

2005 Ten in Tennessee List



1. Alvin C. York Agricultural Institute, Jamestown, Fentress County

Threat: Neglect

Established in the mid 1920s by Alvin C. York, a native of Fentress County and Congressional Medal of Honor winner in World War I, the Alvin C. York Agricultural Institute provided rural children with an opportunity to attend a comprehensive high school. The original facility was a handsome three story brick building that was a testament to York's vision. As America's most prominent war hero, he eschewed making a personal fortune from his fame, but traveled the country enthusiastically raising funds for the school's construction. The state of Tennessee took over the operation of the school in the 1930s, after financial issues associated with the Great Depression left it in need of alternative funding sources. Although the state continues to operate York Institute with new facilities, the original 1920s structure has been vacated and neglected in recent years and has fallen into serious disrepair. Both the interior and the exterior are in need of substantial work, with the most significant problems including collapsing floors, fallen plaster, and deteriorating mortar causing bricks to fall out. Widespread community awareness and strong local support make this property an excellent candidate for preservation and rehabilitation. The building has a variety of potential adaptive uses, including a possible arts education facility.



2. Mount Olivet Cemetery Office/Chapel, Nashville, Davidson County

Threat: Demolition

Mount Olivet Cemetery was incorporated in 1856 and contains the final resting places of some of Davidson County's most prominent citizens. Sited on a knoll overlooking Hermitage Avenue is the Gothic style Office/Chapel. The earliest section may have been built in the 1850s. An east addition added in 1872 and southern addition was added circa 1900-1920. The original section and the circa 1900-1920 section are in good condition. Recent scholarship suggests that Ryman Auditorium architect Hugh C. Thompson may have been the designer of the main portion of the chapel. Unfortunately, the office/chapel appears slated for demolition. A proposal is before the board of directors for the owner of Mount Olivet for the creation of a non-profit organization entitled the Historic Mount Olivet Preservation Consortium. The organization's first steps will be to complete a National Register Nomination, restore the office/chapel, establish a cemetery museum per NPS guidelines, and restore the monuments. Listing will bring increased awareness of the site and help reinforce its historic significance to the cemetery board and Tennesseans in general.



3. Anderson-Coward House, Memphis, Shelby County

Threat: Vandalism; Neglect

This wonderful Italianate-style building was probably constructed in the 1840s, making it one of the earliest remaining buildings in Memphis. In the 1850s it was remodeled and expanded into its present style. The house exemplifies construction methods of the time, including 1.5 feet thick brick walls made of bricks created on the property. The house served as the popular Justine's Restaurant Between 1958 and 1996. For sale for the past two years, a local community service organization would like to purchase the house for senior citizen assisted living. The property is in receivership and may be sold at auction. In addition, the Memphis Housing Authority has designated an adjacent area for Hope VI development but does not appear interested in rehabbing and renovating the property. The house is currently vacant and has been vandalized repeatedly.



4. Shake Rag (McNabb Mines), Marion County

Threat: Deterioration; Theft of Materials

Established in the 1880s, Shake Rag served as a company town for the McNabb Mines in rural Marion County. Perched along a bluff overlooking the Tennessee River, the community was permanently abandoned circa 1905. In 1984, thirty-four structures remaining from the community were documented-- including ruins of the original school, commissary, hotel, coke ovens, rail incline, and worker housing. The property is currently part of the Prentice Cooper State Forest and is owned by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture, Division of Forestry. Since the 1984 survey, many of the remaining structures have deteriorated or have been vandalized. Listing would help raise awareness within the state management agencies and local preservationists. It is hoped that the listing will encourage these agencies to ensure the preservation of this rare and important resource.

5. Battle of Franklin Sites, Franklin, Williamson County

Threat: Lack of Formal Protection; Development

The terrible battle that was waged across much of what is now within the city limits of Franklin on November 30, 1864 was one of the bloodiest and most strategically important of the entire Civil War. Yet precious little of the battlefield has been protected. Recent local preservation efforts have been very encouraging, and are attracting national attention and support. What has been described as the largest battlefield reclamation project in American history is now

underway with the pending purchase of the Country Club of Franklin by Franklin's Charge. However, the group needs additional funds to make sure that the restoration of over 100 acres of what was the eastern flank of the battlefield will be a success. Other vulnerable sites include undeveloped core battlefield land along the historic "Antebellum Trail" (Columbia Avenue.) These properties, part of the route of General Hood's army, are part of a gateway to Franklin and some have been individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places. Local residents, government leaders, and preservation professionals are actively seeking ways to ensure the preservation of battlefield land including conservation easements, public funding, and historic overlay zoning.

6. Central Elementary School, Union City, Obion County

Threat: Demolition due to abandonment and neglect

Built in 1936 by the Public Works Administration, Central Elementary School is a fine example of PWA Modern architecture. The school originally housed Union City Grammar School and offered the auditorium and gymnasium for community use. The building closed in 2002. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2001. It has been studied by the MTSU Center for Historic Preservation for its potential reuse community center or a magnet school, but that option appears to have fallen by the wayside for now. Listing would bring much-needed awareness about the significance of its important to Union City. Long term goals include transferring ownership from the city to a foundation and rehabilitation.



7. Matt Gardner Homestead, Elkton, Giles County

Threat: Deterioration

A former slave, Matt Gardner established a 106-acre farm near the town of Elkton in 1880. By 1896, Gardner had built a handsome, two-story frame dwelling (defined by architectural historians as an "I-house") on the property along with several outbuildings to serve his large farming operation. Gardner went on to become a community leader by starting a school for African-American children and issuing credit to his poorer neighbors. Due to its significance in African-American ethnic heritage, agriculture, commerce, and architecture, the property was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1995. Today the buildings on the property are deteriorating. A wood-frame stable has partially collapsed, while the farmhouse is in need of structural repairs. In 2003, the Matt Gardner Homestead was incorporated as a not-for-profit museum with plans to open it as a museum in 2006. The organization has developed

partnerships with local groups like the Elkton Historical Society and the Giles County Chamber of Commerce as well as with other groups such as the Center for Historic Preservation and the TN Civil War National Heritage Area. The organization has also submitted a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities for help in developing the museum. The property has generated much local interest and community support that is exemplified through its incorporation as a museum. However, additional support will be needed to make much-needed repairs to the complex.

8. Mining Sites of Coal Hill, Scott County

Threat: Neglect, Vandalism

The Coal Hill Community sprang up in 1880 after the incorporation of the Crooke Coal Company by J.S. Crooke. In 1884, the company was sold and became the Glenmary Coal and Coke Company. Like many mining towns throughout Appalachia, Coal Hill became a boomtown with segregated company housing for both white and black workers, a company store, churches, mining structures, and cemeteries for mine workers and their families. By 1914, both the coke and coal operations had ended, leaving the town to deteriorate when the company money ran out. Many residents left and those remaining were too poor to properly care for the structures. Those resources that remain to tell the story include a series of coke ovens (ca. 1885), a powder house (ca. 1880), and an African American cemetery. Currently these structures are threatened through deterioration and vandalism. Fortunately, the local residents and current landowners are aware of Coal Hill's unique history. Their long-term goals include having the sites placed on the National Register, connecting the sites with an interpretive walking trail, and rehabilitating the properties. This designation should bring much-needed recognition and will hopefully assist in garnering more local support for the preservation of the sites.

9. Middle Tennessee State University's President's House Murfreesboro, Rutherford County

Threat: Loss of Historic Setting

Constructed in 1911, the President's House was used by the first president of the Middle Tennessee Normal School. Of the three state normal schools created in the early twentieth century, the MTSU President's House is the only remaining original dwelling that has not been razed. The original Presidents' Houses at University of Memphis and East Tennessee State University in Johnson City are no longer standing. An example of Georgian Revival architecture, the house sits on the corner of Tennessee Boulevard and Main Street at the edge of campus. The house itself is not threatened. But there is a strong potential for the loss of its historic setting, including much of the associated yard if a proposed road widening project occurs. As a result of proposed road improvements along Tennessee Blvd., the President's House was determined potentially eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its educational associations and Criterion C for its architecture. It is hoped that this listing will create public awareness that would possibly help maintain its historic setting.

10. Crosstown Sears, Memphis, Shelby County

Threat: Neglect

Opened in 1927, the impressive Art Deco landmark Crosstown Sears represents a significant part of the retail and commercial history of Memphis. The Crosstown Sears served as a regional hub for commercial activity and signified the city's twentieth-century suburban expansion to the east. The Crosstown Sears was the 14th retail store opened in the country and one of the few built in the suburbs in the 1920s. The building is 11-stories tall and held more than 650,000 square feet of retail space. The retail store closed in 1983 with the catalog distribution center closing in 1993. The building has been vacant since its closure. The property is currently for sale and would be a premier candidate for a mixed use commercial/residential structure or as a office/distribution center that could bring jobs to a depressed area of Memphis. The Memphis Landmarks Commission has listed the property on its endangered list. A mixed-use development has been proposed before for the building, but funding was unavailable.