(Above) Studio at 3614 Jackson Highway, 2010. Photographer Carol M. Highsmith (Library of Congress)

and B. B. King. FAME is significant for the numerous African American artists who would have their own music recorded and produced at FAME through the 1960s and 1970s. While the studio does not produce exclusively African American musicians, it certainly has helped to solidify the legacy of many African American artists, who in turn have shaped and solidified the fame of FAME Recording Studios.

Muscle Shoals Sound Studio (MSSS)

The vocal artists at FAME were usually backed by the Muscle Shoals Rhythm Section (MSRS), founded in 1959 by Rick Hall and former partners Billy Sherill and Tom Stafford. The MSRS provided the music for many of the vocal artists and were talented in pop, rock, blues, soul, and country music. In 1969, four men of MSRS went out on their own to open a studio at 3614 North Jackson Highway, known as the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio (MSSS) – technically in nearby Sheffield today. One of the first songs produced at the Muscle Shoals Sound Studio was R. B. Greaves "Take a Letter Maria," which hit number two on the Billboard Chart in 1969 and earned a gold record. From 1969 and 1978, the MSRS continued to work with African American artists and producers in defiance of Southern racial relations to create the "Sound."

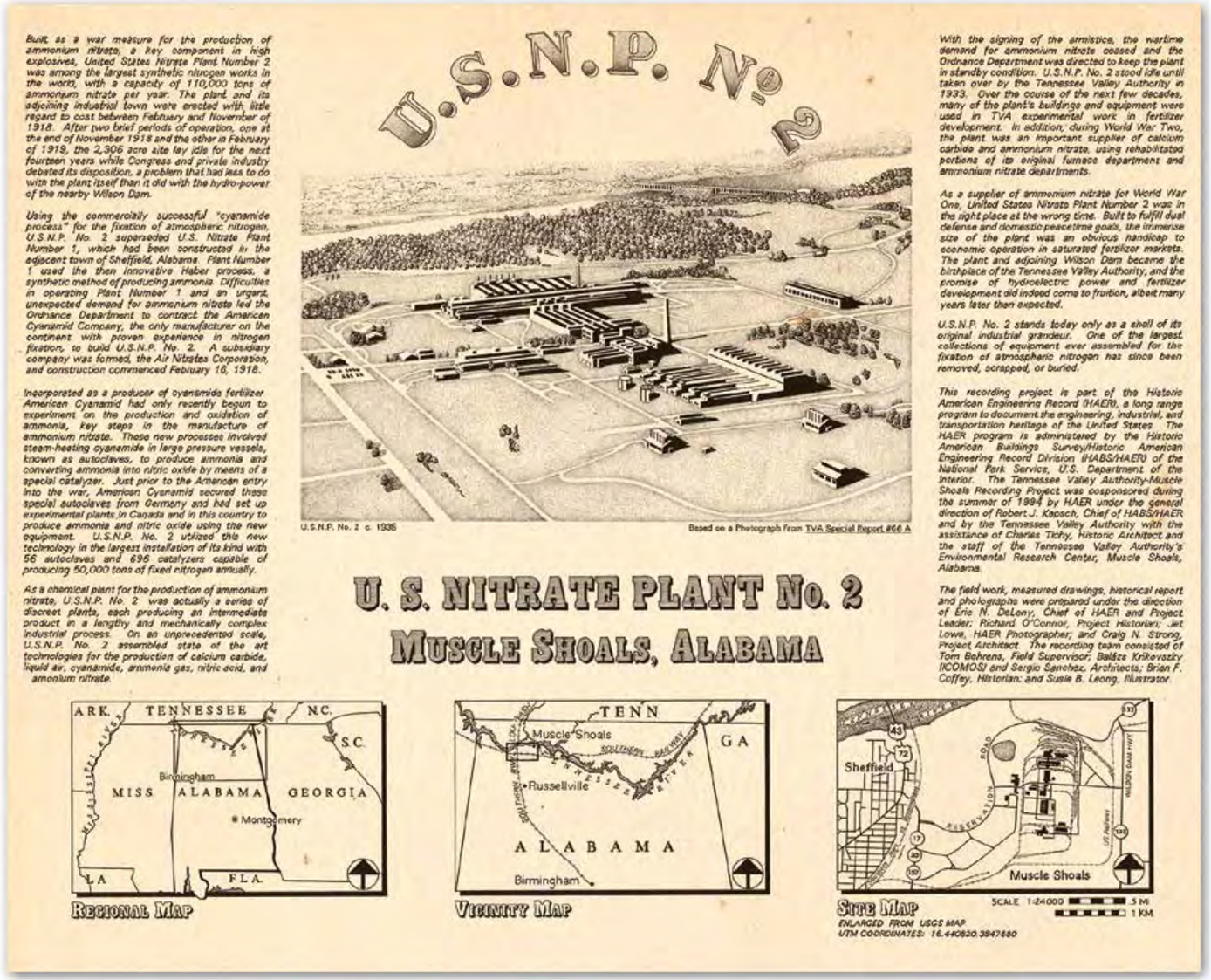
While the MSRS and the MSSS were not the first to create and record the "Muscle Shoals Sound," the studio and its collaborators did much to promote the unique style by deliberately naming their enterprise for the Muscle Shoals area in a time when regional independent recording styles were at a peak. In an effort to distinguish themselves from FAME and claim intellectual property over the "Sound," MSSS began to attract artists who performed the rhythm and blues.

The original MSSS building at 3614 Jackson Highway was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2006. The MSRS moved from that location in 1978 and built a new studio in Sheffield. The old studio was purchased in the early 2000s and is operational again.

WLAY-AM

Also, in the realm of music, the WLAY-AM radio station broadcasted on 1450-AM in the Shoals area from 1933 to 2014. Originally, the station aired a mix of gospel, country, and African American artists, which was refer to as "race music" at the time. WLAY became known for its open acceptance of music performed by white and African American artists. Renowned record producer, Sam Phillips of Florence, was a DJ and radio engineer at WLAY in the early 1940s. Because of this "open format" his career and success would continue to promote the "Muscle Shoals Sound" and African American artists at radio stations across the South. WLAY was often the first to play many of the records produced at the sound studios of the Shoals. Producer Quin Ivy, owner of NORALA Recording Studios and Quinvy Studios, was a DJ at WLAY before striking out on his own and finding a big hit in African American singer Percy Sledge.

The station was located on Second Street in Muscle Shoals at the height of its success and influence. In 2007, the Alabama Historical Commission deemed it a Historic Landmark, however, WLAY ceased broadcasting in 2014 and now the original studio is on exhibit at the Alabama Music Hall of Fame.



(Left) United States Nitrate Plant No. 2, Reservation Road, Muscle Shoals, Colbert County, Alabama, Thomas M. Behrens - Creator, 1994 (Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress)