

Alabama's Most Endangered Sites for 2012

Alabama Historical Commission
Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation

Contact: Melanie Betz, 334-230-2645
melanie.betz@preserveala.org

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2012 PLACES IN PERIL ANNOUNCED

In observance of National Historic Preservation Month, the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation (ATHP) announce the 2012 listing of Alabama's Places in Peril.

Since 1994, the AHC and the ATHP have joined forces to annually highlight some of Alabama's significant endangered historic sites.

"Places in Peril is a valuable tool for directing public attention to some of the many historic places in Alabama that are threatened by neglect or demolition," said Frank White, executive director of the AHC.

David Schneider, Senior Director of Preservation Services at ATHP states, "This list reminds us that much remains to be done to help Alabamians recognize that our historic places are essential assets for community revitalization."

Here are the Places in Peril for 2012:

- **Black Primitive Baptist Educational Institutions, statewide**

The Thomaston Colored Institute in Marengo County, the Tennessee Valley Primitive Baptist Institute in Lawrence County, and the Boguechitto Institute in Dallas County are the only known schools to be constructed in Alabama with support from the black Primitive Baptist community. Churches spearheaded educational initiatives for blacks in Alabama until a segregated public school system was established. But the efforts of black Primitive Baptists to build secondary schools in rural communities across the South is a little-known facet of black educational history. Today, all three school buildings are vacant, hopefully awaiting some kind of new use. Collectively, however, they testify to a visionary goal, set by a single denomination a century ago, of bettering opportunities for rural black children at a time when these were often non-existent.

- **Cotton Gins Thematic, statewide**

Cotton was Alabama's principal economic engine before the Civil War and continued to play a major role in the state's agricultural economy well into the twentieth century. Once

ubiquitous across the Alabama landscape, the cotton gin was the economic – and sometimes the social – hub of countless rural communities. But technological changes and the consolidation of gin facilities in the present cotton industry have made most gins obsolete and in Alabama, as elsewhere, they are disappearing. Most gin buildings remaining today date from the early 20th century, with a few rare survivors pre-dating 1900. Those retaining original gin equipment are even harder to find. If the demise of the cotton gin as such is inevitable, some of these buildings offer exciting opportunities for new usage. Certainly a state aware of its heritage should make an effort to hold on to a few examples of what was once a virtual totem of its cotton past.

- **First Missionary Baptist Church, Haynesville, Lowndes County**

The First Missionary Baptist Church in Hayneville is not only a place of worship, but also a place where history was made. During the 1960s, the church played an important role in the voting rights struggle in Lowndes County. The church was used for community meetings, voter registration, and as a voting center, with local residents casting their first-ever votes here in 1966. Constructed in 1959 to replace an earlier structure, the First Missionary Baptist Church was used as a “Freedom School” for the children of Lowndes County. A new political party was also created at the church in 1966. Local black community leaders joined with members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) to form the Lowndes County Freedom Party (LCFP). The new party was an alternative to the Democratic party, and offered a slate of African-American candidates. On Tuesday, May 3, 1966, about 900 newly-registered black voters came to First Missionary to cast ballots in the LCFP convention. Despite this enthusiastic turnout, the LCFP folded after the November 1966 national election. Today, however, a dwindling congregation faces the challenge of maintaining this historic building.

- **Fort Henderson/Trinity High School Athens, Limestone County**

From the Civil War until the Civil Rights era, the old Fort Henderson site and Trinity School played an important role in the history of Athens and north Alabama. Constructed in 1863, Fort Henderson was garrisoned by regiments of the Union Army’s United States Colored Troops (USCT). Shortly after the war, the American Missionary Association built Trinity School near the old fort site to educate the children of former slaves. It became the first accredited high school for African-Americans in Alabama and for many years served as the only high school for blacks in Limestone County. The original buildings no longer stand, but a 1929 auditorium survives along with a section of the 1959 school. Both are now vacant and in need of repair. Other structures and historic sites also survive on the campus including a portion of the earthworks that once surrounded the original fort.

- **Howell School, Dothan, Houston County**

Whether big or small, schools evoke sentimental memories of childhood and days gone by. Dothan’s old Howell School in Dothan is one of these. But it also an architectural landmark - an eclectic mixture of arched windows and ornate classical cornices dating from 1902. The city’s main grammar school until 1942, the building later re-opened as a pajama manufacturing company. Now it is vacant and owned by the Downtown Dothan Redevelopment Authority. A developer’s recent proposal to convert the old school into low income senior housing raises new hope. But the substantial funding needed has yet to be put in place, and a questionmark hangs over Howell’s future.

- **Lakewood, Livingston, Sumter County**

With a graceful Doric portico approached by an unusual, horseshoe-shaped iron stairway, Lakewood is a premier example of southern raised cottage architecture. This c.1840 landmark is as mysterious as it is beautiful, with stories of a resident ghost adding to the allure of its rich history. But its 10-acre site adjoining the University of West Alabama makes it a prime target for new development. New England craftsmen infused elegant Federal and Greek Revival detailing into this distinctively regional house-type. Today, Lakewood is owned by the seventh generation of the same family, descendants of North Carolina-born Joseph Lake, for whom it was built. Noted Alabama educator Julia Strudwick Tutwiler, a kinswoman of the Lakes, lived at the house from time to time between 1881 and 1910 when she served as president of Livingston Female Institute. Recently, a developer has approached the owner about acquiring the property for a residential subdivision.

- **Lustron Houses Thematic, statewide**

The “Lustron” house seemed to be the perfect solution to the post-World War II housing shortage. First produced in 1949 by the Lustron Corporation of Illinois, these prefabricated steel-framed houses were affordable, virtually maintenance free, and touted as being three times stronger than a frame house. However, production problems and other issues ended the making of Lustron houses by 1950. About 2500 of these unique homes were built nationwide, but only 1200-1500 survive today. Alabamians ordered twenty Lustron houses according to a 1950 company report, but less than 12 survive. Designed with efficiency in mind, Lustron houses offered the ease of no painting and wipe-down steel walls. Built-in features included bookcases, vanities, china cabinets and even a unique combination sink-dishwasher- washing machine. Over the years, Lustron houses have been lost to demolition, neglect, and unsympathetic changes. The long-range survival of remaining examples depends on educating the public about their significance. Fortunately, these unique structures are still functional today as affordable, low maintenance housing.

- **Old Masonic Lodge, Crawford, Russell County**

Constructed in 1848, the old Lodge 863 (formally Tuckabatchie Lodge 96) in Crawford is one of only seven pre-Civil War fraternal halls surviving in Alabama. It is also the most notable structure remaining from the time (1839-1868) when Crawford served as the seat of Russell County. Several years ago, the lodge was almost demolished when the Masons decided to replace it with a new building. At the eleventh hour, a local philanthropist stepped in and moved the structure a short distance to its current location. It escaped demolition once, but today it again faces an uncertain future. Since photographed in 1935 by the Historic American Building Survey, few changes have been made to the building. The two-story temple front building still has its four tapering square columns and outside “dog-leg” stair. The original weatherboarding and wood shake roof are intact beneath asbestos siding and asphalt shingles. In addition to being used by the Masons, the lodge also served the community as a meeting hall, school and church. Today, the building stands vacant and deteriorated with neither a contemporary use nor funds to maintain it.

- **One Wood Place, Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County**

The April 2011 tornado that swept through Tuscaloosa virtually destroyed the Wood Manor neighborhood. One house in the neighborhood that *did* survive was a 1947 Colonial

Revival-style residence known as “One Wood Manor.” It was designed by local architect, Don Buel Schuyler, ironically better known for his advocacy of early modernism than as an architectural traditionalist. Although the brick and concrete residence stood tall after the tornado, another storm may be on the horizon. One Wood Manor is currently on the market, and its close proximity to the University of Alabama makes it a target location for student and multi-family housing. One Wood Manor was built for Webster Manderson and his family with architect Schuyler using reinforced concrete throughout the house. In a prophetic statement, one of the apprentice brick layers on the job, Roy Madison, joked that the structure “could withstand an earthquake and that tornados would bounce right off!” Madison is said to have regarded the two-story classical house, with its white columns and full-height portico, as “the most beautiful” he had ever seen. He would, in fact, eventually purchase it from the second owner, Lloyd Wood. Now local preservationists and the current owner, Roy Madison’s daughter, are looking for a buyer who themselves appreciate the significance of this elegant, tornado-resistant building.

- **Remington Hall, Anniston, Calhoun County**

Remington Hall is a landmark Spanish Revival-style building at Fort McClellan in Anniston. Constructed in 1936 as the Officers Club, it hosted generals, U.S. presidents, and other dignitaries from around the world. But the building is most significant for its seventeen interior murals painted by German and Italian prisoners during World War II. Depicting family and everyday life in the artists’ native countries, these murals offer a rare glimpse into European culture and history during the 1940’s. Although protected by a preservation agreement, the murals are at risk because Remington Hall is now vacant. Remington Hall is now privately owned. The owners have been good stewards of the building, but maintaining a 30,000 square foot structure is a financial hardship, especially with murals requiring adequate climate control and professional conservation. The building is currently on the market.

- **Steele-Armistead-McCrary house, Tuscumbia, Colbert County**

Alabama’s earliest houses, built just before or soon after statehood in 1819, are a rare and disappearing breed. Usually modest in size, they often go unnoticed and unappreciated as fragile links to the past. The Steele-Armistead-McCrary house in Tuscumbia is one of these, a fine example of a house type falling into the “too important to lose” category. Built around 1830, it is the oldest of two distinctive “raised cottages” included on this year’s Places in Peril list. The raised cottage -- with ground-level family and service rooms beneath a more formal, high-ceilinged main floor --- is often associated with coastal Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana. But raised cottages also occurred as far north as Maryland and Virginia, though usually minus the sweeping verandas of the Deep South. It is from the Upper South that the builder of the Steele house probably came, erecting a prim brick raised cottage that could as easily stand on a street in antebellum Richmond as in Tuscumbia. Alterations about 1900 removed most of the original many-paned windows and added the present porch. But delicate Federal-style mantelpieces and woodwork still enrich the interior. Standing opposite the Colbert County courthouse and currently for sale, this important architectural landmark could be a prime candidate for adaptive restoration using preservation tax credits.

The Places in Peril list carries no formal protection, but it does build awareness in local communities about endangered sites, and can help generate support to preserve these places.