

PRESERVATION

Alabama Historical Commission

REPORT

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JULY-AUGUST 2011

AHC ON THE GROUND IN COMMUNITIES STRUCK BY TORNADOES

The April 27 tornadoes sent AHC staff scrambling to assess damage to historic resources and assist some of the hardest hit communities.

Planners, historians, and archaeologists were on the ground in Tuscaloosa assisting city planners and federal agency staff within weeks of the storm.

Within days of the tornadoes, Tuscaloosa officials asked Commission staff to help determine if damaged historic districts had enough integrity to retain their local designation.

On May 4, AHC preservation planner Mary Shell and survey coordinator Lee Anne Wofford

visited three Tuscaloosa districts and one neighborhood pending local designation. Shell found that Hillcrest, Glendale Gardens, and The Downs retained enough of their historic character to remain historic districts.

Although the majority of houses in Forest Lake were destroyed, she suggested the city could pursue a local district to protect the remaining elements of the plan and lake.

On May 9, Shell accompanied AHC deputy SHPO Elizabeth Brown and structural engineer Lowell Christy to Cordova and Jasper. Cordova's Tallulah Hotel and Long Methodist Church

could not be salvaged, but most of downtown could be.

Emergency funds from the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Gwyn Turner Fund paid for Christy's structural assessment. The Alabama Trust helped secure this funding.

The storm destroyed one of Alabama's oldest homes, the c. 1818 William E. Murphey House near Decatur. AHC senior architectural historian Robert Gamble is working with the owner, Nucor Steel, to find creative ways to interpret the remaining standing chimney and to address archeological remains.

AHC archaeologists Greg

Rhinehart and Amanda Hill met with Army Corps of Engineers officials in Tuscaloosa on May 25 to ensure that sensitive archaeological sites not get damaged in the debris removal process.

According to AHC executive director Frank White, "We are grateful for the assistance from the Alabama Trust and FEMA."

FEMA workers scanned all of the National and Alabama Register files and will link this data to their computerized mapping system. This data about historical places is key to the AHC's efforts to build its own statewide Geographic Information System (GIS).

Frances Dillard donates Cary-Pick House to Auburn University

To honor her family, Frances Dillard has donated an Auburn treasure, the Cary-Pick house, to Auburn University. Built in 1848, the home is the second oldest house in Auburn. The house is important both for its architecture and its historical associations. The antebellum raised cottage contains a striking solid mahogany free-standing circular staircase that is noted for its structural design.

Noted also for its association with leaders in education, science, the military and historic preservation, the house will contain the archive of Dr.

Charles Allen Cary, the founder of Auburn University's College of Veterinary Medicine. Beginning in the late 19th century, Dr. Cary helped establish the first meat inspection system in the United States and worked to create meat and milk inspection ordinances in all major Alabama cities.

In addition to hosting the Cary archive, the house also will become the Cary Center for the Advancement of Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies. The center opens July 1.

"Our family has upheld traditions of patriotism, responsibility,

leadership, mentoring and philanthropy for generations," said Dillard. "We are thrilled with the establishment of the Cary Center."

As a founding member of the Women's Philanthropy Board,

Mrs. Dillard has demonstrated great generosity by donating her historic family home. "All of Alabama's preservationists should join together to applaud and thank her," said AHC commissioner Dr. Ralph Draughon.



AHC executive director Frank White in the new Freedom Rides Museum.

Worldwide debut for the Freedom Rides Museum

"The museum may be small, but its significance is monumental," said U.S. District Judge Myron Thompson. He spoke at the May 20th formal opening of the Alabama Historical Commission's Freedom Rides Museum.

Media outlets worldwide reported the event.

Located in Montgomery's historic Greyhound Bus Station, the museum tells the story of the 1961 Freedom Rides. Using

nonviolent protest methods, an interracial group of 21 college students came to Montgomery 50 years ago and helped end racial segregation in America.

A high point of the week-long opening events was a meeting between Freedom Riders and former Governor John Patterson. Opposed to the rides in 1961, Patterson today praises the protestors saying they brought about needed change.

Freedom Rider John Lewis, now a U.S. Congressman, said about the meeting with Patterson, "...it's almost unreal. It says something about the distance we've come, in our state and our nation."

According to AHC director Frank White, "This is a powerful place to tell the story of a major turning point in our national history. This is the place where that history happened."

www.freedomridemuseum.org

PLACES IN PERIL 2011

Boiling Springs Native American Sites

Chocolocco Creek, Calhoun County

Chocolocco Valley's Creek Indians bowed to President Andrew Jackson in 1832 and agreed to move from their ancestral home in exchange for new land in Oklahoma. Although Native Americans inhabited the region since 10,000 BC, they could not withstand the demand for new land by white settlers seeking to make their fortune in cotton. The fact that Native Americans owned this land posed a problem for newcomers. However, Jackson solved this problem by signing the 1832 Treaty of Cusseta/1832 Treaty of Washington.

The remnants of their aboriginal settlement are scattered throughout Boiling Springs in the Chocolocco Valley. Researchers have identified multiple archaeological sites that provide invaluable insight into Native American life for 10,000 years. These lands are a desirable setting for developments that could endanger much of the area's Native American cultural landscape.

Bermuda Hill House

Gallion, Hale County (c. 1845)

Sitting on a hill overlooking the old Prairieville to Greensboro Road, the Bermuda Hill House is a product of an era when ambitious men believed the road to riches ran through fluffy rows of cotton. The prominent Manning family first owned the property. The Mannings were early settlers and planters in Prairieville and owned large land tracts in the original French grants of the Vine and Olive colony. In 1845, William W. Manning sold the land to William Weeden of Madison County, but it is unclear who built the house.

The home is a significant example of a Canebrake plantation house based on the I-house form. The façade is dominated by a full height pedimented portico, supported by four paneled columns embellished with sawnwork brackets.

Bermuda Hill is threatened by neglect and deferred maintenance.

Windham Construction Company Office Building

Birmingham, Jefferson County (1912)

The Windham Construction Company Office Building is a remarkable reminder of a successful African-American business that flourished in a segregated society. The building was home to Windham Brothers Construction Company, a major black contractor that built some of the most significant buildings in Birmingham. Wallace Rayfield, Alabama's first formally trained black architect, designed the building and collaborated with Windham Brothers to build the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and the Alabama Penny Savings Bank, Alabama's first black-owned bank. In 1927, the company built the seven-story Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Co. Building.

Listed on the National Register, the structure is unoccupied and threatened by vandalism. Restoration of the building could help to revitalize the adjacent Smithfield neighborhood.

Old Gurley Town Hall

Gurley, Madison County (1895)

Located 16 miles from Huntsville, Gurley incorporated in 1890 and grew up around a water and coaling station that served the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. The Town Hall was listed on the National Register in 2004, as part of the Gurley Historic District.

The two-story brick building has three stone arches across the front façade and was first a hardware store. It has also housed a print shop, a lodge, the Crescent theatre, and a school. It served as the town hall from 1965-1982. Today, it is a town fire station.

The building needs a new roof and the rear wall stabilized. However, it qualifies for a 20% federal historic preservation tax credit. The future of the building is uncertain, and residents fear that it could deteriorate even further or be demolished.

Jemison-Turner House

Turner, Talladega County (c. 1840)

Born in Lincoln County, Georgia, Robert Jemison brought his family and slaves to Talladega County in 1837 and began acquiring property in the rich bottom lands bordering the Chocolocco and Cheaha creeks. Joined in Alabama by six of his siblings, Jemison contributed to his family's great economic and political prominence.

Jemison's plantation house is significant for its unusual plan and its exceptionally fine and intact Federal period interiors. The home's unique split-level plan appears in only one other house in the state, also located in Talladega County and constructed by a Jemison family member.

The Jemison House is deteriorating due to abandonment.

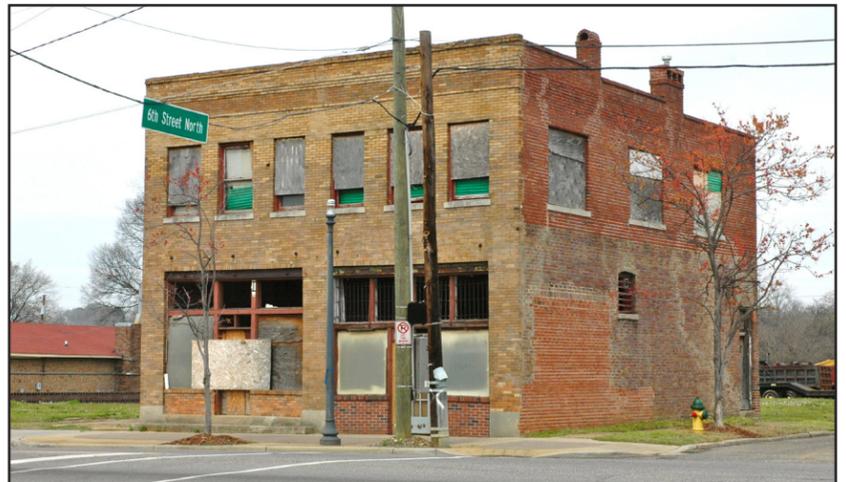
ALABAMA TRUST for HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Alabama's
Places
In
Peril
ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

Since 1994, the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation have joined forces to sponsor Places in Peril, a program designed to highlight some of Alabama's most significant endangered historic sites.



credit: David Schneider



credit: David Schneider



credit: David Schneider



credit: David Schneider

PLACES IN PERIL 2011

Powell School

Birmingham, Jefferson County (1888)

Seeking to attract new residents, Birmingham founder and Elyton Land Co. president James R. Powell donated four blocks in 1873 to build Powell School, the city's first public school. The initial building was replaced in 1888 by the current structure. For over a century, thousands attended Powell School, also known as the "Free School."

The three-story red brick structure has a stone foundation and represents the Victorian Gothic style. The façade has three primary bays, which are divided into three bays separated vertically by pilasters and horizontally by brick courses.

Vacant since 2003, the school symbolizes the city's early business leaders' commitment to education. A January 2011 fire destroyed the roof and most of the interior, leaving Powell's future in doubt. Community leaders contend that the historic building can be restored and reused. The city is considering demolishing the building.



credit: David Schneider

Downtown Anniston Historic District

Anniston, Calhoun County (1888)

A proposed federal courthouse project and the construction of a new city criminal justice center threaten Downtown Anniston's historic district. Historic resources dating from Anniston's heyday as the "Model City of the New South" through its turbulent Civil Rights history are endangered. As currently planned, the projects will demolish 14 percent of the district's contributing resources.

The courthouse project threatens the intact Gurnee Avenue streetscape that served as the backdrop for the May 14, 1961 attack on a Greyhound bus carrying Freedom Riders. The justice center lies within a locally designated historic district, and any demolition requires approval by the city's Historic Preservation Commission.



credit: David Schneider

Avondale Mill Village

Talladega County (c. 1910s)

Associated with one of Alabama's most significant early 20th century textile operations, Avondale Mill Village in Sylacauga is now representative of the demise of this once great industry.

Typical of similar villages found throughout Alabama, the neighborhood provided affordable housing for the mill's "operatives" in close proximity to their work. The village fostered a strong sense of community among the residents. Former mill workers and their families today recall the village as an excellent place to raise a family.

Located just outside of Sylacauga's city limits, the village has suffered economic decline and disinvestment and struggles to remain a viable neighborhood. While there is an effort to improve conditions, broad-based community support and action are needed to address the many issues facing the village.



credit: David Schneider

Motion Picture Theatres

Statewide

Some people may remember the 1930s and 1940s, when going to the movies was the national pastime. However, America's habit of going to the movies began to wane as television made its inroads in the 1950s. By the 1960s, many of the grand movie palaces had already succumbed to the wrecking ball. By the 1970s and 1980s, the vast majority of Alabama's historic theatres had gone dark.

Few building types hold such broad appeal within their communities. As a result, many cities have found creative ways to save and repurpose their historic theatres. Birmingham's Alabama Theatre (1927) has been restored as a performing arts center. Similar conversions have occurred in Mobile, Decatur, Montgomery, Talladega, Tuscaloosa, and Winfield. Yet there are many more theatres that are awaiting restoration and an audience. We can still smell the popcorn!

Elizabeth Presbyterian Church

Sumter County (1858)

A group of Sumter County residents established the Elizabeth Presbyterian Church in November 1838. Elizabeth Knox donated the land where the first church was built, and it was named in her honor. The growing congregation replaced the original log structure in 1858 with a two-story wood frame building. Members also established a small cemetery on the property.

Economic developments and demographic changes have been unkind to many of Alabama's rural areas. The descendants of those who settled these regions have moved to pursue opportunities elsewhere. When they leave, they leave behind structures like Elizabeth Presbyterian Church, a building where generations gathered to celebrate life and mourn loss. The church is threatened by neglect.



Pastime Theatre, Winfield

- Constructed in 1937
- Historic theatre success story
- Restoration completed in 2002
- Public and private funding
- Managed by volunteer board

www.winfieldcity.org/pastimetheatre

courtesy: Pastime Theatre



credit: David Schneider

CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENTS • GRANT AWARDS FY 2011

Communities participating in the Certified Local Government (CLG) program are eligible to receive federal 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 program. Funding for the projects is provided by Alabama's annual appropriations from the National Park Service, Department of the Interior.

Cities must match the grants, which can be used for surveys of historic resources, nominations to the National Register of Historic Places, local preservation planning, preservation education and training, and predevelopment studies.

CLG program information online:
preserveala.org/certlocalgovts.aspx
www.nps.gov/hps/clg

To learn more, contact Mary Shell:
mary.shell@preserveala.org / 334.230.2691

Historic Preservation Training

City of Fayette \$2,000 - Fund training for preservation commission members.

City of Montevallo \$5,000 - Fund training for preservation commission members.

Public Awareness and Education

City of Eufaula \$3,800 - Provided speaker for the 2011 state meeting of the American Planning Association.

City of Mobile \$5,000 - Add information from Oakdale and Africatown historic districts to city's web site.

Staffing

City of Monroeville \$4,500 - Provide contracted staff assistance to local preservation commission.

Survey and Registration

City of Decatur \$5,000 - Prepare National Register nominations for two historic districts.

City of Demopolis \$7,200 - Prepare National Register nomination for historic district.

City of Fayette \$8,000 - Prepare historic resources survey of downtown area.

City of Guntersville \$8,000 - Prepare historic resources survey documenting downtown properties.

City of Huntsville \$10,000 - Update National Register documentation of Old Town Historic District.

City of Mobile \$10,000 - Prepare National Register nomination for Africatown Historic District.

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