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2018 Fragile & Fading List Announced on May 15

May 15, 2018

Knox Heritage announced its 2018 Fragile & Fading list of “places in peril” during the Power of Preservation Luncheon held on March 15 at The Press Room. The list features important endangered historic buildings and places in Knoxville and Knox County. The Fragile & Fading list has evolved from the Fragile 15 lists of years past in order to focus on the most significant properties without limitation to a specific number in any given year. This will also help strengthen advocacy efforts for these places. The list may be amended during the year if another significant property is identified or saved.

Every May during National Preservation Month, Knox Heritage releases this list to inform community leaders and the public about the issues facing these significant historic places. A plan for their preservation can conserve resources, keep beautiful architecture, sustain the local economy, create jobs, grow heritage tourism, and connect us to our shared history.

Knox Heritage stands ready to work with property owners, developers, government officials, and citizens to preserve these important contributors to Knoxville and Knox County’s historic landscape. The Knox Heritage mission is to preserve, restore, and transform our historic places. The organization is committed to serving as an advocate for places in peril and invite the community to join us in our efforts.

The 2018 Fragile & Fading

(listed in alphabetical order)

Fort Sanders Historic District

Fort Sanders is named for a Civil War-era Union bastion that once stood near the center of the neighborhood and was the site of a key engagement in 1863. During the 1880s, several of Knoxville’s wealthiest residents built notable houses in the area alongside more modest dwellings for plant managers and workers employed in factories along Second Creek. Fort Sander’s residents included some of Knoxville’s leading industrialists and politicians, as well as professors from the University of Tennessee and the author James Agee. Today, the neighborhood still contains a notable number of its original Victorian-era houses and other buildings which were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 as the Fort Sanders Historic District.
Fort Sanders suffers from popularity. Its close proximity to downtown Knoxville and The University of Tennessee makes it an ideal location for dense housing developments which are not part of the traditional streetscape. Many homes have been destroyed over the years either for new development or from neglect. The historic neighborhood is bounded to the west by the thriving Covenant Fort Sanders Regional Medical Center campus and to the south by a dramatically changing Cumberland Avenue corridor. Increasingly dense development, neglected maintenance and teardowns are destroying the character of this charming neighborhood.

Knox Heritage encourages community support for the Historic Fort Sanders Neighborhood Association along with good planning and productive dialogue between the Association, the City of Knoxville, the medical center, major property owners, the university and other relevant parties on strategies that will result in more sensitive development, a well-defined growth plan for the medical campus, improved infill standards, and policies that encourage owner-occupied housing to restore balance to the once predominantly single-family residential nature of the neighborhood.

**Knoxville College – 901 Knoxville College Drive**

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 eight contributing buildings. 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. While pursuing their education, students assisted in the design and construction of these historic buildings and used bricks made on campus. The historic buildings, with their fine craftsmanship and solid design, deserve to be restored and used again.

Currently all campus building are condemned and suffering from a severe lack of maintenance. Arson fires and the fact that it is now completely vacant have heightened the critical need for immediate intervention. The school is faced with a large debt, is not currently offering classes and there is no known preservation strategy in place.

Recently the City of Knoxville announced an agreement with the college which would locate a new safety building on a portion of the campus that is not part of the National Register district. There is also an offer in place to assist with debt restructuring. Knox Heritage encourages more partnerships to save this significant site and is willing to assist the Knoxville College Board of Trustees with developing a viable plan for saving and utilizing the historic core of this campus.

**Park City Historic District**

The Park City Historic District, most commonly known as Parkridge, is located east of downtown Knoxville off Magnolia Avenue. The area was once part of a vast farm owned by Moses White, the son of Knoxville founder James White. Originally developed as a streetcar suburb for Knoxville's professional class in the 1890s, the neighborhood provided housing for many workers at the nearby Standard Knitting Mill. In 1990, over 600 houses were listed on the National Register of Historic Places as the Park City Historic District. The neighborhood contains one of the largest concentrations of houses designed by George Franklin Barber (1854–1915), a mail-order architect known nationwide for his ornate Victorian house plans. Diverse architecture, walkable streets and its notable history make this district an important part of the city’s development story.

While there is a trend of housing renovation taking place, too often these renovations are not sensitive to the historic character of the structures. In addition to inappropriate alterations, there are many neglected properties and occasional teardowns, particularly of ancillary structures that were once used for housing and contribute to the National Register district.

Knox Heritage would like to see all renovations within the National Register district adhere to the Secretary of Interiors Standards. New infill should be sensitive to the historic character of the neighborhood. The organization seeks to work with homeowners, neighborhood groups and others on good design practices.
Rule High School – 1901 Vermont Avenue

Rule High School was built in 1926-1927 and opened in the fall of 1927. The 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. The school closed in 1991. Its hilltop location still offers stunning views of downtown Knoxville and the mountains.

The school languishes in a deteriorated state and the resources for its preservation are lacking. In 2016, the building was transferred to Knox County as surplus property from Knox County Schools. Knox County has since been marketing it for potential redevelopment. The most recent request for development proposals closed January 23, 2018 and the county did not receive any responses. The county is currently reassessing their options and re-evaluating what to do with the property.

Similar schools have been repurposed into residential uses. 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. In the meantime, every effort should be made to keep the property secured and maintained so its future redevelopment remains a viable option.

Standard Knitting Mill – 1400 Washington Avenue

This circa 1945 building is the only remaining structure associated with Standard Knitting Mill. Standard was founded in 1900 with 50 employees. By the 1930’s, Standard was the largest textile and knitting mill in Knoxville, and employed over 4,000 Knoxvillians. At one time Standard produced over one million garments a week and inspired Knoxville’s title as the “Underwear Capital of the World.” The current building footprint still comes in at over 400,000 square feet and was the home of Delta Apparel until 2007.

The future is still uncertain for the remaining building of the Standard Knitting Mill complex. Located in a swath of industrial land between the historic Parkridge and Fourth and Gill Neighborhoods, the current mill owners have stated plans to rehabilitate the property, but no progress has been made to date. Broken windows and overgrown grounds are the most noticeable features for this high visibility property.

Knox Heritage continues to encourage the owners and other stakeholders to make the redevelopment of the structure a top priority since its condition has a negative impact on the surrounding historic neighborhoods. Knox Heritage can provide assistance on using federal rehabilitation tax incentives to help finance a successful project. A mixed-use development combining office, retail and residential tenants should be considered. Redevelopment of the site would add to the city’s tax base and spur on the renaissance underway in the surrounding historic neighborhoods.

Eugenia Williams House - 4848 Lyons View Pike

Eugenia Williams was born in January 1900 to a prominent physician and one of the original investors who introduced Coca-Cola to East Tennessee. In 1940, Eugenia commissioned her childhood friend, John Fanz Staub, to design her a new residence. Staub, a native Knoxvillian, is best known for designing homes for many wealthy and influential Texans, with over half of his design work located in Houston alone. Architect Howard Barnstone, the publisher of The Architecture of John F. Staub and The Country Houses of John F. Staub stated that Staub “…talked about designing homes that would be an expression of the people who lived in them. You have to look at his houses not only as a record of his design work, but also his interpretation of the character and personality of his clients.” Miss. Williams’ Regency-style home sits on 24 acres bordering the Tennessee River and still has most of its original design features intact.

In 1998, the house was willed to the University of Tennessee as a memorial to Eugenia’s father. For many years after her death, the house was plagued by vandals and a lack of basic maintenance. The University is seeking a long-term lease for the property, but no viable plans for restoration have been presented and a lack of basic maintenance continues to be an issue.
Knox Heritage would like to assist The University of Tennessee with developing a plan for finding a partner who can restore this significant piece of residential architecture. It is the only remaining Staub-designed structure in Knoxville.

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