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Neglected buildings make the 2008 Endangered Sites list

Neglect of seven vacant buildings, a century-old steam locomotive forgotten in a scrap yard and a city-owned stone wall was charged by the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation in its annual listing of Endangered Sites, announced Thursday.

When buildings are unoccupied and maintenance stops, they deteriorate and lose value, the preservation group said. Ongoing neglect often raises the cost of renovation to more than the building is worth, creating white elephants. The foundation is concerned that structures are maintained and cared for at a minimum level so they survive for renovation.

Leading the list in downtown Roanoke are the apparently abandoned Hotel Patrick Henry, closed last year, and the former Heironimus department store, closed in 1996, briefly reopened as an emporium of shops and finally shut down in 2005. The hotel could be auctioned if a tax bill is not paid by the end of the year,

The threat of neglect is a bit unusual, said Mike Kennedy, foundation president. "So often, nowadays, it's development that threatens our built heritage. With the slowing economy, I suppose we'll see more neglect and fewer bulldozers tearing holes in our historic fabric."

These neglected sites were selected by a foundation committee:

- A locomotive made in the old Norfolk & Western Railway East End Shops in 1911, left in the former Virginia Scrap Iron yard since 1950. Its owner, the Transportation Museum, wants to sell two other old engines to pay for moving the locally made locomotive to the museum.
- The former Adams, Payne & Gleaves livery stable, once used for storage by Virginia Scrap Iron. A brick, two-story structure probably built around 1900 near South Jefferson Street is the last known livery stable in Roanoke. Horses were kept there for the Adams, Payne firm, a building materials supplier.
- The 117-room Patrick Henry Hotel, opened in 1925, was closed in 2007 by its New York owner after charges of inadequate fire protection for the classic building listed on the National Register of Historic Places and purchased by investors in 1990. Ceilings have fallen and water has leaked. Proposals for senior living in the building failed to materialize.
- Heironimus department store building has been vacant since 2005 when the last of several emporium shops closed. The downtown store closed in 1996..
- A stone wall, in need of repair by the City of Roanoke, on Wasena Avenue
- Horton Building, on the southeast corner of Kirk Avenue and 1st Street, SW, sold to a Charlottesville firm; is in need of exterior repair. A restaurant, The Judge's Chambers, is under development in one area but three other building fronts are offered for lease.
- 1222 Campbell Avenue, SW, a craftsman style house labeled as "a public nuisance...unfit for human habitation," by the City Code Enforcement office. The long vacant house has elephantine columns, a chimney of stone rubble and decorative notched rafters.
- Buena Vista, an 1850 mansion and former Southeast city recreation center, listed for sale; in need of a new roof and exterior repair.

(more)

1st add—endangered

- The Burke cabin, also known as the Tanyard House after it was built in the 1850s. The cabin, at Clay Street and Thompson Drive, is owned by Roanoke College. The 1 1/2-story frame building has been vacant for years.

The structures are in different stages of neglect. Financial problems and uncertainty in the nation's declining economy are expected to limit development even more in the future.. Financial uncertainties are often blamed for neglect but the last decade has seen developers thrive.

Lack of adequate concern and commitment by landlords, especially absentee owners, often holds up repair and restoration. The National Trust for Historic Preservation said that neglect of historic properties may be caused by "impoverished owners, difficulties arising from unsettled estates or simply an uncaring attitude by owners."

The Trust also identifies "a more disturbing trend...an owner's intentional use of 'demolition by neglect' to circumvent legislation aimed at protecting historic properties." If owners neglect properties by choice, their attitude may be, "If you won't let me tear it down, then I'll let it fall down."

All six of the 2007 Endangered Sites remain under threat. They were the village of Bonsack, Elmwood Park, Buena Vista and Villa Heights, former recreation centers, Hotel Patrick Henry and the valley's tree canopy.

In recent years, two of the endangered sites saved are the Fellers house on Hollins Road, soon to be a new campus for Blue Ridge Behavioral Healthcare unit and the Oliver Hill boyhood home on Gilmer Avenue, now a Washington & Lee University legal center.

On the other hand, a house at 806 Marshall Ave., SW, has been removed and log structures at Greenfield Plantation in Botetourt County, the corridors of Route 220 south and Route 122 in Franklin County and Roanoke Valley tree canopy remain endangered. A Georgia developer has missed several timelines for a Bonsack project so a threat to that village may have been averted.

The foundation's aim is to call public attention annually to endangered sites in the fall and to select successful preservation projects for awards in the spring.

The annual meeting also featured a panel discussion of protection of Roanoke Valley mountaintops by Janet Scheid, county greenways planner; Ron Crawford, founder of the Read Mountain Alliance, and Gail Burress, a leader of the Mill Mountain Conservancy. The meeting was held at the Discovery Center on Mill Mountain.