

DRAFT INTERPRETIVE PLAN

Muscle Shoals National
Heritage Area



INTRODUCTION & OVERVIEW

The Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area (MSNHA) contains a rich, diverse collection of historic, cultural, and natural resources. Many resources are listed in the National Register of Historic Places or in the Alabama Register. There are also several state and local parks and wildlife management areas. Some resources have existing organizations dedicated to the interpretation of a major theme of the heritage area. Just one example is the Oakville Indian Mounds Education Center. Other resources exist as annual festivals that help interpret a theme, such as the W.C. Handy Music Festival in Florence. There are numerous historical markers throughout the heritage area that support one or more of the major interpretive themes or sub-themes. Visitor centers in the heritage area offer an array of informational brochures. Some of these are city or county-level pamphlets listing sites and events and perhaps include maps. Others are site or event-specific, and still others provide directions for a walking tour of historic architectural sites in neighborhoods and towns.

A1. REQUIREMENTS FOR INTERPRETATION

Interpretation is one of the key components of a management plan and figures prominently in the legislation establishing the heritage area. The goals and objectives stated in the legislation for the management plan include:



The primary goal of the Interpretation Plan for the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area is to: 1) expand on the interpretive themes of the heritage area; 2) identify the resources that represent these themes; and 3) recommend specific techniques for interpreting the stories and resources of the MSNHA. The themes are based on both the Vision Statement and Mission of the heritage area and are

intended to ensure that the interpretive goals reach its audience and meet the purpose of the heritage area. The Mission of the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area per this management plan is to:

“Present, preserve and promote the cultural heritage resources of the Muscle Shoals region.”

After a series of public meetings and workshops, a number of goals and objectives were formulated for the management plan as part of the federally required Foundation Statement. One of these was Goal 2, *“Conduct research, education and interpretation related to the MSNHA’s primary themes as a means of documenting and telling the story of the Heritage Area’s unique cultural identity.”* Specific objectives included:

- 2-A - Support and/or sponsor research into the various themes associated with the MSNHA.
- 2-B - Establish an oral history program utilizing high school and/or college students within the MSNHA to record histories from individuals that address the Heritage Area’s primary themes.
- 2-C - Create an educational curriculum with the Heritage Area’s grade schools and high schools to teach the MSNHA’s primary themes which might be supplemented by field trips.
- 2-D - Develop one or more interpretive centers for the MSNHA. Also, existing or planned facilities that are separate initiatives by other entities might be leveraged to achieve this objective.
- 2-E- Develop a series of theme-based tours for walking, cycling and driving. Some tours might be at the community scale, while others are at the Heritage Area scale. Also, a variety of media might be utilized for interpretation, including printed maps/brochures and telecommunications.
- 2-F - Create a series of educational and interpretive materials telling the MSNHA’s story. In addition to more conventional materials, such as brochures, a coffee table book on the Heritage Area’s resources and stories might be developed, as well as web-based materials.
- 2-G - Program sites/attractions throughout the MSNHA with regular or periodic living history demonstrations and events.

It is noteworthy that, in transforming these goals and objectives into the plan’s subsequent Strategies section, some of them have been at least modestly modified. For example, Objective 2-B has been adapted to add middle school students to the possible students for recording oral histories. Likewise, Objective 2-D has been modified to not suggest “developing” interpretive centers, but rather to conduct feasibility studies to determine the viability of such centers, while also considering more cost-effective approaches, such as leveraging existing facilities and utilizing interpretive kiosks.



The Givens Interpretive Center at the Wheeler Wildlife Refuge is one example of an existing facility that can be leveraged in lieu of a new interpretive center.

To achieve this Mission, interpretive themes for the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area build upon the three core themes of the region. These primary themes are: 1) Native American heritage, 2) The Tennessee River, and 3) Music. Sub-themes and stories associated with these primary themes provide greater detail and insight into the area’s rich trove of resources remaining on the cultural landscape. *The following summary of the themes and sub-themes also introduces for the first time in this management plan an Interpretive Statement for each theme and sub-theme.* These statements are based on the regional and national significance of the Muscle Shoals region and connect the region’s

resources to the themes in a tangible way. The Interpretive Statements are designed to communicate the current relevance of the themes, how the themes can be approached in the future, and how to make them as accessible to the general public as possible.

The first part of this section summarizes the interpretive themes, sub-themes, and Interpretive Statements within the heritage area. *The themes and sub-themes were presented previously in detail in the Background Study of this plan.* Relating the message and themes for various audiences is an important part of the interpretation planning process, and the existing and potential audiences are addressed. The next section of the Interpretive Plan examines existing resources and how the themes and stories are currently presented to the target audiences. Finally, the plan provides recommendations for linkage among the region's cultural and natural resources, and methods for enhancing interpretation and reaching a wider audience.

A2. INTERPRETIVE STATEMENTS

Interpretive themes are the intangible concepts that relate the significance of the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area. These interpretive themes are perceived, in part, through the tangible historic, cultural, and natural resources found within the Heritage Area. The themes often overlap or intertwine with one another and connect the many cities, towns, and communities that produced those resources.

Three dominant themes characterize the history of the six-county region of the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area: Native American history, the influence of the Tennessee River, and local contributions to American popular music. Numerous sub-themes have also been identified, including the agricultural economy and the Civil War. The river is credited for the fertile bottomland that supported vast cotton plantations and also made North Alabama a strategic location during the Civil War. The river is the thread that weaves together the major and minor themes, encouraging Indian and European-American habitation, providing a potential inland waterway across 600 miles, as well as a source of hydropower, and inspiring uniquely American musical traditions. These themes and sub-themes are repeated below, along with the introduction of their accompanying new Interpretive Statements:





The balance of this Interpretive Plan will illustrate how the three dominant interpretive themes inter-relate. Furthermore, sub-themes will be identified and will also interconnect. The themes and sub-themes are represented in the many historic sites, museums, festivals, parks and trails, archaeological sites, memorial monuments, transportation corridors, nature conservations, downtowns, and small rural communities within the heritage area.

Elsewhere in this management plan, resources are grouped by theme, as well as by county (please see the Cultural Resources Inventory within this plan's Background Study). A visitor may, therefore, be able to understand the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area as a whole, even if only stopping in a single town or following one thematic tour. The interconnection of the themes and sub-themes is discernible across the landscape and conveys an integrated understanding of the unique character of the entire heritage area.

A. EXISTING APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATION

B1. INTRODUCTION

The Muscle Shoals region contains over 100 historic sites that currently have some form of recognition. The majority of these sites are associated with at least one of the themes and sub-themes identified for the MSNHA. Some sites are already marketed to tourists and get thousands of visitors each year. Others are relatively unknown and lack any significant interpretation. The Muscle Shoals authentic music sites remain largely un-interpreted, even though the music recorded there influenced an entire generation. Overall, the sites offer a great diversity and viewpoints on the prehistory and history of the region. However, there are challenges in the interpretation of the MSNHA's cultural resources, which are summarized as follows:

- *Where Am I? Lack of Directional Signage* – Some historic and natural sites are well-marked with directional signage at reasonable intervals. However, many other venues do not have sufficient signage to orient and direct the visitor. Existing signage is of various designs and sizes and, for most themes and sub-themes, there is little consistency.



Decatur is one of the few MSNHA communities with effective wayfinding for general areas, but individual sites are more difficult to find.

- *What Happened Here? Insufficient Information* – While many of the historic sites are marked and are accessible to the public, once you get there it can be difficult to understand the site's importance and story. For example, the Town Creek Civil War Battlefield has one historic marker, but there are opportunities to obtain property at this site and provide additional wayside exhibits. Wayside exhibits at the region's many train depots are also needed to discuss their construction, how their operations affected their communities, and how they have been preserved or adaptively reused.
- *What is this Museum Trying to Tell Me? Unfocused or Incorrect Interpretation* – Many of the museums in the region tell their stories well and have good interpretation. Others lack focus, have outdated exhibits, or tell stories that are factually incorrect or lack sufficient context. Most of the museums lack professional staff, rely on volunteers, and do not have long-range plans for financial stability. Assistance with volunteer training, short-term and long-term planning, and reassessments of exhibits and interpretation is needed at many of the heritage area's small and medium-sized museums.
- *What Else is There to See? Insufficient Connection with Related Sites* – While there are a number of tours that detail similar or related sites, there is not enough linkage between many of the related sites in the region.

The following overview examines the existing approaches to interpretation practiced in the region. This section is followed by goals and recommendations for future interpretive efforts. A detailed description of thematic tours is included in the Appendix of this Interpretive Plan, and more descriptive information on each site is located in the Appendices of this management plan's Background Study.

B2. EXISTING SITE INTERPRETATION BY THEME

Theme 1: Native American Heritage

Prehistoric Era

This era refers to the period prior to European settlement of North America, which began during the late-15th century.

Sites Lacking Accessibility & Interpretation

One of the challenges in interpreting prehistoric Native American sites in the region is the sensitive nature of these sites. While numerous sites are listed in the National Register, most addresses are restricted and the public has little or no access for viewing the properties or receiving any kind of interpretive information. Many of these sites are on private land and the owners do not wish for any visitation to prevent looting of artifacts or other types of ground disturbance. Examples of key prehistoric sites that have address restrictions include the LaGrange Rock Shelter and the Rock Creek Archaeological District in Colbert County. Visitation is permitted at the Kinlock Historic District in the Bankhead National Forest, which features a rock shelter dating to the Mississippian period. This site is accessible to hikers and there is a nearby historic marker. However, there is no significant interpretation via exhibits or markers at the site itself.

Other sites known to be traditional camping grounds or village sites from the prehistoric era do not have any signage, exhibits or other interpretation. The Five-Oaks Spring in Russellville is a Native American site and is listed in the Alabama Register, but there is no historical marker or other interpretive wayside displays at this location.

Sites with Access & Interpretation

Throughout the MSNHA are several Native American mounds with associated museums providing displays and other interpretive information. The most significant of these are the Indian Mound and Museum in Florence and the Oakville Indian Mounds Park in Lawrence County. The Florence museum features one of the largest mounds in the Tennessee Valley, along with exhibits such as projectile points and other artifacts. The Oakville Indian Mounds Park is a group of twenty mounds from the Middle Woodland Period and this site also contains a visitor center and museum. Artifacts within the museum range from the Paleoindian period to the Woodland period. However, interpretation improvements are needed at both sites.

Several Native American paths also extend through the heritage area, although the interpretation of these prehistoric highways is limited. The High Tower Path in the Bankhead National Forest is representative of these early trails, but there are only a few historic markers to denote its route. This path continued to be used by the Chickasaw, Creeks and Cherokee into the early 19th century.

Historic Era

The historic era refers to the occupation of the region by the Chickasaw, Creek and Cherokee tribes from the 15th century to the 1830s. These sites include villages, paths and home sites associated with the historic era of Native American occupation. They tend to be more readily accessible to the public than prehistoric sites and offer additional interpretive opportunities in the region.



Associated with the 1830s Trail of Tears, Tuscumbia Landing in Sheffield is an example of a historic era site.

Natchez Trace Resources

The historic roadbed of the Natchez Trace is well interpreted by the National Park Service where it extends through the northwestern corner of Colbert County. Originally a Native American Trace, the Natchez Trace was a significant route of trade between the Nashville and New Orleans during the early 19th century. Buzzards Roost is the site of a spring that served an inn owned by Levi Colbert, a trader and ferry operator of Scotch and Chickasaw heritage. Historical markers at these sites detail the influence of the Colbert brothers, not only on local transportation, but on Chickasaw tribal affairs during the first three decades of the 19th century.

Trail of Tears Resources & Events

Prior to European settlement, the Muscle Shoals region was occupied by the historic tribes of the Chickasaw, Creeks and Cherokee. These tribes were moved out of Alabama by the 1830s in what became known as the "Trail of Tears." Several sites associated with Indian removal are in the region. The most significant historic site is Tuscumbia Landing, which was a steamboat landing on the Tennessee River in present-day Sheffield. It connected with the Tuscumbia, Courtland & Decatur Railroad and was used to transport Cherokee in 1838 during the Trail of Tears. This site is presently closed to the public, but the National Park Service and local officials are currently studying the site to plan for its use and interpretation. There are also a number of contemporary commemorative sites and events that honor the Trail of Tears. The Sacred Tears Statue in Spring Park in Tuscumbia includes bronze statues and plaques honoring the many people of different tribes who traveled the Trail of Tears. In Lauderdale County, near the Natchez Trace, is the Tom Hendrix Memorial Wall erected to tell the story of the Trail of Tears. Also, the Trail of Tears Commemorative Motorcycle Ride attracts thousands of riders who cycle along U.S. 72 through the region.

Theme 2: Tennessee River

The theme of the Tennessee River incorporates many sub-themes associated with the historical, economic, and architectural legacy of the region. This theme is currently interpreted in a variety of methods, including walking and driving tours, local museums, wayside exhibits, and historical markers.

The Agricultural Economy

The Agricultural Economy sub-theme focuses on the 19th century agricultural development of the region. The development of the cotton industry was particularly important, and along the Tennessee River and its tributaries are excellent examples of the Federal, Greek Revival and other ante-bellum styles. This heritage is recognized and interpreted in Limestone County through the "Antebellum Trail Driving Tour," which provides an overview of the cotton economy of Limestone County before the Civil War and the types of "city" houses built by the area's rich planters, as well as rural plantation homes. In Decatur, the ante-bellum Old State Bank Building, the Dancy-Polk House, and Riverside are interpreted through historical markers at the street. In Lauderdale County are the ruins of the Fork of Cypress plantation house. This Greek Revival style mansion was destroyed in a fire, but its columns remain standing and there are intermittent tours of the property. Several of the private ante-bellum homes in the region are also open for tours on a seasonal basis.



The Ante-Bellum Trail in Limestone County is designated through tour stops and a driving tour.

The Civil War

The Civil War is an important part of the region's heritage, and this sub-theme has had extensive interpretive efforts.

Existing Tours & Sites

The "Alabama Civil War Trail," the state's self-guided driving tour brochure, describes the war in Alabama and important sites across the state. In the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area, "Forrest's North Alabama Cavalry Raid" is featured, along with short descriptions of the fighting at Athens and Sulphur Branch Trestle in September of 1864. The brochure also has information on the "Decatur Demonstration" of Hood's attempt to cross the Tennessee River with his army in October of 1864. The engagement at Town Creek is part of the tour of "Streight's Cavalry Raid" in 1863.



A walking and biking trail along the historic railroad bed leads to the Sulphur Creek Trestle Battlefield near Elkmont.

Separate walking and driving tours are also available for the Civil War sites in Limestone and Morgan Counties. The "Athens-Limestone County Civil War Trail" brochure provides information on the Civil War history of the county and the battles that took place during the war. The self-guided tour provides a map to visit sites such as Fort Henderson in Athens, the Sulphur Creek Trestle Battlefield, and the Athens City Cemetery, which contains 180 graves of Confederate soldiers. Decatur's Civil War Walking Tour is located in the Old Decatur and New Albany Historic Districts. This self-guided walking tour includes thirteen total blocks and chronicles events surrounding Confederate General John Bell Hood's attempted advance across the Tennessee River, a four-day battle that took place in October of 1864. In Lawrence County is the site of the Town Creek Battlefield, and this site is commemorated through an Alabama Historical Association marker.

Civil War Museums

The MSNHA also has two museums that have substantial collections of Civil War artifacts. The Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives in Athens is located in the historic Louisville & Nashville Freight Depot and contains over 2,000 artifacts from the nation's wars, including the Civil War. The Blue and Gray: North Alabama Civil War Museum in Decatur is reputed to be the largest private collection of Civil War memorabilia in the country. This museum and relic shop is located in Downtown Decatur on Bank Street.

Earthworks

There are also some physical remains of earthworks on private property in the heritage area. The most notable of these are in Colbert County on the south side of the Tennessee River on TVA property. Erected by the Confederacy for the defense of Florence, these earthworks have the potential for visitation and interpretation. A potential historic district containing the earthworks was identified in a TVA archeological study in 2002. Also, remnants of the earthworks at Fort Henderson are also still accessible in Athens.

Historic House Museums

Near Hillsboro is Pond Spring, the home of Confederate General Joe Wheeler. Wheeler was an important cavalry leader during the Civil War and he built this house on his farm after the Civil War. In Florence, is also the Pope's Tavern, which was originally a stagecoach stop and later housed wounded soldiers during the war. Both Pond Spring and Pope's Tavern are open to the public and provide information for visitors.

Transportation

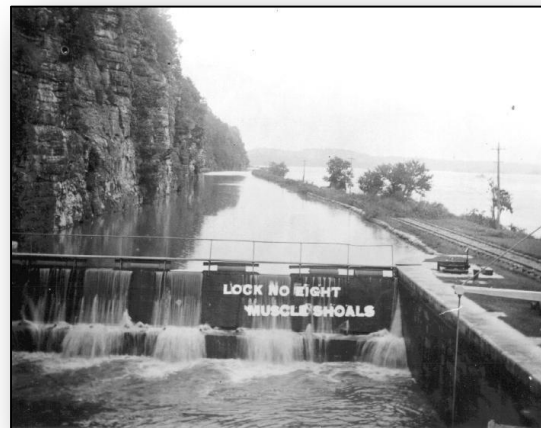
One of the major sub-themes of the Tennessee River is transportation and this heritage is reflected in historic roads, railroads and the river itself.

Historic Roads

Extending through the region are the historic roads of the Natchez Trace and Jackson's Military Road. The Natchez Trace extends through Colbert County and is well interpreted by the National Park Service. Extending from Nashville to Natchez, it started as a Native American trail and soon became used by early settlers. In Florence, the route of Jackson's Military Road is designated by several historic markers. This route from Nashville to New Orleans was established prior to the War of 1812, and it was improved with federal funds after the war and named after Andrew Jackson.

The River

Navigation on the Tennessee River through the Muscle Shoals was a continual challenge for local, state and federal officials in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The presence of the shoals restricted river transportation during much of the year and led to the construction of numerous railroads to move commerce and passengers. Efforts to circumvent the shoals by building a canal were also attempted in the 1830s, but this project was only partially successful. A remnant of this canal, Lock #3, is located at the mouth of Bluewater Creek and is accessible to boaters. No interpretive information concerning this structure is at this site. The need to provide dependable navigation on the river was a primary reason for the construction of Wilson Dam and later dams and locks built by the TVA. The history of the river and the difficulties of navigation are detailed in wayside exhibits at Wilson Dam and in historical information at the Muscle Shoals City Hall.



The Muscle Shoals Canal was one of several efforts to improve navigation on the river.

Railroad History

The presence of the shoals led to the construction of the first railroad west of the Appalachian Mountains, and this railroad is interpreted at several locations. Begun in 1832, the Tuscumbia-Courtland-Decatur Railroad was acquired by the Memphis and Charleston Railroad in 1850. In 1899, it merged into the Southern Railway, which built a depot in Decatur. Since 1982, the line has been operated by the Norfolk Southern Railroad, serving as a vital link between the Shoals and the city of Decatur. Its importance is interpreted at the Tuscumbia Railway Depot. Built in 1888, the depot was restored as a museum in 2005 and tells the history of the railroad and its significance. The railroad originally extended to the Tuscumbia Landing, and planning for interpreting this site is currently underway.

The railroad heritage of the region is also reflected in the large depots which stand in Decatur and Athens. The Southern Railway Depot in Decatur was built in 1904. The City of Decatur has proposed adaptive re-use plans for the building, but there is currently no interpretation of the building. In Athens is the Louisville & Nashville Freight Depot built in 1928. This building has been rehabilitated to house the Alabama Veterans Museum and Archives, but displays also detail the history of the building and its importance to the transportation history of Athens and the county.

Throughout the region are several smaller train depots, some of which have interpretive information and signage. These include the 1886 Elkmont Depot in Limestone County, which is open to the public as a senior citizen's center and contains interpretive information and memorabilia. Another interpreted railroad station is the Hartselle Depot built in 1914. The building contains displays provided by the Hartselle Historical Society that tell the story of the depot and the significance of the railroad to the growth and development of the city.



Elkmont's train depot is one of several in the region with great potential for interpretation.

Federal Highways

Several federal highways were built through the region in the early 20th century, including U.S. Highways 31 and 72. Interpretive information on these highways is limited to just a few historic markers. In Athens, the College Inn and Newby Gas Station are restored examples of the rise of the automobile culture of the early 20th century. The College Inn was a popular restaurant, while the station provided gas and other services to locals and visitors. Both buildings have been rehabilitated and can be toured.

Community Development

The Community Development sub-theme relates the river to the diversity of the communities that developed in the region. Communities such as Mooresville, Florence and Decatur evolved as important river towns, while others such as Hartselle and Elkmont were railroad towns. The historical and architectural development of these communities is interpreted through walking and driving tours, local museums, and markers and exhibits at historic sites.

Walking & Driving Tours

The architectural and historical development of the many of the communities can be understood through the walking and driving tours currently available. The Colbert County Historic Landmarks Foundation, Inc. offers a brochure for a self-guided walking tour through Tuscumbia. In Limestone County, Athens has a self-guided walking tour brochure for the Robert Beaty Historic District. This residential district is described in detail with information on many of its 19th and early 20th century residences. A walking tour is also available to tour the important early 19th century community of Mooresville in Limestone County.



While limited in their effectiveness, roadside markers are one form of existing interpretation for historic sites in Florence and the MSNHA.

"A Walking Tour of Historic Decatur, Alabama" is a self-guided walking tour of the Old Decatur and Albany Historic Districts. The tour features the remaining ante-bellum buildings in the downtown area, as well as dwellings from the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the two residential districts. Florence has walking and driving tours of downtown and eight residential historic districts surrounding the campus of University of North Alabama. A "Walking Tour of Courtland" provides visitors with a self-guided tour of over one hundred 19th and early 20th century homes and commercial buildings in the historic railroad community of Courtland. Seasonal tours are also available in communities such as Hartselle and Moulton.

A themed driving tour in the region is “The Hallelujah Trail.” This tour brochure highlights the religious development of the region in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The trail encompasses all of north Alabama’s sixteen counties, and twelve churches are featured in the six counties within the Muscle Shoals National Heritage Area. Except on Sunday, visitation would only be to the exteriors of the churches unless prior appointments are made. Limestone County has developed the “Glory Road Driving Tour” as a variation of the “Hallelujah Trail.” This self-guided tour takes visitors to 35 churches from the 19th and 20th centuries in Athens and throughout the county.

Historic House Museums

There are several historic house museums open to the public that interpret particular persons or architecture significant to this sub-theme. Belle Mont near Tuscumbia was built between 1828 and 1832 for Dr. Alexander W. Mitchell, and is notable for its Palladian design. The house was donated to the Alabama Historical Commission in 1983 and has since undergone a phased restoration. In Tuscumbia is Ivy Green, the birthplace of Helen Keller. This historic house museum tells the story of her prominent family of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and her own struggle to overcome her disabilities. Florence is the site of the Rosenbaum House, which was built in 1939 and the only property in Alabama designed by famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright. While the house is notable for its association with Wright and its Usonian style, the house also speaks to the social and economic vitality of Florence in the mid-20th century. This property is open for tours and provides interpretive information on the Rosenbaum family and Wright. In Athens is the Houston Memorial Library and Museum, which commemorates two-time Alabama Governor and U.S. Senator George S. Houston. The museum contains memorabilia associated with Houston, as well as the growth and development of Athens.

Other Sites & Museums

Other notable historic sites and museums in the MSNHA include the LaGrange College Site Park in Leighton. LaGrange College was established in 1830 and stood until it was burned during the Civil War. The site now contains a replica of a mountain town, a restored Civil War cemetery, and a marker commemorating the college. In Waterloo is the Edith Newman Culver Memorial Museum, which includes exhibits related to the Tennessee River and region. In Franklin County is the Red Bay Museum, which houses numerous artifacts from the town’s 19th and early 20th century growth and development. This museum also has displays relating to country music star Tammy Wynette and other regional music figures.

Industry and Hydroelectric Development

The sub-theme of industry and hydroelectric development is of particular importance to the region. The potential hydroelectric power of the Muscle Shoals was finally harnessed in 1918 when Wilson Dam was constructed. The dam and powerhouse not only increased navigation on the river, but also supplied abundant electric power to the region. This development led to increased industrial development, the creation of the city of Muscle Shoals and economic development of nearby Florence, Tuscumbia and Sheffield.



TVA provides information to visitors at its dams and powerhouses.

The interpretation of this heritage is limited, but visitors can view historical exhibits at the Muscle Shoals City Hall. The Wilson Dam, spanning the river between Colbert and Lauderdale Counties, is no longer open for guided tours, but there is a pull-off on the south side that offers an overlook and a wayside exhibits tell about the dam’s construction. The famous shoals are quite visible from this vantage point. Wheeler Dam, up-river from Wilson Dam, was built in the mid-1930s by TVA, and on the south bank of the river is a historical marker located near the visitor center parking lot at the base of the stairs leading to the power house. The marker explains how the TVA system protects the Tennessee Valley from

flooding and generates electrical power. In Sheffield is Nitrate Village No. 1, a unique collection of stuccoed Spanish Colonial and Bungalow designs built in 1918 for employees of the Wilson Dam construction project. This planned community is significant for its architecture and community planning. Although the village can be toured from the street, the directional signage to the village is not clear. An Alabama Historical marker is in the center of the village, but no other interpretation is available.

Theme 3: Music

The theme of music is of particular importance to the MSNHA because of its significance and potential tourist draw, but it is also one that presently offers very limited interpretive opportunities.

W.C. Handy Home and Museum

The most accessible music-themed site in the region is the W.C. Handy Home and Museum. W.C. Handy was born in a log house that has been reconstructed and moved to its present location in Florence. This building is open for tours, and the museum includes a library with books about Handy, music, and African American history and culture. Highlights include Handy's personal papers and sheet music in his handwriting.



W.C. Handy Home and Museum

Alabama Music Hall of Fame

A second key site that offers information on the music heritage of the region and state is the Alabama Music Hall of Fame in Tuscumbia. The Alabama Music Hall of Fame was established by the State Legislature in 1980 to preserve and promote the musical heritage of the state of Alabama. The current facility opened along US Highway 72 W. in 1990. This museum houses exhibits and artifacts related to the music industry, including Sam Phillips, W.C. Handy, Rick Hall and Buddy Killen. Unfortunately, it has recently struggled financially to remain open, and its relatively isolated location is such that it cannot leverage significant economic spin-off benefits to the area.

Red Bay Museum

In Red Bay is the Red Bay Museum, which contains a collection of memorabilia related to Tammy Wynette, the "First Lady of Country Music." Wynette was born in Tremont, Mississippi, eighteen miles southwest of Red Bay. Because of the small size of Tremont, she had a strong orientation toward Red Bay. The museum also contains memorabilia related to musicians Mac MacAnally, Jerry Bridges and others.

Recording Studios

The interpretation of the sound studios in the region is currently limited. The Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, the Cypress Moon Sound Studio, FAME Studio, and Wishbone Productions are working studios and can be accessed by appointment only.

Roots of America Music Trail

Visitors can also view additional sites by acquiring the informational brochure on the "Roots of American Music Trail." This brochure provides a map and information on the W.C. Handy Home and Museum, as well as the major sound studios in Sheffield, Muscle Shoals and Tuscumbia.

