

When the Obstacles Loom Large

For two threatened Twin Cities historic properties—the Fort Snelling Historic District and the Sam S. Shubert Theatre in Minneapolis—the obstacles to preservation are large and complex and have frustrated efforts to preserve them for years. Finding a suitable new use for the properties would appear to be key to a decision. But it's not that simple, and as this issue of the *Planner* goes to press, very different approaches to addressing the preservation issues are unfolding for each property.

Fort Snelling

The Fort Snelling Historic District is one of only 21 National Historic Landmarks (NHL) in Minnesota. In 1971, title to the property was transferred to the State of Minnesota by the U.S. Government, with deed restrictions requiring that it be used for "public park or recreational purposes." Since then, the property has been administered by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

For years, the myriad of federal and state agencies involved have been unable to decide what to do with the 28 buildings, which are known to many as Officers' Row or the Department of Dakota buildings. To further complicate the situation, the district stands in the shadow of the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

During the 1997 session, the Minnesota Legislature, upon recommendation by the Legislative Commission on Minnesota Resources, authorized funding for a study to develop a conceptual utilization plan for the Upper Bluff Area. The study couldn't have come at a better



MHS Collections

Officers' Row. This photograph was probably taken in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

time. The vacant buildings are deteriorating, which can be attributed in part to indecision about the future expansion of the airport and the limitations of the deed restrictions, both real and perceived. Now that the decision has been made not to expand the airport in the direction of the fort—at least in the foreseeable future—the time is right for exploring alternatives that would ensure a future for this national treasure.

The DNR initiated the study this fall, contracting with preservation consultant Thomas Zahn and Associates to facilitate the process. A preservation consulting team was assembled, which consisted of a preservation architect, an economic specialist, recreation planners, and representatives from the DNR, SHPO and the Metropolitan Council.

The team's assignment is to explore the potential for viable new uses for the buildings as well as the open spaces. A public meeting kicked off the project in late November and was followed by a whirlwind week during which the team conducted over 50 interviews. One promising sign early on was learning from a National Park Service planner that the agency is open to exploring creative and innovative options regarding the deed restrictions. Over the next several

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

GRANTS DEADLINES

Jan. 9: Pre-application deadline for CLG grants.

Feb. 6: Final deadline for CLG grant applications.

PUBLIC MEETINGS ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION

SHPO will host three public meetings to discuss planning for historic preservation as it relates to the needs of the general public, government agencies, and communities throughout Minnesota. Your thoughts are needed to help the Office review the goals of the statewide preservation plan issued in 1995 and establish priorities for its 1998-99 work plan. We encourage you to attend one of the meetings listed below. No advance registration is required. Meetings begin at 7 p.m.; receptions are at 6 p.m. For more information, call Michael Koop, (612) 296-5451.

March 26: Morton, Lower Sioux Agency Interpretive Center

April 23: Little Falls, Cass Gilbert Depot

May 7: Virginia, Coates Plaza Hotel

MEETINGS & WORKSHOPS

Jan. 12: Brown Bag Lecture, noon-1 p.m. "Nature's Finest Scenery: The Urban Development of St. Paul's East Side." Cargill Commons, MacMillan Education Center, Minnesota History Center. Cultural resource historian and planner Garneth Peterson will discuss the growth patterns of an early neighborhood whose residents enjoy the bluffs, views and water.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

March 4: "Whose House Was This?" 2-3 p.m. Learn how to use resources such as city directories and photographs to uncover your house history. MHS Research Center, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul. \$3 for MHS members, \$5 for nonmembers. Registration required; call (612) 296-2143

March 19: Grants Review Committee Meeting, 9:30 a.m., Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul. For agenda information, call Mandy Skypala, (612) 296-5478.

March 19: State Review Board Meeting, 7 p.m., Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul. For agenda information, call Michele Decker, (612) 296-5434.

May 2-10: Minnesota Archaeology Week. The fourth annual Minnesota Archaeology Week includes a range of events throughout the state. For more information, call (612) 725-2729 or write to Minnesota Archaeology Week Statewide Coordinator, c/o Office of the State Archaeologist, Fort Snelling History Center, St. Paul, MN 55111.

May 3: Mendota Landmarks Walking Tour, Sibley Historic Site, 2-3:30 p.m. In this 90-minute guided walking tour, Sibley Historic Site visitors can explore Mendota's natural and historic landmarks, including ferries and bridges, Pilot Knob, and the 1854 Church of St. Peter. Fee required. For information, call (612) 452-1596.

May 7: State Review Board meeting, 7 p.m., Minnesota Historical Society, 345 Kellogg Blvd. W., St. Paul. For agenda information, call Michele Decker, (612) 296-5434.

May 10-16: National Historic Preservation Week, including the statewide Historic Preservation Conference. Theme: "Preservation Begins at Home." The next issue of the *Planner* will include a list of events.

Right: The stone entrance gate to St. Croix State Park.

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months the team will synthesize its findings, make recommendations and produce a report; additional public meetings will be scheduled for later this winter.

The Shubert Theatre

While the situation is encouraging and even hopeful for Fort Snelling, the future is very tenuous for the Sam S. Shubert Theatre in Minneapolis, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. On Dec. 15, the Community Development Committee of the City Council voted in favor of a major development project that calls for the demolition of the 1910 classical revival theater. Committee members appeared to ignore the findings of a feasibility study, commissioned at their request, which was

presented at the same meeting and that validated the unique contribution the theater makes to the community. The final decision awaits action by the full council, scheduled for Dec. 30, and discussions continue with the Minneapolis Community Development Agency about plans that could preserve the historic theater, including moving the building a block away to save it. The next issue of the *Planner* will include available information on this volatile situation; perhaps a new vision of downtown development will emerge, one that incorporates a restored Shubert Theatre.

Britta L. Bloomberg
Deputy SHPO

REGISTRATION

St. Croix State Park Is Designated a National Historic Landmark

The St. Croix Recreational Demonstration Area, now known as St. Croix State Park, was designated a National Historic Landmark (NHL) on Sept. 25, 1997 by the U.S. Department of the Interior. The park joins 20 other properties in Minnesota that have achieved Landmark status, which is reserved for properties that have transcendent value to the nation as a whole.

Ten years ago the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) did a survey to identify the CCC/WPA/Rustic Style historic resources in 23 of Minnesota's state parks. Rolf Anderson, historical consultant, was retained to complete the survey and prepare the National Register documentation. As a result of this work, and the assistance of the Department of Natural

Resources park staff, over 500 historic park resources have been listed on the National Register.

The St. Croix Recreational Demonstration Area was one of 46 recreational demonstration areas (RDA). These were New Deal planning projects intended to retire "submarginal" agricultural lands and develop them for recreational use. A number of federal agencies were involved in these projects; the National Park Service provided the overall technical supervision and the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) and the Works Progress Administration (WPA) usually provided labor.

St. Croix State Park is one of the two best remaining examples of recreational demonstration area planning and design in the country. The St. Croix RDA also is an extremely significant and well-preserved state park of the period, and epitomizes the artistic quality and high aspirations held for state parks designed by the Park Service during the 1930s. St. Croix is one of a handful of parks nationally that best represents the highest achievements of the collaboration of the Park Service, the CCC, other New Deal agencies and local park authorities during the New Deal.



SHPO collection

New Mitigation Agreements for Historic Properties in Construction Projects: Discussions in Progress

When historic properties are identified in construction or development project areas, special steps sometimes must be taken to avoid or reduce the effects of the project on the historic properties. When this happens, a memorandum of agreement stipulating mitigation measures is drawn up. (For long-term projects, a “programmatic agreement” is sometimes used.) Agreements are signed by the project agency, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and other interested parties. New agreements have recently been formulated and are under discussion in meetings of Review and Compliance staff of SHPO and federal and state agencies.

Recent meetings have included consultations about the following historic properties:

- St. Anthony Fall Historic District, Minneapolis. Discussions are being held with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission about an application to establish a hydroelectric power operation in the Crown Roller Mill, located in the district, and about Northern States Power’s (NSP) application to renew its

license to operate its Hennepin Island Plant.

- The Bureau of Mines main campus, which typifies a modern government research center from the 1950s; building 201 at Fort Snelling (the 1907 hippodrome built for the Fort); and an intact Nike Missile Base, dating from 1959, on a parcel of land in Farmington. Discussions are being held with the Bureau of Mines closure team regarding pending sale of these three properties.

- The Duluth Ship Canal, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Administration Building in Duluth’s Canal Park, and the Duluth Vessel Yard. All three are National Register-eligible properties. Discussions are underway with the Detroit District of the Corps regarding a long-term planning and maintenance strategy for these three sites.

- Sumner Field housing project, Minneapolis, (a National Register-eligible property), and Mill Ruins Park in the St. Anthony Falls Historic District. SHPO staff is in consultation with the City of Minneapolis (which is fulfilling the responsibilities of the Department of Housing and Urban Development) about (a) the proposed demolition of the

Sumner Field project and (b) development of the Mill Ruins Park.

- Certain properties in the Minnehaha Parkway Historic District, a National Register-eligible district in Minneapolis. The Sound Insulation Program, which involves those properties, is under discussion with the Federal Aviation Administration and the Metropolitan Airports Commission.

- Graceville Library, an Ellerbe-designed, Carnegie-funded building in Graceville (Big Stone County). Discussions about the proposed demolition of the library are being held with the State Department of Education and the Institute for Museum and Library Services (a federal agency).

Finally, broader concerns are at issue in discussions with the Natural Resources Conservation Service about integrating cultural resource considerations in the agency’s work with statewide rural conservation practices.

Future issues of the *Planner* will bring you information as it becomes available.

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MnDOT Seeks Public Comments on Sauk Centre’s Main Street Historic District

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MnDOT) is trying out a new way to involve the public in reviewing a proposed project in a historic district.

MnDOT is proposing certain improvements to Trunk Highway 71 in the Main Street Historic District in Sauk Centre. Information on this proposal is on MnDOT’s home page, with an invitation for public comment. MnDOT and SHPO felt that it was important to solicit widely for public comment, since the district’s associations with Sinclair Lewis contribute to its national significance.

You can access the information through the “News and Events” section of MnDOT’s home page (<http://www.dot.state.mn.us>), or through a link with the “Preserving the Past” section of the Minnesota Historical Society’s home page (<http://www.mnhs.org>). A link is also being established with the Sinclair Lewis Society’s home page, which originates at the University of Illinois.



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<http://www.mnhs.org>

SAVED



Above: Several projects were completed on District No. 48 School (1870) in Collinwood Township, Meeker County, including: installing new double-hung sash and storm windows, constructing a new roof, replacing deteriorated siding, repair and re-installing original shutters, and painting both the interior and exterior of the building. Funds were provided from the state bond-funded County and Local Preservation Project Grants-in-Aid program.



Above: New energy-efficient windows that matched the originals were installed on the Buhl Public Library (1917) in St. Louis County; funds from the MHS State Grants-in-Aid program were used.

ARCHITALKS Checks Out the History of Library Design

This winter, SHPO and The Friends of the Minneapolis Public Library will renew their popular ARCHITALKS lecture series by offering three presentations on the history of library design in Minnesota. Each lecture will be presented twice: first on Sunday afternoon at 1 p.m. in the Minnesota History Center's 3M Auditorium, and again at noon the following day (Monday) at Heritage Hall in the Minneapolis Public Library on Nicollet Mall. Kicking off the series on **March 8-9** will be University of Arizona Professor Abigail Van Slyck, author of *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries and American Culture, 1890-1920*. On **March 22-23**, historian Garneth Peterson will team up with architect Jeff Scherer to discuss the history of neighborhood libraries in Minneapolis and the restoration of the Hosmer Branch. The program for **April 5-6** will be announced soon. Watch the *Interpreter* and *Planner* for further details.



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