

SPARK!

PLACES *of*
INNOVATION

A Smithsonian
Traveling Exhibit

Alabama Tour
2025-2026



Presented by:

ALABAMA
HUMANITIES
ALLIANCE

50
YEARS



Smithsonian

Sponsored by:



THE SMITHSONIAN COMES TO...

SYLACAUGA

JUNE 20 – JULY 19, 2025

Known as The Marble City, Sylacauga sits above a solid deposit of the finest marble in the world. Sylacauga's story is one of innovation and reinvention. Established in 1834, the city was first incorporated in 1838 as Syllacoga and again in 1887 as Sylacauga. While marble mining has remained part of our economy for nearly two centuries, Sylacauga was also long home to Avondale Mills. The Birmingham-based mill opened a textile plant here in 1906 and the company soon made Sylacauga its headquarters.

In 2006, Avondale closed its doors; five years later, a lightning strike burned down the deserted plant. Residents wondered if the town could survive this loss. Today, the former Avondale Mills site is transforming into the home of the East Alabama Rural Innovation and Training Hub (EARTH). This transformative workforce development program, physically rooted in our past, helps Alabamians prepare for careers and industries that might not even exist yet. *Spark!* will help us all continue to consider new ideas and solutions for our shared future in Sylacauga.

Catch the Spark!

June 20 – July 19, 2025

Isabel Anderson Comer Museum and Arts Center

711 N. Broadway Avenue | Sylacauga, AL 35150

256.245.4016 | iacomermuseum.com

Exhibit hours:

Tuesday-Friday: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. | Saturday: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Local programming partners:

B.B. Comer Memorial Library, Sylacauga Arts Council, Sylacauga Beautification Council, East Alabama Rural Innovation and Training Hub.

OPENING RECEPTION!

June 26 | 6 p.m. | Comer Museum

Reception includes a tour of the EARTH site soon to stand on former Avondale Mills land.



B.B. COMER MEMORIAL
LIBRARY



DID YOU KNOW: The Alabama Humanities Alliance and Design Alabama will offer a two-day Spark!-themed teacher workshop to spark new ideas for the classroom. PD credits, stipends, and resources provided!

June 24-25 | Comer Museum | alabamahumanities.org/super-teacher

THE SMITHSONIAN COMES TO...

DOTHAN

AUGUST 1-31, 2025

As a 150-acre living history museum, Landmark Park is excited to host the *Spark!* traveling exhibit, and to help tell these stories of ingenuity come to life — to inspire and educate those in our community. *Spark!* aligns with our mission here to collect, preserve, and interpret the cultural and natural heritage of Dothan and the Wiregrass region.

Innovation is in our region's lifeblood. It was the groundbreaking agricultural studies of Dr. George Washington Carver that directly led to the flourishing of Dothan and the Wiregrass, as peanuts became a staple crop and cultural identifier. You can see that same spirit of discovery today. One example: The City of Dothan and HudsonAlpha Institute for Biotechnology are opening the Wiregrass Innovation Center as a visionary space for hands-on, ag-tech innovation — propelling businesses forward and providing jobs for local people. We're thrilled to partner with the Center, and other groups, to complement *Spark!* with stories of creativity from families and communities across the Wiregrass.

Catch the Spark!

August 1-31, 2025

Landmark Park

430 Landmark Drive | Dothan, AL 36303

334.794.3452 | landmarkparkdothan.com

Exhibit hours:

Tuesday-Saturday: 10 a.m.-5 p.m. | Sunday: noon-4 p.m.

Local programming partners:

City of Dothan, HudsonAlpha Wiregrass, and more.

OPENING RECEPTION!

August 1, 2025 | 10 a.m. | Landmark Park



DID YOU KNOW: *Spark!* explores the ideas and inventions that have shaped our country and often sparked the birth, growth, and re-birth of rural communities nationwide. It also inspires us to see ourselves as innovators — and consider how we might impact our own communities' future.

THE SMITHSONIAN COMES TO...

BREWTON

SEPTEMBER 23 - OCTOBER 23, 2025

Settled as a logging and lumber production hub in the 1800s, Brewton has a story to tell of innovation — in industry, arts, education, and more. Our community partners will trace the remarkable story of our region from log rafts on the creeks and rivers, to steam tractors and locomotives, and on to the complex processes that create paper products at Georgia Pacific today. Videos and live demonstrations will showcase agricultural innovations in crops from tree farms to cotton — and show how soybeans are now grown with the help of drone and computer technology.

Over time, remarkable local changes have impacted Brewton, our state, and even the world. To illustrate this, we're enlisting teams of local students and educators to document the evolution of technology in Brewton through videos, QR codes, and student-built apps. Tech industry pioneer Provalus will join with the Hall and Monroe STEM Center to demonstrate advances in coding, robotics, and artificial intelligence. Other stories will come from friends at the Poarch Band of Creek Indians, T.R. Miller Mill Company, Frontier Technologies, and more.

Catch the Spark!

September 23 – October 23, 2025

Brewton City Hall

1010A Douglas Avenue | Brewton, AL 36426

251.604.4256 | cityofbrewton.org

Exhibit hours:

Monday-Friday: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. | Saturday: 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Local programming partners:

Brewton City Schools, Escambia County Cooperative Extension, Escambia County Historical Society, Frontier Technologies, Georgia Pacific, Hall and Monroe STEM, Poarch Band of Creek Indians, Provalus, and T.R. Miller Mill Company, Inc.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING:

Saturdays will feature special events, local exhibits, and live demonstrations.



DID YOU KNOW: The Alabama Humanities Alliance will offer workshops at each stop of the Spark tour, sharing about AHA programs and grant opportunities that support communities' own public humanities projects!

Stay tuned for dates: alabamahumanities.org/grants

THE SMITHSONIAN COMES TO...

UNIONTOWN

NOVEMBER 11 - DECEMBER 13, 2025

Uniontown is truly a place of, and for, innovation. Settled in 1818 and first incorporated as a town in 1836 as Woodville, the Uniontown of today remains rooted in Alabama's Blackbelt. In 1897, the Uniontown Cotton Oil Company was one of the first facilities of its kind in the state and one of the first industrial businesses here in Perry County. Today, like most rural cities, Uniontown remains largely dependent on agricultural activities and the presence of its educational system to sustain its historical value and chart new paths forward.

As you travel one of the four major highways connected to Uniontown, you will feel the warmth of community, reflected in our brilliant town murals. You can enjoy locally grown food at the Farmer's Market, or in a soulful meal at Dorothy's Kountry Kitchen in downtown Uniontown. Along Highway 80, family businesses thrive, such as Alabama Livestock Auction and Harvest Select Catfish. Across from US 183, past and future blend with the historic First Colored Missionary Baptist Church and Auburn University's Rural Studio project, CHOICE House. And as area leaders collaborate on new businesses, programs, and resources, we here at C.H.O.I.C.E Uniontown are empowering our youth to spark our community's future.

Catch the Spark!

November 11-December 13, 2025

Renaissance Center

290 Water Avenue | Uniontown, AL 36786

334.231.7019 | choiceuniontown.org

Exhibit hours:

Sunday–Thursday: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Local programming partners:

Black Belt Community Foundation, City of Uniontown, Community Foundation of Uniontown, Perry County Commission, and Perry County Schools.

SPECIAL PROGRAMMING:

Opening reception (date to be announced!); Youth Innovation Showcase; an exhibit featuring the work of local entrepreneurs, chefs, and more.



DID YOU KNOW: Across 2023-2024, more than 5,000 Alabamians toured the Smithsonian's Crossroads exhibit when it visited the towns of Cleveland, White Hall, Roanoke, Triana, and Ozark.

THE SMITHSONIAN COMES TO...

ATHENS

JANUARY 3 - FEBRUARY 10, 2026

Athens and Limestone County have always been places where hard work, resilience, and ingenuity drive progress. From our earliest settlers who tilled the land and built thriving agricultural communities to the industrial boom that brought textile mills and TVA-powered growth, our region has continually adapted to changing times. Families who once relied on cotton fields saw new opportunities in manufacturing, and as the Space Age dawned in nearby Huntsville, local workers and businesses contributed to America's leap into the stars.

Education and workforce development are keys to sustaining our progress, with Athens State University standing as a pillar of learning for nearly 200 years. Generations of students have walked its halls, preparing for careers that shape the region's future. Today, as Limestone County attracts high-tech industries like automotive manufacturing and advanced robotics, investments in infrastructure and sustainable growth ensure the area thrives while maintaining its small-town warmth. Just as our ancestors forged new paths, the people of Athens continue to build a future defined by progress, innovation, and pride in their home.

Catch the Spark!

January 3 – February 10, 2026

Athens-Limestone County Public Library

603 S. Jefferson Street | Athens, AL 35611

256.232.1233 | alcpl.org

Exhibit hours:

Monday–Friday: 9 a.m.–6 p.m. | Saturday: 9 a.m.–2 p.m.

Local programming partners:

Athens-Limestone Chamber of Commerce, Athens City Schools, Athens State University, Between the Stacks podcast, Limestone County Archives, Limestone County Schools.

OPENING RECEPTION!

January 9, 2026 | 4 p.m. | Athens-Limestone County Public Library



DID YOU KNOW: Since 1997, the Alabama Humanities Alliance has partnered with the Smithsonian's Museum on Main Street to bring a dozen national exhibits — including *Spark!* — to 63 communities statewide.

THE SMITHSONIAN COMES TO... **FORT PAYNE**

FEBRUARY 20 - MARCH 25, 2026

At the foot of Lookout Mountain and the Cumberland Plateau lies the city of Fort Payne. It was here in the early 1800s that Sequoyah created a Cherokee syllabary, sparking a new form of literacy for Cherokee Nation — and the first bilingual newspaper in the world. Following the discovery of coal and iron ore in the 1880s, the area experienced an industrial boom still visible today in cultural landmarks such as the Fort Payne Opera House and Depot. The boom was bust by 1894 and another era began in 1907 with the advent of hosiery manufacturing. Fort Payne was known as the “Sock Capital of the World” into the 1990s.

Today, we’ve pivoted again. Tourism serves as the main industry in DeKalb County, with over 250,000 annual visitors taking in the scenic wonders of Little River Canyon National Preserve and DeSoto State Park — and learning about our past at the Fort Payne Hosiery Museum. *Spark!* offers a chance to celebrate this rich heritage of innovation while glimpsing, together, what our future might hold.

Catch the Spark!

February 20 – March 25, 2026

Presented by Landmarks of DeKalb County

Fort Payne Coal & Iron Building

500 Gault Avenue North | Fort Payne, AL 35967

256.845.6888 | landmarksdekalbal.org

Exhibit hours:

Monday-Friday: 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Evenings and weekends by appointment

Local programming partners:

Anita Flanagan, Alabama Chapter of the Trail of Tears Association; DeKalb Hosiery Museum; DeKalb Tourism; Fort Payne Depot Museum; Fort Payne High School Gigawatts robotics team; Sequoyah Birthplace Museum.



DID YOU KNOW: Smithsonian traveling exhibits are one of many programs offered by the Alabama Humanities Alliance. In 2024, AHA reached a quarter-million Alabamians and provided \$380,000 in grant funding to local communities statewide.

SPARK!

PLACES of INNOVATION

The story of human history is written in inventions and innovations. Across our nation. And right here in Alabama. Join us in 2025-2026 to catch a new Smithsonian traveling exhibit touring the state...and *Spark!* some new ideas of your own.

Spark! uses photographs, digital stories, objects, and interactive elements to explore the places, people, and circumstances that ignite innovation and invention in rural communities across our nation. The exhibit also offers a springboard for diverse local programming, spotlighting the stories, ideas, and innovations of Alabamians — and a call to contribute to the future of the towns we call home. Learn more at alabamahumanities.org/spark.

TOUR DATES

Sylacauga: June 20 – July 19, 2025

Dothan: August 1-31, 2025

Brewton: September 23 – October 23, 2025

Uniontown: November 11 – December 11, 2025

Athens: January 3 – February 10, 2026

Fort Payne: February 20 – March 25, 2026

About the Alabama Humanities Alliance

Founded in 1974, the nonprofit and nonpartisan Alabama Humanities Alliance serves as a state affiliate of the National Endowment for the Humanities. Through our grantmaking and public programming, we connect Alabamians to impactful storytelling and lifelong learning. We believe the humanities can bring Alabamians together and make our communities stronger. alabamahumanities.org

About Museum on Main Street

The Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street exhibitions are designed to engage small town audiences and become a catalyst for conversation about life in rural America. We want to start dialogue, build excitement, facilitate connections, and open doors to communities' culture, people, and sense of local pride. museumonmainstreet.org

Spark! Presenting Sponsor



As Alabama's first statewide public-private partnership focused on entrepreneurship, technology, and innovation, Innovate Alabama implements programs and policies that support Alabama's innovation ecosystem. Through these efforts, Innovate Alabama empowers entrepreneurs, business owners, and students to build a business, a career, and a life in Alabama. innovatealabama.org



The Daniel Foundation of Alabama's mission is to strengthen communities within Alabama and improve the quality of life for citizens from all regions of Alabama. We believe this can be achieved through support of effective organizations that are focused on building a healthy and well-educated population, living in a vibrant community. danielfoundationofalabama.com

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ALABAMA
HUMANITIES
ALLIANCE

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1974-2024



Smithsonian