



## 2020 VIRGINIA'S MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

### Report

The COVID-19 pandemic is an unprecedented event in our lifetime, and its effects will reverberate for months and possibly years to come. Historic places across Virginia and the nation have been, and will continue to be, greatly impacted. Life has changed, and our mission to protect and reuse historic places has become more challenging. However, across the Commonwealth, we see historic places of all types remaining resilient. New efforts are being developed in response to the impacts of the pandemic, including historic downtowns working to sustain local businesses and museums and heritage tourism destinations hosting virtual tours and webinars.

While we face these quickly changing and challenging times, this year's list of Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Places illustrates how some long-standing issues still need to be addressed and can't be forgotten during times of crises. Of particular importance, while previous listings highlighted historic places important to underrepresented communities, four of this year's seven listings remind us that these historic places continue to be threatened at alarming rates.

In addition, two of this year's listings are transportation-related and reflect the alarming rate at which Virginia is losing historic bridges and roads that are important to our historic landscapes. Improved relationships with state agencies and significant efforts need to be expended to foster transportation projects that are sensitive to the historic character of these resources before they all are lost.

Over the next few years, as we adapt to the challenges of living in a post-pandemic world, Preservation Virginia will help to counter the specific threats identified in this year's Most Endangered Historic Places list, and to ensure that all of Virginia's important historic places are fully considered. In addition, we will demonstrate how - using proven tools of historic preservation, as well as, innovative new models and collaborations - Virginia's historic places help recharge our spirits and restore local communities. Now more than ever, we can look to our past for renewal and strength.

Consequently, for the fifteenth year, Preservation Virginia presents a list of historic places across the state that face imminent or sustained threats to their integrity, or in some cases their very survival. The intent is not to shame or punish the current owners of these places, but to bring attention to the threats described and to encourage citizens and organizations to continue to advocate for their protection and preservation. In no particular order of significance, the seven Virginia places below are considered as endangered for the year 2020.

## **Rassawek**

Rassawek, the historic capital and sacred site of the Monacan Indian Nation, located at the confluence of the Rivanna and James River in Fluvanna County, is in danger of destruction by a water intake system proposed by the James River Water Authority.

Rassawek contains significant archaeological deposits and potentially likely burials, and is considered one of the most important archaeological sites in Virginia. The Monacan Indian Nation as well as many organizations have voiced their opposition; however, the permitting process for the water project is moving forward.

About the proposed water station, Chief Branham of the Monacan Indian Nation stated, "Rassawek was the place to which all other Monacan towns throughout our expansive former territory in Virginia and North Carolina came to pay tribute, perform ceremonies, and share the joys of family and fellowship. Our capital city was a contemporary of Jamestown, but much larger and more complex, and it lasted as a community far longer. It remains for us a sacred place of great cultural significance, and it is for all Americans a place a historical significance. Surely, the many Monacan ancestors buried at Rassawek deserve to remain in peace. If the Monacan people ever decide their site may be excavated, it should be done carefully and collaboratively over decades, as has been done at Jamestown and Werowocomoco - not destroyed with salvage archaeology."

On alternatives to the water station, Chief Branham stated, "The project proponents have been compelled by the federal government to identify a dozen routes as an alternative to their current plan, but they persist in pursuing the one that would destroy the heart of Rassawek. The Monacan Nation has expressed public support for exploration of one of those routes, in particular, because we believe it has the greatest chance of delivering water to that community without sacrificing irreplaceable history and disturbing burials on sacred ground. We will work with all parties to advance investigation of this alternative. Those who say one cannot have both development and preservation offer a false choice."

While Preservation Virginia does not oppose Louisa and Fluvanna Counties' needs for a new water source, alternative locations exist for the water intake project. Preservation Virginia encourages the James River Water Authority to locate the pump station at a different site that suits local water needs and does not destroy this significant and sacred place.

In a state that prides itself on preserving history, Native American heritage has too often been overlooked, and in some cases, deliberately destroyed. This legacy of neglect makes it even more crucial to preserve Rassawek.

## **Alexandria Elks Lodge #48**

The Alexandria Elks Lodge #48 has been an anchor for residents in the Parker Gray Historic District for over 115 years. Since 1904, the building has served as a meeting place for members of Elks Lodge #48 of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World, as well as a location for community activities including dinners, weddings, and funeral receptions.

The brick Elks Lodge building is sound, but serious roof, foundation and window deterioration has allowed moisture into the building. These repairs are greatly needed, as well as a feasibility study to determine how the interior could be configured to better serve the community.

## **Halifax Roller Mill**

The Halifax Roller Mill, a three-story, frame flour and feed mill constructed in 1915 in the Town of Halifax, was a thriving operation and a social center for Halifax residents until the 1990s. The

mill was built to use electric power rather than water and was located adjacent to the railroad, emphasizing the development of electricity in rural areas and the growing importance of rail transportation.

While the current owners have addressed immediate deterioration issues, recent water damage has renewed threats to the building. Funding for immediate stabilization and an updated feasibility study are necessary to preserve and reuse the mill, which would complement the Town of Halifax's award-winning downtown revitalization, adaptive reuse, and recreational efforts.

### **Historic Metal Truss Bridges Statewide**

In 1975, Virginia had approximately 620 metal truss bridges. Today, approximately five percent of those bridges remain. Every effort should be made to halt the rapid loss of historic metal truss bridges, which are a key element of the state's distinctive landscapes that can bolster tourism and provide an increasingly unique visual experience that connects people to their journey, the roadways, and the rivers and creeks they cross in the rural landscape.

In a recent study, Piedmont Environmental Council found that current policies regarding the evaluation of historic bridges in Virginia are inadequate and that ongoing and preventative maintenance of historic bridges by the Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) is insufficient.

A dedicated fund to provide for continual preventative maintenance, effective long-term planning and improved collaboration with VDOT and other entities are all solutions that could help preserve Virginia's remaining metal truss bridges.

### **James Street Holiness Church**

The James Street Holiness Church, founded in 1891 by the Holiness preacher Bettie Thompson, illustrates the rich, but little studied, history of the African American community in north Danville, the history of African American women religious leaders, and the history of 19<sup>th</sup> century Protestant religious groups.

The church has been largely vacant for more than five years and was damaged during Hurricane Michael in 2018. The roof is in poor shape and the basement has flood damage. Immediate repairs are needed to prevent further deterioration of the building so it can be reused as a potential community center.

### **Loudoun County's Rural Road Network**

Bordered by trees and punctuated by stone walls, sunken lanes, cemeteries, mills and other historic sites, western Loudoun County's network of rural roads is a largely unchanged, a living museum of 300 miles of gravel roadways that traverse the Loudoun Valley. This complex network of overland routes is under threat from the region's rapid development, which has led to an increased demand for paved road surfaces to support higher traffic volumes and speeds.

Collaborating with all residents in western Loudoun County to raise awareness of the importance of protecting the rural roads network, while maintaining relationships with VDOT to ensure public safety and road maintenance, is the primary objective. America's Routes, a local non-profit formed to protect Loudoun's rural roads, believes that the changing lifestyle of parts of the county from agrarian to commuter need not be an obstacle to protecting the historic road network, the scenic and environmental resources, and disappearing agrarian traditions. Our current health crisis only highlights the importance of the restorative and environmental benefits of open space and rural areas.

### **Pine Grove School Community**

The Pine Grove School Community, a rural community of businesses, churches, cemeteries and homes of students and teachers who attended the Pine Grove Rosenwald School in Cumberland County, is under threat from a proposed 1,200-acre landfill that, if approved, will fundamentally change the historic character of this 100-year old community and put residents at risk from major environmental hazards.

Up to 5,000 tons of municipal solid waste per day would be trucked to the proposed landfill, which will ultimately grow in height to hundreds of feet. As a result, the proposed landfill will have both direct and indirect impacts on the community's health, environment, historic landscape, and quality of life. The sensitive location, scale, enormous service territory, and potentially severe impacts of the proposed landfill raise significant questions about the need for this project and the reasonableness of this location.

The threat to the Pine Grove School Community is symbolic of the continual and systematic failure to adequately protect Virginia's historic African American historic sites. Minority and low-income communities have historically faced higher levels of environmental degradation than other populations, generationally and disproportionately affecting public health and quality of life. State and federal decision-makers are urged to carefully review the need for the project and the potential preservation, environmental, and environmental justice impacts it would have, and to reject the proposed landfill.