Each May, Preservation Virginia announces Virginia’s Most Endangered Historic Places. This list brings attention to the threats statewide and advocates and finds solutions that protect and preserve Virginia’s irreplaceable historic resources. Each historic place listed has the potential to strengthen the local community’s economy, create opportunities for heritage tourism and offer a glimpse into the unique history of the locality.

AFRICAN AMERICAN CEMETERIES STATEWIDE

The Daughters of Zion Cemetery is nestled near Charlottesville’s vibrant downtown pedestrian mall. A benevolent society for African American women, the Daughters of Zion, established this cemetery in 1873. Until 1933, it served as the formal burying ground for African American men and women of Reconstruction and Jim Crow-era Charlottesville. Recently, The Preservers of the Daughters of Zion Cemetery formed to restore and preserve the cemetery while researching the history of people buried there. The Daughters of Zion Cemetery is representative of African American cemeteries and burial grounds prevalent across Virginia’s landscape. These places of memory vary in form and detail, some with ornate fences and headstones. Others are unmarked and discernible only to the trained eye.

**Threat:** Virginia’s African American cemeteries and burial grounds face an array of threats from development and infrastructure projects to neglect and vandalism. As a result of the Daughters of Zion society disbandment in 1933, the Cemetery
is currently in poor condition. Weather-related deterioration, erosion, mowing mishaps and vandalism threaten the site. A nearby housing complex slated for redevelopment poses further peril.

Solution: The successes at the Daughters of Zion Cemetery can serve as a model for preserving and protecting African American cemeteries and burial grounds across the Commonwealth. The Preservers of the Daughters of Zion Cemetery plan to clean, repair and/or replace grave markers, identify unmarked burial sites, repair metalwork, address security and maintenance concerns and investigate erosion control measures. With an active social media presence, the Preservers’ efforts are raising public awareness about the cemetery and its condition and creating model programs that could help save other African American cemeteries in the Commonwealth.

HOWLAND CHAPEL SCHOOL & TEACHERS’ COTTAGE, HEATHSVILLE

The Howland Chapel School and Teacher’s Cottage represent educational and philanthropic efforts following the Civil War. Howland Chapel School is the oldest schoolhouse in Northumberland County and one of the earliest public schoolhouses on the Northern Neck. Built by local carpenters and laborers to serve the children of former slaves, the structure is a rare and little altered Reconstruction-era schoolhouse.
New York educator, reformer and philanthropist Emily Howland (1827 - 1929) funded the one-story frame building two years after the Civil War ended. She and members of the local African American community supported and maintained the school until the Northumberland County school board took control of the property. The building was used as a Baptist house of worship from 1867 to circa 1920. Also on the grounds is the Teachers’ Cottage.

**Threat:** The Howland Chapel School and Teacher’s Cottage require stabilization and repair as a result of deterioration and disuse.

**Solution:** The owners, First Baptist Church, should pursue their goal of rebuilding the industrial annex to house social functions and use the restored schoolhouse as a museum, community center and adult education facility by 2018. To accomplish this, additional awareness and funds raising are necessary. First Baptist Church should build on their successful outreach to local supporters and their relatives who attended Howland Chapel School to bolster interest in the restoration of the structures. Their committee has already funded the stabilization of the foundations and walls and is poised to paint both structures and replace the footings and two porches on the Teachers’ Cottage by the end of 2016.
Facing Capitol Square, the GAB is an integral part of the landscape of both the Virginia State Capital and grounds and the gateway to downtown Richmond. Located along Broad Street between the open lot of the Murphy Hotel site and Old City Hall, the GAB houses the General Assembly members’ offices and meeting spaces during legislative session. It also accommodates a number of year-round legislative agencies. The building and its immediate neighbors complement Thomas Jefferson’s Capitol and serve as a model for how buildings engage with important public spaces, streets and entrance corridors and the citizenry.

The current building was built in three stages and includes the façades of the 1912 Life of Virginia Building, designed by Alfred Charles Bossom of Clinton and Russell; the 1923 high-rise addition accessible from Broad Street; and the Marcellus Wright concrete and steel-frame Modernist addition of 1965. Taken together, the buildings represent the architectural evolution of public architecture in downtown Richmond.

**Threat:** In early April 2016, Gov. McAuliffe and General Assembly budget leaders reached agreement on a bond package, which includes over $300 million to replace the GAB, build a parking deck for the new facility (on the site of the former...
Murphy Hotel) and renovate Old City Hall. There is uncertainty about the process and opportunities for public input regarding reuse of important elements of the current GAB and the design of the parking deck.

**Solution:** New construction on Capitol Square deserves careful consideration. Ideally, the Commonwealth would commit to rehabilitating the GAB, retaining as much of the original structure as possible. Recent renovations of other historic government buildings including the Virginia Capitol, the Patrick Henry Building, the 9th Street Office Building (the former Richmond Hotel) and earlier work on Old City Hall, have met high standards for historic preservation while incorporating quality, modern design and energy efficiency measures. The Commonwealth has the opportunity to achieve similarly high standards for the GAB.

An August 2015 joint letter signed by Preservation Virginia, Historic Richmond Foundation, Partnership for Smarter Growth, Virginia Conservation Network and Southern Environmental Law Center urged the Commonwealth’s Department of General Services to save the 1912 façade of the GAB and recommended that the design for the parking structure at 9th and Broad Streets include active ground-floor retail uses. This proposal would complement nearby public buildings while advancing the economic revitalization of the City.
Samuel Hairston (1788 - 1875) completed Oak Hill in 1825. As one of the largest slave-holding families in the South, the Hairstons controlled a large swath of land along the Dan River. Hairston was considered the wealthiest man in Virginia on the eve of the Civil War and Oak Hill served as the center of the family’s empire. In 1981, a devastating fire compromised the site and destroyed the main house, causing it to be delisted. Recent archaeological investigations performed by the Department of Historic Resources, with the assistance of the Archaeological Society of Virginia under their Threatened Sites Program, revealed intact archaeological deposits that would very likely make the site eligible (once again) for the state and national registers.

**Threat:** The site faces multiple threats from relic hunters and development. Nearby land is being developed as Berry Hill Mega Park, one of the largest industrial parks in the Commonwealth. The viewshed at Oak Hill is at risk, but many worry that Oak Hill may be lost as the park is further developed.

In late 2014, the site was compromised by a team of treasure hunters from the Discovery Channel series “Rebel Gold.” Using dubious techniques, the team excavated a large depression northeast of the ruin and the slave quarters. While some items were given to the
Pittsylvania Historical Society, the treasure hunters boasted of recovering coins, a gold ring and other artifacts, which they kept. Because of the publicity, local historians fear further looting at this site. Statewide, there is concern that shows like this will promote unsupervised excavations at other sites.

**Solution:** While many organizations are rallying to save this site, more education is required to reinforce the need for archaeological investigation, conducted according to professional standards. We are encouraged by the Pittsylvania Historical Society’s goal to fund a structural report of the slave dwelling and to raise capital for necessary stabilization and exploration. We appreciate the Hairstons’ consideration to explore different ownership structures and protective easements. Following these steps, opportunities exist for the creation of new heritage tourism initiatives to benefit the region.

**WESTWOOD TRACT, RICHMOND**

In 1887, Dr. Hunter Holmes McGuire acquired Westwood, a tract of land in Richmond’s Northside, to be near friends Major Lewis Ginter and Joseph Bryan. Dr. McGuire updated and expanded the existing, circa 1790’s structure in the Italianate Cottage-style. In the mid-1890s, entrepreneur and philanthropist Major Ginter donated 12 acres to Union Theological Seminary, now Union Presbyterian Seminary. The Seminary bought the cottage and adjoining land following Dr. McGuire’s death.
The 34-acre, park-like tract sits at the junction of three historic neighborhoods, diagonally across an intersection from the 19th century seminary complex. In the 1950s, the neighborhood supported rezoning to allow the Seminary to build dormitories. Today, two abandoned dormitory complexes, the historic McGuire Cottage and several other buildings are scattered around the tract. Recreational features, many mature trees and a community garden attract activity making it an important asset that contributes to the vitality of the neighborhood and the economic health of Richmond.

Of the three neighborhoods that abut the tract, Ginter Park and Laburnum Park are locally-designated historic districts and are listed on the state and federal register. Sherwood and Ginter Parks were developed by Ginter, who consulted with the firm of Frederick Law Olmstead to lay out generous lots and limit density. Laburnum Park was developed by the children of Joseph Bryan and based on similar concepts.

**Threat:** In 2014, Union Presbyterian Seminary announced a plan to develop all 34 acres of the Westwood Tract, featuring dense, by-right residential development with single family housing and rental units. More recently, the Seminary revised its plans which now include a 300-unit apartment plan on 15 acres of the site. The neighborhood has three years to fund the purchase of the remaining 19 acres. The McGuire Cottage is vacant and vulnerable to vandalism, infestation and weather.

**Solution:** The proposed development would alter the neighborhoods, undermining their sense of safety, security and place. Acknowledging the Seminary’s right to develop and their stated need for additional revenue and student housing, the community has forwarded two plans that would maintain the open space of the Westwood Tract and rehabilitate the McGuire Cottage and other structures using rehabilitation tax credits. Protective
Virginia’s rich history attracts tourists from all over the nation and the world. Our unique stories, experiences and historic places are powerful economic drivers for the Commonwealth, generating revenue and creating jobs. Tourism ranks within the top five industries each year in Virginia. Viewsheds, like those along the Rappahannock River near White Stone, look nearly as they did when the first English settlers came to Virginia. Post-Emancipation African American settlements and burial sites, like those at Union Hill in Buckingham County, reveal the successes and struggles of generations of African Americans in Virginia. Historic and archaeologically-rich sites like the Coleman Mills near Wintergreen speak to a pre-industrialized past. Each of these places relies on authenticity in order to open a window into our past.

**Threat:** Statewide utility infrastructure proposals threaten to undermine the integrity of key natural and historic resources. These proposals threaten the health of the tourism industry, the jobs they create and the local businesses that benefit from the
dollars they bring. From the Mountain Valley and Atlantic Coast Pipelines, to the building of electrical transmission line towers alongside Norris Bridge on the lower Rappahannock River and across the James River within sight of Jamestown, Carter’s Grove, the Colonial Parkway and the Captain John Smith Water Trail, the visual disruptions and ground disturbances threaten the integrity of historic districts. The potential cumulative negative effects on Virginia’s heritage tourism industry are substantial and unprecedented.

**Solution:** Virginians need reliable power; however, alternative solutions exist and should be explored in order to protect Virginia’s irreplaceable historic sites. When reviewing energy infrastructure proposals, state and local officials should first avoid sites eligible for historic listing. State and local officials should recognize that like the utilities, heritage tourism is an economic driver that creates jobs and generates local and state revenue. Ensuring the integrity of these economic drivers should be balanced with the predictions made by the utility companies.

Preservation Virginia is supporting two possible tools for advocating for the balance between preserving our historic places and carefully sighting utility corridors. In the 2016 General Assembly session, Del. Minchew offered HB 908 that would require that new transmission line routes first “avoid” historic sites listed or determined eligible for listing on the state register. A study committee will meet this summer to take up the bill’s goals. Preservation Virginia will track that legislation. Additionally, our economic impact study of heritage tourism, due to be released this summer, will quantify the contributions made to Virginia’s economy by historic places.
“HISTORIC PLACES REMIND US THAT WE ARE ALL A PART OF A CONTINUUM.
THERE WERE PEOPLE BEFORE US AND THERE WILL BE PEOPLE AFTER US.
THE SOUL CRAVES THOSE CONNECTIONS.”

— ELIZABETH S. KOSTELNY
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