

Welcome to  
Canton and  
Madison County,  
Mississippi,  
a small, friendly  
Southern community  
full of rich history,  
and looking toward  
a bright future.

For additional information contact the

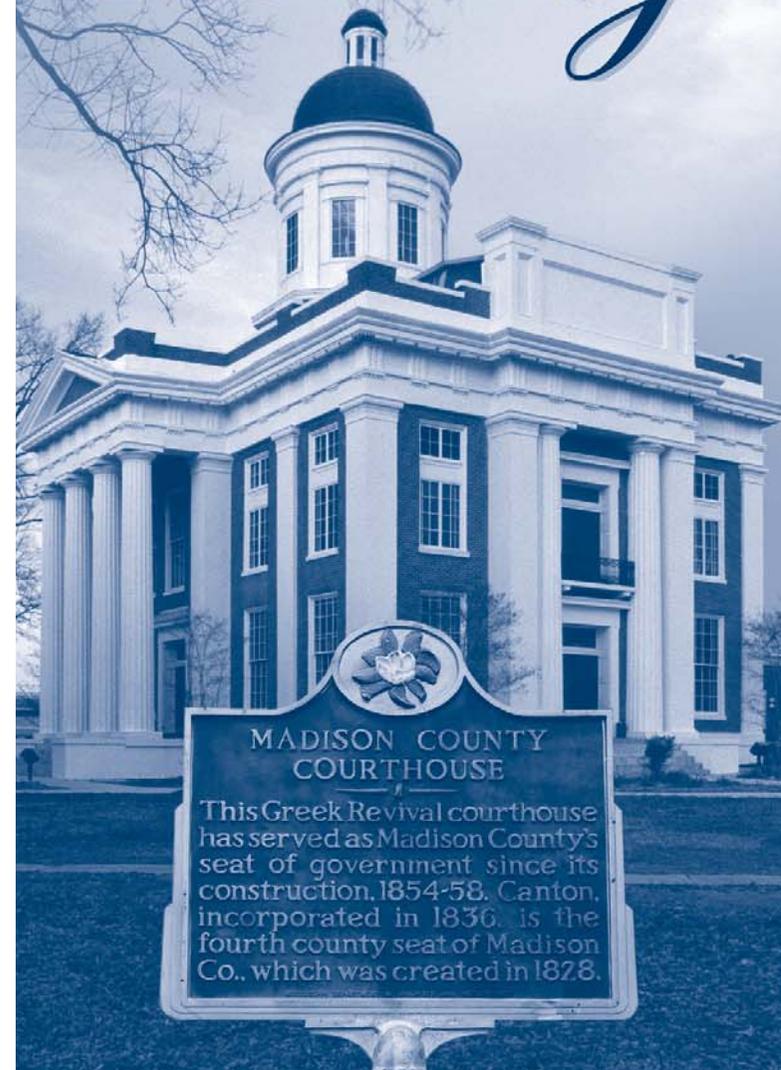


**CANTON**  
CONVENTION & VISITORS BUREAU & FILM OFFICE

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# CANTON

## *Rich History*



## CANTON AND MADISON COUNTY

Named for fourth President James Madison, the 23rd county in Mississippi was created in 1828 out of Yazoo and Hinds Counties. It incorporated lands between the Pearl and Big Black Rivers where General Andrew Jackson met with the Choctaw Chieftain, Pushmataha. That meeting resulted in the 1820 Treaty of Doak's Stand.

This area attracted large numbers of settlers from Virginia and the Carolinas who came to farm the lush, rolling hills and fertile soil. In 1833, the Madison County Board of Police (a governing body similar to today's supervisors) appointed surveyor John B. Peyton to select a geographical center for a new county seat and to lay it out in blocks. In 1834, 40 acres of land belonging to Killis and Margaret Walton were deeded to the county for \$100. The land was divided into square parcels with the plot nearest the center reserved for the public square.

Legally incorporated in 1834, Canton boasted a population of 400. The first recorded ordinance made it a misdemeanor to gallop horse, mare, or mule on any street or alley.

By 1838, Canton boasted two banks, two hotels, ten dry goods stores, a drug store, three groceries, a bakery, a tin shop, three tailor shops, and two watchmakers. The public buildings were a courthouse, jail, church, and a female academy. The town enjoyed notoriety for having as visitors the celebrated original Siamese twins, Chang and Eng, who ordered two custom suits from Perlinsky's Tailor Shop.

There are two stories concerning the naming of Canton, and both attribute the name to Chinese origin. One states that Canton, Mississippi is the exact opposite side of the world as Canton, China, and was thus named. The other story states that the daughter of a Chinese family died in the area and the sympathetic community named the town for the family. There is really no more proof for one over the other; it's just which one you wish to believe.

## THE COURTHOUSE

The very center and glory of our town is the beautiful Greek Revival Courthouse. Members of the local Masonic Order laid the cornerstone to the Courthouse in July 1855. The Board of Police paid \$26,428 for it, as well as \$65 per month to a commissioner to supervise proper construction — a magnificent sum at that time. The bricks used were salvaged from the old Courthouse that had been condemned in 1840 because of the deterioration of the mortar. The new Courthouse was the scene of a huge Fourth of July celebration in 1857, but was not legally accepted until 1858. The beautiful iron fence was added later at a cost of \$5,250.

The large dome (twenty feet in diameter and thirty feet high) has twice been threatened with removal for security reasons. The first time was during original construction in 1856, and the second time was during remodeling in 1925. Both times the women of the town were successful in protecting it by insisting that "beauty prevail over reason."

The Courthouse has also served as a gathering place to welcome the railroad, send soldiers off to war, as a court of justice and the seat of county offices, a polling place, an early library, a theater, and a hospital during the yellow fever epidemic.

The happenings within the Courthouse walls have reflected the humorous, chivalrous, hardheaded, hospitable personalities who have given the South its distinctive character. During Reconstruction, there was so much ballot box stuffing and tensions that when election day threatened to become bloody, a group of officials dispersed a gathering crowd by climbing into the dome and shooting down rocks with sling shots.

The legal chambers within the Courthouse have witnessed many fiery trials, several of which resulted in duels between lawyers. When dueling had been outlawed in the state, Judge Calhoun and Judge Bowers, respecting the law, traveled together to Vicksburg and crossed the river into Louisiana to settle a court quarrel with pistols. Neither man was injured; it was simply a matter of honor.

In 1994-1995 a new Courthouse was built one block north of the Square and the beautiful old Courthouse underwent a \$2,000,000 renovation. The 1855 cornerstone was opened and re-laid by the Masonic Order. The first floor is currently home to the Madison County Economic Development Authority, and the old courtroom on the second floor is used for official city and county meetings only.

## THE COURTHOUSE SQUARE

In 1982, the Canton Courthouse Square District was officially entered into the National Register of Historic Places and declared one of three best examples in the State of Mississippi.

The Courthouse Square, still the focus of exciting activities, is the biannual venue for the nationally famous Canton Flea Market Arts & Crafts Show. The Market attracts up to 100,000 visitors annually from across the United States and beyond.

It is estimated that over \$20,000,000 in public and private funding has been invested in the Canton Square District, including the new and old Courhouses.

In recent years, the beauty, uniqueness, and preservation efforts of our Courthouse Square and Historic District with its beautiful homes, have attracted the attention of Hollywood. Canton has been the location site for five feature films beginning in 1995 with John Grisham's "A Time To Kill". This was quickly followed by Willie Morris' "My Dog Skip", "The Rising Place" (an independent film by Tom Rice of Jackson, MS), the Coen Brothers' "O Brother, Where Art Thou?" and Eudora Welty's "The Ponder Heart" for PBS Masterpiece Theatre. Many advertising agencies have chosen Canton as the location for commercial and corporate shoots, and PBS again chose the town for a segment of a six-hour documentary on blues great Skip James.

With the new Nissan Automotive Plant one mile south of the city, proposed plans for the Mississippi Film Complex, and continued efforts toward preservation by the community, Canton's future is as bright as its history is rich.

