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The
Alabama
State Capitol

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SITUATED on a magnificent eminence at the head of Dexter Avenue, the most fashionable and popular thoroughfare in the State, overlooking the City of Montgomery and the Alabama River, is the Alabama State Capitol, which is pre-eminently the most historic public building in the South. When the Alabama Territory was created in 1817, by an Act of Congress, the Territorial Seat of Government was located at St. Stephens, then a little town on the Tombigbee River in Washington county. The first Constitutional Convention of Alabama was held at Huntsville, and there the first Legislature of the State assembled on October 25, 1819. Governor William Wyatt Bibb, who was appointed Territorial Governor for Alabama, was duly inaugurated as Governor of the State, in the City of Huntsville on the 9th of November of the same year. Immediately after assuming the duties of his office, Governor Bibb informed the Legislature that he had caused to be laid out a city of considerable proportions at Cahaba, Alabama, which was on the Alabama River, ten miles below Selma, and had sold city lots to the sum of \$123,856, and that a large portion of the money had been expended for the construction and equipment of suitable public buildings for the use of the State Government. The State Capitol was removed to Cahaba in 1820. However, in 1826, by an Act of the Legislature, the Capitol was removed to

Tuscaloosa. It is a singular coincidence that both old St. Stephens and Cahaba have utterly disappeared from the face of the earth, and now linger only in history and tradition. Aaron Burr was captured at St. Stephens and it has been said that he cursed the place and that his imprecations resulted in its complete obliteration.

The Legislature in 1844 submitted to the people the proposition of the removal of the Capitol, who decided to change the seat of Government, by a substantial majority. In 1846, therefore, the Legislature voted to move the Capitol to Montgomery, which was accordingly done. The news of the location of the State Capitol in Montgomery was the occasion of great jollification—the dream and prophecy of Andrew Dexter, one of the founders of the City, was at last realized. The City Council issued bonds to the sum of \$75,000 to defray the expenses of the erection of the necessary Capitol Building, and patriotic citizens of Montgomery came forward and bought up the entire issue.

There being no railroads in those days, the public documents and archives of the State were transported to Montgomery in thirteen wagons. The Alabama State Government on wheels reached Montgomery in time to permit the various officials to arrange their offices just prior to the meeting of the Legislature, which was convened in the new Capitol on the 6th of December, 1847. Reuben Chapman was declared by the Legislature to have been elected Governor for the ensuing term, and he was therefore the first Governor of Alabama inaugurated in Montgomery.

Only two Legislatures, however, were destined to meet in the first new Capitol building, for on December 14th, 1849, the magnificent State House, erected and donated by the people of Montgomery, was consumed in a mighty conflagration that broke out during the sitting of the Legislature, and which in three hours burned the building to the foundations. Preceding the fire, Governor Collier had been declared duly elected for the ensuing term, and a Committee had been appointed for the purpose of making necessary arrangements for his inauguration on Monday,

December 17. The Committee reported that the General Assembly should convene at Montgomery Hall, then a famous hostelry, and escort the Governor-elect to the Methodist Church where the inauguration ceremonies would take place. Governor Collier, therefore, was duly inaugurated in the Court Street Methodist Church; the old building then used is at the present time located at the corner of Holcombe and Mildred Streets, and is used by the colored population, being known as the "Old Ship" Church.

The destruction of the State Capitol aroused a bitter fight in the Legislature, relative to the most expedient thing to do under the circumstances. A bill to locate the Capitol again at Tuscaloosa received a favorable report in the Senate; the majority report of the House Committee on Ways and Means set out that the financial condition of the State Treasury would not permit the incurring of an expense necessary to constructing a new State Capitol. It was contended that if the Capitol should be removed the City of Montgomery should be refunded the amount paid by her people for the Capitol Building, just destroyed. Finally after a long and bitter fight a bill was passed appropriating \$60,000 for the rebuilding of the Capitol.

But few items of interest occurred in the State Capitol until 1860; then there culminated in rapid-fire succession a series of events of such momentous importance, that since those stirring days the Capitol at Montgomery has become historically famous throughout the world.

The question of the abolition of Slavery was at that time a vital one. There was great hostility in Alabama to the movement in the North to free the slaves, and therefore a Constitutional Convention was held in the State Capitol on the 7th of January, 1861, and four days later Alabama formally seceded from the Federal Union. The intellectual giants, the oratorical gladiators and many of the State's best patriots composed Alabama's Secession Convention. Possibly the most conspicuous figures in the Convention were William L. Yancey, who strongly favored

secession, and Jere Clemens, who warned the delegates to pursue a conservative course. After the adoption of the Ordinance of Secession, the Convention then proceeded to make changes in the State Constitution so as to adapt it to the new State program.

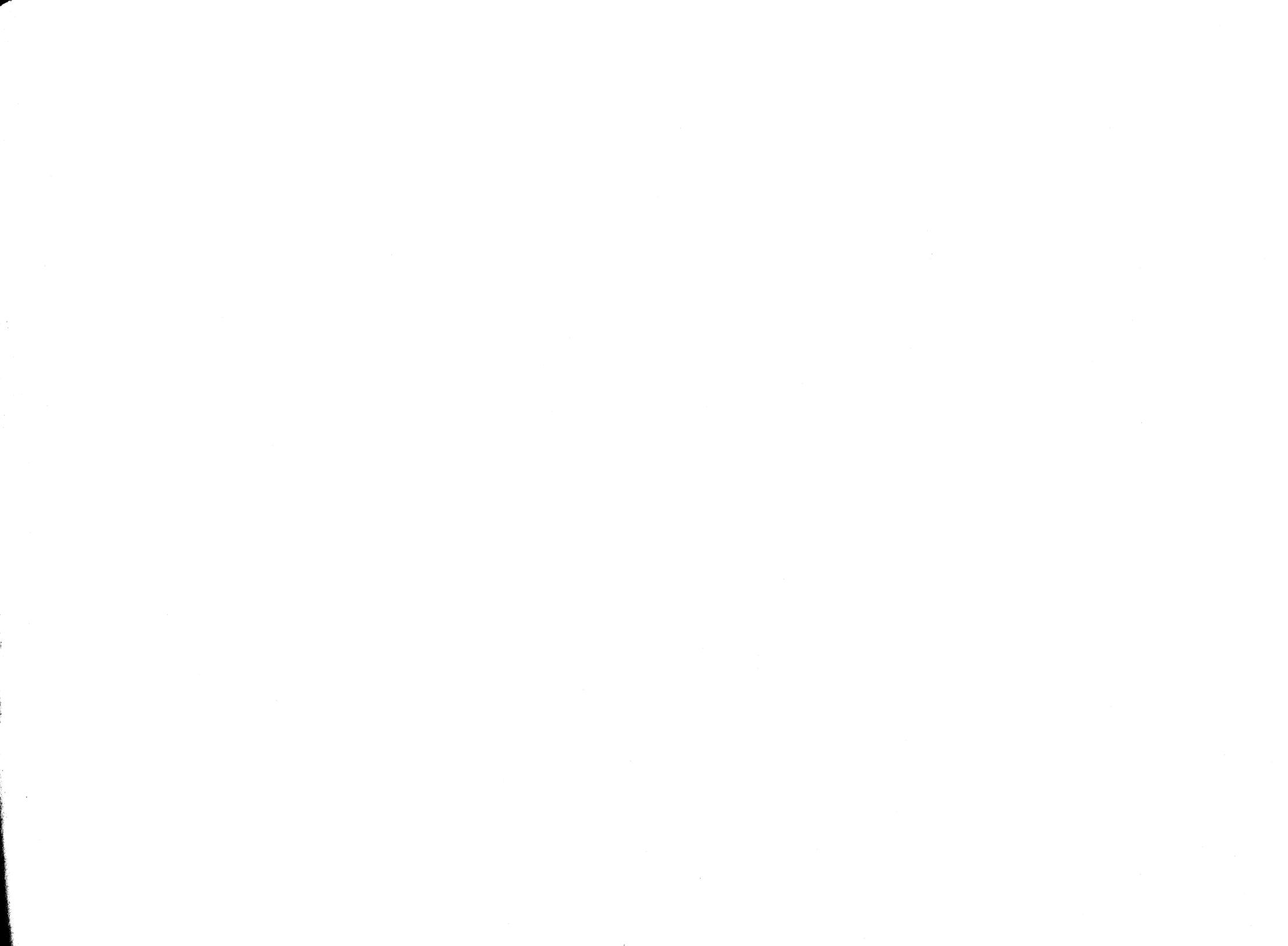
In pursuance of an invitation extended by the Alabama Convention, on the 4th day of February, 1861, Representatives from South Carolina, Georgia, Mississippi, Louisiana, Florida and Alabama met in the State Capitol for the purpose of organizing a provisional government. A permanent organization was effected on February 9th, and Jefferson Davis of Mississippi was unanimously elected President, and Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia, as Vice-President of the Provisional Government of the Confederate States of America, and for the first time the Stars and Bars of the Confederate Nation were flung to the breeze from the flag-staff on the dome of Alabama's State Capitol—a new nation had been born! On the 11th of February, Mr. Stephens, who was a member of the Congress, arose in his place and was duly sworn in as Vice-President. On the 18th day of February, 1861, Jefferson Davis was duly inaugurated President of the Confederate States of America, in the presence of seven thousand spectators. The ceremonies attending his inauguration were the most splendid ever witnessed in the City of Montgomery; he took the oath of office from the front portico of Alabama's State Capitol, and from the Capitol Building, proceeded to administer the affairs of the Confederate States. In the meanwhile the Confederate Congress was in session in the State Capitol.

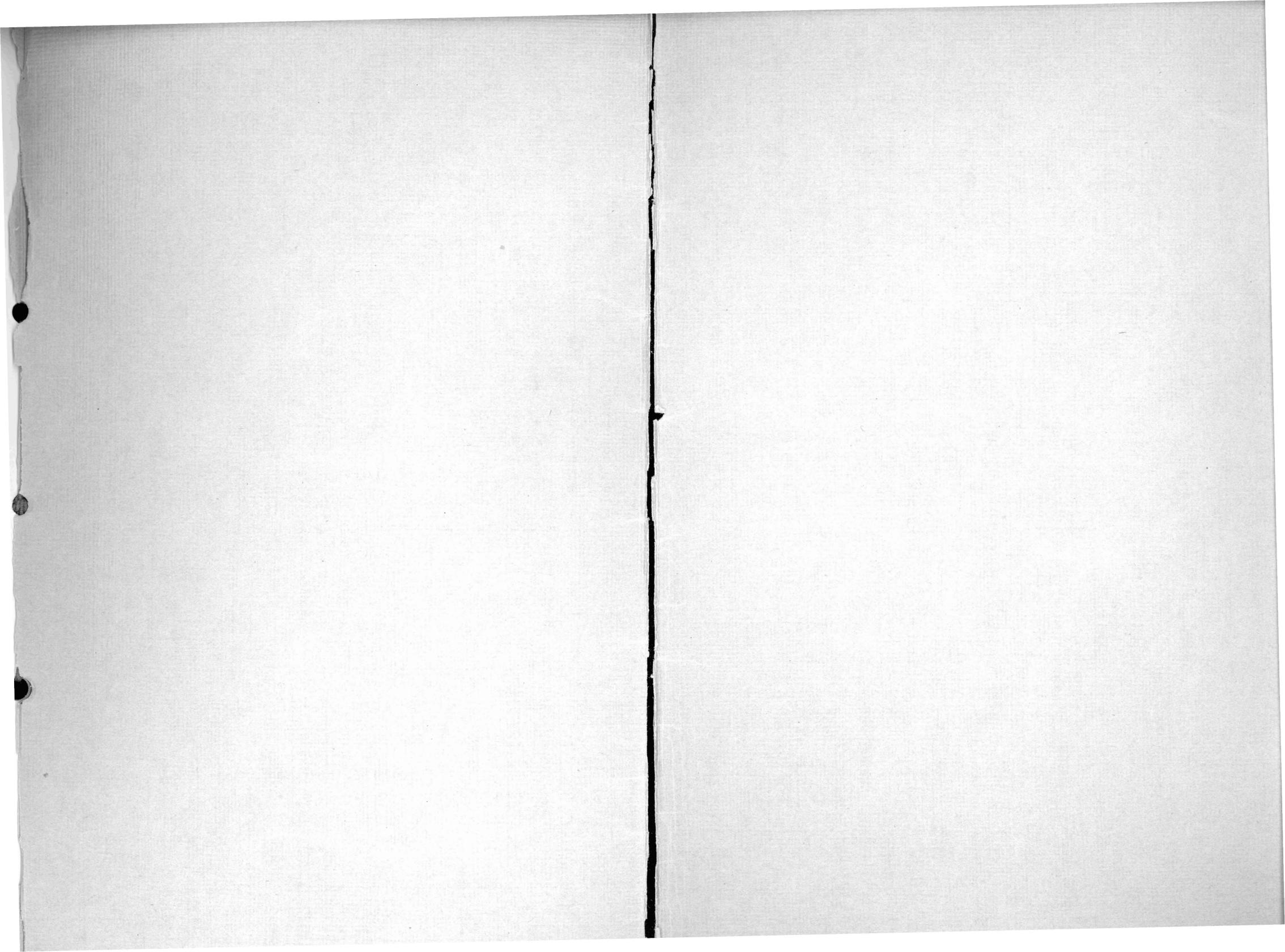
Since 1851 many events of vital consequence to the people of the State, the Nation and the World have transpired in the State Capitol at Montgomery. All except one of the Constitutional Conventions of Alabama have been held within its walls; much splendid history has been made within its chambers and offices, that now reflect glory on the name of Alabama.

The original Capitol Building consisted of only the central portion of the present structure. In 1885 an appropriation of \$25,000 was made for needed enlargements which resulted in the erection of the rear extension of the building. In 1903, the Legislature appropriated \$150,000, with which the South End of Capitol Square was purchased and the South Wing erected, and in 1911 an appropriation of \$100,000 was made, with which the North Wing was constructed and the Capitol grounds beautified. The State House is a handsome structure of the Greek architectural type, and the present offices of the State Officials are comfortably appointed and equipped.

To meet business requirements, due to a constantly increasing population, internal development and progress, the State House has been enlarged whenever necessary to accommodate such demands. It is safe, therefore, to assert that Alabama's Historic State Capitol, the birthplace of sacred memory, the Cradle of imperishable Southern valor and glory, will adorn its present site forever, unless removed by agencies that patriotic Alabamians are powerless to hinder.







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