

Media Release
December 26, 2013

Attalla Downtown Historic District Listed in the National Register of Historic Places

The National Park Service listed the Attalla Downtown Historic District in Attalla, Etowah County, in the National Register on December 11, 2013.

The Attalla Downtown Historic District includes 43 resources, ranging in date from circa 1885-1963. It is the traditional commercial core of the town. The historic district encompasses commercial buildings, a post office, a garage, four warehouses, the town's theater and a historic concrete highway underpass that defines the southern entrance to the downtown.

Attalla was founded in 1870 at a gap in Big Ridge Mountain and Little Wills Valley. It was located on the Alabama Chattanooga Railroad line that ran from Chattanooga to Meridian, Mississippi and was completed that same year. The town prospered as a center of rail transportation during the great industrial boom in north Alabama after the Civil War. The railroads spurred industrial, commercial and residential growth in the community. This growth was supplemented by the discovery of iron ore in the area and the construction of a hydroelectric dam on nearby Big Wills Creek in 1913 by Captain W. P. Lay who also helped found the Alabama Power Company.

In 1902, the first street light in the country that was powered by hydroelectric power was lit in Attalla. It was Captain Lay's idea to string a wire from the dam to downtown Attalla, nailing insulators to trees, pulling the line to a pole at the corner of 4th Street and 5th Avenue. The wire was connected to a light bulb on top of the pole which was lit to prove the possibility and usefulness of street lights. To this day, free electricity is provided by the Alabama Power Company to the City of Attalla for its street lights.

The National Register of Historic Places is the nation's official list of historic places worthy of preservation—www.preserveala.org/nationalregister.aspx. The Alabama Historical Commission administers the program in Alabama.

Contact **Susan Enzweiler** at 334-230-2644 or susan.enzweiler@preserveala.org for more information.

*The Alabama Historical Commission **protects, preserves, and interprets Alabama's historic places** and is the State Historic Preservation Office.*

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