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## From the Nomination to the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage

Historic Huntsville Foundation

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## FROM THE NOMINATION TO THE ALABAMA REGISTER OF LANDMARKS AND HERITAGE

Not all historic districts in our area are primarily residential neighborhoods. Alabama A&M University, a major educational institution in Madison County, is a locally designated historic preservation district, and it is listed on the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage (August 3, 1990) and the National Register of Historic Places (December 31, 2001).

A&M, originally known as the Colored Normal School, was chartered in 1873, serving as a teacher's training school for black students. In 1891, the name was changed to the State Agricultural and Mechanical College for Negroes, and the school moved from its location in a house on West Clinton Street in Huntsville to its present location in the northeastern part of the city. A 200-acre plot on "Normal Hill" containing the Green Bottom Inn had been purchased from Henry Turner in September 1891 even though construction on Palmer and Seay Halls was already nearing completion. The reason for this discrepancy in the dates is unknown.

William Hooper Council, the school's founder and its president for thirty-five years, won a major fight against Tuskegee and Montgomery State to have A&M designated as a state land grant school for blacks under the Morrell Act of 1890. This recognition resulted in sharply increased funding by the state and the beginning of new building construction.

Most of the historic buildings on the campus, however, were constructed during the presidency of Joseph Fanning Drake, 1927-1962. Drake was known as "the builder" because he accomplished so much for the school, even during the Great Depression. By 1928 construction was begun on Bibb Graves Hall and the J. F. Drake Dining Hall. During his presidency Drake constructed forty-one buildings, including numerous agricultural structures, the Gymnasium-Auditorium, Hurt Hall, Hillcrest and Council Hall. Three earlier structures remain: the recently restored Carnegie Library, the Domestic Science Building, and the Virginia McCormick Hospital.

Drake also managed to acquire more than 700 acres of land for the university. In 1929 the college purchased 160.64 acres located west of Meridian Street from Frank Mastin. Another parcel of 180 acres east of Meridian Street and south of the Turner property was purchased in 1945 from W. A. Ware, and in 1954 Thomas S. Dark sold his 275.49 acres located west of Meridian Street and south of the Mastin tract to the college. In 1932 the school became an accredited junior college and in 1939 it became a four-year college. In 1949 the name was changed to Alabama A&M College, and in 1969 university status was achieved.



*Old Carnegie Library, Alabama A&M University, 1904 and 1946  
Courtesy SKT Architects*