

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections



1. Name

historic Old Tuscaloosa County Jail

and/or common V.F.W. Club

2. Location

street & number 2803 6th Street _____ not for publication

city, town Tuscaloosa _____ vicinity of _____ congressional district 7

state Alabama _____ code 01 _____ county Tuscaloosa _____ code 125

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: vacant

4. Owner of Property

name V.F.W. Club, Inc. c/o Mr. Walter Henly, Henly and Clark

street & number 2102 Bridge Avenue, P. O. Box 450

city, town Northport _____ vicinity of _____ state Alabama 35476

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Tuscaloosa County Courthouse

street & number 714 Greensboro Avenue

city, town Tuscaloosa _____ state Alabama

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Alabama Inventory _____ has this property been determined eligible? _____ yes no

date 1978 _____ federal state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records Alabama Historical Commission

city, town Montgomery _____ state Alabama

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The building now known as the V.F.W. Club was constructed in 1856 for the Tuscaloosa County Jail. It is a two-story solid brick structure with exterior walls 28 inches thick and is located in a middle-class neighborhood across the street from Capitol Park, the site of the old state capitol. A basic Georgian type, it has Federal influences in the interior woodwork, Greek Revival influences in the front door frontispiece and the pilastered effect of the raised corners and chimneys, and Italianate influences in the low hipped roof and deep eaves.

Front and rear elevations are identical with five bays per floor. Windows fill all the latter bays with the exception of the first floor front and rear central entrances and the most western rear window opening which has been altered to a doorway. Both front and rear entrances are recessed and have two-panel double-doors with four light transoms. The front entrance has an almost segmental stuccoed brick pediment which rests on shallow brick piers and all windows have stuccoed brick lintels and sills in imitation of stone. The exterior of the front doors has a studded treatment achieved with raised wooden pegs that resemble brads. A contemporary aluminum awning now shields the front entrance, which has a concrete deck that extends over the three central bays. Two untapered chimneys are partially recessed into each end of the building and the brick work at every corner is raised, giving the identical side elevations an unusual pilastered effect. This treatment produces three recessed planes, the central one is the wider and contains two windows on each level, while the narrower planes each have one window per floor. Evidence of a one-story hipped-roof front porch that spanned the three central bays, as well as a small extension that attached to the present doorway in the most western bay of the rear wall, is clearly visible on the weathered brick. Whether the front porch and rear extension were original or later additions is unknown, but it is known that several auxiliary buildings were once located behind the structure. Most likely one of these was a detached kitchen, as none of the present rooms appear to have served this function. Two metal rosettes appear on either side of the front central second floor window and appear to have held chains or other supports for a suspended canopy over the entrance. The eaves are thought to have originally had a boxed cornice and received their present exposed rafter appearance when they were reworked in this century. Bricks used in construction were of a poor quality and were painted in recent years to prevent further deterioration.

Inside, the building follows a very basic plan with a central hall (approximately 10 feet wide) running from front to rear, flanked by two rooms (approximately 20 feet square) on either side. All interior walls were originally plastered, as were the first floor ceilings. Second floor ceilings are paneled with one by four inch boards that have a bead on one edge. A narrow variation of a dog-leg staircase ascends from the left rear of the hall to the second floor. The Federal influence is evident in the handrail which terminates in a round-end fashion over the rather delicate turned newel post; balusters are approximately one inch square and plain. All floors are six inch heart pine; doorways have architrave trim; doors have four raised molded panels; baseboards are approximately one by twelve inches with a top corner bead; and windows, recessed in the deep exterior walls have a narrow surround, deep seat-type sill and an apron.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
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Mantels survive in all first floor rooms except the southwest one, and have a deep lintel resting on fluted pilasters; upstairs three mantels were removed and fireplaces were closed. The one remaining upstairs mantel is Victorian and probably was installed around 1890 when the jail was moved and this became a boarding house.

Recent additions to the structure have included boxing-in the staircase from the landing to the second floor and removing all the interior second floor walls, except those of the southwest room, to form one large "L" shaped meeting room for the V.F.W. organization. Downstairs the two rear rooms were altered when one rest-room was constructed in each.

Examination reveals that between the second level flooring and the first floor ceiling a solid decking of full-length square-cut logs eight inches thick by twelve inches high still exists. In the northwest downstairs room can be seen the hole that Stephen S. Renfroe burned through the log decking between the floors in 1884 to escape. The log decking, as well as the thick exterior brick walls remain to testify that this once was considered one of Alabama's finest jails.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates 1856 **Builder/Architect** William B. Robertson

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Old Tuscaloosa County Jail was built in 1856 by William B. Robertson at a cost of \$8,029.40. It was one of the finest ante bellum jails ever built in Alabama and one of the few still in existence. Architecturally, it was not just a simple masonry or log cube, as were most Alabama jails at this time. The exterior closely resembled many fine homes in Tuscaloosa and gave little exterior indication of what it housed and the interior contained numerous architectural refinements. Due to the extra thickness of its sturdy brick walls, solid log decking between floors and other security features this building had the reputation of being one of the most secure penal institutions in the state.

Locally, the old jail is still remembered for being the scene of one of Alabama's most remarkable jailbreaks on July 7, 1884. Stephen S. Renfroe, one of the state's most notorious outlaws and the former Sumter County (Alabama) sheriff, was transferred to this facility, when he almost succeeded in breaking out of the jail in Livingston. After three months here, he managed to escape by burning a hole through the extra thick log decking of his upstairs cell.

In 1890, the jail was moved to another location and this building was rented as a residence, or boarding house. The county sold the property to John J. Neilson in 1919, and his family owned it until the Veterans of Foreign Wars acquired it in 1951. Presently, the building is vacant and will soon be sold at public auction. Local preservationists fear that the prime location may be acquired as a building site, unless it is placed on the National Register of Historic Places to assure tax incentives for its preservation.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property less than 1 acre

Quadrangle name Tuscaloosa 7.5 minute

UTM NOT VERIFIED

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UMT References

A

1	6	4	4	6	5	6	0	3	6	7	4	1	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lot 219 of original city survey. Lot size 150' x 132'.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state code county code

state code county code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jackson R. Stell, Historic Resources Coordinator

organization Alabama Historical Commission date September 19, 1979

street & number 725 Monroe Street telephone (205) 832-6621

city or town Montgomery state Alabama 36130

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Miss B. Howard, Jr.

title SHPO Alabama date Sept. 21, 1979

For HCERS use only
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register
Carol O. Skiff
Keeper of the National Register
date 11-28-79
Attest: Bruce M. Boyd
date 4/19/79
Chief of Registration

FHR-8-300A
(11/78)

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Clinton, Matthew William. Tuscaloosa, Alabama, Its Early Days, 1816-1865.
Tuscaloosa: The Zonta Club, 1958.

Rogers, William Warren, and Pruitt, Ruth. Stephen S. Renfroe, Alabama's Outlaw
Sheriff. Tallahassee: Sentry Press, 1972.

University of Alabama (Tuscaloosa). Library, Special Collection Scrapbook #4.