

The Valley's Most Endangered Places

1996

A list compiled by
The Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation
Threatened and Endangered Sites Committee

N&W General Office Buildings

Jefferson Street North, downtown Roanoke



For decades, the block of Jefferson Street between the N&W offices and the Hotel Roanoke was the heart of Roanoke's mightiest corporation. Generations of Roanokers spent their working lives within the buildings. The earlier building, closer to the tracks, shows a uniquely Southern approach to the design of the modern office building. The taller Art Deco tower is the masterwork of Roanoke's great local architect, Paul Hayes. Together they are an enduring part of Roanoke's architectural wealth, and of Roanoke's character.

Current plans for a higher education center in the Paul Hayes building deserve public support. No plans have yet been advanced for the earlier building. And while the Norfolk Southern Corporation is currently serving admirably as custodian for the buildings, they stand at risk so long as they stand empty. Roanoke's railroad heritage can be a basis for the Valley's future, and the General Office Buildings are a key part of that heritage.

Southeast City Neighborhoods

Southeast is one of Roanoke's oldest neighborhoods, but has received little notice for its historic contributions to the City or its significant architectural structures. The area was a preferred spot for settlements both prehistoric and historic. It became a booming residential neighborhood with the advent of the Norfolk and Western Railway, and again with the opening of American Viscose.

The neighborhood houses range from vernacular wooden structures of significant interest in the northern section, through brick four-square and Tudor homes in the middle, culminating at the top of the hill in the grand antebellum plantation home of George Tayloe, Buena Vista.

The past decade has seen a severe impact on the neighborhood; a steady decline due to flooding, fires, vandalism and neglect. The lack of any historic recognition or designation has left the area unprotected, and subsequent losses have included the old City Stables, a historic foundry, a brewery and many significant houses.

The RVPF hopes to encourage a public-private effort by the Southeast Action Forum, area homeowners and the City Administration to save the many fine houses remaining in this historic neighborhood.





City Cemetery

Tazewell Avenue, Roanoke City

Roanoke's most historic graveyard is located on Tazewell Avenue adjacent to the Roanoke Rescue Mission. The cemetery, dating from the late 1800s, has many graves of prominent early Roanokers, including several mayors. As well as many beautiful and historic headstones, the cemetery boasts handsome wrought-iron fencing in several styles. There is a large monument to Confederate veterans at the back, as well as individual Confederate graves.

Many stones have been pushed over, broken or removed by vandals. The fencing is also in considerable disrepair. A committee of the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation is working with Roanoke City to address some of the issues, but funding, labor, and a commitment to stabilize and maintain this important landmark are needed.

Claytor Clinic Building

Gainsboro Road at Gilmer, Roanoke City

Built in the early 1940s by Gainsboro's prominent physician, Dr. J.B. Claytor, this handsome building is significant as a piece of architecture, as part of Roanoke's African-American culture, and as a potential key to revitalizing the Gainsboro commercial district.

Dr. Claytor is a memorable figure in the history of Roanoke's African-American community, having attended virtually every birth in that community during the 1930s-50s. At one point four members of his family, all working in the medical professions, had offices in the Clinic building.

The Clinic was damaged by a fire in 1995 and has suffered from the loss of the adjoining pharmacy building. Nonetheless, it is in good shape for reuse as a professional or commercial building. Restoring this building would not only contribute to reclaiming Roanoke's African-American heritage, but to the future health of the surrounding neighborhood.



Mountain Views

The natural beauty of the Roanoke Valley is highlighted by the surrounding Blue Ridge and Allegheny Mountains. Cherished by local residents, applauded by tourists and painted by artists, the beauty of the mountain viewshed and its natural ridge line is threatened by the impact of housing development, transmission towers, power lines, and logging, and by the erosion that all of them bring.

Careful planning and a preservation effort by both public and private interests can ensure that well-defined, green mountainsides and ridge lines will maintain the area's beauty. The RVPF applauds recent cooperative efforts by developers, local governments and interest groups to preserve viewsheds along the Blue Ridge Parkway. This process should be a model for future planning decisions. We salute Roanoke County for its important part in this decision, and call upon it to solidify its position as a Valley leader by restricting development along mountain ridgetops as called for by the Roanoke County 2010 vision process.

Stokes House

5621 Plantation Road

Plantation Road, once an open landscape featuring several striking historic homes, is rapidly becoming a dense suburban corridor. Among the victims of this progress is the Stokes house, a stately "I" house built around 1875. This true plantation house is one of the few 19th-century houses of architectural significance remaining in Roanoke County.

The Stokes house, once considered one of the most charming in the Roanoke area, features exquisite period woodwork, fireplaces in every room, and the remnants of ceiling frescoes. At the rear, the property extends to Tinker Creek and the site of the Jacob Harshbarger mill dam. A free-standing kitchen, smokehouse, servants' quarters and other service buildings still stand on the property.

The building is boarded up and almost surrounded by a modern subdivision, currently under development. A spokesperson for the developer stated in 1995 that an unnamed person had plans to restore the house. To date, no activity is apparent.



Harris Farmstead

U.S. Route 221, Back Creek section

Under its unassuming exterior, the Harris home is one of the best-preserved 19th century farmhouses in Roanoke County. It is listed in the 1993 Roanoke County Historical Survey, where it was recommended for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. Its value is enhanced by never having been disturbed by modernization.

The house has excellent documentation and many surviving interior details. Much of its importance stems from its surrounding outbuildings. The Roanoke County Historical Survey found eight worthy of individual note. These buildings complement the house and provide us with an unusually complete view into nineteenth-century farm life.

The Harris farmstead stands in the the sharpest curve on Route 221. Improvements to 221 have been designed to minimize damage to the house itself, but the impact of road work on the farmstead may be considerable. Worse, the new Route 221 will be higher speed and higher capacity than the current country road, thus accelerating development in the area and contributing to the destruction of the rural landscape and life that makes the Back Creek region so attractive.



Shenandoah Hotel

Williamson Road and Campbell Avenue, downtown Roanoke

Roanoke's City Market area is a great success in reuse of historic places and a district to which the Valley can point with pride. Despite numerous setbacks, redevelopment of the historic district appears now to have gained an unstoppable momentum, making Roanoke justly famous around the country.

The face that the City Market district turns to the world, however, begins with the forlorn Shenandoah Hotel building on the corner of Campbell and Williamson. The Shenandoah is in good condition, and could easily be returned to full use. But the building has been caught in a web of restrictions and disagreements that have kept it vacant for years.

Without the gentle architecture and human scale of its historic buildings, the City Market would not be the attractive place it is now. Each building is precious in the process of redevelopment, and especially buildings like the Shenandoah that form the Market's visible outer edge. Roanoke must put its best face forward by saving and rehabilitating the Shenandoah Hotel.



Burke Cabin

431 Clay Street, Salem

This charming dependency of "Monterey," the nearby Burke house, was once a tannery but has been living quarters for some decades. It dates to the early 1800s, and appears in Edward Beyer's painting of Monterey published in his *Album of Virginia* (1855). The original log walls have been covered with siding, but the lines of the cabin are still easily described.

The cabin is situated on the busy corner of Clay Street and the Thompson Memorial Parkway, where it is threatened from almost every side. Across Clay is the expanding Roanoke County Court complex, while behind it Roanoke College is constantly in need of land. As these and the neighboring commercial district expand, increased traffic will argue for the widening of Clay Street. The front of the cabin is already only a few feet from Clay.

The current owners of the cabin are interested in its preservation, and members of the RVPF have begun discussions with them on ways to ensure its survival and eventual restoration.



Roanoke River Headwaters

From its birth in Montgomery County to its terminus at Roanoke Island in Albemarle Sound, the Roanoke is one of America's most historic rivers. This significant waterway, along with its miles of tributaries and adjacent floodplain greenery, is the Roanoke Valley's most valuable natural resource. The river's beauty and the life in and around it have value in themselves and are a source of wealth and enjoyment to area residents and visitors. Despite this, it has been degraded by pollution, trash, and poor planning.

The Roanoke Valley has a unique moral duty to its river. A river's headwaters are its most delicate part. If a river like the Roanoke is contaminated at its source, there is little incentive for communities farther down the river to decrease their own pollution.

The Roanoke Valley can be a strong leader for communities downstream. Both public and private conservation efforts are needed to preserve the river and the environment of its birth. The RVPF applauds current efforts by Friends of the Roanoke River and the Roanoke Greenways coalition to clean up the river environs. We call upon the Valley to continue these efforts and to make our headwater community a model for the entire watershed.

"The Valley's Most Endangered Places" is a list maintained by the

Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation

a valley-wide non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the preservation of the historic, natural and cultural resources of the Roanoke Valley. The Preservation Foundation encourages valley citizens to suggest additions and changes to this list, and the larger list from which it is drawn.

To get a copy of the list or to bring a threatened property to our attention, please write to

Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation
Threatened and Endangered Sites Committee
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(540) 989-0146.