

News Release



May 20, 2008

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NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION NAMES VIZCAYA AND BONNET HOUSE, FLORIDA TO ITS 2008 LIST OF AMERICA'S 11 MOST ENDANGERED HISTORIC PLACES

Development Pressures Tower Over Historic Sites

Washington, D.C. (May 20, 2008) – Today, the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** named **Vizcaya Museum & Gardens** and **Bonnet House Museum & Gardens**, in **Florida** to its **2008** list of **America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places**. This annual list highlights important examples of the nation's architectural, cultural and natural heritage that are at risk for destruction or irreparable damage.

In Southern Florida, two historic house museums—Vizcaya Museum & Gardens in Miami, and Bonnet House Museum & Gardens in Fort Lauderdale—are threatened by adjacent high-rise development.

Occupying 50 acres of land overlooking Miami's Biscayne Bay is Vizcaya Museum & Gardens, a retreat from the hustle of the modern urban city to the era of the early 20th century. Built largely between 1914 and 1917 by Chicagoan James Deering as his winter residence, Vizcaya is one of the best remaining examples from the American Renaissance when the nation's wealthy industrialists built lavish estates inspired by the traditions of the European Renaissance. The estate includes a 70-room main house, filled with early 20th century furnishings and antiques alongside the latest technology of the period, and has been long celebrated for its 10 acres of lush formal gardens referred to as the finest Italianate gardens in the United States. Accented with fountains, statuary, balustrades, decorative urns and elaborately clipped hedges, the picturesque gardens provide a sense of immersion in another time and place. Unless development is blocked or an intervention occurs, this cultural landscape will be permanently damaged by the construction of three high-rise condominium towers within Vizcaya's historic viewshed. The introduction of these out-of-scale buildings and the corresponding zoning and land use changes they would require threaten to open the door for more high-rise construction even closer to Vizcaya on adjacent lands.

Vizcaya's historic gardens were specifically oriented away from the downtown Miami area to afford guests a serene escape from the growing metropolis. This sense of tranquility is an integral part of the historic and cultural significance of the estate. Vizcaya has always been carefully preserved, first by its original owners and now by Miami-Dade County, which has operated it as a public museum since 1952. Today, under the City of Miami's zoning code, much of the area surrounding Vizcaya is classified as a single-family and mid-rise multi-family neighborhood.

The proposed high-rise condominium project is planned for an area that is currently zoned as government/institutional. The towers would sharply contrast with the scale and character of the neighborhood and require legislation by the City of Miami to change the zoning and land use categories. It is also inconsistent with the provisions of the Coconut Grove Neighborhood Conservation District enacted in 2004 to protect the inimitable character and historic elements within the area. Despite strong opposition from neighborhood and civic associations along with hundreds of individual residents of the Coconut Grove area with supporting testimony from national, state and local experts, the City Commission last year approved the project with only slightly reduced heights on a 3-2 vote. A recent court victory nullified certain of the essential approvals but appeals are likely, thus, the zoning change and construction threat has not been eliminated.

A similar situation is unfolding in Fort Lauderdale with Bonnet House Museum & Gardens. Built in 1921, this historic, Caribbean plantation style waterfront house sits on 35 acres of land and was once the winter residence of American artist Frederic Clay Bartlett and his wife. Unlike many house museums, Bonnet House has survived with its original furnishings intact. Bonnet House is now battling the construction of an 18-story hotel that threatens to destroy the estate's viewshed. After preservation advocates made several attempts to thwart the project, the Fort Lauderdale City Commission granted permission to the developer—Transacta Prive—to build the hotel within 200 feet of the south edge of the Bonnet House gardens. Although Transacta Prive was recently ordered to give \$425,000 to Bonnet House to fund necessary landscaping that would help block the view of the high-rise structure, the issue of over-development surrounding the historical site continues.

“If development is allowed to continue unabated, these historic sites and their landscapes will be engulfed by buildings completely inconsistent and incompatible with the integrity of their surroundings,” says Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “Vizcaya and Bonnet House tell an important story of Florida’s, and our nation’s, history. The proposed development near each site would destroy their distinctive character and rich ambience, and set a chilling precedent for other inappropriate development.”

The 2008 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places (in alphabetical order):

Boyd Theatre, Philadelphia, Pa. - Philadelphia’s last surviving downtown movie palace—a masterpiece of Art Deco design—faces an uncertain future as it sits vacant and remains vulnerable to demolition. It awaits a preservation-minded buyer to return the vintage venue to its original grandeur.

California’s State Parks - California’s state park system, the largest park system in the U.S., encompasses a vast array of historic and cultural resources that chronicle the state’s rich and storied heritage. It also has suffered greatly from years of chronic underfunding and has \$1.2 billion in deferred maintenance. Proposed budget cuts, which would have led to the closure of 48 state parks, have been staved off. The underlying problem remains. Current funds only cover 40% of actual maintenance and operations needs, which means irreplaceable historic and cultural resources remain endangered.

Charity Hospital and the adjacent neighborhood, New Orleans, La. – While Charity Hospital sits abandoned, plans call for the demolition of nearly 200 homes in the adjacent Mid-City neighborhood to accommodate construction of two new hospitals. Alternate locations for the new hospitals are available, and Charity Hospital, a National Register-eligible building that closed after Hurricane Katrina, could be rehabilitated to once again serve the community.

Great Falls Portage, Great Falls, Mont. – This National Historic Landmark, one of the best preserved landscapes along the Lewis and Clark Trail, is slated to get a massive coal-fired power plant in its front yard. Development abutting the Great Falls Portage, an undeveloped rural area under panoramic blue Montana skies, will irreparably harm the cultural and visual landscape.

Hangar One, Moffett Field, Santa Clara County, Calif. – The hangar, a local icon built in 1932 to house U.S. Navy dirigibles, is a cavernous, 200 foot tall dome-shaped structure covering more than 8 acres of land. A 2003 inspection revealed PCBs leaking from the hangar’s metallic exterior. Although the Navy transferred Hangar One to NASA in 1992, the Navy is responsible for environmental remediation, but has no mandate to replace the exterior and preserve the building.

The Lower East Side, New York City - The Lower East Side embodies the history of immigration, one of the central themes of American history in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, yet development threatens to erase the surviving historic structures. This includes houses of worship, historic theaters, schools and the tenement, a unique architectural type which, by the sheer numbers who lived in such a building, had an impact on more Americans than any other form of urban housing. A New York City landmark designation and contextual zone changes within the neighborhood would preserve the physical character of the neighborhood.

Michigan Avenue Streetwall, Chicago, Ill. - This 12-block stretch of historic buildings—dating back to the 1880s—is a virtual encyclopedia of the work of the city’s best architects, including Daniel Burnham and Louis Sullivan. Although this “streetwall” was designated a Chicago Landmark in 2002, its historic character is now being threatened by the inappropriate addition of large-scale towers that retain only small portions of the original buildings or their facades.

Peace Bridge Neighborhood, Buffalo, N.Y. - The neighborhood and the site, with homes and buildings dating to the 1850s on two National Register Olmsted parks, is an iconic section of the City of Buffalo. The Public Bridge Authority (PBA) proposes to expand Peace Bridge and include a 45 acre plaza that will eliminate over 100 homes and businesses (dozens of which are eligible to the National Register) and diminish the Olmsted parks. Suitable alternate sites exist, but PBA refuses to properly consider them.

The Statler Hilton Hotel, Dallas, Texas - When the Statler Hilton opened in downtown Dallas in 1956, it was hailed as the most modern hotel in the country. Today, the building sits vacant. Located on an increasingly attractive piece of real estate, the Statler Hilton faces an uncertain future as encroaching development pressure heightens the threat of demolition. Current regulations restrict alternate uses, so a sympathetic developer is needed to restore and reopen the Statler as a hotel.

Sumner Elementary School, Topeka, Kan. - The school, a National Historic Landmark, helped launch the nation’s Civil Rights Movement as the centerpiece of the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education*. Currently vacant, the school suffers from deferred maintenance and has sustained significant damage from water infiltration and vandalism. Though the city of Topeka owns the school and is required to maintain and protect it, the City Council has authorized its demolition. A sympathetic developer is needed to save and restore this icon.

Vizcaya and the Bonnet House, Fla. - Pending development of out-of-scale buildings and corresponding zoning changes will permanently ruin the vistas surrounding Vizcaya Museum & Gardens (Miami) and Bonnet House Museum & Gardens (Ft. Lauderdale) and threatens to set a precedent for future high-rise structures.

America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places has identified 200 threatened one-of-a-kind historic treasures since 1988. While a listing does not ensure the protection of a site or guarantee funding, the designation has been a powerful tool for raising awareness and rallying resources to save endangered sites from every region of the country. Whether these sites are urban districts or rural landscapes, Native American landmarks or 20th-century sports arenas, entire communities or single buildings, the list spotlights historic places across America that are threatened by neglect, insufficient funds, inappropriate development or insensitive public policy. At times, that attention has garnered public support to quickly rescue a treasured landmark, while in other instances, it has been the impetus of a long battle to save an important piece of our history.

To download high resolution images of this year’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, please visit <http://press.nationaltrust.org>.

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit membership organization bringing people together to protect, enhance and enjoy the places that matter to them. By saving the places where great moments from history – and the important moments of everyday life – took place, the National Trust for Historic Preservation helps revitalize neighborhoods and communities, spark economic development and promote environmental sustainability. With headquarters in Washington, DC, 9 regional and field offices, 29 historic sites, and partner organizations in all 50 states, the National Trust for Historic Preservation provides leadership, education, advocacy and resources to a national network of people, organizations and local communities committed to saving places, connecting us to our history and collectively shaping the future of America's stories. For more information, visit www.PreservationNation.org.

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