

Historic sites may soon be history, group warns

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A nonprofit preservation group released a list today of what it considers New Jersey's most endangered historic sites, including a 202-year-old Somerset County homestead at risk of facing a wrecking ball.

The group, Preservation New Jersey, planned to unveil its annual "Top 10" list today during a rally in front of the Statehouse in Trenton as part of an effort to draw attention to threats to important sites in the state, said Ron Emrich, the nonprofit organization's president.



James Dunster Homestead in Bernardsville

Included on the list is the James Dunster Homestead in Bernardsville. It was the home of the Dunster family from 1801 to 1891, when it was purchased by pharmaceutical magnate Edward R. Squibb. The Squibb family sold the house in 2006, and the property is presently up for sale as "land only." Emrich said the house appears to be structurally sound with its pegged attic beams and ground-floor walk-in fireplace intact.

Being named to the list does not ensure preservation. It's the group's way of calling attention to what they see as urgent needs for preservation.

The other sites on this year's list include:

- Taylor Iron & Steel Co. mill buildings, High Bridge, Hunterdon County: It was once part of the Union Forge Iron Works, which supplied munitions for every war from the Revolution to Korea. It includes a three-story, stone building that was once the centerpiece of the iron works. Emrich said High Bridge Borough purchased the mill to preserve it, but has no money available to stabilize or restore the buildings.
- Waterloo Village, Byram Township: Located within Allamuchy Mountain State Park, this former hamlet was closed as a tourist and arts attraction in October after the state canceled the lease to run the village. The lease was held by the Waterloo Foundation for the Arts for 40 years and was operating at a deficit. "The village currently stands vacant," Emrich said. "Its historic buildings and irreplaceable canal resources are deteriorating and vulnerable to vandalism. It will be expensive to revive Waterloo ..."

- Bell Labs, Holmdel: The birthplace of wireless technology, where a developer, Preferred Real Estate Investments, has gutted the interior and plans to surround what remains of the building with housing.
- Old homes across the state: The demolition of smaller, older houses in towns statewide to make way for larger ones. The National Trust for Historic Preservation has identified Alpine, Florham Park and Monmouth Beach as among the towns where so-called "bash and build" is a concern. Described as a destructive epidemic eroding the historical character of communities, transforming neighborhoods and tearing social fabric.
- Gulick House, Lawrence: An exceptionally high style, 19th century Italianate house that preservationists fear is endangered. Several developers have proposed building an assisted living facility on the property and some plans call for demolishing the house.
- Biddle Mansion, Riverton: An 1876 Second Empire-style house and landmark which is neglected, deteriorating and facing possible demolition to clear the valuable Delaware River waterfront land it occupies.
- T. Thomas Fortune House, Red Bank: A National Historic Landmark that was the 12-room turn of the 20th century home of Timothy Thomas Fortune, an important black journalist and activist. The house's future is uncertain because it stands in the middle of the Red Bank business district, which is experiencing tremendous growth.
- Naugle House, Fairlawn: Built no later than the 1750s, the charming and unique Dutch stone house is built into a hillside near the Saddle River. The Marquis de Lafayette visited the house in 1824. The house is vacant and deteriorating and is threatened by a plan to build townhouses adjacent to it.
- Temple Emanuel, Paterson: Described as an "exuberant" limestone and brick Art Deco landmark that was the centerpiece of the city's Jewish community in Eastside Park from 1929 to the 1980s. The congregation has built a new temple in Franklin Lakes and transferred Temple Emanuel's stained glass windows. Preservations worry the structural integrity of the temple has been compromised.

Contributed by Tom Hester