Among Alabama’s most imperiled places of historical and architectural significance are those on the 2015 Places In Peril list. Neglect, redevelopment pressures, and disregard for the importance of Alabama’s heritage threaten to rob Alabamians of distinctive buildings, bridges, and cultural landscapes, thereby depriving citizens and visitors of irreplaceable elements of the state’s heritage.

To raise awareness of historically and architecturally distinctive places that face immediate risks to the character-defining features that make them special—or risks to their very existence—the Alabama Trust for Historic Preservation and the Alabama Historical Commission (AHC) have published a list of those places annually from 1994 through 2014. This year, in the wake of reduced state appropriations to the AHC, the Alabama Trust has assumed sole responsibility for the Places in Peril program.

The Alabama Trust’s 2015 Places in Peril listing brings public attention and support to the preservation of these important pieces of the state’s heritage. Nominations for the 2015 Places In Peril were made by local organizations wishing to preserve important historic places in their communities. The Alabama Trust presents the following 2015 Places In Peril—significant historic sites to be preserved for telling Alabama’s history.

Urgent action is needed to save one of Alabama’s earliest extant homes, one 19th-century and one 20th-century public building, the last of 15 memorial highway bridges built around 1930, and the remarkable cultural landscape of Malbis Plantation, a communal farm outside Daphne that was established by Greek immigrants to Alabama in the early twentieth century.

The Malbis Plantation Historic District encompasses an expansive agricultural complex that is threatened by insensitive commercial development. The Historic District is located less than a half-mile south of I-10 on AL 181 at US 90. Malbis Plantation is on the Alabama and the National Register. The plantation encompasses one of the largest and best preserved collections of agricultural buildings in Baldwin County, and perhaps in the state. Twenty-six buildings remain from this commercial complex, with the architectural crown jewels being the Big House (1906), the Tampary-Simmons House (1928), the Greek Orthodox Malbis Memorial Church (1965), and the Malbis Cemetery located south of the church. Malbis Plantation is unique to Greek-American history, serving as one few examples of Greeks choosing to establish themselves in an agrarian community in the

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south. Locally, Malbis Plantation is an example of a common settlement pattern among immigrants pursuing agriculture and livestock in central and south Baldwin County in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The majority of the National Register Historic District is in Baldwin County jurisdictional limits, with the Malbis Nursery being located in the City of Daphne. The City of Daphne is looking to grow to the east with comprehensive planning areas encompassing the majority of the Malbis Plantation Historic District. While the Baldwin County zoning ordinances respect historic preservation, the City of Daphne’s ordinances do not have a means for protecting historic properties from insensitive development.

Malbis Plantation, Inc., is the corporation that owns a substantial portion of the historic Malbis Plantation. Recently the Malbis community challenged a national drug store chain. The drug store decided not to go forward with their store at this time. However, the development pressure continues with recent threatening annexation and rezoning requests for the encroachment of commercial development of the historic rural landscape. The Board of Directors is looking at possible development alternatives to preserve the historic frontage and landscape along ALA 181.

Local preservationists have assembled the support of the Baldwin County Historical Society, Baldwin County Historical Development Commission, the Stockton Historical Association, the Historic Malbis Subdivision Property Owners Association, and Malbis Plantation, Inc. With continued education of community leaders regarding the value of historic preservation and strategies for economic development that protect the character-defining features of historic places—like the agricultural buildings and historic landscapes of Malbis—the value of this imperiled place can be protected for future generations.

For more information about the preservation of the Malbis Plantation, Inc., contact the Malbis Plantation office, 251-626-3050, or the Baldwin County Historical Society, Joseph F. Baroco, Jr, President, 251-626-9746, barocohomeport@gmail.com.

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**Braxton Bragg Comer Bridge**

*Scottsboro, Jackson County*

The Braxton Bragg Comer Bridge carries Alabama highway 35 over the Tennessee River at Scottsboro. It was nominated by the Comer Bridge Foundation because this rare engineering achievement is scheduled for demolition by the Alabama Department of Transportation (ALDOT) once it is replaced later this year. ALDOT remains committed to the demolition of the Comer bridge despite an agreement in principle between the Comer Bridge Foundation and the demolition company to allow the demolition funds to be diverted to preserve the bridge, and an agreement with the U.S. Coast Guard not to require demolition of the memorial structure if Coast Guard requirements are met. Although Federal law does not require it, ALDOT insists that the bridge ownership must be a government entity. Efforts are in progress to persuade the city and county governments to form a tourism authority to promote tourism, as well as assume ownership of the bridge. The Land Trust of North Alabama has expressed interest in exploring the possibility of including the B. B. Comer Bridge as part of a hiking/biking trail between Huntsville, AL and Chattanooga, TN.

Comer Bridge (2143 ft.) is a “Warren Through Steel Truss” constructed by the Kansas City Bridge Company for the Alabama
State Bridge Corporation between 1929 and 1931. It was named as a memorial to B. B. Comer, Alabama’s governor from 1907 to 1911. It is the only bridge remaining of 15 built by the state corporation. It is on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. In 2013, the bridge was named one of the top ten “Top Rated Unique Savable Structures” by BridgeHunter.com. In 2015, the National Trust for Historic Preservation awarded a Gwyn Turner Preservation Fund grant of $5,000 to the Comer Bridge Foundation for an economic impact study.

The Comer Bridge Foundation has established a GoFundMe campaign at [http://www.gofundme.com/savecomerbridge](http://www.gofundme.com/savecomerbridge). For more information about the Comer Bridge, see [comerbridge.org](http://comerbridge.org).

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**Forney Hall, Jacksonville**

*Calhoun County*

Forney Hall, a gracious brick dormitory built in the Classical Revival style in 1927, was one of four major buildings of Jacksonville State Normal School, a two-year institution that trained elementary school teachers in Jacksonville. In 1930, the school became a four-year teachers college and moved to its present campus north of the City center and Forney Hall became a dormitory for married student housing. In later years, the college grew to become Jacksonville State University. In recent years, Forney Hall has been abandoned and allowed to deteriorate. This rare survival from the college’s past (it was founded in 1883) sits vacant and forlorn today. A land swap between Jacksonville State University and the City of Jacksonville is in process. That deal may facilitate the renovation of the grand old building, which sits near other historic structures that the City has occupied. In a community that has lost many of its historic buildings, this solid and imposing masonry structure would seem to be sensible to save for adaptive reuse that would capitalize on its distinctive architectural style and fine craftsmanship.

For more information about the preservation of Forney Hall, contact Jerrod Brown, Jacksonville Historical Society, at 205-213-6081.

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**Sadler House and Sadler Cemetery**

*Jefferson County*

The Sadler House and Sadler Cemetery, McCalla, were nominated by the West Jefferson Co. Historical Society, which owns the Sadler House, because the house needs a new roof in order to protect the structure from exterior and interior deterioration. The nearby cemetery is abandoned and at risk of vandalism.

The early-19th-century, single-pen, vernacular style house of John Loveless has mid-19th-century additions by Isaac Wellington Sadler. It is one of few two-story frame “T” houses in the plantation plain style that is open to the public in Alabama. Interpretation
of the house by the historical society serves about 2000 school children annually. The Sadler House’s cedar shake roof has deteriorated and must be replaced to protect the house and its contents. A new cedar shake roof is estimated to cost $30,000. Other appropriate roofing systems are being explored, but a substantial capital campaign is required to reroof the historic house with the proper materials. A grant from the Alabama Historical Commission to repair the roof requires matching gifts from private citizens and organizations.

The abandoned Sadler Cemetery is located in a remote part of the county and is subject to vandalism. A public awareness campaign is needed to improve understanding about the early Alabama pioneers buried in the Sadler Cemetery, and fundraising is needed to finance the cleaning and policing of the property.

For more information about the preservation of the Sadler House and Cemetery, contact the West Jefferson County Historical Society, Randy Johnson, 205-616-8092, trandyjohnson@bellsouth.net, P.O. Box 184, Bessemer, AL 35021.

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**Montgomery Theatre Building/Webber Building**

**Montgomery, Montgomery County**

The Montgomery Theatre Building, also known as the Webber Building, (ca. 1858) was nominated by Old Alabama Town/Landmarks Foundation with the consent of the City of Montgomery, which owned the building briefly in an effort to broker a deal to insure its preservation. The antebellum brick theatre building located two blocks from Court Square suffered the collapse of one three-story exterior brick wall in 2014 during renovation efforts that were subsequently stalled. The building was stabilized but the gaping hole constituted a public safety hazard. In April, the City sold the building for $1 to the developers of adjacent historic properties with the expectation that the developers will deconstruct the historic fabric of the building and salvage everything possible, including the building’s historic footprint. Plans for the corner property include adaptation to an open plaza or courtyard that will improve access to, and emergency egress from, otherwise land-locked historic structures that are under renovation in the core of Montgomery’s historic downtown.

For more information, contact Marion Baab, Montgomery Landmarks Foundation, at 334-240-4500.