

# 2007 TEN MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES



Preservation Alliance of Minnesota

*"to preserve, protect, and promote Minnesota's historic resources."*



*Preservation Alliance of Minnesota*

## 10 Most Endangered Historic Places 2007

Minnesota's historic schools, one of our earliest and largest historic districts, a former theater, and a significant cultural landscape represent just a few of the diverse sites named to the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota's 2007 list of the "Ten Most Endangered Historic Places." This marks the 14th year the Alliance has released its listing of the state's most endangered historic sites.

The 10 Most Endangered program is designed to spotlight historic sites and buildings that face imminent danger through demolition, neglect, or inappropriate public policy. Through this program the Alliance seeks favorable outcomes that can be achieved through restoration or creative re-use. A number of structures that have appeared on past lists have been saved, including the Ivy Tower and Sears buildings in Minneapolis, the Stillwater lift bridge, Camp Rabideau in Blackduck and the Androy Hotel, Hibbing, to name a few.

A photographic exhibit featuring the 10 Most Endangered Historic Places for 2007—created by Doug Ohman, Pioneer Photography, and sponsored by Kodet Architectural Group—will be displayed at museums, libraries and other public places throughout the state during 2007.

This list is selected from nominations submitted by citizens and groups from around the state. The selection committee included members of the Preservation Alliance; State Historic Preservation Office of the Minnesota Historical Society; the Society of Architectural Historians, Minnesota Chapter; Historic Resources Committee of the American Institute of Architects-Minnesota; and the Minnesota advisors to the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

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## Minnesota's Historic Schools

During the first decades of the twentieth century, attractively designed and well-built schools were constructed in communities across Minnesota, using high-quality materials such as brick and stone, in styles from Classical to Art Deco. Collectively, thousands of students passed through the halls of these schools and, individually, the school buildings served as iconic and functional anchors of their communities. However, due to population shifts, school consolidation and State policy—which promotes the construction of new schools over maintenance and renovation of existing buildings—many of Minnesota's most historic schools are threatened by disuse and demolition.

The endangered structures are located in communities throughout the state, although the schools that most urgently need attention are disproportionately located in Minnesota's small towns and cities. Among these is the Beardsley School, a 20,000 s.f. two-story brick structure, built in 1908, in a Classically-inspired style, with a pedimented central entrance; the Jasper School, a 56,000 s.f. structure constructed of sandstone and quartzite from local quarries, built in 1910, and the nearby three-story Pipestone Central School, constructed of brick and quartzite, in a Collegiate Gothic style and opened in 1919; the Kasson Elementary School, a 30,000 s.f. brick and stone structure built in the Arts and Crafts style in 1917; the Worthington Central School, built in 1931 in the Art Deco style; and the Two Harbors High School, a monumental, 135,000 s.f. structure, constructed in 1939 as a Public Works Administration (P.W.A.) project, with distinctive murals characteristic of its era.

The fate of these schools, all now closed, is varied; their futures depend upon the interests of their current owners and the communities in which they are located. Two of the schools, in Jasper and Pipestone, are owned by a developer who is interested in converting the buildings into condominiums, but the viability of these plans is not clear. Conversion to housing has also been considered for the Worthington Central School, which is owned by the Southwest Minnesota Housing Partnership. However, the structure now appears to be headed for demolition. Discussions are underway in Kasson to re-use the elementary school as a community library, although opinion is split among civic leaders and local residents, with many advocating demolition of the school in favor of construction of a new library building. The Kasson City Council recently voted to demolish the building. The Two Harbors School Board has also voted to demolish its historic high school instead of opting for reuse. Beardsley's historic school faces a similarly uncertain future.

Although the structures described above were selected for inclusion on this year's list, as presently endangered, they are representative of the larger, ongoing issue of Minnesota's rapidly disappearing historic schools. A statewide effort to promote re-use studies, resources to aid communities in maintaining and restoring these structures, and a shift in public policy toward preservation of schools would help the state retain these significant historic public resources.



*Beardsley School, Beardsley*



*Jasper School, Jasper*



*Kasson Elementary School, Kasson*



*Pipestone Central School, Pipestone*



*Two Harbors High School, Two Harbors*



*Worthington Central School, Worthington*

## Ely Community Center, Ely

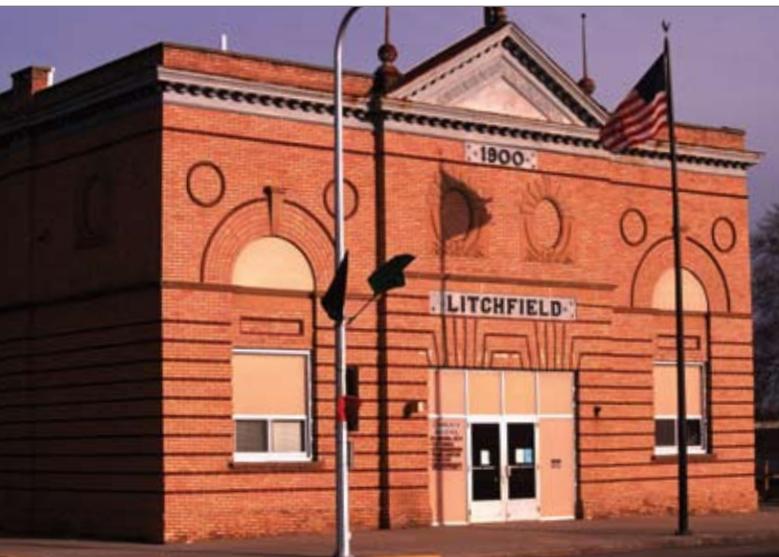
The Ely Community Center was built in 1938 as a project of the P.W.A.—one of the many New Deal agencies of the Great Depression. Architect William Ingemann designed the Streamline Moderne-style building, using Mankato stone, and articulating the structure with large vertical glass block windows, and low relief sculpture characteristic of the era. The building is a fine example of the typical multi-purpose community buildings constructed during the New Deal and houses an auditorium and gymnasium, with a kitchen and locker rooms, as well as the city's library.

The Ely Community Center continues to provide space for a variety of events and activities and plays a vital role in the social, intellectual and artistic life of the city. However, the building's masonry now requires repair, and although the city has pledged \$130,000 for maintenance, the cost of completely renovating the community center has been estimated at several million dollars. While there is strong community support for preserving the building, some have questioned whether the present building should be demolished and replaced with a new community center. With technical assistance and appropriate funding, this structure could continue to serve its vital and historic role as Ely's Community Center.



## Litchfield Opera House, Litchfield

Designed by St. Paul architect William T. Towner in 1900, the Litchfield Opera House stands vacant in the core of the city. The building is constructed of yellow brick, with designs in red brick and terra cotta on its Renaissance Revival façade. It is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Until 1935, the Opera House served as a venue for traveling theater troupes and local musical performances. The building also was the site of the first meeting of the Rural Electric Co-op, as well as the initial meeting of Minnesota's American Legion Auxiliary. Remodeled in 1935 as the Litchfield Community Building, the city-owned structure today suffers from extensive mold problems and underutilization. In 2006, the Litchfield City Council voted to demolish the building, in spite of the presence of an interested buyer. The process of preparing an Environmental Assessment Worksheet (EAW), in advance of demolition, is underway, but the City Council recently voted to participate in a re-use study. With several examples of adapted opera houses and theaters around Minnesota, the Litchfield Opera House remains a viable candidate for re-use.



## State Theater, Owatonna



The State Theater, located in downtown Owatonna, is a one-story Art Deco-style building that opened as a movie theater in 1935. The original interior included a 35' high ceiling, four distinct arches, Art Deco sconces, 1,000 seats, plush curtains and a vaudeville stage. Two small retail spaces are located on each side of the main entry. During the 1970s and 1980s the building was "modernized" through two separate renovations, dividing the auditorium to accommodate three screens. Most of the original features remain in place behind these renovations. The theater closed in 1996 and has since been vacant. In August 2006, the Owatonna Economic Development Authority sent out requests for proposals to redevelop the closed theater but received no responses. An inspection by a structural engineer reported the building to be in good condition, although it requires approximately \$15,000 for asbestos abatement, and up to \$55,000 to replace the roof. Owatonna Main Street has assembled a task force that stands ready to assist a motivated investor in obtaining the necessary grants and low-interest financing required to bring "the State" back to life.

## Waseca Depot, Waseca

This small, well-built depot was constructed of yellow "Chaska brick" in 1913, to serve the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway. As one of two remaining passenger depots in Waseca County, the depot is a rare artifact of the era of railroads that contributed to Waseca's growth and role as county seat. The depot served rail passengers until 1959; most recently it functioned as a liquor store, which was closed in 2000. The City Council of Waseca authorized purchase of the depot that year with the intent of preserving it.

Volunteers donated more than 150 hours to gutting the liquor store and opening up the bricked-in windows of the depot. A grant from the Minnesota Historical Society (MHS) paid for restoration of the depot's exterior woodwork. The project received an additional MHS grant in 2005, the Waseca City Council has pledged another \$20,000, and a non-profit organization has raised another \$10,000. Plans for a full, professional restoration have been prepared. In spite of these efforts, the project has stalled. A former Mayor was a champion of the project, but his two overseas deployments with the National Guard since 2003, difficulty in maintaining volunteer and community interest, and a new Council have caused the project to lose momentum. The current Council may wish to sell the building, which could result in its demolition.

Located just two blocks off the main street in downtown Waseca, and with the recent efforts to stabilize and begin to restore the building, the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway passenger depot is well situated to be renovated and re-used, but is in desperate need of renewed focus.



## St. John the Baptist School, Jordan



St. John the Baptist Catholic School is an historic 2.5-story brick structure built in 1908 on Jordan's downtown main street. It has been vacant since 2004 when its owner, the adjacent St. John the Baptist Catholic Church, constructed a new school building.

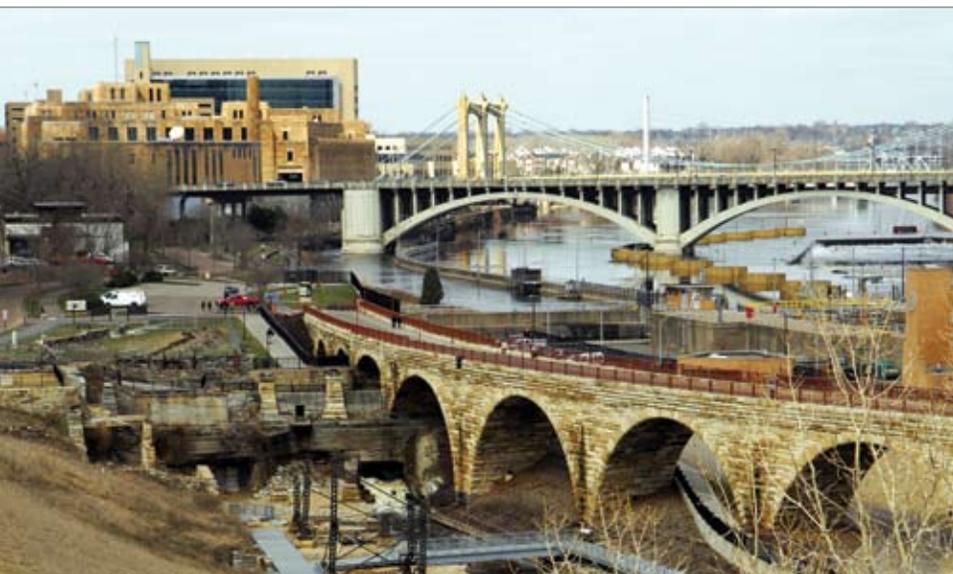
Local residents are interested in re-using the building for a public purpose such as a community center or library or for a private use such as offices or housing. The Church has expressed support for renovation and re-use of the building. However, development pressures may lead to the building's demolition. A retail market analysis conducted in 2002 for the city of Jordan suggested demolishing the historic school building to make way for commercial development in the downtown area. Recently, the site of the school has emerged as the favored location for a new civic center, which would require demolition of the historic building. A re-use study for this building is needed to help the community explore and evaluate potential future uses, options for redevelopment, and costs.

## St. Anthony Falls Historic District, Minneapolis

A sacred site of Dakota and Ojibwe native tribes for generations, the St. Anthony Falls of the Mississippi River were named as such by the French explorer Father Louis Hennepin in 1680. The falls were soon after put into service, providing power for the logging and milling activities that supported the development of the city of Minneapolis. As the city and its industry grew throughout the 19th century—attaining the status as the flour milling capital of the world—civic leaders and, eventually, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, struggled to maintain the falls, under intense use. Then, as industrial activity declined in the 20th century, so did the area surrounding the falls. Today the St. Anthony Falls are both locally and nationally recognized for their historic role in the development of Minneapolis. The St. Anthony Falls Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1971.

Over the past decade, the St. Anthony Falls Historic District—including land and buildings on both the east and west banks of the river—has undergone a dramatic transformation, from

a downtrodden, abandoned industrial area to one of the city's most attractive residential and cultural neighborhoods. The creation of the Mill City Museum and Mill Ruins Park, the transformation of the Stone Arch Bridge for recreational use, and the construction of the new Guthrie Theater and numerous housing projects have brought new life to the historic riverfront. Unfortunately, once again, intense use and development threaten the falls and the historic resources of the district. In the last year several controversial and ill-advised development proposals highlighted the growing problem, drawing attention to the issues of development and the need for careful management of our historic resources, including those at the heart of Minneapolis, in the St. Anthony Falls Historic District.



## Southeast Library, Minneapolis



The Minneapolis Public Library System's Southeast Library is located near Dinkytown and the University of Minnesota's East Bank Campus. The building was designed by renowned Minnesota modernist Ralph Rapson in 1964 as a credit union. In 1967 the building was converted to replace the Pillsbury Library. In the midst of a system-wide Minneapolis Public Library budget crisis, the Southeast branch—along with two other community libraries—was “temporarily” closed on December 29, 2006. Prior to its closure, the library was open limited hours, and the building is in need of maintenance and renovation, including asbestos abatement and a new roof, among other updates. In addition, the site of the Southeast Library is seen as prime real estate for a more intensive use, such as apartments, which would require demolition of the one-story building.

However, since the closure of the Southeast Library the Minneapolis and Hennepin County Library systems have agreed to merge. As part of that process, the City of Minneapolis has requested that the shuttered branches, including the Southeast Library be re-opened. Although a promising development, the fate of the building remains uncertain. In light of the recent demolition of two significant Rapson-designed structures—the Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis and Prince of Peace Lutheran Church in St. Paul—the Minneapolis Heritage Preservation Commission (HPC) is encouraged to consider designation of the Southeast Library, to prompt preservation of this icon of modernism.

## Serbian Cultural Center, South St. Paul

Constructed in 1923 as the Serbian Home, this South St. Paul landmark served as a community gathering space for Serbian immigrants, many of whom worked in the meat packing industry that shaped the local community. The building began to languish in the 1980s as first-generation immigrants aged and their children's ancestral and community interests waned. The building's community significance was recognized with its listing on the National Register of Historic Places in 1992 and soon after the non-profit Serbian Cultural Heritage Center opened in the former Serbian Home. The building was later sold to a private developer, who planned to convert the building to condominiums, but the project stalled, due to funding and zoning limitations. Now, with a large hole in its roof and lacking heat, the building is rapidly deteriorating. Renewed interest in the Serbian Home could identify a new owner that would respect the building's significance while integrating a new use beneficial to the community.



The Mississippi River Valley at St. Paul is a historic landscape defined by the interweaving of its unique physical character and the history that has occurred within and in response to that landscape. Uninterrupted views extending one-half to over seven miles include high bluffs, the long, wide valley and the world-renowned Mississippi River. Since the era of ancient Hopewell Indian culture, the people who lived and worked within the valley have created their space, buildings and transportation patterns in response to the natural landscape. Their response to the benefits and limitations has been imprinted upon the land, defining the built and natural landscape of the valley.

Numerous planning and zoning documents developed by various government agencies and community groups exist to regulate, but not stop, the development of the valley. However, development pressure threatens to dramatically change the balance of human and natural activity in the valley and alter historic public view sheds. Two buildings have already been constructed, one is underway, and yet another massive project is proposed that would have tremendous impacts on the appearance and ecology of the Mississippi River Valley in St. Paul. Adherence to existing planning documents and guidelines would serve to encourage development that is appropriate to this unique setting.

Far from being a matter of local interest, the designation of the valley by the National Park Service as the Mississippi National River and Recreation Area makes this landscape a national priority. The St. Paul Mississippi River Valley contains sites with stories about ancient American Indians, American exploration and settlement, the history of early industries, the development of the area's transportation system and more. Our ability to understand these histories depends upon the essential character of the landscape remaining intact.



### What Can I Do?

Take the next step to help preserve any or all of these historic places:

- ✦ Visit [www.mnpreservation.org](http://www.mnpreservation.org) for more information about how you can help save Minnesota's endangered properties.
- ✦ Call the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota at 651-293-9047 or email [info@mnpreservation.org](mailto:info@mnpreservation.org) with suggestions or for volunteer opportunities.
- ✦ Support the Preservation Alliance of Minnesota with a donation or by becoming a member. Make a donation or become a member online at [www.mnpreservation.org](http://www.mnpreservation.org).