

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

### Endangered Historic Places (2008–2010)

The “11 Most Endangered Historic Places” are compiled annually by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and are meant to illustrate the plight of many other sites throughout the United States. The National Trust is a major partner organization of US/ICOMOS. Here is a selection of sites from the years 2008–2010.

#### 2008

##### Hangar One, Moffett Field

Hangar One, with its exceptional character, innovative design and technical virtuosity, has long been one of the most recognizable landmarks of California’s Silicon Valley. This cavernous, dome-shaped structure, built in 1932 to house U. S. Navy dirigibles, measures 200 feet tall and covers more than 8 acres of land. During World War II, it served as a docking station for the USS Macon, the largest aircraft in the world at the time. The hangar dominates the landscape at Moffett Field, towering over an impressive array of 1930s-era Spanish Colonial Revival military buildings, which are now part of NASA’s Ames Research Center. Hangar One is no-

Hangar One, Moffett Field



table for its colossal Streamline Modern form, and is regarded as emblematic of Silicon Valley’s contributions to aviation and space advancement as well as technology research and development.

In 2005 a group of local citizens formed the grassroots Save Hangar One Committee to advocate for preservation and adaptive reuse of the hangar. They continue to wage an effective campaign, coordinating information for the community and others on the status of the Navy’s remediation plan. The group is also mobilizing efforts to have NASA consider rehabilitating Hangar One for adaptive reuse or educational purposes. In early 2009, after a long and contentious public review process, the Navy formally decided to remediate the environmental hazard at Hangar One by stripping the hangar of its exterior siding, doors and windows, and interior elements, leaving only the structure’s large steel frame. NASA has backed away from its earlier pledge to restore Hangar One after the Navy strips the structure of its toxic siding. Should the Navy proceed with its plan without a commitment for rehabilitation, Hangar One’s exposed frame will be vulnerable to the elements.

##### Michigan Avenue Streetwall, Chicago

An enduring image of the Chicago skyline, Michigan Avenue stands as one of the world’s most-recognized streets. Its 12-block stretch of historic buildings – dating back to the 1880s – is a virtual encyclopedia of the work of the city’s best architects including Daniel Burnham and Louis Sullivan. Although this “streetwall” was designated a Chicago Landmark in 2002, its historic character is now being threatened by the inappropriate addition of large-scale towers that retain only small portions of the original buildings or their facades. Should these development projects gain approval, they will render the local landmark ordinance ineffective as a tool for preservation of the district.

At present, the 1893 Chicago Athletic Association, designed by Henry Ives Cobb is slated for a rooftop addition. These plans propose to demolish a significant portion of the vacant building’s structure and several elaborate interior spaces to accommodate a multi-story, stepped, glass hotel tower. While the building is protected by landmark designation and a preservation ordinance, the project has been justified on the basis that the new construction will not be visible from across the street. However, because of the one-sided nature of the street, the mass of the tower would greatly disrupt the historic skyline as viewed from Grant Park, Millennium Park, and the lakefront.

If approved, preservation advocates fear that this project will set a precedent for similar proposals within the historic district, creating a domino effect of high-rise development on a street where landmark designation was established to prevent such a situation. Chicago’s preservation ordinance currently allows construction proposals to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, which has prevented a clear set of standards from being established. Consequently, an increasing number of projects in which only the façade of an historic building is preserved have been permitted.

The recent economic downturn and the slump in real estate prices has helped to cool the rampant pace of downtown development in Chicago, and the Michigan Avenue Streetwall is no exception. The proposed rooftop additions for two prominent buildings – the YWCA and the Chicago Athletic Club – would have been highly visible from one of the most public spaces in the City. Chicago’s Millennium Park sits directly across Michigan Avenue and defines the edge of the Streetwall, drawing millions of visitors and residents every year. But lack of financing has put one of these projects on



Michigan Avenue Streetwall, Chicago

hold indefinitely, and the publicity and public outcry generated from the listing of the Streetwall as an Endangered Historic Place by both the National Trust for Historic Preservation and Landmarks Illinois has caused a rethinking of the addition proposed for the Chicago Athletic Club. The developer is considering a revision of its original design, which would move the stepped glass addition away from the Michigan Avenue façade and relocate it to the rear of lot, where it will be an extension of the adjacent building on Monroe Street. This change to the design would make the addition more appropriate and much less visible to the public from Millennium Park.

The proposed addition for the Henry Ives Cobb-designed Chicago Athletic Club is being revised in response to requests from City officials. The new design has not yet been released, but is expected to be more sensitive to the historic character of the Athletic Club and the Streetwall as a direct result of publicity generated from 2008 “Endangered Places” listings. While the immediate future of the Athletic Club seems brighter, there is still a fear that inappropriate additions will reappear as a threat to the Streetwall when the economy and real estate prices begin to recover. The City has yet to address the issue of formal design guidelines for the Streetwall district, and there is a distinct possibility that future projects will continue to be handled on a “case-by-case” basis. Landmarks Illinois, the statewide preservation non-profit, plans to have its East Loop Task Force press the issue with City staff, requesting that the Commission on Chicago Landmarks adopt design guidelines that will apply to all proposed projects in the Streetwall and protect one of Chicago’s most prominent historic districts.

## The Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia

Downtown (“Center City”) Philadelphia’s last surviving major motion picture palace opened Christmas Day in 1928 and operated until 2002. This masterpiece of Art Deco design now sits vacant, has no preservation easement in place, lacks designation as an historic landmark and is threatened with demolition.

The Boyd Theatre was considered the most elegant theater in Philadelphia’s premier shopping area, Chestnut Street. Designed by the architectural firm Hoffman-Henon, the Boyd was the only first-run Art Deco movie theatre ever erected in Philadelphia. The rich beauty of its interior was characterized by luxurious ornamentation such as an exquisite, etched glass-mirrored lobby, an enormous auditorium with a seating capacity eclipsing 2,500 and stunning chandeliers. The Art Deco decorative motif was carried out in full force with stained glass insets, a huge mural by acclaimed artist Alfred Tulk and gold and black metal silhouettes celebrating the progress of women throughout the history of the world. The decoration inside the Boyd Theatre has survived and should be preserved.

Following the theatre’s closing in 2002, a local group, Friends of the Boyd, Inc., a nonprofit organization of community volunteers, was formed. Since then, it has waged a highly visible citywide advocacy campaign to prevent the demolition of the theatre, including letters to city government, public testimony, rallies, editorials



The Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia

The Boyd Theatre, the auditorium





to key media outlets, and petition drives. Friends of the Boyd, Inc. has a website, and uses other tools in collaboration with local advocates, including the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, which this year included the Boyd on its most endangered places list. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has had a longstanding interest in preserving the Boyd; in 1993, the National Trust was involved in litigation to grant landmark status to the Boyd, and Adrian Fine, the Director of the National Trust's Northeast Field Office, serves on the board of Friends of the Boyd, Inc.

In 2005, Clear Channel, Inc. purchased the Boyd and planned to embark on a \$31 million restoration of the theatre as a live performance art venue. After Clear Channel underwent a re-organization, however, the Boyd was transferred to Live Nation. Restoration plans were halted in early 2006 when Live Nation decided to re-focus itself as a concert presentation company. Subsequently, the Boyd was placed on the market.

Currently, there is no sales agreement in place for the Boyd Theatre. The National Trust for Historic Preservation is working with Live Nation and the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia to attract purchasers who will restore and use the historic theater. The Boyd is eligible for use of Federal Rehabilitation Tax Credits by developers.

## The Lower East Side, New York City

Few places in America can boast such a rich tapestry of history, culture and architecture as New York's Lower East Side. However, this legendary neighborhood—the first home for waves of immigrants since the 18th century—is now undergoing rapid development. New hotels and condominium towers are being erected across the area, looming large over the original tenement streetscape. As this building trend shows no sign of abating, it threatens to erode the fabric of the community and wipe away the collective memory of generations of immigrant families.

Although the Lower East Side was placed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places in 2000, such a designation functions primarily as an “honor roll” and does not preserve a neighborhood's appearance or regulate real estate speculation. The community, with little recourse for protection, is reeling from the recent destruction of its cultural heritage, including the defacing of several historic structures and the loss of First Roumanian Synagogue. Slapdash and haphazard renovations have led to the destruction of architectural detail, while modern additions to historic buildings sharply contrast with the neighborhood's scale and character. In 2007, permits were approved for the full demolition of 11 buildings on the Lower East Side, compared with just one in 2006. These developments, among others, signify the quickening erasure of the neighborhood's architectural and socio-cultural fabric.

The Lower East Side Preservation Coalition, comprised of nine community organizations, formed in 2006 to create a landmark district that would protect the physical character of the neighborhood and its history of the immigrant experience. The proposed District encompasses an area bounded on the west by Allen Street, with an extension that includes Broome Street west to Eldridge Street, on the north by Delancey Street, on the East by Essex Street, and on the South by Division Street, with an extension that includes Eldridge below Canal Street. The Coalition has garnered significant



The Lower East Side, New York City, typical façade

support from politicians, members of the Lower East Side community and diverse ethnic groups throughout New York.

A melting pot of cultures and nationalities, the Lower East Side remains central to the social history of the United States. Its preservation of 19th and early 20th century properties convey the story of immigrant home, health, entrepreneurship, labor, education and recreational life in New York City.

At the end of 2008, New York City's rezoning of parts of the Lower East Side lowered height limits in ways that will help preserve the character and scale of its historic streetscapes. The Landmarks Preservation Commission continues its survey of the Lower East Side's resources in 2009, the first step toward creating a landmark district.

New construction immediately slowed with the start of the economic downturn, but advocates know from experience that the need to protect the rare resources of the Lower East Side has not disappeared. In the current climate, it is worth noting that landmark districts have generally been found to stabilize property values in New York City. Creating a landmark district now is the only way to manage change in the most historically significant and intact part of the neighborhood, in anticipation of future cycles of development pressure.

2009

## Cast-Iron Architecture in Galveston, Texas

The late 19th century Greek Revival and Italianate buildings with elaborate cast-iron storefronts in Galveston's 12-block Strand/Mechanic National Historic Landmark District constitute one of the largest collections of cast-iron historic commercial buildings in the country. They are reminders of a time when this small island was a center of finance and commerce, with a bustling commercial district nicknamed "The Wall Street of the Southwest". Although the buildings have weathered storms and economic downturns, the blow delivered by Hurricane Ike in September of 2008 has left the Galveston historic commercial district fighting to survive.

On September 13, 2008, Galveston Island took a direct hit from Hurricane Ike, and the downtown commercial district was flooded with 10–13 feet of a noxious mix of salt water, oil and debris. When the water receded after two days, the full impact could be seen: destroyed interiors, ruined mechanical systems and the devastation of Galveston's trademark decorative cast-iron embellishments. In addition, Hurricane Ike's wrath has created structural deficiencies, posing a threat to the integrity of many of the district's buildings.

When it was founded in the 1830s, Galveston was little more than a barrier island with a natural harbor and a barren landscape. Within decades, the city's founders had created a major port, employing architectural cast-iron – both structural and ornamental – as the preferred building material. More than 44 percent of the buildings in the Strand/Mechanic district have cast-iron storefronts, along with buildings along Market and Post Office streets, and many more have brick fronts with cast-iron details. The cast-iron storefronts took the full force of Hurricane Ike's assault and today, the 1859 Hendley Buildings – once used as a Civil War lookout and also reportedly where the first shot of the Battle of Galveston was fired – are suffering from severe structural problems and demolition by neglect.

For more than three decades, the Galveston Historical Foundation has championed economic revitalization in the historic district, and each year it holds a well-attended holiday festival. Even before Hurricane Ike, however, downtown Galveston was experiencing an economic downturn that saw businesses leaving and buildings deteriorating due to neglect. In addition, many business owners had no flood insurance and have not reopened in the wake of the storm. Compounding the already dire situation, the City of Galveston is facing a severe economic decline and has been unable to offer assistance with the revitalization of the historic commercial district.

## Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois

Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple, designed for a Unitarian congregation in Oak Park, Illinois, is widely acknowledged as an icon of 20th-century architecture. Dedicated in September 1909, the cubic, flat-roofed structure is also one of the earliest public buildings to feature exposed concrete, one of Wright's signature design elements. Reflecting on his career shortly before his death in 1959, Wright described the building, now a National Historic Landmark, as one of his greatest achievements, calling it "my contribution to modern architecture." While Unity Temple has been well maintained, water infiltration has caused extensive damage to the concrete structure and interior finishes over the years. Now structurally



Galveston, Texas, typical late 19th century building



Galveston, immediately after Hurricane Ike, September 2008

Galveston, cast iron damage



compromised, the building urgently requires a multi-million-dollar rescue effort, a capital investment that Unity Temple's community of dedicated supporters cannot afford.

The commission for Unity Temple came from Wright's own Unitarian congregation, and the architect responded with





Oak Park, Unity Temple



Oak Park, Unity Temple, interior

an experimental design that broke the rules for Western religious architecture with its deliberate omission of a central nave and iconic steeple, and use of innovative materials. The building's cubic four-level sanctuary and adjoining social hall feature monumental art glass skylights. When it was completed a century ago, architecture critics praised the design for its strong geometric massing, use of modern materials and intricate manipulation of space.

Unity Temple is the only surviving public structure from Wright's prolific Prairie period. Widely recognized as one of the world's most inspiring sacred spaces, it is also a popular tourism destination and serves as a space for performances, lectures, conferences, and community events.

Despite many repair attempts, the temple's concrete structure and interior finishes suffer from widespread damage. Since Wright's experimental concrete design did not call for expansion joints, there is extensive cracking. A coating of concrete applied in the early 1970s is no longer performing its vital, protective function and must be restored.

With its innovative and geometric design, the building has 16 separate flat roofs. Instead of using gutters, Wright designed an internal drainage system with downspouts hidden inside the four main interior columns of the temple. The system was undersized and essentially inaccessible, and to this day water continually overflows the drains and permeates the concrete roof slabs. Heavy rains in

September 2008 caused a large chunk of plaster and concrete to fall from the sanctuary ceiling.

By end of 2009 the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation had raised nearly half a million dollars to stabilize the roof. Stabilization work began in the fall.

### Memorial Bridge in Kittery, Maine & Portsmouth, New Hampshire

For more than 85 years, Memorial Bridge, the first major "vertical lift" bridge in the eastern US, has been a sturdy and dramatic landmark, spanning the Piscataqua River and connecting the historic coastal towns of Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Kittery, Maine.



Memorial Bridge

At its 1923 dedication as the official state memorial to World War I servicemen, the bridge had the longest lift span in the country (297 feet), making it the prototype for later metal truss bridges. Unlike a drawbridge, which swings open and upward like a gate, a vertical-lift bridge hoists a single section straight up, allowing boats to pass underneath. For generations, the bridge has carried automobiles along coastal Route 1, and its wood-floored walkways still provide the only pedestrian and cycling link between two communities steeped in history.

With its dramatic 200-foot twin towers, Memorial Bridge is one of three highway bridges spanning the Piscataqua River between New Hampshire and Maine. The bridge plays a critical role in the local economy linking historic downtown Portsmouth and the recently revitalized Kittery Foreside neighborhood.

Our nation's historic bridges are being destroyed at the alarming rate of one every two or three days. Lack of maintenance and a knee-jerk preference for replacement often counters the directive of Congress that historic bridges be preserved whenever possible. Bridges that cross state lines are especially vulnerable.

In 2007, the states of Maine and New Hampshire agreed that Memorial Bridge should be fully rehabilitated. When estimates came back \$15 million over budget, the two states disagreed on how to pay for proposed repairs and are now studying their options, including destruction and replacement of Memorial Bridge, a solution that could be far more costly.

## Mount Taylor/Grants, New Mexico

Located in the southwestern corner of New Mexico's San Mateo Mountains, midway between Albuquerque and Gallup, Mount Taylor, with an elevation of nearly 12,000 feet, is a startlingly beautiful, sacred place. Visible from up to 100 miles away, the mountain has been a pilgrimage site for as many as 30 Native American tribes, with special significance for the Acoma people. Centuries before the mountain was named for President Zachary Taylor, it was known to the Acoma as Kaweshtima, or "place of snow." Mount Taylor is rooted in Acoma's history and traditions and is closely aligned with the tribe's cultural identity.

Mount Taylor is approximately 50 miles from Acoma Sky City, a 367-foot tall mesa that has been the home of the Acoma people for nearly 1,000 years, and is today a National Trust Historic Site. The



Mount Taylor, New Mexico

mountain sits atop one of the richest known reserves of uranium ore in the country: the Grants Uranium Belt. This reserve has already spawned two uranium-mining booms in the area, one in the 1950s and another in the 1970s. Current high demand for the ore has resulted in a renewed interest in mining the uranium deposits beneath Mount Taylor on federal, state and private lands, as well as on other public and private lands in the area. The New Mexico Mining and Minerals Division continues to receive proposals for exploration, mining and milling operations for Mount Taylor.

Much of the area is governed by the 1872 Mining Law, which permits mining regardless of its impact on cultural or natural resources, meaning that the U.S. Forest Service and other federal land management agencies lack the authority to deny mining applications, even if the application would adversely affect those resources. In addition to threats posed to the mountain itself, uranium mining may contaminate or impair Acoma's primary water source, the Rio San Jose. The Acoma people view the Rio San Jose as both the key to their physical survival and the cultural lifeblood of their community.

In October 2009 a coalition of mining companies, landowners, the Cebolleta Land Grant and the New Mexico State Land Office filed lawsuits in New Mexico state court challenging the decision to list the Mount Taylor Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) in the State Register of Cultural Properties. The National Trust and Pueblo of Acoma filed a motion to intervene in this lawsuit in support of the

TCP designation, and are currently waiting for the court to schedule a hearing on their motion.

## 2010

### America's State Parks and State-Owned Historic Sites

America's state parks and state-owned historic sites are threatened – perhaps more than at any other time in recent history – with deep funding cuts and uncertain futures.

In response to record-breaking deficits, state governments are cutting funding for state-owned and – managed parks and historic sites from coast to coast. State park systems welcome an estimated 725 million visits every year and include places of national signifi-



Montana de Oro State Park, California

cance – from Native American historic sites to Revolutionary War forts to Civil War battlefields to country estates. This year nearly 30 states have experienced cuts to parks' and sites' budgets, and a recent survey estimates as many as 400 state parks could close. While providing some short-term budget relief, this approach will actually cost states far more in the long term. Before they can re-open, state-owned and – managed resources will require massive investments to undo the damage suffered from abandonment, neglect, and deferred maintenance.

John Boyd Thacher State Park, New York





While all 50 states are at risk, at least 26 states across the country are facing major budget cuts for state-owned and – managed parks and historic sites.

### **Prime Examples**

**Arizona:** \$19 million in revenue from the operation of state parks and lottery proceeds was cut in half, and thirteen of the state's 31 parks were forced to close. Ironically, a recent study shows how Arizona state parks – when open – attract 2.3 million visitors annually, generating \$266 million of direct and indirect economic impact.

**California:** Twice in the last two years, budget challenges have put the state's 278 parks at risk, prompting their placement on the 2008 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places. Chronic underfunding has already impacted 150 parks with reduced services and part-time closures. In a politically-charged climate, a ballot measure slated for November will determine if voters approve a long-term, stable funding solution.

**Missouri:** Over 120 state park jobs were eliminated due to the downturn in the economy, making a bad situation even worse. With an existing backlog of deferred maintenance totalling more than \$200 million, the state park system's 1,845 structures – 700 of which are historic – are put at even greater risk.

**New Jersey:** State parks and state-owned historic sites have been on life support for years. Now Governor Christie is slashing the budget of the state agency responsible for parks and historic sites, reducing its funding from \$11.6 million to \$3.4 million. Christie's stark budget also eliminates all funding for the Battleship New Jersey, the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton, Morven Museum in Princeton, and the Save Ellis Island organization.

**New York:** Governor Paterson announced the closure of 41 state parks and 14 historic sites, including landmarks like the farm and gravesite of abolitionist John Brown in North Elba and the beautiful Georgian-era Philipse Manor Hall in Yonkers – a vibrant center of local community gatherings and activities.

**Pennsylvania:** A drastic 37% budget cut forced the closure of Old Economy Village – an exceptionally well-preserved religious colony constructed between 1824 and 1830 and the Commonwealth's first historic site – along with 11 other sites that will close to the public. With Pennsylvania's next budget projected to be even more severe, the future of Pennsylvania's historic resources is in jeopardy.

### **Hinchliffe Stadium in Paterson, New Jersey**

On a bluff above the Great Falls National Historical Park in Paterson, N.J., Hinchliffe Stadium, one of only three remaining Negro League stadiums in the country, stands vacant and dilapidated. Designed by the architectural firm Fanning & Shaw and built with public funds at the start of the Great Depression, the 10,000-seat,



Hinchliffe Stadium

poured-concrete Art Deco stadium was once the pride of Paterson. Starting in 1933, the New York Black Yankees played home games here for more than a decade, losing the Colored Championship of the Nation to the Philadelphia Stars that same year. Some of the Negro League's brightest stars, including the legendary Hall of Famer Larry Doby, who tried out for the Newark Eagles at Hinchliffe and became the first African American to sign with the American League, played on Hinchliffe's hallowed field.

A beloved community landmark, Hinchliffe also played host to automobile and motorcycle racing, pro football games, and high caliber amateur boxing attended by celebrities from Babe Ruth to Joe Louis and Lou Costello. Currently owned by the Paterson Public Schools, Hinchliffe has been closed since 1997 and is dangerously deteriorated.

For the last 17 years, the stadium has been assaulted by the elements. Trees and weeds are destroying its seating, and because the structure is not adequately secured, there are many points of illegal entry. The stadium is gradually deteriorating into a haven for gang members and drug users. In the past four years, arsonists have attacked Hinchliffe and surrounding areas more than 30 times.

### **Pågat / Yigo, Guam**

The island of Guam, the westernmost United States territory in the Pacific, is home to the Chamorro people who maintain a thriving

Pågat, Guam



culture dating back thousands of years. A Spanish colony from 1668 until its surrender to the U.S. in 1898, Guam and the neighboring Northern Mariana Islands retain a unique concentration of resources that are central to the cultural identity of the Chamorro.

Dating to 700 A. D., Pāgat, one of Guam's most treasured cultural sites, contains remains of prehistoric structural stone foundations, known as lattes, freshwater caves, medicinal plants, as well as stone mortars, pottery and tools of the Chamorro people. One of the island's last remaining and best preserved Chamorro settlements, Pāgat is revered by native people who continue to perform thousand year-old traditional cultural practices at the site, and serves as a popular destination for hikers, tourists, and students who are drawn to the area's serpentine beachfront forest and sparkling underwater caves.

The United States military plans to undertake a massive buildup on Guam that is estimated to cause a 45% population increase on the island over the next five years. In addition to concerns about Guam's already overtaxed infrastructure and fragile natural environment, many islanders are worried about the potentially devastating impact on the island's cultural resources. Current plans call for the construction of five Marine Corps firing ranges within several hundred feet of Pāgat.

Department of Defense plans for a firing range on a bluff directly above the site would bring military exercises, live ammunition and security fencing to Pāgat. As a result, access to this cherished place will be significantly curtailed, treasured artifacts will be threatened and thousands of years of Chamorro history will be placed at risk. The U.S. military already occupies and restricts access to numerous places of cultural importance to the Chamorro people on Guam.

In addition to the firing ranges, the proposed military buildup includes construction of new infrastructure for nearly 9,000 marines and their dependants as well as a deep-draft wharf that would destroy a 71-acre coral reef. The Department of the Navy has prepared a draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that assesses the impacts to the island, but does not analyze a single realistic alternative to the range location that threatens Pāgat.

In November 2010 the National Trust, joined by the Guam Preservation Trust and We Are Guåhan, filed a legal action against the U.S. Department of Defense challenging its plans to construct a complex of five firing ranges in Guam that are immediately adjacent to and directed toward an ancient settlement, Pāgat Village.

### Threefoot Building in Meridian, Mississippi

In 1930, the citizens of Meridian, Mississippi, had never seen anything like the newly dedicated Threefoot Building, a shiny, 16-story Art Deco skyscraper that was the tallest building in the state. Named for its owners, a successful German-American family in Meridian, the building was admired for its decorative polychrome terra cotta and granite exterior and lavish interior details, including marble flooring and wainscoting, cast-plaster walls and ceilings, and etched bronze elevator doors. Although the Threefoot family lost their prized property in the Depression, the building was a mainstay of downtown Meridian for decades until it closed in 2000 because of deterioration and extensive upper-floor vacancies. Hopes were buoyed when the building's owner, the City of Meridian, began negotiations with a developer who planned to renovate the building and turn it into a hotel, but the City later abandoned that plan.



Threefoot Building in Meridian, Mississippi (old postcard)

Threefoot Building, detail of the façade





In the last several years, the building has experienced significant deterioration. Terra-cotta tiles are falling off the facade, water is infiltrating in several locations and windows are in poor shape. Without immediate action, portions of the masonry are at risk of falling into pedestrian and vehicular traffic. Even though a developer expressed interest in the building, the City of Meridian was unable to provide funds for gap financing or other incentives – and

now locals fear that the City Council will attempt to remove the building from the Mississippi Landmark List in order to pave the way for its demolition.

Reports and photos provided by the National Trust  
for Historic Preservation