

## AHC listens to public about Middle Bay Lighthouse Solicits opinions on proposal

A \$1.7 million dollar proposal to move Mobile Bay's Middle Bay Lighthouse to an on-shore location has generated considerable discussion by boaters, preservationists, lighthouse fans, and museum enthusiasts.

The Alabama Lighthouse Association (ALA) wants to raise funds to relocate the 1885 structure next to the USS Alabama at Battleship Park. Opponents want the lighthouse to remain as a landmark and icon in Mobile Bay.

The Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) acquired the lighthouse in 1977 from the General Services Administration.

To gather public opinion about the proposal, the AHC's Historic Sites Committee held a public forum in Mobile on June 23, and the AHC activated a comment line. The forum, held in conjunction with a Historic Sites Committee fact-gathering tour of the lighthouse, attracted 51 people from the Mobile Bay area.

"We appreciate all of the comments people have given us, and will consider all viewpoints as we move forward in this process. Public participation is a vital component of the decision-making process, and the meeting allowed people to directly engage with



credit: Warren Lee, ALA (2007)

Middle Bay Light is one of the few remaining screwpile lighthouses still in its original location and has been a landmark in Mobile Bay since 1885.

the commission about the future of the lighthouse," stated AHC executive director Frank White.

Opponents, including representatives of Mobile Bar Pilots, LLC., say the lighthouse helps them navigate through Mobile Bay, and that it is a welcoming site as they return from working, fishing, or sailing trips.

**"Lighthouses are like the wilderness. People who may never go there just want to know that they are there."** — *overheard at the forum*

Others say that it would be an appropriate addition to Battleship Memorial Park, allowing thousands of visitors to see the lighthouse up close for the first

time. One person suggested that a replica of Middle Bay could be constructed at Battleship Memorial Park, while leaving the light in the bay and preserving it in place.

Proponents of the move said that the new location would be safer from the elements of hurricanes. Opponents cited the devastating damage Katrina did to the Battleship Park, and the very minor damage it did to Middle Bay.

Historic Sites Committee Chairman Dr. Craig Sheldon noted, "Middle Bay Lighthouse is treasured by many different groups that represent boaters, anglers, historians, yachters, sailors, elected officials, bar pilots, and lighthouse enthusiasts. These groups may want to form a coalition that

would focus on volunteer efforts and fund raising for the light to ensure that it is preserved, whether it remains in the bay or is moved."

The story of Middle Bay Lighthouse begins in September of 1885 when seven piles were screwed into the floor of the bay to support the hexagonal wood-framed structure. After the lighthouse was secured to the bay's floor, a fourth-order Fresnel lens first cast its beam from the lighthouse on December 1, 1885. Most of the screwpile lighthouse was built in the North and

shipped to Mobile Bay due to the high construction costs in the post-Civil War South. Located 15 miles south of the harbor, the lighthouse's battery-powered beacon towers 54 feet above Mobile Bay and is used today as a navigation aid that is maintained by the United States Coast Guard.

The commission encourages citizens to voice their opinions by calling the public comment line at (334) 230-2693, or e-mailing Mark Driscoll, director of the Historic Sites Division, at: [mark.driscoll@preserveala.org](mailto:mark.driscoll@preserveala.org).

The AHC's web site page [preserveala.org/currentissues.aspx](http://preserveala.org/currentissues.aspx) has additional information about the condition of Middle Bay Light and the AHC's action plan.

## Black Heritage Council's Preservation Forum puts Hobson City on the map

The Black Heritage Council hosted the annual Black Heritage Preservation Forum in Hobson City, Ala. on May 29-30. Founded in 1899, Hobson City is included on this year's Places in Peril list. This helped attract attention to the event from across the nation, even garnering coverage from Canada. More than 100 news outlets ran the AP story, and CNN featured the town as part of its July 24 newscast.

The forum opened on Friday with a reception held in the historic Calhoun County Training School, a Rosenwald School. Over 80 guests joined local and state elect-

ed officials and community leaders for the reception. Birmingham's CBS-42 and the Anniston Star covered the event. Following the reception Mayor Alberta McCrory led a tour through the town.

Sessions on Saturday covered community development, tourism, historic preservation, and using educational resources.

The keynote speaker was Jeh Jeh Pruitt, a reporter with Fox 6 News and a native of Hobson City. Pruitt spoke of the city's importance, not only due to its place in history, but also in the hearts and the minds of its residents. He concluded his speech with a challenge

for everyone to work together to transform the town into a vibrant community.

"The forum was quite successful and educated the public about the significant role Hobson City played in the history of Alabama and the nation. At the same time, the forum helped the town reconnect to its past and learn ways to preserve its historic resources to develop a sustainable future. The BHC continues to support the collaboration of community groups and Hobson City officials

to maximize the town's preservation opportunities," said Frazine Taylor, Chairperson of the BHC.

The Black Heritage Council (BHC) of the AHC is the only statewide organization in Alabama whose mission is the preservation of historic African-American places.



# Additions to the National Register of Historic Places

## Sunny Slope, Auburn

listed on March 12, 2009

Sunny Slope is an antebellum Greek Revival house at 1031 S. College Street in Auburn. The house was constructed c. 1857 as the seat of a 1700-acre plantation belonging to William F. Samford and Susan Lewis Dowdell Samford.

The house is significant as one of the city's six surviving examples of the single-story, hipped-roof Greek Revival cottages that were being built in east-central Alabama in the years just before the Civil War.

Sunny Slope was the boyhood home of William James Samford, the 31<sup>st</sup> governor of Alabama. Samford Hall, the main administrative building on the campus of Auburn University, bears his name.



The Auburn Heritage Association sponsored the application, researched the house, and prepared the initial paperwork and drawings. AHC Commissioner Dr. Ralph Draughon, Jr. played an integral role in the application process.

## Ramsay-McCormack Building Birmingham

listed on January 30, 2009



Constructed in 1929-1930, this ten-story Art Deco style office building is the most prominent building in Ensley, which was then home to the largest steel mill complex in the Birmingham District. Erskine Ramsay (1864-1953) was one of the Magic City's most important industrial, commercial, civic and philanthropic leaders from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth century. He and his business partner, George B. McCormack, were involved in many ventures, including real estate in downtown Ensley.

## Tankersley Rosenwald School, Montgomery County

listed on January 22, 2009



Located in the Hope Hull area 10 miles south of Montgomery, this building typifies the type of small, rural schools built all across Alabama and the South by the northern philanthropist Julius Rosenwald. The school was constructed around 1922 at a cost of \$5,300, of which Rosenwald contributed \$1,000.

Rosenwald's project enabled black children to get an education during segregation. Booker T. Washington of Tuskegee Institute was instrumental in getting Mr. Rosenwald to support this work. By 1930, the Rosenwald School Building Program was operating in fifteen southern states and had constructed over 4,700 rural schools. Alabama had 382 such schools by 1932, including the Tankersley Rosenwald School.

## Ross-Knox House, Mobile

listed on December 30, 2008



The Ross-Knox House, with its steeply pitched gables, prominent chimney, half-timbering and casement windows, is one of the best examples of the Tudor Revival style in Mobile. It is located in Country Club Estates, a 1920s upper-class suburb that features a golf course and a country club.

The house was designed by Mobile architect John Platt Roberts, and constructed in 1929. Ross Knox, the president of the Lucas E. Moore Stave Company of Georgia, a co-opeage and supply company, bought the house in 1933 and sold it in 1942. The house was purchased by Judge Herndon Inge, Jr. in 1959, who resided there for 43 years.

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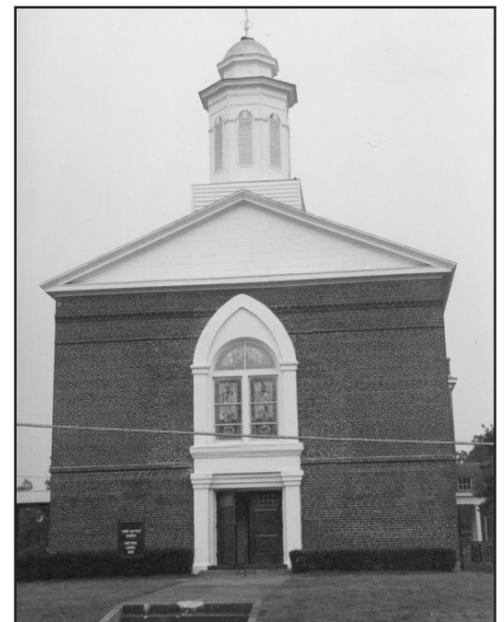
## First Baptist Church, Wetumpka

listed on October 24, 2008

The church was originally constructed in 1852, and currently occupies the equivalent of a city block on a busy street. The property reflects typical priorities of the Baptist ministry, particularly the emphasis on Christian education and, most recently, on family life activities in a multi-use facility.

The congregation was officially formed in 1821, and was called the Coosa River Baptist Church. In 1837, the congregation was combined with another Baptist congregation and named the Coosa River Baptist Church of Wetumpka. The name then changed to the First Baptist Church of Wetumpka in 1942.

The significant architecture of the church was noted by the inclusion of the building in the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), conducted by the federal government in 1935. The design of the building is classified as Gothic Revival, or Classical Revival.



The church, located at 205 West Bridge Street near the Coosa River, celebrated its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in July of 1996 and is an active congregation today.

## Vines Funeral Home and Ambulance Service, LaFayette

listed on October 15, 2008

This modest, brick building was constructed in 1952 by the black mortician Julius Summers Vines to house his funeral home and ambulance service. It was a common practice in the days of segregation for black-owned funeral homes to provide such a service. Today, Vines Funeral Home is still family-owned and operated. Located at 211 B Street SW, it is also the only funeral home in Alabama with an ambulance service.



## Middle Bay Light AHC taking action in response to structural report

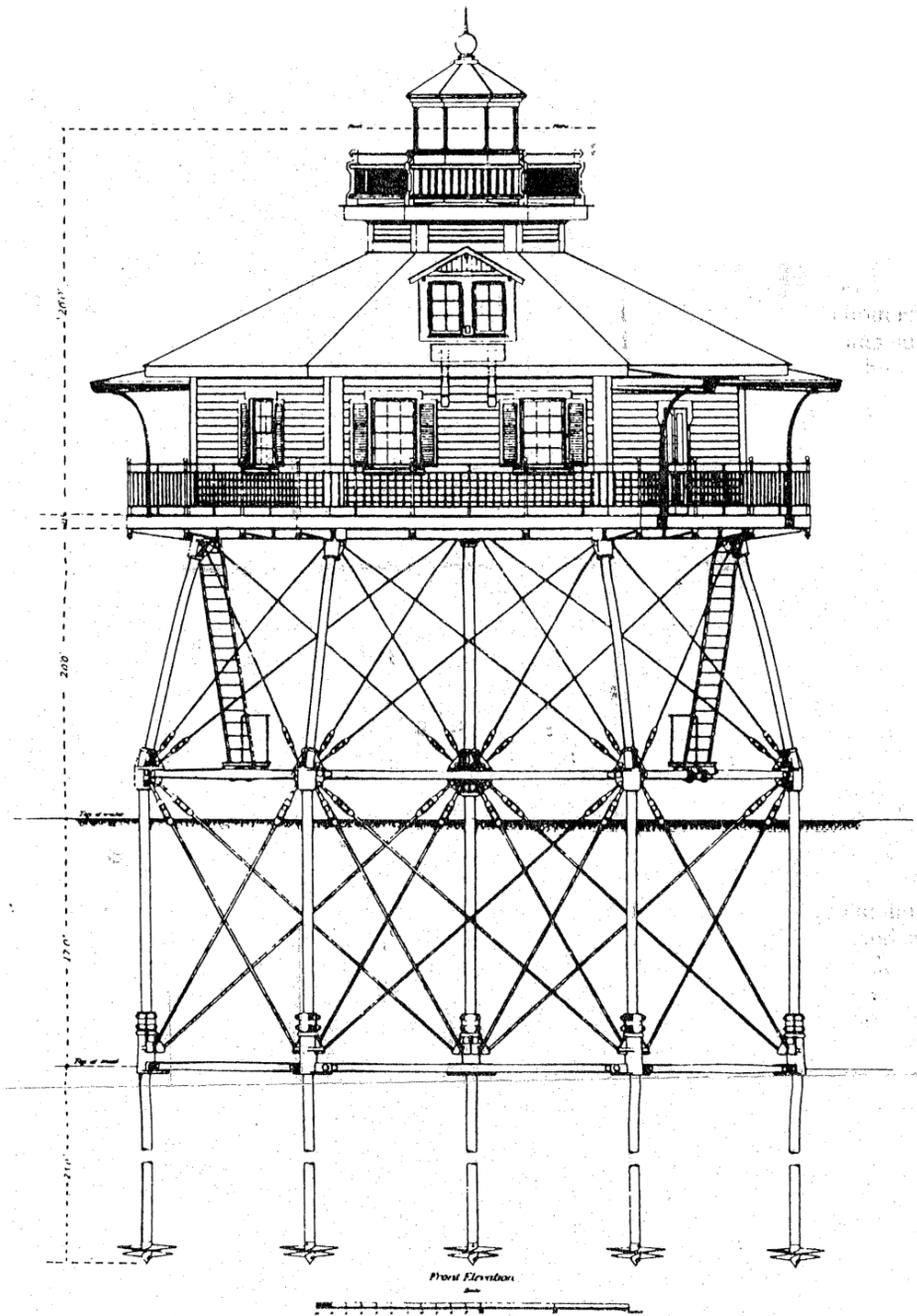
In January of this year a study conducted by Mobile's Commercial Diving Services, Inc. indicated that the metal support structures and some of the wooden portions of the house need repairs and maintenance. Four of the 60 metal tie rods are missing. There is some corrosion of the cast iron legs and of the steel I-beams. The metal handrails around the house's platform need to be repaired or replaced. A few of the windows have broken panes, there is some rotted wood in the eaves and windows, and the entire wooden structure needs caulking and painting.

In 2003, metal anodes were placed on the underwater metal members to protect them from further corrosion. These metal disks – sometimes called 'sacrificial anodes' – will corrode completely before the nearby cast iron will start to corrode. Designed to last 10 years, these anodes are about 50% depleted and are still protecting the lighthouse legs.

These conditions are not an immediate threat to the structure, but left untreated could become critical. The AHC has budgeted \$120,000 and plans to replace the missing tie rods, sandblast the steel I-beams, coat all of the metal support members with an epoxy coating, and replace the anodes. If sufficient funds are available, the commission will repair and paint the wooden structure.

Over the past 18 years, the Alabama Historical Commission has spent \$120,000 to match \$290,000 in federal grants to the AHC for repairing the lighthouse. These totals include FEMA funding for repairs after Hurricane Ivan.

Since its creation in 2000, The Alabama Lighthouse Association (ALA) has provided essential painting and maintenance with volunteer labor, materials, and transportation. A predecessor organization, The Mobile Middle Bay Lighthouse Centennial Commission, helped refurbish the light for the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1985 and helped with later maintenance until the ALA was formed.



Middle Bay Lighthouse is an excellent example of a screwpile lighthouse, so named for long cast iron legs that anchor the structure to the floor of the bay. Steel rods and turnbuckles tie these spider-like legs to a central post and to each other. This metal understructure supports a steel I-beam platform and the wooden lightkeeper's house.

## AHC sells Greenwood home in Greensboro

In July, the Gary family of Tuscaloosa purchased the Greenwood home in Greensboro from the Alabama Historical Commission. The AHC sold the house to the Garys with a protective covenant held by the AHC. The agreement states that the house must be rehabbed by 2016. The Garys are excited about restoring a Black Belt landmark and historic fixture in the Greensboro community.

Located just 40 miles south of Tuscaloosa, Greenwood is an 1856 Greek Revival mansion measuring nearly 4000 square feet on a large two acre lot. In 2003, the house suffered a disastrous fire, which destroyed the rear wing as well as the roof. The Alabama Historical Commission rebuilt the roof after the fire and eventually acquired the property through its Historic Endangered Landmarks Program.

The home is listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of Greensboro's Main Street Historic District. As such, it is eligible for federal rehabilitation tax credits if refurbished for income-producing purposes.

There are many people to thank for making this sale a reality. From the outset, two local

businessmen—Nick Cobbs and Mickey Harrow—acted as unofficial guardians of Greenwood. In fact, Cobbs's timely discovery of the second fire probably saved the house from complete destruction. Later both men cut the grass at their own expense, while Harrow advertised and showed the house to prospective purchasers.

Additionally, AHC's Eleanor Cunningham and the staff at nearby Magnolia Grove house museum made themselves available for people who were interested in Greenwood and helped keep the grounds.

In March 2008, HERO (Hale Empowerment and Revitalization Organization) director Pam Dorr led a group of volunteers from Auburn University's Rural Studio and the Alabama Historical Commission that cleaned up the interior of the house, as well as trimming the overgrown landscape back.

AHC senior architectural historian Bob Gamble marketed

the property statewide and comments, "I am pleased that the story of Greenwood will continue to be told by the Gary family. The house is an important landmark and as asset to the community of Greensboro. I am looking forward to seeing it restored."



New owners Laura and Brad Gary (right) enjoying their new home with their son and friend.

## STATEWIDE REPORT

### Stephanie Burton joins AHC as intern

Montgomery native Stephanie Burton began work as an intern in the Public Outreach division in May. Serving for her second consecutive summer, Burton is assisting staff with media relations, while also promoting the services that the AHC provides. She helped with logistics and program design for this year's Black Heritage Preservation Forum in Hobson City. Burton is a rising junior at

Florida A&M University in Tallahassee, studying communications.

She believes that her experience will give her the necessary tools for a career in the communications field. Burton remarks, "I am gaining invaluable experience that will help me as I develop my career, and my time at the commission has opened my eyes to the exciting new world of historic preservation. I absolutely love it."

### Rickwood Field receives funding



credit: www.baseballpilgrimages.com

The Birmingham City Council recently approved \$7.5 million for Rickwood Field. The allocation will help build a baseball museum and restore Rickwood. The council previously passed a resolution supporting the project and outlined plans to fund it. The proposed museum would include both the history of Negro League players and the Southern Baseball League. The Birmingham Barons

and the Birmingham Black Barons played at the century-old ballpark.

Rickwood Field is America's oldest baseball field, with the first pitch thrown in 1910. Today, it is visited by baseball enthusiasts from around the country. Every summer, the stadium's history is celebrated at the Rickwood Classic, complete with period uniforms. For more information about this historic treasure visit: [www.rickwood.com](http://www.rickwood.com).

### SAVE THE DATE

### Alabama Preservation Conference

October 8-10, Auburn

The Alabama Trust, the AHC, and the Black Heritage Council are hosting the annual Alabama Preservation Conference in Auburn October 8-10. The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center is the official hotel for the conference, offering spacious and well-appointed rooms. A group rate of \$119/room

is available through September 15.

Participants can tour the campus, North College Street Historic District, Pine Hill Cemetery, Sunny Slope estate, and the Darden house in Opelika. The city of Auburn was just named one the 10 best places to live by U.S. News & World Report, so be sure to come see the community for yourself.

### Friends of Gaineswood accepts arts grant

The Black Belt Community Foundation (BBCF) recently awarded Friends of Gaineswood a \$5,000 Black Belt Arts Initiative grant. The Friends of Gaineswood raises funds for Gaineswood National Historic

Landmark, an AHC site located in Demopolis. This grant supports Heritage Days in April, an annual educational program that serves approximately 500 fourth-grade students from the Black Belt studying Alabama history.

## PRESERVATION REPORT

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