



ARKANSAS'S MOST
ENDANGERED
PLACES



2018



SPECIAL THANKS

Special thanks to 2018 Most Endangered Places Selection Committee Members: Chair Shelle Stormoe, Dr. Story Matkin-Rawn, James Meyer, Paul Porter, and Laura Winning.

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ABOUT PRESERVE ARKANSAS

Founded in 1981, Preserve Arkansas is the only statewide nonprofit advocate for the preservation of Arkansas's historic places. Our organization works to build stronger communities by reconnecting Arkansans to our heritage and empowering people to save and rehabilitate historic places. Support our work year-round by becoming a member at [PreserveArkansas.org/get-involved/membership](https://www.PreserveArkansas.org/get-involved/membership).

ABOUT THE MOST ENDANGERED PLACES PROGRAM

Arkansas's Most Endangered Places program began 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 listings include the Johnny Cash Boyhood Home, Dyess; Rohwer Japanese-American Relocation Center, Desha County; Hantz and Durst Houses, Fayetteville; Downtown Hot Springs; William Woodruff House, Little Rock, and many others.

Properties are nominated by individuals, communities, and organizations interested in preserving these places for future Arkansans. Criteria for inclusion in the list include a property's listing or eligibility for 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. Once selected for the list, these properties become a priority for Preserve Arkansas's advocacy efforts.



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Preserve Arkansas Announces 2018 List of Arkansas's Most Endangered Places

LITTLE ROCK—Preserve Arkansas's 2018 Most Endangered Places list includes an African American cemetery, four historic churches, an Italian prisoner-of-war camp, a neighborhood commercial building associated with the desegregation of Central High School, a railroad depot, a tourist home for African Americans during the Jim Crow era, and an antebellum home.

The announcement took place on May 4 at Curran Hall, 615 E. Capitol Avenue in Little Rock. Arkansas's Most Endangered Places Program began in 1999 to raise awareness of historically and architecturally significant properties throughout the state that are facing threats such as deterioration, neglect, insufficient funds, and insensitive development. Preserve Arkansas solicited nominations from individuals and organizations throughout the state. The list is updated each year to generate discussion and support for saving the places that matter to Arkansas.

Properties named to the 2018 list are as follows:

- Camp Monticello (Monticello, Drew County)
- Centennial Baptist Church (Helena-West Helena, Phillips County)
- First Baptist Church/EMOBA (Little Rock, Pulaski County)
- First Presbyterian Church (Fordyce, Dallas County)
- Latimore Tourist Home (Russellville, Pope County)
- Magnolia Cemetery (Helena-West Helena, Phillips County)
- Ponder's Drug Store/Capel Building (Little Rock, Pulaski County)
- Quinn Chapel AME Church (Fort Smith, Sebastian County)
- Rock Island Railroad Depot (Perry, Perry County)
- Thomas-Tharp House (Fayetteville, Washington County).

Photos and information about 2018's Most Endangered Places are available at www.PreserveArkansas.org.



Camp Monticello

Monticello, Drew County

Camp Monticello was an Italian prisoner-of-war camp during World War II. Located along Arkansas Highway 35 southeast of Monticello, it was one of four main camps and 30 branch camps in Arkansas that interned enemy prisoners during the war. Construction on the camp began in 1942 and consisted of three compounds for enlisted men, two compounds for officers, a hospital, garrison echelon, and other facilities. The camp was surrounded by barbed-wire

fences and guard towers. After the British captured much of the Italian high command at Tobruk and elsewhere in North Africa, Italian POWs, the vast majority of them officers, began to arrive at Camp Monticello in 1943. POWs spent their time working, playing sports, attending Mass, preparing Italian meals, learning, and creating art. The camp was closed in 1945 at the conclusion of World War II, and prisoners were eventually returned to Italy. The camp property was declared surplus and purchased by Arkansas A&M College, now the University of Arkansas at Monticello. Since the 1940s, the college has used much of the former camp for teaching livestock and forest management. For this reason, Camp Monticello is one of the best preserved POW camps in the U.S. The site retains many character-defining features including original asphalt roads, building foundations, an 80' brick chimney from the camp hospital, steam boilers, and ruins of a chapel built by POWs.

Beginning in the 1950s, portions of the land have been sold for industrial development; however, the majority of the site remains intact and should be preserved. By acknowledging the significance of the site and developing a plan for its interpretation, UAM, along with local and statewide partners, could attract heritage tourists and create a learning laboratory for students.



Centennial Baptist Church

*Helena-West Helena,
Phillips County*

Centennial Baptist Church, a Gothic Revival-style beauty at the corner of York and Columbia streets in Helena-West Helena, was completed in 1905. Designed by African American architect Henry James Price, the church featured a steeply pitched, cross-gabled roof, asymmetrical towers, and lancet-shaped window and door openings. Centennial Baptist Church is one of only 25 National Historic Landmarks in Arkansas. It is a rare exam-

ple of a church designed by an African American architect for an African American congregation, and it is exceptionally significant for its association with Dr. Elias Camp Morris. Dr. Morris, who pastored at Centennial from 1879 until his death in 1922, was a nationally known figure in the Baptist denomination, serving as publisher of *The Baptist Vanguard* and president of the National Baptist Convention. Morris was also a founder of Arkansas Baptist College in Little Rock. He served as a delegate to state and national Republican conventions and was appointed an ambassador to the Belgian Congo by President Theodore Roosevelt. When Dr. Morris died in 1922, the membership of Centennial Baptist Church numbered more than 1,000.

Sadly, regular services have not been held at Centennial Baptist Church for several years. It was actually included on Preserve Arkansas's Most Endangered Places list in 2006 and was resubmitted for consideration by a member of the Centennial Church Foundation board. The roof is sagging and the east wall of the church is being held up by steel bracing. A cooperative effort is urgently needed to save this National Historic Landmark.



**First Baptist Church/
EMOBA**
*Little Rock, Pulaski
County*

Located at the corner of 12th and Louisiana streets just north of the Governor's Mansion Historic District, Little Rock's historic First Baptist Church was built in 1941 to accommodate the church's growing congregation. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1994 as an excellent example of a church designed in the Collegiate Gothic style by Little Rock architect A. N. McAninch. The First Baptist Church of Little Rock traces its origin to

1824, when a group of Baptists met at the home of early settler Isaac Watkins. The congregation met in several locations before settling at 12th and Louisiana. The 1941 church is notable for its Collegiate Gothic composition and monumental stained glass windows featuring rich hues of red, purple, and blue. The congregation of First Baptist Church moved to its present location on Pleasant Valley Drive in 1974, and the historic building sat vacant until 1993, when it was purchased by the nonprofit Ernie's Museum of Black Arkansans or EMOBA, founded by Little Rock native Ernestine "Ernie" Dodson. EMOBA was the first African American history museum to highlight the contributions and achievements of black Arkansans to the development of the state. In addition to exhibits, EMOBA hosted programs for youth and the Haunted Cathedral each Halloween.

Deferred maintenance has taken its toll on the old church, and heavy rain storms over the past few months caused a portion of the roof to collapse. If the building is not properly secured against the elements immediately, historic fabric will be lost and repair will become more costly. Ideally, this property would be rehabilitated or repaired and mothballed. Given its National Register status and location near an active commercial corridor, the building's rehabilitation for income-producing purposes would qualify for federal and state tax credits.

First Presbyterian Church *Fordyce, Dallas County*



Organized in 1883, the First Presbyterian Church was the first church in Fordyce, prompting railroad mogul and town namesake Samuel Fordyce to donate the church bell. The present buff brick church is the congregation's third building. Constructed in 1912, the First Presbyterian Church was designed by Tennessee architect Reuben Harrison Hunt. Hunt's firm was based in Chattanooga but had regional offices at Jackson, Mississippi, and Dallas, Texas. Specializing in churches, public buildings, and skyscrapers, the R. H. Hunt Company was one of the most prominent architectural practices in the South from the 1880s to the 1930s. Hunt's Gothic Revival design for the Fordyce church featured asymmetrical elevations and three towers with castellated parapets. The interior was finished with rich walnut paneling and trim, and the stained glass windows were made in Italy. The sanctuary accommodated 350 people with roll-up doors providing overflow room during weddings and funerals.

The church remained in use until about 10 years ago, when the local Presbyterian congregation disbanded. Since then, roof leaks have caused some water damage to the sanctuary walls, and foundation settling has caused the rear wall to crack. Remarkably, the church still contains its original pipe organ, pews, pulpit, and even the hymnals. The residents of Fordyce support the restoration of First Presbyterian Church, and a newly formed nonprofit organization called Historical Fordyce, Inc., has recently taken possession of the church building in an effort to save it. However, the church remains endangered until sufficient funding is secured.

Latimore Tourist Home

Russellville, Pope County



The Latimore Tourist Home at 318 S. Houston Avenue in Russellville was a Folk Victorian-style lodging house for African American travelers and railroaders. It was built at the turn of the 20th century by a black carpenter, Gordon Parker, for his family. Eugene Latimore, an educator and steam engine repairman, bought the home in the early 1930s, and his wife, Cora, opened the house as a tourist home. During the Jim Crow era, cities and towns throughout the South had segregated facilities. If a traveler was not familiar with a particular area, then it was difficult to know which establishments were friendly toward African Americans. *The Negro Motorist Green Book* was established in 1936 and listed gas stations, restaurants, hotels, and tourist homes that specifically catered to African American travelers. Located a few blocks south of U.S. Highway 64, the Latimore Home was the only accommodation in the *Green Book* between Little Rock and Fort Smith where an African American traveler could stop for food and lodging. Though the Civil Rights Act passed Congress in 1964 ending segregation, the Latimore Tourist Home remained in business until the mid-1970s. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2011 for its significance to the state's African American history.

Now owned by an adjacent church, the boarded-up lodging house has been condemned. Although there is local support to save the Latimore Tourist Home, the congregation is concerned about the long-term financial obligations. A successful save might include the restoration of the home as lodging for visiting church speakers, a space for the youth ministry, or as a heritage tourism site to educate people about the African American experience during the Jim Crow era.

Magnolia Cemetery

Helena-West Helena, Phillips County



Magnolia Cemetery is an African American cemetery located north of downtown Helena on the west side of Crowley's Ridge opposite the Maple Hill Cemetery. Established about 1870 as Evergreen Cemetery, the present-day Magnolia and Maple Hill cemeteries originally comprised one large city cemetery with separate sections for whites and blacks. In 1898, Evergreen Cemetery was reorganized as Maple Hill Cemetery. The following year, 15 African American citizens formed the Magnolia Cemetery Company to purchase the black portion of the cemetery for \$400. The cemetery is an important burial ground for Helena's African American community. It is the resting place of one of the first black legislators of Arkansas, W. H. Grey, as well as businessmen, philanthropists, newspapermen, blues musicians, reverends, military veterans, and members of pioneering black families. The graves are marked with elaborate marble as well as hand carved concrete markers. There is also a plethora of fraternal markers, such as Knights and Daughters of Tabor, Mosaic Templars, and Supreme Royal Circle of Friends that show the history of African American Helena.

Nineteen of the cemetery's 36 acres are situated on the western downward slope of Crowley's Ridge, and erosion and flooding have damaged many of the burials. The cemetery also faces problems similar to other African American cemeteries in rural areas, such as vandalism and neglect, limited funding for restoration, and migration of communities out of Arkansas during and after World War II, leaving few people to remember the families buried there. By listing Magnolia Cemetery as one of Arkansas's Most Endangered Places, Preserve Arkansas hopes to raise awareness of its importance and the need for preservation.

Ponder's Drug Store/Capel Building

Little Rock, Pulaski County



Located at the corner of W. 16th and Park, caddy-corner from Little Rock Central High School, the Capel Building was built in 1926 by neighborhood resident William E. Capel. In the decades immediately after its construction, the building's eastern storefront at 2121 W. 16th housed grocery stores, while the western storefront at 2123 W. 16th housed drug stores. Occupants included Cox Stores, Inc., Grocers and Tiger's Drug Company (1928) and the Kroger Grocery and Baking Company and High School Pharmacy (1930). By the late 1940s, the building was home to Clark G. Ponder's Drug Store. During the fall of 1957, Ponder's Drug Store bore witness to the desegregation of Central High School and served as an outpost for reporters trying to relay their stories by pay phone.

A contributing resource in the Central High School Neighborhood Historic District, the old Ponder's Drug Store building has been vacant for several years, and the lack of regular maintenance has taken its toll. The building's roof collapsed some time ago, ultimately causing a portion of the upper brick façade to fall onto 16th Street last summer. Neighborhood residents feared the worst. Losing this rare and significant commercial site would deliver a devastating blow to the Central High School National Historic Site, to the neighborhood's National Register-listed historic district, and to the history of civil rights in Little Rock. While the building has a long way to go, a historic tax credit project is underway. In fact, selective demolition began last week, with plans to stabilize and rehabilitate the building. The adaptive reuse of Ponder's Drug Store can have a positive impact on the entire neighborhood.

Quinn Chapel AME Church *Fort Smith, Sebastian County*



The Quinn Chapel AME Church is a contributing resource in the Belle Grove Historic District, which comprises Fort Smith's oldest neighborhood. Fort Smith's African Methodist Episcopal congregation was organized in 1864 and met in several different places before 1917, when the present church was erected. The red brick, Gothic Revival-style church features two towers of different height and lancet windows. In 2007 and 2008, the congregation was successful in obtaining nearly \$90,000 in grants from the Arkansas Historic Preservation Program to stabilize and repair the church. However, the church was abandoned in 2013 because the congregation could no longer afford to maintain the building. Sadly, the church was damaged by fire in March 2018, raising concerns about the building's future. The church is structurally sound, except where the northwest corner was damaged by fire. The sanctuary pews, made of curved and handcrafted wood, remain unharmed. Although paneling was added to the walls and a drop ceiling was installed, the sanctuary's original tin ceiling, choir loft, and wood floors are intact.

The congregation of Quinn Chapel is looking for a buyer who will see the historic church's potential and invest in it. The church is eligible for additional grants if the new owner is a nonprofit organization or unit of municipal government. The building is temporarily secured with plywood covering fire-damaged window and door openings, but the damage needs to be addressed soon to avoid further deterioration and vandalism.

Rock Island Railroad Depot *Perry, Perry County*



Built about 1918, the Rock Island Railroad Depot at Perry is the only remaining wood-frame depot from the Rock Island line in Arkansas. Located north of Perryville, the town of Perry was incorporated

in 1914 and grew up around the railroad. The line was constructed about 1899 by the Choctaw, Oklahoma & Gulf to transport coal from Indian Territory—now Oklahoma—to the Mississippi River at Memphis. In 1902, the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad bought controlling interest in the Choctaw line and acquired 31 railroads to create a 700-mile network in Arkansas. The Rock Island shipped agricultural and timber products, oil, and coal as well as passengers. This part of the Rock Island was called the Sunbelt Line, which ran from Memphis to Amarillo, Texas. Passenger traffic began to decline in the 1950s, and the last regular passenger train came by the Perry Depot in November 1967. In 1975, the Rock Island filed for bankruptcy, and in 1980, the railroad's assets were liquidated. A few months after the Rock Island's closure, former railroad employees created the shortline Little Rock & Western Railway to service industries between Little Rock and Danville using old Rock Island trackage. For this reason, the Perry Depot was never abandoned, and in the early 1980s, the Little Rock & Western built a metal locomotive servicing shop directly behind the old depot and constructed a new office nearby. In recent years, the depot has been used for storage.

In mid-2017, preservationists and historians learned that the railroad intended to demolish the old depot to make way for a new machine shop. Since then, the Perry County Historical and Genealogical Society has led the effort to save the Perry Depot by coordinating its move to a city-owned site just across the tracks from its present location. After much uncertainty, plans are in place for the move, but additional fundraising will be necessary to immediately repair or replace the depot's roof and complete a full restoration.

Thomas-Tharp House

Fayetteville, Washington County



The Thomas-Tharp House at 2650 W. Old Farmington Road in Fayetteville was built about 1845 by the William and Irena Thomas family. The home was later occupied by their daughter, Alla Jane Thomas Tharp, and son-in-law, Moses B. Tharp. While it is not listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the Thomas-Tharp House is significant as an example of early vernacular architecture in Washington County, and as the home of the prominent Thomas and Tharp families. After the Civil War Battle of Prairie Grove, Irena Thomas and her daughter, Alla Jane, tended to sick and wounded soldiers from the Federal and Confederate Armies. The women also buried men killed by guerilla warfare in the aftermath of the battle in what is now Tharp Cemetery on Old Farmington Road.

Today, the house, which is not far west of Shiloh Drive—the access road for Interstate 49—is almost surrounded by hotels and other new development. It is currently unoccupied and deteriorating rapidly due to vandalism and weather infiltration. Although the Thomas-Tharp House is for sale and is zoned commercial, there is an opportunity for its adaptive reuse. The house backs up to 228 acres recently acquired by the City of Fayetteville with the help of the Walton Family Foundation that will be developed into a mountain bike park and trail system. The Thomas-Tharp House could be preserved and used as a southern gateway to the park.



ABOUT US

Preserve Arkansas works to build stronger communities by reconnecting Arkansans to our heritage and empowering people to save and rehabilitate historic places.

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UPCOMING EVENTS

May 24 - Most Endangered Places Bike Ride

Starts at Rock Town River Outfitters

River Market, Little Rock, 5:30 p.m.

July 28 - Block on Rock 5th Birthday Bash

A portion of the proceeds benefits Preserve Arkansas.

Stone's Throw Brewing

402 E. 9th Street, Little Rock