

Places in Peril

Alabama's Most Endangered Sites for 2008

Alabama Historical Commission
Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation

Contact: Melanie Betz, Alabama Historical Commission, 334-230-2645

Eleven Properties Named as Most Endangered

Since 1994, the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation (ATHP) have joined forces to sponsor *Places in Peril*, a program designed to highlight some of Alabama's most significant endangered historic sites. Modeled after the National Trust for Historic Preservation's program, this year's list features 11 endangered sites.

"*Places in Peril* is a valuable tool in directing public attention to the many cultural resources in Alabama under threat from neglect or demolition," said Frank White, executive director of the Alabama Historical Commission.

"Being listed as a significant historic endangered site carries no formal protection, but it can help generate the local support necessary for the sustained preservation of these resources," said Melanie Betz, architectural historian with the Alabama Historic Commission.

Named to this year's *Places in Peril* are the **Bethlehem Baptist Church**, Valley (Chambers Co.); the **Boynton House**, Selma (Dallas Co.); the **Folsom Birthplace**, Elba (Coffee Co.); the **Gateway to Anniston Buildings**, Anniston (Calhoun Co.); **Green Street Baptist Church**, Selma (Dallas Co.); **Historic Fort Gaines**, Dauphin Island (Mobile Co.); **Lowndesboro Colored School**, Lowndesboro (Lowndesboro Co.); **The Oaks Plantation**, Leighton (Colbert Co.); **Old Mobile-Fort Louis de la Louisiane Site** (Mobile Co.), the **Old Rock School**, Springville (St. Clair Co.) and the **Ramsay-McCormack Building**, Birmingham (Jefferson Co.).

(more)

Bethlehem Baptist Church: Valley is a city committed to preservation so it is not surprising that when the oldest building in town – the **Bethlehem Baptist Church** – fell into disrepair, city officials decided to save it. After acquiring the church from private hands, the Valley Historic Preservation Commission (whose members are appointed by the City Council) is now working on plans to restore it. However, the Commission does not presently have sufficient funds to undertake such a venture but they are still determined to save their treasured landmark one way or another.

Boynton House: During the 1960's, the **Boynton house** at 1315 Lapsley Street in Selma became a central meeting place for some of the 20th century's most important civil rights leaders. Dignitaries including Dr. Martin Luther King, his lieutenants, U.S. Congressmen, attorneys, and countless others from all over the country joined Amelia and Samuel Boynton at their home to plan the demonstrations that would eventually lead to the Voting Rights Act of 1965. History was made here, but today the house is empty, in need of repairs, and facing an uncertain future.

Folsom Birthplace: After vandals broke out windows and set fire to the old **Folsom house** in rural Coffee County, preservationists and local officials were determined not to lose one of their most treasured landmarks. This building was not only an exceptionally intact example of a late 19th century farmhouse, it was also the birthplace of James Folsom, 45th and 47th governor of Alabama – and the only resident of Coffee County ever to be elected governor. The house today is in need of repair. A group of dedicated preservationists wants to see this change and is determined to one day open the building to the public so that they can see an historic house with no plumbing, no closets, no electricity or any other modern convenience.

Gateway to Anniston Buildings: In their efforts to “sell” Anniston to potential investors and residents, the city's founders constructed several fine Victorian-style buildings designed to give visitors a favorable first impression of their prosperous model community. Today, three out of the five surviving “**Gateway to Anniston**” buildings are vacant and deteriorated: **the Anniston City Land Company Building** (1890); **Union Depot** (1889) and the **Ritz Boarding House** (c.1895). Together, this collection of buildings represents one of the city's most significant historic resources.

Green Street Baptist Church: The story of the **Green Street Baptist Church** in Selma is like that of many historic churches across the country: despite being architecturally and historically significant, a shrinking congregation and a lack of funding for maintenance threatens its future survival. The congregation has been advised to tear down the older section of the building because saving it would be too costly. Most members do not want this to happen but they acknowledge the challenges it would take to save their church.

Historic Fort Gaines: **Fort Gaines**, along with Fort Morgan, was one of the key participants in the Battle of Mobile Bay. Significant for its masonry architecture, **Fort Gaines** is today among the best-preserved 19th century brick coastal fortifications in the
(more)

country. However, its location along the Gulf Coast shoreline has always made it a prime target for erosion, and deterioration of this landmark structure. Funding is needed to address the many maintenance and restoration problems.

Lowndesboro Colored School: Dating from the late 19th century, the old **Lowndesboro Colored School** one of Alabama's oldest surviving African-American schoolhouses. The school is now boarded up and used for storage, but much of the exterior is still intact. Local residents also recall seeing the old blackboards when the structure was used as a laundromat in recent years. This rare and significant school is rapidly deteriorating and in need of immediate repair. Although in private ownership, local preservationists hope that the **Lowndesboro Colored School** can be restored and eventually included on the annual community pilgrimage tour.

The Oaks Plantation: The **Oaks** is among the Tuscumbia area's earliest and most important plantations. The complex includes the original c.1820 house, the attached c.1825-32 main house, and a very early log kitchen. Although the current owner passionately restored the buildings in the 1960's, she is unable to maintain them today. Deteriorated siding, broken chimneys and shutters, peeling paint and sagging floors illustrate the critical need for repair.

Old Mobile-Fort Louis de la Louisiane Site: The **old Mobile-Fort Louis de la Louisiane site** in Mobile County is so significant that archeologists have described it as "a French colonial counterpart to the English settlement at Jamestown, Virginia." The site is unique for the integrity of its archeological remains dating from the early 18th century. Despite its importance, **Old Mobile-Fort Louis** is under continuous threat of industrial development and other potentially adverse uses.

Old Rock School: The **old Rock School** is a local landmark in Springville, once providing classroom space for high school students. Constructed in 1921, the building is now empty and unrepaired. Along with its significance as being an historic educational facility, the **old Rock School** may be the largest surviving chert rock structure in St. Clair County. Discussion about tearing down the old school concerns many in Springville, who want their landmark to be saved and put to a new use. One promising option may be for the building to become a much-needed new public library.

Ramsay-McCormack Building: Constructed in 1929, the **Ramsay-McCormack building** is an impressive ten-story Art Deco structure that once overlooked the Ensley steel mills. After the mill closed in 1979, the city of Birmingham acquired the **Ramsay-McCormack building** four years later but plans for it never panned out. It has stood empty since 1986. Although deemed structurally sound, the building might be too costly to renovate according to some people. The city is considering both the options of demolition and renovation, making the fate of the **Ramsay-McCormack building** uncertain at this point.

####