Lyric Theatre, Birmingham, PIP 2009

This majestic building hosted vaudeville players, silent movies, "talkies," premelodic movies, and adult films before it closed for decades. It was one of the first places in Jim Crow Birmingham where black and white audiences could watch a show simultaneously, though African Americans used a separate entrance and seating area. Today the Lyric's gilded grandeur is impressively restored, and segregation's color barrier is vividly exposed by the removal of a wall between the lobbies for black and white patrons—one with pristine white Sylacauga marble floors, the other with inexpensive terrazzo tiles.

PLACES IN PERIL AT TWENTY-FIVE

After a quarter-century of identifying endangered sites, we assess what has happened to many of them.

By Michael W. Panhorst
In the twenty-five years that the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC), the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation (ATHP), and Alabama Heritage (AH) have collaborated to compile and publish an annual statewide list of places in peril, we have profiled more than 250 places that have suffered from neglect, indifference, and insensitive development of our state's architectural heritage. We have preached the merits of historic preservation and demonstrated successful tools and techniques for saving and revitalizing places—with mixed results. Our advocacy for historic preservation through public education has helped save significant examples of Alabama's built environment; however, many places in peril and countless other public buildings and private properties, farmsteads and townhomes, schools and factories, roads and bridges, churches, cemeteries, and prehistoric archaeologi- cal sites have been lost.

But not all is lost. This installment of Places in Peril (PIP) traces some of the historic properties listed in years past, updating readers on what has happened to these structures since this column alerted readers to their peril.

Some have received intervention, like the historic Bryce Hospital in the University of Alabama campus (PIP 2003). Though the extensive wings of its influential Kirkbride Plan for mental institutions were demolished in the renovation process, the university is currently rehabilitating the core of Bryce Hospital. Sites and structures like Auburn's Victorian-era railroad depot (PIP 2010) and antebellum Sunny Slope (PIP 2007) have been saved and adapted to new uses, even while high-rise commercial development and questionable preservation planning threaten Toomer's Corner today.

In fact, we have seen some notable successes. Birmingham's Lyric Theatre (PIP 2009) has been restored to its former glory and Huntsville's Lowe Mills (PIP 2002) now stands as a model for successful revitalization of obsolete buildings that once enabled Alabama's textile industry to prosper. After decades of neglect, Mobile's Barton Academy (PIP 2005) is well on its way to an encore performance as a public school, and nearby Fort Conde Village (PIP 1994) has a fighting chance to retain characteristic features of its early history. Even Montgomery's Winter Place, an eclectic mid-nineteenth-century residence that has twice been on the Places in Peril list (2004 and 2014), is becoming a boutique hotel.

In big cities, small towns, forests, and pastures, from Bayou La Batre to the Tennessee Valley, places in peril have been rescued and revitalized, preserving contemporary Alabamians' connections with the past and enriching the lives of future generations. As we embark on the final phase of Alabama's three-year-long bicentennial celebration, let's look back at our state's successes and failures in historic preservation over the past twenty-five years and look forward to the challenges ahead.

Though hard evidence is lacking to prove that the cupola of St. James CME Church in Lowndesboro came from the Calhoun capital, the story has been accepted for many generations, and chances are good that it is true. After its PIP listing in 1996, the church was restored for use as an event space. (All photos Robin McDonald unless otherwise indicated)

PLACES IN PERIL SAVED

Forks of Cypress Ruins, Lauderdale County, PIP 1995
The neoclassical residence between Big and Little Cypress Creeks on the Tennessee River was likely designed by William Nichols, architect of the statehouses in Tuscaloosa, Alabama: Raleigh, North Carolina; and Jackson, Mississippi. The house burned in 1966, but twenty-three of the twenty-four colossal, stuccoed brick columns that surrounded it survived and were stabilized by a public-private partnership formed in direct response to its Places in Peril listing. Today Alabama's earliest home with a colossal peripetal colonnade is maintained as a picturesque ruin.

Cupola of Alabama's First State Capitol and St. James Colored Methodist Episcopal Church, Lowndesboro, C. 1833, PIP 1996
Once the state capital moved to Tuscaloosa in 1826, Calhoun became a ghost town. The cupola from the capital building was subsequently moved to Lowndesboro and installed on St. James Methodist Church, which was later sold to an African American congregation that eventually abandoned the building in 1983. In 1990 AHC facilitated the building's lease to the Lowndesboro Heritage Association, which now operates it as a wedding venue and event space.

The former Queen City Pool House was reopened in 2011 as the Mildred Westervelt Warner Transportation Museum, funded by a grant from the Alabama Department of Transportation with additional funds from the city of Tuscaloosa.

Bald Rock Lodge, Cheaha State Park, PIP 1996
Bald Rock Lodge is the gem in the crown of Alabama's premiere collection of Depression-era architecture. It has been restored and is operated by Alabama State Parks.

Queen City Pool House, Tuscaloosa, PIP 1998
This is one of the few remaining buildings by Tuscaloosa architect Don Buel Schuyler, an apprentice of Frank Lloyd Wright. Rather than demolish the Art Moderne building with its distinctive curvilinear design features and spacious interior that was abandoned in the 1980s, a public-private partnership adapted it into a transportation museum that opened in 2011. Using historic structures as museums is a common preservation technique, but the cost of ongoing building maintenance and museum operations challenges many museums that lack substantial financial support from government or private sources.
PLACES IN PERIL LOST

Tallassee Mills Complex, Tallassee, PIP 1994, and Main Mill #1, PIP 2001

Only massive stone walls remain after heavy timbers and heart pine floors were removed for their salvage value. Other parts of the sprawling complex, some of which clothed and armed the Confederate army, await demolition following what authorities deemed a suspicious fire.

Montgomery Theatre/Webber Building, Montgomery, PIP 2015

One of the oldest theater buildings in the country, this building suffered irreparable damage when a corner collapsed after its upper floors were removed for their salvage value. The remainder was deconstructed, leaving only basement walls. Today they stand like a specter of the actors who struttered across the theater’s stage, where the lyrics of Dixie were allegedly scribbled on the wall prior to its first public performance.

Hickory Ground, Wetumpka, PIP 2001

The twenty-first-century Poarch Band of Creek Indians chose the site of the nineteenth-century capital of Creek civilization for construction of a new casino over objections of the AHC and other Native American groups, thus sustaining the importance of the land but obliterating archaeological evidence of earlier cultures.

The largest building in Alabama under one roof when it was completed in 1854, the great mill building in Tallassee is literally a shell of its former self since the roof collapsed during a storm following the removal of the floors. One of Alabama’s most magnificent ruins, it has been called “Our Coliseum.”

PARTIAL LOSSES

North Eufaula Avenue, Eufaula, PIP 2014

Widening the pavement of the parkway through the Seth Lore and Irwinton Historic District achieved the Alabama Department of Transportation goal of providing four lanes from Georgia to Florida, but it did not alleviate traffic jams on holiday weekends. The new lanes do speed traffic through the gracious old residential district; however, more traffic makes it harder for pedestrians to cross the street safely. The area is undoubtedly altered, and the jury is still out on whether the extraordinary tree canopy will survive.

Greystone Bus Station, Montgomery, PIP 1994

Ironically, the expansion of the US Court House in which Judge Frank Johnson issued rulings protecting civil rights activists resulted in the demolition of the bus loading area next door, where Freedom Riders were attacked in 1961. Fortunately, the lobby and “Colored” entrance to the station have been preserved and are operated by the AHC as the Freedom Riders Museum.

Top: The former Greyhound Bus Station on South Court Street in downtown Montgomery is now the Freedom Riders Museum, in commemoration of the events of May 20, 1961. Above: North Eufaula Avenue in Eufaula has been widened to four lanes at the expense of the median and against strong opposition by local preservationists, who feared that the signature oaks that line the street would be damaged or killed.
Places in Progress

Old Pratt Gin Factory, Prattville, PIP 2005

With the help of federal and state historic preservation tax credits, a supportive city government and visionary commercial developers have partnered to revitalize the long-vacant industrial buildings on Autauga Creek, where Daniel Pratt mass-produced cotton gins. A mixed-use housing and commercial complex that retains the character of the mammoth masonry buildings and their intimate relationship with the creek is under development.

Manitou Cave of Alabama, Fort Payne, PIP 2016

This historic site, which has seen human habitation for thousands of years, stands near the nineteenth-century sites of Sequoyah’s creation of the Cherokee syllabary and the Trail of Tears. Since the turn of the last century, new stewards have adopted the cave and its modest Mid-Century Modern visitor center, gating the cave entrance to prevent vandalism while permitting bats easy egress, and using anATHP Endangered Properties Trust Fund loan to help replace the visitor center roof while retaining the original Sequoia Redwood ceiling beams.

Slave Dwellings Statewide, PIP 1997

Though roughly half of Alabama's 1850s population was enslaved, few of their homes survive, and many of those are neglected and deteriorated. The ongoing Black Belt Slave Housing Survey estimates only 150 to 200 extant examples in the Black Belt. More are presumed to survive statewide, but many are in poor condition, and very few are accessible to the public. Antebellum house museums abound in Alabama, but only a handful maintain and interpret the historic structures inhabited by African Americans. Examples of this important preservation work include the original brick kitchen and slave quarters of the Ordeman-Shaw House at Old Alabama Town in Montgomery and the slave cabin at Magnolia Grove, an AHC museum in Greensboro.

Historic African American Schools Statewide

Urgent threats to Primitive Baptist Schools (Thomaston Colored Institute, PIP 2000), Freedmen Schools (Lowndesboro Colored School, PIP 2008), Rosenwald Schools (PIP 1996), Equalization Schools (Chilton County Training School, PIP 2017), and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (Thomaston Colored Institute has been listed in Places in Peril twice: individually in 2000, and as one of three Primitive Baptist schools in 2012. It still remains in need of help. 1998) have been profiled over the years. Some structures, such as the restored Shiloh Rosenwald School near Tuskegee and Lincoln School in Marion, survive thanks to active alumni stewards, but support for preservation of these places pales in comparison to the need. Other structures of this type include:

- Leighton Training School, Colbert County, PIP 2001
- Street Manual Training School, Richmond, Dallas County, PIP 2002
- Foster Hall, Talladega College, Talladega, PIP 2006
- Mount Pleasant Baptist Church and Community Day School, Hamburg, Wilcox County, PIP 2009

Historic Civil Rights Sites Statewide

In 2015 the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed Birmingham's A. G. Gaston Motel, built in 1954, as one of the country's most endangered places. This handsome Mid-Century Modern motel was owned and built by and for
blacks when Jim Crow laws mandated segregation. In 2017 Pres. Barack Obama designated the Gaston Motel as part of the United States’ first Civil Rights National Monument, which includes Birmingham’s Civil Rights Institute and Sixteenth Street Baptist Church. In 2017 the World Monument Fund designated those historic civil rights sites, Rev. Fred Shuttlesworth’s Bethel Baptist Church and its two paracones (one of which was destroyed by a bomb), and two dozen more sites across Alabama to its international watch list. It also facilitated formation of a consortium to protect, preserve, and promote those places. This is great progress, but the Bethel Church ‘Guard House’ (PIP 2016), which remains in private ownership adjacent to the surviving paracones, and the Boynton House (PIP 2008 and 2014), home of the voting rights activists who penned the invitation for Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. to come to Selma in 1965, stand derelict and forgotten—facing urgent threats from leaking roofs and vandals. Countless other civil rights sites in Alabama are in similar situations.

Pioneer-Era and Early Agricultural Structures
Few structures that were built in Alabama prior to the Second Creek War, like Overton Farm in Franklin County (PIP 2017), survive. It is unclear how many of the antebellum log houses in Lawrence County (PIP 1999) still stand, though at the time of their listing, they numbered over thirty. Log barns and farm outbuildings built anytime in the nineteenth century are few and far between.

Little is left above grade at St. Stephens (Alabama’s territorial capital), and the site of Huntsville’s Alabama Constitution Village is reconstructed. Our first state capital, Cahaba, is a ghost town, but a new partnership between AHC and a local nonprofit is starting to stabilize and interpret the ruins. The footprint of Tuscaloosa’s statehouse, built by William Nichols in 1827, has been preserved, but the walls and roof are long gone. Indeed, there is more physical evidence of Athens, the capital of the ancient Greeks, after two millennia, than there is of Alabama’s first four capitals after two centuries.

Historic Industrial Sites and Structures
Several imperiled industrial sites have been identified over the years, and many of those remain at risk. The massive brick ruins of Brierfield Furnace (PIP 1997) are protected by a chain link fence and a metal pole barn inside a state park, but vegetation continues to encroach, and erosion of the soft bricks laid in 1862 must be monitored relentlessly. The Finley Roundhouse (PIP 2017), a semi-circular, steel-reinforced concrete cathedral of industrialism, awaits resurrection as part of Birmingham’s urban renaissance, while a youthful railroad enthusiast, Khair Marquette, leads advocacy efforts through his Save the Finley Roundhouse Facebook page. Meanwhile, the Spanish-Mission-style CSX railroad depot in Wadley (PIP 2009) and other railroad stations threatened by functional obsolescence molder away. Like railroad stations, textile mills were once integral to life in Alabama, but many now are vacant and subject to vandalism and demolition by neglect.

Mount Vernon Arsenal and Searcy Hospital, Mount Vernon, Mobile County, PIP 1995
This area first prospered when it was part of the Mississippi Territory, guarding the border with Spanish Florida at the end of the Federal Road and providing safety for white settlers after the massacre at Fort Sims during the First Creek War (1813–1815). A federal arsenal of a dozen brick buildings was built in the 1830s, and most of those survive to some degree, surrounded by later structures built when the site served to garrison US troops to incarcerate Geronimo and around four hundred Chiricahua Apache from 1887–1894, and to provide segregated mental health care for African Americans (1902–1969). In 2012 the state closed the 1,500-acre Searcy Hospital complex and abandoned millions of dollars in capital investment, leaving poorly maintained historic structures to molder away. In 2016 the roof of the main Arsenal building collapsed. Several other neglected structures at Mount Vernon are doomed to a similar fate unless we act now.

Efforts to save this place in peril have included meetings with two commissioners of the Department of Mental Health, publication of a white paper, grants from the Endangered Properties Trust Fund of ATHP and an AHC grant (both for emergency mitigation of the roof crisis), an unsuccessful nomination of the site to the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s 2018 Eleven Most Endangered Historic Places list, and ongoing advocacy in concert with the Mount Vernon Historical Society, which maintains the Superintendent’s Home and the Administration Building that houses Geronimo’s cell.

Places still in peril include (opposite page, top to bottom) the Spanish-Mission-style railroad depot in Wadley; the Jemison-Turner House near Eastaboga, noted for its plasterwork; the town of Mooresville’s Stagecoach Inn and Tavern; and Birmingham’s Powell School, seen here after a 2011 fire.

Powell School, Birmingham (PIP 2011)
This brick Romanesque structure replaced an earlier “Free School” built by Birmingham’s founder and is named for him. It burned in 2011, but ATHP and civic leaders continue to search for ways to revitalize the architectural remains.

The Town of Mooresville
(PIP 2000)
The route of Interstate 556 was redirected to save this quaint village on the north shore of the Tennessee River, but now suburban sprawl threatens its quaint character.

Jemison-Turner House, Eastaboga Vicinity
(PIP 2011)
Some of the finest Federal plasterwork in the state has been offered to those who would move the house.

Historic Rural Cemeteries Statewide
(PIP 2003)
Many of the state’s historical cemeteries are threatened by urban and industrial development, erosion, vandalism, and general neglect.

Grove Court Apartments, Montgomery
(PIP 2009)
Despite a renovation renaissance in downtown Montgomery, this nearby International Style ferro-concrete complex awaits revitalization. Fortunately, its sturdy construction means that it would be costly to demolish.

FATE UNCERTAIN—YOU CAN HELP
Much of the historic fabric of Alabama’s built environment and even the archaeological record of native cultures in our state are gone. Historical plaques may mark the sites and chronicle their importance, but we are poorer for the loss of the built environment. Still, perhaps we can learn from the past, not only to understand the present but also to build a better future—one with greater respect for our historic architecture and cultural landscapes, a future that values what we have before it is gone.

The resources of AHC and ATHP are inadequate to monitor all of the 250 places in peril listed over the past two and a half decades, much less the many other historic sites statewide that face urgent threats. Alabama Heritage readers can help by reporting the status of places mentioned in this article to albamahtrust@athp.org.
ALABAMA'S ENDANGERED HISTORIC LANDMARKS

PLACES IN PERIL 2018

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

By Collier Neeley

W E ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THAT The Places in Peril program facilitated by the Alabama Historical Commission and the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation is entering its twenty-fifth year. Over the years the listing has featured bridges, caves, antebellum houses, and other structures that represent the history of Alabama. As shown in the previous article, Places in Peril has elevated many historic places around the state, bringing preservation into the spotlight and showing us how important it is to save Alabama's history.

THIS YEAR, THESE PLACES REPRESENT THE EVERYDAY LIVES OF EVERYDAY PEOPLE. They are all public spaces that played a part in the social, religious, economic, and legal lives of Alabamians across the years. Unfortunately, they all now stand threatened by vacancy and disrepair. Each building has its community behind it fighting to bring it back from the brink and put it back into use as an educational or community space. Sound planning and a unified community effort can bring these buildings to a certain point, but public awareness can also provide options and resources from across the state.

For more information about the Places in Peril program, please contact alabamaturst@aph.org or call (205) 652-3497. Alabama Heritage also has more information about each location on our website at alabaheritage.com.

ACMAR CIVIC CENTER, ACMAR, ST. CLAIR CO.
The mining village in Acmar was entirely segregated, which necessitated the construction of a church and community space for African Americans. Built in 1905 by the Acmar mining company; the Acmar Civic Center (above) served as the First Missionary Baptist Church until 1977. Until the 1930s, the building also served as the Acmar Junior High School and continued as an educational space into the 1950s, providing trade education and a space for GI's returning from WWII. The building was closed in 1990, but the Acmar Civic League continues its efforts to maintain the structure. The group is now focused on saving the building and recreating the public space that once served the community.

SHOAL CREEK BAPTIST CHURCH, FRUITHURST, CLEBURNE CO.
Tucked deep in the woods of the Talladega National Forest is the Shoal Creek Baptist Church. The Shoal Creek area was incorporated in 1866 as a part of Cleburne County, and in the 1880s, the Missionary Baptist Church constructed a building that burned and was replaced by the current building (above). The population of this area declined, and by 1914 the congregation stopped meeting regularly. The building was not abandoned and is still used for sacred harp singing. Currently, the floor joists and foundation piers are failing, causing the floor to sag. The Shoal Creek Preservation Society lacks the knowledge, skills, and funding to undertake a restoration.

ADA HANNA SCHOOL, HAMILTON, MARION CO. After the Brown v. Board decision in 1954, the state committed itself to maintaining "separate but equal" schools. Those built between 1954 and 1969, are referred to as "Equalization Schools." The Ada Hannah School, built in 1965 for the African American community, was in use for only four years until Alabama integrated its public-school system. The building was used as a recreational center and later a manufacturing facility. The victim of several arson, the building is in poor condition and in need of immediate action to save it. The community would greatly benefit from the reuse of the only remnants of an African American School in Marion County.

HAMBURG BUILDING, FOLEY, BALEW Nin. The Hamburg building was built by the Farmers Mutual Cooperative as a processor, warehouse, and storefront that operated as a feed and seed. The co-op shut its doors in 1949 and was bought by H. M. Hamburg and his sons. The co-op's former members brought in their crops to be cleaned, graded, packed, sold, and shipped. Hamburg and Sons Inc. operated until 2004, and today the building sits vacant. Several ideas for its use are being considered.

GEORGE W. BRAXDALL LODGE #78, DECatur, MORGAN CO.
In 1903 the Prince Hall Grand Lodge of Alabama, the primary group of African American Free Masons in Alabama, granted a charter to the George W. Braxdall Lodge in Decatur. That year the lodge occupied the building at 817 Church St. that they have used for 135 years. Over the years, membership has declined, and the building has suffered decades of deferred maintenance. Recently, the City of Decatur issued notice to the group requiring repairs be made or the structure could face demolition. The lodge lacks the funding and knowledge to repair and save their historic building.

OLD HALE COUNTY JAIL, GREENSBORO, HALE CO.
Located behind the Hale County Courthouse, the Old Hale County Jail (top) served from its completion in 1908 until 1999, when it was replaced by a modern facility. The monastery building is three stories with offices on the first floor and holding cells on the second and third. The second and third floors were each divided into two separate cells. The jail is owned by the Hale County Commission and sits vacant. There are several structural issues that need to be addressed, including a damaged roof. (Photos by Robin McDonald)