

# Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas

*announces the 2012 list of  
Arkansas's Most Endangered Places*



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For more information contact: Vanessa McQuin  
[Vmckuin@preservearkansas.org](mailto:Vmckuin@preservearkansas.org)  
(501) 372-4757

## **Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas Announces 2012 list of Arkansas's Most Endangered Places**

*Sites in Benton, Hot Springs, Jonesboro, Stuttgart, Warren, Benton County,  
Cross County, Perry County, and statewide named to list*

LITTLE ROCK—Historic County Courthouses across the state, a hotel that welcomed visitors to a South Arkansas town for seven decades, three early 20<sup>th</sup> century schools, including two landmarks of our state's African American heritage, a stunning Art Deco skyscraper, remnants from an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century resort, a university President's house an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century theater and a 19<sup>th</sup> Century rooming house comprise the ten sites that the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas has named to its 2012 list of Arkansas's Endangered Places.

The Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas announced the list in front of the historic Packet House (McDonald-Wait-Newton) house in Little Rock on May 1.

"The 2012 list highlights distinctive historic places throughout Arkansas that represent important aspects of Arkansas's history and heritage. In each instance these places are integral to the communities where they are located, yet they are in immediate danger of disappearing from the landscape," said Vanessa McQuin, executive director of the Historic Preservation Alliance of Arkansas.

"By calling attention to these sites now, we want to encourage local action while there's still time." said McQuin. "It is our hope that inclusion on our list will provide those who care for these sites with the support and momentum to take their preservation efforts to the next level."

Named to the list were:

**Arkansas's Historic County Courthouses**, Statewide

**Bigelow Rosenwald School**, Highway 60 and Bethel AME Road, Toad Suck,  
Perry County

**Coker Hotel**, 114 W Cedar, Warren, Bradley County

**Holloway House (Pioneer House/Hiwassee Hotel)**, 13692 Hwy. 72, Hiwassee, Benton  
County

**Holman School**, 605 N Buerkle Street, Stuttgart, Arkansas County

**Medical Arts Building**, 236 Central Avenue, Hot Springs, Garland County

**Monte Ne & Oklahoma Row Hotel**, Hwy. 94 spur near Monte Ne, Benton County

**New Hope School**, 3762 Highway 284, Wynne vicinity, Cross County

**Palace Theater**, 224 W South Street, Benton, Saline County

**V.C. Kays House**, 2506 Aggie Road, Jonesboro, Craighead County

# About the Most Endangered Places Program

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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 Look-outs 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.

# Success Stories from Previous Lists

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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 key 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.

## *Dyess Colony Administration Building*



*Courtesy of ASU Heritage Sites*

## *Johnny Cash Boyhood Home*



*Courtesy of Rural Heritage Development Initiative*

The WPA-era agricultural resettlement colony Administration Building and the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home (2006 MEP List) are being restored through leadership of ASU's Heritage Sites Program, the Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage Development Initiative and local partners. These sites are key components in a redevelopment plan that uses heritage tourism for economic development and revitalization of the small Delta town of Dyess. Listing on the Most Endangered Places list helped bring state and national attention to these treasures of Arkansas culture and American history.

## *Selma Rosenwald School*

The Selma Rosenwald School is the only remaining Rosenwald Foundation-funded school in Drew County. In 2005, The Alliance listed Rosenwald Schools statewide to the list of Most Endangered Places. Listing encouraged local efforts to restore the school and strengthened grant applications for funding from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program and the Lowes Charitable Foundation. The restored Selma school was reopened to the public in October 2010 as a community center.



## *Westside Junior High*

The 1917 Westside Junior High (1999 MEP) served as a school and a community center for half a century before closing in 1971. After many years of vacancy, the Rock School District announced plans in the early 1990s to demolish the building. The MEP listing bolstered efforts by neighborhood leaders to save the building. The Arc Arkansas purchased the building and renovated the school, creating 43 loft apartments as well as a medical clinic run by UAMS.



# Arkansas's Most Endangered Places List, 2012

## Arkansas's Historic County Courthouses *Statewide*

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**Bigelow Rosenwald School**

*Perry County*

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**Coker Hotel**

*Warren, Bradley County*

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**Holloway House  
(Pioneer House/Hiwasse Hotel)**

*Hiwasse, Benton County*

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**Holman School**

*Stuttgart, Arkansas County*

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**Medical Arts Building**

*Hot Springs, Garland County*

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**Monte Ne/Oklahoma Row Hotel**

*Monte Ne, Benton County*

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**New Hope School**

*Cross County*

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**Palace Theatre**

*Benton, Saline County*

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**V. C. Kays House**

*Jonesboro, Craighead County*

# Arkansas's Historic County Courthouses

## *Statewide*

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Arkansas historic county courthouses are often the most architecturally noteworthy structures in a given town. They are located in the core of their communities and are the building where virtually every member of the public will have business at some time.

These buildings are solid and stable, constructed in an era when craftsmanship was paramount, but decades of tight county budgets and deferred maintenance are taking their toll, resulting in leaking roofs, crumbling masonry and outdated environmental systems. As a result, some county governments are seeking to move to newer buildings, while others continue band-aid approaches to their buildings' problems.

The County Courthouse Restoration Subgrant Program, funded by the Arkansas Natural and Cultural Resources Council and administered by the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP) is the only existing funding source for preservation of these community landmarks and levels for the past 10-12 years have provided funds for less than 20% of requests. In the FY12 grant cycle requests totaled \$4.6 million, but the agency had less than \$760,000 to meet this need. These desperate pleas for assistance accentuate the strong local support to preserve these historic county courthouses, rather than move to locations outside of the historic centers.

By listing Historic County Courthouses on the Most Endangered Places list, the Alliance hopes to call attention to the lack of adequate funding for historic courthouses' maintenance and repair and to encourage devotion of greater resources for these irreplaceable historic buildings so that they can continue to serve in their historic capacity as the seats of county government and the historic centers of their towns.

# Bigelow Rosenwald School, 1926

*Highway 60 & Bethel AME Road | Perry County*

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In 1917, Julius Rosenwald, philanthropist and President of Sears Roebuck and Co. created a foundation to support education of African American youth. Rosenwald's fund aided construction of over 5,000 school buildings across the South and over 300 schools in Arkansas. The Bigelow Rosenwald School was built in 1926, at the height of the Rosenwald Foundation's activity in Arkansas. It was the only Rosenwald School constructed in Perry County and is one of less than twenty that survive statewide. The building was used as a school until 1964 and then as a community center for many years.

The building is threatened from lack of maintenance and lack of funds to preserve the building. Although it is easily recognizable as a Rosenwald School, the building's large banks of windows have been replaced by much smaller windows.

Recently a board of directors was established to help restore the building. The group has consulted the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program (AHPP), for guidance on actions that are needed to preserve the building. Once the board establishes 501(c)(3) status, they will be eligible for grant funding. The Alliance hopes this listing will bring state-wide attention and momentum to the efforts of the Rosenwald Community Cultural Center to preserve the Bigelow Rosenwald School.



# Coker Hotel

114 West Cedar | Warren | Bradley County

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Built in 1914 by Philip and Fannie Coker, the Coker hotel housed travelers and visitors to Warren and Bradley County for over half a century. The hotel served the lumber industry in Warren, which precipitated the business and population boom into the 1920s and 1930s. The hotel building is a key community landmark in Warren's downtown. The building is not currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but it is within the boundaries of the area being surveyed for a downtown commercial historic district.

The Coker Hotel suffers from years of lack of maintenance and is currently vacant, making it susceptible to vandalism, damage from the elements and animal and rodent infestation. Having recently joined the Arkansas Downtown Network, the City of Warren is committed to the preservation of its historic downtown and landmarks. The elderly owner of the building lives out of state and has no plans for the Coker Hotel, but the Warren Chamber of Commerce sees the hotel as a key piece in the revitalization of downtown Warren.



The Alliance hopes that this listing will bring attention to the history of the Coker Hotel and encourage National Register listing to boost the efforts of those working to preserve the Coker Hotel and downtown Warren.

# Holloway House (Pioneer House)

13692 Hwy. 72 | Hiwasse | Benton County

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The community of Hiwasse has historical significance as an early settlement in Arkansas known for its apple and apple byproducts production. Hiwasse was located on the Frisco line, which ran west from Bentonville and Rogers to Oklahoma and the Indian Territory.

The two story Holloway House sits on land along now Highway 72 that was part of a homestead established in 1859. By 1898, A.J Nichols had constructed an eight room house with three rooms for rent by overnight guests. Local history indicates that the house contains a section of an earlier log house built as part of the homestead. An early 1900s advertisement describes “THE PIONEER HOUSE, Boarding And Lodging AT Reasonable Prices” A.J. Nichols served as the Post Master of Hiwasse and likely conducted postal business from the house. After Nichols sold the building around 1911, the house served as a private residence, changing owners only a few times before the current owners, the Holloways, acquired it in 1976.

The house has been abandoned for many years and is deteriorating due to lack of maintenance and exposure to the elements. Like many once-



rural areas of Benton County, Hiwasse is an unincorporated community surrounded by encroaching suburban development. The Holloway House illustrates the plight of historic structures whose mostly forgotten history coupled with development pressure threaten their continued existence.

# Holman School

*605 North Buerkle Street | Stuttgart | Arkansas Co.*

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The institution that would become the Holman School began with funds from the Julius Rosenwald Foundation in 1924. The Rosenwald structure was replaced with a masonry building in the early 1940s and a second building and a gymnasium were constructed c. 1955. Named after long-time teacher John Holman and his wife, the Holman School operated as a school for African-American students until 1970, following the desegregation of the Stuttgart School District. In 1996 the Holman Heritage Development Corporation acquired the center for use as a cultural and historical landmark and a community education and health center.

In 2008, straight line winds caused by a tornado inflicted severe damage to the building's roof. Though the building was insured, the insurance company has refused to pay for the damage caused by the storm. The storm damage and the ensuing years of water infiltration have taken a toll on the interior of the building, rendering parts unusable.

Currently, a new roof membrane is being installed on the gymnasium, but without the insurance payment, the expense is too great to replace the roof on the main classroom area. Strong community support exists for repair and continued use of the Holman School. If the Holman Heritage Development Corporation can raise funds to match the efforts of its volunteers and civic supporters, this important part of Stuttgart's past will continue as an asset to the community for many years to come.



# Medical Arts Building

*236 Central Avenue | Hot Springs | Garland County*

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The Medical Arts Building was built in 1929 in the Art Deco style by G. C. Gordon Walker. Designed by John Parks Almand (who also designed Little Rock's Central High School). The Medical Arts Building was the tallest building in Arkansas until 1960, when the Tower Building was constructed in Little Rock. Originally built to house medical offices, the Medical Arts Building is an outstanding example of Art Deco style.

Since the 1980s, city policy has exempted vacant upper stories of multi-story buildings from meeting code requirements and all utilities must be disconnected from vacant floors of the building. This code exemption contributes to underutilization and decay of structures like the Medical Arts Building, which has been vacant above the first floor since approximately 1986. The vacant building's iconic status has attracted "urban explorers," some of whom have vandalized parts of the building. The Medical Arts Building is quite large and has multiple owners, complicating factors to the redevelopment of this landmark.

Despite the fact that it is currently vacant, the Medical Arts Building remains a prominent presence on Central Avenue in Hot Springs. Redevelopment of the Medical Arts Building is key to revitalization of Hot Springs. Listing on the National Register makes the Medical Arts Building eligible for State and Federal historic investment tax credits, which are strong financial incentives for preservation. The Alliance hopes to bring attention to the importance of the Medical Arts Building, the impediments for its redevelopment and the potential for rehabilitation of this exceptional building.



# Monte Ne/Oklahoma Row Hotel

*Hwy. 94 spur near Monte Ne | Benton County*

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The resort community of Monte Ne was begun around 1900 by William ‘Coin’ Harvey, an entrepreneur and politician who got his nickname from his promotion of an economy based on silver. At 316 feet long and 50 feet wide, the Oklahoma Row Hotel was believed to be the largest log hotel structure in the world, requiring 6,000 logs and 40,000 cubic feet of stone and cement. After the resort’s decline in the 1920s, Harvey began construction of a pyramid to house relics for future discovery. The pyramid was never completed, but the base was used as an amphitheater.

The majority of Monte Ne was flooded by the creation of Beaver Lake by the Army Corps of Engineers in the 1960s, and is only visible when lake levels are lowered. However, the three-story tower, the last remaining part of the Oklahoma Row Hotel, still stands on the lake shore.

After years of not being maintained, remaining parts of Monte Ne continue to deteriorate and the property is vandalized on a regular basis, presenting a security hazard and safety liability. As a result, the Corps of Engineers has considered demolishing the site unless a local partner organization can take over the maintenance of the site. The COE has produced a cultural resource plan detailing options for either demolition or preservation of the site. That representatives of several local organizations have met with the COE to come up with a solution is encouraging, but there is still a long way to go, and economics will play a key role in any solution that involves the site’s preservation



# New Hope School

3762 Highway 284 | Wynne Vicinity | Cross County

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The New Hope School is one of the very few two-room schools existing in Eastern Arkansas. It is an excellent example of the small, rural schools which were once vital to Arkansas's education system. The building was first built in 1903 as a one-room school house and was expanded to two rooms prior to 1930. School was held in the building for nearly half a century before consolidation moved the last class to Wynne. The New Hope school is located outside of Wynne, situated on top of Crowley's Ridge, a unique geographic feature along the eastern side of Arkansas.

Thanks to the hard work of volunteers, the building's concrete piers have been leveled, the interior braced and the exterior wrapped in tarps to stabilize the building, but the old school is still very vulnerable to high winds and the elements. The Cross County Historical Society's Restoration Committee has applied for two large grants for stabilizing the building and has raised money to match grant funds. However, limited funding availability has not yielded grant awards for the group. Time is running out for this important community asset.

The Restoration Committee's vision for the building is to become a welcome center/ museum and gift shop, a rare tourist site along Crowley's Ridge Parkway National Scenic Byway to bridge the welcome centers at either end - in Piggot and in Helena-West Helena.



# Palace Theatre

224 W. South Street | Benton | Saline County

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The new Palace Theatre opened its doors to a sold-out crowd on March 5, 1920. Unfortunately, the builder was forced to sell the Palace Theatre only a few months later. Throughout the 1920s the building changed ownership several times, but remained a movie and play theatre before closing its doors.

After World War II, citizens joined together to reuse the old Palace Theatre as a youth recreation center. The popular Play Palace attracted young people from around the county for recreation and social events. The center closed in 1953 and the building was used as a gathering place for citizens of Benton before the Panther Den (for Benton's school mascot) opened 1960. After its closure a few years later, the city remodeled the building, bricking up windows and installing an arched entrance. A white vinyl "slipcover" façade was added. The Saline County Library opened there in 1967 and served the city in this capacity until 2003. In 2005, the city removed the slipcover from the front of the building, revealing the historic façade which was masked for nearly 50 years.

The building is now used for storage. A leaking roof has caused damage to the interior and has recently caused the City of Benton to consider demolishing the Palace. A major obstacle to the building's preservation is its ineligibility for the National Register of Historic Places and the related financial incentives and grant opportunities. If the building were stabilized and returned to the point of eligibility, rehabilitation of the building would be more financially viable. It would be a shame to lose a building that has served the City of Benton in so many important ways for almost a century.



# V.C. Kays House

2506 Aggie Road | Jonesboro | Craighead County

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The Victor C. Kays House was built by the first president of Arkansas State University. He and his family occupied the stylized English Tudor house during and after his tenure at ASU, 1910-1943.

In 2004 ASU purchased the house from the Kays Foundation for use as temporary employee housing. ASU recently announced plans to construct a row of sorority houses in the site. While concept drawings show the Kays House at the center of the sorority row, the school adopted a plan that would include razing the Kays House, despite a demonstrated commitment to preservation through the school's Arkansas Heritage Sites Program.

After opposition to the demolition attracted significant media attention and after the house was nominated to the Most Endangered Place List, the Chancellor of ASU's Jonesboro campus issued a statement giving proponents of the house one year to raise funds to preserve and maintain the building. This temporary stay for the building is a positive turn, but ASU has stated that no university or foundation money will be used to preserve the Kays House.

The Kays house is eligible for individual listing on the National Register of Historic Places and the surrounding staff and faculty housing built during the 1930s are also eligible for a National Register Historic District. This designation makes the properties eligible for historic tax incentives and grant funding, but fundraising efforts still present a challenge.

By listing the Kays House, the Alliance hopes to bolster support for preserving this historically and architecturally significant structure for the education and enjoyment of future generations.

# Notes

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# Organizational Contacts

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Arkansas's Historic  
County Courthouses  
Historic Preservation Alliance of  
Arkansas  
Vanessa McKuin  
501-372-4757  
vmckuin@preservearkansas.org

Bigelow Rosenwald Schools  
Rosenwald Community Cultural  
Center  
William Evans  
(501) 733-8118

Coker Hotel, Warren  
David King, Executive Director  
Bradley County Chamber of  
Commerce  
(870) 2265225  
bcc.warren@sbcglobal.net

Holloway House  
Camille Hatcher  
Butterfield Trails Chapter,  
Questers International  
(479) 855-4761  
crhatcher@cox.net

Holman School, Stuttgart  
Calvin Criner  
Holman Heritage Community  
Center, Inc.  
(501) 804-2580  
holmancdc@yahoo.com

Monte Ne and Oklahoma  
Row Hotel Site, Monte Ne  
Allyn Lord, Director  
Shiloh Museum of Ozark History  
(479) 750-8165  
alord@springdaleAR.gov

New Hope School  
Bridget Hart, Chair New Hope  
School Restoration Project  
Cross County Historical Society  
(870) 238-4100  
bhart0000@sbcglobal.net

Palace Theatre  
Lamont Cornwell  
Benton Historic District Commission  
(501) 776-5938  
lcornwell@bentonar.org

V.C. Kays House  
Beth Wiedower  
Arkansas Delta Rural Heritage  
Development Initiative  
(870) 816-0774  
Elizabeth\_Wiedower@nthp.org

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.

Find us

In person: 1201 Tower Building, 323 Center Street,  
Little Rock

By mail: PO Box 305, Little Rock, AR 72203-0305

By phone: (501) 372-4757

Website: [PreserveArkansas.org](http://PreserveArkansas.org)

Facebook: [Facebook.com/PreserveAR](https://www.facebook.com/PreserveAR) 

Twitter: [@PreserveAR](https://twitter.com/PreserveAR) 



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