



ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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Alabama Historical Commission and Partners Announce “Clotilda: the Exhibition” in New Africatown Facility

(Montgomery, AL) The **Alabama Historical Commission** (AHC) has partnered with **The History Museum of Mobile** to develop **Clotilda: The Exhibition** in a new Africatown facility. *Clotilda: The Exhibition* includes the histories of the final journey of the *Clotilda*, the settlement and history of Africatown, and the discovery of the sunken schooner, all through a combination of interpretive text panels, documents, and artifacts. **AHC will contribute more than a dozen artifacts from the *Clotilda* to the exhibit.**

The exhibit will be housed in a forthcoming facility - the “Africatown Heritage House” - that will be adjacent to the **Robert Hope Community Center** in the heart of **Africatown**. The building project was spearheaded by **Mobile County Commissioner Merceria Ludgood, the City of Mobile, and City of Mobile Mayor Sandy Stimpson** and construction will begin immediately. Work on the facility is expected to be completed by late summer 2020, with the exhibit tentatively opening in October 2020.

After 1808, Federal Law prohibited the importation of Africans to the United States. In 1860, co-conspirators Timothy Meaher and Captain William Foster made a bet that they could smuggle enslaved Africans into the United States, despite the law. They journeyed to an area of Africa, now known as Benin, and forcibly migrated 110 enslaved Africans to Mobile on the *Clotilda*, the last-known slave ship to enter the United States. After scuttling and burning the vessel to hide the evidence of their crime, the illicit voyage was denied, which left the descendants and survivors without “proof” of their connection to Africa. Africatown, a small town outside of Mobile, AL was established post-Civil War by a band of *Clotilda* survivors and descendants. The vessel’s existence was questioned for nearly 160 years until May 2019 when AHC announced the scientific evidence of a wreck in the Mobile River was that of the *Clotilda*, and the announcement became an international press sensation that inspired curiosity and pilgrimage to Africatown.



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The exhibit will serve as a platform to continue dialog and facilitate much needed understanding and education about the impact of slavery and the long-lasting effects that have shaped Alabama and the country. Artifacts from the ship, in tandem with first-hand accounts of *Clotilda* survivors, will not only serve as dynamic insight into the Middle Passage, but also as tools that could shape how we all understand and teach the effects of the abhorrent institution that was slavery and the aftermath of Emancipation. The History Museum of Mobile will supplement artifacts from its own collection to showcase the breadth of the maritime history of Mobile.

“Through this exhibit and collaborative effort, everyone will have the opportunity to experience the moving story of the *Clotilda* and its survivors,” said **Lisa Demetropoulos Jones, Executive Director, Alabama Historical Commission**. “This exhibit will bring the tragedy of slavery into focus while witnessing the triumph and resilience of the human spirit in overcoming a horrific crime.”

“With worldwide attention on the recent discovery of the *Clotilda*, the Alabama Historical Commission is excited to collaborate with The History Museum of Mobile on its maritime exhibit by lending artifacts recovered in the exploration of the *Clotilda* site,” said **Eddie Griffith, Alabama Historical Commission Chairman**. “These samples of materials were clues in verifying that the wreck was indeed the *Clotilda* and elevate its story to tangible reminders of the complex intertwining of the slave trade with Mobile's maritime trade.”

AHC is charged with protecting, preserving and interpreting Alabama's historic places. This charge also includes abandoned shipwrecks, or the remains of those ships, and all underwater archaeological artifacts embedded in or on lands belonging to the State of Alabama. This mandate is set forth in the **Abandoned Shipwrecks Act** and the **Alabama Underwater Cultural Resources Act**.

To curate this exhibition, the History Museum of Mobile is drawing on the vast expertise of its staff, among whom there are professional historians, collection management specialists, exhibit designers, and curators trained in marine archaeology, iron conservation, archaeological documentation, public history, and cultural and forensic anthropology. Drawing on the archaeological reports released by the Alabama Historical Commission, *Clotilda: The Exhibition* tells the stories of the *Clotilda* and Africatown in the context of slavery and maritime shipping along the Gulf Coast. It includes the histories of the final journey of the *Clotilda*, the settlement and history of Africatown, and the discovery of the sunken schooner, all through a combination of interpretive text panels, documents, and artifacts.

“This exhibition will be a central, physical location for locals and tourists alike to discover the details of this important history,” said **Meg McCrummen Fowler, director of the History Museum of Mobile**. “Our priority is ensuring that the citizens of Africatown get the full benefit of this exhibition. The History Museum of Mobile is honored to be offering our staff's enormous experience with archeology, anthropology, and public history. Ultimately, though, this exhibition is about Africatown telling Africatown's story.”

“It is so gratifying to see federal, state, and local governments and private industry come together to bring another major asset to the Africatown community. Collaborations like these ensure that we will be able to honor and preserve the memory and legacy of the *Clotilda* and her descendants for generations to come,” said **Mobile County Commissioner Merceria Ludgood**.



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Artifacts can dually bring the history alive for contemporary audiences and serve as empirical evidence of the past. “The past is represented not only by stories but by the physical evidence of events,” said **Dr. James Delgado, maritime archaeologist and Vice President of SEARCH Inc.**, who led the scientific investigation for the *Clotilda* and consulted on the exhibit. “Those stories are revealed to the present by and through archaeology. The wreck of *Clotilda* and artifacts recovered speaks powerfully about the events of July 1860 and the ship's final voyage.

“This is an incredible opportunity to share this important story with the world while furthering our efforts to revitalize the Africatown community that already so reflects the resiliency exemplified by the *Clotilda*,” added **Council President Lavon Manzie**, who represents the area. “I’m proud that we have been able to secure the funding for this facility which will not only be key to telling the story of the *Clotilda* and Africatown but it will also serve as a place for the community to gather for years to come.”

The exhibition will be free to Mobile County residents, and admission from other visitors will be reinvested to support operations at the site.

The Alabama Historical Commission appreciates the collaboration, diligence, and expertise of the History Museum of Mobile in this project.

About the History Museum of Mobile: *The History Museum of Mobile is where Mobile’s story begins. Over 117,000 objects weave together the rich, diverse, and often turbulent histories of Mobile and the surrounding area, from the prehistoric past to the present. Located in the heart of downtown, the History Museum of Mobile operates three campuses: The primary exhibitions are located in the Old City Hall-Southern Market building at 111 South Royal Street; Colonial Fort Condé is at 150 South Royal Street; and the Phoenix Fire Museum is at 203 South Claiborne Street. For more information, please visit: www.historymuseumofmobile.com*

About the Alabama Historical Commission *Located in historic downtown Montgomery at 468 S. Perry Street, the Alabama Historical Commission is the state historic preservation agency for Alabama. The agency was created by an act of the state legislature in 1966 with a mission to protect, preserve and interpret Alabama’s historic places. AHC works to accomplish its mission through two fields of endeavor: Preservation and promotion of state-owned historic sites as public attractions; and, statewide programs to assist people, groups, towns, and cities with local preservation activities. For a complete list of programs and properties owned and operated by the AHC, hours of operation, and admission fees please visit ahc.alabama.gov*

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