PRESERVATION REPORT

Alabama Historical Commission

VOL. 37, NO. 6 SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 2011

Fort Gaines named one of America's most endangered

In June the National Trust for Historic Preservation named Fort Gaines on Dauphin Island to its 2011 America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places list. This annual list highlights significant architectural, cultural and natural sites that are threatened.

Fort Gaines was pivotal to the Battle of Mobile Bay during the Civil War. On August 5, 1864, Confederate troops guarding Fort Gaines rained down cannon fire on Union Admiral David Farragut's fleet. Despite the intense fire, Admiral Farragut yelled, "damn the torpedoes, full speed ahead," overpowering the Confederates and capturing the fort.

Today, Fort Gaines faces an even more challenging adversary: the relentless erosion of its Gulf of Mexico shoreline. Fort Gaines' shoreline is eroding at a rate of approximately nine feet per year. To date, 400 feet of historic battlefield has eroded. This is the result of more frequent and intense storms, sea level rise and dredging of the Mobile Ship Channel. The Deepwater Horizon oil spill response compounded this problem. Fort Gaines could eventually wash away, destroying a vital piece of our nation's heritage and an important monument to brave Civil War soldiers.

"Fort Gaines, a place of extraordinary national significance, is in a precarious position," said Stephanie Meeks, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "While we cannot stop the tide, we can stabilize the shoreline, serving to protect Fort Gaines and Mobile Bay from ever-increasing coastal storms."

A comprehensive engineering feasibility/design study found that shoreline stabilization and beach nourishment will lesson shoreline erosion and stabilize the island. This project would require significant funding though.

Constructed in 1861, Fort Gaines is almost exactly like it was during the Civil War. The fort has original cannons, a restored blacksmith shop, and kitchens used for living history demonstrations. A tunnel system leading to corner bastions with vaulted brick ceilings also adds to the site's intrigue. The federal government sold Fort Gaines to the City of Mobile in 1926. The city gave the property to the Alabama Department of Conservation, which then deeded it to the Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board.

Courtesy Dauphin Island Park & Beach Board

The Dauphin Island Park and Beach Board submitted the nomination for Fort Gaines. To contact Fort Gaines, call 251-861-6992 or e-mail fortgaines@dauphinisland.org.

Adapted with permission from press release by National Trust for Historic Preservation.

Visit **www.preservationnation.org/places** to learn more about what you can do to support Fort Gaines, experience first-hand accounts of the fort, and view photos.

Community turns vacant school into vibrant arts center

School boards across the state often face the reality of vacant buildings that will never be schools again.

In 2003 the Coosa County Board of Education closed the West Coosa Elementary School as part of a consolidation plan. The school was located on the historic Weogufka High School campus and the board had to decide what to do with the land and 32,000 square feet of empty buildings. In 2007 the school board deeded the Weogufka campus property and its five buildings to the nonprofit group Weogufka Center for Arts, Entertainment, and Education Inc.

The effort to preserve Weogufka School began in April 2007 when Weogufka High School alumnus Presley Boswell (class of 1957) formed the Weogufka School Preservation Committee. This effort soon led to the formation of the Weogufka Center for Arts, Entertainment, and Education, a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization. The group's mission is to restore the school and reuse it for the community's benefit.

The center hosts a variety of events including the Old Farm "N" Bluegrass Day in the fall and Mule Day every spring. Both of these annual events draw over 3,000 people. It is also used for civic meetings, wedding receptions, songwriting workshops, and comedy shows.

Boswell is the driving force behind the Weogufka Center's success, and serves as its board chairman and president. He credits the organization's fundraising success to being targeted about setting project goals. "We have focused on completing small projects, and only working on one at a time," said Boswell. They raise funds through monthly dinner theatre shows, concerts, and selling corporate sponsorships and merchandise.

The Weogufka School main building (1940) is the centerpiece of the 16-acre campus.

Boswell says that the group only asks volunteers to handle a small task, such as operating the stage lighting or concessions. The organization has more than 50 committed volunteers who help run the events and promote the center.

www.weogufkacenter.com
334-578-1364

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

credit: Alabama Historical Commission

Greyhound Bus Station, Montgomery
listed May 16, 2011

Alabama's newest museum is officially "historic." Built in 1951, the station is associated with the 1961 Freedom Rides protest that helped end racial segregation in public transportation. On May 20, 1961, Freedom Riders were attacked by an angry mob at the station. The building now houses the Alabama Historical Commission's Freedom Rides Museum, which opened to the public in May.

www.freedomridesmuseum.org

credit: Shaun Wilson, City of Mobile

International Longshoreman's Association (ILA) Hall, Mobile
listed June 27, 2011

Built in 1949, ILA Hall is the site of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s only Mobile speaking engagement, taking place on January 1, 1959. The ILA created a Mobile chapter in 1936 to represent African Americans working on Mobile's docks. The hall not only provided meeting space for its union members, but it also held many civil rights events. ILA Hall is one of Mobile's few examples of the Art Moderne architectural style.

Dallas Mill Village Historic District, Huntsville
listed June 27, 2011

The North Alabama Improvement Company established Dallas Mills in 1890. The village's design is based on the ideas of the late 19th century planner D.A. Tompkins. He advocated that mill villages should contain a diversity of housing styles and that workers' houses should be set apart from managers' dwellings. The Tompkins plan also called for amenities to be within walking distance of the workers' residences. Although a fire destroyed the mill complex in 1991, the mill village is essentially intact.

Lowe Mill & Mill Village Historic District, Huntsville
listed June 24, 2011

Of Huntsville's four mill villages, Lowe Mill Village has the most intact textile mill complex. Lowe Manufacturing Company began building the mill in 1900. Soon it was one of Huntsville's major industrial facilities. The company provided housing for its mill workers along streets that extended to the west and north of the mill. Today the mill serves the community as an arts and entertainment center. The mill's owner also leases space to many independent businesses.

credit: Shaun Wilson, City of Mobile

Davis Avenue Recreation Center, Mobile
listed June 27, 2011

Mobile's first public recreation center for African Americans was founded in 1921 as the Davis Avenue Community House. The year before, the city of Mobile constructed a "whites-only" recreation center on Spring Hill Avenue. In 1936 the city replaced the Community House with the current building and named it the Davis Avenue Recreation Center. The center is the only public recreation center in Mobile built with Works Progress Administration funds.

Dunbar High School, Bessemer
listed March 18, 2011

Built in 1923, Dunbar High School served as Bessemer's only high school for African Americans until 1960 when students moved into a new school building. Its original name, Bessemer Colored High School, still remains on an inscription panel over the front door. However, the school's name changed in 1928 to honor African-American poet Paul Laurence Dunbar.

Southside Historic District (expansion), Birmingham
updated June 30, 2011

The NPS added a commercial building located at 2208 Sixth Avenue South as a contributing resource. The owner recently removed metal covering from the front facade, revealing a c. 1921 building that retains much of its original architectural character.

AHC LOSES THREE STAFFERS WHO MADE HISTORY COME TO LIFE

Lawrence Lee Gregory

September 29, 1951– April 23, 2011

Larry Gregory was one of the AHC's longest-serving employees. He worked at Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson Park for almost 38 years until his death this spring.

Gregory came to the fort in the early 1970s as part of an archaeological team. They were looking for the exact locations of the two different forts that occupied the site. Gregory so loved the park's history and natural beauty that he stayed on as a park worker and museum technician.

His efforts were critical in the 1985 relocation and renovation of the Graves House Visitor Center. And he worked hard to help make Frontier Days one of Alabama's outstanding events. "Larry touched almost every activity, program and plan at the fort," said site director Jim Parker.

Gregory was a graduate of Troy State University in Montgomery and was married to Melanie Betz, architectural historian at the AHC.

Larry Gregory will be remembered as someone who had a gift for sharing the history of a very special place. "For so many visitors and volunteers, Larry was the person who made this history come alive," said AHC commissioner Craig Sheldon.

Larry Gregory in front of the Graves House Visitor Center

Edwin Jean McArthur

May 16, 1928 – June 21, 2011

For 13 years, Jean McArthur thrilled children, parents and teachers with tours of the Alabama State Capitol. Dramatic stories about "murder" and "whispering walls" won him a real following. School groups asked for him by name when booking tours.

Affectionately known as "Mr. Mac," he welcomed colleagues with a smile and a sincere "Hi…how ya doing….how's your family?"

With his retirement in May and his death in June, Alabama lost what many said was the best greeter the Capitol has ever had.

Fort Morgan director retires

After 23 years of running this complex 1834 site, Blanton Blankenship retired on June 30. "He is a walking encyclopedia of the best stories about the people and events associated with the fort," said Mark Driscoll, historic sites division director.

ALABAMA REGISTER

LISTED ON MAY 19, 2011

Old Keener Barn

ARKWRIGHT BAPTIST CHURCH
Vincent, Shelby County

ARTHUR HAROLD PARKER HIGH SCHOOL
Birmingham, Jefferson County

BETHLEHEM PRIMITIVE BAPTIST CHURCH and CEMETERY
Lapine, Montgomery County

DOWNTOWN ATTALLA HISTORIC DISTRICT
Attalla, Etowah County

HENDRIX-MORGAN HOUSE
Mexia, Monroe County

LOWNDESBORO SCHOOL
Lowdesboro, Lowndes County

OLD KEENER HOUSE AND BARN
Keener, Etowah County

ROSA A. LOTT SCHOOL
Citronelle, Mobile County

Lowndesboro School

Alabama Register of Landmarks & Heritage
www.preserveala.org/alabamaregister.aspx

EVENTS at AHC SITES

9/10: General Wheeler's Birthday Celebration at Pond Spring - The General Joe Wheeler Home
10:00 am - 3:00 pm - Grounds open for tours, but Wheeler Home closed. Free event. Contact: 256.637.8513
www.wheelerplantation.org

9/24: B.Y.O.B. (Bring Your Own Bike) Tour at Old Cahawba
10:00 am - noon - Explore Cahawba on two wheels. $4 adults, $3 seniors, $2 children. Contact: 334.872.8058

10/21: Haunted History Tours at Old Cahawba
7:00 pm - 9:00 pm - Tours begin every half hour. $15 per person. Contact: 800.457.3562

10/22: "Hear the Dead Speak" Daytime Walking Tour at Old Cahawba
10:00 am - 11:00 am - Tours begin every half hour. $4 adults, $3 seniors, $2 children. Contact: 334.872.8058
www.cahawba.com

STATEWIDE REPORT

Mobile launches new grant program

The Mobile Historic Development Commission recently created a new grant program that assists low to moderate-income historic homeowners. Qualified individuals are eligible for up to $15,000 in grant money for exterior maintenance and repairs that preserve their home's historic character. Recipients will use the funds for the repair or replacement of roofs, rotten wood, windows, doors, foundation members and other architectural details.

www.mobilehd.org/hhgp.html

Legislature passes bill to preserve the People's House

First Lady Dianne Bentley joined Governor Bentley for the HB 437 signing ceremony on June 16, 2011.

During this year's session, the legislature passed the "First Lady Dianne Bentley Governor's Mansion Preservation Act." The act (HB 437) creates a Governor's Mansion Authority consisting of many historic preservation experts. The governing board's mission is to "protect the historical and architectural integrity of the mansion's exterior, interior, contents and grounds."

The Governor's Mansion Complex occupies one square block in Montgomery's Garden District neighborhood. It includes the Governor's Mansion and the John Blue-Hill House, purchased by the Friends of the Governor's Mansion in 2000.

Wilcox County Field Days a success

Dr. John Hall from the University of West Alabama teaches the paleontology module to Camden Middle School students. AHC archaeologist Stacye Hathorn led lessons during the May 16-17 workshop at the Liddell archaeological site. Students said that the excavation and pottery lessons were their favorite activities. Auburn University's Environmental Institute partners with the AHC to conduct the annual workshop.

Marcya Lockwood hired as AHC intern

Marcya Lockwood is a freshman at Alabama State University majoring in Communications. Originally from New Haven, Conn., she moved to Montgomery in 2005 and graduated from Jefferson Davis High School in May of 2010. After graduating from college Lockwood wants to work as a public relations agent in the music industry.

Lockwood received the internship through the Black Heritage Council which is partnering with Alabama State University to expose African-American students to historic preservation. She began working for the Alabama Historical Commission in June and is assisting the Outreach Division.

Muscle Shoals NHA launches website

The Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area recently launched a new website. The heritage area consists of six counties in the northwest corner of Alabama. The new site will help you plan a visit, learn about area events, and explore the region's heritage.

msnha.una.edu

PRESERVATION Alabama Historical Commission **REPORT**

Preservation Report is a bimonthly publication of the
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www.preserveala.org
Preserve, Protect, and Interpret Alabama's Historic Places

PRESERVATION REPORT
September-October 2011
Alabama Historical Commission
468 South Perry Street
P. O. Box 300900
Montgomery AL 36130-0900

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