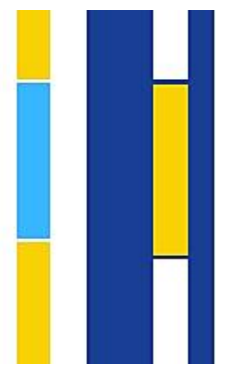


HISTORY OF ARAB, ALABAMA

Proud of our Past... Embracing our Future

Arab's Journey Story: Every Place has a Story to Tell.



Arab, Alabama is a thriving city situated atop Brindlee Mountain, and just 30 miles south of Huntsville and 70 miles north of Birmingham. How the town came to be and who the people were that made it this way makes for an interesting study in history. Arab is a quaint yet progressive city, where its best assets are its people.

The Cherokee Indians lived in and around the Arab area prior to the coming of white settlers. An 1805 post road made it possible for settlers to move into North Alabama. By 1819 the Indians gave up their land, making it legal for settlement to take place. In this area the Indians were civilized, friendly and helpful to the settlers. Most of these settlers were Scotch-Irish and from the Carolinas, Tennessee and Georgia. Some came on packhorses or in wagon trains down the old post (mail) road. After crossing a ferry at Ditto's Landing they followed the Huntsville-St. Stephens Road which had been authorized by Congress in 1818 as a Federal road and was at that time one of the most important roads in the Alabama Territory. In this area it was called Bear Meat Cabin Road. Although it was just a crude trail with stumps cut just low enough not to interfere with the axels of the wagons, at that time it was considered to be a fairly good road.

Others traveled on flatboats and settled along the Tennessee River. Gradually, some migrated up the mountains to Arab. Still another way that settlers came into the area was along the wagon road that Andrew Jackson opened in 1813 and also by way of the Georgia State Road coming from Georgia by crossing Sand Mountain.

In 1790 Philip Fry was the first recorded settler in the surrounding Arab area to build a log cabin. Another very early settler in the area included Mace Thomas Payne Brindley (1816); the mountain on which Arab is located was named after him, Brindlee Mountain. Another was Phillip Clack, who bought his land from the government for 2 ½ cents an acre. He operated a stagecoach inn, and in 1843 was given the right to establish a turnpike. Where his land was located became the community of Eddy. It is now part of Arab and his turnpike is currently Hwy 231 that runs through Arab.

While at least 104 small communities existed around Arab, Oleander, just north of Arab, was at one time one of the chief towns in Marshall County, and its post office was established in 1834. Joseph Thompson brought his family to Marshall County in 1836, when they settled in Thompson Falls in 1840. Joseph's son, Stephen Tuttle Thompson, in 1857 was the first settler to build a house on land that became Arab. He established the Arab Post Office in 1882 and submitted the name of his thirteen-year-old son Arad for the name of the town. Due to the misreading of the "d" for a "b", the town became Arab instead.

The people that settled the Arab area were people of Faith, and early on, they established churches. In 1860 Hiram Brashier organized Brashier's Chapel Methodist Church, which would later burn and be rebuilt by the congregation in 1899 on a different site. In 1882 both the Rocky Mount and Gilliam Springs Baptist Churches were organized. These communities at that time were not a part of Arab. It was the Northern Methodists that are given credit for building the first church in Arab in 1883, a log building, which was used for both church and school. It was 1890 before a frame building was constructed just for school purposes. Union Captain James Walter Elliott, who had been the town's first school teacher, donated the land. In 1893 the Southern Methodist built on First Avenue with a Masonic Lodge on the second floor and the Northern Methodist moved south of town to Union Hill. In 1912 the First Baptist Church of Arab was organized.

During the 1880's an influx of new settlers helped the town to grow. At one point, wagon trains from Georgia were seen coming into Arab almost every day. As more people arrived, more services were needed for the people. In 1885 J.R.N. Thompson, son of Tuttle Thompson, operated the first gristmill. Arab's first doctor, Dr. T.M. Barcliff started his practice. Beef cows from Arab were being herded to market in Birmingham. But prospects for a railroad that was planned for the growing area were dashed in 1888 with a Yellow Fever scare.

By 1892 Arab had grown large enough to become an incorporated town, and it was then that J.R.N. Thompson was appointed Mayor. By 1897 more stores were appearing in Downtown Arab. Russell Rice built a large general store that held the post office (he was postmaster back then) and later it also held the telephone company. The first lines for telephones were strung in 1908.



As the century turned, the people of the town became more dedicated to properly educating their young. In 1902 Professor J.B. Sherill opened the two-story school on Main Street called the Arab College. Many students had to board in town to attend school since the roads were so bad in the winter. By 1922 a much larger school was built on the same property. It had been donated by Stephen Tuttle Thompson. The town of Arab, determined to have a high school, mortgaged their farms to buy supplies, and donated their time to build the school. They made the bricks from the dirt and excavated for the

basement, and they manned the kilns 24 hours a day. The school was Arab's first accredited high school, and is still there today. Prior to the school being built, students had to pack a trunk, take a buggy down the mountain to Guntersville, and then board a train to Albertville to attend school. They came home only for Christmas and afterwards returned until spring.

Arab's first bank, the Bank of Arab, was built on the corner of Main Street and First Avenue. Having a bank helped the town to grow while other communities that had been much larger began to decline. The chief "industry" of the town was growing cotton. The first warehouse was built in 1910. Many more followed until the 1950's when growing cotton began to wane.

Dr. M.L. Hinds started his practice in Arab in 1910 and was a doctor for about 50 years before joining his brother, Dr. Gum Hinds, and offering prescriptions in their office. The first real drug store was established in 1926 by Dr. W.G. Griffith in the People's Drug Store, and in 1934, the infamous duo, Bonnie and Clyde made a visit to the store.



Arab had many attempts at having a newspaper but it was the Arab Tribune in 1958 that was successful. The first one was the Optimist in 1912. The famous Hyatt's Boarding House also started in 1912. It was the best place in town to eat. For an unknown reason, in 1916, Arab had to be reincorporated. At that time, J.R. Riddle became the first elected Mayor. In 1917 Arab was included on the bus line that ran between Cullman and Guntersville. By 1920 the population of Arab was 261.

At that time they needed a jail so the calaboose opened in 1922. In 1924 Luther's Dry Goods built a store that still stands in Downtown Arab, and in 1927 the Sandwich Shop opened, where you could get a really good burger for 5 cents. During the late 1930's it was open 24 hours a day due to the traffic through Arab. The town really took on new life and growth in the late 1920's and early 30's. In 1928 the Alabama Power Company brought electric power to Arab when they were given the franchise to string lines to the town. In 1929 the bridge over the Tennessee River at Whitesburg was opened. The toll was removed in 1936. Arab's first water tower was built in 1931.

During this time (1930), Dr. James M. Crawford started his practice, and in 1937 opened the Arab Infirmary over the Peoples Drug Store, then later he opened the Arab Hospital on South Main Street. In 1933 Hosea Stamps opened a hardware store and Perry Fleming opened a barbershop. A year later Throwers Shoe Shop opened. By 1935 the population of Arab was 600.



The Thompson Hotel opened in 1936 and was a boom for Arab. Tourist traffic was coming through at all hours since the highway through Arab was designated as the shortest way to Florida. The rock livery stable opened, and people parked their horses and mules by that building which was a back road in downtown. Also the Cullman Highway coming into Arab was changed from First Avenue to the present site in 1936.

By 1938 Main Street was paved; this may have been when the old well, located where First Avenue entered Main Street, was filled in. As the town's population grew to 640 in the late 1930's to the mid 40's, more businesses were added downtown. There were signs showing that the town was becoming more modernized. J.E. Oliver bought the telephone company and put it on its way to being successful. The Arab Electric Cooperative was organized, and

the Arab Water Board was incorporated. Downtown Arab got sewers and the road through Arab became a Federal Highway. This growth may have been due in part to the completion of the TVA Guntersville Dam and Lake. However, other signs pointed to the fact that Arab was still a small farming town.

The Farmer's Exchange was built and gave farmers a place to swap their farm goods for other things they needed, and the Arab mule barn opened for business for farmers to buy or swap their beast of burden, the mule. During the late 40's Arab's downtown streets were paved and the town had its first plant to open. Blue Bell (Wrangler) opened on South Main Street and gave many, especially women, a job. In addition, Arab built a new Senior High School on the site that the high school is located today.



The opening of the Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville brought a boom to Arab in the 1950's. Many in Arab found good-paying jobs and decided to discontinue farming for a living. Many new families that worked at the arsenal chose Arab to live due to its small town atmosphere. Dr. Ellis Porch began his practice in 1954, followed by the Arab Chamber of Commerce being formed, and the Arab Tribune being established, both in 1957.

Town growth was really underway by the 1960's. The by-pass around town was built. The Elementary and Junior High Schools opened and WRAB went on the air. SCl relocated to Arab and opened even more job opportunities for the town. Keeping up with the needs of its citizens, the Arab City Pool and the Public Library both opened.

By the mid-60's the Security Bank and the Arab Church opened, giving proof that the town had more people and it was in fact growing. The Arab Cotton Warehouse was built and Gold Kist of Arab were both formed in the 1960's, as well. By the late 60's and early 70's the population of Arab had grown to 4,400. A half-million gallon water tank was built due to the town's growth. Another school was needed so the town built a Primary School for the early grades. A great help for those working at Redstone Arsenal was the building of the four-lane highway from Huntsville to Arab.

During the 1970's several other companies opened in Arab. Among them were Hall Chemical, Floral Design, Cutler Hamner, Syncro, Heil Corporation, Ryder International, Bobo Engineering and Eaton Corporation. By this time even more farmers had taken jobs and abandoned farming for a living, yet Arab still remained a town with a small community atmosphere. During the Christmas holidays in early 1975, the Arab High School burned. It was rebuilt and is the building in use today.

By the 1980's and into the early 1990's the town grew even more. During this time the population reached 6,000. Other plants that opened were Accutex, Dana, Palco and Quadrum Telecom. Arab built a new Armory and Recreation Center, and added a walking trail at the City Park. One of the best improvements of the early 1990's was the building of the more modern Marshall Medical Center Hospital that serves both Arab and Guntersville.

Arab is now home to more than 8,300 residents, with a retail trade area of roughly 53,000, and continues to grow year after year. Industries like frogg toggs®, Progress Rail-CATERPILLAR®, BK Aerospace, Atrion® Medical Products, Laysan Bio, Inc., UMICORE Specialty Chemicals, and WEBER-Hydraulik-HYCO, to name a few, are located here, and the Arab City School System is ranked 4th in the State academically. Historic Downtown Arab is really thriving following the downtown revitalization project that made the sidewalks ADA-Compliant, and is filled with high-end men's and women's boutiques, gift shops, antiques and specialty stores, a coffee shop, diner, and a Mercantile. An 18-hole disc golf course was added in 2017 to the many amenities already offered at Arab City Park, and a splash pad was added in 2019. The Thompson-Eidson Soccer Complex features four lighted soccer fields, a 6-lane track, a one-mile walking trail in a natural setting, locker rooms and shower facilities. The Arab Historic Village, adjacent to Arab City Park, is home to the Elvin Light Museum, the original 1935 Hunt School, the Lola Boyd Farmhouse, Smith's Country Store, Ruth Clubhouse, Phillips Blacksmith Shop, the Rice Church, and the first grist mill, all filled with hundreds of pieces of local history that date back to the Pioneer days of the late 1800's to the 1930's.

For inquiries, email Ms. Janet Calhoun
Journey Stories, Author
Email: mj michael@ charter.net