

Help preserve the Nashville Nine Historic Nashville Inc., wants to save these buildings

September 9, 2009
By Nancy DeVille

A church, cemetery chapel, federal post office and former Masonic school have been added to a list of the most endangered historic properties in Davidson County.

The 2009 Nashville Nine includes nine historic properties nominated by the public that are threatened by demolition, neglect or development.

The list is compiled by Historic Nashville, Inc., a local nonprofit that works to promote public awareness of endangered historic sites and encourage preservation.

Historic Nashville, Inc. has advocated for the preservation of downtown landmarks including the Ryman, Union Station, and the Second Avenue, Printers Alley and Lower Broadway historic districts.

“Similar endangered properties lists have been very successfully at both the state and national levels in encouraging the preservation of buildings and other sites that are important to everyday people,” said David Price, board president and Nashville Nine committee chairman.

“HNI will be proactive and work collaboratively to help find solutions to preserve them for future generations.”

This is the inaugural Nashville Nine, but Historic Nashville maintained an ongoing endangered properties list from 1998 to 2001.

Many of those properties have been saved, including the Savage House, now The Standard restaurant and Berger Building on Rosa Parks Boulevard, as well as the Hodge House at Warner Park, which is now an education center, among others.

The 2009 Nashville Nine are:

McC Campbell House, 305 Kent Road in Donelson. This two-story brick Federal-style home was built around 1790 by the Hall brothers. The McC Campbell family acquired the estate in the 1840s. Since the mid-20th century, most of the grounds have subdivided and developed.

The McC Campbell House remained a private residence although in recent years deferred maintenance has resulted in the house and grounds becoming overgrown and deteriorated. The owner recently passed away and willed the vacant house to the State of Tennessee for potential use by the State Museum.

As one of the few remaining pre-1800 residences in Davidson County, HNI encourages the State Building Commission to initiate plans to stabilize and rehabilitate this important landmark.

Jackson House, 3500 Brick Church Pike in Bordeaux. This home is a vernacular farmhouse dating to the Victorian Era. While the Jackson House was built around 1885, the rear ell contains an earlier building, probably dating to the antebellum period. The home's proximity to I-24 has increased its value to developers who plan to subdivide the large estate.

HNI encourages the owners to preserve this historic home and to create buffer zones from any future development so that future generations can enjoy the beauty of this landmark.

“Silverdene,” Lawrence Finn House, 931 Main Street in East Nashville. Lawrence Finn, a native of Ireland, retired to this mid-19th century, Edgefield “country estate” in the 1860s and lived here with his family until his death in 1881.

The Finn family is buried at Calvary Catholic Cemetery. By 1908, his son-in-law had subdivided the 600-acre Silverdene farm for dozens of new homes. With its Grecian architecture and stately colonnaded facade, the home is a replica of Andrew Jackson’s Hermitage mansion.

From 1926 to 1967, the East Nashville landmark was used as a roadside “tourist inn” for automobile travelers along Gallatin Pike; later it was used as “Main Street Salvage.” The home was vacated a few years ago and recently seriously damaged by a fire.

The property is currently on the market and threatened with demolition. Though deteriorated, the home could be salvaged and renovated for use as housing, offices, or commerce. HNI is willing to work with the owner to buy time for the preservation of this significant Nashville landmark.

Mt. Olivet Cemetery Chapel & Office, 1101 Lebanon Pike, was built in phases between the 1870s and 1940s, this Gothic Revival-style building served as the chapel and offices for the historic Mt. Olivet Cemetery until it was replaced with a new facility in 1996.

The unique brick building features extraordinary architectural detailing such as a cathedral ceiling with original woodwork in the octagonal vestry, two bell towers, a built-in vault, and pointed arched windows. The 19th century building was likely designed by Nashville architect Hugh Cathcart Thompson, best known as designer of the Ryman Auditorium.

The Tennessee Preservation Trust placed this building on its endangered properties list in 2005, the same year the entire 206-acre cemetery with its 192,000 burials was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The historic chapel and office is currently vacant and deteriorated. HNI is currently working with the owners and the Metropolitan Historical Commission on options to buy time to save the landmark.

U.S. Post Office at 16 Arcade, located in the historic Arcade shopping mall in downtown Nashville, this U.S. post office has operated continuously at this location since 1903. Downtown users love the funky 1950s Art Deco architecture and convenient location.

For over a century, local residents, office workers, and visitors have used this building to post their packages and letters to locales around the world while enjoying the smells and tastes of the neighboring peanut shop and restaurants.

Recently, the local district office announced plans to close this post office branch, resulting in strong support of keeping the location open. HNI fears that if this post office were to close, the entire Arcade, which is listed in the National Register of Historic Places, would be threatened and implores the U.S. Postal Service to reconsider and keep the Arcade Post Office open.

Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ, 4508 Charlotte Ave., was constructed in 1921, this local landmark is owned by the Charlotte Heights Church of Christ congregation. Built around the same time suburban housing was expanding into this part of the city, the church is an example of 1920s Gothic Revival church architecture in Nashville.

Due to changing demographics of the neighborhood, the congregation has vacated the building and plans to build a new church on property it purchased two miles away.

The congregation is looking for a new use for their old church property after developers for a Rite

Aid Pharmacy dropped plans to build on it amid opposition from neighbors who do not wish to see the community landmark razed. The property is currently on the market and its future is uncertain. HNI encourages the congregation to sell the property to an owner that will adaptively reuse and preserve this historic landmark.

Home for Aged Masons/Masonic School, R.S. Gass Boulevard and Hart Lane in Inglewood, is the home for Aged Masons. A three-story limestone building constructed in 1913-1915, and the nearby ca. 1915 Boy's School are the only surviving buildings from a larger complex dating to the early 20th century, when the Tennessee Masons provided a campus to house widows, orphans, and the aged in the Masonic "family."

Designed by the Nashville architectural firm of Asmus & Norton, who designed the landmark Cathedral of Incarnation on West End, the Colonial Revival-style Home for Aged Masons is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Purchased by the State of Tennessee in 1941 for use as a tuberculosis hospital, the property was vacated in the 1990s, but plans for renovations are in the works. HNI encourages the State of Tennessee to adaptively reuse these historic buildings, perhaps donating or leasing them to a community nonprofit organization, to ensure their future preservation.

Historic Neon Signs, popular since the 1930s and 40s, these flashy electric signs promoted everything from bowling alleys, restaurants, liquor stores, nightclubs, and motels to drive-in theaters, car dealerships, and tourist attractions.

Currently there are no specific government protections for these popular landmarks, resulting in the signs being threatened by development or neglect. Good examples of neon signs are located at Weiss Liquor sign on Main Street in East Nashville, Krispy Kreme donuts on Thompson Lane and bowling alleys in Madison and Donelson as well as at the Loveless Café, Drake Motel, Elliston Place Soda Shoppe, Donut Den, and the Walter Nipper's Nashville Sporting Goods on Eighth Avenue North.

Iconic neon signs also grace Nashville's skyline, promoting WKDF and the L&C tower, as well as the guitar-shaped scoreboard at the Nashville Sounds ball field. HNI encourages owners of these signs to maintain them and restore them where needed as well as city leaders and planners to consider adopting ordinances that will protect these local works of art.

Historic Neighborhood Schools, Nashville's first public school opened in 1855 and the county's first public school opened in 1907; the two school districts merged in 1964. Today, Metro Schools counts 136 schools serving nearly 75,000 students. HNI first recognized that Nashville's historic neighborhood schools were threatened in 2001.

While there have been several success stories, such as preservation of the Eakin Elementary School near Hillsboro Village, many of the city's historic public schools are neglected.

John B. Ransom School at Elmington Place, just off West End Avenue, may be demolished for construction of eleven single-family homes. This historic city school dates from 1926 with wings added from 1932-1955 and was designed by the Nashville architectural firm of Warfield & Keeble, best known for designing the 1950s L&C Tower.

The school was last used as the Randall's Learning Center before Metro vacated it in 2007 and sold it at auction in 2008. HNI encourages the city to work with local neighborhood groups to develop a solution that will preserve this local landmark.

<http://www.tennessean.com/article/20090909/COUNTY01/90908004/Help+preserve+the+Nashville+Nine>

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