FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

2019 Fragile & Fading List Announced on May 17

May 17, 2019

Knox Heritage announced its 2019 Fragile & Fading list of historically significant properties in immediate need of a preservation plan during the East Tennessee Preservation Conference held on May 17 at the Knoxville Botanical Garden & Arboretum. The annual list is a local tradition with a goal to strengthen advocacy efforts to save these historic places before they are lost forever.

Every May during National Preservation Month, Knox Heritage releases this list to remind property owners, community leaders, and the public about how quickly important places can fade away due to neglect and the lack of a realistic plan for their preservation. Saving these historic places will conserve resources, maintain beautiful architecture, sustain the local economy, create jobs, grow heritage tourism, stabilize neighborhoods, and keep the community connected with its shared history. The Knox Heritage mission is to preserve structures and places of historic or cultural significance for our community and that often takes many people and organizations working together to develop viable plans.

2019 Fragile & Fading

Knaffl-Stephens House – 3738 Speedway Circle

This c. 1880 Victorian home was once located at 918 Gay Street until the construction of the Andrew Johnson Hotel in 1926. It was originally home to art and portrait photographer Joseph Knaffl, 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. 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-1960s. The house still retains a portion of its original marble façade with the original street number “918” over the front door.
The house has suffered from long-term neglect and the last owners stripped the interior of much of its original character. The property is currently for sale through the City of Knoxville Homemaker’s Program and offers a unique opportunity for someone to restore a former residence of one of Knoxville’s most well-known artists.

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

The Pryor Brown garage is an early example of a mixed-use structure featuring parking decks along with several retail spaces along both Market Street and Church Avenue. Its builder was Pryor Brown, a Knoxville businessman who 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. With the popularity of automobiles growing, Brown expanded the garage in 1929 covering the area of his old livery stable. The parking garage is a remarkable story of continuity on one site and is one of the oldest parking garages still standing in the United States.

Knox Heritage encourages the re-use and preservation of this unique historic structure. There is great potential to compliment a broader redevelopment of this block of downtown Knoxville with the garage becoming a compelling piece, both historically and architecturally.

**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.

The University of Tennessee is currently evaluating whether to sell the property. If a sale does occur, this could be the opportunity the home has needed for a preservation-minded buyer to emerge. Knox Heritage strongly recommends that the property not be sold without a preservation easement protecting the structure from demolition and encouraging proper restoration.

**Fort Sanders Historic District**

Fort Sanders is named for the 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, inappropriate renovations, and tear downs are destroying the character of this charming neighborhood.
Knox Heritage is currently restoring a home that was saved from demolition by moving it across the street. Our organization encourages community support for this neighborhood that can result in more sensitive development, better renovations that adhere to the current design guidelines, 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.

Knox Heritage encourages more partnerships to emerge that can work together to save this significant site. The Knoxville College Board of Trustees have been applying for a variety of grants to assist with stabilization efforts.

**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 on good design practices and will launch the first local H-1 Overlay Gap Fund in partnership with the City of Knoxville’s Preservation Fund to assist low to moderate income homeowners with making repairs in compliance with design guidelines.

**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 will be writing the National Register nomination for the building which, if designated, will create an opportunity for a developer to use federal rehabilitation tax credits as part of a financing package. A mixed-use development combining office, retail and residential tenants would add to the city’s tax base and spur on the renaissance underway in the surrounding historic neighborhoods.

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**About Knox Heritage:**

The Knox Heritage mission is to preserve structures and places of historic or cultural significance for our community. The mission is fulfilled in seven primary ways: educational programing, preservation advocacy, the Vintage Properties Revolving Fund, special events that connect people to places, the East Tennessee Preservation Alliance, the Salvage Shop, and Historic Westwood.

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