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HISTORIC NASHVILLE ANNOUNCES 2013 NASHVILLE NINE

Historic Nashville Inc. reveals the nine most threatened properties in Davidson County during a press conference at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts

NASHVILLE, TN, Sept. 30, 2013 – A press conference will be held Monday, Sept. 30, 2013 at 10:30 a.m. at the Frist Center for the Visual Arts to reveal Historic Nashville’s annual Nashville Nine. The list represents nine historic properties threatened by demolition, neglect or development. Historic Nashville, Inc. (HNI) will announce the 2013 Nashville Nine and underscore the importance of local historic preservation.

This year’s Nashville Nine press conference will take place at the First Center for the Visual Arts. Located at 919 Broadway in the heart of downtown, the Frist Center is one of the most iconic buildings in Nashville, making it an appropriate venue for HNI’s announcement of the city’s annual list of threatened and endangered properties. The Frist Center is celebrated nationally for its creative re-use of an historic post office (constructed in 1933-34) and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

This year marks the fifth year that HNI has solicited input from the public for the Nashville Nine program. Throughout the year, Historic Nashville focuses its advocacy efforts on these locations as well as Nashville properties listed in previous years that are in need of protection. Over the years, Historic Nashville has successfully advocated for the preservation of landmarks that are “unmistakably Nashville” such as the Ryman Auditorium, Union Station and the Hermitage Hotel. The work HNI does is vital to preserving the history and vitality of Nashville and is an essential part of the community.

“The Nashville Nine represents the cares and concerns of our community,” said Melissa Wyllie, Historic Nashville president. “These are the places that Nashvillians believe are the most threatened, the most likely to be lost due to demolition or neglect. The Nashville Nine is our response to the community’s concern, and it is the driving force behind our advocacy and annual education programs.”

The 2013 Nashville Nine list highlights nine historically significant properties that make Nashville a great place to live, work and play. Nominated by the public, the 2013 list contains the emerging importance of Nashville’s mid-century modern architecture, demonstrated by the listing of five post-war properties on this year’s list. Considered by many to be cold and

unappealing, this style is representative of the optimism that followed the end of World War II for a better and brighter America. Nashville was no exception as exhibited by many of the properties on this year's Nashville Nine list.

Descriptions include a brief history of the properties and current threats. Throughout the year, Historic Nashville will work with the owners, government agencies, and public to educate, evaluate and create solutions for preserving these important elements of Nashville's unique history.

The Historic Nashville 2013 Nashville Nine

Cordell Hull State Office Building (downtown)



The Cordell Hull Building was constructed in 1952-1954 to house the rapidly growing State Government offices following World War II. One of the best examples of mid-century modern office architecture in the state, the Cordell Hull State Office Building was designed by the Nashville-based architectural firm of Hart and McBryde. The building's form is three parallel office towers connected by a perpendicular central tower. Faced with limestone, the Cordell Hull Building's

interior public spaces feature now-rare Tennessee pink marble on the walls. The building was named in honor of one of Tennessee's premier 20th century statesmen, Secretary of State Cordell Hull of Byrdstown. (National Register-eligible)

THREAT: The State of Tennessee and Governor Haslam's office has announced preliminary plans for demolition of the building for green space. Those plans are currently being reassessed, but the future of the building remains in the balance.

Ben West Library (downtown)

The Ben West Library was designed by Nashville architect Bruce Crabtree. The structure and design represents a stunning example of Crabtree's work, combining Nashville's affinity for classically-derived architecture with the spirit of modern architecture of the mid-century period. Following construction of the new Main Branch of the Nashville Public Library in 2001, the vacated library building was used as Council Chambers and



offices of the Mayor temporarily during the rehabilitation of the historic Davidson County Courthouse. The building has been vacant for nearly a decade except for a brief usage following the 2010 flood. (National Register-eligible)

THREAT: Although a planned land swap between Metro and the State of Tennessee – which would have resulted in the demolition of the Ben West Library for surface parking – has fallen through, this landmark building remains vacant. Metro Nashville should find an alternate use for this building and site which meets the criteria set forth by the deed of gift, to include a library.

Geist House & Blacksmith Shop (Germantown)

The Geist House & Blacksmith Shop has been relisted for the third time in five years. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980 and consists of three buildings:

- c. 1891, brick, one story, tin-roofed, shotgun house - one room wide and three rooms deep with basement kitchen,
- c. 1900 shop building - two story brick structure with flat roof
- c. 1908 house - brick, two story, American foursquare



Historic Nashville, Inc. continues to voice its concern over this unique historic landmark. According to an entry in *The Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture* (<http://bit.ly/19leYSB>):

“Until it closed its doors in 2006, the John Geist and Sons Blacksmith Shop was thought to be Nashville’s oldest business in continuous family ownership and operation. From 1886 to 2006, three generations of Geists shod horses, crafted ornamental ironwork, and, in later years, repaired lawnmowers from the same location on Jefferson Street. The Geist properties, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, are both a rare vestige of Nashville’s blacksmith trade and a testament to the hard work of its German settlers.”

The significance of this property derives from association with the Geist family business and the German-American community of North Nashville. After emigrating from Germany in 1874, John Geist, Sr., began his business in 1884 and purchased the property in 1886. As the business and family grew, the group of buildings now standing developed. Buildings and business were passed to his sons, John Jr., and George in 1911 and later to John, Jr.’s son, George and his siblings. It was the last remaining blacksmith shop in Nashville when it was listed.

THREAT: This property has recently come under new ownership. The new owner(s) and their intentions for the property are unknown. The threat to the Geist House is elevated and significant. Beyond the evident maintenance issues and uncertainty over the future of this property, recent news reports indicate that new development including a new minor-league baseball stadium might border or encompass this site. HNI hopes that developers of the new

stadium complex and those subsequently developing the surrounding areas will take into account this historic property and include these historic buildings within the new development, making use of tax credits and preservation easements to ensure the future stability of these buildings. The proposed ballpark also endangered potential prehistoric and historic archaeological sites identified by the Tennessee Division of Archaeology.

Kellytown Archaeological Site (Forest Hills)

Located on privately-owned property zoned for commercial development near the Davidson-Williamson County border, the Kellytown site is one of the more significant archaeological sites in Middle Tennessee. The following information was provided by the City of Forest Hills website (<http://bit.ly/15nTsPw>):



“From February through June 1999, Gary Barker, a TDOT archaeologist, conducted an investigation of the site. What he discovered was astounding. In the roughly 30 feet of right-of-way, he found the evidence of 12 structures, sections of two palisade lines with bastions, seven human graves, and domestic cultural deposits associated with a Mississippian Period village. (The Mississippian Period was approximately from A.D. 950 to 1450.) Several of these artifacts are now on display at the Forest Hills City Hall. They include bowls in the shape of frogs, earrings, daub walls, and remnants of corn and nuts. Mr. Barker named the site ‘Kellytown’ in honor of the Kelly family who owned the property at the time. It is clear that a large part of the ‘Kellytown’ village remains and is still capable of yielding important information about the era. Michael Moore, the Tennessee State archaeologist, states, ‘Archaeological sites, and especially significant sites such as Kellytown, comprise non-renewable resources that are disappearing at a rapid rate. Protection of the intact archaeological features at Kellytown (including human burials) could be accomplished by developing the site into a park or greenspace.’”

THREAT: Development pressure

Naval Building at Shelby Park (East Nashville)



An extremely unique architectural landmark in East Nashville, the Naval Building was built by architect Edwin Keeble in the late 1940s as recruitment offices for the US Naval Reserve. At its opening in 1949, the *Nashville Banner* described the building: “The bow of the building, which looks onto the Cumberland River, is built to resemble the nose of a heavy warship, ploughing through the waters – complete even to a captain’s bridge above prow, with a signal-hoist and yardarm.” (*Banner*, 9 March 1949)

Following decommissioning in the late 2000s, Metro Parks acquired the building immediately adjacent to Shelby Park. The building suffered damage following the 2010 floods, and has remained vacant for years. This architecturally unique structure is important to the history of Nashville, and Metro Parks is currently planning hazmat remediation for potential lease of a portion of the Naval Building to the Nashville Rowing Club. (Listed in the National Register)

THREAT: The major threat to this building had been deferred maintenance and lack of use. Metro Parks is to be commended for their work to preserve and maintain this building after their acquisition of the property, and HNI hopes to work with Metro Parks to find a suitable long-term use for this building. It is our hope that continued advocacy and education about this historically significant building will make sure the building remains a priority.

Methodist Publishing House office (downtown)

The United Methodist Publishing House is one of the oldest continuously-operating businesses in Nashville. In 1957, this five-story concrete and steel building was constructed to the east of the original plant to house the offices of the publishing house. The two buildings were connected via a brick wing. The 1957 addition is an example of mid-century modern architecture and has a first floor of granite veneer and entrances with ca.1990 aluminum and glass doors. The upper façade has an exterior of limestone panels framing single-light aluminum and glass windows divided by aluminum piers. The window glass is tinted green. The Publishing House is moving operations and the site has been sold to a property development company who is proposing to demolish this mid-century modern landmark for a mixed-use residential/commercial/hotel development on the same site.



THREAT: Demolition for redevelopment

Gossett Building (downtown almost Midtown)



This two-story commercial building on Church Street is a wonderful and unique example of mid-century commercial architecture in Nashville. According to tax records, M.T. Gossett Building was built around 1949 by Maurice Thomas "M.T." Gossett (1903-1996). Gossett was longtime president of a company that sold air conditioning, refrigeration, heating, and industrial supplies from this building.

In 1931, Gossett invented and received a U.S. Patent for a flush valve repairing tool. The current owners purchased the now vacant building in 1997. Most people will remember it as the location of the Performance Studios Costumes a few years back. It retains an original neon sign with "M.T. Gossett Bldg." spelled out. There is also a sign on the building stating it is a "fallout shelter."

THREAT: Uncertain future, sale, redevelopment

Roxy Theater (North Inglewood)

The Roxy Theater on Meridian Street in North Edgefield is a part of an underutilized neighborhood commercial node that once included a pharmacy, grocery, and other retail space. The Roxy operated from 1937-1959. Segregated for whites only, the Roxy closed in 1959 before Nashville's theaters were integrated. According to an article in *The East Nashvillian* (<http://bit.ly/1f2eS8p>), "...the Roxy Theater opened in late 1937 in a former drugstore facing Wilburn Street. Located on a streetcar route that ran down Meridian, the drugstore building dated from 1914."



Since its closing, the Roxy has been used for church services and "a self-service Laundromat called the Roxy Speedwash." It has also been used for storage, a short-lived music studio, a performance center, daycare for children, but now remains unused. Mired in legal and financial troubles, the property has been vacant for several years.

THREAT: Uncertain future; deferred maintenance

C.E. McGruder Center at historic John Early School (North Nashville)



Historic Nashville, Inc. has continued its advocacy work around the future of historic neighborhood schools, especially after they are no longer used as schools. Designed by Nashville architect Granberry Jackson, the John Early School was constructed in 1935, and named for a prominent Nashville businessman and philanthropist. The "old" John Early School, a New Deal era school, was replaced with a new building in Metro Center. The old building sat vacant and deteriorating until the Matthew Walker Comprehensive Health Center/C.E.

McGruder Family Resource Center acquired the property. However, the deteriorating building keeps the full benefits of the property from

being recognized by the community. The Wallace/McGruder organization has a big vision for the future of this neighborhood center, but there is very little funding to make that vision a reality for this underserved Nashville neighborhood. You can find more information on the programs of the McGruder center here <http://bit.ly/hPW2jk>. The former school is a North Nashville landmark. (Potentially eligible for the National Register)

THREAT: Deferred maintenance, lack of funding.

About Historic Nashville, Inc.

Established in 1968 and renamed in 1975, Historic Nashville, Inc. (HNI) is a nonprofit 501(c)3 membership organization with the mission to promote and preserve the historic places that make Nashville unique. Over the years, HNI has successfully advocated for the preservation of such historic places the Ryman Auditorium, Union Station, Hermitage Hotel, 2nd Avenue & Lower Broadway and Shelby Street Bridge, as well as neighborhood historic districts throughout the city.

In 1982, HNI established the state's first Preservation Easement program and currently owns easements on 16 historic landmarks with a market value of over \$30 million. HNI hosts an annual membership meeting, publishes an Annual Report, maintains a website, hosts educational programs such as Behind-the-Scenes tours, an annual fundraiser called the Brick & Mortar Bash and the annual Nashville Nine list of the city's most endangered historic places. For more information, visit www.historicnashvilleinc.org, connect with us on [Facebook](#) or follow us on twitter: [@historic_nash](#).

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