ANNOUNCING MISSOURI’S 2012
LIST OF MOST ENDANGERED
HISTORIC PLACES

MAY 30, 2012

Missouri Preservation announced its list of Most Endangered Historic Places today at a press conference held in St. Joseph at The Frank L. Sommer house, which is one of the places named on this list. Others to be named are listed below, in no particular order. Missouri Preservation is a statewide organization whose chief advocacy program is the Most Endangered Historic Places. Now in its twelfth year, the program has sought to bring statewide attention to endangered places through a media campaign and offers support services to the properties on the list. Nominations are received from citizen preservationists throughout the state. This year there was such a large number of new nominations that an entirely new list was presented. Those properties that would have normally been carried over from the previous year are on a “Watched List,” which is also provided below.

Missouri’s 2012 Most Endangered Historic Places

The Frank L. Sommer House (“The Cracker House”) Buchanan County
The AAA Building St. Louis City
The Lyric Theater Building Phelps County
Barns and Farmsteads of Missouri Statewide
(Including the Fulton State Hospital Barns, Callaway County)
The Poncey Building Jackson County
The Diamonds Café & Truck Stop Franklin County
Kemper Arena Jackson County
The Charles and Bettie Birthright House Dunklin County
School Buildings of Missouri Statewide
(Milton Moore School in Kansas City, Jackson County)
(Central Elementary School in Boonville, Cooper County)
(Lyon School in St. Louis City)
The Frank L. Sommer House  
(The Cracker House)  
914 Main Street  
Saint Joseph, Buchanan County

This Italianate style home was built in 1882 just a few blocks north of Frank Sommer’s bakery. The saltine cracker is known to have been created at this bakery earning the house its local moniker, the “Cracker House.” Mr. Sommer’s bakery, the American Biscuit Company, later merged with the New York Biscuit Company to become the National Biscuit Company, or Nabisco. Nabisco now makes more than 35 billion crackers each year – enough to circle the equator 44 times. The Cracker House has been vacant for a number of years and has suffered greatly from neglect. It is currently owned by an absentee landlord and the property is on St. Joseph’s dangerous properties list. A local non-profit group called The Cracker House Project is hopeful that they can gain ownership of this historic home and renovate it as a house museum and for other public use.
The American Automobile Association or AAA Building is an oval-shaped mid-century modern building in a modern classical style referred to as New Formalist. Designed by architect W.A. Sarmiento in 1976, the building has not yet reached the 50-year-old age criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In the absence of a completed survey of modern architecture in St. Louis, it has not yet been identified as potentially eligible for historic listing, and therefore is not subject demolition review. Even though Saint Louis’ mayor has supported the preservation of this iconic building in the City’s West End, the Planning Commission gave approval by 5-3 vote to allow a developer to demolish the building and clear the site for a CVS Drug Store. It is hoped that Most Endangered listing will encourage CVS to use the existing building for its drug store operation or construct a new building elsewhere.
The Lyric Live Theater
117 First Street
Newburg, Phelps County

Originally named The Community Theater, the Lyric opened in 1919, exclusively offering live performances then switched to a combination of live theater and movies before it closed in 1957. The building was used for storage by a local lumber company for a number of years. In 1983 it was purchased by J.D. Turley and again became a live theater venue. It was purchased later by the Regional Opera Company (ROC), and this group has presented live performances during every summer season since then. The ROC is a volunteer group and the only money collected for upkeep of the building has been from donations taken at the door. Storms on leap day 2012 have caused damage to the building and without funds for repairs needed immediately, the local company announced that it cannot hold performances there in 2012. It is hoped the Lyric Live Theater can find supportive financial friends through its Most Endangered listing and return to a place of entertainment and pride for the Newburg community.
Barns of Missouri, Statewide
Including the State Hospital Barns
Fulton, Callaway County

According to the most recent US Census of Agriculture, the State of Missouri ranked #2 in the country in the number of historic barns with over 35,000 reported. Due to a variety of factors including urbanization, new farming building practices and the inability of small farmers to compete with large agribusiness, we are losing barns and farmsteads at an alarming rate. Farm Aid estimates that an estimated 330 farmers leave the business each week in America. Without a new purpose, empty barns suffer from lack of maintenance which leads to rapid deterioration. The two barns used here as examples were once used for sustenance farming at the State Hospital in Fulton, Missouri. With no clear purpose, these unique structures are the first to suffer from neglect. It is hoped that this listing will help find a new purpose for many Missouri barns such as these, and that efforts can be stepped up to ensure the basic historic documentation of the tens of thousands of Missouri farms and their barns before many are lost.
The Pouncey Building
1505 East 18th Street
Kansas City, Jackson County

The Pouncey Building is a 1909 2-story brick commercial building in the heart of Kansas City’s 18th and Vine Jazz District. This is one of the few remaining original office buildings in the district and is significant in its association with the social history of the district in that it was the office of the city’s first African American female lawyer, Leona Pouncey Thurman, who moved her office to this building in 1955. Missouri Preservation has been made aware that the City of Kansas City intends to move forward with demolition in anticipation of the City hosting the All Star baseball game in July 2012. The building is on the main strip of the Jazz District and in close proximity to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum. It is currently on the dangerous building list. Although on the National Register of Historic Places and subject to Section 106 review, it is feared that the City desires to “fast track” the demolition as they are concerned about codes and safety, and the image of blight in the City. Listing on Missouri’s Most Endangered Historic Places will hopefully bring additional interest and awareness to the building to find a buyer who can rehab the building, as there has been interest in the past and the building is currently for sale.
The Diamonds Restaurant
100 Old Highway 100
Villa Ridge, Franklin County

This Art Moderne restaurant building was constructed along historic Route 66 in 1950, replacing an earlier (1928) Diamonds Restaurant which had burned in 1949. In rebuilding the Diamonds, the owner created a state-of-the-art restaurant in the streamlined north wing and added another purpose to the site, constructing in the adjoining north wing a truck stop with sleeping rooms and showers. The Diamonds’ advertising postcard from 1960 called it the “Worlds Largest Roadside Restaurant Serving over a million people a year...” When Interstate 44 was constructed during the 1960s, the Diamonds was moved to a new building along the new roadway, about two miles northeast of the original site. The vacated building continued to operate as a restaurant, but under new name and ownership before finally closing several years ago. Although suffering from lack of maintenance, the original 1950 building still stands as a Route 66 roadside icon. It is currently for sale and its owner has committed to list the structure on National Register of Historic Places, making it eligible for the state’s Historic Preservation Tax Credits. It is hoped that listing will attract a new owner interested in renovation of this extraordinary property.
In 1972 the City of Kansas City selected the Chicago architecture firm of C.F. Murphy Associates to design a state of the art arena on the groups of the Kansas City Stockyards. With this charge, Helmut Jahn, their Director of Planning and Design developed an innovative solution to suspend the roof from monumental steel trusses located on the outside of the building, eliminating the need for interior columns. Opened in 1974, the 19,000 seat Kemper Auditorium was one of the first examples of high-tech architecture, known as Structural Expressionism, to be constructed in North America. The building stands today as a seminal example of this style. In 2007, in an effort to attract a professional hockey and basketball team, Kansas City opened the Sprint Center. The new arena has since replaced Kemper as the City’s premier event venue. Unfortunately, the building is quickly falling into disrepair from neglect. In October 2011, a local plan was revealed to replace the Arena with a new 5,000 seat agricultural events center for the American Royal Farm Show. It is hoped that this listing will inspire greater recognition of Kemper Arena’s importance architecturally, as well as the great potential the Auditorium presents as a repurposed community asset.
For more than 40 years this house was home to Charles and Bettie Birthright, former slaves who achieved economic independence and prosperity while building close ties with the families that had held them in slavery and the predominantly white citizenry of Clarkton and Dunklin County. From modest beginnings, this barber and seamstress amassed substantial wealth from highly successful commercial and farming operations. By 1901 Charles was among a group of men cited in the local press as contributing to “Dunklin County’s greatness.” The couple used their growing wealth to benefit the community, investing in its economic development and donating funds to construct the 1884 and 1911 Clarkton school buildings. After their deaths, their estate went to Stillman Institute (now College) in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, constituting the single largest charitable contribution to the college until the 1980s. A building on campus, Birthright Auditorium, is named in their honor. Though not civil rights activists in the common definition of the phrase, the couple’s economic and civic contributions to Clarkton and Dunklin County contradicted the popular image of blacks as indolent, undisciplined and unworthy of the full rights of American citizens. The Birthrights represent an aspect of history rarely studied in Missouri or the United States—African Americans who were well respected and accepted members of the larger white community during a period when racism was the social norm. The house has suffered from extensive termite damage, as well as structural problems from recent earthquake activity. The Clarkton Historical Society feels that this listing will allow the public the opportunity to learn of the importance of the Charles and Betty Birthright House and that their story will be able to reach an audience of supporters that are dedicated to the support of the home and to the development of the site into an interpretive site for educational purposes.
School Buildings of Missouri
Statewide, Including:
Milton Moore School – Kansas City, Jackson County
Central Elementary School – Boonville, Cooper County
Lyon School, Saint Louis Independent City

Due to increased suburbanization in Missouri, many inner-city schools have been closed due to dwindling enrollments. Between the state’s two largest urban districts alone – Kansas City and Saint Louis - there are currently over seventy empty school buildings. Although many of the Kansas City school buildings are designed by noted architects like Charles Ashley Smith, and many of the Saint Louis schools designed by the world-renowned William B. Ittner, many of these buildings are in neighborhoods struggling with the effects of long term disinvestment. Lack of available financing makes adaptive reuse projects challenging. Similarly our rural school buildings are endangered. As more of our state’s population moves from rural areas to the new suburbs of our larger cities, they leave behind empty buildings in our smaller towns and rural school districts have been consolidating, sometimes to rein in the costs of property maintenance. Some communities feel that a vacant lot is better than a vacant building, and many school districts cannot afford the costs of upkeep. This makes demolition likely if reuse plans cannot be identified and encouraged. Some empty school buildings of Missouri have found new purposes, including municipal offices, condominiums and affordable housing, especially for senior citizens. It is hoped that this listing will call attention to these many endangered historic resources and encourage reuse and repurposing of many more of Missouri’s empty school buildings.

2012 Watched Properties List:

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<tr>
<th>Property Name</th>
<th>County</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Jefferson School</td>
<td>Cape Girardeau</td>
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<td>Historic Bridges of Missouri</td>
<td>County Statewide</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Riverside Bridge, Christian County)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Route 66 Bridge, St. Louis County)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Former Missouri State Penitentiary Complex</td>
<td>Cole County</td>
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<td>The Wheatley-Provident Hospital Building</td>
<td>Jackson County</td>
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<td>Lexington Municipal Auditorium</td>
<td>Lafayette County</td>
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<td>Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church</td>
<td>Lafayette County</td>
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<td>St. Louis, Iron Mountain &amp; Southern Railroad Depot</td>
<td>Madison County</td>
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<td>The Russell Hotel</td>
<td>Mississippi County</td>
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<td>Delmo Community Center</td>
<td>Pemiscot County</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rock Mechanics Laboratory/Former Missouri</td>
<td>Phelps County</td>
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<td>Trachoma Hospital Building</td>
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The 2012 Most Endangered Historic Places is sponsored by Superior Waterproofing of St. Louis