

Maine Preservation Announces “Most Endangered Places” List

Statewide Nonprofit’s Annual List Shines a Light on Seven Historically Significant Sites

Yarmouth, ME — October 10, 2023. Maine Preservation, a statewide nonprofit advocacy organization, announced its annual list of the Most Endangered Historic Places in Maine.

The 2023 list of Most Endangered Historic Places calls attention to the diversity of buildings, sites, and traditions significant to Mainers and obstacles faced by preservation-minded people and communities in saving, repurposing, and stewarding these resources. Nominations received this summer from all over the state have been distilled to the most critical in need with actionable steps. The endangered list is intended to highlight and amplify these grassroots efforts, from two brothers joining ranks to rescue a theater central to both their childhoods and their community to the tenacity of a young Ellsworth local reviving the town’s candlepin bowling alley to keep the sport alive and create a cultural hub for the community.

“Each of these seven places face a set of circumstances and challenges that landed them on this year’s list, but many of the obstacles are universal, allowing us to call upon our experience and network of supporters and preservation professionals to help,” explained Tara Kelly, Executive Director of Maine Preservation. “Our statewide charge has given us the privilege of witnessing the strategies and steps to save imperiled places, like Oxford’s Pigeon Hill Schoolhouse from our 2022 list, which, through the efforts of the Oxford Historical Society has been retrieved from a site slated for development, and funds raised to relocate and rehabilitate the one-room schoolhouse.”

The 2023 Most Endangered Historic Places in Maine are:

Historic Resources of Swan Island

The remaining historic farmhouses, outbuildings, and cemetery located in the Steve Powell Wildlife Management Area have been relisted (originally in 2001) following a decision by Maine Department of Inland Fisheries & Wildlife to end the public ferry service to Swan Island. Mired by restrictions on funding and organized local support that has diminished, action from nearby



communities and the State of Maine are needed to rethink a sustainable strategy for preserving these significant structures.

D’Amanda’s (Ellsworth Bowling Alley)

The 1970s candlepin bowling alley has been a stalwart of good times along Route 1 in Ellsworth, so when the previous owner didn’t have any prospective buyers, the 19-year-old lane mechanic stepped up and proposed a trial run. Fast forward to 2023, and Autumn Mowery has kept the business afloat, singlehandedly repairing the c. 1949 pinsetters original to the bowling alley and boosting attendance with weekly specials and behind-the-scenes tours. A long list of repairs and needed safety upgrades to the vintage equipment remain as obstacles to stability.

Bowdoinham Town Hall

Observed in a 1912 history of Bowdoinham as the “conspicuous landmark of this town,” the Town Hall has long occupied the high point in town and served as a place of worship, civic gathering space, and community events venue. The building was originally constructed as a church by the Universalist Society in 1823, before the congregation relocated down the street in 1890. In 2021, the Bowdoinham Town Hall Committee commissioned an assessment of the building, which revealed costly repairs to replace the failing foundation, sections of the roof trusses, and rehabilitate the exterior. A \$1 million bond issue was presented at the 2023 town vote and unfortunately failed, leaving local leaders to develop a phased approach to saving the landmark building.

Colburn House State Historic Site

Early Pittston colonist Major Reuben Colburn built the Georgian-era house along the Kennebec River in 1765 and was later integral in helping plan and supply Colonel Benedict Arnold’s expedition to seize control of Quebec during the Revolutionary War, which launched from Colburn’s property. The state-owned historic site is closed to the public because of structural deficiencies and life safety concerns. Grant funds have been secured, but more money is needed to rehabilitate the house and make it safe for public use.

Gayety Theatre Building

Years of deferred maintenance and a leaking roof have jeopardized the c. 1921 theater building along Van Buren’s Main Street. Two brothers, whose family once operated the movie house, recently acquired the Gayety from its absent owner and are making strides to secure and stabilize the building through sweat equity and community support. In addition to discovering details from the various phases of the theater’s evolution during clean-up, the brothers have also unearthed a treasure trove of historic photos, ephemera, and stories.



Jonathan Fisher House

The unique, c. 1814 plank-frame house was designed and largely built by Jonathan Fisher, the first Congregational minister of Blue Hill and a true Renaissance Man—pursuing art, furniture making, farming, science, mathematics, surveying, and writing. The property is now operated as a house museum by the nonprofit, Jonathan Fisher Memorial, Inc. A series of building assessments that commenced in 2019, intended to identify repair needs and develop a rehabilitation plan, left the nonprofit’s board in shock. Accompanying the identified repair needs was a price tag exceeding \$1 million.

Winter Harbor Historical Society Museum

The Winter Harbor Historical Society owns and stewards the 1877 schoolhouse as its museum, which is in need of structural interventions to ensure its future. Only 10 years after it was built, the school was moved by a local developer who wanted to build a hotel with water views. It took 10 oxen and two weeks before reaching its current location. Today, the balloon frame structure is bowing outward, jeopardizing floor joists and exacerbated by an unstable foundation. The small historical society needs to prioritize work and put together a plan to build support and save the schoolhouse before it’s too late.

[CLICK HERE FOR PICTURES](#)

For more information on each of the listings, please visit:

<https://www.maine Preservation.org/most-endangered>

About the Most Endangered Historic Places List

The Most Endangered Historic Places List began in 1996 for the purpose of identifying and raising public awareness about preserving threatened historic properties. Sites previously listed and successfully rehabilitated include the Great Bowdoin Mill in Topsham, Eastport Savings Bank, Francis Perkins Homestead in Newcastle, Seguin Island Light, Capt. Samuel Holden House in Moose River, Wood Island Lifesaving Station in Kittery, and Lincoln Street School in Rockland. However, several sites remain threatened, including the [American Can Company Building in Eastport](#) (2022) which is now on the market, primed with a comprehensive redevelopment plan.

About Maine Preservation

Founded in 1972, Maine Preservation is a statewide nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting and preserving historic places, buildings, downtowns, and neighborhoods—strengthening the cultural and economic vitality of Maine communities.