

# Discovering Alabama

## Suggested Curriculum Areas

History  
Geography  
Social Studies

## Suggested Grade Levels

4–12

## Key Concepts

History  
Heritage  
Future

## Key Skills

Perspective  
Map Reading  
Forecasting



Teacher's Guide

Prattville / Autauga County

## Synopsis

The video *Discovering Alabama "Prattville/Autauga County"* is especially timely as its completion coincides with the celebration of Alabama's bicentennial. The story of Prattville and Autauga County includes some of the most intriguing historical elements of Alabama's 200 years of statehood. The video highlights the overall appeal of Autauga County while giving primary focus to the globally significant history associated with famed industrialist Daniel Pratt and his influence on the development of the town of Prattville, today the seat of government for Autauga County. The video includes interviews with some of Alabama's most notable historians, discussing the county's past and present, and reflecting on concerns for the area's future.



*Discovering Alabama* is a production of the **Alabama Museum of Natural History** in cooperation with **Alabama Public Television** and **The University of Alabama College of Continuing Studies**. For a complete list of titles in the *Discovering Alabama* series, as well as information about ordering videos and accompanying Teacher's Guides, contact us at either: *Discovering Alabama*, Box 870340, Tuscaloosa AL 35487-0340; phone: 205-348-2039; fax: 205-348-4219; or email: [orders@discoveringalabama.org](mailto:orders@discoveringalabama.org). Also visit our website: [www.discoveringalabama.org](http://www.discoveringalabama.org).

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*The Solon and Martha  
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Lyndonwood  
Foundation



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## Before Viewing

1 Have students individually draw an outline of the state of Alabama. Ask them to indicate on their map where your county is located in the state. Discuss the fact that Alabama contains 67 counties and that each county has a town that is the chosen “seat” of county government. Ask students if they know the county seat of your county. Show the class a highway map of our state and point out the information provided in the margins of the map, including the alphabetized list of the 67 counties with Autauga being first on the list.

2 Place students in small groups and give each one an Alabama highway map. Have them work to locate Autauga County and its county seat. Next, have each group develop a list of as many towns as they can find in Autauga County, as well as any parks, rivers/creeks, or other special attractions in the county. Introduce the video by explaining that it visits Autauga County to see aspects of the county firsthand and to find out about the unique history of the area.

## While Viewing

Have students make note of the names of significant people associated with the history of Autauga County and Prattville.

### Video Mystery Question:

In the early part of the video, viewers are introduced to the Pratt Gin Factory, built in the 1830s. What is the strange sound that seems to emanate from this vacant old factory building during this part of the video? (**Answer:** This is sort of a trick question because the strange sound is never identified by name. The sound is an authentic recording of the actual factory whistle from the

1800s that blew daily, marking key times of the day for factory workers, shops, schools, and residents of Prattville. In other words, the sound we hear is a true audio artifact of history.)

## After Viewing

1 Have student groups use their state maps to locate your local county and county seat (if different than Autauga County) and have them make a list of towns, parks, and other features in the county. Compare and contrast with such features of Autauga County or a neighboring county.

2 Have the groups think about the kind of changes that are affecting Autauga County (and possibly your county as well) as a consequence of ever-expanding growth and development. Ask them to describe what they envision as a probable future for the county 50 years, 100 years, or 200 years from today.

## Extensions

1 View other *Discovering Alabama* programs featuring an Alabama county. Such videos include “Tuscaloosa County,” Lee County,” and “Covington County.”

## Philosophical Reflections

Autauga County adjoins Montgomery County, home of our state capital, the city of Montgomery. Montgomery County is an urbanizing county with much greater population than Autauga County. In recent decades, continued population increase and expanding growth and development have spread from Montgomery County well into parts of Autauga County. Thus, as the video presents, Autauga County is facing the question of how much of this merging new growth is desirable and how much would conflict with qualities of natural surroundings, rural values, and other presently appealing aspects of life in Autauga County. This concern, increasingly common for communities across the nation today, gives rise to philosophical debate between two classic perspectives. On the one hand is the belief that the manner and pace of growth and development should be free to occur wholly as a function of market-based economic interests unburdened by imposed limitations. On the other hand is the belief that better community outcomes can be achieved through “managed” growth that involves planning and policies that serve to control growth and prevent undesirable impacts of development while promoting various environmental and social values. Which of these two perspectives do you think is the more appropriate for your community?

## Nature in Art

Prattville is home to a remarkable art gallery that includes works by George Cooke who traveled through the South in the 1830s and 1840s painting portraits, landscapes, and townscapes. Cooke was an acquaintance of Daniel Pratt who collected, showcased, and helped popularize much of Cook's work. A visit to this gallery in the Prattville Creative Arts Center would be quite an art experience for students.

## Community Connections

- 1 Arrange for a local historian to visit your class and discuss the history of your county and community.
- 2 Assign group projects to research aspects of local history. Topics might include "native peoples," "settlement period," "early business/industry," "famous people," etc.

## Additional References & Resources

- Autauga County Heritage Association: [museum@autaugahistory.org](mailto:museum@autaugahistory.org); 334-361-0961.
- "Autauga County," Encyclopedia Alabama: [www.encyclopediaofalabama.org](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org).
- "Prattville," Encyclopedia Alabama: [www.encyclopediaofalabama.org](http://www.encyclopediaofalabama.org).
- *Old Autauga: Portrait of a Deep South County* by Larry W. Nobles (Brierfield, Ala.: Cahaba Trace Commission, 2000).
- *Daniel Pratt: Alabama's First Industrialist* by Merrill E. Pratt (New York: Newcomen Society of England, American Branch, 1949).

- *The Story of Coal and Iron in Alabama* by Ethel Armes (Birmingham: Chamber of Commerce, 1910).

- [www.accessgeneology.com/alabama/native-american-history-autauga-county-alabama.htm](http://www.accessgeneology.com/alabama/native-american-history-autauga-county-alabama.htm)

- *Daniel Pratt: Antebellum Southern Industrialist* by M.C. McMillan (Augusta, Ga.: Autauga County Heritage Association, 1998).

## Parting Thoughts

A number of years ago my friend Bob Lee contacted me to encourage the production of a Discovering Alabama show about Prattville and Autauga County. Being a Prattville resident and prominent contributor to the community, Bob was eager to have the area's rich history showcased for public appreciation. I informed him that the Prattville/Autauga topic was already on my list to do someday, but that Discovering Alabama's limited funds would not be enough to undertake production any time soon. Well, Bob was resolute that the show needed to be done pronto, and he expressed firm faith that he could obtain sponsor funds from local sources. Apparently this was a more difficult challenge than Bob anticipated. Bless his heart, within a few years Bob's advanced age was beginning to take its toll and health issues curtailed his mobility. Meanwhile, he was also feeling demoralized about not succeeding with his hope of obtaining funding for a Discovering Alabama video about Prattville and Autauga County. Likewise, I was feeling similarly demoralized because Bob had been a good friend since the 1970s. During his long career with a major paper company he had

been an active voice for Alabama's forest products industry, an industry historically at odds with many of Alabama's environmental organizations. But Bob was always willing to join with me in working to build better understanding and mutual cooperation between the two interest groups. And back in those early days, this required some measure of political courage and openness to differing views. Bob was true to both, and I credit him with being a key leader in improving dialogue between the forest industry and environmentalists in Alabama and achieving the improved relationships that exist today. As Bob's health declined, I visited him and made him a promise that I would find a way, somehow, and the Prattville/Autauga show **would be produced** and televised for all of Alabama to see. Bob passed away shortly thereafter. And so, in respectful humility, I am pleased to dedicate this Discovering Alabama program in honor of my friend Bob Lee and his love for Prattville and Autauga County.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot: The people of Prattville and Autauga County were supremely helpful during the production of this show. Likewise, the Alabama Wildlife Federation, located near the Autauga County line, happily made available their exceptional educational facility, the Alabama Nature Center, for our use during videotaping. I thank all who participated or assisted with this production and I only wish our 30 minute video allowed time to feature more of these folks and the interesting history of their part of Alabama.

Happy outings,

*Dr. Doug*





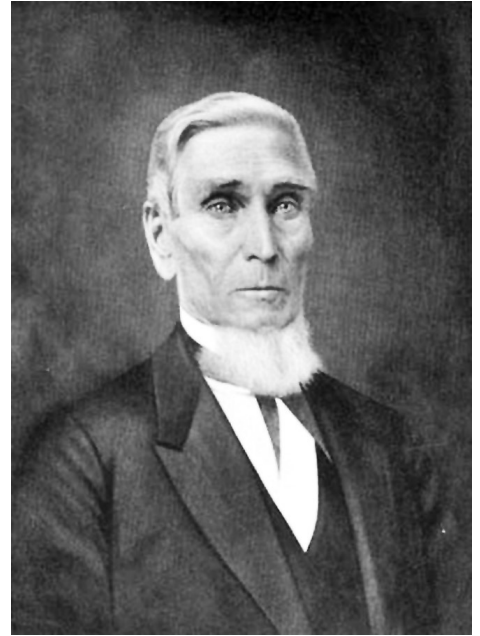
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Activity/Information Sheet

Prattville /  
Autauga County

## The Daniel Pratt Legacy – A Few Highlights\*

A native of New Hampshire, Daniel Pratt traveled south to the state of Georgia at the age of 20 to practice his trade as a master carpenter. Always one to explore new venues, around 1831 he went to work for Samuel Griswold of Clinton, Georgia in Griswold's small cotton gin factory, where Pratt learned to build cotton gins. As the cotton market expanded, Pratt decided to move the cotton gin industry to Alabama, along Autauga Creek, where he became keenly aware of the extreme poverty of settlers in the region and he made the personal commitment to improve the quality of life for Alabama's people. As Pratt told a friend, "I am determined to



Far right: Daniel Pratt's Cotton Gin Factory, Prattville

build a manufacturing village so as to give employment to as many people as I can with a special eye to the moral and religious condition of the people."

It took Pratt three years to pay the \$21,000 for 2,000 acres surrounding Autauga Creek. Though by some definition a "dismal swamp," the land featured the two items required by Pratt – an abundance of water power and plenty of yellow-pine timber. He drained the marshes around the creek, and by 1838, he was ready to build his village, which by the 1850s had grown to become a remarkable town of unprecedented industrial diversity and self-sufficiency that supplied industrial goods around the world.

But the remarkable story of Daniel Pratt's role in Autauga County is but part of his giant legacy. His greater vision for Alabama was multifold. He was instrumental in bringing railroads into the state, in the development of the coal and iron industry in the state, and in promoting the establishment of colleges and industrial training institutes for the state.

Daniel Pratt died in 1873, revered far and wide, and his passing evoked the following words of eulogy.

*Daniel Pratt is no more: yet no marble shaft need rear its head to perpetuate his fame. Every sound of the hammer and blast of the forge, every ring of the anvil and shove of the plane, every fly of the shuttle and turn of the wheel, unite in bearing his illustrious name.... It is unnecessary for us to recount the results of his extraordinary labors about Prattville. We have but to walk out into her street.... His fame needs no monument to proclaim to coming generations his wonderful works and munificent benefactions.... Look around you, behold magnificent buildings, noble structures of art and genius, looming up in every direction, which will attest his remarkable enterprise and liberality long after we shall have passed away....*

\* partially excerpted from a 2016 speech by Anne Boutwell, Autauga County Heritage Association.