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KNOX HERITAGE ANNOUNCES
2016 “FRAGILE 15” LIST OF ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

Knox Heritage announced its 2016 list of the most endangered historic buildings and places in Knoxville and Knox County on May 16, 2016. The announcement took place at Oakwood Senior Living, 232 E. Churchwell Avenue

Every May during National Preservation Month, Knox Heritage releases its list of the most endangered historic buildings and places in Knox County to inform the public and local leaders about the plight of significant historic resources. Often, the endangered buildings and places are representative of issues that endanger other centerpieces of our heritage across the community.

The historic places included on the list are selected by the Knox Heritage Board of Directors from nominations received from members of Knox Heritage and the general public. The list provides a work plan for the organization over the next 12 months. Preservation strategies are developed for each site on the list and can include working with current property owners, government officials, citizens and/or potential new owners to preserve these important parts of Knox County’s heritage. Knox Heritage is committed to acting as an advocate for the endangered properties we identify each year. We invite the community to join us in our efforts to save our endangered heritage through advocacy and action. To volunteer, please contact Knox Heritage at 523-8008 or info@knoxheritage.org.
2016 Fragile Fifteen

1. **Knoxville College Historic District** – 901 Knoxville College Drive
   
   Representative Properties:
   a. McKee Hall
   b. Wallace Hall
   c. Elnathan Hall
   d. McMillan Chapel
   e. Giffen Memorial Gymnasium
   f. President’s House

2. **The Cal Johnson Building** – 301 State Street

3. **The Sterchi Mansion/Stratford** – 809 Dry Gap Pike

4. **Fort Sanders House & Grocery** – 307 18th Street, 1802, 1804, & 1810 Highland Ave

5. **The Paul Howard House** – 2921 N. Broadway

6. **The Joseph Knaffl House** – 3738 Speedway Circle

7. **Greyhound Bus Station** – 100 E. Magnolia Avenue

8. **Estabrook Hall – University of Tennessee** – 1012 Estabrook Road

9. **Sanitary Laundry** – 625 N. Broadway

10. **Burlington Commercial District**

11. **Rule High School** – 1901 Vermont Avenue

12. **Pryor Brown Garage** – 314 & 322 W. Church Avenue

13. **French Board River Corridor**

14. **The Eugenia Williams House** – 4848 Lyons View Pike

15. **South High School** – 801 Tipton Avenue.
Knoxville College was founded in 1875 as part of the missionary effort of the United Presbyterian Church of North America to promote religious, moral and educational leadership among freed men and woman. The National Register District is composed of ten buildings, eight of which contribute to the district. Knoxville College has significantly contributed to the educational and spiritual welfare of the African American population in Tennessee since 1875. The campus was the first African American college in East Tennessee and hosted prominent figures such as Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois and Martin Luther King, Jr. The buildings at Knoxville College are a tribute to the creativity and resourcefulness of the student body. While pursuing their education, students assisted in the design and construction of these historic buildings using bricks they manufactured at the campus. This spirit of involvement continues today, even as the college struggles to continue its mission. The historic buildings, with their fine craftsmanship and sold design, are deserving of support from the entire community and their preservation is a critical part of the rebirth of the college.

Representative Properties:

a. McKee Hall

McKee Hall is the oldest building on campus, originally built in 1876, largely rebuilt in 1895, following a fire. The building is named for the Reverend O.S. McKee, who had established the first school for African-American children in Nashville in 1862. This building currently houses administration offices and is suffering from major structural, water and fire damage.

b. Wallace Hall

Wallace Hall was built in 1890 as an orphanage. This building is named for Eliza B. Wallace, the school’s principal of female students from 1877-1897.

c. Elnathan Hall

Elnathan Hall was built in 1898 following the destruction by fire of the original Elnathan Hall, and altered in 1905 and 1971. The building has served variously as a women’s dorm, administration building, and classroom building.

d. McMillan Chapel

McMillian Chapel, built in 1913, was designed by Knoxville College alumnus, William Thomas Jones. Along with church services, the chapel served as the campus’s primary performance venue. Notable guests who have delivered speeches at the chapel include George Washington Carver, Countee Cullen, W.E.B. Du Bois, Jesse Owens, William H. Hastie and Jackie Robinson.

e. Giffen Memorial Gymnasium
Giffen Gym was built in 1929.

f. President’s House

The president’s house was built in the late 1880s. The house originally had wood siding, but brick siding was added in 1905.

The situation at Knoxville College continues to dramatically deteriorate with several building either condemned or suffering from a lack of maintenance. Recent arson fires on campus have heightened the critical need for immediate intervention. The school is mired in debt and the very survival of the historic campus is in doubt. Last year the school created a redevelopment committee to examine possible strategies to save the historic core of the campus. However, this gargantuan task will require assistance from the City of Knoxville and other organizations in order to secure the campus in the short term and develop a financially feasible strategy to save the historic buildings that are now deteriorating at a rapid pace. Knox Heritage and its members are committed to assisting the college in its efforts to preserve its architectural heritage.

2. The Cal Johnson Building – 301 State Street

The Cal Johnson building was constructed in 1898 in the Vernacular Commercial style and originally housed a clothing factory. It was constructed by Knoxville's first African American philanthropist and is a rare example of a large commercial structure built by a former slave. Cal Johnson also served as a city alderman during his extensive career, which included the operation of several area saloons and one of Knoxville’s most popular and durable horse racing tracks.

The building is threatened by long term, ongoing deterioration and a lack of maintenance. Knox Heritage seeks to work with the property owner to make the necessary repairs and capitalize on the current level of downtown redevelopment in order to spur the reuse of this important structure before it is too late. Mayor Madeline Rogero recently submitted an application for historic overlay (H1) zoning to protect the building from demolition. Knox Heritage supports this application and encourages the Knoxville City Council to vote in favor of protecting this one-of-a-kind piece of Knoxville’s history.

3. The Sterchi Mansion/Stratford – 809 Dry Gap Pike

Stratford was built for Knoxville businessman and community leader James G. Sterchi. The Classical Revival house was designed by local architect Richard F. Graf and was constructed in 1910. Sterchi is best known as the cofounder of the furniture wholesaler, Sterchi Brothers Furniture Company. At its height, Sterchi Brothers was the world’s largest furniture store chain with 65 stores across the southeastern United States. In 1946, the company became the first Knoxville-based firm to be listed on the New York Stock Exchange.

Sterchi played a surprising role in the promotion of early popular music. As one of the South's major suppliers of phonographs, Sterchi was interested in expanding the supply of recorded music on 78. Beginning around 1924, he sponsored some of the earliest known country-music recordings. He was a major sponsor of the Brunswick-Vocalion recordings at the St. James Hotel in 1929-30, recently celebrated with the release of a high-quality box set “The Knoxville
Sessions.” That international project by Bear Family Records of Germany actually includes a
verbal statement recorded by Sterchi in 1929, outlining the success of his furniture company. The accompanying book, written by early music scholars Ted Olson and Tony Russell, describes Sterchi and the house known as the Stratford, which shared its name with a hotel Sterchi owned on Wall Avenue near Market Square.

The land where Stratford sits today was originally part of a 371-acre farm Sterchi’s grandfather purchased and farmed starting in 1848. In 1900, Sterchi purchased the family farm and other adjoining farms until he had amassed an estate of 1,400 acres. In 1910, he built Stratford, the home he and his wife used until his death in December 1932. Following his death, his widow continued to live in the house until her death in 1973.

The stately mansion is a community landmark and many have been dismayed to see it empty and deteriorating. A lengthy foreclosure battle between the current owners and their mortgage holder has left the property in limbo and its future uncertain. It is currently listed for sale and its fate apparently rests in the hands of new owners. Knox Heritage will assist in marketing the property to new owners dedicated to its preservation.

4. **Fort Sanders House & Grocery** – 307 18th Street, 1802, 1804, & 1810 Highland Ave

These historic structures on the southwest corner of the 1800 block of Highland Avenue comprise one of the few remaining dividing lines between the residential and medical uses in the Historic Fort Sanders Neighborhood. They all were purchased by Covenant Health in February of 2008. Though the houses have been protected by Neighborhood Conservation (NC-1) Zoning for more than 15 years, they are currently boarded up and deteriorating, thus the future of the historic structures is still uncertain.

307 18th Street – This Commercial Vernacular style building was constructed circa 1923 as the W.T. Roberts Grocery Store, but for many years has been known as the 18th Street IGA. Roberts owned and operated the store from 1923 until 1950, and afterwards it was owned by Fred McMahan, who lived on the second floor of the building. It was a viable and familiar market until the recent era of the hospital’s ownership.

1802 Highland Avenue – This Victorian style house was built circa 1891 for Ranson D. Whittle (1852-1932) who owned and founded the Whittle Truck and Bag Company; the Whittle Springs neighborhood is named for his family. From 1914 until 1950 William T. Roberts, owner of the 18th Street IGA around the corner lived in the house.

1804 Highland Avenue – This Victorian Cottage was built circa 1898 and the first owner was Methodist Reverend Isaac Van Dewater.

1810 Highland Avenue – This Victorian style home was built circa 1895 for Dr. Henry Patton Coile, a prominent surgeon and physician, who lived there from 1895 until 1900. His son Samuel A. Coile, the first pastor at Fort Sanders Presbyterian Church, became the owner of the family home, and left it to become president of Tusculum College in Greeneville. Later, it was the home of Jeremiah Work, dean of Knoxville College and a Presbyterian scholar and author.

Covenant Health has stated its intention to demolish all of the structures in order to “clear the corner” - even though no plans for new construction have been announced. The properties were included in a Neighborhood Conservation (NC1) District as part of the Fort Sanders Forum Plan
adopted by City Council and MPC 16 years ago and that is still the official adopted plan for the Fort Sanders Neighborhood. This plan was the result of 18 months of meetings and negotiations that included all neighborhood stakeholders, including Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center. Knox Heritage calls upon Covenant Health to abide by the commitments it made and work with residents and Knox Heritage to restore these important properties so they can continue to be assets to the community and a transition between the institutional and residential uses in the neighborhood.

5. **The Paul Howard House – 2921 N. Broadway**

This elegant 1910 Craftsman style house was considered a model when it was designed in 1910 by local architect Charles Hayes. Built in an era when many prominent Knoxvilleians lived on Broadway, it has been home to two City Councilmen, a Knox County Trustee, and a Knoxville City Manager – that last post was held by Charlton Karns, a powerful figure in 1920s and ‘30s Knoxville. During the era when Broadway was becoming known as part of the national Dixie Highway, the house served for several years as the Minton Tourist Home. For more than 60 years, it has been owned by the Howards, a prosperous plumbing-supplies family.

The home is a North Knoxville icon and is one of the finest examples of Craftsman style architecture still standing in Knox County. It has a rich history and has received Knox Heritage awards on two occasions for the quality maintenance and care by its previous owners, Mr. and Mrs. Paul E. Howard. This historic North Knoxville icon is now a part of Mr. Howard’s estate, which requires the residence be sold.

This stretch of Broadway in Historic North Knoxville is already cluttered with development that detracts from the historic neighborhoods in the area and the loss of this beloved historic property will be detrimental to efforts to improve the area and surrounding residential property values.

The home was recently saved from destruction that would have made way a big-box retail store, but its fate is still in limbo. Mr. Howard’s heirs have listed the property for sale, but there are no protections in place to save it from being demolished by a new owner. Historic Overlay (H1) zoning would prevent its demolition and that tool has been used to save South High School and Kern’s Bakery with widespread public support. Knox Heritage is working to identify a new owner committed to preserving this beloved part of North Knoxville’s history and future.

6. **The Joseph Knaffl House – 3738 Speedway Circle**

This Victorian was built on Gay Street circa 1880 and was home to art and portrait photographer Joseph Knaffl. He is best known for his 1899 portrait, "Knaffl Madonna," which has been reprinted thousands of times, and is still used for Hallmark Christmas cards. The Knaffl family lived in the house for more than half a century. The house was originally located at 918 Gay Street until the construction of the Andrew Johnson Hotel in 1926. The Knaffl family moved to a new house and one would assume the house was torn down. However, in 1927, James Stephens, a local steel contractor, moved the house three miles east of downtown to Speedway Circle, the former Cal Johnson racetrack turned residential subdivision. The Stephens’ family
lived in the house until the mid-1950s. The Victorian house still retains its original marble façade and its original street number “918” over the front door.

The artist’s home has witnessed incredible changes over more than 130 years and it has escaped destruction once already, but it has never been more imperiled that is now. A foreclosure in 2012 left the house in the hands of LPP Mortgage and it was sold to new owners in 2013. The owners reside in Greeneville and have stripped all of the original woodwork from the interior of the house while allowing it to deteriorate to the point that it has been condemned by the City of Knoxville. The owners have stated their intention to dismantle and demolish the house. Knox Heritage requests that the city move forward with a finding of demolition by neglect and acquire the house for resale through its Homemaker’s Program. This will enable a new owner to retain and restore this important former residence of one of Knoxville’s most well-known artists.

7. Greyhound Bus Station – 100 E. Magnolia Avenue

The Greyhound Bus Station was built in 1960 and designed by Louisville, KY architect W.A. Arrasmith. Arrasmith is best known for designing over 50 Greyhound bus terminals all across the United States. The station was to be “of the most modern type” and featured air-conditioning, a cafeteria, a barber shop and a beauty shop. The exterior featured extensive blue window walls in bold aluminum framing, red brick walls and extensive interior tiling. The building reflects the modern style that evolved during the 1950s and 1960s.

In February, Greyhound Lines announced they are considering relocating their bus terminal to a new location. That move would make the building available for redevelopment in a blossoming area just north and east of the downtown core. The building is showing its age, but that could be an asset for a new owner. This type of mid-century architecture lends itself to new uses and its former use does not dictate its future. As with The Grey, a new restaurant in Savannah housed in a former Greyhound bus station, Knoxville’s bus station could be reborn to serve the growing residential population in the area and capitalize on the renaissance taking place in downtown and its adjacent neighborhoods.

8. Estabrook Hall – University of Tennessee – 1012 Estabrook Road

Estabrook Hall was built in 1898 and named for Mr. Joseph Estabrook, the fifth president of University of Tennessee from 1834 until 1850. Estabrook led the movement to change the name of the school from East Tennessee College to East Tennessee University in 1840. The building has a strong association with the Engineering program at the school, housing classrooms, offices, and an engineering experiment station in 1921. During the 1930’s, TVA associate and nationally recognized chemical engineer Harry Curtis kept an office here. Estabrook Hall is also the birthplace of the UT School of Architecture, having been the main home for the program before the Art & Architecture building was constructed in 1982. Buckminster Fuller, the renowned 20th century inventor and visionary, was a guest at Estabrook when he was invited to speak to students and faculty members.

Estabrook Hall was used by Summer School of the South from 1902 until its closing in 1918. It and South College are the only UT buildings left from the Summer School, which had a national impact. Starting in 1902, Summer School of the South was a major instrument of regional
educational improvements that over the years instructed over 32,000 teachers in the art of education.

In 1906, an addition was added to the building, and this marks the first university facility to have state appropriated funds obtained for its construction.

University representatives have expressed a willingness to preserve Estabrook if building code and security issues can be addressed in a cost effective manner. Knox Heritage stands ready to assist in this process and connect UT with experts in the reuse of historic academic buildings in order to determine a strategy for incorporating the historic structures into the University’s future.

9. **Sanitary Laundry** – 625 N. Broadway

The Sanitary Laundry & Dry Cleaning Building was built in 1925. V.L. Nicholson served as engineer and building contractor, using mill work furnished by Knoxville Lumber & Manufacturing Company.

Located in the area now known as Downtown North, this neighborhood was still the northern part of an uninterrupted downtown business district when this brick building was built, and several streetcars per hour squealed past the building on their way toward Fountain City. Nearby Emory Place, named for a beloved minister who was a victim of the 1904 New Market Train Wreck, was Knoxville’s first urban public park.

The building has been allowed to deteriorate to a point that it is endangering surrounding structures and detracting from the revitalization efforts underway in Downtown North, which has been designed as a redevelopment area by the City of Knoxville. The City acquired the property and issued a Request for Proposals for its redevelopment. The one proposal submitted was rejected. Knox Heritage encourages the City to reissue the RFP as soon as possible and stands ready to assist a new owner with efforts to transform this important building into a hub of activity in this quickly revitalizing area of town.

10. **Burlington Commercial District**

This early 20th-century “downtown” has deteriorated a great deal in recent decades, both in terms of businesses and buildings, but it still has an appealing, homey, walkable feeling. Originally located at the end of Knoxville’s first streetcar line, it was a place where people stepped off the trolley to go to Chilhowee Park and also to Cal Johnson’s Racetrack, whose oval outline is still evident in nearby Speedway Circle.

The area is ripe for development that will restore its historic buildings while providing needed retail and restaurant options for the surrounding neighborhood. Knox Heritage recently received a grant from the City’s Historic Preservation Fund to complete a National Register District nomination for the area. This will make the buildings eligible for preservation tax credits and other incentives for redevelopment. We forward to working with the City of Knoxville, property owners and the community to encourage investment in the heart of the Burlington neighborhood.
11. **Rule High School** – 1901 Vermont Avenue

Rule High School was named after Captain William Rule, a former Union Army Captain who went on to become the mayor of Knoxville, as well as publisher and editor of the *Knoxville Journal* from 1885 until his death in 1928. Rule High School was built in 1926-1927 and opened in the fall of 1927. Its hilltop location still offers stunning views of downtown Knoxville and the mountains. The school closed in 1991 and is currently owned by the Knox County School Board. The school continues to languish in a deteriorated state and the resources for its preservation are lacking.

In the summer of 2015, the school system began looking for a new home as part of a budget compromise with Knox County. Knox County officials are looking to potentially sell the Andrew Johnson Building downtown, where the school system’s headquarters are currently housed. The district has been at that location since 1991. In July 2015, the school system requested letters of interest to gauge possible locations for its administrative and operations offices. The system received five responses, including one from Dominion Development, which wanted to acquire Rule and rehab it for the school system's needs.

In 2013, the East Tennessee Community Design Center was asked by the school board to identify the building's best uses and most economically viable purposes. The group found while the school is "detrimental to the well-being of the surrounding community," the school board should work with city and county officials to revitalize it. The district surplused the school's stadium, but still owns the rest of the property.

Knox Heritage encourages the Knox County School Board to continue its efforts to identify a new owner who will make the necessary investment to restore the property for a new use. Or, if one cannot be identified, seriously consider the campus as a new headquarters for the Knox County School administration. In the interim, the School Board and Knox County should secure the property and identify ways to stop further deterioration that is increasing the cost of redevelopment every day.

12. **Pryor Brown Garage** - 314 & 322 W. Church Avenue

A model mixed-used parking garage with several retail spaces along both Market Street and Church Avenue, Pryor Brown Garage was built in two stages, the first in 1925 and the second in 1929. Its builder was Pryor Brown, a Knoxville businessman who was born ca. 1849 on Brown Mountain in South Knox County. After the Civil War, Brown moved to Knoxville and found work in local livery stables. By the 1890s, he was running his own stable on this site along Church Avenue. After a fire in 1916, Brown rebuilt his stable with concrete floors capable of accommodating cars, and ran the Pryor Brown Transfer Company. Following the popularity of the automobile, in 1925 Brown built the first section of the garage along Market Street and in 1929 expanded the garage, covering the area of his old livery stable. The parking garage, which has operated for more than 80 years on the site of what had been livery stable and served a comparable purpose in a previous century, makes for a remarkable story of continuity on one site.

Pryor Brown Garage was known for many years as “The House of Brown” and is thought to be the first ramp-style parking garage in Knoxville. It is also one of the oldest parking garages still standing and in use in the United States.
Knox Heritage is working with the owners to consider other options that will save the building while benefitting them and downtown as a whole. We encourage the City of Knoxville and Knox County to support any proposal that insures the re-use and preservation of this unique historic structure.

13. **French Broad River Corridor**

The French Broad River was a significant settlement area for prehistoric peoples, and was one of the earliest settlement paths in Knox County after European-related settlement began. By the mid-1780s, early homes and industries were located on both sides of the river. The French Broad was the highway for commerce and social interaction, with ferry landings on both of its banks. Francis Alexander Ramsey settled in this corridor and the stone Ramsey House still stands today. There is evidence to suggest that James White built his first house in the area. In *The Annals of Tennessee* by Dr. J.G.M. Ramsey, the French Broad Corridor is described as the home of Alexander Campbell; the large Georgian style house he built still stands. On both sides of the French Broad are some of the most intact architectural examples of early Knox County including a mill, churches, homes built using the technique of noggin construction, a cantilevered barn, log homes, and early cemeteries and ferry landings.

The French Broad River corridor, because of its relative isolation and lack of urban infrastructure, has retained its historic places, scenery, breathtaking views and vistas and its glimpses of Knox County history during the 18th and early 19th centuries and for centuries before. Some of its buildings are well-maintained, and still utilized by descendants of the families prominent in the 18th and 19th centuries. Others are vacant or deteriorating; if they are lost, a large portion of this portrait of early Knox County will also be lost.

The East County Sector Plan approved by Knox County Commission calls for protection of the river corridor’s historic resources through historic overlay zoning and a small area plan. Knox Heritage encourages the Knox County Commission and County Mayor to fully fund this work of the Metropolitan Planning Commission and to make it a priority to implement these important plans in order to protect this endangered treasure in east Knox County from being destroyed by nearby development.

14. **The Eugenia Williams House** – 4848 Lyons View Pike

Eugenia Williams was born to Dr. David H. Williams and Ella Cornick Williams in January 1900. Dr. Williams was a prominent physician and one of the original financial backers who introduced Coca-Cola to East Tennessee. In 1940, Eugenia commissioned her childhood friend, John Fanz Staub, to design her new residence. Staub, a native Knoxvillian from one of the city’s prominent families, is best known for designing homes for many of the wealthiest and most influential Texans, with a little over half of his design work located in Houston. He was also the architect for the well-loved Hopecote on the UT-Knoxville campus. Miss. Williams’ Regency-style home sits on 24 acres bordering the Tennessee River and Lyons View Pike and features a three-car garage, with automatic garage-door openers which were a novelty in 1940. In 1998, the house was willed to the University of Tennessee as a memorial to Eugenia’s father. For many
years after her death, Miss. Williams’ house was plagued by vandals and a lack of basic maintenance, but its character-defining details remain and the house is still structurally solid.

In December 2014, the University of Tennessee issued a request for proposals seeking a long-term lease agreement for the property, but the open period for proposals ended in April 2015 with no ideas. In September 2015, the University of Tennessee generously opened the property and allowed over 550 Knox Heritage members to tour the house. Knox Heritage stands ready to assist the University in seeking a long-term lease for the house.

15. **South High School** – 953 E. Moody Avenue

South High was designed by noted local architect Charles Barber and was built in 1935-1936 as South Knoxville Junior High School. The school opened in 1937. Barber was the primary architect of 14 schools in Knoxville and Knox County prior to 1940. South High served as a junior high school and high school until the last graduating class in 1976. The building sustained serious roof damage over the next three decades and the water infiltration harmed the structural integrity of parts of the building. Preservationist and residents of South Knoxville began their efforts to save historic South High in 2002. In 2004, the Knox County School Board surpluses the building to Knox County so it could be redeveloped as a community asset. County Commission voted to auction the building to the highest bidder in 2008. The high bidder at the June 2008 auction was Bahman Kasraei. Mr. Kasraei expressed his intent to preserve the building, but construction was delayed. A portion of the building’s roof was replaced, but the rear of portion of the building stood open to vandals until the City of Knoxville secured the property in the spring of 2015 through its Demolition by Neglect powers.

The City of Knoxville purchased the building in April 2015 and plans to issue a request for proposals for its redevelopment in June 2016. Knox Heritage is committed to working with the City, residents and a new owner to restore the building to its role as an asset to the surrounding neighborhood.

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