

## MHDC Newsletter March 2017



The Mobile Historic Development Commission saves buildings and neighborhoods. The Mobile Historic Development Commission is a department of the City of Mobile, under the direction of an independent volunteer Commission. The Commission is composed of representatives of various civic and public entities. The staff is a group of four professionals and a secretary who do the work of the organization, and serve as staff for the City's Architectural Review Board.

### Why have the Mobile Historic Development Commission?

During the 1960s and 1970s the City of Mobile lost many of its historic buildings. The City recognized that this loss had serious repercussions for our community. The MHDC was formed to protect and enhance our historic resources. Since its founding in 1962, the MHDC has placed 14 districts in Mobile on the National Register of Historic Places. Each of these is protected by City Ordinances. The Commission has also worked to list a number of buildings individually on the National Register. The staff applies for grants that help with a number of its projects including brochures of the historic districts, publishing guidelines for the review boards, and other activities. The mandate for the MHDC has gone beyond the recognizing of a few historic buildings. Today, the staff handles many requests for information, researches buildings, conducts seminars, offers tours, assists with tax credit projects and provides technical expertise. The part time volunteer staff that began the work of the MHDC has grown to a department that performs work ensuring the continuation and preservation of our common heritage. (MHDC Website)

*"For decades engineers have stood accused that their buildings do not have any cultural value. We have attempted to liberate engineering of this accusation." — Fritz Todt*

# *March 2017 – A Glimpse into Church Street East*

## *Losses – A need for MHDC*

### *A City Progressing without Recognition of the Past*

(Photographs and information courtesy of Thomas McGehee/Facebook)



*In 1893 a turreted villa arrived on the south east corner of Government and Hamilton streets, designed by local architect Rudolph Benz for physician Angelo Festorazzi. The cost for the home, complete with elaborate inlaid woodwork, was \$8,500.*

The doctor's widow eventually converted her home into the Festorazzi Apartments and fought unsuccessfully in court to prevent Urban Renewal from seizing her house. She lost and by 1967 the house was gone and in the midst of being replaced by Spanish Plaza, a park dedicated to the Spanish heritage of Mobile.

*The Jonathon Emanuel home which once occupied the southwestern corner of Government and Joachim streets and dated to 1836. Emanuel had arrived from New York in the 1820's where he had married a widow named Isabella King. Emanuel prospered as a merchant at first and was also president of an insurance company, a director of the Mobile & Ohio Railroad and the Mobile Chamber of Commerce.*

The Emanuel home was also bequeathed to the church which rented it to a woman who operated as a rooming house until 1923. The neighborhood had been slowly evolving to commercial and in that year the Shriners purchased the house and spent the astronomical sum of \$250,000 renovating the structure as a meeting space.

The fortunes of the Shriners took a hit during the depression and the house was lost twice, finally succumbing to foreclosure in 1938. The new Bankhead Tunnel was under construction and the property was thought to be an excellent location for a hotel.

The Admiral Semmes Hotel was up and ready to handle the masses of traffic spewing forth from the new tunnel and has occupied the corner ever since.





### A Lost Block of Mansions in Mobile, Ala.

A late 19th century view of Mobile's Church Street looking west from Jackson to Claiborne Street. The handsome line up of Greek Revival mansions dating to the 1840's-50's was not lost on the photographer.

By the 1920's these houses had all been subdivided and urban renewal took the rest in the early 1960's. The offices and parking lot of the Mobile Housing Board now fill the block.

*A GREAT TRAGEDY* - A courthouse for Mobile County arrived on the south west corner of Government and Royal streets in 1822 and for more than a century and a half a structure for that purpose dominated this intersection.



Fire took the 1822 building in 1851 and an 1864 fire from a defective flue took most of the replacement. The 1872 version went up in smoke in 1888.

Here is the 4th County Courthouse designed in 1889 by German-born architect Rudolph Benz. Period postcards termed the structure "German Renaissance" when that relatively new nation was much admired for its leading influence in science, medicine and culture.

In the pediment is a coat of arms for the State of Alabama. The three figures topping this were allegorical of Law (reclining with a book) Unity (at center holding the fasces of the republic) and on the right, Wisdom with an owl.

This image shows an impressive pedestal awaiting a monument of some sort. Perhaps this was the planned site for the statue of Admiral Semmes which was delayed for some time until placed in its current location to the east.

An annex to the south was added in 1908 and contained more courtrooms and a new jail, complete with indoor gallows.

A trio of hurricanes and time took its toll. Many Mobilians remember it with its lilliputian replacement cupola and shorn of its statuary and corner towers. Most of that statuary would become landfill but a pair of lions survived and were later restored and placed within Mobile's History Museum thanks to the efforts of the Friends of the Museum.

For once, fire was not the cause of losing this historic building. The wreckers arrived in 1957 to make way for a new courthouse. It has now met the same fate and the lot is being prepared for a park honoring Mobile's position as "the Mother of Mystics."



*In Progress - MHDC always here to help*

*A Church Rebuilding It's Past*

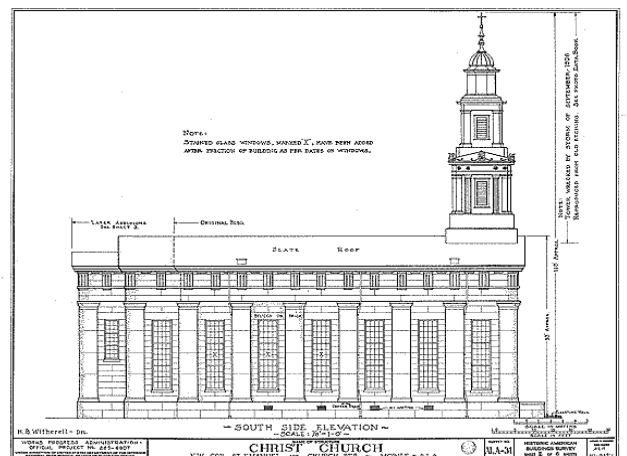
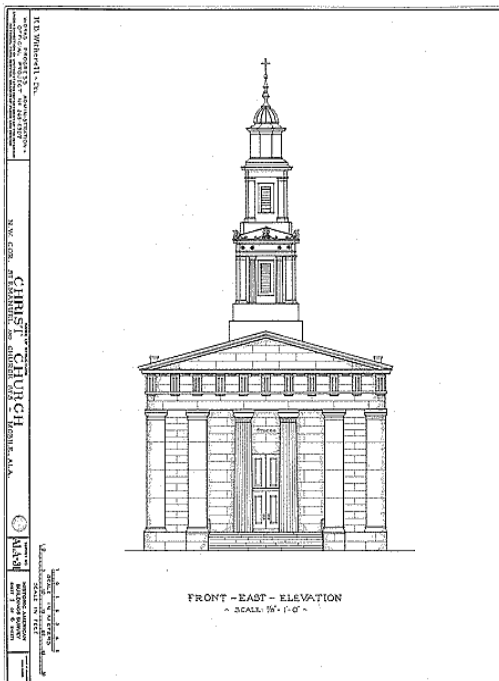


be rebuilt following the 1906 disaster, features stained glass windows. In 2005, the church became the cathedral of the Episcopal Diocese of the Central Gulf Coast. It serves as the seat of the Bishop.

Christ Episcopal is now in the process of rebuilding it's steeple that once graced this beautiful building. Once complete, it will be one of the highlights of the Church Street East District.

*Cornerstone* for the present 'Greek revival' style building was laid in 1835 and it took seven years to complete the construction. It was consecrated in 1842 by Leonidas Polk, the Bishop of Louisiana and Alabama. The Bishop was also nick named as "Sewanee's Fighting Bishop" because he later joined the Confederate States Army during the American Civil war and commanded an Artillery Corps in the capacity of Lieutenant General. The word "Sewanee" denotes the place where he founded the University of the South.

In 1906 a major hurricane devastated the Mobile area and the storm blew the original steeple through the roof. It was never replaced. The church assumed its modern appearance without the steeple. The interior, which had to



## *Wins - A feeling of pride*

### *A City Recognizing It's Greatest Attributes*



#### *Southern Market & City Hall*

The building was originally planned by the city in 1854 as the principal city marketplace for selling vegetables, meat, and fish. In February 1855 it was decided that the building would also house some of the municipal offices with approval on 1 June 1855 of \$44,000 in municipal bonds to pay for construction. The architect for this initial building phase was Thomas Simmons James, a Mobile architect originally from Virginia. On 27 December 1855, while the new building was under construction, the existing city hall on Conti and Jackson Street burned. As a consequence, in May 1856,

the city passed a resolution approving \$40,000 to complete and expand the building with accommodation for the mayor, city clerk, city treasurer, and two city boards. Payment receipts indicate that the building was completed by 20 April 1857.

In 1910 the building was altered by architect William L. Denham. A new council chamber was added above a new second floor bridge connecting the front and back of the central sections. The original open passageway between the two central sections was enclosed to create an entrance lobby and the stairway was reoriented to the east wall of the lobby. The complex was altered again in the mid 1930s by architect Frederick W. Clarke. Most of the work involved infilling some of the formerly open spaces with interior spaces. Also, murals by John Walker depicting scenes from local Mobile history were painted at this time. The complex was damaged by Hurricane Frederic on 12 September 1979, causing the tenants at that time to vacate the building. It was later restored.

Beginning in 1997 the building was renovated to house the History Museum of Mobile. An addition was added to the back of the building in 2000 to house the Museum's permanent exhibits and staff offices. The museum was closed for repairs for approximately six months following flood damage from Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

The exhibits cover two large floors of the complex and chronicle 300 years of Mobile history. The museum normally has a six-month-long featured exhibit, special collections exhibits that are rotated periodically, and several permanent exhibits. The permanent exhibits include: the *Old Ways New Days* exhibit that explores Mobile's history from colonization to the present; the *Walls and Halls* exhibit featuring furniture, antique silver, artwork, and other artifacts.







### Conde-Charlotte House

The house had its beginnings in 1822 as Mobile's first courthouse and city jail, and was built between the southern bastions of Fort Condé. The fort itself was in the process of being demolished at the time. In 1849 the site was purchased by Jonathan Kirkbride from Mount Holly in New Jersey and the old courthouse and jail were converted into a kitchen wing, attached to the newly built main house. The residence would remain in

the Kirkbride family until 1905, when it was purchased by B. J. Bishop. The site was purchased by the Historic Mobile Preservation Society in 1940 and a partial restoration was undertaken. It was during this time that the outlines of four of the old jail cells were discovered in the kitchen wing. The restoration would later be completed by The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America.

The Conde-Charlotte house and its surroundings became isolated from the rest of the city with the construction of Interstate 10 and urban renewal. Most of the surrounding neighborhood, one of the oldest in Mobile, was demolished to make way for the interstate project. The most notable section of the neighborhood that was destroyed was the early multi-storied townhouses of Bloodgood's Row along Monroe Street. The new construction left only a small one block section of Theatre, Monroe, and Saint Emanuel streets intact afterward, surrounded by a circle of interstate and its associated entrance and exit ramps. With the foundations of Fort Condé being discovered during tunnel construction, a replica fort was rebuilt on the old site after the George Wallace Tunnel was finished. The fort is now a backdrop to the Conde-Charlotte house. In recent years the city has made attempts to develop this area into "Fort Condé Village", which has seen the relocation and restoration of period appropriate buildings and the addition of brick streets and gas street lamps.



Historic Mobile Preservation Society presents:

2017 Historic not just Homes Tour – showcasing Church Street East



48th... HMPS 2017  
**HISTORIC  
not just  
HOMES  
TOUR ...**



**HISTORIC MOBILE  
PRESERVATION SOCIETY**



Friday, MARCH 10 & Saturday MARCH 11

**Homes Tour Tickets \$25 Prior, \$30 Day of Tour**  
**Special Events Tickets & Walking Tours \$10 / Order on Facebook & POS**

**Special Events Fri & Sat**

- Author & Historian, **John Sledge**, Booksigning & Church Street Graveyard
- Past President, Historic Mobile Preservation Society, **Bob Allen**, Church Street Graveyard
- Architectural Historian, **Carl Blackwell**, Church Street East Historic
- Award Winning Architects, **Nicholas H. Holmes III, AIA**, Friday, & **Douglas B. Kearley, AIA**, Saturday, Architecture of Grace Lutheran Church" - Celebrating their 150th Anniversary
- Horticulturist, Downtown Alliance, **Hap Kern**, Grace Lutheran Church, "Plantings of Mobile"
- Author, *Mobile Under Siege*, **Paula Webb**, Christ Episcopal Church, Booksigning/Discussion
- Museum Director, Bellingrath Gardens & Home, **Tom McGehee**, Government St. Presbyterian Church, "Lost Church Street East"
- Historian, **Ann J. Pond PhD**, "Creoles, Cotton Brokers & Yellow Fever Antebellum Mobile", Government St. First Baptist Church



**EVENT SPONSOR**

For Tickets, Questions or to Volunteer, please see their

Facebook page at:

<https://www.facebook.com/HistoricMobilePreservationSociety/>

## *Speaking on Real Estate in the Church Street East District*

Ivy Thompson with Roberts Brothers Realty said “Church Street East is one of the most desirable neighborhoods in historic Mobile. Because of this, property can be hard to come by. Homes for sale in popular Church Street East typically have very few days on the market. As you can see, It doesn’t take long to fall in love with this neighborhood and all of its unmistakable old Mobile Charm.”

## *A Historic District Coming Together to Help Its Namesake*

(A neighborhood blurb by Bill Boswell of Leinkauf Historic District)

Leinkauf Historic District surrounds Leinkauf Elementary School, the neighborhoods' namesake. Named for former educator W.H. Leinkauf, this school was built in 1903 as a one story, four classroom facility. Leinkauf School has the distinction of being the oldest continuously operating school in the State of Alabama. Heavily damaged by fire in 1993, it was historically reconstructed and additional facilities were added to enlarge the campus. The school now encompasses roughly 2 city blocks.

### **What is LEAP?**

LEAP, Leinkauf Elementary Arts Project, is an after-school and summer program designed to ensure high quality, expanded learning opportunities which occur outside of regular school hours for children in a safe and sound educational environment. Classes are held at the historic Leinkauf Elementary School.

The LEAP program will include the visual arts, music, dance and theatre and is currently funded by a 21st Century Community Learning Program Grant that was awarded to Leinkauf Elementary in 2016. The Leinkauf Historic District Neighborhood Organization (LHDNO) partnered with the school to receive the grant and has committed to be the primary partner to help provide funds and resources to expand and sustain the program. The grant for the STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) programs amounts to \$150,000 a-year for 3 years.

The community's partnership with Leinkauf Elementary will contribute to the development of a vision and a plan for the program's financial capacity to support and eventually sustain itself after the three-year grant funding ends.

LEAP has started small with 20 students for the initial spring semester beginning in January 2017 with participants chosen who made application through Leinkauf Elementary. The program will be expanded next year to include four classes of 20 students each, for a total of 80 students. As funding increases, more students will be included in the program.

LHDNO and its sponsors and supporters have begun its fund raising activities and will be announcing further events in the coming months. The long range plan is to create a Leinkauf Arts Festival to benefit LEAP and other neighborhood projects.

To donate or volunteer your time or talents and find out more about LEAP, please visit the LEAP website: (<http://www.leinkaufneighborhood.com/leap.html>). LHDNO is a 501c3 non-profit. Email [leinkaufleap@gmail.com](mailto:leinkaufleap@gmail.com) with any questions.



## *A Museum Bringing Awareness to the Field of Medicine*

The Mobile Medical Museum is pleased to announce the launch of a new medical history writing contest, open to all Mobile area public, private and home school students in grades 6 through 8. Students may participate as a class or individually. The Museum is offering free tours from now through April 14, 2017, for participating students and their chaperones.

Due to space limitations, classes of more than 20 students that tour the museum will split into two rotating groups. The first group will tour the museum, while the second group will participate in a hands-on activity using x-ray slides of a human skeleton.

After touring the museum, students will select a person, artifact, or episode from medical history to serve as the focal point for their writing project. The project may be an original narrative, play, song, poem, journal entry (as told by a medical professional), or any other creative writing form that will convey this rich history and showcase their writing skills.

Sponsoring teachers will be accepting submissions on behalf of the Mobile Medical Museum through Friday, April 21, 2017. Submissions will be judged by a panel of educators, led by MCPSS teachers Ms. Stephanie Legrone and Ms. Johnnie Williams. Cash prizes will be awarded to the winners at a public ceremony in May, 2017: \$500.00 for first place, \$250.00 for second place, and \$100.00 for third place. A limited number of \$25.00 gift cards from NASCO will also be awarded to sponsoring teachers on a first come, first served basis.

For more information, contact Daryn Glassbrook, Executive Director, at (251) 415-1109 or [admin@mobilemedicalmuseum.org](mailto:admin@mobilemedicalmuseum.org).

## *Calendar of Events March 2017*

*Spring Tea*

at the

*Bragg-Mitchell Mansion*

*Friday, March 10, 2017*

2:00pm to 5:00pm

Adults \$15 (\$17 at-the-door, subject to availability)

Children (12yrs. and under) \$10 (\$12 at-the-door, subject to availability)

The Bragg-Mitchell Mansion is hosting its annual Spring Tea fundraiser. Guests are invited to enjoy delicious finger sandwiches and light hors d'oeuvres, hot/cold tea and an informal look at one of Mobile's most iconic antebellum homes. Visitors will be served in the Bragg-Mitchell tea rooms and, weather permitting, on the veranda overlooking the Mansion's beautifully landscaped lawn, shaded by more than a dozen century-old Live Oaks. Following refreshments,

guests will enjoy a historical tour of the grand mansion where one can experience the grandeur of life in the Old South.

Proceeds from the event will benefit the restoration and operation of the Bragg-Mitchell Mansion. For questions, please contact the Bragg-Mitchell Mansion at (251)471-6364.



### *Old Dauphin Way*

Old Dauphin Way will hold their March General Meeting on Thursday, March 9, 2017 from 7:00pm-8:00pm at St. Mary's Catholic School.

### *MHDC Preservation Class Schedule*

*April 25<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

History of Mobile – John Sledge, Senior Architectural Historian of the MHDC

*May 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2017*

Architectural History of Mobile – Cartledge Blackwell, Assistant Director of the MHDC

*May 9<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

Bricks and Mortar Tour

*May 16<sup>th</sup>, 2017*

Historic House Tour

*May 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2017*

Tour of Magnolia Cemetery