



Name of Property: Monroe County Courthouse

City, State: Monroeville, Alabama

Significant Dates: 1960-1962

NHL Criteria: 1

Theme: III. Expressing Cultural Values
3. Literature
6. Popular and Traditional Culture

Previous Recognition: 1973 National Register of Historic Places

National Historic Context:
XIX. Literature
B. Fiction
1. Novel

XXI. Motion Pictures
I. Film Product



NHL Significance:

- The Monroe County Courthouse is nationally significant for its association with Harper Lee's novel, *To Kill A Mockingbird* (1960) and with the 1962 film adaptation of the book. As both a book and a movie, *To Kill a Mockingbird* is among the most popular and influential works of the twentieth century.
- Written during the Civil Rights Movement, *To Kill a Mockingbird* exposed the pervasive racism in the Southern legal system and encouraged whites to speak out against injustice. Although it has since drawn criticism for placing whites at the center of the fight against racial discrimination while relegating African Americans to a largely passive role, the story provided an enduring point of reference in national discussions of race relations.
- One of the novel's main characters, lawyer and single father Atticus Finch, achieved iconic status in the legal profession. Legal scholars have analyzed and debated the novel's insights into ethics and discrimination in the judicial system and frequently cited Finch in discussions of the character and importance of the legal profession.
- The 1962 film won several Academy Awards and is still widely considered to be among the best movies in the history of American cinema. As portrayed by actor Gregory Peck, the character of Atticus Finch captivated the public and contributed to the popularity and prevalence of lawyer-heroes in books, television, and movies in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.
- The Monroe County Courthouse was the inspiration for the fictional courthouse in Harper Lee's novel. The building's courtroom has an especially strong association with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, since it serves as the setting for a pivotal event in the novel: the trial of Tom Robinson. The courtroom was recreated as the set for Tom Robinson's trial in the film, further cementing its association with *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Integrity:

- Built in 1904, the Monroe County Courthouse retains a high level of integrity both to the 1930s, when the novel is set and when the author was a child living in Monroeville, and to the early 1960s, when the novel and film were created.
- The courtroom, which is the part of the building most closely associated with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, appears almost exactly as it did in the 1930s, when Harper Lee was a child watching her father in court, and in 1961, when the film's art director, Henry Bumstead, visited the courthouse to make notes and sketches for the movie set.
- The building remains in its original location on Monroeville's courthouse square. In 1963, a new courthouse was constructed on the north half of the courthouse square, but it does not obscure views of the 1904 courthouse's primary elevations.
- There have been minor changes to the exterior, as well as to other portions of the interior, but these alterations do not detract from the courthouse's ability to convey its association with *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Owner of Property: Monroe County, Alabama

Acreeage of Property: 1.3 acres

Origins of Nomination: In 2016, the City of Monroeville received a Certified Local Government matching grant from the Alabama Historical Commission and the federal Historic Preservation Fund to prepare a National Historic Landmark nomination for the Monroe County Courthouse.

Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:

Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program: None known.

Public Comments Favoring Designation (as of November 5, 2020):

- Alisha Linam, Director, Alabama Center for Literary Arts – 10/20/2020
- Alabama Governor Kay Ivey – 10/21/2020
- Sandy Smith, Mayor of the City of Monroeville – 10/21/2020
- U.S. Representative Bradley Byrne – 10/22/2020
- Penelope Hines, Exec. Director, Monroe County Chamber of Commerce – 10/23/2020
- U. S. Senator Doug Jones – 10/26/2020
- Alabama State Historic Preservation Officer – 10/26/2020
- Sonya Greene Stinson, Chair, Monroe County Commission – 10/30/2020

National Historic Landmarks Committee Comments:

- Rethink how the terms African American, black, and white are used in the nomination.
- Inquired as to why Criterion 2 for Harper Lee was not being considered.
- Is there other, stronger research that shows that Lee specifically use the Courthouse in her fiction?
- Identified issues regarding details about the movie version of “To Kill A Mockingbird”, an addition to the bibliography, additional historic photos, and design and stylistic elements, which will all be addressed in the revised nomination.

National Historic Landmarks Committee Recommendation:

The Committee recommends that the National Park System Advisory Board recommend to the Secretary of the Interior the designation of the Monroe County Courthouse in Monroeville, Alabama, as a National Historic Landmark, with any additions and corrections as noted by the Committee being made prior to the nomination being forwarded to the Secretary of the Interior for action.

Advisory Board Recommendation:

