



# Preserving Pennsylvania

Volume 10

Number 1

The Newsletter of Preservation Pennsylvania, Inc.

Spring 1996

## **PENNSYLVANIA AT RISK 1996**

**P**reservation Pennsylvania presents the fifth annual listing of endangered properties across the Commonwealth.

***Pennsylvania at Risk*** is our yearly record of the state's rich, yet sometimes fragile, heritage of historic places.

Helping communities to preserve and productively reuse our legacy of historic buildings, structures, and places is the mission of Preservation Pennsylvania.

The nine historic sites offered on the following pages represent the best of our past - a legacy whose loss to development, neglect, and unexpected natural forces continues to diminish the heritage of all Pennsylvanians.



*Ice-choked flood waters of the Susquehanna River rip a section from Harrisburg's historic Walnut Street Bridge, forcing it downstream toward impact with the Market Street Bridge.  
Photo: Suzanne Yenchko, January, 1996.*

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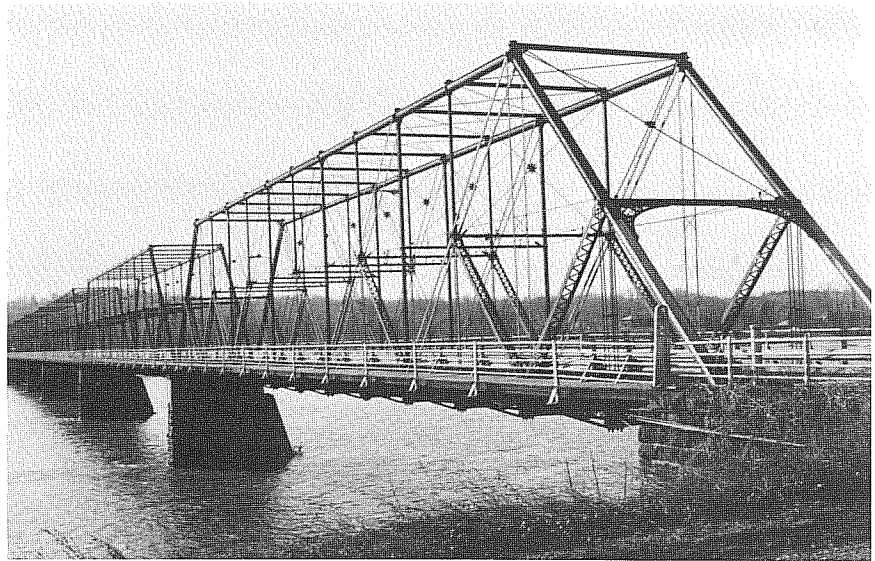
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## WALNUT STREET BRIDGE DAUPHIN & CUMBERLAND COUNTIES



*The Walnut Street Bridge, heavily damaged during 1996 winter flooding on the Susquehanna River, is one of the largest multi-span truss bridges ever fabricated by the nationally-significant Phoenix Bridge Company of Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. Erected in 1889-90, the bridge has provided pedestrian access to popular City Island since its restoration after Hurricane Agnes in 1972.*

*Photo: PA Historical & Museum Commission.*

### Significance

Erected during 1889-1890, the Walnut Street Bridge is the oldest surviving bridge across the Susquehanna River and is one of the largest multi-span truss bridges ever fabricated by the nationally significant Phoenix Bridge Company, located in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. It is perhaps the country's most extensive and most visible structure preserving the technology of the company's patented Phoenix column. Its 2,850-foot length, borne in the middle by City Island, was composed of fifteen wrought-iron, steel pin-connected Baltimore truss spans. In a broader context, it is a monumental embodiment of the late 19th century era of civil engineering, in which numerous independent bridge companies experimented widely with many different types of metal trusses.

For the Harrisburg area, the construction of the bridge ended a long-standing toll bridge monopoly, and by 1893 the so-called "People's Bridge" carried commuter trolleys from the west shore community of Mechanicsburg eastward to the capital. The location of the bridge also initiated recreational development on City Island. By 1909 baseball, swimming, football, track competition, boating, and picnicking had become popular, island-based activities.

Closed to vehicular traffic after damage from flood waters of Hurricane Agnes in 1972, the bridge faced a preservation crisis which was averted by listing it in the National Register of Historic Places and by promoting the bridge as a linchpin in the city's effort to capitalize on its riverfront. The bridge subsequently became an important pedestrian link between the river's west shore, City Island, and a revitalized Harrisburg downtown commercial district.

### Threat

The ice-jammed flood waters that devastated Harrisburg in January of this year seriously damaged the bridge and reopened questions about its preservation. The flood wrenched one metal truss span out of alignment and carried two other spans down river, crushing them against the stone piers and parapets of the Market Street Bridge. Since the flood, PennDOT work crews have removed the three adjoining wrecked spans which were located between the West Shore and City Island, and removed as well the destabilized stone piers which had supported them. The fate of the bridge is under study and is not yet resolved.

Local preservation groups and individuals, many of whom crossed the bridge daily in their fitness routines, have joined together under the leadership and support of the mayor to form the People's Bridge Coalition to work for the long-term preservation of this important engineering structure and local landmark.

# KNOX BUILDING (CASCADE THEATER) NEW CASTLE, LAWRENCE COUNTY

## Significance

The birthplace of the Warner Brothers empire can be traced to downtown New Castle and the Cascade Theater. Youngstown, Ohio soap salesmen Harry, Sam, Abe, and Jack Warner were introduced to the nickelodeon during visits to Pittsburgh at the turn of the century. Their interest in the new entertainment medium led them to form the Pittsburgh-based Duquesne Amusement Supply Company to distribute films and to open the Cascade in New Castle in 1904. The theater remained in operation under their ownership until 1911. By 1912, brother Sam was on his way to Los Angeles to open an office, and Warner Brothers rise to prominence in the film and entertainment industry was launched.

Architecturally, the three story brick Italianate building with its two-story rear ell that once housed the Cascade Theater is a prominent element along East Washington Street in downtown New Castle. Originally known as the Knox Building, it was constructed in 1875 and in ensuing years became the centerpiece of the block.



*Birthplace of the Warner Brothers entertainment empire, the Cascade Theater was located on the second floor of the above two-story rear section of the Knox Building in downtown Newcastle. The front facade of the three-story section of the building collapsed in February 1996, and owners are seeking funding to rehabilitate the structure and restore the theater. Photo: PA Historical & Museum Commission.*

## Threat

The Knox Building was threatened with demolition by the city of New Castle following the collapse of the front wall of the top two floors in February 1996. This front section of the building had been vacant for a number of years and the roof had suffered from lack of maintenance. According to local press coverage at the time of the collapse, the building had been the subject of several renovation proposals, including one that would have restored the original second floor theater.

Since February, work to rehabilitate the theater has begun with a modest gift from Time-Warner matched by funds from the city and the state. Securing the building structurally and repairing the roof are priority activities as owners seek additional funding to undertake other needed repairs and to restore the historically significant Warner theater.

# MORSS MANSION SIMPSON, LACKAWANNA COUNTY



*The Greek Revival Morss Mansion was bequeathed to the town of Simpson in the 1920s to be used as a library or museum. The plan to create a community resource never materialized, and the building has been in private ownership and deteriorating for many years. Current owners propose to demolish the mansion. Photo: PA Historical & Museum Commission.*

## Significance

George Lord Morss constructed this impressive Greek Revival style house overlooking the Lackawanna River in 1853. Morss, a member of a wealthy family of leather tanners from Greene County, New York, moved to this area in 1838 and purchased large tracts of timber land in the area of what is now Fell Township, Carbondale Township, and Carbondale. Here he built a tannery, workers housing, a company store, and cut a direct route to Carbondale. Ultimately he acquired most of his wealth by leasing land to anthracite coal mine operators.

The mansion features a monumental portico that wraps three sides of the building, a wraparound balcony that is suspended by iron rods, and a shallow-pitched hip roof with a large lantern. The interior retains significant details and elements of craftsmanship, including a spiral staircase.

The mansion remained in the Morss family until the death in the 1920s of Morss' daughter Amanda, who bequeathed the property to the community of Simpson to be used as a library or museum.

## Threat

The leadership to carry out Amanda Morss' wishes did not materialize, and the building was eventually sold. Purchased in the 1960s by the local fire company which had initially hoped to turn the building into a community center, the mansion and its maintenance have become an excessive burden. Plans at present are to have a salvager demolish and remove the building from its site.

## MISSION STATEMENT

Preservation Pennsylvania, through creative partnerships, targeted educational and advocacy programs, advisory assistance, and special projects, assists Pennsylvania communities to protect and utilize the historic resources they want to preserve for the future.

## PHOENIX IRON & STEEL COMPANY FOUNDRY BUILDING PHOENIXVILLE, CHESTER COUNTY



*With its imposing massing and distinctive stepped hip roofs, the Phoenix Iron and Steel Company Foundry Building is significant both architecturally and for its place in the industrial history of southeastern Pennsylvania. Phoenixville is actively seeking a developer to work in partnership with the local development corporation to undertake rehabilitation and reuse of the building. Photo: PA Historical & Museum Commission.*

### Significance

Constructed between 1875 and 1885, the foundry building of the Phoenix Iron and Steel Company is an unusually robust and detailed work of industrial architecture. Listed in the National Register in 1987 as a contributing structure in the Phoenixville Historic District, the building is most noted for its mottled sandstone walls and stepped hip roofs with clerestory lighting, which together give the large building a squat, powerful massing. The foundry is the oldest industrial building that remains of this defunct and largely dismantled mill complex.

Located within the Schuylkill River Heritage Park Corridor, this site is important to the history of the iron and steel industry in southeastern Pennsylvania. The company that built the foundry is significant for the production of structural metal fabrications, including the patented Phoenix Column, and for its subsidiary works, the Phoenix Bridge Company, which was responsible for construction of numerous historically significant bridges including the Walnut Street Bridge in Harrisburg.

### Threat

Although obviously built to last, the foundry building has long suffered without maintenance. Holes in the roof admit rain and vandals have broken most of the glass in its large multi-light window sash.

At this writing, the borough of Phoenixville has announced plans to acquire the building by eminent domain, and the Phoenixville Area Economic Development Corporation (PAEDCO) is seeking grant money to reroof the foundry in order to stabilize the structure and prevent further deterioration. However, to undertake rehabilitation plans that include commercial facilities as well as interpretation of the iron and steel industry, a private developer must be secured as a partner for this initiative.

## BANGOR PARK SWIMMING POOL BANGOR, NORTHAMPTON COUNTY

### Significance

At the height of the Great Depression, residents of this small community in an area of Northampton County known as the Slate Belt, joined workers from the W.P.A. to build a recreational facility that would serve the town for more than fifty years. Constructed at a cost of \$63,000, the Bangor Park Swimming Pool is an above-ground, oval-shaped concrete pool. Pool, deck, railings, locker rooms, benches, and walls of this unusually designed structure are all made of concrete. From the distinctive Art Deco style entrance, swimmers and spectators could access the ground level locker rooms, visit the concession stand with its cabinets and countertops made of indigenous slate, or climb a stairway to the deck and the pool.

The pool, with its unusual above-ground design and Art Deco detailing remained virtually unchanged from its opening on May 27, 1938. The popular summer recreation spot served the community well until its closing in 1993.

### Threat

The very construction technique that made the Bangor Pool unique proved to be the source of continual maintenance problems. The above-ground concrete required constant and increasingly expensive repair and maintenance. A 1990 feasibility study on rehabilitating the pool was abandoned when bids proved beyond the financial capability of the small community. Difficulties of compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and other health and safety codes added to the decision to build a new community pool.

In a recent memorandum of agreement with the Bureau for Historic Preservation, the pool will be recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), after which it will be demolished. Plans for the new community pool do include incorporating the Art Deco concrete entry into the bathhouse building.



*The Art Deco entrance to the W.P.A.-built concrete above-ground pool in Bangor, Northampton County, will be incorporated into plans for a new pool. Ongoing maintenance problems, coupled with an inability to meet health, safety, and accessibility requirements in the 1938 structure, have forced the community to replace it with a new recreational facility. Photo: PA Historical & Museum Commission.*

# HOWE-CHILDS GATEWAY HOUSE PITTSBURGH

## Significance

Once known as Willow Cottage, the mid-Victorian Gothic Revival cottage style residence on Fifth Avenue's Millionaire Row in Pittsburgh, is a fine example of the style popularized in the nineteenth century by architect Alexander Jackson Davis. Built by Thomas Howe just before the Civil War, the house was originally part of a larger estate that once included a large stone mansion on the hill above the cottage.

With an irregular L-shaped plan, the cottage displays myriad bays, bay windows, porches, wings and dormers that, in the words of architectural historian James Van Trump, "... create a varied and complex pattern of volumes, voids, lights and shadows across the front elevations." Victorian detailing includes delicate porch columns, braces, balustrades, scalloped cornice and gable bargeboards.



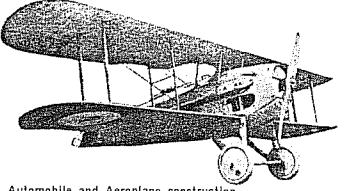
*The Gothic Revival Howe-Childs Gateway House on Pittsburgh's Millionaire Row has been the subject of a protracted legal battle over the owners' right to demolish the property. On May 21, 1996, the State Supreme Court issued an opinion that upholds the denial of a demolition permit based on the historic designation of the property. Photo: PA Historical & Museum Commission.*

## Threat

Designated historic by Pittsburgh's City Council in 1986, the house has been in jeopardy since 1989 when the owners of the cottage, who had purchased it in 1988 with full knowledge of its historic designation, applied to the city for a demolition permit. The owners claimed that there is no viable economic use for the property and that they would suffer an economic hardship if demolition were denied. Following a denial of the request by the city's Historic Review Commission (HRC), the owners appealed to the Court of Common Pleas which reversed the HRC decision. Subsequent appeal to the Commonwealth Court upheld the decision of the Court of Common Pleas. In an appeal to the State Supreme Court, the unanimous ruling, issued on May 21, 1996, reinstated the HRC's denial of the demolition permit.

The court said the owners had failed to demonstrate that they could not make any economic use of their property and that it was impractical or impossible to sell the property. As cited in the Supreme Court ruling, owners paid \$175,00 and spent approximately \$36,00 on repairs; with expert testimony that the house could be sold for \$200,000 to \$300,000, the court saw no hardship and, in fact, acknowledged that the owners could conceivably realize a profit if they sold the property.

In the meantime, the Howe-Childs Gateway House has been vacant and deteriorating for a decade. The fate of this important architectural landmark is still to be resolved.



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HARRISBURG, P. A.

*As advertised above in a 1923 Harrisburg City Directory, William Felton's Automobile and Aeroplane Mechanical School offered training in flying, driving, and repairing the new transportation machines. Felton was an important African-American entrepreneur in the early 20th century commercial and transportation history of southcentral Pennsylvania.*

# AUTO & AEROPLANE MECHANICAL SCHOOL HARRISBURG

## Significance

In 1923, William McDonald Felton opened the Auto and Aeroplane Mechanical School at 44 North Cameron Street in Harrisburg. In what were still early years for automobiles and airplanes, Felton offered "Practical Training in Flying, Driving and Repairing" these machines. With a business that included an airstrip at 14th and Sycamore Streets on the south side of town, Felton was an important African-American entrepreneur in the early 20th century commercial and transportation history of the area.

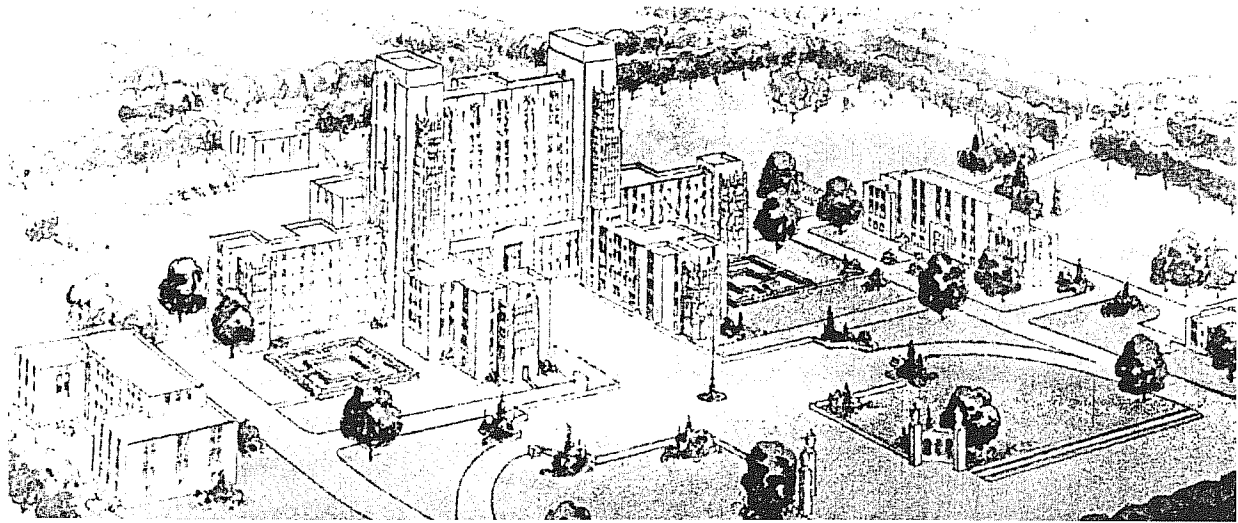
Felton's involvement in the automobile and airplane business began in New York City at the turn of the century. He arrived there in 1898 from Marshallville, Georgia, where he had operated a small watch repair shop. Finding work first in a city pawn shop cleaning and repairing watches, clocks, and guns, and fixing and building bicycles, he parlayed his mechanical talent and directed his savings into opening an automobile school on Eighth Avenue with a partner at the turn of the century. After the partner's withdrawal in 1902, Felton opened a garage on 39th Street, and in 1910 opened the Auto Transportation and Sales Company, employing fifteen people. In 1913, Felton patented a car-washing device, and was also owner of the Fifty-Ninth Street Theater.

By 1919 Felton had moved to Harrisburg and, with the help of his wife who is described in the press of the time as the first African American aviatrix, set up his school in nearby Steelton. In 1923, at a cost of \$100,000, Felton erected the two-story school building in Harrisburg. The school contained lecture rooms and a large reception room on the first floor, with workshops on the second floor. As part of his growing business, Felton also advertised mechanical correspondence courses as far away as Chicago.

## Threat

Felton's former mechanical school is located in an area of rambling commercial warehouse buildings that are largely vacant and in deteriorating condition. Despite the brick infill of the front windows, the garage complex retains most of its original industrial character. The City of Harrisburg has initiated a revitalization project for this block in which the Felton Garage complex will be partly or entirely demolished to provide parking for adjacent development.

# NAVAL HOSPITAL, PHILADELPHIA



*The Naval Hospital, Philadelphia, illustrated above in a 1931 rendering of the original complex by architects Karcher and Smith, is one of the city's finest examples of the Art Deco style. Closed as a medical facility in 1990, the buildings are scheduled for demolition as part of a redevelopment plan proposed for the site by the city.*

## Significance

Commissioned in 1935, the Naval Hospital, Philadelphia, was the first high-rise hospital building constructed by the U.S. Navy. The striking fifteen-story Art Deco steel-frame tower of the main hospital building, faced with yellow brick and brown terra cotta, was a significant departure from the two or three story hospital complexes that preceded it. At its opening it represented a state of the art facility for the Navy with 650 beds and a total floor space of 352,000 square feet.

The original buildings of the Naval Hospital were designed by the Philadelphia firm of Karcher and Smith, known for their ability to employ the eclectic architectural vocabularies of the day. The plan, with a main central building flanked by lower buildings, is a classical Beaux Arts arrangement. Detailing in the building's interior includes such significant features as anodized aluminum heater grates depicting a ship in full sail. These grates were set in marble panels in the vestibule, and below are air intakes in the shape of dolphins.

The hospital received attention from national architectural publications when it opened, and it is now recognized as one of the finest Art Deco buildings in the city.

The complex grew during the years of World War II as the need for more hospital beds increased. Karcher and Smith also designed many of the structures added at this time.

Following World War II, the hospital was used primarily as a rehabilitation facility and later as a teaching hospital. By the late 1970s, declining use of the facility and studies that determined the building incapable of being renovated for modern medical use signalled the end of the hospital's role as a major medical facility for the Navy.

## Threat

Closed in 1990 as a medical facility for the Navy, the property has not found a developer to rehabilitate it for a new use. The city has proposed a redevelopment plan for the site; and, at this writing, the property is undergoing environmental review. Demolition appears highly likely.

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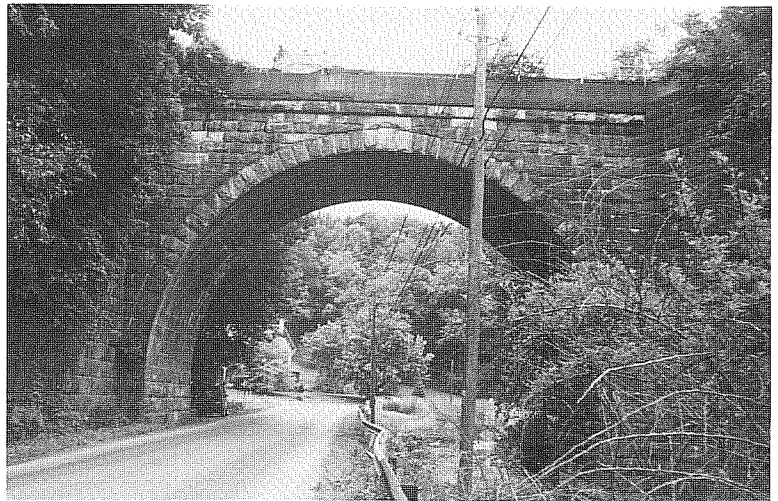
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## ENOLA LOW GRADE RAILROAD LINE LANCASTER COUNTY

### Significance

Spanning twenty-three miles across the southern end of Lancaster County, the Enola Low Grade Railroad Line was built between 1903 and 1906 by the Pennsylvania Railroad. Considered one of the most significant engineering accomplishments of the Pennsylvania Railroad, the line was designed to have no contact with other vehicular traffic and to run almost completely level, with no more than a one degree slope, and in a straight line with the radius of curves never greater than two degrees. The line was part of a plan for cross country transportation conceived by Pennsylvania Railroad president J. Edgar Thomson in the late 1800s. Implementation of the plan was undertaken by A.J. Cassatt, president of the line in the early 20th century, who built two segments of the Low Grade in southcentral and south-eastern Pennsylvania and another smaller segment in Ohio.

The Low Grade Line, which extends from Atglen on the western edge of Chester County across southern Lancaster County to Safe Harbor on the Susquehanna River, is especially significant for its fine stone arch bridges. The 805-acre corridor, 28 of its bridges, and other amenities have been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

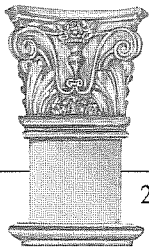


*The stone arch bridges of the 1903-06 Enola Low Grade Railroad Line are threatened with demolition by a pending action in which the seven local municipalities would each take title to a section of the line. A local group, organized to preserve the line, hopes to see it become a recreational trail.  
Photo: Friends of the Atglen Susquehanna Trail.*

### Threat

Friends of the Atglen Susquehanna Trail (FAST) formed in 1990 and incorporated in 1993 to preserve the Enola Low Grade Line as a recreational resource for the region. At the time of FAST's inception, none of the municipalities or the county were interested in taking over the line, reportedly because of potential liability. FAST's efforts to acquire the line, generate local support, and raise funds, including state historic preservation and recreation grants, were meeting with success until recently, when a number of the local municipalities through which the line runs sought to acquire ownership. In the plan now under consideration by the Public Utility Commission (PUC) for dispersal of ownership among the various municipalities, eight bridges including five stone-arch spans would be demolished. Demolition of the bridges would not only destroy significant historic resources, but would also destroy the uninterrupted character of a significant linear engineering resource. FAST, in conjunction with the Historic Preservation Trust of Lancaster County, are calling for review of the impact of the plan on the historic resources and character the line before takeover by the municipalities is considered.

Takeover by the individual municipalities, most of which have shown little or no interest in the trail concept, is seen by FAST and the Historic Preservation Trust as the end of the historic rail line unless an agreement can be reached that compels the communities to cooperate in developing the trail. Recently, Lancaster County Commissioners have voiced their support for the trail; their support is seen as critical to bringing the municipalities together on this issue. At this writing, negotiations among the parties continue.



# Preservation Pennsylvania

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## Pennsylvania's Endangered Heritage

*Pennsylvania at Risk* is published annually by Preservation Pennsylvania. The list is a representative sampling of the variety and richness of our Commonwealth's historic properties and the types and severity of threats they face. The list is compiled from recommendations made by our members, local heritage organizations, the board and staff of Preservation Pennsylvania, and the Bureau for Historic Preservation, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

In addition to the annual listing, released each April, Preservation Pennsylvania will occasionally add to the endangered list in the summer, fall, and winter issues of this newsletter in response to timely threats to significant historic properties.

Criteria for listing are:

- the property is listed or determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places, **or**
- the property is considered a contributing structure in a National Register Historic District, **or**
- the property is designated historic by local government, **and**
- the property is faced with imminent, recognized endangerment either from overt action, neglect, incompatible use, or loss of context.

We welcome your comments on this year's list and your suggestions for future listings.

The following properties have been included in past listings of *Pennsylvania At Risk*. Those with \* have had a positive preservation outcome; those with \*\* have been lost. The other listed properties remain at risk.

### 1992

Astor Hotel, Reading  
Bedford Springs Hotel, Bedford

Brith Shalom Synagogue, Easton  
Carrie Furnaces, Swissvale, Allegheny Co.  
Danville West Market Street Historic District, Danville  
Deshong Estate, Chester  
East Broadtop Railroad, Rockhill Furnace, Huntingdon Co.  
Eastern State Penitentiary, Philadelphia  
Highway Routes 23 & 30 expansion projects, Lancaster Co.  
Lackawanna Avenue Historic District\*\*  
Legionville Campground, Harmony Township, Beaver Co.  
Lynnewood Hall, Cheltenham Township, Montgomery Co.  
Meason House, Dunbar Township, Fayette Co.  
Native American Ossuary, North East, Erie Co.\*  
Park Home, Williamsport  
Selma, Norristown, Montgomery Co.  
Star Barn, Lower Swatara Township, Dauphin Co.  
Stegmaier Brewery, Wilkes-Barre  
United States Naval Home, Philadelphia

### 1993

Borg Warner Complex, York\*  
Church of St. Michael the Archangel, Pittsburgh  
Colonial Theater, Lebanon  
Delaware Canal  
Erie City and County Library  
Glassworks and Greensboro, Greene Co., and New Geneva, Fayette Co.  
King of Prussia Inn, Montgomery Co.  
Knowlton, Philadelphia  
Memorial Park, Lock Haven  
Mountain Springs Hotel, Ephrata, Lancaster Co.  
Palace Hotel, Windber, Somerset Co.\*\*  
Path Valley Turnpike Rest Stop, Franklin Co.\*\*

S.S. Grand View Point Hotel, Bedford Co.  
St. Severin Church, Drifting, Clearfield Co.  
Searights Tollhouse, Fayette Co.  
Victory Building, Philadelphia

### 1994

Armstrong Cork Company Complex, Pittsburgh  
Bomberger's Distillery, Heidelberg Township, Lebanon Co.  
Brandywine Battlefield, Chester & Delaware Counties  
Glosser Brothers Department Store, Johnstown  
Huber Breaker, Ashley, Luzerne Co.  
Keller's Covered Bridge, Ephrata Township, Lancaster Co.  
Lancaster County (entire county)  
Motor Vessel/Steamship Niagara, Erie  
Philadelphia Savings Fund Society (PSFS) Building, Philadelphia  
Shoe House, Hellam, York Co.\*  
Vera Cruz Jasper Quarry, Upper Milford Township, Lehigh Co.

### 1995

Allegheny River Boulevard, Allegheny Co.  
Allentown National Bank, Allentown  
George Carroll House, Erie  
Leap the Dips, Lakemont Park, Altoona  
Lock and Dam 7, Monongahela River, Greene and Fayette Counties  
John McCullough House, West Pennsboro Township, Cumberland Co.  
Moland House, Warwick Township, Bucks Co.  
Oley Township Historic District, Berks Co.  
Penn Square, Callowhill Historic District, Reading  
Plymouth Flats Archeological Sites, Plymouth Township, Luzerne Co.  
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