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Landmarks Illinois announces Ten Most Endangered Historic Places for 2011

Wednesday, April 6, 2011, Springfield, Ill. — A list of the state’s ten “most threatened” historic sites was announced today at a press conference at the state capitol in Springfield.

Now in its 17th year, the statewide endangered list calls attention to historic resources in dire need of assistance in the form of responsible stewardship or creative reuse plans. This year, a number of the sites listed have fallen victim to the poor economic climate, which has resulted in property foreclosures and restrictions in available financing.

“The sites named on the list are all exceptionally important structures,” said Jim Peters, President of Landmarks Illinois. “And by calling attention to them, we hope to generate solutions for their preservation.”

The properties on this year’s list are: an 1859 mansion, a pair of buildings that housed one of the state’s most noted artists, a turn-of-the-century historic bridge, an 1871 county sheriff’s residence and jail, a former social settlement house, a 1930s Art Deco theater, a 1920s community center that promoted physical fitness, a Bertrand Goldberg-designed modern hospital, three century-old Catholic churches, and one of the state’s most extravagant movie palaces.

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Since the inception of Landmarks Illinois' "Ten Most" list in 1995, more than a third of the listed properties have been saved, less than a quarter have been demolished, and the rest remain threatened or are being rehabilitated.

Landmarks Illinois is celebrating its 40th year as a statewide advocacy and education organization. The not-for-profit works with citizens and communities throughout Illinois to preserve, protect and promote historic places through advocacy and education. In addition to the Ten Most Endangered list, the organization also sponsors an annual awards program and a matching grants program for County Courthouses.

The complete "Ten Most" list, including photos of the following sites, is available at www.Landmarks.org through the "Press Room" link.

Landmarks Illinois 2011 Ten Most Endangered Historic Places

Belleville Turner Hall

15 N. First St., Belleville (St. Clair County)

This brick-and-limestone building, with Art Deco and Gothic ornamentation, was constructed by the German community in 1923-24 as a social and civic center. Its primary purpose was a venue for physical fitness and educational programs for the community. Owned by the City of Belleville since 2006 and vacant, the building is in need of a new use and immediate repairs. A grassroots organization has offered to raise funds for repairs and to develop a plan for converting the building into a visual and performing arts center, but the City has not expressed interest.

Bolivia Road Bridge

North Fork, Sangamon River, Bolivia (Christian and Sangamon counties)

This bridge is the oldest in Illinois to include a Parker through-truss span (named for the engineer C.H. Parker) that still serves vehicular traffic. Connecting the counties of Sangamon and Christian, this single-lane, steel-and-timber bridge was built in 1901. In 2001, the Sangamon County Highway Department announced plans to replace it with a new concrete structure. Due to lack of funding, however, the bridge has not yet been demolished and replaced. Local advocates are working with county and state officials to preserve the bridge for cycling and pedestrian use. In the meantime, the bridge continues to deteriorate and may risk closure.

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Iannelli Home and Studio

225 N. Northwest Hwy., Park Ridge (Cook County)

This pair of late 19th and early 20th century buildings were the home and studio of famed sculptor Alfonso Iannelli (1888-1965) for more than 40 years. They are now for sale and vulnerable to demolition if purchased by an unsympathetic buyer. At this location, Iannelli produced innovative sculptures in collaboration with such architects as Barry Byrne, Purcell & Elmslie, and Frank Lloyd Wright. The locally based Kalo Foundation has taken on an advocacy and fundraising campaign to save the property for what it hopes could be an Iannelli Studio Heritage Center.

New Regal Theater

1641-59 E. 79th St., Chicago (Cook County)

Originally built as the Avalon in 1927, this is a prime example of the “atmospheric” motion picture palace. It was designed in a Middle Eastern/Moorish-style by noted movie palace architect John Eberson. The 2,300-seat theater has changed hands several times over the years and has functioned as a church, a cultural venue, and a live performance space. In 2010, the New Regal was cited for dangerous exterior wall conditions by the City of Chicago and a court case was started to monitor its condition. The building has since gone into foreclosure and is expected to be sold through a judicial sale this summer. In the meantime, needed repairs have not been undertaken.

Prentice Women’s Hospital

333 E. Superior St., Chicago (Cook County)

This Bertrand Goldberg-designed building has been largely vacant since Northwestern’s Women’s Hospital relocated to a new structure in 2007. Ownership is expected to revert back to Northwestern University this year, when the last tenant moves out of the building. This concrete, clover leaf-shaped structure, which was built in 1975, would then likely be demolished for a new medical research facility. Although Goldberg’s organic architectural designs – such as this one – were widely influential, none of his major Chicago works is protected by local landmark designation.

Sheriff's Residence and Jail

259 W. State St., Paxton (Ford County)

Located next to the Ford County Courthouse, this 1871 Italianate-style, brick house served as a sheriff's residence, with an attached stone jail, for 120 years. It was sold in 1993 to private buyers who planned to create a bed and breakfast, but they were unable to carry out the project and the building has sat vacant for several years. The County repurchased the building in 2007 with the intent of using it to relocate probation offices from the courthouse. However, county officials have since decided against this approach and have suggested possible demolition. Local advocates have urged the County to consider other options, such as leasing the building for office space or for a community use. To date, county officials have been unwilling to consider these options.

Soper-Burr House

812-814 Prairie St., Bloomington (McLean County)

Located on a highly visible corner facing a public square, this is one of the oldest and most prominent homes in the Franklin Square Historic District. It was constructed in three phases, from 1859 to 1890. Vacant since June 2009, the house has been in the City's building court due to neglect and numerous code violations. A local bank foreclosed on the property in 2010 and is seeking a new owner. Neighboring homeowners believe if the home is not acquired and renovated soon, its declining condition and appearance will negatively impact the overall health and character of the district.

Streator Catholic Churches

Immaculate Conception, 404 N. Park St., Streator (LaSalle County)

St. Anthony's Church, 407 S. Park St., Streator (LaSalle County)

St. Stephen's Church, 711 Lundy St., Streator (LaSalle County)

Citing shrinking congregations and costly building repairs, the Catholic Diocese of Peoria approved a consolidation plan that resulted in the September 2010 closure of three late-19th and early-20th century churches in this north-central Illinois community. Land was purchased—outside the city limits—to construct a new church serving a single consolidated parish. While congregants from each closed parish are currently challenging the consolidation under a Canon Law process with the Vatican, services are being held at St. Stephen's Church. However, many fear this is temporary until funds can be raised to build a new church. St. Anthony's Church and Immaculate Conception Church have been vacated and are planned for demolition.

West End Settlement House

427 7th Ave., Rock Island (Rock Island County)

Built in 1909 in the city's West End neighborhood, this building provided social services and educational training for the city's poorest citizens at a time when "settlement houses" were the only resource for such needs in big cities. Currently, the Prairie/Craftsman-inspired building, identified by the city of Rock Island as one of its "100 Most Significant Structures," is occupied by an Elks organization for its lodge. However, conflicting ownership interests, due to unpaid property taxes, have put the building in a state of endangerment, as many needed upgrades to keep the building a viable facility for public use are not being addressed.

Will Rogers Theatre

705-715 Monroe St., Charleston (Coles County)

Since 1938, this theatre has been downtown Charleston's only movie house. Its Art Deco design, vertical tower, and marquee also mark it as one of this eastern Illinois community's most distinctive buildings. Permanently closed in November 2010, the owner, American Multi-Cinema (AMC), is selling the theater and the adjoining commercial block. Locals fear that due to years of deferred maintenance and a lagging economy, it may be a long time before the building is sold to a capable owner. In the meantime, the building is at risk of further deterioration. The Charleston Preservation Commission has recommended the building for local landmark designation to protect it from future demolition, but the City Council has yet to make a final decision.

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