

## **Preservation Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Places 2007**

What do the cities of Norfolk, Danville, and Fredericksburg have in common? The cities themselves or the historic districts in them have been designated to the list of the Most Endangered Historic Sites in Virginia for 2007. APVA Preservation Virginia President William B. Kerkam, III, and its Executive Director Elizabeth S. Kostelny announced the eleven designees at a press conference held on Thursday morning in Danville at Main Street Methodist Church, a building not designated to the list but nonetheless at risk. The entire city of Danville, however, has been named one of the Most Endangered Historic Sites in Virginia.

**Danville's** two bedrock industries, tobacco and textiles, closed their doors and left the City's future uncertain. Today, Danville is at a crossroads. While the community is working hard to forge a new, diversified economic base, what hangs in the balance is Danville's very character, its architectural essence, and identity that give the City distinctive charm and tell its story. This is the third year in a row that monuments of Danville's past have appeared on APVA Preservation Virginia's list of Most Endangered Historic Sites in Virginia. In 2005, it was the Worsham Street Bridge; in 2006, the Schoolfield Mill District. Both still remain in jeopardy. One building in Schoolfield that served as the district's gateway has already been demolished to make way for the cookie cutter design of an urban chain pharmacy. This year, the APVA nominated two additional significant sites in Danville, Long Mill and Danville General Hospital. Given the continuing threat to a large number of Danville's architectural treasures, however, the APVA has designated the entire city of Danville to its 2007 list.

The **Downtown Norfolk Historic District** that has served and continues to serve as a center of commercial, banking, and legal institutions in southeastern Virginia also was chosen for the list. Development interest in downtown Norfolk is viewed as the primary threat to the district. Unfortunately, as part of the new renaissance of Norfolk's downtown, a number of the contributing buildings in the district have been demolished. To save the district, the City's elected leaders need redirection and to place an emphasis on renovation/reuse and preservation rather than an emphasis on new construction that requires the demolition of buildings.

Also designated as most endangered was the **Old and Historic Fredericksburg District (HFD)**, a 50-block historic area encompassing the Fredericksburg downtown business district and its immediate surrounding residential neighborhoods. It is Fredericksburg's recent history and the very success of its historic district that now paradoxically threatens the downtown area. The vibrant historic district has had a tremendous positive impact on property values downtown, a double-edged sword. Increased property values have not prompted the major landholders to invest more in their properties. Rather, vacant lots have become more valuable as investments than lots with buildings in advanced stages of disrepair. Demolition has become an economically lucrative option that the protection afforded by the historic district seems incapable of stopping. Fredericksburg and its Architectural Review Board seem to have lost their respect for the

collective whole of the historic district, instead looking at individual properties and making decisions in a piecemeal and arbitrary fashion.

**Rural historic resources also proved to be imminently at risk. Alarming is the threat to Virginia's Northern Piedmont.** Dominion Power has announced plans for a 500,000-volt transmission line through Frederick, Warren, Rappahannock, Fauquier, Culpeper, Prince William, and Loudoun Counties. The transmission line would cut a 200-foot scar for 40 to 68 miles across the landscape with its cleared right-of-way. The proposed transmission towers, spaced 1,000 feet apart, would stand 12-17 stories tall and be visible for miles. The line would slash through historic districts; magnificent viewsheds; publicly held open space; a high concentration of conservation easements; and historic sites.

**Cedar Creek Battlefield and Belle Grove Plantation in Frederick County** are threatened not only by the possibility of this transmission line but also by a proposal by O-N Minerals to expand dramatically their quarry operation from its current 58 acres to 639 acres. If this massive acreage is rezoned from rural to industrial, it will be the largest rezoning in the history of Frederick County and will result in five strip mining quarry holes on core battlefield areas. The rezoning will result in waste piles, industrial facilities, and 1,400 quarry dump trucks per day (one every 60 seconds!) traveling Middletown's historic Main Street.

Other rural historic resources the APVA deemed most endangered include the **Grandma Moses and the Yount/Gochenour Houses** that represent the rural agricultural heritage of Augusta County and the Shenandoah Valley, a heritage that is rapidly disappearing. The fate of these two structures, both owned by Augusta County, rests with the seven-person Board of Supervisors. Ironically, the immediate threat to the two houses comes from the Board itself. Although the buildings are structurally sound with much of the period interior woodwork intact, a motion has been made by one member of the Board to demolish the two houses citing the burden on the County taxpayers to restore the buildings. The motion was set aside in favor of a motion to appoint a committee with the mission "to explore options for the future uses and/or the demolition" of the houses and present a set of ranked recommendations to the Board of Supervisors by October 24, 2007.

**Greenfield in Botetourt County** was a domestic site, the base of a vast plantation in the 18th and early to mid-19th centuries owned by the Preston family, perhaps southwestern Virginia's most prominent and powerful family during this time period. In spite of the loss of the manor house to fire in the mid-20th century, the site and two surviving structures are very significant for their early log architecture with near perfect physical integrity. Extant slave quarters (and indeed, early plantation house dependencies) with such integrity are extremely rare. Greenfield is within Botetourt County's Greenfield Industrial site and zoned M1- Industrial. The buildings are vacant and have not been maintained for more than a decade, possibly several decades. The structures are threatened from long-term neglect, and a dramatic toll in the form of physical deterioration already has taken place. There are currently no known commitments of any kind to preserve

Greenfield. For these reasons, Greenfield is considered one of Virginia's Most Endangered Historic Sites for 2007.

Making the list of eleven is **Fort Monroe**, the 570-acre active Hampton military installation that will be vacated and abandoned by the United States Army in 2011 under the 2005 BRAC procedures. Losing its federal shield, the future disposition is threatened by the potential commercial value of this finger of land at the harbor's entrance. With magnificent views in all directions, it is a magnet for developers. Many individuals and organizations have spelled out the impending threats to this extraordinary national treasure, under both the Section 106 scoping meeting and the NEPA scoping process. Reasonable options for this land must be explored.

The 1899 **St. Francis de Sales building in Powhatan** also is deemed significantly at risk. St. Francis de Sales was the first of 55 schools Katharine Drexel built for African-Americans. For 70 years it provided a high level education, opportunity, and dignity to many citizens who would not have received these rights. In more than 30 years, the St. Francis de Sales building has been largely untouched, with the exception of necessary repairs. No new construction or mechanical upgrades to the structure have been made since the early 1950s, and the building is not being utilized today. There are areas where water is entering the structure, deteriorating its walls and creating structural stress. The cost of building upkeep for the Sisters of The Blessed Sacrament, an order of nuns founded by Saint Katharine, is prohibitive. Katharine's Foundation, a non-profit 501(C)(3) community organization, nominated St. Francis de Sales to the Most Endangered Historic Sites list. The Foundation was formed to develop awareness, organize support for a stabilization campaign, and develop a solution for this failing American landmark.

The City of Roanoke owns four historically and architecturally significant park buildings that are suffering deterioration as a result of underutilization and neglect. **Buena Vista, Mountain View, Villa Heights, and a small brick house in Washington Park** collectively were determined to be most endangered. On a positive note for this designation, the Roanoke City government announced in April (after the nomination of the park buildings to the Most Endangered Historic Sites list) that it intends to pay the full cost of roof repair for Mountain View as the initial phase of a full restoration.

The eleventh designee is not a historic site or property but a character-defining element of many historic buildings. Savvy salesmen convince owners and architectural review board members that replacement windows are superior to historic **wooden windows** when, in many cases, the truth is historic windows have lasted more than one hundred years. As a result, historic wooden windows are destroyed daily in lieu of new, inferior windows. With some maintenance, these historic windows can be airtight, weather resistant, and can last another one hundred years-longer than any new wooden or vinyl-clad window. The restoration/rehabilitation message is that windows can be saved. The remodeling message is that they must be replaced. In the world of historic preservation, it is important to "repair rather than replace" superior historic materials and character-defining elements. The public needs to be educated about the value of these windows

and, when properly repaired, how they can be energy efficient. The informed public can serve as the voice of the historic building that cannot speak for itself. Perhaps this is what we must remember when considering how best to protect our endangered resources. It is the educated, informed public that must speak out as to the value of our cultural heritage. Only then will listings of the Most Endangered Historic Sites no longer be needed.