



ALABAMA'S ENDANGERED
HISTORIC LANDMARKS

PLACES *in* PERIL 2012

*This year's list of historic places in
need of restoration and preservation
includes a number of compelling
sites throughout the state.*

By Melanie Betz Gregory

J. B. HAIN CO. COTTON GIN, SARDIS, DALLAS
COUNTY (ALL PHOTOS BY ROBIN McDONALD)



EACH YEAR SINCE 1994 THE FALL ISSUE OF *ALABAMA Heritage* has highlighted threatened historic sites throughout Alabama—the Places in Peril list compiled annually by the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation. The 2012 roster includes eleven sites dating from Alabama’s early statehood and moving up through the civil rights era of the 1960s. As with each installment of Places in Peril, this year’s list describes the endangered sites, considers the importance of these particular places, explains the threats facing them, and explores ways *Alabama Heritage* readers and citizens throughout the state can unite to preserve these significant landmarks.

COTTON GINS, STATEWIDE

Cotton was Alabama’s principal economic engine before the Civil War, and it 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 served as 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 twentieth century, with a few rare survivors predating 1900. Those retaining original gin equipment are even harder to find.

The cotton “gin” (short for “engine”) was designed to separate the cotton fibers from the seed. As cotton production boomed after 1820, gin manufacturing became a key part of early industrialization in the South, most notably with the 1833 founding of Daniel Pratt’s cotton gin factory at Prattville. Pratt’s company grew into the world’s largest gin factory, and in 1899 it merged with six other firms to form what ultimately became the Continental Eagle Corporation.

Today, the state’s cotton production continues to decline, and gins are being idled. If the demise of the cotton gin is inevitable, some of these buildings offer exciting opportunities for new use and for preserving a virtual totem of the state’s cotton-rich past.

OLD MASONIC LODGE, CRAWFORD, RUSSELL COUNTY, 1848

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 1839–1868, when



*Above: Masonic Lodge 863 in Crawford, built in 1848.
Opposite page: Howell School in Dothan, built in 1902.*

Crawford served as the seat of Russell County. Several years ago, the lodge was almost lost when the Masons decided to replace it with a new building. As the demolition date approached, a local philanthropist intervened and moved the structure a short distance to its current location. It escaped destruction once, but today it again faces an uncertain future.

In addition to being used by the Masons, the lodge also served the community as a meeting hall, school, and church. However, despite its varied uses, since being photographed in 1935 by the HABS, the building has undergone few changes. The two-story, temple-front building retains its four original tapering square columns and outside “dog-leg” stair. The original weatherboarding and wood shake roof are intact beneath asbestos siding and asphalt shingles. Today, the building stands vacant and deteriorated, with neither a contemporary use nor funds to maintain it. Intervention is desperately needed to save this structure.



**HOWELL SCHOOL, DOTHAN,
HOUSTON COUNTY, 1902**

For former students, Dothan's old Howell School evokes sentimental memories of childhood and days gone by. But it is 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 reopened as a pajama manufacturing company. Now vacant, it is owned by the Downtown Dothan Redevelopment Authority.

The first public grammar school in Dothan was built in 1889, but it later burned. The Howell School, named for a prominent local educator, was designed by J. W. Baughman, who topped the building with a central tower—later removed—complete with a spiral fire escape slide.

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 uncertainty hangs over the Howell School's future.

**FORT HENDERSON SITE AND TRINITY 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





school system. After emancipation, educating rural black youth became one of the chief missions of the National Primitive Baptist Convention of the U.S.A. (NPBC), which was founded in 1907. In 1910 the NPBC constructed its first Alabama school, Thomaston Institute, a substantial two-story brick building in Marengo County. A second school was erected two years later at Bogue Chitto in neighboring Dallas County. When this building burned in 1967, it was replaced by two concrete block structures. Another decade passed before the NPBC constructed its last Alabama school—the Tennessee Valley Primitive Baptist Institute, another sturdy two-story

1863, Fort Henderson was garrisoned by regiments of the Union army's United States Colored Troops.

Shortly after the war, the American Missionary Association built Trinity School near the fort site to educate the children of former slaves. Trinity School became Alabama's first accredited high school for African Americans, and for many years it served as the only high school for blacks in Limestone County. It closed after the 1970 desegregation mandate. The original buildings no longer stand, but a 1929 auditorium survives, along with a section of the 1959 school and a portion of the earthworks that once surrounded the original fort.

The Athens-Limestone Community Association, Inc., now owns the property and is aggressively raising funds to reclaim the school as a museum and research library. Additional plans call for reconstructing a section of the Civil War fort. Although this endeavor will be challenging, there is much community support for the project.

BLACK PRIMITIVE BAPTIST SCHOOLS, MARENGO, LAWRENCE, AND DALLAS COUNTIES

Three historic school buildings, now unoccupied and deteriorating, recall a little-known episode in Alabama's educational history: the effort of black Primitive Baptists to provide education for Alabama's rural African American children. Thomaston Colored Institute in Marengo County, the Tennessee Valley Primitive Baptist Institute in Lawrence County, and the Bogue Chitto Institute in Dallas County are the only known schools to have been constructed in Alabama with support from the black Primitive Baptist community.

Churches spearheaded educational initiatives for blacks in Alabama until the establishment of a segregated public

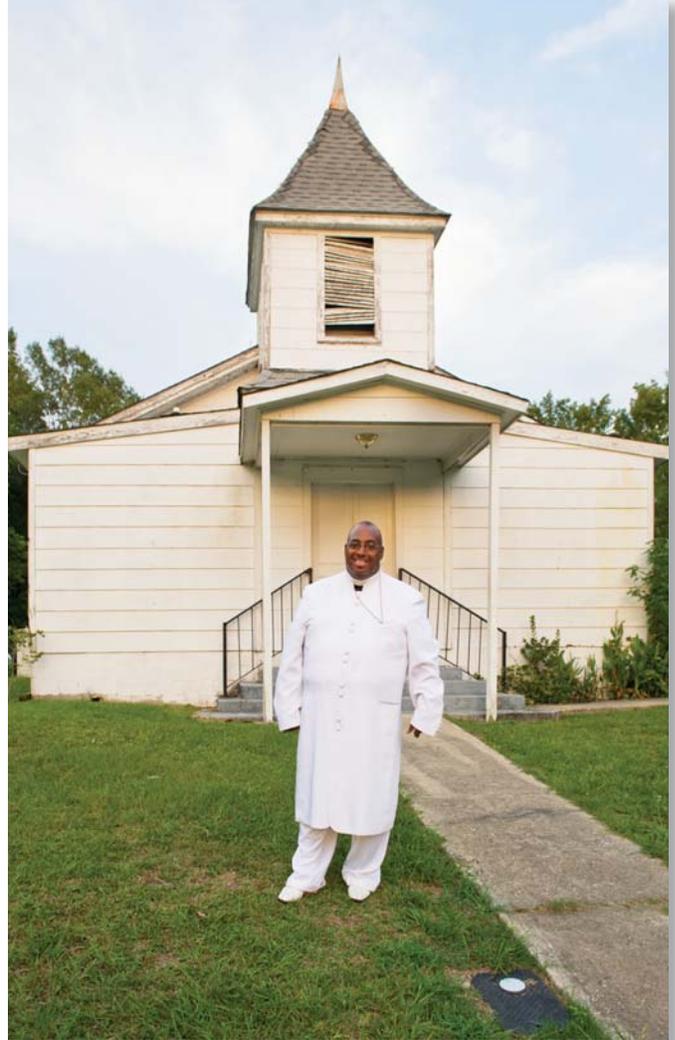
brick building at Hillsboro in Lawrence County. These structures continued to serve black students in their communities from kindergarten through high school, closing only with the advent of school integration in the 1960s.

Today, all three school buildings stand vacant, at risk for vandalism and deterioration. Collectively they testify to a visionary goal set by a single denomination a century ago—the hope of bettering opportunities for rural black children.





Opposite page, above: Trinity School in Athens was Alabama's first accredited African American high school. Thomaston Colored Institute (above) and Tennessee Valley Primitive Baptist Institute in Hillsboro (below) are two of the three surviving black Primitive Baptist schools in the state. Right: Bishop Aaron D. McCall is the pastor of Hayneville's First Missionary Baptist Church, which served as a Freedom School in the 1960s.



**FIRST MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH,
HAYNEVILLE, LOWNDES COUNTY, 1959**

The First Missionary Baptist Church in Hayneville is both a place of worship and 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 education, community meetings, voter registration, and as a voting center, with local residents casting their first-ever votes here in 1966. Today, however, a dwindling congregation faces the challenge of maintaining this historic building.

Constructed in 1959 to replace an earlier structure, the First Missionary Baptist Church was used as a "Freedom School" for Lowndes County children. Local black community leaders joined with members of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee at the church to form the Lowndes County Freedom Party (LCFP) in 1966. The new party served as an alternative to the Democratic Party and offered a slate of African American candidates. On Tuesday, May 3, 1966, about nine hundred 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.



First Missionary Baptist Church is a local landmark and an important Alabama civil rights site. Although in need of restoration and funds to maintain the structure, the church is a place worth saving for future generations.

**STEELE-ARMISTEAD-McCRORY HOUSE,
TUSCUMBIA, COLBERT COUNTY, c. 1830**

Alabama's earliest houses, built just before or soon after statehood in 1819, are rare and disappearing. Usually modest in size, these fragile links to the past often go unnoticed and unappreciated. 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 older 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 northern models usually lacked the sweeping verandas of the Deep South. The build-





Livingston's Lakewood (above) and Tuscumbia's Steele-Armistead-McCrory House (opposite page, below) are examples of raised cottages. Below: One Wood Manor, built in 1947, survived the April 2011 Tuscaloosa tornado.

ers of the Steele house probably came from the Upper South, 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 near the Colbert County Courthouse and currently for sale, this important architectural landmark could be a prime candidate for adaptive restoration using preservation tax credits.

LAKWOOD, LIVINGSTON, SUMTER COUNTY, 1840

With a graceful Doric portico approached by an unusual, horseshoe-shaped iron stairway, Lakewood is a pre-

mier example of southern-raised cottage architecture. This landmark is as mysterious as it is beautiful, with stories of a resident ghost adding to the allure of its rich history. But its prime real estate location in the city center also lends it potential for nonhistoric uses.

New England craftsmen infused elegant Federal and Greek Revival detailing into this distinctively regional type of house. Built for North Carolina native Joseph Lake and owned today by the seventh generation of his descendants, Lakewood has hosted celebrated guests. Noted Alabama educator Julia Strudwick Tutwiler, a kinswoman of the Lakes, occasionally lived at the house between 1881 and 1910 when she served as president of Livingston Female Institute. In 1936 Lakewood was selected as one of eleven Sumter County structures to be documented by the Historic American Building Survey (HABS).

ONE WOOD MANOR, TUSCALOOSA, TUSCALOOSA COUNTY, 1947

The April 2011 tornado that struck Tuscaloosa virtually destroyed the city's Wood Manor neighborhood. One surviving house, a 1947 Colonial Revival-style residence known as "One Wood Manor," was designed by local architect Don Buel Schuyler—ironically better known for his advocacy of early modernism than for skill as an architectural traditionalist. Although the white-columned, 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 for student and multi-family housing.





Twelve of the twenty Lustron houses ordered in Alabama are still standing, including this example in Florence.

Built for Webster Manderson and his family, One Wood Manor boasts reinforced concrete throughout. 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 tornadoes would bounce right off!” Madison remained so impressed with the house’s construction that he eventually purchased it from its second owner, Lloyd Wood.

Now local preservationists and the current owner, Roy Madison’s daughter, are looking for a buyer who appreciates the significance of this elegant, tornado-resistant building. While other uses may be considered, continuing its life as a single-family residence would be ideal. [UPDATE: Since the Places in Peril 2012 were announced in May 2012, One Wood Manor has been sold to a couple wanting to preserve the house.]

**LUSTRON HOUSES,
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 structures were affordable, virtually maintenance-free, and reportedly three times stronger than a frame

house. Designed with efficiency in mind, Lustron houses offered wipe-down steel walls. Built-in features included bookcases, vanities, china cabinets, and even a combination sink-dishwasher-washing machine.

Production problems and other issues ended the manufacturing of Lustron houses by 1950. Of the approximately 2,500 built nationwide, 1,200 to 1,500 survive today. A 1950 company report reveals that twenty Alabamians ordered Lustron houses, and today fewer than twelve survive. Although they were constructed throughout the state, most Lustrons remain in north Alabama, Birmingham, and the Tuscaloosa area.

Over the years, Lustron houses have been lost to demolition, neglect, and unsympathetic changes. Some people misidentify them as run-of-the mill 1940s housing, while others use them as rental properties. The long-range survival of remaining examples depends on educating the public about their significance. Fortunately, these unique structures remain functional today as affordable, low-maintenance housing.

**REMINGTON HALL, ANNISTON,
CALHOUN COUNTY, 1936**

Constructed in 1936 as the Officers Club, Remington Hall, a landmark building at Anniston’s Fort McClellan, hosted generals, U.S. presidents, and other dignitaries from around the world. But the building’s greatest significance





Fort McClellan's Remington Hall, built in 1936 (opposite page, below), boasts a large ballroom (above). The building is best known for the murals (right) in the main lounge painted by POWs in 1945 (see Alabama Heritage 94).

stems from its seventeen interior murals painted by two prisoners, Albin Sagadin and Herbert Belau, during World War II. The murals depict enigmatic emotional and imaginative scenes, some violent, in mostly medieval settings. Although protected by a preservation agreement, the murals are at risk of vandalism and deterioration, because Remington Hall currently stands vacant.

Along with its historical significance, Remington Hall also offers a good example of the Spanish Revival style, popular for US military bases of the period. Characteristic features include its stucco exterior, red clay roof tiles, and arcaded entranceway. The impressive interior boasts grand ballrooms, intricate woodwork, vaulted ceilings, and original wood beams.

Remington Hall is now privately owned. The owners have been good stewards of the building, but maintaining a thirty-thousand-square-foot structure poses a financial hardship, especially as the murals require adequate climate control and professional conservation. The building is currently listed for sale.

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