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PRESERVATION IOWA ANNOUNCES 2022 MOST ENDANGERED PROPERTIES

Preservation Iowa has designated 7 properties across Iowa for 2022 Most Endangered Designations. Here are the 2022 Most Endangered Properties:

Homer Seerley Home, UNI Campus, Cedar Falls, Black Hawk County
Former Marion Methodist Church, Marion, Linn County
Cedar Rapids Elementary Schools, Linn County
First National Bank Building, Ottumwa, Wapello County
Des Moines Birthplace Wall Mural, Polk County
Dunsmore House, Waterloo, Black Hawk County
Lacey School/Pike Grange Hall, Nichols, Muscatine County

Preservation Iowa's Most Endangered Property program was started in 1995 and was implemented to educate Iowans about the special buildings and historic sites that are slowly and gradually slipping away from us. Over the past 25 years, Preservation Iowa has designated over 200 homes, churches, archeological sites, landscapes, commercial buildings and a variety of other properties.

The Most Endangered Properties program helps to bring to the public's attention the risks to a designated historic property and introduces owners of an endangered property to preservation advocacy and resources that can help preserve their historic property. Additionally, there have been interest groups who have been able to use the designation as a mechanism to leverage other financial resources to restore and preserve properties. For more information about the Most Endangered Program, check out Preservation Iowa's website at www.preservationiowa.org or contact Preservation Iowa at info@preservationiowa.org.

This press release includes additional information on each of the designated properties.



#1 Homer Seerley Home, UNI Campus, Cedar Falls, Black Hawk County

This Queen Anne style house constructed of local red brick is the oldest building on the campus of the University of Northern Iowa. It was built in 1890 to serve as the home of college president Homer Seerley and his family. Seerley became president of what was then the Iowa State Normal School in 1886 and oversaw a large period of growth including a name change in 1909 to the Iowa State Teachers

College. During his over 40 years as college president, he spearheaded changes to the college's educational programs and his expertise in the areas of education and teacher training were sought after both at the state and national levels. Seerley worked with Henry Sabin, the Iowa State Superintendent of Public Instruction, to create a normal school training program that was made available through high schools in most county seat towns. This allowed students who aspired to become teachers to begin their training close to their home. And it allowed trained teachers to be placed in more than 11,000 one-room schools across Iowa. This enhanced learning opportunities for hundreds of thousands of rural students and made Iowa a leader in learning. Variations of this regional approach to training teachers were adopted by other states.

The construction of the home was directed by local architect J.E. Robinson who went on to become the Superintendent of the Building Program in 1895 and is responsible for many of the historic buildings remaining on campus today.

After a new president's home was built in 1909, the former home was used as a campus hospital and then a nursery to focus on child study and parent education. It became a retirement home for former president Seerley and his wife from 1928-1934 and then a residence for two more university administrators and their families until 1969. In 1971, the cottage was converted into the first home of the Ethnic Minorities Cultural and Educational Center. Today, it houses the university's honors program.

Despite the replacement of the turned spindle work porches and the removal of the front balcony, several original features of the exterior remain including the decorative, stepped brick cornice and original limestone foundation. Many architectural features remain on the interior as well including the decorative casings with bullseye rosettes and plinth of the windows and doors. The foyer opens up to the original dog-legged staircase with side paneling. A set of pocket doors separates the foyer and parlor and a fireplace remains in the back parlor. In addition, most of the doors are the original four panel doors, though the original front door has been replaced.

The University of Northern Iowa has requested permission from the Board of Regents to raze the home because of projected deferred maintenance costs and its lack of ADA compliant accessibility. The Feb 23rd Board of Regents meeting does not currently show an agenda item for the January tabled decision to demolish the home.



#2 Former Marion Methodist Church, Marion, Linn County

Completed in 1896, this structure on 8th Avenue served as the third home of the First Methodist Episcopal Church in Marion. The Church Gothic exterior includes Gothic-arched windows, door, and belfry vent openings. A 100-foot tall entry/bell tower on the north-west corner features four spires and decorative circular windows at the apex.. The church was designed by Bell & Kent of Council Bluffs,

Iowa. The art glass windows came from the Kansas City Art Glass Company. It is contributing property to the Marion Downtown Commercial Historic District added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2009.

The building served as a Methodist Church until 2019 when it was purchased by the First Pentecostal Church of Cedar Rapids who also operated a daycare out of the classroom spaces. The church has been unused and for sale since a derecho wind storm in 2020 caused significant damage to the northwest corner of the historic church including the bell tower. Additional deterioration has occurred since the storm because action was not taken to protect the damaged section from the elements.

Notices to secure the building and request for a preservation plan were sent to the property owner by the City of Marion. A demolition permit applied for by the owners was pulled and a more extensive review process has begun.

The loss of this building would significantly change the skyline and historic nature of the Uptown Marion District and impact the momentum the district has achieved since becoming an Iowa Main Street district in 2013. There has been major reinvestment into the historic district despite the derecho storm and COVID pandemic. Some interest from local investors has been voiced in a potential project to rehabilitate the church building for reuse. City officials, Chamber of Commerce, and Uptown Marion Main Street are supportive of an adaptive reuse and have expressed willingness to work collaboratively on financial incentives to make the project a reality.

#3 Cedar Rapids Elementary Schools, Linn County

The Cedar Rapids Community School District has made plans to close and replace 16 of its elementary schools all but one of which are over 50 years old. Once closed the facilities plan calls for demolishing many of those schools.

The two oldest buildings, Garfield (pictured here) and Arthur, both opened in 1915. Imposing stone columns loom tall at the entrance of Garfield Elementary, which remains a rare example of Egyptian Revival architecture with hardwood floors and natural woodwork. Arthur Elementary was built in an uncommon fortress/castle design and retains many original features, including transom windows and oak woodwork.



Harrison opened in 1930 and was constructed after the old Harrison School burned in a fire. With its unique English Tudor and Gothic design by Cedar Rapids architect Harry Hunter, the two-story red brick building is the most architecturally significant of the elementary schools, and includes an interior mural in the foyer, created by artist William Henning, a student of renowned artist Grant Wood.

Kenwood, Cleveland and Grant Wood were the first new schools built following World War II and all opened by 1951. Cleveland and Grant Wood were designed to be “sister” schools, and Kenwood features intricate swag ornamental stone reliefs on its exterior.

Erskine, Wright and Hoover schools opened in 1955. Wright Elementary had an airplane form in its design to further acknowledge the Wright brothers legacy and their Cedar Rapids connection.

Madison and Truman schools opened in 1961, with Truman featuring unique pagoda-style architectural details.

Pierce was built in 1965 and Van Buren, Nixon and Johnson all opened in 1970, with Van Buren and Nixon constructed in the same architectural design.

Opened in 1973, Taylor Elementary made a historic comeback after the unprecedented 2008 flood.

All of the buildings are currently structurally sound and in good condition. The schools listed for demolition and replacement are in imminent danger while those listed for closing also could be lost as there are no plans for them to be repurposed. The district plan calls for using the 1 percent sales tax stream known as “SAVE,” to demolish older schools and construct new ones which circumvents a bond issue vote by residents.

Save CR Heritage has worked to raise public awareness of the school district’s plan by hosting a televised public forum and a bus tour of the endangered schools as well as leading a coalition of groups and individuals to speak out in front of the school board in favor of preserving the historic schools.



#4 First National Bank Building, Ottumwa, Wapello County

The First National Bank building at 131 E Main Street embodies the characteristics of late 19th to 20th century Neo-Classical Revival architecture. Constructed in 1915, it was designed by H.H. Stoddard of Chicago and constructed by the Black Hawk Construction Company of Waterloo. It features a temple front with monumental columns on its primary facade and a full terra cotta side façade. The ten sets of second floor windows are separated by monumental pilasters and terra cotta parapet caps that run the entire length of the building. After the bank closings of the Great Depression, it became the Fidelity Savings Bank. A remodeling in 1956 replaced the original entrance with the present recessed two story plate glass wall.

The building was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1995.

The City of Ottumwa pursued legal action after the property was abandoned by a previous owner and won title to the building. Years of neglect have produced damage to the terra cotta and windows. At the time it was acquired by the City, it was packed floor to ceiling with stuff. Main Street and Ottumwa Historic Preservation Commission volunteers spent nearly a year of weekends cleaning out the building.

The City of Ottumwa, with an HRDP grant, has hired RDG to complete a historic structure report in order to gain a full assessment of the building with the goal of finding a buyer interested in restoring the structure.

#5 Des Moines Birthplace Wall Mural, Polk County

This mural near Principal Park was constructed in 2010 to help mark the birthplace of the City of Des Moines. The 34 foot long mosaic designed by Des Moines artist Hilde DeBruyne is constructed of over 500 painted porcelain tiles produced by Robert Sawyer of Creative Edge Master Shop in Fairfield. The mural's creation was sponsored by the Polk County Historical Society.



As an outside public art piece, the mural is exposed to the elements. Water leaking through the wall has damaged the artwork including causing some of the painted tiles to pop out of the wall. The City of Des Moines is responsible for the site and discussions as to how to preserve and best maintain it have concluded that it would be best to move the mural away from the birthplace site to where it would be better protected from the elements. Work is underway to obtain estimates as to the cost of relocating the mural.

#6 Dunsmore House, Waterloo, Black Hawk County

This structure is the oldest limestone building in the City of Waterloo. The house sits on the northern end of the city's historic triangle district. It was built around 1866 by Thomas Chadwick, a master stonemason who emigrated to the area from England. The house was named for John F. Dunsmore, an employee of the Illinois Central Railroad and a waterworks supervisor for the railroad in the 1890s who lived in the home during the last quarter of the 1800s. By 1913, the house had been acquired by P.M. Michael, who made several structural alterations and additions.



The house was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1977.

The house is currently owned by the City of Waterloo and has been sitting largely empty for the last 20 years. It is in a very dilapidated condition.

Waterloo's City Council and Historic Preservation Commission are interested in rehabilitating the property but at present there is no long-range plan for the future use of the structure. The City has set aside Capital Improvement Funds to fund a portion of the rehabilitation of the property but the total cost to refurbish the property would be considerably more than what has been allocated.



#7 Lacey School/Pike Grange Hall, Nichols, Muscatine County

This former one-room schoolhouse located east and south of Nichols was built on this spot in 1929 to replace an 1800s schoolhouse located nearby. After the school closed in 1946, the hip-roofed structure continued to be used as the Pike Grange meeting hall into the 1980s. Today, the building is vacant and in poor condition but it is one of only a few country schools remaining in Muscatine County.

Despite some exterior changes including the removal of the belfry from the roof, much of the original exterior remains including the original narrow-reveal clapboard siding, some of the original wood-sash windows, and the pediment with cornice returns above the entry door. It also sits on the original rusticated concrete block foundation.

The schoolhouse is currently privately owned. Changes were made by the owner with the goal of converting the schoolhouse into a residence although the process was not completed.

At this time, the current owner has expressed interest in selling the structure and there is the danger that it would be demolished by a new owner. The Muscatine County Historic Preservation Commission and the Friends of Historic Nichols are currently evaluating the possibility of purchasing the property and restoring it.