

Seven to Save

Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas's 2013 list of
Arkansas's Most Endangered Places



About the Most Endangered Places Program

The Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas began Arkansas's Most Endangered Places program in 1999 to raise awareness of the importance of Arkansas's historic properties and the dangers they face through neglect, encroaching development, and loss of integrity. The list is updated each year and serves to generate discussion and support for saving the state's endangered historic places. Previous places listed include the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home and the Dyess Colony Administration Building in Dyess, Bluff Shelter Archaeological Sites in Northwest Arkansas, Rohwer and Jerome Japanese-American Relocation Camps in Desha County, the William Woodruff House in Little Rock, Magnolia Manor in Arkadelphia, Centennial Baptist Church in Helena, the Donaghey Buildings in Little Rock, the Saenger Theatre in Pine Bluff, the twentieth century African American Rosenwald Schools throughout the state, the Mountaineer Apartments in Hot Springs, Forest Fire Lookouts statewide, the Historic Dunbar Neighborhood in Little Rock, Carleson Terrace in Fayetteville, the Woodmen on Union Building in Hot Springs.

Properties are nominated by individuals, communities, and organizations interested in preserving these places for future Arkansans. Criteria for inclusion in the list includes a property's listing or eligibility for listing in the Arkansas or National Register of Historic Places; the degree of a property's local, state or national significance; and the imminence and degree of the threat to the property.

The Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas was founded in 1981 and is the only statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving Arkansas's architectural and cultural heritage. The mission of the Alliance is to educate, advocate, and assist historic preservation in Arkansas.

Arkansas's Most Endangered Places 2013

Hantz & Durst Houses, 1950 & 1951
Fayetteville, Washington County

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Ferguson House, 1861
Augusta, Woodruff County

—

Frith-Plunkett House, c. 1858
Des Arc, Prairie County

—

Park Hill Elementary School, 1924
North Little Rock, Pulaski County

—

Roundtop Filling Station
(Happy's Service Station), 1936
Sherwood, Pulaski County

—

St. Joseph Center of Arkansas, 1910
North Little Rock, Pulaski County

—

Wynne Opera House, c. 1900
Wynne, Cross County

Hantz & Durst Houses

855 & 857 Fairview St., Fayetteville | Washington Co.



Hantz House front



Hantz House rear deck

Along the winding Fairview Street in Fayetteville, the Hantz House and the adjacent Durst House form a distinctive unit of Mid-Century Modern residences that represent the important legacies of significant figures in art and architecture in Arkansas whose contributions also helped shape the University of Arkansas. These modest scaled houses also stand out as fine examples of the adaptation of high style Modern architecture to the distinctive terrain of the Arkansas Ozarks.

The houses are now owned by the Durst Family Trust, which was established by the daughter of the Durst House's original owners. While the houses retain a great deal of historic integrity, the experimental nature of their design and construction has given the owners a substantial and unique set of issues. The owners are committed to the preservation of these buildings, but the great needs of these unique properties, increasing over time, have proven to be a significant challenge.

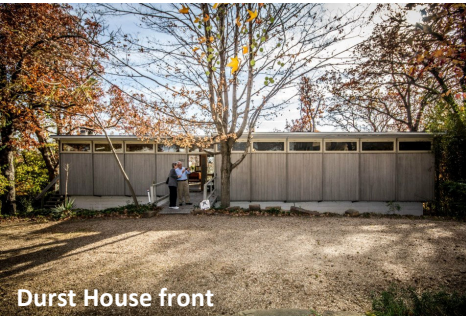
An additional threat to the Hantz and Durst Houses is the sites' changing context. The 21st Century college campus has been marked with unprecedented growth of institutions of higher education and paralleled development to accommodate students and the changing face of education. The University of Arkansas's Fayetteville campus has experienced an explosion in growth in recent years and is undertaking a building boom to meet those increasing needs. The school recently announced a call for proposals seeking private developers to build a 125-150 room hotel on the site directly across Fairview from the Hantz and Durst Houses. A large building would greatly change the feel and context of the houses that sit on Fairview Street.

The classic preservation issue of balancing development with preserving historic context and integrity and the ongoing need for repairs and maintenance of modern architecture are the two greatest challenges in this complicated case. Combined, these factors create an uncertain future for these houses.

Hantz House

The Hantz House is unique amid the prolific works of E. Fay Jones in that it is the only design he was commissioned to draft while a student at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville that was built. There is no other example of a Jones structure from his student days. The Hantz House, constructed in 1950, is important because it was designed and built before Jones befriended his life-long mentor, Frank Lloyd Wright, in 1953, and thus may be the purest form of Jones being Jones.

The house was built for Harold and Katherine Hantz, who were both employed by U of A. After contacting the Department of Architecture, the Hantzes engaged senior architectural student E. Fay Jones to design their home. He produced the preliminary drawings and design for the Hantz House before leaving Fayetteville for further studies at Rice University in Texas. Jones hired fellow student Ernie Jacks to complete the working drawings, and construction began in the fall of 1950. From 1951 through 1999 the Hantzes lived in the house where they raised their two sons Edwin and David. It was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2001.



Durst House

The Durst House was designed by John G. Williams, the founding chair of the University of Arkansas's architecture department and professor to future AIA Gold Medal winner Fay Jones as well as to many other Arkansas architects of note. David and Mary Margaret Durst were the original owners of the house. The openness of the home suggests a collaborative environment, a design principle rooted in Williams' exposure to then-prevalent modes of modernism.

David Durst was Chair of the U of A art department and was instrumental in conceptualizing the U of A Arts Center and its multidisciplinary curriculum. Durst was also instrumental in getting Edward Durrell Stone to design what would be an award-winning building for the campus' the new Arts Center. The Durst House is not listed on the National Register of Historic Places, though it has been determined to be eligible for listing.

Ferguson House

416 North 3th Street, Augusta | Woodruff County



The 1861 Ferguson House was built by one of Augusta's earliest and most prominent families, James P. and Maria Alcorn Ferguson. Built in the vernacular style with Greek Revival characteristics, the house was constructed with hand-cut virgin pine and cypress from up the White River in Clover Bend.

During the Civil War, Union General Steele and soldiers spent a week in Augusta, making their headquarters across the street from the Ferguson House. Local lore places the Ferguson Home at the center of events during the Civil War, including a tale that a cannonball was shot through the front door and lodged in the main staircase. Also, a story is told about the posting of a Union Army guard by General Steele to protect the Ferguson House because he observed Mrs. Ferguson wearing a Masonic emblem. Such tales are difficult to verify, but they secure the Ferguson House's place as an important building in Augusta.

The house was also home to W.E. Ferguson, the Ferguson's eldest son, who served as a state senator and who held every county office in Woodruff County and was a significant figure in the community's civic and social history.

The house was listed on the National Register on Historic Places in 1975. Though its historic form remains largely intact, a 1963 fire destroyed an early rear addition and steel siding was added in 1973 covering the narrow wood clapboard siding.

The house has been vacant for many years and has experience damage to the roof and deteriorated two-story front porch. Sections of the house are overgrown with vegetation, which could be harmful to the structure in the long-term. The owners of the property would like to rehabilitate the house and local support exists from the Augusta Area Chamber of Commerce, the City of Augusta and the Augusta Improvement Club.

The condition of the building remains a challenge, though the owners would like to rehabilitate the house.

Frith-Plunkett House

801 Main Street, Des Arc | Prairie County



As Des Arc's oldest residence, the Frith-Plunkett house reflects the prosperity of the most successful economic era (1850-62) in this rural river town's history. Both architecturally and historically significant, the Frith-Plunkett House presents a unique representation of the architecture that formed the backdrop for Des Arc's pre-Civil War development.

Des Arc's population increased dramatically during the 1850s as a result of its location on the White River, a critical transportation artery in antebellum Arkansas. Both the house's builder, John Frith, and its second owner, William A. Plunkett, were associated with this early economic history of the area.

During the Civil War period, many buildings in Des Arc were burned and others moved to nearby DeValls Bluff. Because of the Frith-Plunkett house's function as a hospital during the war, it remained intact.

The Frith-Plunkett House is an important vernacular example of the Greek Revival style, retaining much of its antebellum integrity. Though essentially an "I" house, a traditional Arkansas form, the two-story Classically-influenced portico distinguishes this residence. The portico depicts a clear understanding of the components of the Classical Greek Revival style. Although the Classical vocabulary is interpreted in a simplified fashion, careful attention to detail and craftsmanship is evident.

Currently the house is vacant and in disrepair. In 2002, the current owner purchased the building to save it from demolition, but the building has since remained vacant. Though the owners have made small steps throughout the years, the condition of the building has caused the city council to again consider a resolution to demolish the Frith-Plunkett House. The owners and other concerned citizens are working to raise awareness about the importance of saving the Frith-Plunkett House and resources to stabilize and eventually rehabilitate the property.

Park Hill Elementary School

3801 JFK Boulevard, North Little Rock | Pulaski Co.



In Arkansas, historic school buildings are rapidly disappearing. District consolidation is a factor in rural communities, while other factors include movement of student population and changing technology and classroom needs. Due to tight district budgets, often maintenance is deferred for years, leaving older school buildings in need of major updates and repairs. In 2012, the North Little Rock School District passed a large millage to address the buildings that it owns. Some buildings will be renovated, but others may be sold or demolished.

The issues that affect Park Hill Elementary School are representative of problems that face many historic schools in Arkansas and nationwide. Because of these factors, community-centered schools are becoming increasingly rare, even in a city like North Little Rock that prides itself on a Safe Routes to School Program.

Major challenges to preserving the Park Hill Elementary school lie in state policies, which encourage new construction over rehabilitation of older school buildings. Current law prevents districts from possessing one-time school buildings while the property on the market. The district has to count all space that it owns against its classroom count. This places school districts in a situation where they must quickly dispose of buildings, often leading to demolition. Also, district-owned buildings must be sold for fair market value vs. assessed value or even sold for nominal amount to keep a community asset in service.

The 89th General Assembly attempted to address this issue in consolidated districts. Act 318 of 2013 gives those districts the ability to donate property, however the legislation **only** applies to consolidated districts and it restricts donations **only** to entities that have an educational purpose or mission. This greatly limits the reuse potential of historic school buildings by excluding cities, neighborhood associations, or non-profit developers from accepting title by donation.

The concern of Park Hill neighbors and others is that, given the difficulty of disposing of older school buildings, the NLR School District might instead be forced to demolish this community anchor and landmark once it is closed.

Roundtop Filling Station

Old Highway 67, Sherwood | Pulaski County



Happy's Service Station, better known today as the Roundtop Filling Station, in Sherwood, was built in 1936 by the Justin Matthews Company for Pierce Oil, one of the "baby Standards" formed after breakup of Standard Oil Company in 1911. Pierce operated gasoline stations in Arkansas, southern Missouri, western Louisiana, Oklahoma, Texas, and Mexico. In 1936, Pierce Oil contracted the Justin Matthews Company to construct a uniquely shaped gasoline station along U.S. Highway 67. It is believed the structure was designed by Matthews company architect, Frank Carmean.

W.D. "Happy" Williford was the operator of the station from its inception, and eventually purchased it in 1955. The station closed in 1981, when Williford retired. In 1989 the Roundtop Filling Station was purchased at auction by a local businessman who planned to renovate the building. Unfortunately, those plans were never realized and in 1999 the station was donated to the City of Sherwood.

For years the gas station-turned-landmark sat abandoned, becoming the victim of vandalism and theft. In the mid-2000s, Becki Vassar, a former City Council member, advocated for preservation of the station and it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008.

The Sherwood History and Heritage Commission hopes to restore the exterior of the Roundtop and adapt the building for use as a Police substation, and perhaps eventually, a history museum for Sherwood.

The biggest challenges facing the Roundtop Filling Station and the City of Sherwood are protecting the fragile building from vandalism and securing funding for the project. The Commission hopes to draw attention to the station's history and the urgent need to take steps now to preserve this landmark for future generations.

St. Joseph Center of Arkansas

6800 Camp Robinson Rd., North Little Rock | Pulaski Co.



St. Joseph Orphanage was commissioned by Bishop John Baptist Morris in 1908 to house and care for orphaned children. Architect Charles Thompson designed the 56,000 sq. ft. home atop a hill as a beacon of hope which served the North Little Rock and Little Rock communities for almost a century.

After the orphanage closed in 1978, the Benedictine nuns adapted their ministry to open a day care and the name changed to St. Joseph Home. When the day care closed in 1997, St. Joseph Home was used for retreat groups. In 2007, the last two nuns returned to their mother-house, St. Scholastica Monastery in Ft. Smith.

Due to the expense of operating and maintaining the property the Catholic Diocese of Little Rock considered selling the property in 2008. In response, a group of concerned citizens formed St. Joseph Center of Arkansas, Inc. (SJCA), a 501(c)(3) non-profit to save the building and adjoining 63 acres. SJCA signed a 50-year lease with the Diocese in 2010 to assume fiscal and management responsibility while researching adaptive re-use options to make the property self-sustaining. The resident caretaker since 1956 continues to keep things running with the help of former residents and friends who regularly volunteer.

St. Joseph Center currently houses several charitable non-profits. Unfortunately, its largest tenant, the Union Rescue Mission, plans to move following the completion of their new headquarters. SJCA is also used by St. Anne's Catholic Church for educational programs. The facility is available for meetings and retreats, and has a community garden tended by residents of a local low-income retirement center.

SJCA is committed to preserving, restoring and developing St. Joseph Center but many challenges remain. A plan for the building and property is due for presentation to the Diocese by September 1, 2013, in order to continue operations. If SJCA cannot provide a viable business and financing plan, the Diocese will be faced with a tough decision leaving the future of the building and its pastoral setting in limbo.

See www.sjark.org for more information or contact stjosephcenter@gmail.com for additional information on leasing, development and gifts.

Wynne Opera House

218 S. Front Street, Wynne | Cross County



Located in the Wynne Commercial Historic District, the two-story brick building known as the Wynne Opera House has served a variety of purposes for over a century in the seat of Cross County. A record of those uses remains in painted “ghost signs” over the building. The words “OPERA HOUSE” appear at the top of the building front and below that, one can make out the letters, WILKS, a remnant of Mr. J. J. Wilks’s Horseless Farm Equipment sales established in 1935.

The building was constructed about 1900 as a grocery on the first floor and an opera house above. By 1903 the first floor was vacant but the “opera hall” seemed to be thriving. During 1903 when the county seat was moved from Vanndale to Wynne, the building served as the temporary courthouse for Cross County, but when the county failed to pay the rent, it was asked to move. Then in 1908 Burton Hardware Store occupied the first floor and a tin shop occupied the second floor. In 1917 the hardware business was purchased by Mr. W. T. Graham. Mr. Graham remained in the building until 1935 when he moved the business to Union Street, where the business remains today. the Historic Downtown Wynne, listed in 2010 on the National Historic Register of Historic Places.

For the last 40 years, very little has been done to the building. Because of the lack of updates over the years, the building retains some interesting historic elements, including cast iron storefront columns. However, because the building is open to the elements, it is deteriorating quickly.

Local support for improvement of the downtown district and preservation of the buildings exists from the Wynne Downtown Revitalization Committee and the Cross County Historical Society. Wynne recently joined the Arkansas Downtown Network, a group of communities in the Main Street Arkansas Program to support vibrant commercial historic districts. However, finding financial resources and uses for the buildings remains a challenge in the preservation of this downtown Wynne building.

Updates on Previously Listed Properties

By highlighting the significance of endangered places and elevating these properties for statewide attention, listing on the Alliance's Most Endangered Places list has been important to the efforts to preserve many irreplaceable historic resources. These selections from previous lists are great illustrations of what can be accomplished through dedication and collaboration to preserve important historic places.

Arkansas's Historic County Courthouses (MEP 2012)



Monroe County Courthouse



Scott County Courthouse



Searcy County Courthouse

With the nomination of historic county courthouses to the Most Endangered Places in 2012, the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas set out to advocate for increased funding for the County Courthouse Subgrant program by raising awareness of the lack of adequate funding for historic courthouses and mobilizing county officials and other stakeholders. Thanks to the outreach by many county judges and others familiar with the challenges facing historic courthouses, and to the attention that the courthouses received from the Most Endangered listing, the ANCR and Department of Arkansas Heritage allocated \$1.2 Million for county courthouses in FY2013 and \$1.399 Million for FY2014.

While need is still far greater than the funds available, the increased funding in FY2013 and FY2014 will support some of the most pressing courthouse projects. The Alliance will continue to advocate for adequate funding and preservation of historic county courthouses

Rohwer & Jerome WWII Japanese-American Internment Camp (MEP 2010)

The Japanese-American relocation camps at Rohwer and Jerome represent an important aspect of United States history that has not been widely interpreted in Arkansas. The Rohwer camp operated from September 1942 to November 1945 and held



George Takei



Monuments at Rohwer NHL



UA Student HALS Project

nearly 8,500 people at its peak population. The Jerome Relocation Center operated from October 1942 to June 1944 and held over 7,900 people at one time.

The National Historic Landmark cemetery at Rohwer was neglected and vandalized over the years and listed as endangered in 2010. Shortly after its listing, projects to document, interpret and preserve the monuments and landscape at Rohwer were awarded grant funding through the Japanese American Confinement Sites Grant program. As part of the project, students from the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville prepared award-winning documentation for the Historic American Landscape Survey (HALS). In April of 2013, Arkansas State University and the McGehee Industrial Foundation dedicated the Rohwer National Historic landmark Interpretive Exhibits and World War II Japanese American Internment Museum, projects that were made possible with the funding. Actor and former internee George Takei participated in the dedication ceremony.

Helena High School (MEP 2001)



Helena High School Before and during rehabilitation

Helena High School was built in 1912 and the first class graduated in 1913. The old school building is one of the most monumental and lavishly detailed early neo-Classicism buildings in Helena. After the building was vacated in 1972 and used for storage for several years, it was abandoned, becoming the victim of deterioration and vandalism. The old school is finally getting a new lease on life with a rehabilitation project well under way to adapt the building for use as affordable senior housing.

Local Organizational Contacts

Hantz & Durst Houses

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Ferguson House

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Frith-Plunkett House

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Park Hill Elementary School

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St. Joseph Center of Arkansas

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Wynne Opera House

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Electronic Press Packet

The Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas is the only statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to preserving Arkansas's architectural and cultural heritage. The mission of the Alliance is to educate, advocate, and assist historic preservation in Arkansas. Founded in 1981, the Alliance has been the statewide voice for historic preservation for three decades.

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