war demands. In the mid-1920s, new port facilities were built at Mobile, which allowed the state to greatly increase its trade with foreign nations.

World War II restored Alabama's economy after the Depression. In 1941, the Redstone Arsenal was established in Huntsville. This facility developed the rockets, satellites, and spacecraft that launched America's space age. In 1960, the George C. Marshall Space Flight Center opened in Huntsville. This center developed the rockets that took American astronauts to the moon.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Alabama faced many serious racial problems. The state was the focus of the nation as civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and John Lewis led protests calling for an end to segregation. And in 1963, President John F. Kennedy federalized the Alabama National Guard to enforce school integration laws there.



*Issued for Alabama's 150th anniversary of statehood.*



*Pictures the state flag and a shrimp boat.*

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