

~ A B O N U S S E C T I O N F O R O U R A L A B A M A R E A D E R S ~

Alabama People & Places™

A photograph of the Alabama State Capitol building in Montgomery, Alabama. The building is a grand neoclassical structure with a large white dome and a portico supported by tall columns. In the foreground, a woman in a dark business suit and sunglasses stands on the steps, holding a large rolled-up document. The sky is clear and blue.

Saving History

Mae B. Washington works to preserve the state's historic structures. —page 8

Fairhope
PAGES AND
PAINTS

Huntsville
MORE THAN
A MARKET

Tuscumbia
HELP FROM
THE ROBBINSES



From her office in Montgomery, Mae Washington travels across the state saving Alabama's most historic structures.

Coworkers could call her All-Over-the-Map Mae, because that's where Mae B. Washington's job takes her.

Architect for the Alabama Historical Commission, Mae is responsible for taking care of the buildings and landmarks owned and operated by the commission. In that role, she spends much of her time traveling throughout Alabama to the state's architectural treasures—from Fort Morgan, on the edge of Mobile Bay, to Pond Spring, the Tennessee River Valley home of Confederate general Joe Wheeler.

Fendall Hall and Freedom Rides

One day may find her checking on the progress of new gutters at Fendall Hall in Eufaula; another, overseeing a courtyard restoration at Belle Mont Mansion in Tusculumbia; or a third, ordering repairs of the windows at Gaineswood, a plantation home in Demopolis. "I am getting a good tour of the state," Mae says with a chuckle.

Recently the architect's job took her just a few blocks from her office to Montgomery's old Greyhound bus station.

Forty-eight years ago the nondescript building became the focal point of a national movement when a mob attacked a group of students taking part in Freedom Rides across the South. The violence prompted the Kennedy Administration to push for a ruling by the Interstate Commerce Commission that eventually ended segregation on interstate transportation such as trains and highway buses and in bus and train stations and airport terminals.

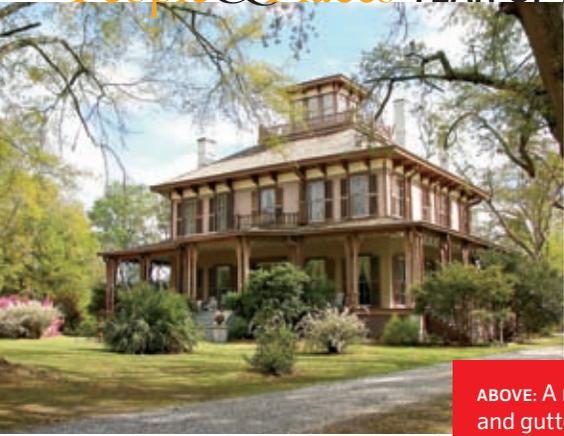
When plans for the construction of a new federal courthouse included the bus station's demolition, the historical commission stepped in. Then, when conflicting regulations between two state governmental agencies threatened funding for its interpretive exhibit, Mae resolved the stalemate and helped save the project. Now the award-winning panels with images of the Freedom Rides and quotes from the students who led this movement adorn the station's exterior walls. Plans call for making the entire building a museum remembering the 1961 event.

"We have a variety of projects, and each one has a life of its own," Mae says proudly. ➔ *turn to page 10*

Preserving Alabama's Past

As architect for the state's historical commission, Mae B. Washington helps save our heritage.

By **Gary D. Ford**



ABOVE: A new roof and gutters crown Fendall Hall in Eufaula.



LEFT: Visitors view "The Freedom Rides" exhibit at Montgomery's old Greyhound bus station, one of Mae's projects.

Preservation Is in the Details After the Lowndes County native earned a degree in architecture from Auburn University, she left to work in Florida. Then the position of architect for the historical commission came open four years ago. "I had the opportunity to move home, and I took it," Mae recalls.

Her restoration jobs can range from saving something as large as a Civil War fort to putting a new coat of paint on a historic home's front door. Mae spends much of her time guarding against the small, silent enemies of preservation—rust, rot, termites in the foundation, and squirrels in the attic.

"Taking care of small things such as those costs less in the long run for taxpayers," she explains. That's why Mae stays busy—in her office and across the state—working to make the past very much a part of the present. ●

For more information on the Alabama Historical Commission and its restoration projects, visit www.preserveala.org.

A Year To Remember

In honor of the state's diverse heritage, the tourism department has declared 2009 "The Year of Alabama History" and issued a new publication, *Historic Alabama: A Guide to Landmarks and Events*. Available from the tourism department and at state welcome centers and tourism destinations, the free, 94-page brochure features information on museums, events, and historic sites in 163 cities and towns. Visit www.alabama.travel, or call 1-800-252-2262.