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DONNA CASTELLANO

### **A Brief History of the Twickenham Historic District**

It has been forty years since the Huntsville-Madison County Historical Society sent a letter to the Huntsville City Council expressing its concern about the rapid growth of the city and the necessity to preserve historic buildings and places. The letter recommended that “the City act by ordinance to set up a Historic Commission for the purpose of creating a zone epitomizing ‘Historic Huntsville.’ We further recommend that the ordinance provide for the preservation of the area so zoned.” The Historical Society was joined in its efforts by the Antiquarian Society of Huntsville, the Huntsville Planning Commission, and the local chapter of the American Institute of Architects, whose members volunteered to evaluate the structures to be preserved. The district boundaries were drawn to encompass many of the early architectural treasures and reflect the architectural history of the community.



403 White Street, Victorian, ca. 1893

*Except where noted all photos courtesy Lynne Berry Lowery*

In 1965, the Twickenham Historic Preservation District Association (THPDA) was organized to promote the creation of the district and to aid the city in acquiring the necessary legislation at the state level to permit establishment of a commission empowered to enforce regulations needed to maintain the integrity of the district. After considerable opposition from some who disliked the idea of enforced regulation, the state legislature

in 1971 passed acts which provided that when 60 percent of property owners within proposed boundaries of the district petitioned the city for its creation, the Twickenham Historic District could become a reality. On March 23, 1972, the city council passed an ordinance that gave legal status to the district and provided for the Huntsville Historic Preservation Commission of nine members charged with its oversight.

Since its creation in 1972, the THPDA has directed much of its energy toward the preservation of the Weeden House, the birthplace of Huntsville artist Maria Howard Weeden. After saving the house from plans to demolish it because of damage sustained in a house fire, THPDA restored and operated the home as a house museum. The Huntsville Housing Authority agreed to purchase the Weeden property from THPDA in 1975 so that a federal HUD grant of \$90,000 could provide the major portion of the restoration cost.

After indications that the city could no longer provide funding for the operation and maintenance costs of the Weeden House, THPDA assumed sole financial responsibility for the property in 2001. Since that time, the association has focused its fundraising activities on the house. THPDA raised \$50,000 and received a matching grant from the Alabama Historical Commission for the Weeden House in the spring of 2002. Other THPDA projects include this year's plan to create a community park and garden on the property located at the corner of White and California Streets.



*413 Randolph Avenue, Greek Revival, ca. 1851*

While promoting historic preservation through its stewardship of the Weeden House, the Twickenham Historic District has maintained its commitment to preserve historic architecture through the expansion of the district. In 2000, residents of Newman Avenue and of some portions of California Street and Lowe Avenue joined with THPDA and successfully petitioned the Huntsville City Council to have the boundaries of the district expanded to include property on these streets. The addition of these streets expanded the district to encompass the southeast quadrant of Huntsville as it existed in 1861.



*414 Randolph Avenue, Federal, ca. 1832*

## Old Town Historic District



Adapted from City of Huntsville maps