

# ALABAMA REGISTER OF LANDMARKS AND HERITAGE

## Nomination Form

### 1. Name

historic FAME Recording Studio  
and/or common \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 603 East Avalon Avenue  
city, town Muscle Shoals ---vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_  
state Alabama county Colbert zip 35661

### 3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

### 4. Owner of Property

name Fame Enterprises, Inc. (c/o Rick and Linda Hall) Phone number 205-381-0801  
street & number 603 East Avalon Avenue  
city, town Muscle Shoals, Alabama ---vicinity of \_\_\_\_\_ zip 35661

### 5. Floor plan & site plan. Use space below to sketch floor plan and site plan or attach additional sheet.

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## 6. Description (See attached instructions for specific guidelines.)

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### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance.

Fame Recording Studio is a two story modern commercial building facing south in the middle of a commercial block at 603 East Avalon Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Colbert County. Dating from 1963, the building was originally a narrow two-story edifice that was one room wide and three rooms deep. In 1967, the eastern half was added, doubling the width, and the building featured a flat roof with brick exterior siding and a one-story flat-roofed porch extending across the facade. The addition provided space for a lobby, additional offices, and a second recording studio. Subsequent exterior modifications dating from 1972 resulted in the present "mansard" appearance, with the first story arcade-like vertical elements of a concrete and rock composite material "supporting" a metal-faced second story. The lot measures 160' x 110' and includes lots 52, 53, & 54 on the city tax map. The building is situated very close to the street, the front parking area having been lost when the street was widened. Dwarf foundation plantings and tall crepe myrtle ornament the facade, and parking is available on the east and west sides.

The structure is built on a concrete slab and features an interior wood frame structural system. Windows are aluminum (single pane, fixed) and are sporadically spaced across the first and second floors of the south, east and west sides of the building. The rear elevation is composed of a solid concrete block wall. On the facade, entrance is through a single modern glass door at the center of the building. A variety of interior wall treatments include sheetrock, wood paneling and wall paper. The ceiling is acoustical tile (in studios) and blown acoustic material (in offices), light fixtures are recessed fluorescent panels, and flooring is vinyl tile and carpet. The recording studios, both the original on the west and the addition on the east, are located at the rear of the building and are two stories in height. In the original studio, the control room and two sound booths, though technologically modernized, remain intact. Technological advances have precluded the need for the original echo chambers, which during the 1960s were vital to the creation of the Muscle Shoals "sound." One of four of these rooms remains, currently being used as a small storage closet located under the stairway dating from the 1967 renovation. The room features wavy and off-center walls which created the echo sound effect that is now produced electronically.

The building has remained essentially unchanged since its modifications in 1972. As the City of Muscle Shoals has grown, the setting has changed from an open lot on a narrow semi-rural road to a crowded commercial block on a major city street. The building is currently threatened by the widening of Avalon Avenue.



## 7. Significance (See attached instructions for specific guidelines.)

Period	Areas of Significance-Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> music	humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates

Builder/Architect

### Statement of Significance

Constructed in 1963, FAME Recording Studio is eligible for listing on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage under criterion A, in the areas of music and commerce, and meets the criteria for exceptional significance under category D, being a property that is less than 40 years old but of exceptional significance to the state.

FAME, an acronym for "Florence Alabama Music Enterprises," was organized in 1958 by music industry entrepreneur Rick Hall. After only moderate early success, Hall discovered talented singer and songwriter Arthur Alexander. Production of Alexander's "You Better Move On" brought royalties that made possible the construction of the current building on Avalon Avenue in Muscle Shoals. Rick Hall and FAME soon became synonymous with the "Muscle Shoals Sound," a unique blend of "fundamental rhythm & blues and rock & roll, enhanced by a funky backbeat." The success of FAME attracted recording artists from across the nation, eventually sparked the establishment of numerous recording studios in the Tri-Cities area, and made significant contributions to the country music industry in Nashville, Tennessee. It was FAME that established the "Muscle Shoals Sound" and launched the Tri-Cities' music industry boom of the 1960s and 1970s.

FAME was the first recording studio to be established in the Tri-Cities area and is the only one to operate under continuous ownership. The current building, the third to be occupied by the company, is the only extant structure associated with the enterprise. It currently houses two recording studios, three publishing companies and a production company. With the exception of Arthur Alexander, all of the major artists who recorded at FAME utilized the existing facility. Originally surrounded by open spaces on the outskirts of Muscle Shoals, the building has become the nucleus of a commercial block situated on a major thoroughfare and is potentially threatened by the expansion of Avalon Avenue.

### Historical Summary:

Aspiring songwriter and producer Rick Hall, began his career peddling songs to Nashville, with a prominent "country" flavor to his work. Not finding a market for his work in Nashville, he remained in Alabama and, in 1958, formed a partnership with friends Tom Safford and Billy Sherrill known as the "Florence Alabama Music Enterprises." The first studio and recording company was located on the upper floor of the old City Drug Store in downtown Florence. With only moderate success, the partnership dissolved, and in 1960 Hall moved the company to a vacant Tobacco and Candy Warehouse in Muscle Shoals, shortening the name to FAME. Billy Sherrill moved to Nashville where he became a successful producer in the country music industry.

It was in this makeshift studio in the vacant warehouse that Hall began to develop a new sound derived from a blend of country with rhythm & blues and rock & roll. His first hit, "You Better Move On," was a recording by talented singer and songwriter Arthur Alexander. With royalties from the song, Hall constructed the core of the

present FAME building on Avalon Avenue on the outskirts of Muscle Shoals. He quickly produced a follow-up hit, "Steal Away" by Jimmy Hughes, in the new studio. With a talent for producing and engineering recording sessions, Hall attracted musicians whom he trained to be successful recording artists. Hall's ability to provide the technology, back-up musical talent, and the unique "Muscle Shoals sound" launched his studio to the forefront of the music industry. Within a decade, FAME attracted such artists as Aretha Franklin, James and Bobby Purify, Joe Tex, Clarence Carter, Wilson Pickett, and The Osmonds, and in 1971 Hall was named Producer of the Year by Billboard. Later artists who recorded at FAME included the Allman Brothers and Alabama. It was Rick Hall's talent and determination that brought FAME's success and continues to oversee it to the present.

The success of FAME sparked a boom in the recording industry in the Tri-Cities area, and a number of other studios attempted to emulate FAME's accomplishment. Only one came close, when, in 1969, the musicians working in the FAME rhythm section left FAME to form the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio and Publishing Company, Inc. They located at 3614 Jackson Highway, Sheffield, in a structure that currently houses an appliance repair shop. It was in this building that the Rolling Stones held a recording session. A notable feature of the structure is a graffiti-covered bathroom door which displays the signatures of many famous artists. In 1979, the company relocated to its present address at 1000 Alabama Avenue, Sheffield, in the old Naval Reserve building. The studio was sold in 1985 to Malaco Music Group, a recording company based in Jackson, Mississippi.

Even though these spin-off recording studios created competition for FAME, they also revealed the degree of success FAME had achieved and placed Muscle Shoals and the Tri-Cities on the map as being nationally significant to the music industry. Their significance was further highlighted by the creation of the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in the early 1990s.



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## 8. Major Bibliographical References

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Bradford, Debbie. Former Special Projects Coordinator, City of Muscle Shoals.  
"FAME Recording Studios: 35 Years of Gold." Brochure.  
Hall, Linda. Wife of Rick Hall, founder of FAME Recording Studio, Muscle Shoals.  
"History of FAME Recording Studio." Print-out of FAME Internet Web page.  
Johnson, David. Director, Alabama Music Hall of Fame, Sheffield, Alabama.

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## 9. Geographical Data

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Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_ less than one acre \_\_\_\_  
Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

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Enclose map showing location of property. (city or county map, state highway department map, or USGS map)

Attached.

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## 10. Form Prepared By

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name/title	Sally Moore		
organization	AHC	date	Nov. 17, 1997
street & number		telephone	
city or town		state	zip

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## 11. Please submit color slides of the property with this form.

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Color slides are essential to the review process.

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## 12. Please return ALABAMA REGISTER form and documentation to:

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Alabama Register Coordinator  
Alabama Historical Commission  
468 South Perry Street  
Montgomery, Alabama 36130-0900

**FAME** RECORDING  
STUDIOS





**FAME**

**RECORDING  
STUDIOS**

**WHERE  
IT ALL  
STARTED**













RECORDING STUDIOS

1111 11th Street, N.W.  
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and Producers in the World.*



# Senate of Alabama



MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

## Resolution

RECOGNIZING AND DESIGNATING FAME STUDIO IN MUSCLE SHOALS AS ALABAMA'S FIRST MUSIC RECORDING STUDIO, AND URGING THE ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION TO ASSIST IN HAVING FAME STUDIOS NOMINATED AS A NATIONAL LANDMARK

By Senator Denton

WHEREAS, in 1958, Rick Hall founded Florence Alabama Music Enterprises, FAME Studios in the Muscle Shoals area, the first professional music recording facility in Alabama; and

WHEREAS, from these humble beginnings, the music industry in Muscle Shoals has grown into a business producing five million dollars (\$5,000,000) annually, and currently employs 565 artists, songwriters, engineers, and producers; and

WHEREAS, the Muscle Shoals area music recording studios have struggled and prospered in this highly competitive industry including New York, Nashville, Los Angeles, and other locations to become a major force in the industry; and

WHEREAS, in 1961, FAME Studios moved to its present location at 603 Avalon Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Alabama; and

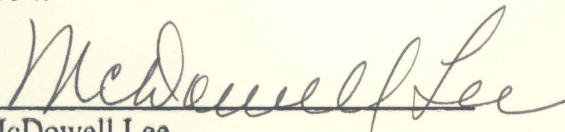
WHEREAS, of the approximately 5,000 recordings engineered at FAME, 18 have been ranked as number one hits, 31 have been top five hits, and 45 have been top ten hits; and

WHEREAS, FAME Studios deserves recognition in the history of the state's music recording industry, having become an institution within the industry; now therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA, BOTH HOUSES THEREOF CONCURRING, That we recognize and designate FAME Studios at 603 Avalon Avenue, Muscle Shoals, Alabama, as Alabama's First Music Recording Studio, and that we urge the Alabama Historical Commission to assist in having FAME nominated as a national landmark in recognition of its impact on the history of the music recording industry.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, That a copy of this resolution be sent to Mr. Rick Hall of FAME Studios and the Alabama Historical Commission.

I hereby certify that the above is a true, correct and accurate copy of Senate Joint Resolution No. 14, adopted by the Legislature of Alabama on January 25, 1994.

  
McDowell Lee  
Secretary of Senate

