Seventh Annual Endangered Properties List

Vacant Church Properties

Citywide

SIGNIFICANCE Philadelphia’s neighborhoods are graced by hundreds of beautiful and historic churches and other religious buildings. These structures help define community character and often serve as important neighborhood landmarks.

THREAT With a shrinking city population and ever-shifting demographics, not all of the city’s historic religious structures have congregations to watch over them. Some historic church buildings have been demolished, some have been sold for other uses, and many congregations are being forced to consider leaving their historic buildings for smaller or more easily maintained spaces.

Examples of currently endangered church properties include:

- **Christ Memorial Church**
  4233-4257 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia
  Christ Memorial Reformed Episcopal Church was constructed in 1887 and designed by architect Isaac Pursell (1853-1910), one of the city’s most prolific church designers. Built on a knoll, the structure dominated the skyline for blocks around.
  In 2004, the church was struck by lightning, and the 170-foot-tall steeple collapsed, badly damaging the sanctuary. After a two-year court battle with its insurance company, the congregation could not afford the high cost of rebuilding, and the property was sold to a local developer.
  The church is listed as a contributing property in the West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb National Register Historic District, but that designation does not protect the building from being altered or demolished unless the developer plans to use federal funds.

- **Church of the Assumption**
  1123-1133 Spring Garden Street, Philadelphia
  The Church of the Assumption was constructed by the Catholic Church in 1848-1849. The church is the oldest surviving structure designed by prominent architect Patrick Charles Keely (1816-1896), who designed more than 600 churches in North America. It was the first Catholic church in Philadelphia to feature twin spires, an effort to differentiate Catholic ecclesiastical architecture from Protestant.
  The church has been vacant since the Archdiocese of Philadelphia closed it in 1995. Siloam, a nonprofit organization that provides mind/body/spirit services to people living with HIV/AIDS, purchased the property in 2006. After exploring options, Siloam planned to demolish the church, but neighborhood residents persuaded the Historical Commission to add the church to the Philadelphia Register in May 2009. Siloam has said it cannot afford to renovate the building.

- **Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church**
  1001-1007 S. 4th Street, Philadelphia
  The Emanuel Evangelical Lutheran Church was completed in 1869 to serve a German and German-speaking population in what is now known as the Queen Village neighborhood of South Philadelphia. The church was built in the modern Roman style, with a base of brown stone and a brick edifice. Its 187-foot-tall wooden steeple quickly became a landmark for ships in the Delaware River.
  The Emanuel Lutheran congregation thrived in its early decades, but in recent years, the now-small congregation found it impossible to maintain the large building. In 2008, it merged with a nearby church.
  The church was added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 1963, and therefore cannot be altered or demolished without the approval of the Historical Commission. But the (continued on page 2)
Sidney Hillman Medical Center
2116 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia

SIGNIFICANCE The Sidney Hillman Medical Center was built in 1950 by the Male Apparel Industry Union to provide free medical care to its members and is considered to be the first facility of its kind in the U.S. It served as the model for seven similar medical centers around the country, all named in honor of Sidney Hillman, an important labor leader.

 Designed by Louis Magaziner (1878-1956) and Herman Polss (1901-1964), the building is a distinctive example of mid-century Modernist architecture. The orange, limestone-covered façade angles away from Chestnut Street, while a reddish-brown, polished-granite base and end wall follow the street line. The diagonal organization of the plan allowed additional wall surfaces for a larger number of windows to provide natural light.

 The building is listed as a contributing property in the city’s Rittenhouse Fitler Historic District, and therefore cannot be altered or demolished without the approval of the Historical Commission. In addition, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) declared the Sidney Hillman Medical Center eligible for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

THREAT The building owner and joint venture partner, the John Buck Company, have proposed complete demolition of the Hillman Medical Center for a mixed-use development, including a 33-story apartment tower, retail space along Chestnut Street, and a parking garage, as well as separate office facilities for the medical center fronting on Sansom Street.

Although both its Architectural Committee and Financial Hardship Committee recommended that the application for demolition be denied, in June 2009 the Philadelphia Historical Commission approved the application to demolish the building by reason of financial hardship. The Preservation Alliance appealed that decision. Subsequently, the Zoning Board of Adjustment approved zoning variances for the project to allow for a building of a height far exceeding current zoning of the site. The Preservation Alliance appealed the zoning decision.

PHMC’s decision that the property is eligible for the National Register requires a Section 106 review of the project, because the developer has applied for federal mortgage insurance to assist financing. PHMC, like the Preservation Alliance, states that the proposed high-rise development will have an adverse impact on both the historic building and on the surrounding historic properties.

RECOMMENDATION Center City can benefit from additional residential development, which would also create badly needed jobs for the construction industry. However, the area has many parking lots and undeveloped sites suitable for new residential development that do not require the demolition of historic buildings or impose adverse impacts on historic districts.

The developer should seek other sites for the proposed project, and the property owner should explore ways to preserve and rehabilitate the Hillman Medical Center building.
Divine Lorraine
699 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia

SIGNIFICANCE The Divine Lorraine, formerly known as the Lorraine Apartments and the Lorraine Hotel, was one of the first high-rise apartment buildings in Philadelphia.

Designed by noted Victorian architect Willis Hale (1848-1907), the 10-story French Renaissance Revival style building was constructed in 1893-1894 and offered new amenities like electricity and telephones. In 1898, Hale designed a six-story red brick annex to house servants for the residents as well as the staff for the kitchens and restaurants of the building. Two years later, the Metropolitan Hotel Company purchased the building and re-envisioned it as the Lorraine Hotel.

In 1948, the building was purchased by Rev. Major J. Divine and the Divine Peace Mission. Father Divine renamed the building the Divine Lorraine Hotel, and operated it as the first racially integrated hotel in Philadelphia. The building also served as the center of the Divine Peace Mission's civil rights, religious and business activities for the next 50 years.

THREAT The building has been vacant since 2000, when Father Divine’s followers sold it. The Divine Lorraine was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2002, and the Philadelphia Historical Commission listed the building on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 2005.

In 2006, the Historical Commission approved plans to convert the building to condominiums as part of an 800-unit residential complex constructed in several phases adjacent and connected to the Divine Lorraine. Although that approval was appealed, the developer proceeded with demolition of the interior of the building, removing many of its historic elements. All construction activity ceased shortly thereafter, and the building has remained vacant and unprotected since then. In response to graffiti appearing on the building, the Philadelphia Historical Commission went to court to force the owner, a Dutch company with no offices in the United States, to board up the property.

RECOMMENDATION The Divine Lorraine is a particularly vulnerable building and is in grave danger. The Dutch company that owns the building has no other interests in the U.S. and has clearly indicated a lack of concern for protection and maintenance of the building. It is unlikely that the project it proposed can proceed in the current economic climate.

Although immediate development of the property is unlikely, the time is ripe for a Philadelphia investor to purchase the property for future development.

William Penn High School
1333 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia

SIGNIFICANCE Opened in September 1974, William Penn High School was an ambitious and high-profile project of then-Superintendent Mark Shedd to bring quality schools to Philadelphia’s poor and especially African American neighborhoods.

The school was designed by celebrated architect Romaldo Giurgola of the Philadelphia firm Mitchell/Giurgola. Originally envisioned as a magnet school for girls, William Penn High School was neither a magnet school nor single-sex by the time it opened. The $23 million complex includes five interconnected structures, green courtyards, and recreation space, and is located prominently on North Broad Street. When William Penn High School opened, it was the largest and best-equipped facility of its kind in the city, with an Olympic-size swimming pool, radio and TV studios, and a 450-seat theater.

The structure’s concrete façade appears fortress-like to many, but the school’s interiors include a rich variety of soaring and sun-filled spaces. Inga Saffron, architecture critic for the Philadelphia Inquirer, toured the building in March 2009 and commented, “It’s rare in a building today, especially an institutional one, to see so many creative architectural ideas in play at once.”

THREAT The Philadelphia School District announced in February 2009 that it would close William Penn High School at the end of the 2009 school year, due to declining enrollment and the high cost of repairing the school’s deteriorating underground piping system. Community members successfully fought the closure, and officials announced in June 2009 that the district would instead close the building for two years beginning in June 2010 while considering its options.

RECOMMENDATION At a time when “sustainability” and “green design” are key components of public policy, it seems inappropriate to demolish existing buildings before exploring all possibilities for adapting them for current community needs.

William Penn High School should be renovated and put to appropriate use, if not by the School District then by a college or university (Temple is only two blocks north), a charter school or a consortium of institutional and community users.
**Historic Windows**

**SIGNIFICANCE** Windows often define the character of older and historic buildings. From the wooden, double-hung windows common in Philadelphia row houses to the massive floor-to-ceiling plate glass windows used in Modernist buildings, windows are essential elements of a building’s style and history.

**THREAT** Historic windows have become an easy target in the push to make buildings more “green” and reduce energy costs.

Homeowners are bombarded with marketing that promotes replacement windows. Though new windows rarely match the high-quality aesthetic, craftsmanship or material of original windows, companies claim that replacing rather than repairing windows will save consumers time and money.

A new federal program offers up to $1,500 in tax credits for installing certain energy-efficient replacement windows during 2009 and 2010.

**RECOMMENDATION** Older windows can be just as energy efficient as new windows with proper maintenance and repair, weather-stripping, and sometimes the installation of storm windows. Retaining original windows is also far more environmentally sustainable than scrapping them for newly manufactured windows.

Property owners should resist the claims of window manufacturers that replacing windows is the best environmental solution. The Philadelphia Historical Commission should continue to require that property owners maintain a building’s historic windows when applying for alteration permits.

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**Cast-Iron Subway Entrances of Philadelphia**

**SIGNIFICANCE** From the 1920s to the 1950s, the city of Philadelphia greatly expanded its network of underground mass transit beyond the original 1907 Market Street Subway. Philadelphia’s population was growing during this period, and the city responded to these new transportation needs by adding the Broad Street Subway system and improving the Market-Frankford and Subway-Surface lines.

While much of this expanded transit system was hidden underground, the city marked the entrances to the subways by installing cast-iron guardrails around the entry stairs on three sides. Vertical lamp standards mounted near the entrance, either singly or in pairs, serve as beacons denoting the location of the entries.

The cast-iron elements that remain today include four distinct designs constructed and installed at eight different times between 1928 to 1955. The oldest cast-iron entrances can be found on the North Broad Street section of the Broad Street Subway, with more ornate ornamentation than the later 1950s entrances installed on the Market-Frankford and Subway-Surface lines.

**THREAT** The cast-iron entrances are vulnerable to rusting and corrosion along the flat, rectangular bases and bottom edges. SEPTA has removed cast-iron entrances as part of ongoing station remodeling over the years, leaving only a handful of the oldest entrances intact.

**RECOMMENDATION** The cast-iron subway entrances are distinctive designs and part of the history of the subway system in Philadelphia. Their historic character often is more compatible with the entrance locations than newer designs. At least the remaining cast-iron entrances on the Broad Street Subway should be listed on the Philadelphia Register, and SEPTA should maintain and restore them to their historic appearance.
**Cruiser Olympia**  
*Penn’s Landing, Philadelphia*

**SIGNIFICANCE** The *Olympia* is the oldest steel warship afloat in the world. The cruiser launched from San Francisco, CA, in 1892, and is similar to the early steel warships built in Philadelphia for the U.S. Navy. Best known for its service as a flagship in the Spanish-American War, the *Olympia* devastated a Spanish fleet at Manila Bay in the Philippines on May 1, 1898. Then-Commodore George Dewey was on board the cruiser, and gave his famous order from *Olympia’s* bridge: “You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.”

The ship later served as a training vessel and was active in World War I, before being decommissioned in 1922. The *Olympia* was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1966 and later named a National Historic Landmark. The *Olympia* has operated as a floating museum for decades, overseen first by the Cruiser Olympia Association and more recently by the Independence Seaport Museum, which took responsibility for the cruiser in 1996.

**THREAT** Over the last 13 years, the Independence Seaport Museum has made great strides in stabilizing the *Olympia*, including installing a fire protection system and pumps to remove water. However, the vessel’s steel hull has deteriorated and thinned after so many years in the water. The *Olympia* needs significant hull repairs in dry-dock to ensure that it will remain afloat, and the estimated costs for such repairs are substantial. Just to move the ship to dry-dock, the museum would need to dredge a path out of the silt and debris at the river’s edge and stabilize the vessel to ensure it would not sink en route.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Independence Seaport Museum is developing a new strategic plan that includes consideration of the role of the *Olympia* in the museum’s programs. The *Olympia* is a significant historic landmark and deserves preservation for its historic significance. It also adds interest to Penn’s Landing. The Independence Seaport Museum should seek resources to make the necessary repairs so that the *Olympia* can continue to be available for public access and interpretation.

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**Pennhurst State School and Hospital**  
*Spring City, Chester County*

**SIGNIFICANCE** Pennhurst State School and Hospital, and its poor treatment of residents, served as an important catalyst in the movement to defend the civil and human rights of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Founded in 1908 as the Eastern Pennsylvania Institution for the Feeble Minded and Epileptic, Pennhurst is located high on a hill overlooking the Schuylkill River. The 112-acre central campus includes more than 20 Jacobean Revival buildings, many linked by underground tunnels, and was designed by architect Philip H. Johnson (1868-1933), who served for 30 years as architect for the Philadelphia Department of Public Health. During that time, he designed a number of hospitals and city health institutions, including Philadelphia General Hospital and the Philadelphia Hospital for Contagious Diseases.

At its founding, Pennhurst was seen as a model facility for the treatment of individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Planners intended Pennhurst to be self-sustaining, isolated from the rest of society, and residents provided a large amount of the labor to build and maintain the institution. However, a groundbreaking 1968 NBC investigation, “Suffer the Little Children,” exposed squalid conditions and drew national outrage. Later legal challenges drew further attention to Pennhurst’s conditions, and a Supreme Court decision forced the institution to close in 1986.

**THREAT** Pennhurst has remained vacant since its closure 23 years ago, and the buildings and grounds have quietly deteriorated. In 2008, a developer purchased the central campus, with plans to demolish all or most of the historic campus for single-family homes.

A group of concerned citizens formed Pennhurst Memorial and Preservation Alliance (PMPA) to rally public support for preserving the campus. With the developer’s approval, PMPA recently received a grant of design services from the Community Design Collaborative to consider how the site might be adaptively reused. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has confirmed Pennhurst’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, but that designation would not protect buildings from being altered or demolished unless the developer planned to use federal funds.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Community Design Collaborative has assembled an excellent team of architects, urban planners, landscape architects and economic development consultants to explore the feasibility of preserving some or all of the historic buildings at Pennhurst. The results of the study will be beneficial to the property owner as well as to township officials and others concerned with the future of Pennhurst. The property owner should cooperate with the feasibility study and explore its recommendations.
Deshong Mansion and Gallery Building
Avenue of the States / Edgemont Avenue, Chester, Delaware County

SIGNIFICANCE Wealthy businessman and art collector Alfred O. Deshong (1837-1913) bequeathed his family estate to the city of Chester, in the care of three trustees, for the creation of an art museum and public park. The Deshong mansion, a stuccoed masonry Greek revival structure, was constructed ca. 1850 by Alfred’s father, who made his fortune in the lumber business. Alfred lived in the house for most of his life, and in his will, instructed his trustees to maintain the estate as a public park.

He also directed his trustees to build a museum on the grounds to display his impressive art collection. The trustees selected architect Clarence W. Brazer (1880-1956) to design the museum, which was dedicated in 1916. The Renaissance Revival museum building is located on the northeast corner of the property.

THREAT By the 1970s, the surrounding neighborhood had deteriorated, and the threat of crime kept visitors away. After a scandal about art theft at the museum, the Deshong trustees petitioned the Delaware County Orphans’ Court in 1984 to terminate the trust. The property was transferred to the Delaware County Industrial Development Authority, and the art collection was given to Widener University.

Since then, the buildings have stood vacant and are deteriorating through neglect. The estate is vulnerable to being subdivided for new development, which could threaten the mansion and museum building. The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission has confirmed the Deshong estate’s eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places, but that designation would not protect buildings from being altered or demolished unless the developer planned to use federal funds.

RECOMMENDATION The Delaware County Industrial Development Authority should explore the feasibility of re-using the buildings. They should engage planning and economic development consultants to examine potential uses of the site and buildings and strategies for preservation.

2008 ENDANGERED LIST
Carnegie Libraries
Philadelphia
As a result of community opposition, Mayor Michael Nutter withdrew his plan to close 11 branch libraries, four of which were funded by a 1905 grant from Andrew Carnegie. The Preservation Alliance nominated the four Carnegie libraries to the Philadelphia Register, and the Historical Commission approved the nominations for the Kingsessing, Holmesburg, Logan and Haddington branches in June 2009.

Central Delaware River Waterfront
Philadelphia
The city of Philadelphia has moved forward with planning for the Delaware River Waterfront by reorganizing the Penn’s Landing Corporation and by selecting Cooper Robertson of New York to develop a plan for the area. It is not clear if this plan will give consideration to the industrial heritage of the area, the focus of the endangered listing in 2008.

Elkins Estate
Elkins Park, Montgomery County
Food for Life Inc. purchased the Elkins Estate in 2009 with the intention of preserving the property and all historic structures. Elstowe Mansion is now available to host weddings and special events; Chelten House is available for wellness programs and retreats.

John D. McIlhenny House
Philadelphia
Owned by the Philadelphia School District, the McIlhenny House remains vacant and continues to deteriorate.

Robert Purvis House
Philadelphia
The Robert Purvis House remains in a state of disrepair. The Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections brought legal action against the owner in 2009 to require stabilization of the property. Some work has been done, but much remains to be done before the property is secure. The City continues to press for the owner’s compliance through the court.

Lower Dublin Academy
Philadelphia
The Lower Dublin Academy building remains in a state of disrepair. The Friends of Lower Dublin Academy, dedicated to preserving the building, now has 501c3 status, an expanded web site at www.lowerdublinacademy.org, and is actively fundraising to support its cause of saving the building.
It appeared as if the Boyd Theater had been saved when ARC Wheeler entered into an agreement of sale with Live Nation and presented plans for renovation of the theater in conjunction with the development of a hotel on the site. When the economic recession required postponing the hotel, ARC Wheeler redesigned the project to include only the restoration of the theater as a first phase. However, public funding for the project—expected to come from the state's Redevelopment Assistance Capital Program—was delayed by the state budget problems in 2009 and has not yet been resolved. Without public assistance, ARC Wheeler’s proposal cannot move forward.

**Hatfield House**
*Fairmount Park, 33rd Street and Girard Avenue, Philadelphia*

2006 Endangered Properties List
The City of Philadelphia has leased Hatfield House to the Father’s Day Rally Committee, a non-profit organization, with requirements for rehabilitation of the property.

**Church of St. James the Less**
*3222 West Clearfield Street, Philadelphia*

2006 Endangered Properties List
With the support of the Episcopal Diocese of Philadelphia, the congregation of St. Mark’s Episcopal Church at 1625 Locust Street, Philadelphia, has adopted St. James the Less as a parish mission church. The congregation has also begun planning for a new school at St. James the Less.

**Stonorov Steel House**
*Charlestown Township, Chester County*

2005 Endangered Properties List
After many years of seeking a permanent home for the Stonorov Steel House, the Preservation Alliance secured the interest of Patrick Radbaugh, who will reassemble the house on Cherrymont Farm in Morgantown, PA. The house eventually will be available for public viewing.

**Bouvier Building**
*149 S. Hancock Street, Philadelphia*

2005 Endangered Properties List
Although the Bouvier Building is still in danger of demolition, the Redevelopment Authority, owner of the property, finally listed the property for sale in 2009. (See http://www.phila.gov/rda/ for information.)

**Philadelphia Historic School Buildings**
*Citywide*

2004 Endangered List
The Northeast Manual Training School, subsequently Edison High School, at 7th Street and Lehigh Avenue has been sold by the Philadelphia School District to a private developer who proposes to demolish it for new development.

**Chester Avenue Street Paving**
*West Philadelphia*

2004 Endangered Properties List

**Christ Temple Church**
*(North Philadelphia)*
*1617 Girard Avenue, Philadelphia*

2003 Endangered Properties List

**STATUSES U NCHANGED**

The following properties remain in the same condition as they were when listed on the Endangered Properties List.

- **Family Court Building**
  *19th and Vine Streets, Philadelphia*
  2007 Endangered Properties List

- **Castleway Development**
  *1900 Block of Sansom Street, Philadelphia*
  2006 Endangered Properties List

- **Surplus City Properties / Germantown Town Hall**
  *Citywide*
  2006 Endangered Properties List

- **Chestnut Street**
  *700 to 2000 blocks of Chestnut Street, Philadelphia*
  2007 Endangered Properties List

- **Cramp Shipyard Machine Shop #2**
  *Front Street and Girard Avenue, Philadelphia*
  2005 Endangered Properties List

- **Burk Mansion**
  *Thompson and N. Broad Streets, Philadelphia*
  2004 Endangered Properties List

- **Nugent Home for Baptists**
  *W. Johnson Street, Philadelphia*
  2004 Endangered Properties List

- **Dilworth House**
  *S. 6th Street, Philadelphia*
  2003 Endangered Properties List

- **Madison Square**
  *2200 and 2300 Blocks of Madison Square, Philadelphia*
  2003 Endangered Properties List

- **Lynnewood Hall**
  *920 Spring Avenue, Elkins Park, Montgomery County*
  2003 Endangered Properties List

- **Historic Farmhouse, Philadelphia**
  *1817 S. Vodges Street, Philadelphia*
“Community character is lost one building at a time.”

Ed McMahon, The Conservation Fund

Is there a historic property in your neighborhood that you would miss if it were demolished? Don’t wait for it to appear on the next Endangered Properties list—tell us about it NOW and let us help you find a way to protect it through historic designation or other means.

EMAIL advocacy@PreservationAlliance.com