

2005 Most Endangered Places

Riceland Hotel – Still In Danger

When the Riceland Hotel in Stuttgart was built in 1919 through 1923, it was truly a community effort. The forty original investors included not only Stuttgart's elite, but, as the nomination states, "the remaining investors were ... average business owner and farmers who envisioned a successful future for the community." The Riceland Hotel was the center of community life in Stuttgart, hosting notable guests such as Ernest Hemingway and Clark Gable, and also serving as a social center for military personnel from the Stuttgart Air Field.

However, in recent decades, the Riceland Hotel has been closed and vacant. A lack of maintenance threatens the integrity of the building, and the Stuttgart City Council has declared the building a public nuisance and hazard. Even so, many of the hotel's original features and grandeur remain just waiting to be restored.

Today, the Riceland Hotel needs someone to come forward to take on the challenge of restoring and resurrecting this centerpiece of the Stuttgart skyline. As the nomination states, "It has been a local landmark for many generations and should be restored so as to provide future generations with a link to the history of the Grand Prairie."

Ragsdale Farmhouse – Lost

The original two-room house was built by John Robert Ragsdale in the El Dorado vicinity of Union County in 1898, and was expanded by his brother, William Franklin Ragsdale, in 1926. The Ragsdale family grew crops that were typical on an Arkansas farm of the period, including cotton, corn, and sugar cane. The farm also had a fruit orchard and vegetable garden, and the Ragsdale family also kept hogs, cows, and mules. The Ragsdale Farmhouse was representative of a rural Arkansas farmhouse of the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. Until demolition, the farmhouse and the original smokehouse remain in the Ragsdale family. Although the house had remained in the Ragsdale family since it was built, maintaining the property had been difficult.

African-American Cemeteries – Still In Danger

Representative of African-American cemeteries across the state, the Ida Bell Cemetery in Palarm, Faulkner County; Union Cemetery in Sherwood; Hickman Memorial Cemetery in North Little Rock; and the Haven of Rest and Union Cemeteries in Little Rock, are facing threats from a variety of sources. These cemeteries, which are believed to have been established over a period of time from the 1860s to the 1930s, represent an important part in Arkansas' African-American history. In addition, Haven of Rest Cemetery, which is the final resting place of notable African-Americans such as Lena Jordan, attorney Scipio A. Jones, and Daisy Bates, has importance beyond Arkansas's borders. The threats to these cemeteries are quite varied. The Hickman Memorial Cemetery is threatened by commercial development while the Ida Bell and the Union Cemetery in Sherwood are both threatened by encroaching residential development. The Union Cemetery in Little Rock is also threatened by development, but the nomination states that it was also "in grave danger because the property was being destroyed by three wheelers, vandals and littering and due to poor drainage." With respect to Haven of Rest Cemetery, however, the

nomination states that “funding through the Arkansas Cemetery Board and the troubled cemetery fund will be depleted sometime in the year 2005.”

Although strides have been made to bring recognition to these cemeteries through the efforts of the Afro-American Historical & Genealogical Society and other organizations, there is much to be done. More work needs to be done to identify and document African-American cemeteries across the state, and educate the general public about the need to protect these important resources.

Noel Owen Neal House – Saved

Constructed circa 1840, the Noel Owen Neal House dates to the earliest days of settlement in the Nashville vicinity of Howard County. Neal had been born in Georgia, and like many early settlers, migrated to Arkansas after living for a period in Mississippi. Neal and his family farmed the land and lived a prosperous life until Neal died in 1850. After his death, Neal’s wife, Hesky, continued to manage the farm.

The house that Neal and his family built after their arrival in Arkansas was a log house with a central dogtrot. Many pioneer settlers in Arkansas built dogtrot homes, with the dogtrot acting as a breezeway, providing shade and cooling breezes for the occupants. Although many of them have been demolished or altered over the years, the Neal House remains a remarkable intact example of this pioneer house form. The Noel Owen Neal House has been moved to Washington, Arkansas, restored, had its porches, roofs, and chimneys replaced, and has been delisted from the National Register of Historic Places.

Magnolia Manor – Saved

Sitting on twelve acres of land with a caretaker’s cottage barn, Magnolia Manor is a remarkably preserved example of a nineteenth-century rural residence. Completed in 1857 for John B. McDaniel, many of the materials used to construct the house were found or made right on the property, including the bricks, nails, and oak, pine, and walnut wood. The house was built in a mixture of the Greek Revival and Italianate styles, both which were popular in the period around the Civil War, and it was named for the Magnolia trees that McDaniel planted on the property. Magnolia Manor became the property of Henderson State University in 1999, and they had planned to turn the house into a conference center. However, the estimated cost to complete the project caused the University to cancel its plans. Earlier this year, the property was sold to Park Hill Baptist Church, located just to the east of the property.

This property has been completely restored by the owner who resides there.

Rosenwald Schools – Still In Danger

During the early twentieth century, educational opportunities for African-Americans were very limited. Julius Rosenwald, who was the president and later chairman of Sears, Roebuck, and Company, and a friend of Booker T. Washington’s, was bothered by this fact. As a result, he established the Julius Rosenwald Fund in 1917 with the idea of creating more equitable opportunities for African-Americans. The biggest legacy of the fund was the rural school building program, which helped to build over 5,000 schools across the South. In Arkansas, 389

school buildings, which included schools, shops, and teachers' homes, were built between 1917 and 1932, mainly in the state's southern and eastern counties. The new schools brought opportunities never seen before to the state's African-American students, and allowed them to learn more than they ever would have thought possible.

However, as integration occurred across Arkansas, many of the schools fell into disuse in the 1950s through the 1970s, and many were demolished, even though they were well built and used the latest innovations in school design for the period. As a result, of the original 389 buildings built across the state, less than 20 survive today, and the surviving buildings are severely threatened. As the nomination states, "Unfortunately, those buildings that do survive are either not utilized or are underutilized. Although the buildings would be excellent candidates for reuse, the rural locations of the buildings, often in economically-depressed parts of the state, make coming up with affordable and viable uses extremely difficult." Although there has been an increased awareness in recent years of the importance of Rosenwald Schools, there is still a great need to spread the news of their importance and to find uses for them so that they can again become useful parts of their communities.

Rosenwald Schools:

Bigelow Rosenwald School, Toad Suck
Chicot County Training School, Dermott
Kiblah School,, Doddridge, AR vicinity
Lafayette County Training School, Stamps
Mt. Olive Rosenwald School, Mt. Olive
Oak Grove Rosenwald School, Oak Grove
Peake High School & Shop Bldg., Arkadelphia
Tollette Shop Building, Tollette
Dallas County Training School High School Building, Fordyce
Marion Colored High School, Sunset
Malvern Rosenwald School, Malvern
St. Luke School (also known as Big Creek Colored School), Turkey Scratch
Lafayette Shop Building, Camden vicinity
Friendship School, Sharman vicinity
Rosenwald School, Delight vicinity
Selma Rosenwald School, Selma
Free Hope School, Magnolia vicinity