

# Alabama's Places In Peril

ALABAMA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

## 2011 most endangered

Since 1994, the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation have joined forces to sponsor Places in Peril, a program designed to highlight some of Alabama's most significant endangered historic sites.

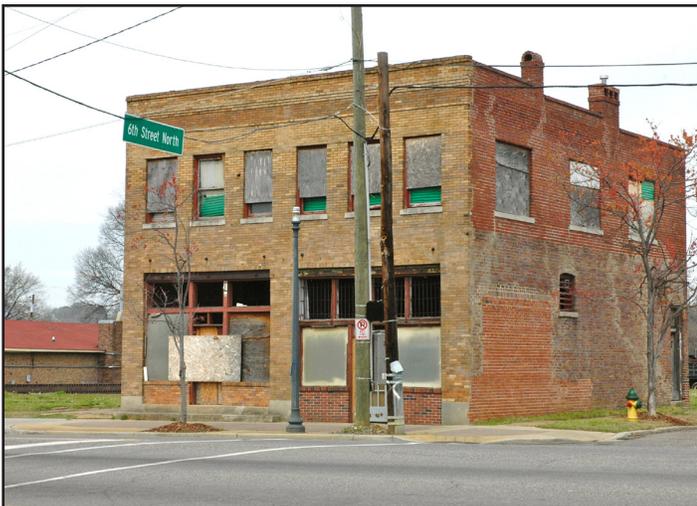


**Bermuda Hill House, c. 1845**  
Gallion, Hale County

Sitting on a hill overlooking the old Prairieville to Greensboro Road, the Bermuda Hill House is a product of an era when ambitious men believed the road to riches ran through fluffy rows of cotton. The prominent Manning family first owned the property. The Mannings were early settlers and planters in Prairieville and owned large land tracts in the original French grants of the Vine and Olive colony. In 1845, William W. Manning sold the land to William Weeden of Madison County, but it is unclear who built the house.

The home is a significant example of a Canebrake plantation house based on the I-house form. The façade is dominated by a full height pedimented portico, supported by four paneled columns embellished with sawnwork brackets.

Bermuda Hill is threatened by neglect and deferred maintenance.



**Windham Construction Company Building**  
Birmingham, Jefferson County, 1912

The Windham Construction Company Office Building is a remarkable reminder of a successful African-American business that flourished in a segregated society. The building was home to Windham Brothers Construction Company, a major black contractor that built some of the most significant buildings in Birmingham.

Wallace Rayfield, Alabama's first formally trained black architect, designed the building and collaborated with Windham Brothers to build the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church and the Alabama Penny Savings Bank, Alabama's first black-owned bank. In 1927, the company built the seven-story Birmingham Railway, Light and Power Co. Building.

Listed on the National Register, the structure is unoccupied and threatened by vandalism. Restoration of the building could help to revitalize the adjacent Smithfield neighborhood.

## PLACES IN PERIL 2011



**Boiling Springs Native American Sites**  
Chocolocco Creek, Calhoun County

Chocolocco Valley's Creek Indians bowed to President Andrew Jackson in 1832 and agreed to move from their ancestral home in exchange for new land in Oklahoma. Although Native Americans inhabited the region since 10,000 BC, they could not withstand the demand for new land by white settlers seeking to make their fortune in cotton. The fact that Native Americans owned this land posed a problem for newcomers. However, Jackson solved this problem by signing the 1832 Treaty of Cusseta.

The remnants of their aboriginal settlement are scattered throughout Boiling Springs in the Chocolocco Valley. Researchers have identified multiple archaeological sites that provide invaluable insight into Native American life for 10,000 years. These lands are a desirable setting for developments that could endanger much of the area's Native American cultural landscape.



**Jemison-Turner House, c. 1840**  
Turner, Talladega County

Born in Lincoln County, Georgia, Robert Jemison brought his family and slaves to Talladega County in 1837 and began acquiring property in the rich bottom lands bordering the Chocolocco and Cheaha creeks. Joined in Alabama by six of his siblings, Jemison contributed to his family's great economic and political prominence.

Jemison's plantation house is significant for its unusual plan and its exceptionally fine and intact Federal period interiors. The home's unique split-level plan appears in only one other house in the state, also located in Talladega County and constructed by a Jemison family member.

**UPDATE:** The Holmes family donated the Jemison-Turner House to the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation on June 7, 2011.



**Old Gurley Town Hall, 1895**  
Gurley, Madison County

Located 16 miles from Huntsville, Gurley incorporated in 1890 and grew up around a water and coaling station that served the Memphis and Charleston Railroad. The Town Hall was listed on the National Register in 2004, as part of the Gurley Historic District.

The two-story brick building has three stone arches across the front façade and was first a hardware store. It has also housed a print shop, a lodge, the Crescent theatre, and a school. It served as the town hall from 1965-1982. Today, it is a town fire station.

The building needs a new roof and the rear wall stabilized. However, if the building is ever used for income-producing purposes, it would be eligible for a 20 percent federal rehabilitation tax credit. The future of the building is uncertain, and residents fear that it could deteriorate even further or be demolished.

## PLACES IN PERIL 2011



**Powell School, 1888**  
Birmingham, Jefferson County

Seeking to attract new residents, Birmingham founder and Elyton Land Co. president James R. Powell donated four blocks in 1873 to build Powell School, the city's first public school. The initial building was replaced in 1888 by the current structure. For over a century, thousands attended Powell School, also known as the "Free School."

The three-story red brick structure has a stone foundation and represents the Victorian Gothic style. The façade has three primary bays, which are divided into three bays separated vertically by pilasters and horizontally by brick courses.

Vacant since 2003, the school symbolizes the city's early business leaders' commitment to public education. A January 2011 fire destroyed the roof and most of the interior, leaving Powell's future in doubt.

**UPDATE:** The city of Birmingham is in the process of transferring ownership of the school to the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation.



**Downtown Anniston Historic District**  
Anniston, Calhoun County, 1888

A proposed federal courthouse project and the construction of a new city criminal justice center threaten Downtown Anniston's historic district. Historic resources dating from Anniston's heyday as the "Model City of the New South" through its turbulent civil rights history are endangered. As currently planned, the projects will demolish 14 percent of the district's contributing resources.

The courthouse project threatens the intact Gurnee Avenue streetscape that served as the backdrop for the May 14, 1961, attack on a Greyhound bus carrying Freedom Riders. The justice center lies within a locally designated historic district, and any demolition requires approval by the city's Historic Preservation Commission.



**Elizabeth Presbyterian Church, 1858**  
Sumter County

A group of Sumter County residents established the Elizabeth Presbyterian Church in November 1838. Elizabeth Knox donated the land where the first church was built, and it was named in her honor. The growing congregation replaced the original log structure in 1858 with a two-story wood frame building. Members also established a small cemetery on the property.

Economic developments and demographic changes have been unkind to many of Alabama's rural areas. The descendents of those who settled these regions have moved to pursue opportunities elsewhere. When they leave, they leave behind structures like Elizabeth Presbyterian Church, a building where generations gathered to celebrate life and mourn loss. The church is threatened by neglect.

## PLACES IN PERIL 2011



**Avondale Mill Village, c. 1910s**  
Talladega County

Associated with one of Alabama's most significant early 20th century textile operations, Avondale Mill Village in Sylacauga is now representative of the demise of this once great industry.

Typical of similar villages found throughout Alabama, the neighborhood provided affordable housing for the mill's "operatives" in close proximity to their work. The village fostered a strong sense of community among the residents. Former mill workers and their families today recall the village as an excellent place to raise a family.

Located just outside of Sylacauga's city limits, the village has suffered economic decline and disinvestment and struggles to remain a viable neighborhood. While there is an effort to improve conditions, broad-based community support and action are needed to address the many issues facing the village.

**UPDATE:** A fire destroyed the Avondale Mills complex on June 22, 2011.

### Motion Picture Theatres

#### Statewide

Some people may remember the 1930s and 1940s, when going to the movies was the national pastime. However, America's habit of going to the movies began to wane as television made its inroads in the 1950s. By the 1960s, many of the grand movie palaces had already succumbed to the wrecking ball. By the 1970s and 1980s, the vast majority of Alabama's historic theatres had gone dark.

Few building types hold such broad appeal within their communities. As a result, many cities have found creative ways to save and repurpose their historic theatres.

Birmingham's Alabama Theatre (1927) has been restored as a performing arts center. Similar conversions have occurred in Mobile, Decatur, Montgomery, Talladega, Tuscaloosa, and Winfield. Yet there are many more theatres that are awaiting restoration and an audience.



**Pastime Theatre, Winfield, 1937**

- Historic theatre success story
- Restoration completed in 2002
- Public and private funding
- Managed by a volunteer board

[www.winfieldcity.org/pastimetheatre](http://www.winfieldcity.org/pastimetheatre)

All pictures are credited to David Schneider, except for the Pastime Theatre.

The Places in Peril list carries no formal protection, but it does build awareness in local communities about endangered sites, and can help generate support to preserve these places.

This program has been financed in part with federal funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.