

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Historic Huntsville Tour

*Travel through the past in our
downtown historic districts*



501 Franklin Street
Van Valkenburg House, ca. 1902

Twickenham, Old Town and
Five Points Historic Districts

HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA...

A Look Back

John Hunt, lured through the foothills of the Appalachian Mountains by Indian tales of a Big Spring of ever-flowing, fresh, clear water, built his home near the limestone bluffs in 1805. Settlers followed the explorer and Madison County, Alabama, was created in 1808 with a population of over 300.

Huntsville's first land developer, Leroy Pope, arrived and purchased much of the surrounding land and promoted re-sale to friends and acquaintances from Georgia and Virginia. In 1810 Pope gave the name of Twickenham to the town after the English home of the poet Alexander Pope. In 1811 anti-British sentiment, which culminated in the War of 1812, was the principal cause of the change of name to Huntsville in honor of its first settler.

Huntsville's growth was rapid in the early years. The year 1811 saw the creation of what is the oldest Masonic Lodge in Alabama, with John Hunt a charter member and Andrew Jackson a frequent visitor. In 1812, *The Madison Gazette*, said to be the second newspaper in the territory, was organized. Next came a school, a bank, a library and one of the earliest public water systems in the South. During 1819 Huntsville was chosen convention city for the drafting of Alabama's first Constitution. It was in Huntsville that the first governor of the State, William Wyatt Bibb, was inaugurated and the first state legislature called into session at Constitution Hall. Huntsville served as the first capital (temporary) of Alabama, while Cahaba, designated as the first permanent capital, was being readied.

Huntsville continued to flourish as a center for political, educational, cultural, agricultural and industrial development. One of the earliest cotton mills in the nation operated nearby. River barges, stage lines and later the Memphis and Charleston railroad made the town a transportation hub for the region.

As war clouds gathered in the 1850's, anti-secession sentiment ran high. It was the railroad, a prime objective of the Union troops, which led to the capture and occupation of Huntsville in 1862. Many homes were used by the Union officer's quarters and schools and churches were used by the Union troops for their barracks. Surprisingly, only a few structures were destroyed and those were reported as accidents by fire.

When the Civil War ended, the economically devastated town began slowly to rebuild. Investment of Northern capital was encouraged and by 1900 Huntsville was one of the thriving textile centers in the state. Hardwood factories, plant nurseries, and summer tourists attracted by Monte Sano, the "mountain of health," contributed to the development of the primarily agricultural area.

World War II brought Redstone Arsenal and, afterward, 100 German scientists, led by Dr. Wernher von Braun. Phenomenal growth occurred during this period; growth in every direction and by every measurement. Diversification of industry was the next step, and the town of Huntsville became a city of the future.



HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA... The Downtown Historic Districts

The historic districts of Huntsville, Alabama – the **Twickenham Historic District**, **Old Town Historic District** and **Five Points Historic District** – are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This official list contains places considered worthy of preservation for their significance in American history, architecture, archaeology, engineering and culture.

Twickenham, one of the largest concentrations of antebellum homes in the South, contains more than sixty-five antebellum structures. The name chosen for the district, Twickenham, was derived from the first official name given to the town when it was chosen as the county seat in 1810. Within the district are homes of various architectural styles many built prior to 1860. The houses have been carefully researched and identified. Several have been included in the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of 1935 and detailed plans of these structures are on file with the Library of Congress.

Old Town is composed mainly of residences built between 1870 and 1930. It is the only predominantly Victorian neighborhood remaining in the city. Its unique character results from the high concentration of closely spaced, ornate Victorian homes. In some places the original brick sidewalks and carriage blocks remain. Although Old Town is essentially a post-bellum development, there are several antebellum homes in the district.

Five Points is Huntsville's newest locally designated Historic District, established in 1999. Initially part of the 1892 East Huntsville Addition, this neighborhood illustrates the evolution of middle-class housing in 20th century Huntsville. The dwellings include a collection of modest one and two-story vernacular Victorian homes, a variety of Bungalows that experienced great popularity in the 1920's and 30's, modest Cape Cods, which were then succeeded by the Ranch style so fashionable in the 50's and 60's.

Although space in this brochure does not permit the inclusion of all the homes in the historic districts, we have chosen a selection that we hope you will enjoy.

TWICKENHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT



1. 109 Gates Avenue Alabama Constitution Village

A living village commemorating Alabama's entry into the Union at the 1819 Constitutional Convention. The museum consists of four major buildings of the period 1805-1819 reconstructed on their original sites. Costumed interpreters portray life in 1819 and take you through Constitution Hall, the Clay building, Boardman complex and the Neal residence which includes an adjoining kitchen, well house, servant's quarters, carriage house, necessary house and gardens. Tours available. Admission charged.

2. 216 West Side Square Regions Bank Building, ca. 1835

The last of the original buildings of early Huntsville on the public square, this magnificent Greek Revival structure with six ionic columns and high entablature, was constructed by George Steele in 1835. It has been in continuous service as a financial institution since it was built. The bank was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. HABS, 1935.



3. 124 South Side Square Harrison Brothers Hardware Store, ca. 1897

In business since 1879, this museum store is now operated by the Historic Huntsville Foundation. Authentic interior fixtures provide a first-hand look at an early 20th century mercantile establishment. Open Monday through Saturday.



**4. 231 East Side Square
I. Schiffman Building, ca. 1845**

One of Huntsville's few existing antebellum commercial structures. The actress Tallulah Bankhead was born here in a second floor apartment in 1902. The building was significantly altered in 1895 in the Romanesque Revival style.

**5. 212 Eustis Avenue
The Church of the Nativity, Episcopal, ca. 1859**

Designed by Frank Wills of the internationally prominent architectural firm of Wills & Dudley of New York, this brick Gothic Revival building is in essentially original condition. It is a product of the "Ecclesiological Movement" in Episcopal Church design, wherein church buildings were inspired by English parish churches of the Middle Ages. Ordered to stable horses inside the church during the Civil War, a Union officer refused to obey the command after reading the words "Reverence My Sanctuary" engraved over the entrance. The chapel and parish house were added later in keeping with the original Wills & Dudley structure. HABS, 1935.



**6. 300 Williams Avenue
Thomas Bibb House, ca. 1836**

A high-style example of Greek Revival architecture, this brick house was built by Thomas Bibb, second governor of Alabama. Exterior walls of the structure are twenty inches thick with three-foot partitions between the two front rooms and hallways. The only basic change in the original plan is in the kitchen arrangement. Formerly it was located away from the house, but is now connected directly to it.

**7. 210 Williams Avenue
Fletcher-Lowe House, ca. 1902**

This turn of the century house was designed in the Chateausque style by Huntsville architect Herbert Cowell. The interiors of this fine house contain many of the original wood finishes.

**8. 205 Williams Avenue
Public Inn, ca. 1818**

This building was opened as a "public house" for "travelers and a few boarders in the best manner and on the most reasonable terms" about 1818 at its then location around the corner on Madison Street. How convenient it might have been for the overworked legislators, working on the Constitution, to retire for food, drink and a room to share, sometimes three to a bed. The building was moved in 1926 and has been here since, recently restored with a luxury condo upstairs.

9. 501 Franklin Street *(featured on cover)*
Van Valkenburg House, ca. 1902

This house is an excellent example of Classical Revival styling by the architect Herbert Cowell. The majestic two-story home has several beautiful stained glass windows.

10. 515 Franklin Street
Munroe-Clark House, ca. 1814

A two-story brick Federal home built in the half-house tradition around 1819 for Dr. Alexander Erskine, one of the founders of Alabama's first Masonic Lodge. The present Greek Revival porches, the third set of porches built over the years, were added much later. The wide pine floor boards in the house are original.

11. 516 Franklin Street
Mastin-Batson House, ca. 1819



This early frame dwelling was built in 1819 on land which had previously belonged to Leroy Pope. The structure was originally built as a log cabin and parts of the cabin still remain under the framing of the back porch. The brick floors in the basement were laid by slaves and one of ten fireplaces in the house is located there.

12. 517 Franklin Street
Thomas Fearn House, ca. 1820

Tall ceilings, mantels faced with Italian marble and hand carved woodwork are abundant in this lovely two-story brick home. Dr. Thomas Fearn, nationally known for his research in the use of quinine, built this home in 1820 and in 1847 hired George Steele to add the south twin parlors and modify its facade in Greek Revival style. Period outbuildings are also on the grounds. Brick walks and landscaping done by Dr. Fearn more than 100 years ago remain virtually the same. Dr. Fearn was prominent in civic and business affairs of early Huntsville.

13. 527 Franklin Street
Albert Erskine House, ca. 1818

Early Federal styling reflects the date of construction of this house which was given to the Erskine family by Mrs. Erskine's father. Unusual blue glass panes, which are believed to be original, are found in two of the upstairs windows. Speculation is that in the early 1800's sunlight shining through the panes was believed to be of benefit to people suffering from arthritis. Outbuildings beyond this two-story brick home, including a smokehouse and servants quarters, are preserved. The Victorian period porch, added in the late 19th century, makes an attractive counterpoint to the simple lines of the early 19th century house.

14. 558 Franklin Street
Morgan-Neal House, ca. 1823



Marked as the birthplace of Confederate raider, John Hunt Morgan, this brick home received its Italianate facade and three-story tower in 1855 at the direction of George W. Neal who purchased the home in 1850.

15. 601 Franklin Street
Hollowell House, ca. 1835

This charming brick Palladian raised cottage was built as a honeymoon house by a Madison County planter. The delicate proportions of the portico, the hipped roof and raised main floor reflect the pervasive influence of the 16th-century Italian architect Andrea Palladio, who published *The Four Books of Architecture*.

**16. 600 Franklin Street
Grove-Bassett House, ca. 1818**

One of the earliest brick houses in Huntsville, this house is a fine example of the Federal period. The original four foot front door is unusually wide for a single door. Public health pioneer, Dr. John Young Bassett, bought the home in 1830.

**17. 600 Adams Street
Cruse House, ca. 1825**

Disguised by its 1920's era entrance porch, this two-story Federal brick house was built by Samuel Cruse in 1825. Mary Ann Cruse who grew up in the home, wrote children's books and used the earnings to purchase stained glass windows for the Church of the Nativity.

**18. 528 Adams Street
Yeatman House, ca. 1825**



Built by George Steele in 1825, this two-story brick house has a fine Italianate entrance porch. The Greek Revival north rooms were added to the house at a later time by Steele. It was the birthplace of John C.

Greenway, prominent engineer in early Arizona history and the Spanish American War.

**19. 603 Adams Street
Moore-Rhett House, ca. 1826**

The back portion of this large Italianate house is believed to have been constructed by John Boardman shortly after he purchased the area from Leroy Pope in 1824. Hand-pressed bricks were made by slaves for the walls of the house. A black craftsman, Charles Bell from Charlottesville, Virginia, was brought here to build the three spiral stairways. Two



of the stairways led to the second floor and the third, built around a large post, led to the tower that once was on the roof. Much woodwork inside the house is walnut, put together with wooden pegs. The Moore house was the scene of one of Huntsville's most famous social events, a formal party in 1892 honoring the cow "Lily Flagg," the world champion butter fat producer.

**20. 517 Adams Street
McDowell House, ca. 1848**



At construction, during absence of the owner, the overseer is said to have misunderstood the owner's desires and the house was built with the front of the house facing in the wrong

direction. Federal Army General Ormsby Mitchel chose this house as his headquarters during the Civil War. The entrance portico was added during the 1920's. Period outbuildings surrounding the house have been preserved. HABS, 1935.

**21. 518 Adams Street
Clarke-Dorning House, ca. 1835**

Nineteen rooms are contained in this two-story Federal style brick house with period outbuildings. It was enlarged before the Civil War by John J. Fackler, cotton merchant of Huntsville and New Orleans. HABS, 1935.

**22. 511 Adams Street
Lane House, ca. 1835**

The porch of this raised brick cottage was added during the 1960's. The United States flag flew over the cottage during the Civil War

and much valuable information was passed to Union forces by its owner, George W. Lane, a staunch



Union man. During the war, President Abraham Lincoln named him to a Federal Judgeship in Kentucky.

Huntsville, Alabama Historic Tour

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23. 413 McClung Avenue
Walker-Lowe House, ca. 1834

Constructed in the early 1830's, this Greek Revival house was purchased by Leroy Pope Walker after the Civil War. The grandson of Leroy Pope, he served as the first Secretary of the Confederacy. The picturesque front lawn contains the old city reservoir which was converted into a sunken garden. The reception hall and twin parlors on the first floor, an identical second floor and a basement were included in the original dwelling, as well as at least two original white marble mantels.

24. 416 McClung Avenue
McClung House, ca. 1838



Double plantation porches were added to this two-story Greek Revival house prior to the Civil War. Period outbuildings and statues in the tiered gardens remain interesting features of this historic location. It was built by James McClung, lawyer and legislator, whose family was prominent in the development of Knoxville, Tennessee.

25. 403 Echols Avenue
Pope House, ca. 1814

Constructed by Leroy Pope in 1814, this two-story brick house is the oldest documented residence in Alabama. The house is complete with period outbuildings and beautiful gardens. George Steele, a fine Huntsville architect, added the highly original classical Revival portico to the residence around 1850. The architect used the Tuscan order for six columns supporting a truncated pediment carved in a delicate Adamesque fan design. HABS, 1935.

26. 310 Williams Avenue
Mastin House, ca. 1823

Influenced by his observation of architecture in New Orleans, Captain Francis T. Mastin built this house in 1823.

Prior to the Civil War the Italianate features of the house were added. Of special interest is the cast iron fence decorated with the fleur-de-lis pattern and the adjacent two-story building (which is now connected to the house) used as living quarters for Captain Mastin's four sons.



27. 407 Lincoln Street Helion Lodge No.1

This building houses the first Masonic Lodge in Alabama chartered August 29, 1811 under the Masonic Jurisdiction of Kentucky. Many prominent Huntsvillians have been members, including John Hunt, who was a Master Mason, and Thomas Fearn, who was a Senior Warden. The northernmost wall of this present building, originally the southernmost wall of the first structure, dates from the early 1820's, and qualifies as the oldest Masonic edifice in Alabama.

28. 401 Lincoln Street Perkins House, ca. 1815

Legal history was written here during the occupancy of this two-story brick home by Arthur F. Hopkins, prominent lawyer and judge. The house was built in two stages, with the porch added in the late 19th century.

29. 311 Lincoln Street Cox House, ca. 1825

The round-cornered and paired Italianate windows were added later to this house designed by George Steele and built for Josiah Cox, business and civic leader and developer of Big Spring water system. Legend holds that Mr. Cox had the house built to an unusual height to block the view of the Leroy Pope house further up the hill. Because of this, the two-story stuccoed brick house has been nicknamed the "Spite House." In any event, the house has ceilings unusually high for the early 19th century.



**30. 312 Lincoln Street
First Presbyterian Church, ca. 1860**

Organized in 1818, this is the oldest Presbyterian church in the state of Alabama. The 1860 brick Gothic Revival edifice replaced an earlier 1822 white frame church at the same location. The present church had the tallest steeple in Huntsville but it was destroyed in an 1878 storm and never replaced.



**31. 300 Gates Avenue
Howard Weeden House Museum, ca. 1819**

Home of John McKinley, Associate Justice of the United States Supreme Court, as well as birthplace and lifelong home of nationally famous artist and poet, Maria Howard



Weeden (1846-1905). The two-story brick house features an outstanding leaded glass entrance fanlight, spiral staircase and hand carved mantels. After the Civil War, Miss Weeden partly supported her impoverished family by teaching art here. The Weeden House opened as a house museum in 1981. Tours available. Admission charged. HABS, 1935.

**32. 206 Gates Avenue
Bernstein House, ca. 1818**

The earliest part of this house was simply two front rooms and an entrance hall, built about 1818. General John Brahan purchased the house in 1828 and made some additions. General Brahan ran into financial difficulties with the federal government to the tune of between \$40,000-\$80,000. Fortunately his many good friends in town came to his rescue and paid the debt to keep him out of prison.

OLD TOWN HISTORIC DISTRICT

33. 103 Lincoln Street Temple B'nai Sholom, ca. 1898

This Romanesque Revival style synagogue was probably designed by the same architect who designed the Central Presbyterian Church. The red brick and matching mortar of the walls form a solid background for the brick arches which top the openings and a contrast with the light stone of the lintels and stringcourses. The gable peak erupts in a flurry of small turrets. The two towers are of different heights with the taller terminating in a polygonal slate roof.



34. 111 Calhoun Street Lloyd House, ca. 1857

This Greek Revival house retains many Federal architectural features. It is the oldest remaining frame house in the Old Town Historic District. The Victorian-era porch was added later using the original smaller porch columns. This spacious entry foyer and graceful stairway are noteworthy for a house of this size. Businessman A.H. Thurston and his descendants owned this house for ninety years. It later served as a men's boarding house before being restored in 1979.



**35. 118 Calhoun Street
Dill House, ca. 1855**

Called Roselawn, this house was built by prominent attorney Isaiah Dill. It is a symmetrical five-bay Greek Revival brick house with Federal influence remaining. The exterior is basically unchanged from the original except for an addition in the rear.

**36. 505 Holmes Avenue
Shepherd House, ca. 1828**

This is the smallest known Federal period house in Huntsville, with its two original rooms, and is still owned by the descendants of the Shepherd family. It was built for Levin Wilson Shepherd, whose son Charles Shepherd established a boys' private school after the Civil War where he taught for fifty years, his motto being "Spare the rod and spoil the child."

**37. 132 Walker Avenue
Johnson House, ca. 1872**

Courthouse records indicate the existence of this house in 1872, but its actual construction date is unknown. The original house, built by Elizah S. Johnson, consisted of four rooms, two upstairs and two below, with a back outside stairway. This house was updated to Carpenter-Gothic style in the 1890's with four additional rooms and a sawn balustrade porch.

**38. 127 Walker Avenue
Pleasants House,
ca. 1889**

The metal mansard roof of this two-story frame house has a three-story tower with round topped windows. The original porch has cresting along the top.



**39. 100 Pratt Avenue
Clemens House, ca. 1830**

The Clemens House is a combination of a Federal period (early 1830's) house and an extensive Italianate (latter 1800's) remodeling. At one time it was the home of Jeremiah Clemens, first cousin of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain). Jeremiah Clemens was a state legislator for five years before being elected to the U.S. Senate in 1849. He was a leader of opponents to secession in 1861 and an outspoken advocate of peace during the latter months of the Civil War. He died a few weeks after peace was declared. The house remained in his estate until 1874 and passed through several owners before being purchased by Huntsville Utilities in the mid-1970's. The house was sold to Jeff Kennedy and moved to a site adjacent to the Children's Advocacy Center on Pratt Avenue in 2004.

FIVE POINTS HISTORIC DISTRICT

Five Points Commercial District

It is often said by locals that the Five Points businesses may not have everything you want, but they sure have everything you need. A landmark for the Five Points neighborhood and for Huntsville since the late 40's, the commercial area, tucked between the residential Historic Districts, certainly contributes to the magnetism and appeal of this area. The commercial businesses on Pratt, Wellman, Holmes and Andrew Jackson Way originated to serve the immediate vicinity. Through the years, the area has grown to include numerous eateries, antiques & collectibles galleries, a cozy locally-owned grocery and other one-of-a-kind shops housed in post-war buildings and converted bungalows that draw people from all over town. It remains a thriving and vital business community today.

40. 809 Pratt Avenue Booth-Putman House, ca. 1906



This charming turn of the century cottage boasts a welcoming bungalow porch yet maintains its Victorian framework with a steeply pitched roof & transom over the ornamental wood door. It was built by A. M. Booth, a civic leader and owner of one of the largest lumberyards in the City. He felt that everyone should "Own your own home, it makes for happiness, good citizenship and stimulates thrift and industry."

41. 1115 Ward Avenue Livingston House, ca. 1929

Built in the California Craftsman style, this one and one-half story brick bungalow has a prominent front porch with a long gabled roof and a large centered front dormer. The attached porte cochere is a desirable feature which adds interest. Many lots on this block were part of a tract originally purchased by Dr. William J. Mayo and thought to be a potential site for the Mayo Clinic which was eventually built in Minnesota.



**42. 1204 Ward Avenue
Cummings House, ca. 1940**

This two-story Cape Cod style home features slender triple dormers and an interesting round window predominant in the front gable. It was built by Huntsville leader Milton J. Cummings of Brown Engineering, the first high-technology firm established in Huntsville that later became Teledyne-Brown. Mr. Cummings led in the development of Huntsville Research Park, later to be re-named "Cummings Research Park" in his honor.

**43. 811 Randolph Avenue
Petty House, ca. 1905**

This attractive two-story Victorian home features an appealing Bungalow style porch with slender tapered columns and was built by prominent Huntsville attorney F. Turner Petty and his wife Margaret.

Mr. Petty mysteriously

disappeared in 1916. The surrounding gardens are a perfect compliment to this turn of the century home.



**44. 804 Wells Ave.
Coombs House, ca. 1899**

Long-time residents fondly know it as the "Pig House" because a former owner was once a pig farmer and adorned the yard and exterior with pig sculptures and placards. This home is a fine example of the "Folk Victorian" style. Owned by the Coombs family until 1919, it was sold to the Wills-Taylor School, a private preparatory school that added a two-story addition to the rear of the house used as a boy's dormitory. The school then became the Huntsville College, and the house was used as the college physics and chemistry laboratory. The home has been a private residence since 1928.

45. Maple Hill Cemetery

This beautiful cemetery was established in 1818 when Leroy Pope sold two acres of land to the City of Huntsville for \$200 and now covers nearly 100 acres. It had no official name then and was known only as “the burying place.” Today Maple Hill is the most historic and largest cemetery in the state of Alabama, with five Governors buried here. It is also the final resting place for heroes from the War of 1812 and the Revolutionary War to the most recent War on Terror.



There is a special section of Maple Hill known as Potter’s Field. In the 1800s, hundreds of people who could not afford markers or monuments were placed there in unmarked graves.

Surveyor Thomas Freeman established the Meridian Marker here for the newly purchased Indian lands of 1807. It is the point from which all land in northern Alabama is still surveyed.

The stone wall was built in 1918 for \$5000, through the efforts of The Women’s Club of Huntsville, replacing an old cedar rail fence.



One of the most beautiful sights in town is Maple Hill Cemetery in the fall as the leaves begin to change. The **Maple Hill Cemetery Stroll** is not to be missed. More than sixty costumed characters “come alive” to represent notables from the past during this annual event which is free to the public.

HUNTSVILLE

Historic Huntsville Tour



Historic Huntsville Depot & Museum circa 1860

One of the nation's oldest remaining railroad structures. Climb aboard locomotives, see Alabama's largest public model railroad, visit the Civil War exhibit and discover graffiti written by soldiers.

Located at 320 Church Street.

For information, call 256-564-8100.

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