

# 20 Alabama's Places In Peril 14

ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
*too important to lose.*

Some of Alabama's greatest places of historical and architectural significance are at risk! Neglect, redevelopment pressures, and disregard for the importance of historic preservation threaten to rob Alabamians of distinctive buildings and their settings, depriving citizens and visitors of irreplaceable elements of the state's cultural heritage.

Each year since 1994, the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation have published a list of the state's most endangered historic places in an effort to publicize the urgent need for action to save important private homes, public buildings, bridges, and other parts of the built environment. Over those two decades, many structures have been saved, but many others have been lost. In fact, this year's list includes two places that have been listed before—one that continues to languish in neglect, worse for the wear and tear of intervening years, and one that has benefitted from recent restoration but now needs a new steward.

The 2014 list of Alabama Places in Peril includes two public buildings, a grand antebellum home and a modest twentieth-century bungalow, an old mill complex, and one

of the best-known streetscapes in the state.

- Old Tuscaloosa County Jail, 2803 Sixth Street, Tuscaloosa, circa 1856, William B. Robertson, arch.
- Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Birmingham Branch, 1801 Fifth Ave., N., Birmingham, 1926-7, Warren, Knight & Davis, arch., J. Krebs, builder; addition 1958-9
- Winter Place, 454 S. Goldthwaite St., Montgomery, ca. 1850 w/1870s addition
- Amelia and Samuel Boynton House, 1315 Lapsley Street, Selma, ca. 1935
- Pearce's Mill, Hamilton vicinity, ca. 1840-1940
- North Eufaula Avenue Parkway, Eufaula, mid-19th century to the present, multiple architects, landscape architects, and horticulturists, many unknown

For information about Places in Peril, and to help with their preservation, please contact the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation by mail at Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation, UWA Station 45, Livingston, AL, 35470, call (205) 652-3497 or email [alabamatrust@athp.org](mailto:alabamatrust@athp.org). Visit our website at [www.alabamatrust.info](http://www.alabamatrust.info).

## Pearce's Mill Complex Marion County

In the decades just before and after the Civil War, the Pearce Mill complex along the Buttachatchee River near Hamilton, south of Tusculumbia, was a bustling economic hub. In the early 1870s, James P. Pearce developed the grist mill his father had built in the 1840s into a thriving community by adding a saw mill, cotton gin, and general store that were surrounded by support structures, operatives quarters, and his impressive two-story Victorian home.

Today little of the built environment of the Pearce Mills National Register Historic District is left amid the heavy vegetation that has all but reclaimed the woodland site. Pearce's derelict home, a few outbuildings, a steel truss bridge, a Depression-era tenant house, and a cemetery remain on the remote 3,000 acre tract that is privately owned. What does the future hold for this historic agricultural service center that railroads and other modern transportation innovations have marginalized?



Pearce's Mill Complex

# Historic Places Make Life Better!

## Boynton House Dallas County

The tidy bungalow that was the home of stalwart Selma civil rights foot soldiers Amelia and Samuel Boynton is abandoned today. The Boyntons helped revive the Dallas County Voters League (DCVL) in the 1940s. In the two decades before Colia and Bernard Lafayette of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) came to live with them in the 1960s, the Boyntons had been part of a small group that had begun to intensify efforts to increase black voter registration throughout the Black Belt. In 1964, the DCVL and SNCC along with Rev. F.D. Reese and other local leaders met in the Boynton House and issued an invitation to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. of the Southern Christian Leadership Council (SCLC) to visit Selma in support of black voter registration. He arrived in January 1965 bringing national attention to the Voting Rights movement already underway. After being attacked on their first attempt, these activists along with thousands of others from all over the nation led a successful Selma to Montgomery March two months later, prompting President Lyndon Johnson and Congress to pass the Voting Rights Act of 1965. The seeds of that legislation and the subsequent transformation of American democracy were nurtured and took root in the Boynton House.

Today, on the eve of the Golden Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March, the Boynton House sits vacant and

derelict. Its condition has deteriorated since 2008, when it first appeared on the Places In Peril list. It was subsequently purchased by its current owners, Gateway Educational Foundation, but they have faced severe challenges in attracting potential partners to assist in the preservation of the house. This historic place holds international significance as a symbol of American democracy. The Boynton House desperately needs responsible stewards to weatherproof the house, protect it from vandals, and develop and fund a preservation or restoration plan this year so that its significant history can be interpreted during the Golden Anniversary of the Selma to Montgomery March in 2015.



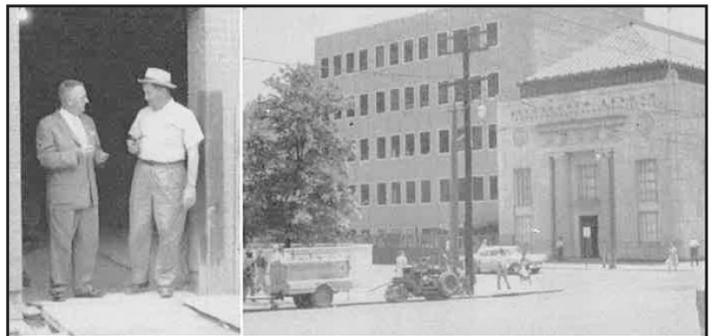
Boynton House

## Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Birmingham Branch Jefferson County

The Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Birmingham Branch, is an early-twentieth-century neoclassical commercial structure with Art Deco influence by one of Alabama's most renowned architectural firms. It sits in the heart of Birmingham's banking and legal center. Although individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places, it has been vacant for several years and is now robbed of its original copper tiles and roofing. A redevelopment plan that capitalized on the 2014 Alabama Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits lapsed in early April for lack of investors. Starwood Properties Trust, an out-of-state firm servicing the portfolio of a failed investment company, is entertaining a purchase proposal that would result in leveling the building for a parking lot. The Birmingham Design Review Board may be the next line of defense. Adaptive reuse, perhaps utilizing Alabama Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credits, is probably the most practical long-term preservation strategy to save this urban place in peril.

The Federal Reserve Bank building is the second oldest of the U.S. government structures in the city's center. It and the old U.S. Post Office (1921, now the U. S. Courthouse), the Hugo Black U.S. Courthouse (1985), and the Attorney

General's Office (2002) are adjacent to the city's revitalized historic theatre district. Although the bank lobby was altered in conjunction with the 1958-9 addition, it retains its original footprint and awaits restoration as the grand and gracious reception area redolent of the Roaring Twenties before the stock market crash and Great Depression, which it survived in style. Now a victim of the Great Recession, the Federal Reserve Bank could succumb to short-sighted economic interests unless city government and private enterprise rise to the occasion.



Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, Birmingham Branch

# Historic Places Make Life Better!

## Winter Place Montgomery County

Winter Place consists of two large antebellum stuccoed brick dwellings and three smaller brick structures on a spacious corner lot in the Cottage Hill Historic District of Montgomery. The “North House” retains its original symmetrical fenestration and Italianate details, but the “South House” was renovated in the 1870s with a fashionable Mansard roof and tower and other Second Empire features. Few vintage buildings in either style survive in Montgomery. Winter Place is listed individually on the National Register because of its architectural significance, and it is listed as part of the locally designated Cottage Hill Historic District.

After Winter Place appeared on the Places in Peril list in 2004, it was sold and the new owner addressed crucial roof, foundation, drainage, and vegetation issues, as well as restoration of the porch of the South House, but that owner is unable to complete the preservation of Winter Place. This National Register property near downtown Montgomery is ready for new stewards to insure its survival in the 21st century.



Winter Place

## Old Tuscaloosa County Jail Tuscaloosa County

The Old Tuscaloosa County Jail is a handsome two-story brick building (with Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, and Italianate features) that served as the county jail from 1856 to 1890. It sits vacant across the street from Tuscaloosa’s Capitol Park, near the site of urban redevelopment that is transforming downtown Tuscaloosa with new residential and retail construction. It has been vacant for five years and the owner, Tuscaloosa City School Board of Education, has no immediate plans for proactive preservation or restoration of the historic building. The historic structure is relatively weather-tight, but it is suffering from demolition by neglect, and the burgeoning value of nearby real estate could raise the risk of losing this rare public building that survives from Tuscaloosa’s early days.

The building was probably constructed in 1856 to the plans of William B. Robertson, but some evidence suggests it was built in the 1840s and served as a hotel before functioning as the jail from 1856 to 1890. (Only one other jail from that era, Coosa Co. Jail, Rockford, ca. 1845, still stands in Alabama. It is a museum.) Among other notorious criminals, it housed the infamous “Outlaw Sheriff of Sumter County,” Stephen S. Renfroe, who attempted to burn a hole in its solid log floor (8 x 12 inch high squared logs) to escape—the 28-inch thick walls acting as an adequate deterrent. From 1890 to 1951, the handsome hip-roofed building with its four end chimneys and bold surrounds on its main entrance served as a private residence and boarding

house. The VFW occupied the spacious, centrally located place from 1951 through 1979, when it was listed on the National Register and became a public school building (until 2003) and then a private school (2003-07). It has been vacant since 2007, when the private school that had leased the building moved out, complaining about lack of maintenance, potential asbestos problems, and building code violations.



Old Tuscaloosa County Jail

# Historic Places Make Life Better!

## North Eufaula Avenue/US431 Barbour County

Eufaula's North Eufaula Avenue/US431 is lined with grand old homes and an impressive tree canopy that shades countless dogwoods, azaleas, and other flowering trees and shrubs. Every April it serves as "Main Street" for the Eufaula Pilgrimage, Alabama's oldest and best known historic home tour. At that time, thousands enjoy the scenic drive past stately antebellum homes and newer structures of architectural and historical distinction. The mature streetscape (in the Seth Lore and Irwinton National Register Historic District) is unmatched for its distinctive combination of historic architecture and landscape features.

Nevertheless, this historic streetscape is threatened by an Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) proposal to four-lane this section of the road at the expense of countless mature trees and shrubs and the gracious character of the place that is crucial to Eufaula's Pilgrimage.

The local community is united in opposition to widening N. Eufaula Ave. The City Council and its mayor (Jack Tibbs), the Eufaula Heritage Association, the Eufaula-Randolph Neighborhood Association, and the Eufaula-Barbour County Chamber of Commerce have all formally communicated their positions to ALDOT. In addition, the Historic Chattahoochee Commission, Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation and the National Trust for Historic Preservation are on record in opposition to widening the road. The State of Alabama Tourism Department and the Alabama Historical Commission

also recognize the value of this historic streetscape. ALDOT has indicated that final plans have not yet been developed. Community leaders met with ALDOT Director John Cooper on May 12th in Eufaula but he held steadfast to his position that North Eufaula Avenue should be four-laned. A Save North Eufaula Avenue coalition has been formed and they are redoubling their efforts to turn aside this ill-conceived plan.



Eufaula's North Eufaula Avenue/US431

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Alabama Historical  
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