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## NEWS RELEASE

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# **Florida Trust for Historic Preservation Announces 11 Most Endangered Historic Sites for 2015**

The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation announced the 2015 *11 Most Endangered Historic Sites* at the 37<sup>th</sup> Annual Statewide Preservation Conference in Miami. Each year, the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation announces Florida's Eleven Most Endangered Historic Sites as part of the Annual Statewide Preservation Conference. The Most Endangered Historic Sites program is designed to increase the public's awareness of the urgent need to save Florida's neglected or threatened historic resources, and to empower local preservationists and preservation groups in their efforts to preserve Florida's rich history.

The sites are not listed in a rank order.

### **Bellevue Biltmore Resort and Spa, Belleair**

The Bellevue Hotel was built by Henry Plant in 1897 to boost tourism along Florida's west coast. The building is noted for its outstanding architectural features, with its unique multiple gables of different sizes, green sloped roof, exterior white siding, and extensive hand crafted woodwork. Visitors have included U.S. Presidents, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, Duke of Windsor, Joe DiMaggio, Babe Ruth, Thomas Edison, Henry Ford and many Hollywood stars. During World War II, the hotel served as lodging for servicemen stationed at MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa. After that time, the hotel began to decline due to competition from newer, more modern motels. In 1991 Mido Development purchased the hotel and made many repairs. Between 1997 and 2004 a new owner attempted to restore common areas and guest rooms. The building was closed in 2009 following hurricane damage.

A new developer purchased the building in early 2015. The Town of Belleair's commissioners approved a plan to tear down the historic hotel to make room for condominium development. The new owner has plans to save a portion of the hotel and relocating it on the property for a boutique hotel, but given the state of the structure it is unlikely that it will survive the move. The Florida Trust for Historic Preservation, along with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Friends of the Bellevue Biltmore and others are plaintiffs in lawsuits challenging the actions taken by the Town of Belleair in its approval of a Certificate of Appropriateness for demolition in December 2014.

### **Boynton Beach High School, Boynton Beach**

The Boynton Beach High School has been under threat for some time, first to an architecturally insensitive addition that would obscure the architectural design, more recently to a demolition proposal by the Mayor of Boynton Beach. The structure is sound, is important both culturally and historically within the community and can be restored and adaptively reused for a variety of community activities.

According to an article in the *Sun Sentinel*, the city is now reviewing three plans for the old high school. Two options proposed involve renovation/restoration – one would renovate the high school to be a community

center, another would retain the façade and relocate city offices to the building. The third option comes from the Boynton Beach CRA's request that the high school be demolished to make room for new mixed-use development and other new city buildings. As of now, no decisions have been made.

### **Coconut Grove Playhouse, Miami**

The Coconut Grove Playhouse exemplifies the historical, cultural, economic and social trends of Coconut Grove during the 1920s. The building, designed in a "Spanish Baroque" Mediterranean Revival style by Kiehnle and Elliott Architects, was originally constructed as a movie theater in 1926 as a part of Paramount Pictures and for over fifty years was known as one of the nation's leading theatres. With a combination of \$20 million in bond proceeds and controlling interest in the Coconut Grove Playhouse, Miami-Dade County has revitalization plans for the Playhouse, which has remained closed since 2006.

Recently, the Miami-Dade Commissioners approved a plan for a smaller 300-seat theater that, if implemented, will drastically alter the existing 1,150 seat theater. The plans for a significantly smaller theater almost certainly ensures that the majority of the building will be demolished, including the existing historic interior.

### **East Little Havana/Riverside**

One of the most significant urban enclaves in the US, Little Havana / Riverside has always been a safe haven for immigrants and symbolic of the American melting pot. This large neighborhood features a veritable treasure trove of architectural typologies and styles. These types are unique in their local adaptations and further enhanced by the physical vernacular interventions by various ethnicities that have occupied this neighborhood. Currently, there are two main threats to the Little Havana / Riverside neighborhood: up zoning, which will detrimentally affect neighborhood character; and endangered scattered resources with no legal mechanism in place for the establishment of thematic multiple resource nominations. The creation of historic districts and thematic multiple resource nominations will save Little Havana. Recently, the city established a small historic district in East Little Havana which will help future chances of broadening the district.

### **Elliot Plantation, Merritt Island**

Elliot Plantation is located on a 2,585 acre site within Canaveral National Seashore and Merritt Island National Wildlife Refuge in East Central Florida. It is the southernmost 18th Century sugar plantation in the United States and dates to 1763 when Florida was acquired by Britain from Spain. The Plantation ruins contain a sugar works factory, rum distillery, slave village, overseer's house, canals, and other agricultural remnants. The sugar mill itself is significant because it is the only 18th Century sugar mill in Florida made of native stone. Also within the area of the sugar mill is a Pre-Columbian mound.

The site has been reviewed by the Southeast Archaeological Center for the National Park Service, which considers it to be among the most significant and well preserved African-American landscapes because it was totally built with slave labor and the remains of their residences are evident. Because of its age and context they state: "It is our opinion that this property represents one of the most significant properties in North America."

In December 2013, the FAA issued a notice that SpacePort Florida had filed a permit application to operate a commercial launch facility called Shiloh Launch Complex in the general area of Elliot Plantation. At scoping hearings held by the FAA in February 2014, Space Florida released maps showing its proposed location, which includes a portion of Elliot Plantation.

### **Florida Keys Reef Lighthouses**

The Florida Keys Reef Lighthouses are an important piece of Florida's history. The six reef lighthouses are Carysfort Reef (6 miles south of Key Largo), Sand Key (7 miles southwest of Key West), Sombrero Key (5 miles south of Marathon), Alligator Reef (4 miles south of Islamorada), Fowey Rocks (6 miles east of Key Biscayne) and American Shoal (5 miles south of Sugar Loaf). Built between 1852 and 1880, these lighthouses

are made of cast iron with a skeletal design to let as much wind and waves pass through in order to withstand hurricanes. These lighthouses were constructed to warn ships of the hazardous reefs below the surface.

The Florida Keys Reef Lighthouses are currently owned by the US Coast Guard. The Florida Keys Reef Lights Foundation is applying for ownership of all but Fowey Rocks, which has been transferred to Biscayne National Park. With the Coast Guard facing budget cuts and many boaters relying on GPS for navigation, the proper upkeep of the lighthouses has been lacking. All lighthouses now have corrosion showing, and vandals leave the doors and windows open causing damage on the inside (Fowey Rocks has been secured now). The need to save these lighthouses as pieces of history now doubles to protect the reef. Should the lighthouses be left to decay the structures would fall on the reef causing damage that cannot be repaired.

### **Green Gables, Melbourne**

Green Gables, near the heart of Melbourne, is at risk of imminent demolition. Built in 1896 as a home for inventor and industrialist William T. Wells and his family, the house in recent decades had been used only as a vacation home. The house was damaged in the 2004 hurricanes and has deteriorated dramatically since, although still structurally sound. Faced with code violations on the property, the owners, who are descendants of the builder, have chosen to demolish the house rather than bear the cost of repairs.

Following a dramatic show of support in the community, the owners have decided to give a local non-profit, Green Gables at Historic Riverview Village, Inc., some time in which to raise money to acquire the house. Located between the Indian River Lagoon and a major highway, the property is highly desirable for development. The challenge is for the non-profit to acquire the property before a developer. One recent positive action is that the Melbourne Historic Preservation Board is discussing a nomination to list the house on the National Register of Historic Places.

### **Old Melbourne High School, Melbourne**

The Melbourne High School, now part of the Henegar complex, was constructed in 1926 at a cost of \$200,000. It was built by the W. T. Hadlow Company of Jacksonville and W. M. Cristen, who designed many of Melbourne's most important historic buildings, served as architect. The tremendous influx of new residents during the land boom made this large addition to the Melbourne School complex necessary. In the 1970s, there was a proposal to tear it down and it was discovered that the walls are 13 inches thick, so it was left standing and maintained. For several years now, it has stood empty, along with the promises of the City to restore and use it. The High School is now a major contributing structure to the historic downtown Melbourne.

The owner intends to sell the Old Melbourne High School building to a developer who plans to demolish the building to make way for a mixed-use complex with commercial spaces and 130 new apartments. The City of Melbourne is supporting this decision. Because the building contributes to the historic downtown, this decision came as a surprise to residents who are now calling for the city to halt the sale and explore other options for re-use that would not require demolition of the building.

### **One North Orange Building, Orlando**

Sitting in the intersection of Central and Orange Avenues since 1925, the One North Orange Building has seen exactly 90 years of Orlando history, development and growth. One North Orange has housed a bank that folded during the Great Depression, an aviation center when its roof was used to place an eight million candlepower airport beacon in 1928, part drugstore and a staple of cohesion and history in Downtown Orlando.

One North Orange not only has many architectural merits, but it is also one of the few remaining 'Original Sky Scrapers' of Downtown Orlando. Unfortunately, the One North Orange building has been vacant since 2002. The building is in need of major renovation, including updating the building infrastructure to bring it up to date. If these maintenance issues continue to be ignored, the building could become a victim of demolition by neglect, a tragedy that happens all too often with historic structures.

## **Spring House, Tallahassee**

The Spring House is the only private residence in Florida designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and was built of glass, cypress, and Ocala block specifically for the Lewis family on a beautiful five-acre parcel just north of Tallahassee, with a natural spring. The unconventional passive solar ‘hemicycle’ design encompasses 2,282 square feet of gross living area. Threats to the historic site are many and varied. The structure has suffered extensive cosmetic damage over the years, primarily as a result of an experimental roof. Water entered the frame of the building, especially where the roof meets the base of the ‘core’ cylindrical structure that runs through the house. Plumbing, electrical, erosion, and wood rot are also major issues.

In 2013, the organization actively began working with the community to raise awareness and funding for the mission. In the last two years SHI has boomed, raising money to stabilize the structure and to pay routine administrative expenses but is still unable to purchase the property. In 2014, the National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the Spring House on their list of 11 Most Endangered Historic Properties.

## **William Camp House, Ocala**

Enterprising businessman William Camp built this house in 1903 in what became Ocala’s first historic district. Currently, the Camp House is threatened due to the lack of maintenance and is in danger of being demolished. The current owner of the property brought the Camp House before the Ocala Historic Preservation Advisory Board (OHPAB) on December 1, 2011 for an application to demolish the building. The Board decided to delay any action for a period of 90 days to gather more information on the condition of the building. OHPAB can deny demolition for a period up to 365 days, after which time if the building has not been purchased, the owner will be able to demolish the building. The owner is planning on appearing before the OHPAB this May.

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*Founded in 1978, the Florida Trust for Historic Preservation is a non-profit organization of more than 1600 members and is a statewide partner with the National Trust for Historic Preservation. The mission of the Florida Trust is to promote the preservation of Florida’s unique cultural, historical and architectural resources through advocacy, education, and property stewardship. For more information: [www.floridatrust.org](http://www.floridatrust.org)*

*The Annual Statewide Preservation Conference is generally held during the third full week in May and provides an opportunity to showcase the host community’s historic preservation success stories with workshops, tours and events. The conference targets professional preservationists, preservation activists, design review commission members, architects, planners, historic homeowners and many others from the cultural and historical fields.*