

2002 Endangered Sites list of the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation

Late 19th century sidewalks, the H&C Coffee sign, the distinctive Samuel Harshbarger stone and brick home, a classical church and the spacious Fairacres Garden Center lead the 2002 Endangered Sites list of the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation.

Environmental features on the threatened list are the dwindling supply of water, the unplanned sprawl encroaching on scenic rural landscapes and impact of lower federal funding on the Blue Ridge Parkway. The mountain drive is threatened by approaching development and the need for more law enforcement and clearing of foliage at overlooks.

Alison Blanton, Foundation president, said.....”This is the sixth year the preservation organization has announced endangered sites or features with historic, cultural or environmental value. The annual listing calls public attention to threatened places or features and encourages preservation and stewardship of properties.”

Some sites from past listings remain under threat, others have been restored for continued use while some have been lost. Among those restored are the reopened Grandin Theatre, the Moses store in the Gainsboro area now under renovation, the former Norfolk & Western Railway General Office Buildings, now the Higher Education Center and apartments.

The eight endangered sites on the 2002 list:



FAIRACRES—The 1912 Fairacres mansion which the Roanoke Council of Garden Club purchased from the Stephenson family in 1964 has an uncertain future, at best. Costly upkeep of the 6,857-square-foot building on Avenham Avenue in South Roanoke forced the council to vote to sell the mansion and surrounding two acres of land. A committee of garden club members is charged with recommending the selling procedure. The State Department of Historic Resources has determined that the property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, an action which could trigger significant tax credits for the seller. But the Council has not applied for the Register listing. The Preservation Foundation recommends that the Garden Club Council sell the property with deed restrictions assuring that the mansion would remain residential property with no alterations to the exterior. Restrictions should be placed on subdivision of the grounds and construction of additional buildings. Easements should be placed on the property to enable a purchaser to qualify for tax credits for restoration and to receive a lower value for tax purposes.



SAMUEL HARSHBARGER HOUSE – The 1797 Samuel Harshbarger House, one of the oldest structures in the Roanoke Valley, is endangered by potential unsightly hazards next door and dirt bicycle mounds placed there recently. Ed and Delores Truett, owners of the stone and brick home off Plantation Road, near Hershberger Road, Northeast, tried to buy the adjacent property used by the bikers but the owner is asking three times their offer. The Truetts bought the once dilapidated house in 1988 and completed a first-rate restoration. Their home is surrounded by a vacant supermarket building, a skating rink, a propane gas operation and the vacant strip bordering their driveway, now used as a dirt bike track.



WATER, one of the Roanoke Valley’s most valuable natural resources, is scarce and the future supply is endangered unless a water preservation and distribution plan is completed by valley governments working together with citizen input. The drought, impacting Carvins Cove reservoir, has called widespread attention to the threat of extreme water shortage. In addition, antiquated pipes, leaking storage facilities and dams, bacterial contamination, pesticides, oil spills, farm waste, sewage overflow, landfill leaching, human refuse and acid rain have impacted the quality of the water supply. Better use of water that is wasted or untapped is needed. Some significant springs have been covered over or capped by city development and underground limestone pools which could serve as emergency water resource back have been untapped.



BLUE RIDGE PARKWAY VISAS - The Blue Ridge Parkway routing around Roanoke is endangered by encroaching development and a lack of adequate law enforcement and clearing foliage at overlooks because of government budgetary restraints. More funding is needed to retain the scenic quality of the National Park Service’s most heavily visited unit. The 28 mile-section of Parkway crossing Roanoke County section is more threatened by development than any area of the 469-mile scenic drive. Gary Johnson, chief planner and landscape architect for the Parkway, asked Scenic America to designate the Roanoke section a “Last Chance Landscape.” Johnson said this would be a public relations project “to make the public

more aware of how this landscape is changing.” In some areas, the Parkway staff is letting the foliage grow purposely because it “no longer has a view,” said Gordon Wissinger, chief ranger. Vegetation of adjoining property sometimes blocks the view. Wissinger said the Parkway does not have the funding to provide an adequate level of staffing for law enforcement, especially to handle the problem of sexual solicitation at overlooks.



BRICK SIDEWALKS, an important part of the streetscape in early Roanoke, are endangered by commercial construction. The City of Roanoke retains a small stockpile of replacement brick and work is under way on repair of brick walks in the Old Southwest District. A large stockpile at the City Service Center was discarded to the landfill during an EPA cleanup. In 1890, heyday of early Roanoke, Adams, Payne & Gleaves and Roanoke Brick Co. operated brickyards. Brick sidewalks have been saved in the 900 block of Campbell Avenue, SW, and on Gilmer Avenue, NW.



The **H&C COFFEE SIGN**, now unlighted above Roanoke’s City Market, has been compared to a neglected stepchild—abandoned by its parents and neglected by its foster parent. The sign, once a never-ending stream of coffee pouring from a pot, was a welcome sight for nighttime drivers. But it has grown quiet and cold. Its future is uncertain but some people are interested in saving the sign. Several possibilities have emerged: Donating the sign to an interested Roanoke foundation, restoration or turning it around because of planned construction of an Imax theater which would block its view from Int. 581. As a result of neglect, the sign is in use as a pigeon roost. A fund-raising event could provide the needed funding to start the flow of coffee again.



RURAL LANDSCAPES, a major attraction for many who live and work in urban areas, are adversely affected by unrestrained suburban sprawl in the Roanoke Valley and throughout much of Southwest Virginia. Forests, open fields, old farmhouses and barns are being replaced by subdivisions, vinyl-clad homes, highly conspicuous corner gas stations, strip malls and parking lots. The loss of each bucolic acre erases some of our connection with the past and disturbs our collective peace of mind. It is imperative that present and future planning efforts take such quality-of-life issues into consideration with insight and forethought, for the good of citizens and the environment.



FAMILY WORSHIP CENTER/JEFFERSON STREET BAPTIST CHURCH - The Family Worship Center/Jefferon Street Baptist Church located at Albemarle Avenue and South Jefferon Street is one of Roanoke's finest examples of an early 20th century neoclassical and is to be razed by January to make room for a Carilion Health System outpatient surgery center. Its design is based on the Greek temple form, with massive, fluted Doric columns and brick pilasters supporting a traditional Doric entablature and pediment. The church features outstanding stain glass windows and its columns, pilaster bases and capitals and flat window arches are examples of early ambitious use of precast concrete simulating marble.