• Economic Benefits: For Dallas and surrounding counties, the salaries and operating expenses for the park are obviously a benefit. Improvements to the park will also generate temporary spikes in employment. But the economic benefit is far greater than these typical contributors.

Although estimates have not yet been made for Old Cahawba, it is well-documented that attractions draw large numbers of visitors who spend money even if admission is free. When visitors come to Old Cahawba, they will need meals, probably purchase gas, may purchase souvenirs not only from the park but from other nearby attractions, and may stay overnight in the vicinity. Cross promotion with other activities in the area would enhance the hours spent, and increase the money spent, by guests.

• Environment and Bio-diversity: Old Cahawba is a gateway to the natural wonders of the Black Belt, including the Cahaba River (one of Alabama's last free-flowing rivers and a home to more fish species than any other river of its size) and the Old Cahawba Prairie (a remnant of a once vast home to many rare and declining species of plants and birds). A park embracing the entire site will ensure the preservation of the special flora and fauna, and provide a living laboratory for botanists, biologists and zoologists.

• Southern Pride: Alabama has a wealth of natural resources, unique geographic features, and navigable waterways. People speak of their southern heritage and trace their family histories for generations.

We boast of our state's achievements, and forgive its flaws. The story of Cahaba deserves to be included in our laudable achievements, as well as a warning to future generations about the mutability of life as we know it.

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**Old Cahawba was the birthplace of the state government and a flourishing antebellum center. Today it is deserted and ghostly, but rich in archaeological remains. Surrounded by two rivers, it is also rich in flora and fauna and unique biodiversity. … This site should be preserved for posterity, and we invite everyone to join us in this effort.**

*Daniel J. Meador, President*
*Cahaba Foundation, Inc.*

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The Cahaba Foundation will raise $2 million to enable the Alabama Historical Commission to acquire the land in Old Cahawba that remains in private hands.

Once the land is acquired, in future years the Foundation will support archaeological exploration, cemetery and other historic structure restoration, environmental restorations to the area, exhibits in the Visitors Center, wildlife viewing stations, a research library and a host of visitor support functions such as acquiring a tour trolley and installing benches. The park will benefit from comprehensive informational signage, walking trails, and enhanced educational programs for groups and schools.

In the future, the Foundation also intends to establish a permanent endowment, which will generate income to support these efforts and operational needs.

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**The Alabama Historical Commission applauds the Cahaba Foundation's efforts to make Alabama's first capital an exceptional experience for visitors …**

*Frank White, Executive Director &*
*State Historic Preservation Officer*
*Alabama Historical Commission*

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Because modern development has thus far bypassed Cahaba, the entire footprint of this town, and consequently the stories of all the lives that were lived there, still exists frozen in time, undisturbed beneath the sod, waiting to be uncovered by archaeologists. This unique situation has made the park at Old Cahawba a significant archaeological site, important to the study of early Alabama history through the era of the Antebellum South and the Civil War. Preservation of Cahaba is important … for our state, for ourselves, and for the generations to come.


The Cahaba Foundation
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# REMEMBER RECLAIM RESTORE

## THE CAMPAIGN FOR OLD CAHAWBA

## Cahawba

even the name vibrates with echoes of the past.

Located at the confluence of the Cahaba and Alabama Rivers west of Selma, Old Cahawba is treasured for its 4,000-year history of multi-cultural inhabitants and settlements, its pristine archaeological ruins, and its untainted environmental habitats. It is Alabama's history in its most natural state and the birthplace of Alabama government.

## RECLAIM …

Old Cahawba suffers from unintended neglect. Over 30 years ago, the Alabama Historical Commission established the park as a state historic site, but it then owned only the rights of way over the former streets. In the 1980's, the Commission began purchasing land, but state funding has never been sufficient to acquire all the land at the site and develop it fully for public use. Today, the Commission owns only 65 percent of the property, and Old Cahawba remains under-maintained and the archaeological sites unprotected.

In 2008 a group of civic-minded citizens established the Cahaba Foundation, a 501(c)3 organization, to generate funding from private sources primarily for land acquisition and archaeological exploration. The property remaining in private hands, including the site of the Perine mansion and its world famous artesian well, is owned by 32 different individuals. There is a compelling need to acquire this land, and the need is urgent.

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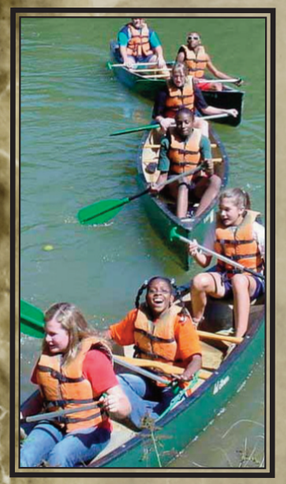
**The mission of the Cahaba Foundation is to secure private financial support from individuals, corporations and foundations for the state historic park at Old Cahawba, site of Alabama's first state capital.**

# REMEMBER, RECLAIM, RESTORE



• Until the land is entirely owned by the State, the history buried in Cahaba's landscape may be destroyed by undesirable residential or commercial development. Irreplaceable archaeological remains could be lost.

• Currently, the Commission cannot adequately protect, control, and manage the park. The entrance gate cannot be locked at night to prevent trespassing or vandalism, explanatory signage cannot be erected at all the historical sites, and park staff cannot conduct complete archaeological explorations. Staff cannot make improvements that would enhance the visitor experience. Significant revenue is being lost because the park is under-utilized, and there is limited access to archaeological "finds" that could be revealed with proper access.

• Land prices in the area are steadily escalating, largely due to rapid riverfront development, and they are likely to continue to rise.

**"I found [Cahawba] a very evocative place, really one of the most haunted places in the South – beautiful and haunted."**

*Tony Horwitz, best-selling author*
*as quoted in The Birmingham News, May 18, 2008*

## RESTORE ...

Old Cahawba should be developed as a well-organized and accessible historical park-for Alabama residents as well as those that visit our state.

• Historical and Educational Benefits: Old Cahawba is invaluable as a snap-shot of Alabama's roots and, in fact, southern history. It has a wealth of archaeological features that are site-specific and cannot be told effectively except in the midst of the town's relics. Visitors, especially school children, see the actual locations where significant events took place, and will be immersed in the culture and environment of the time. When the park is fully developed, learning experiences could include "living history" docents clad in period costumes, and hands-on activities using historical replicas of toys, tools, eating utensils and school chapbooks. The educational aspect will be reinforced by a new Visitors Center, with exhibits and rooms where educational programs can be conducted. Future enhancements could include a reference/resource library, access to the rivers and boat rides, a simulated meeting of the inaugural legislature, and dozens of replicated historically accurate activities that have already proven to be successful at other historic attractions.

• Archaeological Explorations: Much can be learned from the rise and fall of Cahaba, and the rich archaeological possibilities in Old Cahawba have scarcely been tapped. Traces of the thousands of people who lived there from ancient Indian times through the Civil War era remain to be unearthed. Alabama's history as a state began there, and historians have a keen interest in finding artifacts from that period. Archaeological digs at Old Cahawba will provide opportunities for college students studying archaeology, and field interns. Mock "digs" will provide hands-on inspiration to young students to consider careers in archaeology. Federal grant funding may be available for advance research, including the securing, restoring and displaying of artifacts.

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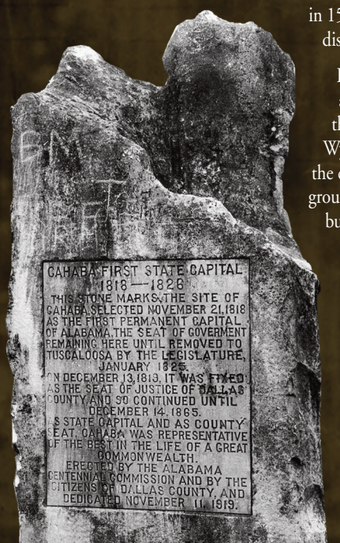
## REMEMBER ...

Indian Heritage: Native Americans lived at Cahawba for more than 4000 years. The last Indians were a remnant of a great mound builder culture, and they migrated from the coast about 1500 to build a fortified village on the banks of the Alabama River, with a ceremonial mound surrounded by a palisades and a moat. The Spanish explorer, Hernando de Soto, is thought to have passed through or near it in 1540. Shortly thereafter, the Indian culture disappeared.




First State Capital: In 1819, when Alabama achieved statehood, Cahawba was selected as the first state capital. Governor William Wyatt Bibb intended to build a statehouse atop the ceremonial Indian mound, and surround the grounds with a moat. The statehouse was never built, but the semi-circular Indian village's design was the centerpiece of Bibb's town plan.

The town was laid out on 1,620 acres from federal land grants. It spanned 14 blocks by six blocks, and was modeled on the city of Philadelphia. Lots were auctioned, and the proceeds went into the state treasury. Businesses were established, including hotels, a theatre, two ferries, and two newspapers. The official state bank and the seat of Dallas County were located there, as well as a land office that issued patents for most of the land in Alabama's Black Belt. A two-story brick capitol was completed in 1820, and steamboat service on the Alabama River began in 1821.

All three branches of state government were based in Cahawba from 1820 to 1826. The State Supreme Court met for eleven terms, the legislature met for six sessions, and four governors presided there. In 1825, Marquis de Lafayette, the French hero of the American Revolution, visited during his tour of the United States to mark the 50th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence.

But Cahawba's days as the state capital were doomed. According to Alabama's 1819 Constitution, the General Assembly was to reconsider Cahawba as the permanent capital at the end of their 1825 session. North Alabama political interests portrayed Cahawba as unhealthy and inaccessible when the river waters were high, and the Assembly moved the capital to Tuscaloosa in 1826. A period of decline followed.

Pre-Civil War Affluence: Within ten years, Cahawba began to recover, and the "w" was dropped from the name. In the 1850's, because its wealth was based on cotton and slavery, Cahaba became a major shipping point to Mobile. By the eve of the Civil War, it was the commercial and social center of a county with the 4th highest per capita wealth in the entire U.S. This wealth was reflected in the residences, notably the Crocheron house overlooking the junction of the two rivers, and the Perine Mansion, the largest private home in the state with one of the largest artesian wells in the world. There were churches, academies for boys and girls, and businesses, including a hotel advertised as the second finest in the state.

War and The Sultana Disaster: During the Civil War, two military units were formed in Cahaba, and a former cotton warehouse was converted into a prisoner of war camp for several thousand captured Union soldiers.

At the end of the war, Union prisoners being returned to the North on the Steamboat Sultana died when the steamboat boilers exploded. The Sultana Disaster is among the worst maritime disasters in U.S History.

After a flood inundated the town in 1865, the county seat moved to Selma, and Cahaba went into a major decline. Most residents moved away; houses were abandoned or relocated elsewhere. The courthouse was used for political gatherings by freed slaves, and Cahaba became known as the "Mecca of the Radical Republican Party" in central Alabama. But by 1870 the population was fewer than 500, and eventually the town became a large farm.

Decline and Decay: By the early twentieth century, almost nothing remained of the deserted town. The surviving brick mansion burned in 1935, and the 19th century bridge spanning the Cahaba River was washed away in 1942. Only two original structures still stand: a two-story brick slave quarters and a frame cottage raised atop a brick first floor. Several streets are still intact, and three cemeteries remain. Brick chimneys and cellars can be seen, and house sites can be identified by still-flowering plants and shrubs.

Recent Revival Efforts: In 1979, volunteers organized an annual festival, moving the Alabama Historical Commission to establish Old Cahawba as a state historical site. The park remains uninhabited except by abundant wild life. A temporary Visitors Center has been erected on the entrance road.

Old Cahawba Today: Within the ghost town, archaeology is revealing stories, and preservationists are attempting to restore the remaining structures and cemeteries. St. Luke's Episcopal Church, built in 1854 and moved away when the town died, is being returned to Cahawba and restored. Aquatic wildlife is again thriving in the rivers and, along the entry road to the park, the Nature Conservancy of Alabama is restoring Alabama's largest remnant of tall grass prairie. As a gateway to the Black Belt Nature and Heritage Tourism Trail and the terminus of the Cahaba River Canoe Trail, Old Cahawba is emerging as an important tourist destination.

Old Cahawba's story is one of dreams, growth, destruction, demise, renewal and restoration — a valuable history lesson for generations to come.