Overview: Like other early American institutions of higher education, slavery played a significant role. This alternate campus tour guide hopes to shed light onto the lives, experiences, and legacy of the many unsung men, women, and children who lived, worked, and even died at the University of Alabama.

From the construction of the initial buildings to the destruction of the campus on April 4, 1865, enslaved people performed much of the labor at the University of Alabama. They served on construction crews for all university buildings, maintained the grounds and facilities, cooked, laundered, performed janitorial duties and did other assorted tasks.

According to one university historical chronicler, Ben was the first enslaved person purchased by trustees. He worked under the direction of the architect, did landscaping, and maintained fencing. While selling Ben in 1831, the University would own several more slaves over the next three decades, including Moses, Jack, and Isaac. Trustees even authorized a professor to spend up to $7,000 on the purchase of enslaved laborers from Virginia. The majority of enslaved persons were hired out directly from local citizens, university personnel, and trustees.

Viewed as property either owned or leased by the university, they suffered the abuses of students and faculty. Some resisted. Some were punished. The majority established communities among the other enslaved laborers in order to cope. Overall, enslaved men, women, and children labored, survived to the best of their abilities, and helped to build the campus.

Marr’s Spring: As the main water source, enslaved workers carried water-filled buckets from Marr’s Spring to the main academic buildings, dormitories, and later barracks.

#2152 Maxwell Hall (Observatory): Enslaved men helped in the construction of the building in 1844 and the addition in 1858. Enslaved persons performed primarily janitorial duties and other assorted tasks onsite. While the building survived the destruction of the campus, the majority of the instruments and equipment were rendered inoperable.

#1214 Woods Hall: Woods Hall, built between 1867 and 1868, was named Alva Woods Hall in 1884 in honor of the first university president and was the first building constructed after the Civil War. His administration saw the first significant usage of enslaved people at the campus.

Originally called the “barracks,” the citadel-style building served as a dormitory, classrooms and a dining hall. It was constructed using both salvaged bricks from the buildings that were destroyed in the Civil War and new bricks. It reflects the postwar rebirth following its destruction by federal forces. Confederate defeat, destruction of slavery, and emancipation.

#1067 Garland Hall: Built in 1888, Garland Hall is named after the third university president, Landon Cabell Garland. He was the last president to employ his personal slaves as well as others rented for use at the university before and during the Civil War.

#1040 Clark Hall: Located on site of the former Lyceum, the building is named after Willis G. Clark, a University trustee from 1876 to 1898. His “History of Alabama” traces the development of education in the state of Alabama from its antebellum origins to the extension of public schools to all Alabamians, white and black after the Civil War.

#1099 Manly Hall: Built in 1885, it is named after the second as well as longest serving university president Reverend Basil Manly. As a large slaveholder, he oversaw the construction of the President’s Mansion and the original outbuildings. He employed his own enslaved workers as well as rented out others for use throughout the campus.

Manly is also known for providing the religious defense of slavery as an institution and for delivering the prayer at the inauguration of President Jefferson Davis. Ironically, it currently houses the Department of Religious Studies and the Department of Gender and Race Studies.

#1043 B. B. Comer Hall: Braxton Bragg Comer attended the University during the last year in which the institution of slavery was employed. He was forced to leave before federal troops destroyed the campus. He served as the governor of the state of Alabama. He is known for deriving personal wealth from his family’s interests in the Comer Farm and Eureka Mines which employed convict-leased labor (predominantly African American), his controversial opposition to child labor laws, as well as his efforts to disenfranchise black and poor white Alabamians.

#1014 Steward’s Hall/Gorgas House: As the first building on campus, enslaved people worked on its construction as well as all other buildings later erected on this campus. Students lost use of the building as the Campus Dining Hall after repeatedly threatening violence on faculty and administrators. This similar behavior and worse was routine among enslaved workers in the dining hall who served and cleaned up after the rowdy students. The converted building was then employed as a residence, lodgings for visitors, and student recitations on the first floor. After the conversion, enslaved individuals continued to work in the building up until the destruction of the campus. Currently, it serves as a museum dedicated to the life and work of the Gorgas family, with particular emphasis on Amelia Gayle Gorgas.

#1107 Morgan Hall: Prior to the construction of the current building, a two-story brick kitchen that prepared food for the Campus Dining Hall (#1014) was located here. Enslaved men and women prepared the food. Enslaved men, women, and children carried buckets of water to the building and then moved food to the dining hall.

John Tyler Morgan, the building namesake, was a former Confederate general, who worked to extend Jim Crow across the nation, advocated for the forced African American migration, and rose to leadership in the Montgomery chapter of the Ku Klux Klan. Currently, the lobby showcases art from the Paul R. Jones African American Art Collection.

#1167 Guard House/Round House: Built in 1862, this small building provided shelter to cadets on sentry duty during inclement weather. It also served as the headquarters for the Drum Corps, which consisted of rented slaves beginning shortly after its construction. Neal, Gabe and Crawford (Crawford replaced Neal in 1864) assisted with cadet drilling, provided music, and alerted cadets when federal forces approached the university in the early morning of April 3, 1865.

The Mound: Enslaved servants worked in all of the dormitories (barracks, 1861-1865). Enslaved men serving students at Franklin Hall often slept where it was possible in the stairwell, hallway, and even on the surviving front stoop.

Franklin Hall (built in 1833) was one of the buildings destroyed by federal forces on April 4, 1865. Unsalvageable bricks were placed in the memorial to the antebellum campus, slavery, and Confederate defeat.
After the Civil War, Nott did not change his views on African Americans. He felt that they as well as other inferior races lacked the capacity to learn and would remain intellectually deficient. He attempted to reclaim the former medical school from being used as a school for black children in Mobile. His efforts failed. The Medical School became Emerson College and then Emerson Institute and Normal for black children. It was one of the premier schools for black children in the state of Alabama.

#1172 Smith Hall: After the Civil War, there were multiple mounds, including the Franklin Hall mound. Smith Hall was located on and near several mounds. Students were upset during the construction of the building. Even though Smith was a beloved faculty member employed before, during, and after the Civil War, the building removed several mounds constructed from the unsalvageable materials of buildings destroyed by federal forces in order to fill in the land behind Smith Hall. Students also deemed it too expensive as a result of the geological artifacts and equipment it contained. Currently, the UA Museum of Natural History is housed in the building.

#1199 Tuomey Hall: In front of the building on Quad side are the remains of Madison Hall. Enslaved workers helped in the construction of this building and then worked in the building up until the destruction of the campus.

#1038 Mary Harmon Bryant Hall: W. S. Hoole Special Collections is located on the second floor. It contains research materials on the role of race and slavery at the university. It also features a Tiffany Studios of New York stain glass memorial window created by the United Daughters of the Confederacy (UDC) in 1925. This memorial has moved from its original placement over its history from the first library (now Carmichael Hall) to the current Gorgas Library to its present location.

#1034 Cemetery and Apology Marker: Two enslaved individuals are buried in a small building behind the Biology building. Jack Rudolph was owned by the university and died of “bilious pneumonia.” President Manly described Rudolph in his diary as “an African, a Methodist, honest, and faithful, and was buried there on May 5, 1843.” Owned by President Manly, William “Boysey” Brown died from whooping cough on November 22, 1844. In 2004, the University and Faculty Senate issued an apology for the use and ownership of enslaved people and placed a commemorative marker.