

Preservation Oklahoma's 2017 Most Endangered List Unveiled

Preservation Oklahoma unveiled the 2017 list of Oklahoma's Most Endangered Historic Places on April 17 during a reception at the Henry Overholser Mansion, home of Preservation Oklahoma offices. Locations were selected by a group of preservation professionals from nominations solicited from the public.

For more than 24 years, Preservation Oklahoma's list of Oklahoma Most Endangered Historic Places has become a deep-rooted staple in advocating for historic sites. Whether abandoned, nearly dilapidated or part of the urban core, the buildings and structures included on the annual list reflect the history of Oklahoma by acknowledging the citizens who crafted the walls and inhabited the room of these often-forgotten places. This year's list includes:

Wheelock Mission Church, Millerton: The Wheelock Mission Church is one of the oldest churches in Oklahoma and the oldest standing building in McCurtain County. Built in 1846, the church served as the home of the Wheelock congregation. The congregation was established by Reverend Alfred Wright in 1832 upon his arrival in Indian Territory with members of the Choctaw Tribe following their removal on the Trail of Tears. The church was part of the Wheelock Mission. The church's interior and roof were destroyed by fire in 1866 and the building was abandoned. At present, the church hosts no congregation and is maintained by the Wheelock Cemetery Association. Today, it faces threats of vandalism and challenges with upkeep due to limited funding.

Excelsior Library, Guthrie: Built in 1954 as part of a City of Guthrie bond issue, the Excelsior Library opened in 1955. The library consisted of two library rooms housing 5,000 books and a larger community room with a stage for meetings. It operated as a racially segregated library until 1967 when the Excelsior Library and the Guthrie Carnegie Library were combined as part of desegregation. The building continued to be used as a branch library until the new Guthrie Public Library building was built in 1970. Today the Excelsior is in danger, as time and maintenance issues have caused the building to fall into disrepair. The building was closed in 2014 and the Friends of the Excelsior Library have been formed to try to save the building.

Police Headquarters and City Jail, Oklahoma City: The Police Headquarters and City Jail, located in downtown Oklahoma City, is an Art Deco style building constructed between 1936-1937 as part of the Oklahoma City Civic Center. The building continued to serve as a jail until a new Oklahoma County jail was built in the 1980s. The building has been vacant for nearly two decades and is currently in serious disrepair. There appear to be no immediate plans for either demolition or for reuse, leaving the building in limbo. Redevelopment in the surrounding area may create opportunity for rehabilitation and adaptive reuse, but also poses a threat for demolition and replacement.

Irving School, Tulsa: Built in 1909, the Irving School was the second public school to open outside of downtown and is the oldest extant school building in Tulsa. The school was in use until May 1974. Alternative schools continued to use part of the building and it was sold to a private company in 1983. The building was again sold in 1995 and the school was used for office and storage space until it was abandoned in 2006. A tornado in 2015 severely damaged the primary gable and today the school remains vacant and is in disrepair.

First Christian Church Historic District, Oklahoma City: The First Christian Church Historic District is an architecturally significant district in Oklahoma City with its organic form, sculpted shape, and the extensive use of concrete and masonry. It is an excellent example of the Modern movement including specifically the Neo-Expressionist design of the main building. Designed by R. Duane Conner, Fred Pojezny, and William Fearnow of Oklahoma City, the buildings are a representation of form and functionality. Adjacent to a major highway, buffered on either side by historic districts and along a major thoroughfare through the neighborhood, it is easily imaginable that this property could be demolished for housing development.

Rosenwald Schools, Statewide: Rosenwald Schools are important representations of the work of Julius Rosenwald and local communities to provide education for African American students against the backdrop of segregation. Today, the schools are obsolete and their construction and locations often make it difficult to repurpose them while maintaining their integrity. As a result, negligence, fire, and natural events have destroyed most of the Rosenwald Schools in Oklahoma. Of those that remain, many are in poor condition and in danger of being destroyed. Some have yet to be located due to incomplete historical documentation, which prevents them from being actively protected as historic structures.

Route 66, Bridgeport to Hydro: Oklahoma contains the longest stretch of Route 66 in the nation. Millions of people travel the Mother Road each year to experience this important part of transportation history. In western Oklahoma, the section of Route 66 from Bridgeport to Hydro is considered distinctive since it marks a change in geography by providing the first glimpse of the western plains. The section also contains the William H. Murray Bridge, also known as the Pony Bridge (due to the truss system it uses). Completed in 1934, the bridge is one of the most distinctive bridges of the road in Oklahoma due to its massive length. Today, the bridge is threatened with demolition due to concerns of increased and heavier traffic flow.

Shoreline Sites, Statewide: Oklahoma has approximately 55,646 miles of shoreline along lakes and ponds. The largest of the state's 200+ lakes—including 34 major reservoirs—were produced by impoundments constructed largely during the 1940's-1980's. A number of significant archaeological sites were documented and excavated prior to being submerged under these lakes. Still other sites are located along landforms that lie along what are now the shorelines of these reservoirs.

These sites are susceptible to erosional activities due to wave action and changes in water level, exposing and dislocating materials and—in some cases—human remains that were once buried well below the ground surface. It is unclear just how many significant sites and burials are exposed each year. Some are reported to OAS or the responsible federal agency, but many go unreported, resulting in the loss of incredible information about Oklahoma's pre-Contact and early historic populations.