

# PRESERVATION

Alabama Historical Commission

## REPORT

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### LIVING UPSTAIRS DOWNTOWN

An “urban setting with lofts creates a new dynamic for Selma,” said local real estate investor A. C. Reeves. When Reeves and her business partner Mandy Henry held a Christmas open house showing their recently restored buildings in downtown Selma, they had no idea how the evening would end. “By the end of the party we rented every available loft,” mostly to young professionals who were interested in “cool, urban living.”

Renovating historic buildings was always part of their goal at The Real Estate Gallery. Reeves and Henry “envisioned a lively downtown with residential lofts, boutiques, and eateries.” Their vision for Selma is right in line with national and statewide trends reviving historic downtowns using preservation and economic development networks.

Many sources fuel this migration back downtown but younger professionals, commonly known as Generation “Y,” are driven by convenience, connectivity, and vibrant urban living. For Gen Y downtown is a walkable place where they can rent instead of buy. Interestingly Baby Boomers are moving here too. With large suburban houses, these “empty nesters” no longer need the space and the demanding upkeep of these homes and big yards.

Montgomery can't keep up with the demand for lofts downtown. Loft construction started some years ago and many developers do small projects believing that it builds momentum and demand.



Above: A. C. Reeves, Mandy Henry with The Real Estate Gallery and contractor David Ousley discussing the restoration.

Below: Before image shows original plaster, wood windows and flooring. After image of second story loft on Broad Street.



Photos and quotes by Ashley Johnson's article “Lofty Goals,” Nov-Dec 2012 issue of *Spanish Moss Magazine*, Selma Times Journal.

In the last ten years, developers **invested 3.8 million in Selma's** downtown. **Statewide 97 restoration projects spent 158 million** using the tax credits from 2003-2012.

“Mixed-use restorations are our focus for future projects,” said developer John Foshee. The market is there and smaller towns like Selma, Florence, Athens, and Opelika are actively creating living downtowns.

These generational changes in the perception of living downtown fit perfectly within many of Alabama's historic preservation programs. The 14 “Main Street” towns in the state work hard to combine economic development, increase public participation, and rehabilitate buildings so that downtown is a fun place to visit.

Key to downtown revitalization is restoration of these historic buildings. Working with the AHC, many developers use the 20% restoration tax credit program. It requires sensitive restoration of important architectural elements of the building and early coordination with Commission reviewer, Chloe Mercer, but it works.

“We are experiencing a major shift,” says Billy Parrish, longtime downtown advocate in Georgia. “There has never been a time in the past 50 years when there was a bigger demand for downtown living. People want to live in walkable, vibrant communities.” Reeves and Henry point out that loft living shows a “whole other side of Selma no one here has seen yet.” The partners already have other projects in the works, “there is money to be made here in Selma, Alabama.”



### DISCOVERING FORT MIMS 200 YEARS LATER

The compelling story of the Fort Mims Massacre on August 30, 1813, has long been a favorite subject of historians and legends. Archaeological investigations began as early as the 1950s and 60s. University of South Alabama staff and students continued the dig in the 1980s, finding the sites of the wooden palisade, Mims family home, kitchen, blacksmith forge, and other cabins.

Many artifacts found at Fort Mims, such as ceramics and broken glass bottles, are burned or melted. This indicates these items were in use during the August 30, 1813 battle. Other artifacts not burned predate the battle and came from the Mims family plantation.

“It is always exciting to find a burned fragment, like a piece of a dinner plate, knowing that it belonged to someone seeking shelter in the fort during the increasing attacks of the Redstick Creek Indians” notes

project archaeologist Bonnie Gums. Renewed interest in the 2000s led to additional excavations discovering the remaining walls of the palisade, the fort's east gate, and a “privy” pit. Archaeological digs continue at the fort site today.

#### WHY CAN'T I DIG HERE?

Archaeologists discover important information and artifacts from professionally excavated sites. Not everyone understands the damage done to potential sites by simply picking up something like an arrowhead. Unfortunately taking objects destroys how researchers understand the history of that area/event. Priceless information regarding how people lived in the past is lost.

These objects, once removed, are like a piece of a puzzle that can never be recovered. Questions? Contact the Alabama State Archaeologist, Stacy Hathorn at [stacye.hathorn@preserveala.org](mailto:stacye.hathorn@preserveala.org).

This axe head found at Fort Mims has the initials “Z M” punched into its face. Research shows that it belonged to Zachariah McGirth, an Anglo-American married to a Creek woman. He and his family took refuge at the fort in August 1813. McGirth, along with two enslaved Africans, set out to gather food for the fort occupants just minutes before the Redstick warriors attacked the fort. Researchers found the axe in one of the fort's wells excavated in the 1960s.



## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### MARCH 16-17

**French Colonial Garrison, Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson.** Costumed re-enactors portray the daily lives of French soldiers and Creek Indian in the 1750s. See various aspects of daily life including foodways, cannon drill and use of the musket. Admission: \$2 for adults, \$1 for students. Contact: 334-567-3002.

### MARCH 16-17

**War of 1812 Living History Days, Fort Mims, Tensaw Delta.** Join us in the swamps of south AL as local settlers and the 1812 militia battle the Redstick Creek Indians. Experience blacksmithing, clothing and flintlock weapons, period music, and observe an archeological 'dig' by University of South Alabama. Open 9am-3pm daily. \$5 per person. Concessions available. Bring your own chair/blanket. For more information, contact the North Baldwin Chamber 251-937-5665 or the Fort Mims Restoration Association 251-533-9024. For map, schedule of events, lodging, camping, vending, and display information visit [www.fortmims.org](http://www.fortmims.org).

### MARCH 30

**B.Y.O. (Bring Your Own) Bike Tour, Old Cahawba.** Take a guided two-hour bike tour and explore a landscape of relics, ruins, and graveyards. See the ghost remains of the first state capital and Civil War prison site from 10am-12pm. Bring your bike, water, and snacks. Contact: 334-872-8058. Fees: \$6 adults, \$3 children 18 & under, \$5 seniors (age 65+), military or college students.



### APRIL 5, 6, & 7

**Eufaula Heritage Association Pilgrimage, Fendall Hall.** Enjoy both daytime garden and evening house tours. Skit on the history of Eufaula included. Admission charged for both tours. Contact: 334-687-3793 or visit [www.eufaulapilgrimage.com](http://www.eufaulapilgrimage.com).

### APRIL 6, 13, 20, 27

**Saturday Walking Tours, Fendall Hall.** Fendall Hall participates in the Eufaula Saturday Walking Tours during April 2013. Tours begin at 10am and leave from a different location each Saturday. Admission is free. Contact the Eufaula/Barbour Chamber of Commerce at 334-687-6664 for more information.

### APRIL 6

**Heritage Days, Gaineswood, Eufaula.** This living history event explores life at Gaineswood during the 19th century. Demonstrations by blacksmiths, potters, and storytellers. Experience Choctaw lifeways. Tour of this National Historic Landmark from 10am-2pm. Admission is \$5 for adults, \$3 for children. Contact 334-289-4846 for more information.

### APRIL 6-7

**War of 1812 Militia Camp, Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson, Wetumpka.** Encampment of Creek War and War of 1812, including the TN militia, will exhibit camp life and weaponry from the period 1813-1814. Admission is \$2 for adults and \$1 for students. Contact: 334-567-3002.

### APRIL 11, 12, & 13

**Alabama Historical Association Annual Meeting, Eufaula.** For more information visit <http://www.archives.state.al.us/aha/aha.html>.

### APRIL 13

**6th Annual Confederate Garrison Living History Day, "Commemorating the April 1863 Garrison," Fort Morgan.** Confederate re-enactors portray life within the garrison during the turbulent spring of 1863. See artillery and infantry demonstrations. 9am-3pm. Admission: \$7 Adult, \$5 Senior (65 and older), and \$4 per Child (6-12). For more information, call 251-540-7127.

### APRIL 20-21

**War of 1812-French and Indian War Encampment, Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson, Wetumpka.** French, British, and Spanish military groups portray units that fought for control of eastern North America during the French and Indian War, 1755-1763. See demonstrations of 18th century life in a Creek Indian village. Saturday 9am to 4pm and Sunday 8 am to 1pm. Admission is \$2 for adults, \$1 for students. Contact 334-567-3002 for more information.

### APRIL 26

**Civil War Living History Program, Confederate Memorial Park, Marbury.** Demonstrations performed by authentically uniformed and equipped Union (6th Indiana) and Confederate (Alabama 33rd) re-enactors. Chose from two sessions: 9am-11:30pm and/or 12:30pm-3pm. Admission is free. Contact 205-755-1990 for more information.

## AFRICATOWN NATIONALLY SIGNIFICANT

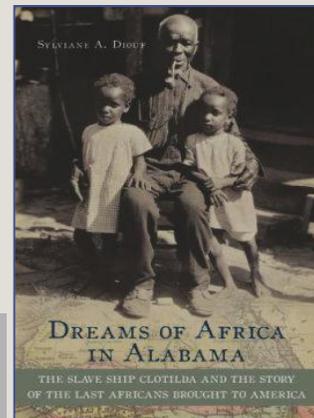
The National Park Service listed the Africatown Historic District, Mobile County, in the National Register of Historic Places December 4, 2012. This district has national significance for its association with the Clotilda shipmates.



A group of West African slaves were brought illegally to Mobile in the schooner *Clotilda*, circa 1860. Historians believe they were the last group of people captured in Africa and imported into the United States for the purposes of slavery.

After the war these Africans formed their own community, Africatown. They bought land communally and built their own houses. By the 1880s these former slaves established a church, school, and cemetery. By the mid-1920s, Africatown was home to 1500 people. This unincorporated community was annexed by the City of Mobile in 1948.

Interested in learning more? Check out *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Story of the Last Africans Brought to America* by Sylviane Diouf, Oxford University Press.



# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

## Three Veterans Administration Hospitals Listed

The National Register listed three historic Veterans Administration Hospital Complexes in Tuskegee, Tuscaloosa, and Montgomery, March 19, 2012, for their significance as "Second Generation" VA Hospitals. Constructed between 1919 and 1950, these hospital complexes represent the Federal government's commitment to caring for veterans.

Second Generation Hospitals focused on the rapid rehabilitation and healing of veterans. Modern medical facilities, therapies, medicines and surgery helped veterans return to productive civilian lives. The Alabama complexes are also noted for their Colonial and Classical Revival architectural style and large campus design.



The Tuscaloosa Veterans Administration Hospital Historic District consists of 34 historic structures constructed between 1919 and 1950.



Tuskegee Veterans Administration Hospital

### Tuskegee VA Hospital Receives Special Designation

The National Register honored all of the VA hospitals for their contribution to Alabama's history; however, the Tuskegee VA received an additional designation for the nationally important programs and history that happened there. Constructed between 1922 and 1950 for black World War I veterans, the Tuskegee VA Hospital Historic District is a large complex containing 43 historic buildings. It was the only VA Hospital staffed by African Americans. This helped promote the development of black medical professionals. In addition to being a general medical hospital, Tuskegee was the only Alabama VA hospital to care for tuberculosis and psychiatric patients.



Montgomery's hospital was the last Second Generation complex developed in Alabama. Its historic area contains 26 buildings constructed in the 1940s.

## New Historic Districts in North Alabama



The NPS listed the Downtown Guntersville Historic District, Marshall County, in the National Register on December 12, 2012.

### Downtown Guntersville Historic District

The Guntersville District contains 76 buildings, ranging in date from circa 1856-1964. The district includes commercial buildings and housing in Queen Anne, Spanish Colonial Revival, and Craftsman bungalow styles.

Between 1880 and 1930, Guntersville's population increased from 325 to 2,826. The Great Depression hit the town's economy hard; however, several New Deal programs revived the area. The Tennessee Valley Authority had the greatest impact, developing Guntersville Dam along the Tennessee River. When the dam went into operation in January 1939, water flooded three sides of the town leaving it on a peninsula stretching out into Guntersville Lake. The lake brought new industry and recreational opportunities to Guntersville, which continue today.



East Old Town Historic District contains 55 buildings, ranging in date from circa 1829-1962.

### Two Districts Added in Decatur

The National Register listed two new historic districts in Decatur, December 26, 2012. Considered the city's earliest African American neighborhoods, East and West Old Town districts developed from a white working-class neighborhood in the mid-19th century. Freed slaves settled here after the Civil War. The integrated neighborhood evolved into a predominantly black one in the 20th century. African Americans from all socioeconomic groups lived, worked, and attended church here.



West Old Town Historic District contains 72 buildings, from circa 1890-1962. It includes a rare historic black Masonic Lodge. The district developed as a mostly black neighborhood west of a white neighborhood near the railroad.

## FROM THE COMMISSION

### AHC WELCOMES NEW STAFF

**Lisa Franklin**, store clerk at the Goat Hill Museum Store, Alabama State Capitol.

**Audrey Hopkins**, Assistant to the Director. Historic Artisan **Jimmy Walker**, based in Montgomery, travels to the historic sites working on capitol projects.

**Walker Brown**, grounds crew, Fort Morgan.

**Betty Stricker**, staffs the visitor's center at Fort Toulouse-Fort Jackson.

**Porshia Hall** and **Corey Schofield**—new museum guides—also do special projects at the Freedom Rides Museum.

**Nancy Rudder**, new Alabama State Capitol tour guide.

New Black Heritage Council interns: **Darrell Johnson** and **Destiny Williams** from Alabama State University.

### AHC COMMISSION ELECTS NEW OFFICERS

During the December 5, 2012, meeting, the Commission selected and approved the following new officers for a one year term beginning February 7, 2013.

**John Schmidt**—Chairman  
**Karen Rogers**—Vice Chairman  
**Bill Denson**—Treasurer  
**Ann Bedsole**—Secretary

### RECENT RETIREES

The Alabama Historical Commission recently said goodbye to four employees working at our historic sites.

At the Capitol tour guide **Jessie Neighbors** (12 yrs) and Goat Hill Museum Store clerk, **Judy Jehle** (8 yrs) will be greatly missed.

**Roger "Dale" Nelson**, mason and all-around maintenance expert at Fort Morgan retired with around 20 years of service.

**Tommy Coleman** celebrated with staff and family on his last day at Old Cahawba. Tommy volunteered for many years but worked as a museum aide for nearly 21 years.

### AHC PLAN IN THE WORKS

The AHC is updating the Statewide Historic Preservation Plan. The plan is used to guide agency priorities when we establish annual work plans.

The current State Plan is posted on our website: [http://preserveala.org/mission\\_plans\\_goals](http://preserveala.org/mission_plans_goals). Please check our website for opportunities to comment on our plan in the coming weeks.

For more information contact Mary Shell at [mary.shell@preserveala.org](mailto:mary.shell@preserveala.org).

### EDMUND PETTUS BRIDGE NAMED NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK



March 11, 2013

WASHINGTON—The Edmund Pettus Bridge received America's highest honor given to historic places, National Historic Landmark designation. On March 7, 1965, civil rights marchers, drawing attention to voting rights inequalities, were attacked by law enforcement officials at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. The "Bloody Sunday" events compelled Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965, considered one of America's most important pieces of civil rights legislation.

Alabama Tourism Director Lee Sentell commended the staff of the Alabama Historical Commission for assisting with the designation.

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