

NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Sarah Hansen, Executive Director
shansen@portlandlandmarks.org
207.774.5561 x.101

EMBARGOED for Release: 1 PM EST Thursday, November 18, 2021

GREATER PORTLAND LANDMARKS UNVEILS 2021 *PLACES IN PERIL*

Portland, ME - Concerned that a number of historic properties are in danger of being irreparably altered or destroyed, Greater Portland Landmarks (Landmarks) today announced its 6th *Places in Peril* listing, calling attention to threats facing community-defining, historically-significant places in the greater Portland area. This year, Landmarks has identified five sites at critical junctures of being permanently lost or diminished.

“These properties help define greater Portland. In every case, the sites we’ve identified contribute to our community identity and help us interpret the stories of people who shaped the places we love,” said Sarah Hansen, Executive Director.

Landmarks calls attention to *Places in Peril* to:

1. Build community awareness about the importance of these places and focus public attention on their significance in state and local history;
2. Advocate for the preservation, protection, and in some cases, adaptive-use of these properties so that they can continue to play a vital role in our community’s architectural landscape;
3. Convene people, provide guidance and identify resources to preserve, interpret and rehabilitate these places.

For more in-depth information and photographs of each of these sites visit:

<https://www.portlandlandmarks.org/places-in-peril-program>

Goddard Mansion

Fort Williams Park, Cape Elizabeth

One of the few remaining works of Portland architect Charles A. Alexander, this Cape Elizabeth mansion was built for Civil War Union Army Officer John Goddard. The Italianate style dwelling became part of Fort Williams and served as military housing in the early 1900s. Abandoned by the 1960s, the interior of the house was burned in a controlled fire and removed in 1981. With broad public support, in November of 2015, the Cape Elizabeth Town Council adopted a policy ensuring that what remains of the Goddard Mansion would be maintained at Fort Williams Park.

Since 2009 the building has been fenced off for safety and little maintenance of the building ruins has been undertaken. The 2021 draft park master plan proposes removing the side and rear wall, stabilizing just the front façade. While there is still support for saving the remaining mansion, funding needs to properly stabilize and maintain the structure have not been determined.

Historic Resources in Bayside Portland

Bayside is home to many of the earliest homes in Portland. While other Portland neighborhoods experienced extensive losses during the Great Fire, most of western Bayside was left untouched by the flames. During the mid-20th century Urban Renewal movement, Portland's newly created Slum Clearance and Redevelopment Authority highlighted Bayside as a target neighborhood. In 1958 the Authority demolished well over 100 dwellings and small businesses in what we now call East Bayside. Another 54 dwelling units were razed for the Bayside Park urban renewal project, an area that now includes Fox Field and Kennedy Park public housing. The razing of the Franklin Street area began in 1967 when 100 structures were demolished and an unknown number of families were relocated or displaced.

Since the mid-20th century, the Bayside neighborhood has been a historically marginalized community. Urban Renewal projects unfairly targeted homes and businesses of immigrant families for removal. Since then, access to historic preservation protections and recognition that have helped with economic revitalization in other Portland neighborhoods have not been available to property owners in Bayside, despite the prevalence of its early building stock. Sharing the history of the Bayside neighborhood's immigrant story, particularly those places associated with the Armenian-American and Chinese-American communities in the early 20th century, is critical to understanding the full history of Portland. As the neighborhood continues to experience increasing development pressures, including as a location for much-needed affordable and middle-income housing, we must ensure that enough of the neighborhood remains to understand and share Bayside's diverse and compelling story.

Gorham's Corner Neighborhood Portland

Gorham's Corner in downtown Portland is where Danforth, York, Pleasant, Union, and Fore Streets meet, and was a primarily Irish neighborhood beginning in the 1820s. Named for early resident William Gorham, a grocer, it was a working-class neighborhood that gained a reputation as an unsavory part of town, known for its saloons and tenements. Largely rebuilt west of Maple Street following Portland's devastating 1866 fire, it remained a predominantly Irish neighborhood well into the late 20th century.

Unfortunately, demolitions beginning in the 1970s reduced much of the historic neighborhood to parking lots, particularly west of Center Street. The individually landmarked Tracy-Causser Building between Cotton and Center Streets is now a vital bridge between the Old Port area and the Gorham's Corner neighborhood. While the parking lots to the south and east of the block may finally be developed, decades after they were first cleared for redevelopment, the fate of two of the three remaining buildings between Cotton and Center Streets is uncertain. Retaining one or both of the buildings, particularly the Cotton Street building, provides historic context to the

Tracy-Causser Block and retains street character, bridging the gap between the Congress Street, Old Port and Gorham's Corner neighborhoods.

Mechanics' Hall **Congress Street, Portland**

Mechanics' Hall was design by Portland architect Thomas J. Sparrow and purpose built for the Maine Charitable Mechanics' Association to house their library and create a communal gathering space for Portland's creative community. Mechanics' Hall is a well-preserved example of mid-19th century Italianate architecture, and is one of the few surviving buildings designed by Sparrow. The faces of Vulcan and Archimedes, as well as the MCMA's chief symbol, a stylized arm with a hammer, are featured on the front façade.

The most pressing threat facing Mechanics' Hall is the deterioration of the structure's clerestory roof. Due to gradual weathering, the condition of the roof now constitutes a serious threat to the building's structural integrity. Mechanics' Hall's problems have been compounded by the stopgap nature of maintenance efforts periodically undertaken throughout the history of the organization, which has never possessed the capital to properly address them. Moreover, the MCMA is running out of time to act, as waiting any longer threatens to deepen existing structural issues as well as create new ones which would jeopardize the building's continued survival. The MCMA has made incredible strides towards rehabilitation of the 170-year-old building, but connection to a wider audience of supporters is critical to help ensure that the space remains a living connection to Portland's past while serving the organization's long-standing mission, "to make knowledge, ideas, and arts accessible."

Mountain Division Railroad Culverts **Westbrook & Windham**

The Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad was chartered in Maine in 1867 with construction starting in 1869. By the early part of the 20th century, the expanding Maine Central Railroad absorbed the P&O RR between Portland and St. Johnsbury, Vermont, together with a line branching north from Whitefield, New Hampshire, running deep into Quebec. Passenger service on the scenic run ended in 1958, and freight trains stopped rolling after Guilford Transportation (later Pan Am Railways) acquired it in the 1980s. Stone culverts along the Mountain Division line are of two primary styles, arched culverts and boxed culverts. Arched culverts, in both function and appearance, are small stone arch bridges while box culverts have vertical stone walls that support a large stone slab that spans the opening width.

Inactivity along the railroad corridor has led to deteriorating condition of many of the historic stone culverts that span tributaries to the Presumpscot River. Local and statewide interest in restoration of the Mountain Division led Maine DOT in 2007 to evaluate the condition and potential passenger and freight rail uses of the 50 mile Mountain Division rail line in southern and western Maine. The study identified several stone box and arch culverts on the lower sections of the rail tline in need of repair, cleaning and debris removal. Long-range plans, supported by the Mountain Division Alliance, call for a continuous 50-mile trail from Portland to New Hampshire along the Mountain Division corridor in collaboration with the nine communities along the line. A feasibility study for this

concept is currently being conducted by Maine Department of Transportation, Department of Economic and Community Development and the Governor's Office of Policy, Innovation and the Future.

Funding for this particular corridor is not imminent. In the meantime, the stone culverts between South Windham and Westbrook continue to deteriorate. Survey work is desperately needed to identify the current condition of these culverts and the work necessary to stabilize and regularly maintain each. Regional advocacy is critical to ensuring that future rail and recreational use of the corridor and river incorporate these culverts while supporting environmental and economic improvements.

Landmarks will continue to monitor the endangered properties in hopes that they can be removed from the list in the near future. Landmarks' intention is to proactively work with property owners as much as possible to protect the properties for the future.

Since its first list in 2012, Landmarks has assigned *Place in Peril* status to 35 places and issues. As of this year, seven are considered protected or saved, and seven others have made progress toward preservation. *Places in Peril* is the only endangered properties program in Maine which focuses on a local region. There are approximately sixty such statewide and local programs in the United States.

The mission of Greater Portland Landmarks is to preserve and revitalize greater Portland's remarkable legacy of historic buildings, neighborhoods, landscapes, and parks. Our goal is to save greater Portland's historic places through preservation and adaptive reuse while promoting creative new architecture that enhances historic neighborhoods.

###