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Endangered icons

SOUTHBRIDGE CHURCH AMONG THREATENED AREA STRUCTURES

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Notre Dame Church in Southbridge
(T&G Staff/MARK C. IDE)

2010 Most Endangered Historic Resources



The Rev. Abiel "Priest" Williams House, Dudley
 Rev. Abiel "Priest" Williams built his Federal-style clapboard house in Dudley, circa 1790. The building is notable for its good and beam joists, original architectural features such as wide plank pine floors, and impressive dry-laid granite foundation.

Oakham West Schoolhouse, Oakham
 Oakham West Schoolhouse is a one-room brick schoolhouse built in 1827. It has seen few alterations since its construction. Most of its interior and exterior features are intact, although in very poor condition.



The Pawtucket Dam, Lowell
 The Pawtucket Dam is an integral part of the Lowell Canal System. The dam has two sections, built in 1847 and 1876, and constructed of squared granite.

The Charles River Speedway Headquarters, Boston
 The Charles River Speedway Headquarters consists of 6 buildings constructed between 1899 and 1905. It is located on Soldiers Field Road in Allston. The complex was designed to support horse and buggy racing at the adjacent speedway, a racetrack, a scenic drive with a bicycle path, and a pedestrian promenade.

East Parish Meeting House, Haverhill
 The East Parish Meeting House was built in 1838 in an appropriately simple New England Congregational style. Featuring a shingled, gable roof, bell tower and steeple, it is one of seven remaining meetinghouses in the state.

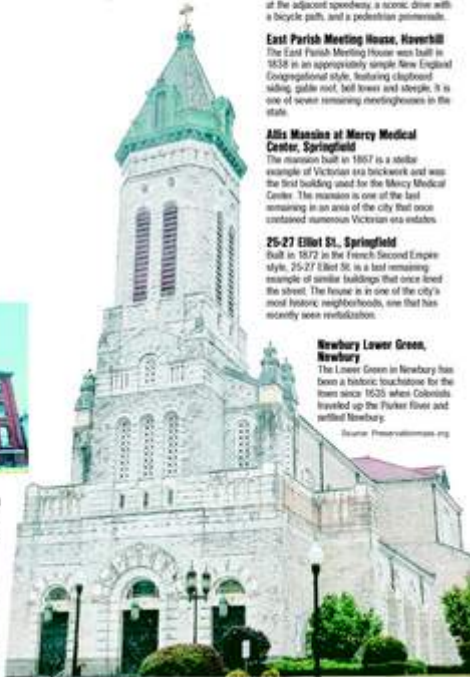
Allis Mansion at Mercy Medical Center, Springfield
 The mansion built in 1887 is a stellar example of Victorian era brickwork and was the first building used for the Mercy Medical Center. The mansion is one of the last remaining in an area of the city that once contained numerous Victorian era estates.

25-27 Elliot St., Springfield
 Built in 1872 in the French Second Empire style, 25-27 Elliot St. is a last remaining example of similar buildings that once lined the street. The house is in one of the city's most historic neighborhoods, one that has recently seen revitalization.



Odd Fellows Home, Worcester
 The 31½ story Romanesque Revival brick and brownstone building was designed by architectural firm Barker and Burns in 1890. The building is on land donated to the Odd Fellows by Thomas Dodge.

Notre Dame Church, Southbridge
 Notre Dame was constructed in 1912 by Montreal architect Joseph Venoix for the French-American congregation. The beautiful French Renaissance style is enhanced in the interior (detailing and 32 paintings by Guggio Faggi).



Newbury Lower Green, Newbury
 The Lower Green in Newbury has been a historic marketplace for the town since 1633 when Colonialists traveled up the Parker River and settled Newbury.
Source: PreservationMass.org

BOSTON — Notre Dame Church in Southbridge, which may be shuttered as part of the reorganization plan by the Diocese of Worcester to cope with the dwindling number of priests, is one of four Central Massachusetts landmarks that have been placed on Preservation Massachusetts' 2010 Most Endangered Historic Resources list.

The others are the Odd Fellows Home in Worcester's Greendale section, which may be razed for a housing development; the Oakham West School in Oakham; and the Rev. Abiel "Priest" Williams House in Dudley.

Preservation Massachusetts has put out an annual list for 17 years. The 10 structures listed have been judged by the nonprofit advocacy group as being historically significant, but threatened with demolition or neglect.

In May, chancery officials merged Notre Dame's congregation with that of nearby Sacred Heart of Jesus Church.

Notre Dame parishioners fear that their cathedral-like church, which was built in 1912 for the local French-American community, will be eventually shut down. They have held protest vigils to keep it open.

"This church is not just an incredible gem. It is an icon of Southbridge," said James Igoe, Preservation Massachusetts president, who noted that many in town feel that the church's closure would have a

negative impact on Main Street businesses.

Preservation Massachusetts officials said about 400 people, including business owners, town councilors and state Rep. Geraldo Alicea, D-Charlton, advocated for the church to make the list.

Mr. Igoe said \$365,000 worth of improvements have been made to the church over the past few years. He added that it makes little sense to close the house of worship because Sacred Heart is smaller and needs considerable restoration work.

Parishioners said additional money has been spent over the years to upgrade Notre Dame's LaSalle Hall. Improvements included work to the kitchen and a new fire alarm system, flooring, and draperies.

Raymond L. Delisle, vice chancellor of operations for the diocese, said no decision has been made about any church closures in Southbridge. He said chancery officials, along with parishioners, are trying to determine how the future needs of the local Catholic community may best be served.

"We're trying to make a decision that works best for the town," he said.

Southbridge has four Catholic churches.

Mr. Delisle said the chancery tries to sell the churches it closes to congregations needing homes or for uses that do not conflict with Catholic teachings.

"Our wishes and the wishes of the preservation group are not mutually exclusive," he said.

Theodore Bartlett, one of the parishioners lobbying to keep Notre Dame open, said he believes the listing will help. He said members of the Diocesan Planning Committee visited both complexes last weekend to gauge church attendance and to inspect the premises.

"It just doesn't make economic sense to close Notre Dame and keep Sacred Heart open," said Mr. Bartlett, noting that the protest vigils at the church still take place daily at 7 p.m.

He said little work has been done at Sacred Heart over the past few years and noted that, according to one estimate, it would cost \$750,000 to get the facility up to snuff.

Mr. Bartlett added that church attendance at Notre Dame, which is on the National Register of Historic Places, substantially dwarfs Sacred Heart's.

Before the parishes merged, about 400 families were enrolled at Notre Dame while 125 families were members at Sacred Heart, parishioners said.

Mr. Bartlett said he believes Notre Dame is targeted for closing because a number of events at the church's LaSalle Hall, which brings in significant revenue for the parish, have either been curtailed or canceled.

Meanwhile, Preservation Massachusetts officials are hoping another use could be found for the large Odd

Fellows Home complex on Randolph Road in Worcester so that the original, highly visible three-and-a-half-story Romanesque Revival brick and brownstone building can be saved.

The Worcester Historical Commission, using a city ordinance aimed at trying to save historic buildings that face the wrecking ball, delayed demolition efforts for a year. That order expires in May.

The clapboard federal-style Williams House in Dudley has served as home to Rev. Williams, the Dudley Congregational meetinghouse's fourth clergyman and a former representative to the General Court.

Preservation Massachusetts officials said the home may be demolished as early as next month, but the owners are willing to sell the structure for \$1 just to get the building off the property.

The Oakham West School is a one-room brick schoolhouse constructed in 1827 and closed in 1920 because of high maintenance costs and because few students attended the school. The structure was bought by the town at auction in 2002, but funding is needed to secure it for the winter.

The Preservation Massachusetts list also includes a former horse track in Boston's Brighton section, a dam in Lowell, a hospital in Springfield, an old meetinghouse in Haverhill, the Lower Green in Newbury, and a 19th-century French Second Empire style house in Springfield.