

ROANOKE VALLEY'S MOST ENDANGERED SITES 1999

A LIST COMPILED BY THE ENDANGERED SITES COMMITTEE OF THE ROANOKE VALLEY PRESERVATION FOUNDATION

This is the third year the Foundation has recognized sites and natural resources that we believe are threatened because they are located in high-impact development areas or are deteriorating because of neglect. We call attention to these threats in order to emphasize the values of preservation and to encourage local governments and developers to include the economic advantages of preservation in their planning. We are also updating the situations of sites and resources from our Endangered Sites lists in 1996 and 1998.

Ebony Club (Strand Theatre)



The Ebony Club, an early movie theater and later a night club, was the location in the 1920s for the Micheaux Film Corporation, one of the first African American film-makers in the nation. It was headed by Oscar Micheaux, who had a 30-year career as an independent producer, writer, director and distributor. Micheaux produced about 35 feature films offering a wide-ranging look at black life in early 20th century America. Before the company moved to the Bronx, New York City, one of those films was made in Roanoke. Oliver Hill, Roanoke native, famed civil rights lawyer and recent Presidential Medal of Freedom recipient, appeared in that film as a youth. Micheaux lived across the street in the Hampton or Dumas Hotel, according to the 1925 City Directory. Constructed about 1922, the building on Henry (First Street, NW, today) was known as the Hampton and later the Strand Theater.

Today, the Ebony Club's roof has collapsed, leaving the interior filled with debris and open to the elements with continued exposure to freeze/thaw cycles. The structure also is vulnerable to uncoordinated development which is insensitive to the history of the place.

Victory Stadium



Seating 25,000, the concrete and brick Victory Stadium was described as the largest athletic stadium in Virginia when it was dedicated at the Virginia Tech-VMI football game on Thanksgiving day, 1942. Today, the stadium faces removal and replacement by a smaller structure if Roanoke City Council accepts the recommendation of a citizen commission. The stadium on the banks of the Roanoke River was constructed for \$315,000 from a bond issue. One cost estimate of basic repairs to the stadium today is \$5 million.

The major reason for building the stadium was the popular Virginia Tech-VMI football game, a hotly contested classic played annually in Roanoke from 1896 until the early 1970s when the huge Lane Stadium on the Virginia Tech campus became the location for all Virginia Tech home games. The Roanoke game was called “The Military Classic of the South” as early as 1913. During its heyday, Victory Stadium was visited by such personages as Secretary of State George Marshall, rooting for his alma mater, VMI, and actress Greer Garson, promoting the sale of War Bonds. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau came for a World War II rally but it was forced indoors by rain.

After the end of the Virginia Tech-VMI game in Roanoke, the stadium’s main use has been for high school football games drawing low attendance. After study, a 21-member citizens advisory commission has voted to demolish the stadium and build a smaller stadium “modern and the right size.” The right size has been set at 3,000, expandable to 6,000 or perhaps 8,000 seats. As part of the Roanoke City Department of Parks and Recreation Master Plan process, the project requires much work and final approval of the Planning Commission and City Council. Cannot some use be found for such a sturdy 57-year-old structure?

Dr. John H. Pinkard House (White House Galleries)

The former location of White House Galleries and once the home of John Henry Pinkard, a prominent herb doctor in the Roanoke Valley’s African-American community, will be razed any day because it blocks the view of a new Lowe’s building supplies store from U. S. 220. Pinkard, an entrepreneur who developed Pinkard Court, a Black residential community, was known for his herbs, for fancy cars and stylish clothes. A Lowe’s spokesman said the building will be removed and the site offered for a fast-food restaurant or store. George Ferguson has moved his antique/art business to a house on Walnut Avenue and Third Street, SW.

When this building is taken down, the last vestiges of a once-active Black community will disappear. The Lowe’s store was constructed on the site of Pinkard Court.