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Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation

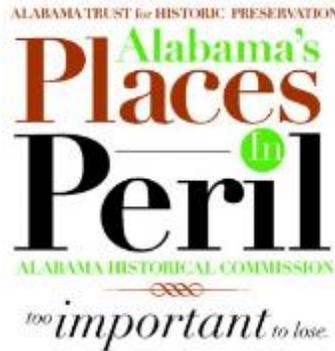
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**Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation and  
Alabama Historical Commission announce 2017 Places in Peril**

In the two centuries since the Alabama Territory was established in August 1817, countless agricultural, industrial, educational and recreational structures have been built here. Many of those farms, factories, schools and parks—especially the earliest examples—have succumbed to wind, rain, fire or functional obsolescence. Few farmsteads that started in Alabama’s territorial period survive. Much of Birmingham’s early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial architecture has been neglected or demolished. Outmoded railroad stations and maintenance facilities now stand derelict. Scores of Mid-Century Modern Equalization Schools have been abandoned. “Whites Only” public park facilities are a thing of the past.

Still, traces of the material culture of earlier times persist in our state’s built environment, although much of the historic architecture that survives is in poor condition and some needs urgent attention lest the hand of time erase it from Alabama’s landscape. Such is the status of the five special places in peril recognized this year by the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation and the Alabama Historical Commission:

- Overton Farm, Hodges, Franklin County
- Chilton County Training School, Clanton, Chilton County
- Fort Davis Railroad Depot, Fort Davis, Macon County
- Finley Roundhouse, Birmingham, Jefferson County
- Henderson Park Recreation Center, Tuskegee, Macon County

For more information on the 2017 Places in Peril, please contact [alabamatrust@athp.org](mailto:alabamatrust@athp.org) or call (205) 652-3497.

## **Overton Farm, Hodges, *Franklin County***

Abner Overton, a tobacco peddler from North Carolina, and his wife, Judy Mae, purchased 160 acres of farm land on Bear Creek in present-day Franklin County in 1817, when the land was part of the Mississippi Territory. In 1819, the year Alabama became a state, the Overton family built a one-room log cabin. Over the course of their lives they added to the cabin and built two barns, corn cribs and other agricultural structures, many of which still stand. The farm remained in the family for a century and a half, until the Tennessee Valley Authority purchased it in 1969 as a part of the Bear Creek Water Control Project.

TVA converted Overton Farm into the Bear Creek Education Center, an educational program focused on showing local school children what life was like in territorial Alabama while encouraging an appreciation for ecology, but due to a lack of funding, the program ended. Today local leaders, including decedents of Abner and Judy May, have developed a partnership to revive the education center and to preserve and rehabilitate Overton Farm.

The group is working to renovate the classrooms, cafeteria and bunk houses associated with TVA's learning center, but the most urgent concern is the historic cabin, which has suffered from the humid climate of northwest Alabama and improper attempts to restore the building. The group needs help establishing a preservation plan and performing preservation work at the farm. Overton retains a substantial amount of integrity and represents life on a homestead in early Alabama.

For more information on Overton Farm and to help with its preservation, contact Patricia Overton Montgomery, at [ticiam@scosche.com](mailto:ticiam@scosche.com).



Overton Farm



## **Chilton County Training School, Clanton, *Chilton County***

In 1924 the first Chilton County Training School for African Americans was completed thanks to contributions of land, labor, and building materials plus financial support from the Rosenwald Fund, a foundation that supported construction of thousands of schools for African Americans in the South during the Jim Crow Era of racial segregation when white school boards routinely discriminated against blacks. The school provided classes for first through ninth grades. In 1940 the county purchased five adjacent acres and added buildings for vocational education and home economics, but the original wooden building burned in 1949.

In 1951, it was replaced by the Mid-Century Modern building that stands today—a long, low, flat-roofed, concrete block building faced with brick and featuring large windows to admit abundant light and natural ventilation, which was important prior to air conditioning. This style is typical of many Equalization Schools that were constructed across the South between the end of World War II and the end of segregation in public education that followed the Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* in 1954.

Equalization Schools were designed as model buildings with the latest insights in school architecture. Identical structures were built for black and white students in a futile attempt to forestall integration. Consequently, once integration became the law of the land many communities owned duplicate facilities that were costly to maintain. In many places, the African American Equalization Schools were closed and eventually abandoned, wasting public resources and destroying black material culture.

Such was the fate of the Chilton County Training School, but in 2010 the county granted ownership of the derelict building to the Chilton County Training School Alumni Preservation Association. That group has worked to protect and preserve the vandalized structure and to promote awareness of the historic place. The Association hopes to revitalize the school and create a park and community center, but desperately needs financial support to succeed.

For more information on Chilton County Training School and to help with its revitalization, please contact Billy Singleton, [singletonbillj@gmail.com](mailto:singletonbillj@gmail.com).

For more information on Equalization Schools in Alabama, please click on the following link:

<http://ahc.alabama.gov/placesinperil.aspx> or contact [dorothy.walker@ahc.alabama.gov](mailto:dorothy.walker@ahc.alabama.gov).



Chilton County Training School

### **Fort Davis Railroad Depot, Fort Davis, *Macon County***

The Seaboard Savanna-Americus Railway Depot at Fort Davis in southern Macon County is characteristic of small town railroad stations constructed across the South at the turn of the 20th century. The simple wooden structure with board-and-batten siding was built in 1904 to replace an 1892 depot, which had burned. In the 1970s the Seaboard System discontinued service to Fort Davis and gave the depot to the Fort Davis Historical Group. A decade later the railroad tracks through town were removed, leaving the quaint station isolated from its original purpose. About that time members of the local Methodist church repainted the old depot.

After that last coat of paint, the depot has fallen into a state of disrepair. The wooden foundation piers have begun to rot and fail. The building is in danger of collapsing. The Fort Davis Historical Group still owns the depot, but lacks the financial support to save the century-old local landmark and revitalize it. They are working to add the depot and the community to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage.

For more information and to help, contact Frankie Kenney at (334) 750-9507 or Glen Davis at [gdavis3@ch2m.com](mailto:gdavis3@ch2m.com).



Fort Davis  
Railroad Depot



## **Finley Roundhouse, Birmingham, *Jefferson County***

The Southern Railroad Company built Finley Roundhouse in northwest Birmingham to service its locomotives in 1915, when the city's iron and steel production made it a hub of railroad operations. The Roundhouse and adjacent rail yard were named for the company's recently deceased president, William Finley.

Like much other industrial architecture of the time, the Roundhouse was built with steel-reinforced concrete walls and roofs. These provided large open spaces for working on enormous locomotives. A double band of clerestory windows under the elevated central portion of the nearly flat roof washes the 25 engine berths in the spacious interior with natural light. Although the railroad tracks inside the building and the 90-foot diameter turntable that sat in the semi-circular courtyard outside have been removed, the Spartan character of the cavernous interior remains as a testament to Birmingham's industrial might during the early twentieth century.

But, steam locomotives were replaced by diesel and railroads were challenged by trucks. In 1952, the Roundhouse was converted into a cold storage warehouse and a rectangular warehouse was built adjacent to it. The evolution of containerized shipping changed Southern's business model and in 2003 the Roundhouse and warehouse closed. A decade later a tornado damaged the roof of the 1952 warehouse but the monolithic Roundhouse continues to stand high and dry, a fitting legacy to the role of rail transportation in Birmingham's once prosperous iron and steel industry.

Since 2012, a local teenaged railroad enthusiast, Khari Marquette, has started a Save the Finley Roundhouse group and social media campaign on Facebook. Over the years he garnered support from the Mid-South Chapter of the Railway & Locomotive Historical Society, the Jefferson County Historical Commission, and the Jefferson County Historical Association, each of which have endorsed the significance of the Finley Roundhouse and recognized the urgent threat caused by its abandonment. Now Marquette is forming a non-profit group to promote the preservation and revitalization of the remarkable reinforced concrete structure, which is one of only two roundhouses left in Birmingham and the largest of its type in Alabama.

For more information on this cathedral of industrial architecture, see Save the Finley Roundhouse on Facebook or contact Khari Marquette at [khari.marquette@gmail.com](mailto:khari.marquette@gmail.com).



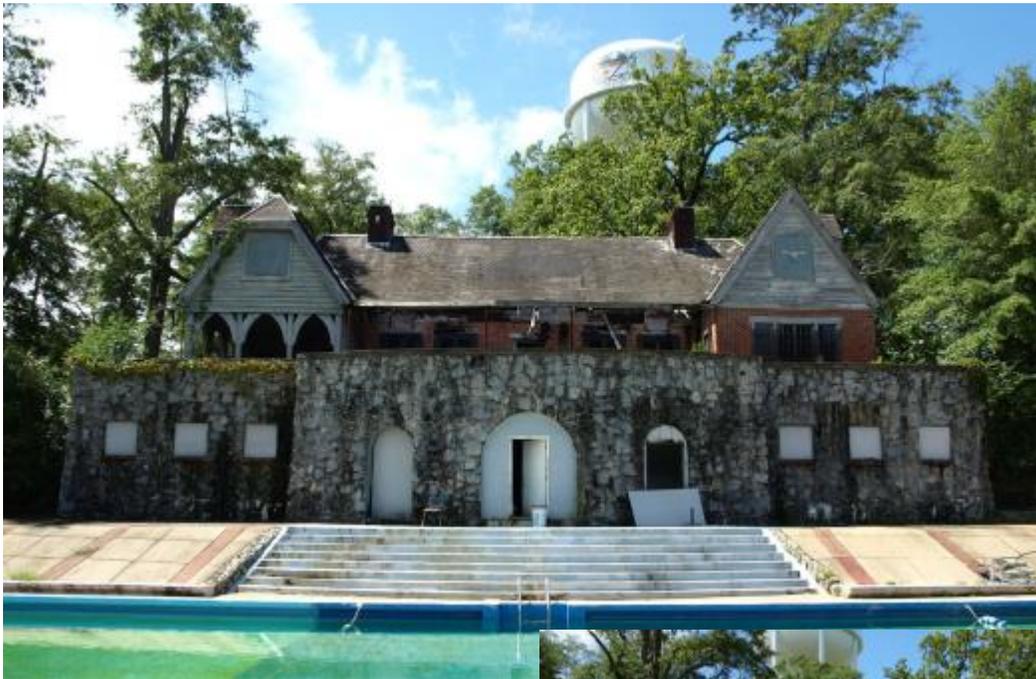
Finley Roadhouse

## Henderson Park Recreation Center, Tuskegee, Macon County

When the Recreation Center was built in Tuskegee's public park by the Works Progress Administration during the Great Depression it was intended for whites only. Jim Crow Era segregation generally prohibited blacks from using the city's recreational facilities, although many blacks were employed in the operation and maintenance of the handsome brick and stone structure that stands adjacent to the community swimming pool. In 1972 the park was integrated and in 1985 it was renamed for Edwin B. Henderson (1883-1977), the Father of Black Sports and an important member of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People who died at his son's home in Tuskegee.

Today the community uses the pool, but the Recreation Center is unsafe to enter due to years of deferred maintenance. The hardwood floors, exposed ceiling beams, lofty roof, gracious porch, and other features of this Depression Era clubhouse are still salvageable if work begins promptly to protect the structure from the elements. Plans have been made for repair and restoration, but funding is still needed.

For more information and to help, contact the Tuskegee Historic Preservation Commission, Dyann Robinson, President, at [dyanrb@bellsouth.net](mailto:dyanrb@bellsouth.net) or call (334) 727-6046; or Lateefah Muhammad at the Black Heritage Council of the Alabama Historical Commission at [lateefahmuhammad@aol.com](mailto:lateefahmuhammad@aol.com) or call (334) 727-1997.



Henderson Park Recreation Center

