

## **2024 PLACES IN PERIL**

### **Fire Station, Building 69 at Fort McClellan/ Gadsden, Walker County**

Located outside Anniston at the base of the Choccolocco Mountain Range, the Fire Station sits on the decommissioned Fort McClellan United States Army base. The Fire Station is part of the Fort McClellan Post Headquarters Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. Originally established as a National Guard training camp in 1917, the U.S. Army commissioned Fort McClellan in 1929. The design and layout of the base exemplifies early twentieth century military planning, which focused on both functionality and aesthetics. The historic district has several buildings, including barracks, primary headquarters, and officer's quarters.

The Fire Station, also known as Building 69, was constructed in 1936 in the Spanish Revival style using the government-issued Quartermaster Plan 634-330-43. The Ray M. Lee Company of Atlanta, Georgia constructed the building in eleven months. The Army used it as both a Fire Station and Guardhouse. The building is situated on a cul-de-sac, allowing easy access to the district's streets. The two-story building's exterior is clad in stuccoed masonry, and the hipped roof is sheathed in red clay barrel tile. The Fire Station has two large arched garage openings with a multi-panel design and features three Juliet balconies.

With the onset of World War II, the U.S. Army used the fort for military training. A Prisoner of War camp housed German and Italian prisoners beginning in 1943. The prisoners contributed to the construction of landscape features and murals in the public spaces. By 1951, Fort McClellan housed the Chemical Corps training school. The Army decommissioned the fort in 1999 in accordance with the Army Base Closure and Realignment Committee (BRAC) program, and the Fire Station's ownership transferred to the City of Anniston for use by the city's fire department.

Due to deed requirements, the property reverted to the federal government and in 2023, the General Services Administration auctioned it off. Though the building needs maintenance, the property has the potential to be adaptively reused and its historic integrity preserved by following the guidance of the Alabama Historical Commission and the Secretary of Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

### **American Legion Post 199/ Fairhope, Baldwin County**

Listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places in 2018, the American Legion Post 199 meetinghouse has a history of resilience. The building was constructed in 1913 and was originally known as "Pine Needles."

Formed in 1910, the Mobile's Women Business Club was a social organization for working females and made it their mission to provide companionship and respite for "self-supporting women" that held a variety of professions. This club of self-sustaining women managed to materialize funds and construct a place where women could affordably stay for periods of time, specifically over the summer months. A three-story wood frame building with hipped shingled roof was constructed in 1913 on the bluff overlooking picturesque Mobile Bay. The structure, designed by famed local architect George B. Rogers, is an excellent example of Gulf Coast vernacular design for a recreational facility. The original exterior featured large galleries on both the first and second floors. The third floor features several dormers with casement windows. Access to the interior was granted through sets of French doors that featured transoms. The interior layout allowed for cross-ventilation of the space with its central hallways and casement windows allowing access to the bay breezes. These functional design features answer the warm climate.

In 1963, the American Legion Post 199 moved into the building to utilize as a meeting space to serve a growing number of Veterans. The American Legion modernized and altered the building to meet the organization's needs. The galleries were enclosed using wood siding to match the existing façade. While the interior partition walls of the first floor were moved, the second and third floors remain largely true to the 1913 design. A "boxing ring" installed on the third floor and remains today. The exterior fenestration impacted by the enclosure of the gallery spaces have either been repurposed or salvaged. At this time, climate controlling measures were introduced into the space. The American Legion Post 199 continues to host meetings and public events on the site.



The American Legion Post 199 meeting hall has been greatly impacted by weather events since 2020. The building, which still retains a high amount of historic integrity, needs repairs to continue serving the community and its veterans. The organization currently has a multi-tier plan in place to rehabilitate the building.

## **Sumter County High School/ York, Sumter County**

Braxton Bragg Comer served as the governor of Alabama from 1907 until 1911. During his tenure, he increased funding for public schools through taxation reform. While this greatly benefited white students, in public schools, African American children attending segregated schools did not enjoy the same privileges.

Governor Comer encouraged legislation requiring a public high school in every county by 1918. The State High School Commission chose the rural community of York as the Sumter County town that would be the future site of Sumter County High School. The original school building was constructed in 1912. Its design was influenced during a transitional time for architecture due to new construction techniques. A horseshoe shape driveway off 4th Avenue still leads to the original facility. The main elevation is defined by a central entrance with a front-facing gable flanked by paired multi-pane wooden windows. Recessed portions of the brick building feature a set of five bay windows flanking the entrance. The ends of the building are punctuated with two forward-facing gables. Multiple wings extend perpendicularly to the front façade off the rear elevation. An asphalt shingle roof sits atop the footprint of the building.

Over the years, major changes occurred in America's school systems, and in Alabama that caused the school's demographics to shift. The Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954 deemed racial segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Despite advances with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, Voting Rights Act of 1965, and other federal laws, the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights found evidence supporting claims that Alabama was denying equal educational opportunities to all students. Judges ordered Sumter County to desegregate schools in 1970. During this same time, students that attended the high school conducted a boycott of the school system until the school was afforded better educational opportunities.

Several alterations have changed the campus grounds over the years, including the additions of wings and buildings in the middle of the century, the 1980s, and the 1990s. Since the consolidation of high school facilities in 2012, the former Sumter County High School sits vacant on eleven acres of land. The building's abandonment has led to its disrepair. The West Alabama Coalition for Community Development is seeking funds to stabilize and rehabilitate the building for future use. Recently, a grant has been secured to replace the roof on the auditorium.