

Preservation group lists Nashville's most endangered historic sites

From historic homes and schools to a post office and neon signs, the inaugural "Nashville Nine" are touted as some of the city's greatest treasures that are most in danger of destruction.

That's according to **Historic Nashville Inc.**, a preservation group that announced Wednesday its 2009 "Nashville Nine," the first of what it says will be an annual list of the most endangered historic properties in Nashville and Davidson County.

The list is aimed at increasing awareness of the the city's historic sites and encouraging preservation at a grassroots level. This year's list features nine historic properties nominated by the public that are threatened by demolition, neglect or development.

"Similar endangered properties lists have been very successful at both the state and national levels in encouraging the preservation of buildings and other sites that are important to everyday people," David Price, board president and Nashville Nine committee chairman, said in a statement. "This new program will focus the efforts of property owners, public officials and preservation advocates on the problems of the listed properties."

The Nashville Nine includes properties dating from the 1790s to the 1960s:

- McCampbell House, 305 Kent Road, Donelson. A two-story, brick Federal-style home built around 1790 by the Hall brothers, this home is one of the few remaining pre-1800 residences in Davidson County.

The McCampbell family acquired the estate in the 1840s. Since the mid-20th century, most of the grounds have subdivided and developed. The owner recently passed away and willed the vacant house to the State of Tennessee for potential use by the State Museum.

- Jackson House, 3500 Brick Church Pike, Bordeaux. A vernacular, Queen Anne-style farmhouse dating to the Victorian Era, the Jackson House was built around 1885.

The home's proximity to Interstate-24, however, has made it a target for

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developers, who plan to subdivide the large estate.

- “Silverdene,” Lawrence Finn House, 931 Main Street, East Nashville. With its Grecian architecture and stately colonnaded facade, this home is a replica of Andrew Jackson's Hermitage mansion. Ireland native Lawrence Finn retired to this mid-19th century, Edgefield estate in the 1860s and lived here with his family until his death in 1881. By 1908, his son-in-law had subdivided the 600-acre Silverdene farm for dozens of new homes.

From 1926 to 1967, the East Nashville landmark was used as a roadside “tourist inn” for automobile travelers along Gallatin Pike; later it was used as “Main Street Salvage.”

The home was vacated a few years ago and recently damaged by a fire. The property is on the market and threatened with demolition.

- Mount Olivet Cemetery Chapel, 1101 Lebanon Pike, Southeast Nashville. Built in phases between the 1870s and 1940s, this Gothic Revival-style building was likely designed by Nashville architect Hugh Cathcart Thompson, best known as designer of the Ryman Auditorium.

It served as the chapel and offices for the historic Mount Olivet Cemetery until it was replaced with a new facility in 1996. The brick building features a cathedral ceiling with original woodwork in the octagonal vestry, two bell towers, a built-in vault and pointed arched windows.

The Tennessee Preservation Trust placed this building on its endangered properties list in 2005, the same year the entire 206-acre cemetery with its 192,000 burials was listed in the National Register of Historic Places. The historic chapel and office is currently vacant and deteriorated.

- U.S. Post Office, 16 Arcade, downtown. Located in the historic Arcade shopping mall in downtown Nashville, this U.S. post office has operated continuously at this location since 1903.

Recently, the local district office announced plans to close this post office branch, resulting in a public outcry in support to keep the location open.

- Charlotte Avenue Church of Christ, 4508 Charlotte Ave., Richland Park. Constructed in 1921, the church is owned by the Charlotte Heights Church of Christ congregation. Built around the same time suburban housing was expanding into this part of the city, the church is an example of 1920s Gothic Revival church architecture in Nashville.

Due to changing demographics of the neighborhood, the congregation wants to vacate the building and build a new church on property it purchased two miles away. The congregation is looking for a new use for their old church property after developers for a Rite Aid Pharmacy dropped plans to build on it amid opposition from neighbors.

The property is currently on the market.

- Home for Aged Masons/Masonic School, R.S. Gass Boulevard and Hart Lane, Inglewood. This three-story limestone building constructed in 1913-1915 and the nearby boy's school are the only

surviving buildings from a larger complex dating to the early 20th century, when the Tennessee Masons provided a campus to house widows, orphans and the aged in the Masonic family. Designed by the Nashville architectural firm of Asmus & Norton, the Colonial Revival-style home is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

The State of Tennessee purchased the property in 1941 for use as a tuberculosis hospital, but it was vacated in the 1990s.

- Historic neon signs, countywide. Popular since the 1930s and '40s, neon signs are affiliated with roadside and commercial architecture both downtown and in the suburbs. These flashy electric signs promoted everything from bowling alleys, restaurants, liquor stores, nightclubs, motels and drive-in theaters.

There are no specific government protections for these landmarks, resulting in the signs being threatened by development or neglect. Examples include the Weiss Liquor sign on Main Street in East Nashville, Krispy Kreme donuts off Murfreesboro Pike and bowling alleys in Madison and Donelson as well as at the Loveless Café, Drake Motel, Elliston Place Soda Shoppe and the Walter Nipper's Nashville Sporting Goods on Eighth Avenue North.

Iconic neon signs in Nashville's skyline promote WKDF and the L&C tower, as well as the guitar-shaped scoreboard at the Nashville Sounds ball field.

- Historic neighborhood schools, countywide. Nashville's first public school opened in 1855 and the county's first public school opened in 1907. Today, the consolidated city-county Metro school system counts 136 schools serving nearly 75,000 students, the 49th largest urban school district in the United States.

While some have been preserved, many of the city's historic public schools are neglected, such as the John B. Ransom School at Elmington Place off West End. This school, dating from 1926, may be demolished for construction of 11 single-family homes.

The school was last used as the Randall's Learning Center before Metro vacated it in 2007 and sold it at auction in 2008.

Originally chartered in 1968 as "The Historic Sites Federation of Tennessee," the nonprofit Historic Nashville works to preserve and revitalize the heritage of Nashville.

Members of the 2009 Nashville Nine committee include Price; vice president Alan Hayes; Patrick McIntyre, executive director of the Tennessee Historical Commission; Claudette Stager, National Register coordinator of the Tennessee Historical Commission; and Tara Mielnik, historic preservation specialist at the Metropolitan Historical Commission.

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