

Progress in Preservation

Through a myriad of partnerships at the federal, state, and local levels, through the efforts of private individuals, private non-profit organizations, and public agencies and representatives, much is being accomplished in historic preservation in Mississippi. The Historic Preservation Division of the Mississippi Department of Archives and History has continued to manage its mandated federal and state historic preservation programs with exceptional skill, effectiveness, and productivity, despite minimal funding and personnel shortages. Numerous historically significant properties in public ownership have been preserved, and many of them admirably restored or rehabilitated, through the Mississippi Landmark program, under the provisions of the Mississippi Antiquities Law, nationally one of the strongest and most effective state-level historic preservation laws. The Community Heritage Preservation Grant Program and the Mississippi Landmark Grant program have assisted communities in restoring and preserving buildings and sites that define the state's past and shape its future.

The number of communities with active local historic preservation programs has continued to expand, with a total of forty active Certified Local Governments (by late 2004) and several other communities with local governmental historic preservation programs in place.

The number of Investment Tax Credit Projects that adhere to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation has grown substantially. Although most of these projects are of a smaller scale (under \$500,000), their impact on downtown and neighborhood revitalization has been tremendous. Because of the increased interest in this program, the number of properties listed to the National Register of Historic Places in Mississippi has grown to 1270 (by the end of 2004).

The Mississippi Heritage Trust, the statewide private, non-profit preservation organization, has continued to promote the cause of preservation throughout the state, cosponsoring the annual statewide Historic Preservation Conference, recognizing significant achievement through the annual historic preservation awards, identifying threatened resources through the biennial "10 Most Endangered Historic Places" listings, and serving as a voice and advocate for historic preservation all across the state. Local private, non-profit groups have also taken an active role in the preservation of their communities.

The Mississippi Main Street Program, administered by the Mississippi Main Street Association, a private, non-profit organization, is one of the strongest partners among the state's preservation leaders and continues to influence the revitalization of the downtown business districts of towns all across the state. The program has for years been recognized as one of the nation's strongest, leveraging more than one *billion* dollars in private investments in

historic downtowns. Much of this investment has utilized the historic preservation investment tax credits.

The Mississippi Blues Commission was created by executive order of the governor in 2003 and was codified into law by the legislature in 2004. The Commission's mission is to study and promote the sites and culture associated with authentic Mississippi Blues music and to create a "Mississippi Blues Trail." The director of MDAH is a statutory member of the Commission.

Through funding provided by the Mississippi Legislature and the Mississippi Department of Transportation, MDAH is working to implement the "Mississippi Civil War Trails" program. This \$6.2 million Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century (TEA-21) project will include the restoration of the Coker House at Champion Hill, the Shaifer House at Port Gibson, and the 1917 Corinth Depot. All three sites will be used as interpretive centers for the respective Civil War battlefield areas. The Civil War Trails project will also include hiking and biking trails at Raymond, Brice's Crossroads, and Corinth, and interpretive wayside exhibits at numerous sites across Mississippi.

The National Park Service opened the Interpretive Center at Shiloh National Military Park in Corinth in the summer of 2004, bringing the number of NPS units in Mississippi to seven. In the fall of 2004 the six counties along and nearest to the Mississippi Gulf Coast were named as Mississippi's first National Heritage Area.