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Landmarks Illinois Announces the 2008 Ten Most Endangered Historic Places

SPRINGFIELD – A list of the state’s Ten Most Endangered Historic Places for 2008 was announced by Landmarks Illinois at an April 2nd press conference held at the State Capitol in Springfield. Landmarks Illinois is a statewide historic preservation education and advocacy group. The press event was attended by community representatives and state legislators – including members of the group’s Historic Preservation Legislative Caucus.

“The sites named on the list are all exceptionally important structures,” said David Bahlman, president of Landmark Illinois. “And by calling attention to them, we hope to generate solutions for their preservation.”

Properties named to this year’s Ten Most Endangered list include a site along the Underground Railroad, a parochial school constructed by Civil War veterans, Chicago’s first riverfront plaza, early examples of American skyscrapers, a Route 66 eatery in Central Illinois, a Mid-Century modern building designed for the Navy, and two renowned sporting facilities: U of I’s Assembly Hall and Chicago’s Wrigley Field.

The Ten Most Endangered list’s purpose is to focus attention on sites threatened by: deterioration, lack of maintenance, insufficient funds, inappropriate development, or insensitive public policy. Since the first list was issued by Landmarks Illinois in 1995, 143 sites have now been identified on the endangered list. The status of the listed properties is as follows: 38 have been saved, 28 have been demolished or substantially altered, and 77 remain threatened to some degree.

Landmarks Illinois is celebrating its 37th year as a statewide advocacy and education organization. The organization works with citizens and communities throughout Illinois to preserve, protect and promote architectural and historic resources in Illinois through advocacy and education.

Following is a short summary of each endangered property. Photos are available at www.landmarks.org through the “Press Room” link.

Adams Memorial Library 102 E. Wesley St., Wheaton (DuPage County)

This Richardsonian Romanesque structure was designed in 1891 by noted architect Charles Sumner Frost to house Wheaton’s first public library. It is located across the street from a city park named in honor of the library’s founder, John Quincy Adams (a cousin of his presidential namesake.) The second-floor auditorium was the original children’s reading room and features a barrel-vaulted ceiling and stained glass windows. The building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is one of AIA-Illinois’ Top 150 Great Places. When a new city library was constructed in 1965, the DuPage County Historical Society purchased the building for use as a museum. At the time, the county agreed to hire a curator and pay operational expenses. However, in the past two years the museum’s budget has been cut by 50 percent and county

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officials are contemplating their options, which include liquidating the collections and closing the facility. If the building is closed, its future could be in jeopardy since it is not a locally protected landmark.

Assembly Hall

1800 S. 1st St., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (Champaign County)

This 16,000-seat arena was designed in 1961 by U of I alumnus Max Abramovitz—whose firm also designed the United Nations Building in New York City—with structural engineers Amman & Whitney. The vast 400-foot-wide concrete domed structure is cited in Frederick Koeper's *Illinois Architecture* and numerous architectural periodicals. It has been declared eligible for the National Register of Historic Places and was ranked #3 in importance by a 1994 campus historic preservation plan (behind Altgeld Hall and the Auditorium Building). Poet Carl Sandburg spoke at the dedication in 1963 and the arena has hosted such performers as Elvis Presley, the Rolling Stones, Frank Sinatra, and the Fighting Illini basketball teams. The university expects to complete a study this year to either replace the facility or make major renovations to accommodate luxury suites and elevators.

Burlingame House

11930 Crown St., Eden (Randolph County)

Located 50 miles northwest of Carbondale and just east of Sparta, this two-story brick Greek Revival-style house dates to 1849. A. A. Burlingame, a local farm pump manufacturer, lived here through the 1850s and offered his residence as a refuge to escaped slaves along what became known as the Underground Railroad. Burlingame's efforts to shelter and transport runaway slaves north as part of his business trips are an integral part of Illinois' antebellum history. The house is an historic resource within the National Park Service's proposed Mississippi Delta Region African-American Heritage Corridor. Vacant and for sale, the residence is in dire need of rehabilitation.

Chicago Daily News Building

400-442 W. Madison St., Chicago (Cook County)

Dramatically located along the Chicago River, this 26-story Art Deco masterpiece was designed by Holabird and Root in 1929. The building's U-shaped design embraces a public plaza facing the river, framed by two concourses. The barrel-vaulted hallway in the south concourse once featured a John W. Norton mural depicting the process of news gathering, printing, and distribution. The mural was removed in 1993 and its fate is unknown. The building owner has discussed construction of a new tower on the site of the riverside plaza and, without local landmark protection, this building and plaza could be radically altered and/or demolished.

Germania Club and Theatre

1536-50 N. Clark St., Chicago (Cook County)

These two buildings are located at the southwest corner of Lincoln Park. The three-story Classical Revival building, designed by August Fiedler, was built as a German-American social hall in 1888. By 1916, a two-story theatre building was completed to the north of the club and also called the Germania. One of Chicago's oldest movie theatres, it was designed by Adolf Werner and retains much of its terra cotta ornament in the second-story piers and cornice. In the wake of World War I, both venues changed their names for political reasons to the Lincoln Club and the Parkside Theatre. The Germania Club moniker was restored in 1921, and the movie house became the Village Theatre in 1967. With the closing of the theatre in 2007, the recent sale

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of the Germania Club to a shopping center developer, and generous zoning allowances, this block is in great danger of redevelopment. While the club was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976, neither it nor the theatre is a protected local landmark.

Gunners' Mates School

Great Lakes Naval Base, North Chicago (Lake County)

This vast glass-and-steel structure, also known as Building #521, was designed in 1954 by Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM). This was Bruce Graham's first commission with SOM and the first glass curtain wall building designed by the firm's Chicago office. Described by the *Chicago Tribune's* architecture critic as a "cathedral of the Cold War," Building #521's blue-green façade conceals a 95,000-square-foot interior that housed full-scale artillery and battle sets used for training simulations. When the Navy stated its intention to demolish the building in 2006, SOM offered several reuse options that would respect its ground-breaking design. However, the Navy continues to support demolition even though it has no definitive plans for the site.

Michigan Avenue Streetwall

Michigan Avenue, from Randolph St. to 11th St., Chicago (Cook County)

This 12-block stretch of historic buildings is one of the most outstanding streetscapes in the world. Designed over the course of 50 years by prominent architects, these buildings reflect an array of styles and building technologies dating from 1880 to 1930. After 25 years of discussion, local landmark designation was finally approved by the Chicago City Council in 2002. Two current proposals, however, threaten the district's character. The former Chicago Athletic Association and YWCA buildings have been slated for rooftop additions, despite the limitations of height and scale enforced in landmark districts. The additions are designed to be set back from the historic façades, but call for considerable demolition of the existing buildings. Their height and mass would greatly disrupt the historic skyline as viewed from Grant Park and the lakefront. Should these projects gain approval from the city, they would set a precedent for high-rise additions in landmark districts and weaken the local landmark ordinance.

The Mill

738 S. Washington St., Lincoln (Logan County)

Built in 1929 as a take-out sandwich shop along historic Route 66, this Dutch windmill-inspired structure is a classic example of early American roadside architecture. The large addition is a former army barracks building that was moved from Camp Ellis in Fulton County after World War II and converted into a dance hall and dining space for the Mill. The restaurant was abandoned in 1996 but, despite years of vacancy and general deterioration, the historic site remains a nostalgic landmark along the "Mother Road." In 2006, the Route 66 Heritage Foundation of Logan County acquired the property and stabilized the building, but its future remains uncertain.

Spoon River Bridge

Ill. Rte. 2, Bernadotte (Fulton County)

Located approximately 20 miles east of Macomb, this steel through-truss bridge, built in 1903, is one of four remaining metal highway bridges in Fulton County listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It spans the Spoon River in an area that gained prominence after poet Edgar Lee Masters' *Spoon River Anthology* was published in 1915. The bridge is identified as a special point of interest along the regional scenic drive that celebrates Masters' literary landmarks.

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Vehicular traffic was prohibited many years ago and, due to increased safety concerns, pedestrian access was banned in 2007. The county does not have funds in its budget for repairs and local advocates and the county engineer are soliciting donations to fix the bridge in time for the annual scenic drive and festival in October.

Ursuline Academy

1400 N. 5th St., Springfield (Sangamon County)

This Civil War-era girls' school was established by an order of nuns that abandoned monastic life in favor of public service through education. The original 1867 building, a three-story brick Italianate, was constructed by Raglan & Myers and housed both the convent and classrooms. Later additions of a chapel (1895) and music hall (1908) were designed by William Conway, Springfield's first certified architect. The music hall hosted poet Vachel Lindsay and the Von Trapp children, along with 150 years of graduating classes. The property was purchased by Lisle's Benedictine University in 2003 to serve as a satellite campus. Four years later, Benedictine closed the high school campus with little notice and vacated the three historic buildings. Plans have been drafted for a new college facility, and Benedictine's president has not ruled out demolition of existing structures.

Wrigley Field

1060 W. Addison St., Chicago (Cook County)

"A Special 11th Designation"

Lost amid the recent public outcry over the possible sale and re-naming of this famed sports facility was the announcement of a proposed rehabilitation project that could seriously alter the character of the nation's second-oldest active baseball park. Although Wrigley Field was designated a Chicago Landmark in 2004, the Illinois Sports Facilities Authority's purchase proposal calls for "relaxation" of the city's landmark regulations. If the ISFA is successful in their demands, this could set a dangerous precedent for other local landmarks. The ballpark, which was designed for a Federal League baseball team in 1914, has been the home of the National League Chicago Cubs since 1916, as well as the Chicago Bears from 1921 to 1970.

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