



## STATE QUARTERS

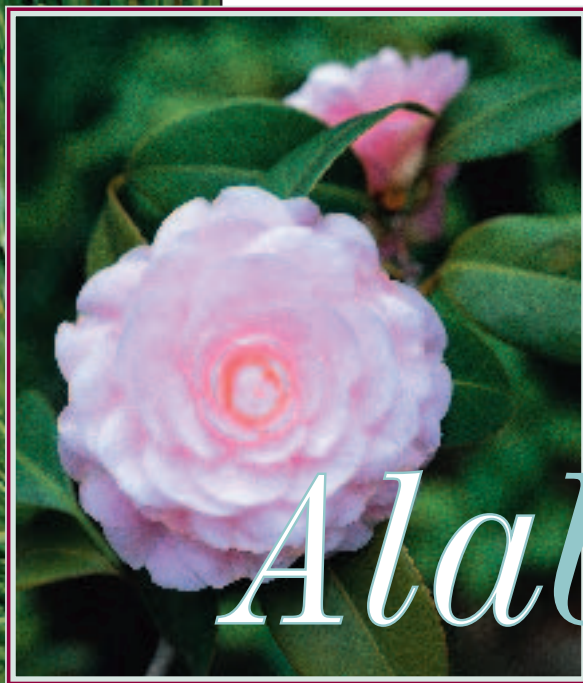
Loss of sight and hearing did not dim the light cast by a courageous, inspired Alabama native—Helen Keller.

by Marilyn A. Reback [ANA129422](#)

**T**HE NEWEST STATE QUARTER appeals to the senses, in every sense of the word. The 22nd issue in the U.S. Mint's 50 State Quarters™ Program, scheduled for release this month, commemorates Alabama, which became the 22nd state on December 14, 1819.

The quarter communicates a sense of Alabama's rich natural beauty. Represented at left and right, respectively, are Alabama's state tree, the Southern longleaf pine; and state flower, the camellia.

The central inscription is touching, both literally and



A  
Touching  
Quarter

*Alabama*

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“When we do the best we can, we never know what miracle is wrought in our life, or in the life of another.”  
—Helen Keller

figuratively. Written in Braille characters as well as in the regular alphabet, it honors one of the state’s most illustrious personalities, Helen Keller. It is the first U.S. circulating coin to include Braille. The lettering is placed to the right of a seated portrait of Keller that was inspired by a favorite family photograph provided by her great-great-niece.

Mark Twain called Keller one of the two most interesting characters of the 19th century. Born in Tuscum-  
bia, Alabama, in 1880,

Helen Adams Keller was blind and deaf from the age of 1½ as a result of a serious illness. When she was 6 years old, her parents took her to see Alexander Graham Bell, who was experimenting with ways to teach the deaf to speak.

On Bell’s advice, they hired a tutor, Anne Sullivan, whose dedication and patience were rewarded with a breakthrough. Pumping water over one of Helen’s hands and repeatedly tapping the letters W-A-T-E-R in the manual alphabet on the other hand, Sullivan helped the young girl reconnect with the world that had been silent and invisible.

Keller was an ambitious student. By the time she was 10, she knew Braille well. She used it to learn French, German, Greek and Latin. In 1904 she graduated from Radcliffe College cum laude. Her positive attitude enabled her to lead a life filled with remarkable accomplishments.

In his remarks upon unveiling the Alabama quarter design, Governor Don Siegelman pointed out the phrase SPIRIT OF COURAGE inscribed on a banner above the date. He felt it

represented the strength, perseverance and positive attitude of Alabamians who, from their earliest habitation, have shown remarkable courage. Embodying such courage in the face of overwhelming challenges was Helen Keller, whose life and spirit continue to inspire generations the world over.



◀ Helen Keller (left) with her teacher, Anne Sullivan, around 1900.

Governor Siegelman also wanted the Alabama quarter to promote a sense of responsibility for education. He opened to all Alabama school students a quarter design competition with the theme “Education: Link to the Past, Gateway to the Future,” challenging them to learn more about the state’s history. Education had been Keller’s gateway to life, one she felt a need to open for others.

Believing “the highest result of education is tolerance,” she traveled the world as an advocate of schooling for and acceptance of those with handicaps. The same goal guided her in writing many articles and several books, including *The Story of My Life* and *Teacher, Anne Sullivan Macy*. Her life was the subject of many books, as well as William Gibson’s play *The Miracle Worker*, which was adapted for a film of the same title. A role model for women as well, Keller is the seventh female to be portrayed on a U.S. coin.

Seeking and accepting challenges, Helen Keller saw no obstacles in what might have been an inaccessible world. As such, she is a sensible and sensitive choice for the Alabama quarter. ☉

### Learn More . . .

American Foundation for the Blind. [www.afb.org](http://www.afb.org).  
“Ivy Green: Birthplace of Helen Keller.” [www.bham.net/keller/home.html](http://www.bham.net/keller/home.html).

The Longleaf Alliance. [www.longleafalliance.org](http://www.longleafalliance.org).