

PRESERVATION

Alabama Historical Commission

REPORT

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NATURE CONSERVANCY TO BUY LAND NEAR OLD CAHAWBA

The Associated Press
January 2, 2008

CAHAWBA | The Alabama Chapter of the Nature Conservancy has signed an option to buy land next to the state-owned archaeological park at Old Cahawba and preserve what was once a common site in the state.

The 3,000-acre tract is left over from the days when rich-soiled tall-grass prairies covered 1,000 square miles in central Alabama.

"This land is one of the best half-dozen remaining blackland prairie sites in the entire Black Belt of Mississippi or Alabama," Chris Oberholster, executive director of the Nature Conservancy, said.

The rich soil of similar prairie lands was used by early settlers to grow cotton. The land the Nature Conservancy plans to buy is next to the park at Old Cahawba, site of the state's first permanent capital. The town, which thrived on cotton, was abandoned after the Civil War.

Oberholster said only 1 percent of the original prairie still exists in its natural state.

Black Belt prairies exist in patches ranging from an acre to a square mile, and have the same tall grasses, wildflowers and animals and insects found in Midwestern prairies, plus species unique to the South.

"It is as close to being a little slice of what Alabama used to be like that first attracted the settlers there."

Chris Oberholster,
state director of the
Nature Conservancy

"There are expanses of native, natural grassland with very few nonnative weeds and grasses. So it is as close to being a little slice of what Alabama used to be like that first attracted the settlers there," Oberholster said.

The land is owned by David Ward and his sister, Carole, who lease the land for hunting and timber.

The state's land preservation program, Forever Wild, had previously sought to buy the land, but no agreement was ever worked out.

The Wards recently reached a deal with the Nature Conservancy to sell the land at the appraised price of about \$5 million, it was reported. Oberholster said the nonprofit land acquisition and preservation group plans to buy the land with the understanding Forever Wild will buy it from the conservancy when it is able.

The land includes forests, the Big Creek Swamp, two miles of frontage on the Cahaba River and land along the roads leading into Old Cahawba.



The Nature Conservancy is interested in the land's biological value. The prairies cover a thin strip of land that goes from Phenix City to Cahawba to Livingston over a deep layer of chalk commonly called Selma chalk. The region is called the Black Belt after the relatively shallow layer of dark chalky topsoil.

The layer of soil in the prairies is too shallow for large forest trees, but supported smaller trees like Eastern red cedar, redbud and hackberry, as well as tall grasses more commonly associated with the Great Plains, like yellow Indian grass and little bluestem.

Winter scene of Indian grass and little bluestem on the Black Belt chalk prairie at Old Cahawba.

In addition to its biological value, the land would enhance the appeal of the state historical commission's site at Old Cahawba. Site director Linda Derry said the prairies are a big part of the story the historical park tells.

The Nature Conservancy is a leading international, nonprofit organization that preserves plants, animals, and natural communities representing the diversity of life on earth by protecting the lands and waters they need to survive.

CONGRESSMAN DAVIS PLEDGES SUPPORT FOR NATIONAL HERITAGE AREA LEGISLATION

As reported in the May-June 2007 *Preservation Report*, the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area task force is seeking to designate 19 counties in Alabama's Black Belt as a National Heritage Area. At a town hall



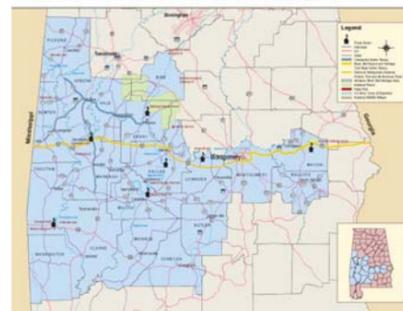
Above: Dorothy Walker, AHC public outreach coordinator and task force co-chair, is shown with Congressman Artur Davis at the recent town hall meeting.

meeting in Livingston on February 20, Alabama Congressman Artur Davis pledged his support to introduce the needed legislation.

The Black Belt region of Alabama is one of the most unique regional areas in the United States. It was once a thriving agricultural economy, known for its fertile, black soil, that later led the nation in the civil rights movement. Stretching across the lower-central portion of Alabama, from the Mississippi to the Georgia border, the 19 counties of the Alabama Black Belt region remain primarily rural and extremely poor. However, the geographic area sustains an abundance of natural resources, historical roots, and cultural diversity valued by residents and sought by tourists.

The Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area task force, in partnership with the Alabama Bureau of Tourism and Travel and other state, federal, and local organizations, is working with the National Park Service, the Alliance for National Heritage Areas, and Congressman Davis in pursuing this national heritage area designation.

Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area



What is a National Heritage Area?

A place designated by Congress, where natural, cultural, historic, and recreational resources combine to form a cohesive and distinct area

What does the Alabama Black Belt Heritage Area do?

- Encourages Black Belt communities to collaborate and share resources to strengthen community identity and economic vitality
- Offers an innovative and sustainable method to enhance the quality of life for the citizens and their communities
- Increases revenue and creates jobs through increased tourism, which stimulates community and economic development



HOUSTON JAIL RESTORED

Houston County Historical Society saves only surviving log jail in north Alabama

Elizabeth Ann Brown, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer and head of the Historic Preservation division, spoke on January 22 in Houston on the 150th birthday of Winston County for the special Houston log jail dedication. She writes:

The cold, blustery day did little to dampen the enthusiasm of more than 60 people who gathered for the rededication of the restored Houston Jail and the dedication of a new Alabama Historical Commission marker. The Houston Historical Society formed with a goal of saving this building and in a little less than two years they raised enough money locally to fund the project. The building is one of the few log jails surviving east of the Mississippi. Among its interesting features are interior reinforcing formed by 80,000 square-cut nails nailed into the walls at one-inch intervals.

The historic marker tells the story of Winston County and the town of Houston. Some say they saw John Houston, the first native-born governor of the state, milling about in the crowd.

The Jail at Houston

The jail, constructed around 1868 from hand-hewn hardwood logs, replaced an earlier one destroyed by pro-Union men in the county during the Civil War. The logs were covered on the inside by boards measuring over two inches thick and 12- to 14-inches wide. The boards were cut from native timber at the nearby water-powered Partridge Mill on the Sipsey River. Once secured, the boards were peppered with horseshoe nails made by a local blacksmith and placed close together to discourage prisoners from attempting jail breaks by sawing through timbers. The jail had two rooms. When the county seat moved to Double Springs following the formation of Cullman County, the old jail was abandoned. It served as a private residence as late as the 1960s. The Houston Jail survives as a reminder of the internal struggle among the people living in the "Free State of Winston" during the Civil War.

GRANT AWARDS FY '08 **CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS**

Certified Local Governments are eligible to receive Historic Preservation Fund grants. The AHC annually awards grants for local preservation projects on a competitive basis to local governments certified under the National Park Service National Register programs. Monies for the projects come from Alabama's annual appropriations from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

The grants must be matched by the applicant and can be used for surveys of historic resources, nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, local preservation plans, preservation education projects, predevelopment studies.

For information, contact Mary Shell at 334-230-2691, or by email at mary.shell@preserveala.org.

City of Birmingham \$1,000
Publish a design review manual, two public newsletters on historic preservation, brochures on National Register and local historic districts, and a Civil Rights District driving and walking tour brochure.

City of Centreville \$2,166
Produce a structural report and feasibility study for the historic Bibb County Jail building located in the downtown Centreville National Register historic district.

City of Demopolis \$5,758
Host a Commission Mentor and Assistance Program workshop to train local historic preservation commissioners. The workshop is to be held in Demopolis, but registration is to be open to all communities.

City of Fairfield \$10,000
Produce an architectural survey of the downtown and surrounding residential areas of Fairfield. Survey documentation will meet National Park Service and AHC standards. The survey will identify buildings and districts eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

City of Mobile \$10,000
Update National Register nominations for the Oakleigh and Leinkauf historic districts to include photography, architectural

descriptions, historic contexts, and statements of significance.

City of Mobile \$5,000
Provide photographs, architectural descriptions, and narrative information for the Oakleigh and Leinkauf National Register nominations and enter data to the city Web site.

City of Selma \$10,000
Develop market studies and building inventory for Main Street project area. Provide marketing and historic preservation services to the Main Street program.

City of Sylacauga \$5,000
Develop a brochure on the Sylacauga Historic Preservation Commission and a brochure on the historic resources in the downtown historic district. Provide speakers and program for two community meetings on the benefits and importance of historic preservation.

City of Sylacauga \$7,500
Provide on-site training workshops and materials to Sylacauga Historic

Preservation Commission members and city staff. Funds will also be used to pay workshop fees and travel expenses to national meeting for additional training in local preservation programs and practices.

City of Tuscaloosa \$2,004
Fund scholarships to pay for half of expenses to attend the National Alliance of Preservation Commissioner's Forum scheduled for July 2008 in New Orleans. The meeting provides excellent training for local historic preservation commissioners and staff.

City of Valley \$3,249
Scholarships to pay for half of expenses to attend the National Alliance of Preservation Commissioner's Forum scheduled for July 2008 in New Orleans. The meeting provides excellent training for local historic preservation commissioners and staff.

HISTORIC CEMETERY REGISTER ADDITIONS



The cemetery register is a prestigious listing of historic cemeteries in Alabama, all of which are worthy of both recognition and preservation. Contact Lee Anne Wofford, cemetery program coordinator, at (334)230-2659 or leeanne.wofford@preserveala.org for more information on the cemetery register.

The following cemeteries were added to the Historic Cemetery Register between August 2007 and February 2008:

AUTAUGA
Old Robinson Cemetery
Rocky Mount Cemetery

BLOUNT
Blountsville Cemetery

BUTLER
Barnes Cemetery

CALHOUN
Memorial Garden—Hobson City

CHILTON
Old Salem Cemetery

CONECUH
Kyser Cemetery

COOSA
Mt. Pleasant Primitive Baptist Church Cemetery
Peace and Goodwill Baptist Church Cemetery

ELMORE
Bullard Cemetery
Cobb's Hill Cemetery
Pleasant Grove Cemetery

ETOWAH
Old Harmony Cemetery

HALE
Randolph-Oakleigh Memorial Cemetery

HENRY
Culp-Kirkland Cemetery
Liberty Methodist Church Cemetery

JEFFERSON
Shadow Lawn Memorial Gardens
Smithson Cemetery

LIMESTONE
New Garden Cemetery—Old Section

LOWNDES
Concord Cemetery
Edwards Cemetery
Gilmer Cemetery
Unnamed Cemetery on Howard Lane

MARENGO
White Place Cemetery

MARSHALL
1883 Methodist Cemetery (Arab)

MONTGOMERY
Bethlehem Cemetery
Bibb Cemetery
Ebenezer Cemetery
Lincoln Cemetery
Oakwood Cemetery Annex
Remount Cemetery
Westcott Cemetery
Winfrey Oliver Place Cemetery

MORGAN
Bell-Nebo Cemetery
Garth-Dancy Cemetery

PICKENS
Garden Cemetery
Old Bethany Cemetery—Vienna

AHC Historical Marker Dedicated for Lakeview Cemetery, Jefferson County

The state's newest cemetery historical markers were dedicated on Sunday afternoon, January 20, 2008, at the St. John Baptist Church in the Edgewater community of Jefferson County. After completing the requirements to nominate Lakeview Cemetery to the Alabama Historic Cemetery Register, Rev. Dr. Jonathan McPherson, Sr. purchased two historical markers for the

cemetery. Lee Anne Wofford, cemetery program coordinator with the Alabama Historical Commission attended the ceremony and presented Dr. McPherson with the certificate of listing for Lakeview Cemetery and afterwards, dedicated the historical markers. One marker is to be erected along Highway 269 and the other will be placed in Lakeview Cemetery.

OLD CAHAWBA AND LOURETTA WIMBERLY RECOGNIZED FOR PRESERVATION OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY



The Black Belt African American Genealogical and Historical Society held its second annual conference and awards banquet in Selma in February. Linda Derry, site director at Old Cahawba, accepted a cemetery preservation award for research, a brochure, and a trail associated with the "Negro Burial Ground" project at Old Cahawba's slave cemetery.

Louretta C. Wimberly of Selma received a preservation award for helping establish the Alabama

Historical Commission's Black Heritage Council. chair emeritus

The Black Belt African American Genealogical & Historical Society, Inc. is a nonprofit organization dedicated to the study and exchange of information and ideas among people interested in African American genealogy, family history, and historic preservation in the twelve counties of Alabama's Black Belt region.

statewide plan on AHC Web site

The Historical Commission develops the Alabama Statewide Comprehensive Historic Preservation Plan to comply with the requirements of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, et. seq., and to provide information to help local, county, regional, and state organizations, and individuals preserve Alabama's cultural resources.

The AHC staff used facilitated planning sessions and public input provided through surveys and committee meetings to develop a mission and goals and objectives to guide the direction of preservation activities in Alabama. The AHC annual work plan, used to implement the Statewide Plan,

is contained in the January-February 2008 *Preservation Report*. We invite public comments on these activities. The Statewide Plan will be up for revision again in 2012.

To view the Statewide Comprehensive Historic Plan on the AHC's Web site, go to: <http://www.preserveala.org/currentissues.aspx>

Or, from the home page, click on "What's Happening at the Historical Commission."

Printed copies of the document are also provided on request. Please contact Mary Mason Shell at 334-230-2691 or mary.shell@preserveala.org to request a printed copy.

FROM THE COMMISSION

New Officers Elected

The Alabama Historical Commission held its annual meeting at the State Capitol on February 6. The commission is chaired by **Dr. James P. "Ike" Adams** of the University of Alabama. **Daniel Bennett**, representing the American Institute of Architects, serves as vice chair. New officers are **Ann Bedsole**, secretary, a member-at-large; and **William F. Denson III**, treasurer, who represents the Business Council of Alabama.



Draughon

New Members Appointed

Governor Bob Riley has appointed **Dr. Ralph Draughon, Jr.**, to the AHC board. A native of Auburn, Draughon has been involved throughout his career in important preservation activities in Georgia, Virginia, and Louisiana. As a historical advisor to a major archaeological firm, he has participated in historical evaluations from Gettysburg to the Gulf of Mexico.

Retiring to Auburn after Hurricane Katrina, Draughon has taken an active role in the Alabama

Historical Association and in local preservation groups. He represents the Alabama Historical Association on the Commission's board for a six-year term. He follows in the footsteps of his late father, Dr. Ralph Draughon, Sr., who served on the Alabama Historical Commission when it was first created.

Lamar Powers of Phenix City represents the Historic Chattahoochee Commission (HCC). Powers serves as chairman of the HCC which promotes tourism and historic preservation throughout the lower Chattahoochee Valley.

Employees of the Quarter

The staff of Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson was honored at the Historical Commission's annual meeting as employees of the quarter. The staff consists of **Jim Parker** (site director), **Ned Jenkins** (archaeologist), **Larry Gregory** (cultural resource assistant), **Joni Musser** (parks worker), and **John**

White (grounds keeper). They were selected for the award for their work with the Friends of the Forts, volunteers, and AHC staff in hosting the most successful Alabama Frontier Days to date (see photo below). Boasting a record attendance, the staff kept traffic flowing, facilities clean, and visitors happy during the four-day event in November.



Alabama Frontier Days at Fort Toulouse, a National Historic Landmark

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468 South Perry Street / P. O. Box 300900
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James P. "Ike" Adams *Chair*
Frank W. White *Executive Director*
Tara Lanier *Editor*

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Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
P. O. Box 300900
Montgomery AL 36130-0900
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