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Nine Worcester structures make 2018's Most Endangered list



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WORCESTER - A lodging house, an opera house, and a bath house all made this year's Most Endangered Structures list, the 23rd annual list compiled by Preservation Worcester to draw attention to threats facing the city's historic structures.

“The hope is to draw attention to the buildings, get the attention of the owners, and also to bring it to the foreground for the public,” said Deborah Packard, executive director of Preservation Worcester. “It’s also the opportunity - for something like Lothrop’s Opera House - for someone to come forward and say they would like to restore it and put it to a new use.”

For [inclusion on the list](#), the structures must be built before 1968, be located in Worcester, and have contributed to the landscape of the city through their historic, architectural and/or cultural significance. The structures must also be threatened by neglect, demolition, alteration, deterioration and/or type of use.

Listed structures can include any structure or portion of a structure, including residential, commercial, industrial or institutional buildings, bridges, monuments, parks, burial grounds - even entire neighborhoods, city blocks or a particular type of building or building elements.

This year’s list included nine entries:

Joel Bjorklund Lodging House, 56 Laurel St.

This is the first year this structure has made the list. Built in 1900, this three story wood-framed structure in the Second Empire style has always been a three-family home since the time of one of its first tenants, Joel Bjorklund, a salesman. Ms. Packard said, however, that the house is in rough shape, and the nonprofit worries that it may succumb to demolition by neglect.

Ghost Signs, citywide

Ghost Signs are faded, hand-painted advertising signs on buildings which harken back to the 1920s and 1930s prior to the proliferation of billboards. Evoking a nostalgic appeal, there is a movement in cities such as Detroit and Philadelphia to draw attention to and preserve the signs.

Bais Hatveloh Mikvah (Jewish Bath House), 4 Huntley St.

First included on the 2011 Most Endangered Structures list, this circa 1890 structure was a house for most of its life. In 1973, it was bought by the Congregation Mikvah Association of Worcester, which used the property as a ritual bath house. The building is a good example of late-19th century housing, according to Preservation Worcester, with shingles and clapboard siding, a mortared granite foundation and interesting architectural massing and detail. But Ms. Packard said that the structure is “really deteriorating,” with a compromised roof, severe rot and bare siding in several locations, and she is unsure whether it remains in use. A phone number for Congregation Mikvah Association was not in service.

Lothrop’s Opera House (Olympia Theater), 17-27 Pleasant St.

The oldest standing theater in the city which once hosted Al Jolson and Mae West, the circa 1891 building is on the Worcester Redevelopment Authority’s Downtown Urban Revitalization Plan as a potential building to be demolished. The building - which has occupied retail space on the first floor - is in a district of buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and is on

one of the few blocks in downtown Worcester where the original buildings are all intact and connected. The theater was shuttered in January 2006 and remains vacant.

“We really feel like with everything going on downtown, it could be used as an independent movie theater, or a comedy club,” Ms. Packard said. “We think it would be a shame to tear it down and have a big hole there, or tear it down and have a boutique hotel. It really would impact the character of the street.”

Our Lady of Mount Carmel Church, 26-28 Mulberry St.

Built in 1928 by the city’s Italian-American community, the church was closed in May 2016 when it was deemed structurally unsafe. The Mount Carmel Preservation Society, a group of concerned parishioners, is fighting plans by the Diocese of Worcester to deconsecrate the church and sell it as part of a 5-acre plus property including the church, rectory, community center and baseball field.

They are also encouraging the state to enforce deed restrictions on the property that keep it for religious education and community recreation purposes, Mauro DePasquale, president of the preservation society, said Tuesday.

The church [appeared on the 2016](#) and 2017 Most Endangered lists and the 2016 Preservation Massachusetts Most Endangered Resources list. The city’s one-year demolition delay expired in May 2017, meaning the church can be legally razed.

“It’s still standing, and we still have two appeals that are in Rome that are in process,” said Mr. DePasquale. “We’re still working at it, and praying.”

Hope Cemetery Barn, 119 Webster St.

One of the very few barns left in the city, the circa 1889 Hope Cemetery Barn is used by the Hope Cemetery groundskeepers for storage. Incorporating elements of Stick- and Shingle-style architecture, Preservation Worcester received a grant from the Massachusetts Historical Commission in 2006 to produce a report on the building and what to do with it. But the report has not been implemented and the building continues to deteriorate, Ms. Packard reported. The barn first appeared on the list in 2006, and also [was listed in 2017](#).

Salisbury House, 61 Harvard St.

Completed in 1838 for Stephen Salisbury II, the Greek Revival/ Neo-Classical style Salisbury House is one of several buildings associated with the Salisburys, one of Worcester’s most prominent families.

But the privately-owned building’s exterior “needs to be attended to,” Ms. Packard said. “It needs a paint job, there’s rot, and it’s just a shame that such an important building is not being taken cared of on its exterior.” This is the fourth appearance on the list for the structure, most recently appearing in 2017.

Deacon David Richard's House, 5 Richards St.

Believed to date back to the 1780s, making it one of the oldest examples of Federal architecture in the city, the Deacon David Richard's House has been empty since a fire and is owned by a bank. Preservation Worcester fears the building is at risk of demolition.

Bramble Hill, 757 Salisbury St.

This 1901 Georgian Revival mansion was originally part of an 135-acre estate and was once owned by the prominent Higgins family. Eighty-six acres of the estate was sold and developed into an over 55 community called Salisbury Hill, but a 17-acre portion including the main house was not developed. The main house, however, has been vacant since 2007 and "it is showing signs of serious neglect," according to Ms. Packard, with interior water damage.

Moreover, the main house and surrounding land was recently sold, and Preservation Worcester fears that it will be turned into a housing development.

In addition to the Most Endangered Structures, Preservation Worcester also recognized 13 buildings and their owners for safeguarding their structures.

These include: H. F. McAleer House, 35 King St.; William E. Maynard Three Decker, 15 Kingsbury St.; Edward Hall House, 41 Kingsbury St.; Moody Shattuck House, 768 Main St.; Gay-McGrath House, 31 Newbury St.; Hope Cemetery Solomon Nixon Gates, 19 Webster St.; Royal Corset Apartments, 45 Grand St.; Lofts at Loomworks, 93 Grand St.; Fremont Lofts, 160 Fremont St.; 14 Northampton St.; 26 Shaffner St.; Samuel Sturtevant House, 89 Blithewood Ave.; Ebenezer Flagg House, 533 Massasoit Road.

"We don't want to just point out the issues, but want to celebrate the successes," Ms. Packard said.