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# Alabama Centennial Commission

## De Soto and the Indians

First of a Series of Children's Plays  
in Commemoration of the Close of  
a Century of Statehood

By Marie Bankhead Owen

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Issued by the  
Alabama Centennial Commission

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## Alabama Centennial Commission

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## Introductory Note

A one act play for Grammar School Children, presenting in semi-humorous vein, the coming of the white man to what is now Alabama soil, and a dramatized version of the battle of Maubilla, between the Spaniards under De Soto and the Indians led by the great chief, Tuskaloosa.

This play is meant to give the younger folks a chance to take a part in the historical celebration of the one hundredth anniversary of the state's admission into the Union. The improvised costuming during school recess, the simplicity of the action and the flexibility of the cast, make "*De Soto and the Indians*" suitable for production in village and rural schools as well as elsewhere.

Four other juvenile plays will be issued by the Centenary Commission covering episodes in the history of the state, and it is hoped by those leading in the movement, that all the plays will be produced by every school at such times as suit the convenience of each. The purpose is to arouse a greater interest in the annals of the state on the part of the children as well as of every loyal Alabamian.

# De Soto and the Indians

Time of history, Oct. 18, 1540.

Time of Action, Dec. 14, 1919.

Theme: The coming of the first white men to Alabama soil and the strife that arose between them and the Indians.

Location of history: Maubilla, in the Fork of the Warrior and Tombigbee rivers.

Place of production: Any school grounds or woodland spot, or upon the stage, set to represent a school playground.

## *Costumes and Property.*

The costuming of "*De Soto and the Indians*" is of the simplest sort, consisting of the addition of red strips of cloth to the every day dress, as sash and headband. The property consists of a large cardboard box or box-top, strings, a paper bag, a bright colored parasol, a girl's hat and scarf, a stick sword, a box of colored crayons, pocket scissors and an old feather duster or bunch of turkey tail feathers to be used by the Indians in their head bands. There are benches, a swing and a basket ball goal. A few boughs against the wall may suggest trees.

## *Persons in the Play.*

### *Boys.*

John, a Book Worm

Joe, De Soto

Samuel, Tuskaloosa

William

Alvin

Tom

Paul

Jim

### *Girls.*

The Teacher

Mary

Ethel

Jane

Sallie

Laura

Louise

Lottie

All the boys and girls of the school as Spaniards, Indians, Priest, etc., etc.



# The Play

The curtain rises on an empty stage, set as a school playground. In a moment there are heard off stage the children crying "Recess, Recess, Recess." They rush on the stage in noisy good humor. Some of the girls take seats on the benches. Two girls sit in the swing. Some boys sit down on the ground and talk and laugh. The smaller children play "Ring Around Roses."

*Enter John.*

*(He is a bookish boy and is reading from "The Battle of Maubilla," Part One of the Alabama Centenary Pageant. He sits alone and pores over his book.)*

*Enter Jane.*

*(She is holding a pencil and tablet in her hands, stands a moment gazing up, then scribbles, gazes again, and writes.)*

*Mary. (Getting up from the seat and crossing to Jane)*

What are you doing, Jane?

*Jane. I'm writing a moving picture play for Mary Pickford. (The boys give a sneering, "Ha, Ha.")*

*Tom. I call that nerve.*

*Jane. (Bursting into tears.)*

*Sallie. (Putting her arms around about her comfortingly.) Don't cry, Jane. I know its a good play. Tom's joking any way. (Making signs to Tom to hush laughing. She leads Jane to back of stage and Mary gives her an apple which she begins to munch between sobs and giggles.)*

*William. (Crossing to John and slapping him on the shoulder.) Heigh, old Shakespeare. Regular bookworm. What are you reading now?*

*John.* (Not looking up.) I'm reading the Centenary play, "The Battle of Maubilla."

*Joe.* (Springing up from the ground where he has been talking with the boys.) I know that play. Brother Robert's got a part in it at the County High School. There are Indians and Spanish knights and things.

*John.* (Showing interest and explaining further.) Yes, lots of them. De Soto, Tuskaloosa, and all that old crowd of folks.

*Lottie.* I know who De Soto was. He was a mighty warrior that King Charles of Spain sent to this country almost four hundred years ago to hunt for gold. My father told me that.

*Samuel.* And Tuskaloosa's a bully town. I went there when my sister graduated in law last year.

*Lottie, John and Joe* laugh and point derisive fingers at Samuel.

*Laura.* (Kindly.) The Tuskaloosa in John's book was a big Indian Chief. He and De Soto had a fight.

*John.* Well, Sam's half right. Tuskaloosa where the University is was named for the Indian Chief.

*Joe.* (Reading the book over John's shoulder.) What's a "Centenary," John?

*John.* A hundred years.

*Joe.* (Reading aloud slowly). Ala-ba-ma. Cen-tena-ry.

*John.* Its been a hundred years ago today since Alabama joined the Union.

*Lottie.* What's today? (Thinking) December the fourteenth.

I know that because Mama's Club is going to have a birthday cake.

*Several boys together.* Oh, Gee. Bring us a piece.

*Joe.* (Taking the book and reading aloud in oratorical manner.)

'Tis harvest time; rich stores are being housed,  
Enough of corn, of fruit of honey and of walnut oil  
Are already carried from the woods and fields  
To feed our army many days.

'Tis naught to us if we leave these savages to starve."

*Alvin.* (Showing interest.) That was some rough speil. Say, John, what's the whole blooming thing about?

*Joe.* (Turning over page and reading to himself.) It's a thriller, kid.

*John.* It tells how the Spaniards came to Alabama after landing in Tampa, Florida, and then took most every think they laid their hands on from the Indians that lived here.

*All the Children.* (They gather around John and show interest.)

*John.* They brought blood-hounds and if the savages didn't do their way they threw them to the dogs. Oh, they were a bloody lot.

*Samuel.* Tell us about some of their fights.

*John.* There were a lot of them, and they were mighty cute. One of their little tricks was to get hold of the Chiefs when they got into their Province and hold on to them until they came to the next.

*William.* What did they do that for?

*John.* The Indians thought a lot of their Chiefs and they were afraid that if they tried to fight the Spaniards they would kill their leading man.

*Samuel.* (Whistling.) Some nifty trick!

*Ethel.* Why did De Soto and Tuskaloosa fight?

*John.* Tuskaloosa was the biggest cheese of all the In-

dians. Just thousands of braves fought under him. When he heard that white men were coming through his lands he went to meet them and gave them the glad hand.

*William.* I call that white.

*Ethel.* (To *William.*) Quit butting in. (To *John.*) Then what happened next?

*John.* Tuskaloosa was mighty proud and pretty foxy too. When he caught on to what the invaders were driving at and saw that they were only a few hundred to his thousands he made up his mind they couldn't order him around. So he marched along with the push, but he kept sending runners on to his capital city to warn his warriors to be ready for a fight. When they reached Maubilla—

*Lottie.* Was that Mobile?

*John.* No. It was an Indian town, built where the Warrior and Tombigbee rivers meet. It was a bully town, had walls and portholes and lots of things.

*Ethel.* (Getting beside *John.*) Go on, *John.* I'm dying to hear what happened next.

*John.* When they got near to Maubilla on their march Tuskaloosa told De Soto he had gone far enough and was going to stop and stay at home. De Soto wasn't willing to that, so Tuskaloosa got mighty mad. They had it nip and tuck. The Chief sent his warriors word to get out their scalping knives.

*Joe.* (Jumping about gleefully.) I bet there was a corking fight. Which whipped?

*Lottie.* The Spaniards had on steel armor and used

guns and swords. The poor savages were half naked and had only bows and arrows.

*John.* Not on your life. They had blowguns, war clubs and stone axes too.

*Joe.* And tomahawks! (*Swinging an imaginary hatchet.*)

*William.* Which won?

*John.* Of course the white men won.

*Ethel.* (*Taking the book.*) This book says De Soto was the first white man that set foot on Alabama soil.

*John.* And so he was.

*Joe.* What did he want to come here for?

*Ethel.* (*Reading dramatically.*)

"It is the quest of gold that leads  
Our Captain ever on and on,  
Already we have lost a hundred men  
From sickness and native's unfriendly hand,  
For my part I'll be right glad  
When runners come to tell us that  
Maldonado hath returned from Cuba  
And waits at Ochuse to take us home."

(*She looks up at John.*) What did "Maldinado" have to do with it?

*John.* He was in command of the ships that De Soto had ordered him to bring back from Cuba to take them back again.

*Ethel.* Well, I hope they went and let the poor Indians alone.

*John.* No, De Soto told the Captain's messengers not to let the army know the ships had come to Mobile, for that was then the Indian town of Ochuse.

*Laura.* I call that a shabby trick.

*John.* You see De Soto hadn't found the gold he'd bragged he was going to get. His pride was up.

*Alvin.* I hope some Indian poked him in the rib.

*John.* Oh, he got his.

*Mary.* What did he get?

*John.* After the fight at Maubilla where Tuskaloosa and several thousand Indians were killed and the town burned to ashes, De Soto took his crowd of freebooters and went on west. After wandering about through Mississippi and Arkansas for a year or two, still hunting gold, he got sick and died, a broken hearted man.

*Jane.* (*Sadly and romantically.*) And they took his body and put it in the trunk of a tree so the Indians wouldn't get it and then buried him in the great Mississippi river. (*Beginning to cry in sympathy.*)

*Samuel.* (*Impatiently.*) Oh, shut up, Jane. You spoil everything.

*Jane.* (*Indignantly.*) You'd cry too if you had any imagination. Teacher says I have a BOUNDLESS IMAGINATION. (*Boastfully.*) And I'm NERVOUS too.

*Mary.* I'll tell you what! (*Clapping her hands with eager pleasure.*) Let's have a play—

*Jane.* (*Suddenly cheerful.*) Make it a moving picture, Mary.

*Mary.* (*Patiently.*) Don't interrupt, dear. Lets make up a play about De Soto and Tuskaloosa.

(*All get enthused and jump about and clap their hands, sayings "A play, a play."*)

*Joe.* I bid to be De Soto.

*Samuel.* I'll be Tuskaloosa.

*(They take opposite sides of the stage and their "sides" line up.)*

*Several Children together.* I'll be a Spaniard. *(They join Joe.)*

*Several other Children.* I'll be an Indian. *(They join Sam.)*

*Joe.* Now John, when does the fight begin! *(He rolls up his sleeves and throws out his chest as he struts about. He steps to center of stage, pretends to draw a sword and speak to his adversary.)*

"Tuskaloosa, mighty Chief, I'll run thee through!"

*Alvin.* When the fight begins how're we going to know who's who?

*Ethel.* *(With excitement.)* Oh, I know! Let's cut up the old red stage curtain and tie sashes on the Indians. *(She runs off to school house.)*

*Joe.* I ought to have on a breast plate or something to show I'm in armor.

*Mary.* Hold on a minute. I've got an idea. *(She rushes to bench where there is an empty lunch box, pours out the scraps of food, and sticks holes in the sides with a hair pin. Through these she runs the strings and ties the "armor" across Joe's chest. She shakes out an empty paper bag and puts it on his head for a helmet.)* Now, who'll dare to say that isn't a perfectly good suit of mail!

*(By now Jane is back with the red curtain, and all hands pitch in and tear it into strips. These are cut in two again with a pair of scissors from John's pocket case. Every one is talking at once, laughing and making up.)*

*Jane.* I brought the box of colored chinks, and the old feather duster. The Indians ought to paint their faces and have war plumes. (*The Indians whoop and begin to chalk each other's faces every color in the box and in their red head bands stick feathers from the duster.*)

*Alvin.* Alright. Begin. John's stage boss.

*John.* Then lets begin.

*Tom.* Hold on a minute. Let me go get the calisthenics clubs. (*He starts running, but John catches him.*) No Indian clubs! You'll be breaking each other's heads.

*Mary.* This is not a sure 'nough fight.

*Tom.* (*Disgusted.*) Girls!

*John.* Lets hurry up. The school bell will be ringing pretty soon. This big play (*holding up the book*) begins with an Indian procession of harvesters. Shall we start with that?

*All together.* Yes, yes, yes, yes.

*John.* Come on Sam. Come on Indians. (*They form in line behind each other. Each halts before John a second while he pretends to hand them their load.*)

*John.* (*He catches hold of Samuel and pushes him to one side.*) You don't go in this. Stand there. (*Catching Jim by the arm*), I need you too, too.

(*To each in turn.*) This is corn. Take it to the winter store house, and all these things. (*To the next*) Here's a basket of dried beans. This is a jar of wild honey. Here, you, take this roll of deer skins. You'll be needing clothes and moccasins



after awhile. This is dried bear meat. Shove along! Shove along!

*(The Indians march off stage carrying their imaginary loads, and singing an Indian song.)*

*(To De Soto.)* Now De Soto, your crowd is marching along through the woods. Get that in your head. There are about six hundred Spaniards, and five hundred Indian slaves. The slaves have been caught along the way to carry the heavy stuff. In the lot are some Indian girls. There are two hundred horses and some blood-hounds too.

*Joe.* Gee-miny. That's a whopping crowd.

*John.* You must send the Indian slaves inside the walls of Maubilla to spend the night and when the fight begins they cut off their chains and take the swords out of their packs and fight like hungry wolves.

*Joe.* *(With great enthusiasm.)* Go to it old boy. Go to it!

*John.* Now, Spaniards, all go out and march in in state.

*Samuel.* Where do I come in?

*John.* You're in the Spanish crowd, coming along like this. *(He folds his arms across his breast and struts across stage with dignity.)*

*Samuel* *(Snatching up a girl's hat from the seat and putting it on.)* This is my war-bonnet. *(He puts a shawl or scarf over his shoulders, the right arm free in Gypsy fashion.)* And this is my martin-skin cloak.

*Mary.* *(Looking in the book.)* The book says that one of the Indians with Tuskaloosa held a deerskin shield over him to protect him from the sun.

*Jane.* *(Snatching up a bright colored parasol.)* Here

take this for the shield. (*She opens the parasol and places it in the hands of Jim, who holds it over his Chief.*)

*John.* (*In business-like manner*). All's set. Begin, begin. (*All rush off right, to re-enter in state.*) Here you girls (*several remained seated on the benches, looking on.*) You've got to be priests. There were monks and priests in De Soto's crowd. Go on. (*All rush out to join the others except one.*)

*John.* Why don't you go on with the rest, "Miss Dignity?"

*Miss Dignity.* Somebody's got to be the Audience. Well. I'm it. (*The procession enters. De Soto and his train, Tuskaloosa and his attendants, Jim, with the umbrella held over himself. Then suddenly shifts it over his Chief. The procession marches around the stage.*)

*Willie.* (*Suddenly howling like a dog.*) Woow, woow! *Jane and the girls, (jumping and screaming.)*

*Willie.* I'm the bloodhounds. (*He howls again.*)

*Alvin.* (*Neighing like a horse.*) I'm two hundred horses.

*John.* Cut it out. (*His hands on his hips disgustedly.*)

*Miss Dignity.* Where's the rest of the army, John?

*John.* A lot of them were already camped at the gates of Maubilla.

*Joe.* Let the fight begin. I'm aching for the fight!

*John.* (*Whispering to Tuskaloosa.*)

*A Priest.* That's not fair. John's taking sides.

*Joe.* He's just telling Tuskaloosa what to say. I don't care.

*Tuskaloosa.* (With great dignity, striding to center of the stage and speaking to Joe.)

“De Soto, mighty stranger—

Of mine own will I’ve journeyed far

Outside my realm to greet thee,

And to give thee welcome.

Halt we now, ’pon mine own land.

Maubilla stands in arrow’s shot and

It comporteth not with my dignity

That I tend on any man’s convenience

Or mere whim.”

(*He scowls deeply.*)

*De Soto.* (Stealing glances at the book, which he then hides behind him.)

“And wouldst thou leave me at thy gates?

Is this thy chiefly hospitality?

*Tuskaloosa.* “If thou, with all thy train

Will tarry here, lands will I give thee freely

And will teach thee how to grow the maize

And gather nuts and hunt wild game—

*William.* Oh, nuts. Begin the fight, I want to fight.

*Tuskaloosa starts off proudly while his attendant stands not knowing what to do, holding the umbrella stiffly over the spot where his Chief lately stood.*)

*John.* (Whispering to him and he moves toward Tuskaloosa.)

*De Soto.* (Springing before the Chief and stopping his departure.) Thou shalt not go! (He takes his stick sword from the pretended scabbard with a broad sweep and threatens Tuskaloosa.)

*Jim.* (Letting down the umbrella, and using it for a stick as he addresses De Soto:)

"Touch not thou my Chief!"

*Paul.* Nor thou touch mine!"

(*He biffs the Indian with a fist blow and knocks him dead.*)

*Tuskaloosa.* (*Scowling savagely at Paul.*) Thou hast slain my greatest fighting man. For this thou too must die. (*He snatches up the umbrella and spears Paul, who falls dead. Tuskaloosa gives a great war whoop and runs off left.*)

*De Soto.* Ho, Spaniards there, to arms. To arms!  
Strike bold for king and Church.

[*Exit.*]

*First Priest.* I'm glad priests aren't fighting men.

*Second Priest.* (*Looking towards battle ground where whoops and yells continue.*) They're at it now, I hope Joe's satisfied.

*Miss Dignity.* I'm the audience, but if I keep my seat I can't see the fight. (*The school bell rings loudly. The priests and Miss Dignity throw up their hands in silent disgust.*)

*Enter Teacher.*

*Teacher.* (*Still ringing the bell.*) Girls, girls! What on earth is happening here? (*Stopping her ears.*) Have the boys all turned Bolsheviks? (*Seeing the two corpses.*) What's this?

*Jane.* They were slain in battle.

*Teacher.* Paul, Jim. (*Shaking the boys who get up.*)

*Paul.* When you're dead you miss all the fun.

*Jim.* Come Paul. (*They run out to join the others.*)

*Miss Dignity.* (*To Teacher.*) We've been celebrating Alabama's birthday. One hundred years ago we became a state and we've been having a play.

*Mary.* "De Soto and the Indians." Its been lots of fun.

*Laura.* The boys are pretending they are Spaniards and Indians and they're just finishing the Battle of Maubilla. (*A final and terrible whoop is heard. Then silence.*)

*Teacher.* It's because it is Alabama's hundredth birthday that you've had such a long recess. Come, now, there's a surprise waiting for you.

*All the girls.* (*Gathering about the Teacher with enthusiasm.*) Tell us! Tell us, please. What is the surprise?

*Teacher.* Your parents have all come to the school-house to help you celebrate.

*All the girls.* (*Clapping their hands.*) Our parents here.

*Teacher.* (*Confidentially.*) And there's something else. A Birthday cake, with a hundred candles on it.

*All the girls.* (*Yelling.*)

*Teacher.* (*Ringing the bell again.*)

*Miss Dignity.* The dinner bell, not the school bell. That's where the audience applauds. (*She claps her hands. Enter all the boys with noisy laughter and fun. They are pretty disheveled.*)

*De Soto.* (*With great gusto.*) The Spaniards beat. The white men beat!

*All the girls to the Teacher.* Don't tell them what we know. Don't tell.

*Sallie.* (*She whispers to Samuel and he to his neighbor, and each boy whispers to the next, until all are jumping and showing secret delight.*)

*All the boys together (to Teacher and Girls.)* We know, Its Alabama's Birthday cake.

*Joe.* Lets give the school yell for the Domestic Science Class. They made the cake. (*He leads and all get close together and give the school yell.*)

*Samuel.* And I propose we honor the occasion, the hundredth birthday of Alabama. Lets sing our State song. (*They form a circle, join hands, and pass around the Teacher singing the first verse of "Alabama."*)

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