

# THE ALABAMA TRUSTEE

A publication of the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation

Spring 2011



## Summer Preservation Lyceum Weekend

*Historic Talladega, Alabama*  
Friday, July 15 - Saturday, July 16

Join the ATHP in the exploration of Historic Talladega. Visit Talladega's restored Historic Ritz Theatre (circa 1936), one of the best examples of an Art Deco 1930's theatre, and the city's vintage Silk-Stocking Historic Neighborhood, among other sites.

## Fall Preservation Lyceum Weekend

*Historic DeKalb County, AL*  
Friday, September 30 - Sat., October 1  
Come for the fall color and explore the late 19th Century of Alabama's Appalachian Mountains in Historic Mentone, a summer retreat and spa for affluent citizens of the era, and Historic Ft. Payne, a planned city of the 1880s.

HOLD THE DATE - MAY, 2012



To celebrate National Preservation Month and to explore Alabama's historic theatres, the conference, which will be in Birmingham, is moving from the fall 2011 to May 2012 at a date soon to be determined. Proposals for conference programs and/or tracks should be emailed to the [alabamatrust@uwa.edu](mailto:alabamatrust@uwa.edu).



Powell School, Birmingham

## Historic Powell School Damaged by Fire

Fire caused extensive damage to Birmingham's historic Powell School in January 2011. One of the city's most significant landmarks and its oldest school building, the flamboyant Victorian-style building was constructed in 1887-1888. The building was named for James R. Powell, president of the Elyton Land Company, who originally donated the land on which the school was built.

The fate of the building is uncertain at this time, as the City of Birmingham considers the viability of retaining and stabilizing what remains, balanced against an engineer's report that deemed the building unsafe. A second evaluation indicates that the school's masonry walls are indeed sound and outlines recommendations for stabilizing the building until a restoration plan can be formulated.

"Unfortunately the threat to Powell School is not an isolated incident,"

stated Alabama Trust Executive Director David B. Schneider. "There are far too many important landmarks that are under imminent threat of demolition or collapse. Powell is among the most significant, and this calls attention not only to its urgent crisis, but reminds us of the inadequate support historic preservation receives."

Birmingham preservation leader Linda Nelson noted: "The site is not only well known, but famous in Birmingham. Scores of people drove by after the fire to stand morosely on the sidewalk and see the damage. The school's dubious future has been bemoaned for years, and any hope for its re-use has always been met with interest and excitement." Unfortunately the fire further complicates efforts to preserve the building and makes the need for stabilization immediate.

As with any landmark, time is of the essence.

# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Historic preservation and economic development are two concepts not often linked together, but they should be. As one looks across the United States and, more specifically around Alabama, communities that made this connection are benefitting from the association.

At the 2010 Alabama Preservation Conference, the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation (ATHP), Alabama Historic Commission and Black Heritage Council of Alabama started this conversation through the economic development track – “Making Downtowns Come Alive.” The conference was held in Montgomery, a city that is embracing its historic downtown structures. As a result, businesses, restaurants and full-time residents are returning to the city’s historic core. The ATHP did not want this conversation about preservation and economic development to stop with one conference. That is why, during 2011, the Alabama Trust continues the conversation with quarterly Preservation Lyceum events held around the state. Details about these events are in this newsletter.

The first Preservation Lyceum Weekend of the series was held in Huntsville, where Trust members were welcomed by the Historic Huntsville Foundation (HHF) and explored local preservation efforts that are yielding economic benefits to their community. Participants enjoyed visits to historic homes, thriving historic neighborhoods, such as Twickenham, and repurposed commercial structures, such as the HHF’s headquarters in the historic Harrison Brothers Hardware, the oldest continuously operating hardware store in Alabama. All are finding new life in the 21st century and helping economic development in Huntsville’s historic areas.

For me, however, the most poignant story was that of the cotton mills. I was amazed at the efforts to take these former structures of industry and refit them into the fabric of Huntsville today. Rather than spools of fiber and bolts of cloth, as in the past, today’s Lowe Mill is a space for artists with studios and retail space.

In the former Merrimack Mill neighborhood, I heard Debra Jenkins talk about she and her husband Alan’s purchase and subsequent refurbishing of this old commissary/gymnasium for Merrimack Mill. Today, the Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center includes a professional theatre, with a successful live performance schedule, and Dance Your Dreams, a thriving dance and music program for mentally and physically challenged children. Incorporated as a non-profit organization, ticket revenue from the theatre will support the arts program for Huntsville’s children with special needs.

I watched a video trailer capturing the story of mill workers, whose lives were connected by Merrimack Mill and its factories, smoke stacks, school, company store, men’s club, gym and surrounding village of homes. All that is left today are the village houses and Merrimack Hall in its new reincarnation – a home to touring productions and a center for the arts for Huntsville’s very special, much-loved people.

I marveled at the foresight of individuals, who like the Jenkins invest in a property in order to make a personal dream come true. In this case, the dream is much more in reality. Historic Merrimack Mill Village sits with Merrimack Hall in the middle - shining brightly for everyone to enjoy.

The Jenkins investment in a dying neighborhood provides an anchor around which a reviving community is reconnecting to the past and regrouping for the future. Are these just isolated cases that highlight instances where the paths of historic preservation and economic development cross? I don’t think so, nor does the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation. We hope you will join these exciting conversations as we travel around Alabama discovering what is happening in preservation. Send us your thoughts to share as well and spread the word that viable communities use historic preservation as an integral part of their economic viability.



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## THE ALABAMA TRUSTEE

published quarterly by the  
Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation  
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## SPEAKING OUT

### *Historic Preservation as a Community Ethic*

by David B. Schneider, Executive Director

I still vividly recall the knot in my stomach and the urgent sense of loss I felt as I stood in the smoldering ruins of Anniston's once proud Union Depot in December 2008. The city's grandest landmarks had stood vacant and neglected for years before a fire reduced it to a pile of stone and brick. Once the very symbol of the city's visionary Victorian-era leadership, intended to put the city's "best foot forward" to greet its visitors, suddenly was transformed into a symbol of just how far Anniston had strayed from its roots as the "Model City of the New South."

So, it was with a profound sense of empathy and concern that I heard and responded to the cries of preservationists in Birmingham when their beloved Powell School was severely damaged by fire this January. Despite the dedicated efforts of a number of local preservationists, proposals that would have resulted in the rehabilitation of the building went unrealized. Now the fate of the building hangs in the balance.

Over the years I have been asked "Why didn't somebody do something before it got to this point?" when an important historic building was destroyed or about to be. Often, the answer is that people had been trying, but that they were ultimately unsuccessful. Preservationists rarely have the power to do something without cooperation from individual property owners and government at all levels. With cooperation success happens.

Sometimes there is sympathy and willingness between interested parties, but financial constraints create hurdles. The result is that important buildings continue to succumb to the wrecking ball, advancing deterioration, vandalism, or fire.

As I travel around the state, I am daunted to think about the sheer number of landmarks calling out for "someone to do something before it's too late." In some cases, the Alabama Trust is made aware of buildings at risk when time is short, and this hampers our ability find effective solutions. In order to find ways to intervene earlier, we are working with the Alabama Historical Commission to develop a list of landmarks "too important to lose" and exploring other ways we might use technology and social media to assist with these efforts.

Ultimately we will always be facing an uphill battle until historic preservation gains more widespread acceptance. That is why the Alabama Trust is finding ways to present the case for historic preservation to a much broader audience by promoting the important roles that preservation can play in economic development, environmental sustainability, and the livability of our communities.

Having lived in Charleston, S.C., I have seen what can be achieved when historic preservation becomes a widely held community ethic. The first question people there ask is "How can we save it?" rather than "Should we save it?" This attitude makes it far easier to align the needs and goals of those who own historic resources with those of the historic preservation community.

Preservation has a long way to go in Alabama before it is appreciated at that level. Each of you working in your own communities are part of that effort and the Alabama and National Trusts are your partners. Join the Alabama Trust to make historic preservation a widely held community ethic in Alabama.

**Contact David Schneider**  
(256) 310-6320  
dbschneider@bellsouth.net

The Alabama Trust extends appreciation to those who have shared their homes, knowledge and enthusiasm for preservation:

#### Winter Preservation Lyceum

- Donna and Michael Castellano
- David Edwards, Lowe Mills Arts Center
- Historic Huntsville Foundation
- Huntsville Park Baptist Church
- Debra Jenkins, Merrimack Hall Performing Arts Center
- Shelbie & Olin King, Historic Fearn House
- James J. Marek, Jr., Merrimack Mill Village
- Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association

#### Spring Preservation Lyceum

- Ann Bedsale, Meadow Bank Plantation
- Agee Broughton, Claiborne-Perdue Hill Foundation
- Wimberly Comer, Alabama Black Belt Nature/Heritage Trail
- Mark Dauber, Dauber Galleries
- Alice Earle Floyd Harper/Bill Harper, Russell Harper House
- Nick Holmes, Jr., Architect
- Chrissy Nettles, Beehive Coffee & Books
- K. T. Owens, Monroeville Historic Preservation Commission
- Stephanie Rogers/Nathan Carter, Monroe County Heritage Museum
- Sandy Smith, Monroeville/Monroe Chamber of Commerce
- Linda Vice/Joe Watts, Alabama Scenic Byways Advisory Committee

*Join Us!*

**Summer Lyceum Weekend in Talladega**  
Friday, July 15 - Saturday, July 16

# PRESERVATION IN THE FIELD

## PRESERVATION LYCEUM SERIES

*Lyceum - (li-se-am), a place for public lectures, debates, classes, concerts and entertainment.*



The Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation announces the inaugural Preservation Lyceum Series, a set of quarterly programs for preservation-minded individuals who want to know more about and visit historic preservation projects.

The 19th century Lyceum Movement flourished in America, providing hundreds of informal gatherings for the purpose of improving the social and intellectual fabric of society. Characterized by lectures and public discourse on a variety of topics and musical and

theatrical performances in a retreat environment, lyceums peaked during the Antebellum Era. With the exception of the New York Great Lake's Chautauqua Institute, best known for the Chautauqua Symphony Orchestra, few remnants of this vibrant phenomenon remain on the national landscape.

Drawing from the past, the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation's newly-formed program, the Preservation Lyceum Series, is traveling the highways, byways and crossroads of Alabama exploring, experiencing and engaging in preservation.

The first Lyceum weekend occurred in January to examine re-adaptive uses of historic and previously abandoned textile mills in Huntsville. On Friday evening, participants enjoyed a casually elegant dinner at the 1929 Arts and Crafts Bungalow of Donna and Michael Castellano in Huntsville's Twickenham Historic District. The following day, a tour of the Historic Weedon House Museum was followed by a visit to the Lowe Mill Arts and Entertainment Center and Historic Merrimack Hall. The formal events ended with a panel discus-

sion at lunch entitled: "A Funny Thing Happened on our Way to Build an Arts Center" where the discussion centered on the transformational power of the arts to breathe life into abandoned industrial buildings and revitalize historic mill neighborhoods.

The second Preservation Lyceum weekend was held in Monroe County in April and focused on the historic trails and byways of the area. Lyceum participants enjoyed dinner on Friday night at Ann Bedsole's historic Meadow Bank Plantation and the following day explored the Old Federal Road and sites along its pathway through Monroe County, including tours of the Historic Masonic Lodge at Perdue Hill, Monroe County Heritage Museum and business district. Participants enjoyed a wine and cheese soiree at the historic Russell-Harper House, home of Alice Earle Floyd Harper. The group experienced first hand one of Alabama's early super-highway, which brought thousands settlers to the area, and learned about proposed historic trails and byways to develop preserve sites that will bring tourism and economic development to Alabama's Black Belt.



*Winter Lyceum participants at the Historic Weedon House*

## UPDATE: PARTNERS IN THE FIELD

Since the last edition, Fall 2010, Executive Director David Schneider continues to actively support historic preservation initiatives throughout the state. From September through January, he participated in preservation activities in 17 communities located in 15 counties across the state as well as coordinating efforts with state

archaeology organizations regarding the Underwater Archaeology Ordinance Revisions, specifically why the proposed revisions to the ordinance would be detrimental to preserving the state's historic interests. On behalf of the ATHP, Schneider issued a letter in support of preserving the Old City Hall in Gurley, Alabama and administers a Gywn Turner Preservation Fund grant to stabilize the Boxwood Plantation Slave Cabin in the Courtland vicinity of Lawrence County.

Other highlights of Schneider's activities include presentations to the following:

- Antiquarian Society, Birmingham, Jefferson County
- Black Heritage Council Forum, York, Sumter County
- Guntersville Historical Society, Guntersville, Marshall County
- Selma Board of Realtors, Selma,
- Dallas County

• Vincent, Shelby County  
Site visits and/or technical assistance consultation at the following:

- Bryce Hospital, Tuscaloosa, Tuscaloosa County
- Freetown, Coatopa, Sumter County
- Historic Norwood Neighborhood, Birmingham, Jefferson Co
- Windham Building, Birmingham, Jefferson County
- Powell School, Birmingham,
- Jefferson County

Since April 2009, when the Partners-in-the Field grant began, Schneider's efforts on behalf of the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation has supported 122 activities located in 62 communities spread through 41 counties in Alabama in addition to participation in six statewide issues.



*House in Birmingham's historic Norwood Neighborhood, Jefferson County*



# PRESERVATION NEWS

## Events Commemorate 1961 Freedom Rides



Historic Greyhound Bus Station, Montgomery  
Alabama Historical Commission Photo

Thanks to the work of the Alabama Historical Commission and local community groups, the 1951 Greyhound station was not demolished, but was

saved to become the Freedom Rides Museum.

Fifty years to the hour, 1961 Freedom Riders, Jim Zwerg and Congressman John Lewis, among others, will return to mark the anniversary at the historic Montgomery Greyhound Bus Station. On that date, a group of black and white students got off a bus to a hostile crowd of citizens. The Freedom Riders' non-violent response to a waiting mob helped end racial segregation in interstate travel. The events that day turned the city's ordinary bus station building into a historically significant landmark.

On May 20, 2011, the Freedom Rides Museum at the station will open, after a brief ceremony, with *Road to Equality - The 1961 Freedom Rides* exhibition. *Road to Equality* features 15 artworks created for the year-long exhibition. The Museum's existing exterior panels tell the Freedom Ride story with participants' words and images, while the *Road to Equality* artwork encourages visitors to further explore the history of that period. In addition, a story quilt by Alabama-quilter Nora Ezell, a "Share Your Story" video kiosk and identified places within the bus station graphically demonstrate how racial segregation was enforced by the building's design.



## Visit the Archives and Museum

### THURSDAY, MAY 19

Noon | **"The Freedom Riders Come to Alabama"** by Dr. J. Mills Thornton  
Alabama Department of Archives and History, 624 Washington Avenue

### FRIDAY, MAY 20

9:30 a.m. | **Opening Exhibition: The Road to Equality—the 1961 Freedom Rides**  
(Speakers, Freedom Riders John Lewis and Jim Zwerg)  
Freedom Rides Museum, 210 South Court Street

11 a.m. - 4 p.m. | **Museum Tours/Book Signings** | Freedom Rides Museum, 210 South Court Street  
(Friday, and Saturday, May 20)

## Also celebrating the 1961 Freedom Rides:

### **Get On the Bus Commemorative Ride Carries Students Through Alabama, May 6 - 16**

Forty college students chosen from applicants from around the nation will join with 1961 Freedom Riders retracing the 1961 bus rides from Washington, D.C. to Jackson, MS, with three stops in Alabama—Anniston, Birmingham and Montgomery. For more information, visit <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/freedomriders/2011/meet-the-riders>.

### **Anniston, May 9-15**

An array of activities commemorating the May 14, 1961 attacks on two busloads of Freedom Riders in Anniston will be held the week of May 9-15. Organized by the Spirit of Anniston, the downtown revitalization program, the events will commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Greyhound bus burning and the Trailways bus attack, both of which became international incidents. The exhibition will open to the public on May 14 at the Anniston-Calhoun County Public Library and remain through July 15.

### **Birmingham, May 13**

At the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute (BCRI) a special photograph exhibition, *Courage Under Fire: The 1961 Burning of the Freedom Riders Bus* is on display through May 22. The photographs also were taken by *Anniston Star* reporter Joseph Postiglione and donated to the BCRI by the Anniston law firm of Merrill, Merrill, Mathews & Allen, LLC. *Courage Under Fire* captures the bus burnings and violence of the Anniston stop along the Freedom Ride Trail of 1961.

### **Montgomery, May 14**

On Saturday, May 14, the Young Freedom Riders will be in Montgomery for an event at the Montgomery Civil Rights Memorial. During the evening, the Freedom Riders documentary will preview at the First Baptist Church, North Ripley Street, where the 1961 freedom riders were incarcerated.

# PRESERVATION: PLACES IN PERIL

## *Saved*

While the preservation of Lowe Mill is, in some respect, old news, its recently featured role in the Trust's Winter Preservation Lyceum program offers an opportunity to acknowledge the ongoing work of its owner Jim Hudson and the staff at the Lowe Mill Arts and Entertainment Center. With a 10-year persistent and steady process to convert the former textile mill into a center for the arts and sciences, the complex now houses a genetics research company, Operon, as well as more than 50 artists and studios. Lyceum attendees were fascinated with the transformation that has occurred and the creative way this former industrial building has been adaptively reused for a variety of purposes.



*Lowe Mill, Huntsville, Madison County*

Lowe Mill was built in 1900-1901 as a textile mill. It operated in that capacity until 1937, after which time it was used as a cotton warehouse. In 1945, the factory was acquired and

converted for use as a shoe factory by the Genesco Company. After that concern closed in 1978, the mill saw a variety of uses. In 1997, the West Huntsville Civic Association was formed to save Historic Lowe Mill Village.

In 1999, Gene McLain, a commercial real estate agent and late husband of former ATHP board member Jerri McLain, bought the decaying mill for commercial development and preservation. In early 2001, Jim Hudson, founder of Research Genetics, bought the building from McLain and has since been restoring and revitalizing the facility. Today, under Hudson's ownership, Lowe Mill Properties houses facilities for the arts and sciences.

## *Lost*



*Blue Mountain Mill, Anniston, Calhoun County*

Following the unfortunate trend of demolishing historic cotton mills for their salvaged materials, the last remaining portion of Blue Mountain Mill in Calhoun County was removed. The sprawling mill complex was primarily constructed between 1897 and 1917 and served as the major employer for the community of Blue Mountain.

During the past several years, numerous other historic textile

mills also have been torn down for their materials even when viable preservation alternatives exist. Among other recent notable losses is the Anniston Manufacturing Company in Anniston and one of the two mill buildings at the former Ide/Profile Mill in Jacksonville.

Many significant mills survive and await creative adaptive use proposals. Huntsville's Lowe and Merrimack mills serve as models.

## *Imperiled*

The Jemison-Turner House is one of two split-level raised cottages located in Alabama. The house has a T-shaped plan with two finely detailed parlors in the front portion. The front cross wing has a dining room and parlors rising in the back wing of the T to include two floors with bedrooms.

Current conversations with the owner are underway to transfer ownership of the house to the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation. Proposed funding from Endangered Properties Trust Fund would help stabilize the building for sale and relocation.

*Jemison-Turner House, Talladega County*



# KUDOS

## *Mobile DIGS the Past*

by Dora Franklin Finley, Board Member, ATHP, Mobile African-American Heritage Trail, Mobile Historic Development Commission

Kudos go to the Mobile African American Heritage Trail (MAAHT), a committee of the Mobile Historic Development Commission (MHDC), that serves preservation by capturing the past and revealing African-American history through interpretive signage.

Historic markers have been installed along 40 individual sites scattered from the southern historic downtown of Mobile to the city's northern edge of Africatown. From early creoles of African descent to African survivors of the *Clotilda* (*Clotilde*), the last slave ship to come to the U.S., to newly freed blacks who worshipped and built some of the oldest churches in Alabama to Civil Rights advocates, the richness of Mobile's history and culture is spread across the city for the visitor to see.

By foot, bus or by car, one can see, among others, the homes of Bettie Hunter, a successful Mobile entrepreneur (Hack Service-Taxi ) and Andrew N. Johnson, the founder of the *Mobile Press Weekly*. The home site of Leroy Robert "Satchel" Paige and the childhood park of Henry "Hammerin' Hank" Aaron's – two of America's most noted professional baseball players and legends – adds further richness to the Trail.

Thanks to the work of an archaeological team from the College of William Mary and grants from the Alabama Historical Commission, MHDC and MAAHT, visitors can also see the restored Africatown/Plateau Grave



*Robert Lewis and daughter Dr. Joél Lewis are descendants of Cudjo Lewis, the last full-blooded African to come to America on the Clotilda in 1859.*

Yard and visit an online electronic registry with topographic map that identifies hundreds of unmarked graves, including the grave sites of two *Clotilda* survivors, Mrs. Innie Keeby and Mrs. Lottie Dennison.

For those interested, the Basilica of the Immaculate Conception, Big Zion A.M.E. Church, Church of the Good Shepherd, and Union Baptist Church, among others, bear witness to the importance of faith in the lives of Mobile's African American communities. Schools, law offices, funeral homes and mortuaries, a hospital, pharmacies and a firehouse are tangible, historic

testaments of the contributions made by Mobile's African American ancestors to the city and to Alabama.

MAAHT provides guides for Step-on Tours bus tours, and Downtown Walking Tours depart the third Wednesday of each month from Cathedral Square. Detailed maps provide directions for Driving Tours and School Bus Tours are available as field trips complementing the Alabama history curriculum for fourth-grade students.

For more information about MAAHT virtual tours, educational resources, maps, Africatown Cemetery Registry visit [www.maaht.org](http://www.maaht.org).

## keep us posted

The Alabama Trust wants to hear about your local issues and successes. Please send information to the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation UWA Station 45 Livingston, AL 35470 or [alabamatrust@uwa.edu](mailto:alabamatrust@uwa.edu).

## PBS presents *Freedom Riders*

From May until November 1961, more than 400 black and white Americans risked their lives by traveling together through the Deep South deliberately violating Jim Crow laws. A two-hour documentary, produced by WGBH-Boston as part of its iconic American Experience series, will air on Alabama Public Television (APT) May 16 at 8 p.m.

*Freedom Riders* documents the Freedom Bus Riders of 1961 and the civil rights activists who organized and boarded buses to ride through a segregated South in pursuit of social justice and racial equality. *Freedom Riders* chronicles a chapter of American history in which America's youth proved that personal conviction and courage can change the direction of a nation. The film is a powerful and ultimately inspirational story of six months in 1961 that changed America forever. The two-hour documentary will re-broadcast on APT on May 16 at 8 p.m., May 17 at 2 a.m., May 22 at 3:30 p.m. and May 27 at midnight.

# ALABAMA TRUST *for* HISTORIC PRESERVATION

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## Gwyn Turner Preservation Fund

In partnership with Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation, the **Gwyn Turner Preservation Fund for Alabama** is administered by the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Turner Preservation Fund was established to aid non-profit organizations and governmental agencies with preservation planning, heritage education, workshops, conferences and special interventions.

Named in honor of noted Demopolis preservationist Gwyndolyn C. Turner, the fund has assisted numerous projects around the state since its inception. Most recently, grants from this fund were used to help prepare emergency engineering assessments of Selma's

historic Y.M.C.A. building and the Anniston City Land Company, as well as assisting with stabilizing the Boxwood Plantation slave cabin mentioned in this newsletter.

"While the grants are typically small, they have an enormous impact," stated Trust Executive Director David B. Schneider. Grants range from \$1,000 to \$5,000 and require a 1:1 cash match.

*Grant applicants are encouraged to discuss the proposed project with the ATHP Executive Director David B. Schneider at 256-310-6320 or e-mail [dbschneider@bellsouth.net](mailto:dbschneider@bellsouth.net).*



*Y.M.C.A., Selma, Dallas County*