

# BGT's 2015 Endangered List: *Eleven in their Eleventh Hour*

The Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit advocate for historic preservation that strives to protect, revitalize and promote the special historic places in our Central Kentucky communities to enhance the quality of life for future generations. The Blue Grass Trust is guided by three tenets – education, service and advocacy.

Since saving the Huns-Morgan House from demolition in 1955, the Blue Grass Trust has sought to bring awareness to historic properties that are threatened. In 1999, the Blue Grass Trust initiated its first-ever "Eleven in Their Eleventh Hour," a list that brings attention to important properties with structural or uncertain futures. Spotlights these endangered properties is one of two major preservation-related programs the BGT conducts. The "Eleven in their Eleventh Hour" is

released in February; and in June, the Trust presents historic preservation awards in concert with its annual member day meeting. The award recognizes leading preservationists and their projects. The goals of both of these vital programs is to fulfill the Blue Grass Trust's mission of education, service and advocacy in preservation by bringing attention to Central Kentucky's historic resources.

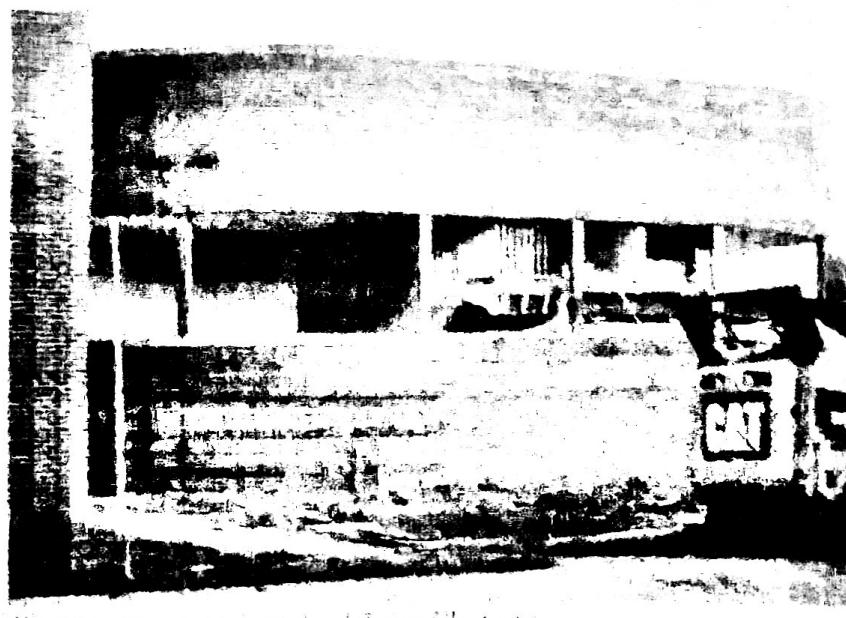
The "Eleven in Their Eleventh Hour" list highlights which properties and how their situations speak to larger preservation issues in the Bluegrass. The goal of the list is to create a progressive dialogue that moves toward positive long-term solutions. The reasons used for selecting the properties include, but are not limited to, significance, likelihood of demolition, condition of structure, or architectural significance.

In the past few years, the BGT's "Eleven in Their Eleventh Hour" has had successes and disappointments, becoming an excellent barometer for preservation-related issues in the Bluegrass. Of the 11 properties listed in 2013, for example, seven have been saved or had positive movement (and none have been demolished). On the other hand, the 2014 "Eleven in Their Eleventh Hour," which focused on endangered historic resources on the University of Kentucky's campus, did not see significant positive movement in terms of saving structures (in fact, 5 of the 11 listed have been demolished, something expounded on in an editorial on page 18 in this issue of *Preservation Matters*). Importantly though, the 2014 list brought attention to historic resources on UK's campus – highlighting them as part of Lexington's history – as well as the state of Mid-Century Modern structures in Lexington.

Coupled with on-the-ground preservation work, the barometer provided by the endangered list has helped inform us that there must be a positive culmination of

people and opportunity; often in the form of funding, to save our endangered historic resources. For any preservation project to be successful, you need people that care about saving our heritage; in the case of endangered properties that have little to

its for buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places, public-private partnerships that seek to revitalize urban areas, and nonprofit revolving funds (used when a nonprofit purchases an at-risk building, provides a level of protection and then sells it, rolling any profit back into the fund). These tools help provide opportunities to save historic places that might not otherwise exist.



University of Kentucky Lexington Residential Hall

no hope, partnerships become key. And while opportunities to save historic places often come in different forms, there is almost undoubtedly the need for funding – without the proper financial resources, saving places that matter is difficult. Opportunities for funding come in various forms, with some of the most common tools being historic preservation tax cred-

Though not to the same extent, the Trust's recent work to save historic properties mirrors trends proven by other successful programs like the nationally celebrated Over-the-Rhine neighborhood in Cincinnati, OH, and the extensive restoration work done by Knox Heritage in Knoxville, TN. These programs often utilize revolving funds and public-private partnerships regularly working with individuals whose main goal may only have historic preservation as a by-product.

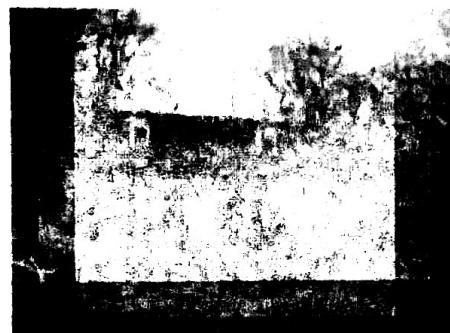
The Blue Grass Trust has worked hard to create partnerships and opportunities to find ways to preserve endangered structures. During the BGT's work to save 543 West Third Street in Lexington and the Willis Green House in Danville,

were able to partner with individuals and groups that cared enough about these sites to be their last hope. For 543 West Third Street, PNC Bank and the BGT saw an opportunity to partner and provide a positive outcome for a critical situation. For the Willis Green House, opportunity came in the form of an absolute auction to sell the house (which had been listed as endangered for multiple years) as well as a consortium that included the BGT, James Harrod Trust, Crutcher Family Foundation and the First Southern Foundation; this consortium provided enough funding to purchase the house until it could be sold in August 2014 to preservation-sympathetic buyers Thad and Jane Overmyer.

The Blue Grass Trust strives daily to fulfill our mission of education, service and advocacy, and the release each winter of our annual "Eleven in Their Eleventh

broadening the traditional parameters of the endangered list. The eleven counties with nominations are (with the number of nominations for each county listed in parentheses): Bourbon (2), Boyle (2), Clark (1), Fayette (1), Franklin (2), Harrison (1), Jessamine (1), Madison (1), Mercer (1), Scott (2) and Woodford (1).

Where applicable, the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation has notified property owners via letter.



Cedar Grove - Bourbon County

#### Bourbon County - Cedar Grove (*Bethlehem Road, Paris*) and John & John T. Redmon House (*Ruddles Mills Road, Paris*)

The two properties nominated for Bourbon County have more than a few similarities, including a threat of demolition by neglect. Located in Paris, KY, Cedar Grove (Bethlehem Road) and the John & John T. Redmon House (Ruddles Mills Road) are early 19th century houses that are architecturally significant; both have had on-and-off renovations over the years. Additionally, Cedar Grove, also known as Brooklawn Farm, has lost several significant early outbuildings. The circa 1818 John & John T. Redmon House has a steep roof more often found in Virginia than Kentucky and has lost its original one-story wings. Though both buildings are vacant, they have recently undergone partial renovations and the BGT believes these structures could still be restored.

#### Boyle County - Citizens National Bank (*305 West Main Street, downtown Danville*) and Dr. Polk House, (*331 South Buell Street, downtown Perryville*)

The two nominations for Boyle County are found in very different cities, but

share similar stories and threats. Both the Citizens National Bank in downtown Danville and the Dr. Polk House in downtown Perryville have been vacant for an extended period of time, experiencing serious neglect. They are also structures that significantly contribute to the historic fabric of their respective downtowns.

Mostly empty for two-plus years, the Citizens National Bank building at 305 West Main Street was built in 1865 with a double storefront that housed First National Bank of Danville and a drug store. Originally Italianate in style, the building was remodeled in 1916 in the Neo-Classical Style, then subdivided in the late-1900s. Currently bank-owned (and listed for \$399,000), the building has roof leaks, water damage and mold. In addition to being threatened by neglect, the building shares walls with both neighboring buildings, and, if demolition or partial demolition becomes necessary, it could adversely effect their structures.



The Dr. Polk House - Boyle County

The Dr. Polk House at 331 South Buell Street in Perryville sits across from Merchants' Row and is arguably the historic landmark most in need of restoration in the downtown. Built in 1830 as a simple Greek Revival house with two chimneys and two front doors, the structure was purchased by Dr. Polk in 1850. A graduate of Transylvania University, he was the primary caretaker of wounded from the Battle of Perryville and his 1867 autobiography details the gruesome battlefield. Although it had some renovations in the early 1990s, the structure has been vacant for more than 20 years. It has been owned by the City of Perryville since 2001.

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Clark County - Indian Old Fields

Indian Old Fields in Clark County was the location of Eskippakithiki, the last known Native American town in what became Kentucky. Located on Lewis Evans' 1755 map of Middle British Colonies, this highly important site was significantly impacted during construction of a new interchange (which opened September 2014) for the Mountain Parkway crossing KY 974 near the center of the Indian Old Fields. The Kentucky Heritage Council noted in 2010 that "Indian Old Fields," is a historic and

prehistoric archaeological district of profound importance,\* with 50 significant prehistoric archaeological sites identified within 2 kilometers of the interchange. These sites cover the Archaic Period (8000-1000 BC), Woodland Period (1000 B.C. -1000 AD) and Adena Period (1000-1750 AD), with several listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These include villages, Indian fort earthworks, mounds, sacred circles and stone graves. The site also has substantial ties to the famous Shawnee Chief Cathecassa or Black Hoof, Daniel Boone, and trader John Finley.

With the new \$8.5 million dollar interchange now open, there are significant concerns that these sites will be under threat from pressure to further develop the area.

#### Fayette County - Modern Structures

The Blue Grass Trust's 2014 "Eleven in Their Eleventh Hour" focused on the historic resources at the University of Kentucky. Many of those included on the list (and most of those demolished) were Modern buildings designed by locally renowned architect Ernst Johnson. Research into Johnson's work by the BGT and others such as architects Sarah House Tate and Dr. Robert Kelley was joined with education and advocacy programming focused on his architecture and legacy as a master of Modernism. This research and programming led to other efforts by

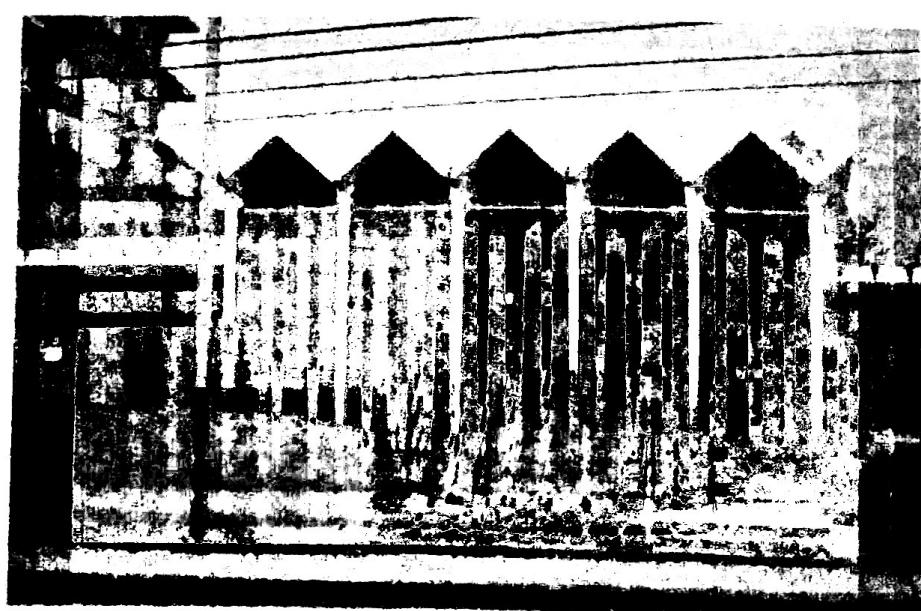
the Blue Grass Trust, namely working to educate the public on the historic value of mid-century architecture.

In our continued education and advocacy effort surrounding these structures, the Blue Grass Trust lists Fayette County's mid-century Modern architecture as endangered. Often viewed as not old enough or not part of the traditional early fabric of Lexington and surrounding areas, the Modern buildings of the 1940s, 50s and 60s are being substantially and unrecognizably altered or demolished. It is important to recognize that buildings 50 years of age are eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, a length of time deemed appropriate by the authors of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 for reflection on an era's importance.



Franklin County -the Old YMCA (104 Bridge Street, downtown Frankfort) and the Blanton-Crutcher Farm (Jett, KY)

In Franklin County, two buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places were nominated to the Blue Grass Trust for Historic Preservation's 2015 Endangered List. One, the Old YMCA in downtown Frankfort, faces potential demolition; the other, the Blanton-Crutcher Farm in Jett, KY, is slowly deteriorating from neglect. Both



Blanton-Crutcher Farm - Franklin County

structures are worth saving and eligible for the Kentucky Historic Preservation Tax Credit (the Old YMCA is also eligible for the Federal Historic Rehabilitation Tax Credit, which is for commercial structures).



Blanton-Crutzer Farm - Franklin County

Built in 1911, the Old YMCA at 104 Bridge Street in Frankfort was designed by Frankfort architect Leo Oberwarth and his son in the Beaux Arts style. It was a state-of-the-art facility featuring a gymnasium, indoor swimming pool, bowling alley, meeting rooms and guest quarters. Though lacking proper maintenance since it was sold by the YMCA organization in 1971, the building still maintains much of its architectural character. Even though the building is owned by a local developer hoping to transform it into a boutique hotel, there is a push by the city of Frankfort to demolish this structure that, if saved, could be a transformative project in our capital city.

Just down the road from Frankfort, sits the Blanton-Crutzer Farm in Jett, KY, which was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1974. (Today, it is also known as Maryland Farm; in the 19th century, it was called Fairview Farm because of its wonderful view.) On the farm is an architecturally and historically significant circa 1796 house built by Carter

Blanton, a prominent member of the Jett farming community. In 1831, Blanton sold the farm to his nephew, Richard Crutcher, the son of Reverend Isaac Crutcher and Blanton's sister, Nancy Blanton Crutcher. The 1974 National Register nomination for the farm notes: "The Crutchers were excellent farmers. Three generations of the family farmed the land and made improvements on the house until 1919 when the property was sold. It has remained a working farm with a large farmhouse, at its center, that has evolved over 180 years of active occupation." In the 1880s, Washington Crutcher significantly increased the size of the house, turning it into the Victorian house that stands today (although the porches were removed due to deterioration and other modern features have been added).

#### Harrison County - the Handy House aka Ridgeway (off of US 62 in Cynthiana)

The Handy House—also known as Ridgeway—is located on US 62 in Cynthiana, KY. The nearly 200-year-old house was



The Handy House - Harrison County

built in 1817 by Colonel William Brown, a United States Congressman and War of 1812 veteran. The farm and Federal-style house were also owned by Dr. Joel Frazer, namesake of Camp Frazer, a Union camp during the American Civil War. In the 1880s, the house underwent significant renovations by W. T. Handy, the owner from 1883-1916 and for whom the house remains named.

The Handy House checks almost every box when it comes to saving a structure: an architecturally and historically important house in good enough shape to rehabili-

tate, a listing on the National Register of Historic Places, qualification for the Kentucky Historic Preservation Tax Credit, and a group—the Harrison County Heritage Council and a descendant of the original owner—willing to take on the project. Unfortunately, the Handy House is jointly owned between the city and the county. County magistrates voted to tear it down, and the city opted not to vote on it with the hopes that the new council will come to a deal with the Harrison County Heritage Council, which has offered to purchase and restore the house as a community center.

#### Jessamine County - Court Row (104, 105, 113 Court Row in downtown Nicholasville)

Completed in 1881, Nicholasville's Court Row is located right next to the Jessamine County Courthouse. Italianate



Court Row - Nicholasville



Court Row - Nicholasville

in design and largely unchanged exterior-wise, Court Row is one of the most significant and substantial structures in downtown Nicholasville.

In a broad context, the listing of Court Row is a comment on the status of all the historic resources in downtown Nicholasville. Several threats exist that are culminating in drastic changes to the fabric

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of the town. Foremost, Nicholasville failed in 2013 to pass its first historic district, an overlay that would have encompassed the majority of the downtown and helped to regulate demolition and development. Then, within the past few months, two historic structures were demolished, including the Lady Sterling House, an 1804 log cabin very close to the urban core. Additionally, Nicholasville is on the 'short list' for a new judicial center, the location of which has yet to be determined but will almost certainly have an effect on the downtown. Together, these threats present the potential for the loss of significant portions of Nicholasville's charming downtown.

#### **Madison County - Downtown Richmond**

Preservation has had a lot of positive movement in Richmond. The Madison County Historical Society is active; the beautiful Irvinton House Museum is city-owned and the location of the Richmond Visitor's Center;



*Miller House at 600 Main Street, Richmond - Photo Credit: Richmond Register*

and the downtown contains a local historic district. Like most local historic districts (also known as H-1 overlays), though, the Downtown Richmond Historic District protects historic buildings and sites that are privately owned. That means that city- and county-owned sites are exempt from the H-1 regulations.

The potential damaging effects of this can already be seen. In February 2013, downtown Richmond lost the Miller House and the Old Creamery, two of its most historic buildings. Both were in the Downtown Richmond Historic District and on the National Register of Historic Places. Owned by the county, the buildings were demolished with the hopes of constructing

a minimum-security prison on the site that would replicate the exterior facade of the Miller House, according to Madison Judge/Executive Kent Clark. There are several other historic sites in the urban core that are owned by either the city or the county, leading to worry about the state of preservation in Richmond's downtown.

#### **Mercer County - Walnut Hall**

(*Warwick Pike, Harrodsburg*)

Built circa 1850 by David W. Thompson, Walnut Hall is one of Mercer County's grand Greek Revival houses. A successful planter and native of Mercer County, Thompson left the house and 287 acres of farmland to his daughter, Sue Helm, upon his death in 1865. In 1978, Walnut Hall was listed on the National Register of Historic Places along with two other important and similar Mercer County Greek Revival houses: Lynnwood (off KY Highway 33 near the border of Mercer and Boyle Counties) and Glenworth (off Buster Pike).

The James Harrod Trust has notified the Blue Grass Trust that the house may be under threat of demolition, as it is owned by



*Walnut Hall - Mercer County*

a prominent Central Kentucky developer known to have bulldozed several other important historic buildings.

#### **Scott County - Choctaw Indian Academy**

(*Blue Springs, near Stamping Ground*)

For Scott County, located in Blue Springs, KY, off Route 227 near Stamping Ground, the Choctaw Indian Academy was created in 1818 on the farm of

Colonel Richard M. Johnson, who served as Vice President of the United States under Martin Van Buren (1837-1841). The Academy was created using Federal funding and was intended to provide a tra-



*Choctaw Indian Academy - Scott County*

ditional European-American education for Native Americans boys. (It was one of only two government schools operated by the Department of War – the other being West Point.) Originally consisting of five structures built prior to 1825, only one building—thought to be a dormitory—remains. By 1826, more than 100 boys were attending the school, becoming well enough known to be visited by the Marquis de Lafayette in 1825. The school was relocated to White Sulphur Springs (also a farm owned by Colonel Johnson) in 1831. The site was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1972.

#### **Woodford County - Versailles High School**

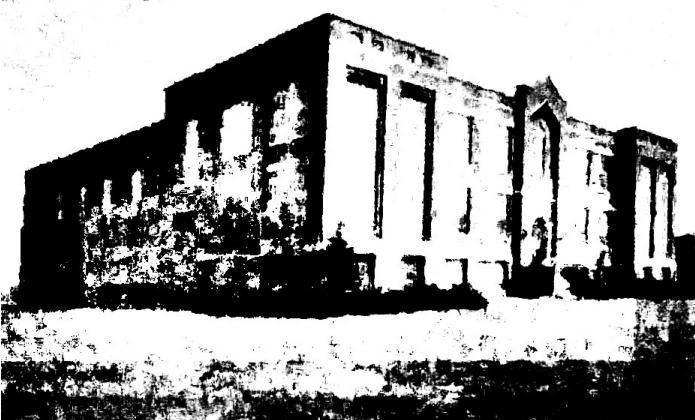
Located on the corner of Maple Street and Lexington Pike in Versailles, the Versailles High School is a substantial structure built in 1928. The building operated as a high school for 35 years before becoming the Woodford County Junior High in 1963, operating as a middle school until being shuttered in 2005. After 77 years of continuous operation, the building has been empty for nearly 10 years.

With no known maintenance or preservation plan, concern exists that the historic Versailles High School will deteriorate from neglect and, ultimately, be demolished.

## Conclusion

The BGT's 2015 "Eleven in Their Eleventh Hour" aims to provide awareness with the goal of bringing people together and creating opportunities for these endangered sites. With an increasingly strong economy, opportunities to partner for creative solutions continue to grow. Recognition that preserving our heritage has significant cultural and economic impacts has served to bolster the case for supporting historic preservation. Pro-preservation arguments abound, ranging from higher-paying construction jobs to increased tourism revenue to urban revitalization to inherent parallels with the powerful local and "green" movements. Perhaps most importantly, historic preservation has been able to find diverse, across-the-aisle support in uncertain political times.

We see the possibility for positive success for each site listed, and hope that individuals, groups and governments will step up to save these special historic places that provide an authentic sense of place for the Bluegrass. [1]



Roxboro High School - Harford County



Chapel Hill Academy - Fayette County



Catawba Indian Academy - Sumter County