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RVPF Announces Rosenwald Schools, Country Stores, Barns and More 2018 Endangered Sites

Rosenwald schools, corner groceries, neglected barns and a Williamson Road industrial building head the annual list of endangered sites compiled by the Roanoke Valley Preservation Foundation. To raise public awareness of threats to the region's historic, cultural and natural resources, the Foundation recognizes sites in May, National Preservation Month.

For more than 20 years, the organization has attempted to make owners of endangered properties aware of the value of preserving these resources, as well as the potential incentives and tools such as tax credits, with opportunities and people available to help them.

State and national endangered sites also are announced during Preservation Month. Roanoke's No. 7 Fire Station, placed on the 2017 Foundation list when its demolition was pending, made the state endangered sites listing last week. The Foundation continues its efforts to persuade City Council to consider an alternative, lower-cost renovation plan for the station.

Unfortunately, Billy's Cabin, a deteriorating structure possibly dating to 1810 and placed on the endangered list in 2015, is being demolished this week by its owner, Roanoke Natural Foods Co-Op. Termites have destroyed much of the aging log structure, according to Bruce Phlegar, Co-Op general manager, and restoration would require much more funding than is available. Legend says that Billy Fleming, son of Col. William Fleming, lived there as early as 1810.

Records show three Rosenwald schools operated in the early 1900s at Catawba, Hanging Rock and Mountain Top on Bent Mountain. Four were in Botetourt at Buchanan, Eagle Rock, Indian Rock and another county location. Four in Franklin County were Bellevue, Ephesus, Sontag and in the county; A Merriwether school was in Bedford County. The Catawba building at 5471 Keffer Road, now vacant, formerly was a church.

These were among approximately 5,000 schools financed by Julius Rosenwald, Sear Roebuck president, to educate African-American children in the South from 1912 to 1932. In the early 1930s, one in three African-American children was enrolled in a Rosenwald School. Local matching funds were required. Educator Booker T. Washington assisted Rosenwald in this project. Many of the schools were forgotten after desegregation in 1954 but some continue as community centers.

The Roanoke Redevelopment and Housing Authority is reviewing a proposal for the 1906, three-story, brick building at 1256 Williamson Road but it is unlikely to be reused, according to Frederick Gusler of the Authority. Considering the asking price, he said, there is not sufficient interest in the building. Occupied by Quality Tire Outlet on

the first floor, it was built as the Exchange Lumber Co. by four leading businessmen in early Roanoke---T. W. Goodwin, S. W. Jamison, B. P. Huff and James P. Woods. The building. Recognized for its archways and detail work, the building was later sold to Skyline Lumber Co. and Ladybird Apparel. It is located near the development corridor fueled by growth of Carilion Health System.

Two country stores, once busy neighborhood businesses but now neglected and deteriorating are the former Farmers Exchange on U. S. Rt. 11 north of Troutville, and the former Hollins Grocery at Williamson and Reservoir roads. The grocery, built in the 1930s by Nicholas Harshbarger, had a central chimney, a pot-belly stove and free-standing shelves. After years as a grocery, it was used as a heating and air conditioning business until it had to be moved because of a highway widening project. The building site and an adjoining house are for sale. The Harshbarger family descended from Samuel Harshbarger who built a 1797 stone and brick home standing near Plantation Road and later moved to Indiana..

Many country barns are falling down for lack of care. Two barns owned by the Beahm family on Sanderson Drive, near the Roanoke-Botetourt county line, are used only for storage and surrounded by housing and business development. Michael Beahm said he would like to find a use for them. The barns, among the last standing in Roanoke County, were built by John Sanderson around 1940 and once housed a thriving produce business.

On Brugh's Mill Road in Botetourt County, Marshall Myers owns a barn made of hand-hewn logs with wooden dowels and pegs. The Brugh's Tavern at Explore Park once stood next to the barn and Myers would like to see his building moved for another use.