

The

Top Ten

Best

Preservation

Opportunities

Young
Preservationists
Association of
Pittsburgh

The Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area 2003

The mission of Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh is the active participation of young people in the preservation of historic resources.
"Give Life to History"



Young Preservationists
Association of Pittsburgh
PO Box 2669
Pittsburgh, PA 15230-2669
youngpreservationists.org

Young Preservationists: Challenge & Response

THE CHALLENGE

Time has not been kind to Pittsburgh's history. In just the last year, Pittsburgh has lost the Ellis Hotel in the Hill, a venerable African American landmark; the Homestead Workingmen's Club in Homestead, one of the oldest black fraternal lodges in Southwestern Pennsylvania; and the Mt. Zion Baptist Church, an African American house of worship in the Borough of Elizabeth. All three sites had been identified on the *African American Sites Survey of Allegheny County* in 1992 and all three were at risk of demolition. Now, they are gone forever.



The Ellis Hotel in 1992.

And that's just African American history.

Hundreds of small town main streets, remnants from America's industrial legacy, and religious properties throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania stand vacant, neglected, and deteriorated. History is virtually disappearing before our eyes.



The Mt. Zion Baptist Church in Elizabeth in 1992.



The Ellis Hotel being demolished in September 1992.

As the Pittsburgh area continues to hemorrhage population, tax base, and its institutional memory, the relics of the past are left behind unwanted and unused. As the region grows, how will the physical manifestations of history be incorporated into its future?

THE RESPONSE

A bleak picture, to be sure. But to the Young Preservationists Association of Pittsburgh, the region's history is a vast, untapped opportunity. The mission of the YPA is the active participation of young people in historic preservation activities.



The Mt. Zion Baptist Church in 2002.



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The Homestead Workingmen's Club in 2002.



The Homestead Workingmen's Club in 2003.

The YPA will accomplish its mission by pursuing the following objectives: 1) to educate public and private decision makers through preservation-related research; 2) to encourage the participation of young people in preservation-related activities, such as tours, focus groups, and design charettes; and 3) to create a linkage among individuals and organizations interested in historic preservation through an electronic Preservation Network using the YPA's website, <http://www.youngpreservationists.org>.

THE HISTORIC PROPERTIES INVENTORY

As a starting point to address the preservation of Pittsburgh's history, the YPA set out to create a Historic Properties Inventory, a web-based service designed to match buyers, developers, real estate agents, and investors with sellers and owners of historic buildings that have yet to be restored. The objective is to facilitate real estate transactions and the restoration of the region's most important historic properties to demonstrate the economic benefits of historic preservation.

In February 2003, the YPA announced a "Call for Nominations" from individuals and organizations throughout the nine-county region of Southwestern Pennsylvania to help identify the best preservation opportunities. By April 11th, 18 nominations had been submitted, not bad considering the YPA's low profile.

The Board of the YPA met on April 19th to "score" the nominations based on five criteria:

1. 50-year threshold (is the site 50 years old or older?);
2. Historical and architectural significance;
3. Threats to the site;
4. Community input; and
5. Feasibility of the solution.

Points were awarded in each of the five categories, plus three bonus categories to ensure the sites have broad regional representation:

- 1) is the site located outside the City of Pittsburgh?
- 2) is the site located outside Allegheny County?
- 3) is the site located in a low-income or minority neighborhood?

The result is the "Top Ten Best Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area," a listing of not-yet-preserved historically- or architecturally-distinctive properties with immense economic benefits to their communities should they be restored. Several themes were identified from the Top Ten list.

Of the Top Ten,

- five are located outside the City of Pittsburgh,
- four are outside Allegheny County,
- four are small town main streets,
- three are related to African American history,
- one is a religious structure,
- one is a building from the 1700s, and
- one is a remnant of Pittsburgh's industrial legacy.

Moving forward, the YPA plans to conduct design charettes in various communities which contain one or several of the "Top Ten" sites to engage residents about their thoughts for the future of these properties. At the end of the day, it is our hope that the YPA can empower individual communities to make wise choices about their future through preservation of the past. When asked, "what is a 'young preservationist,'" the YPA responds: anyone who cares about the next generation.

Give life to history.



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Small Town Main Streets

1. Main Street Uniontown



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name “Murphy Building” and associated commercial structures

Year Built c. 1920-1930

Address Main Street, Downtown Uniontown

County Fayette

Square Feet Approx. 10,000

Zoning Commercial

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name Robert Eberly, President, Eberly Foundation

Owner Address Contact: Muriel Nuttall, Executive Director, Fayette Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 2124
Uniontown, PA 15401-2124
724.437.4571

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

These three buildings are essential components of Uniontown’s Downtown Historic District. They are situated at the heart of Uniontown along the National Road. Built in c. 1920s-’30s, these buildings are excellent examples of Art Deco

commercial architecture and served as vital commercial structures for Uniontown’s booming retail sector in the early- to mid-1900s. They include the “Murphy Building,” with its name etched in limestone.

Possible threats include demolition, neglect, and failure to obtain financing and/or funding to restore these structures.

Situated right next to a performing arts theater, county government buildings, including the courthouse, and other historic buildings as part of the National Register Historic District, the Main Street properties could serve multiple purposes: street-level retail and

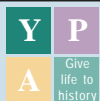
restaurant space with upper-level offices, and would be ideal complements to the emerging arts district.

A consortium of groups called “Revitalize Downtown Uniontown Committee” have banded together to raise funds for the buildings’ restoration and devise a reuse plan.

The buildings would be an ideal link with Brownsville, along the National Road, as well as an integral part of Fayette County’s history.

According to the *Tribune-Review* on 12/7/02, the Revitalize Downtown Uniontown Committee recently met to unveil its goals, which include restoring

properties, including numerous vacant structures that otherwise might be tabbed for demolition, and marketing them to potential new businesses.



Small Town Main Streets

2. Downtown Brownsville



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	Brownsville Commercial Historic District (about 50 buildings)
Year Built	1900s-1930s
Address	105 – 128 Brownsville Ave.; 1 – 145 Market Street, Brownsville Borough
County	Fayette
Square Feet	Approx. 1,000,000 (estimate)
Zoning	Commercial structures

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name	Ernest Liggett
Owner Address	Contact Norma Ryan, President Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation 69 Market Street, PO Box 97 724.785.9331 www.flatironcenter.com

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Downtown Brownsville is a tight ensemble of commercial structures erected primarily between 1900 and 1930. Of 55 contributing structures, only six were constructed either before or after this thirty-year period. The oldest structure, the Flatiron Building (c. 1835), was acquired and restored in the 1990s. It is now a museum and gift shop and houses the offices of the Brownsville Area Revitalization Corporation. Brownsville's main asset is its history and location. Brownsville is located within two heritage areas, the National Road Heritage area and the Steel Industry Heritage area.

These structures, listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1993), are in fair to good condition but are being held by one property owner, who refuses to sell or restore them. Possible demolition and neglect threaten their restoration and reuse.

These structures could be used for just about any purpose—from

restaurants, bars, and taverns, to historical centers, Main Street District, office space, interpretive centers, museums, outlet shops, and loft apartments.



BARC has been trying for years to acquire and restore these properties and return them to productive use, but the owner will not sell and refuses to cooperate. On April 18, 2002, the *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* reported that the landowner of more than 90 percent of downtown Brownsville, Ernest Liggett, was trying to negotiate with a Native American tribe to convert the buildings into a gambling facility. Most of the residents were against the plan.

In 2002, BARC held a design charette with young students in the area to brainstorm about possible new uses for the structures. It is time for the owner to

release the properties into the hands of responsible stewards.



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Small Town Main Streets

3. Eighth Avenue, Homestead



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	Eighth Avenue National Register Historic District, Homestead
Year Built	1890s-1940s
Address	100-300 block of Eighth Avenue, Homestead
County	Allegheny
Square Feet	Approx. 100,000 (estimate)
Zoning	Commercial structures

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name	Various
Owner Address	Contact Mike Solomon President, Homestead Area Economic Revitalization Corporation 303-305 East Eighth Avenue Homestead, PA 15120 412.464.4440

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

During Homestead's heyday, Eighth Avenue was a thriving retail district serving much of the Monongahela Valley. In his book *Homestead: The glory and tragedy of a an American steel town*, William Serrin recalls streets "thronged" with shoppers every Saturday, and quotes a long time resident's recollection that, "Eighth Avenue was like a little Broadway. You could go there at three o'clock in the morning and it would be full."

The town's main thoroughfare fell on hard times in the 1980s but survives as the Homestead National Register Historic District. It is significant for the buildings that remain from such tumultuous times as the Homestead Steel Strike of 1892 through the town's boom years in the 1940s.

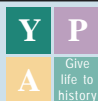


Architecturally, the district contains a varied and representative selection of residential, institutional, and commercial architecture from the period 1890-1940.

Many of the storefronts are now vacant. Once threatened with demolition from CVS Pharmacy, which proposed to build a 10,000 square-foot building surrounded by parking, CVS has since backed off its plans. Today, the commercial district is a victim of neglect and abandonment.

Carson Street on Pittsburgh's South Side serves as a valuable guide for how Homestead's Eighth Avenue can transform itself into a vibrant Main Street—an ideal complement to

the big-box retail development at the Waterfront.



African American History

4. National Negro Opera Company



Mary Cardwell Dawson (1894-1962), founder of the National Negro Opera Company.



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	National Negro Opera Company Home
Year Built	1908
Address	7101 Apple Street Pittsburgh, PA 15208 Homewood Neighborhood
County	Allegheny
Square Feet	7,074 on a 38,000 square-foot lot
Zoning	Residential structure

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name	Jonnet Solomon
Owner Address	1060 Saw Mill Run Blvd Pittsburgh, PA 15220 412.431.6030, ext. 4 jonnetsolomon@yahoo.com

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

This was the first home of the National Negro Opera Company, the first permanent black opera company in America organized in 1941 by Mary Caldwell Dawson (1894-1962).

The house was owned by William A. Woogie Harris, brother of the Pittsburgh Courier photographer Teenie Harris, and owner of the Pittsburgh Crawfords Negro League Team. The house was rented to Lena Horne, Roberto Clemente, Roy Jefferson, John Nesby and Marvin Woodson.

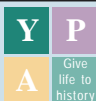
The National Negro Opera Company toured the nation, and was famous for its production of *Aida*. But its home was Pittsburgh, and performed its shows at the Syria Mosque (demolished in 1991). The Opera Company lasted until 1962.

In 1994, a dedication ceremony was held to place a Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission historical plaque outside the house (photo, inset, depicts the ceremony).



Dozens of community members attended and spoke, including former Courier Editor, Frank Bolden. Currently, the property needs to be restored and renovated. Vandalism, break-ins, and theft are all threats to the building.

When restored, the owner would like to convert the National Negro Opera House into a community arts center and music studio. The Opera House will not only be a community arts center, but it will help preserve the history of Pittsburgh musicians and will be a training ground to help youths develop their talents.



African American History

5. New Granada Theater



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name New Granada Theater

Year Built 1927

Address 2007 Centre Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
Hill District Neighborhood

County Allegheny

Square Feet 11,341

Zoning Commercial structure

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name Hill Community Development Corp.

Owner Address Andrea Wright-Banks
Executive Director
Hill Community Development
Corporation
2015-17 Centre Avenue
Pittsburgh, PA 15219
412.765.1320

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The New Granada was built in 1927 as the “Pythian Temple,” a black social hall for a group of black construction workers known as the Knights of the Pythian. The building was designed by African American architect, Louis Bellinger (1891-1946, Sumpter, S.C.), one of the few African American architects in the U.S. who lived in Pittsburgh during the 1920s through the 1940s.

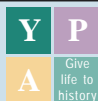
The New Granada Theater became a hotspot for African Americans in the greater Pittsburgh area. It drew major international talent such as Ella Fitzgerald, Count Basie, Cab Calloway, and Duke Ellington. On the second floor—at the Wylie Avenue level—was an extravagant ballroom, opened in 1941. The ballroom had indirect lighting, beautiful Venetian blinds, colorful

drapes, wall murals and a revolving crystal ball. It fell into disuse and disrepair in the 1960s, and has sat vacant for nearly two decades. The New Granada has become nearly as famous for its neglect as for its history. Continued neglect and prohibitive rehabilitation costs threaten the New Granada’s future. There is a plan for Centre Avenue’s revival, but will it include the New Granada?



Restored, however, as a theater, cultural center, or restaurant, the New Granada could be the centerpiece for an entertainment & shopping district along Centre Avenue.

Several other new buildings have been constructed down the street. A mix of old and new would complete Centre Avenue’s renewal.



Small Town Main Streets

6. Ambridge Historic District



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	Ambridge National Register Historic Landmark District
Year Built	1825-1905
Address	11th to 16th Streets Ambridge, PA 15003
County	Beaver
Square Feet	Approx. 10,000
Zoning	Limited Commercial

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name	Various
Owner Address	Contact: Mark J. Peluso Program Director The Main Street Center 1147 Third Street Beaver, PA 15009 724.728.9400

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Economy Historic District in the Borough of Ambridge contains the last remaining structures of the Harmonist Society, which settled here in 1825. The Harmonists were a German communitarian sect who built a community that was to exert a decisive influence

on the economy and development of the region throughout the 19th century. There are approximately 80 buildings in the historic district which are original to the first development of Economy, 1824-1840.

Today, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission administers Old Economy Village as a historic site and at present it draws about 25,000 visitors a year.

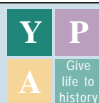
Many of the historic buildings are owned by absentee landlords and many of the residents are rather transitory. Little investment in preserving or restoring the buildings has been made. Many buildings have been “muddled” and some, which are vacant, continue to deteriorate.

The historic district was re-zoned for limited commercial development, meaning that property owners can develop their properties for more than just apartment dwellings. There is a HARB in Ambridge which reviews construction plans, and there is a planning and zoning commission, as

well as a code enforcement officer. Also, an Economic Development Board has been formed whose goal is to promote the appropriate development of the historic district. A streetscape plan has been developed and will be implemented by the Borough this year.

Many studies that have been done of the historic district have pointed out the potential for economic development of the district in conjunction with the PHMC historic site. It is hoped

that appropriate development will improve the neighborhood, both in terms of preservation as well as in quality of life for residents and visitors.



The 18th Century Experience

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	Peter Colley Tavern
Year Built	1796
Address	Route 40, Brier Hill Redstone Township
County	Fayette
Square Feet	Approx. 1,500
Zoning	Commercial

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name	Unknown
Owner Address	Contact Donna Holdorf President National Road Heritage Corridor 65 West Main Street Uniontown, PA 15401 724.437.9877

7. Peter Colley Tavern



HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Peter Colley Tavern was one of nine taverns or inns along the National Road between Uniontown and Brownsville, Pennsylvania. Of the nine, it was the only one known to predate the 1818 opening of the road. It was supposedly built by Colley during 1796 upon land for which he had filed a warrant in 1786. Therefore, he was one of the earliest tavern keepers of the area.

His house, which also served as a tavern, is distinctive because it was typical of stone house and tavern architecture of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. It was built in a basically Georgian style with a central hallway on each of two floors. The houses were built, in at least Fayette County, not by German stonemasons as has often been assumed but, as the tax records show, by

Welsh, English, and Scots-Irish masons. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. The photograph, below, shows a PHMC marker along the National Road.



The National Road was America's first national road fathered by Albert Gallatin. Begun in 1811 in Cumberland, Md., it was built on a road first laid by British soldiers on their march toward Fort Duquesne in 1755 (General Braddock is buried along the road). The road ran through Uniontown and Brownsville, in Fayette County, and was completed to Wheeling in 1818 and ultimately to Vidalia, Illinois. It was a toll

road under state control from 1835 to 1905. Rebuilt, it is currently U.S. Route 40.



African American History

PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name August Wilson Home
Year Built c. 1895
Address 1727 Bedford Avenue
 Pittsburgh, PA 15219
 Hill District Neighborhood
County Allegheny
Square Feet 2,838
Zoning Commercial

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name Darnell Harper
Owner Address 470 Enright Court
 Pittsburgh, PA 15206



8. August Wilson Home

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

Before he became Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright August Wilson, Frederick August Kittel (1945 –) grew up at 1727 Bedford Avenue in Pittsburgh’s Hill District. Black-owned businesses surrounded Bella’s and provided the setting for so many of

Wilson’s plays, including *Fences*, *Ma Rainey’s Black Bottom*, *Jitney*, and *Seven Guitars*.

Ervin Dyer of the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, who authored an article about Wilson’s home on January 26, 2003, writes, “A mom-and-pop market fronts the first level in the three-story brick building. The back part of the house, where Wilson was born, is rotting and covered with weeds. What happens to it now? No one’s sure, but the property’s owner, Darnell Harper, wants to keep the building. He didn’t know it was Wilson’s home and that the house, which was once a jitney station, hid a larger cultural significance.

At 1727 Bedford Ave. Rear, where all seven of the Wilson-Kittel siblings were born and raised in the 1940s, five families were

boarders at the property, said Kittel. Bella’s Market, which was owned by a Jewish family, faced the street. The Wilson-Kittel family rented two rooms in the back of the house, which had no hot water. They used an outhouse. The family lived in the property for 18 years. In 1958, the Wilson-Kittel family moved to Hazelwood.



Harper would like to honor Wilson’s achievements and what they represent by breathing new life into 1727 Bedford. He has no specific plans but is open to working with foundations, nonprofits, or other community people to pull tourists and conventioners to the home.

If Wilson’s home is saved and used to pay homage to his art, it would be the second such honor for a black American male writer. The first was Paul Laurence Dunbar, who gained national prominence as a poet. His home, a handsome two-story brick structure in Dayton, Ohio, was bought in 1904 for his mother, Matilda. The Ohio Legislature declared it a state memorial in 1936, and it was opened to the public in 1938.”



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9. B'Nai Israel Synagogue Sanctuary

Religious Properties



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	B'Nai Israel Synagogue Sanctuary (Urban League Charter School)
Year Built	1923-24
Address	327 N. Negley Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15206 Garfield-East Liberty Neighborhood
County	Allegheny
Square Feet	13,520
Zoning	Residential, multi-unit moderate density

OWNER INFORMATION

Owner Name	The Urban League of Pittsburgh
Owner Address	Dr. Gail Edwards, Chief Administrator Urban League of Pittsburgh Charter School 327 N. Negley Avenue Pittsburgh, PA 15206-2831 412.361.1041

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The original temple was designed by Henry Hornbostel in the mid-1920s for the B'Nai Israel Congregation. There is only one other synagogue in the Pittsburgh region designed by

Hornbostel, the Rodef Shalom Temple on Fifth Avenue and Morewood in Oakland. The B'Nai Israel Temple is possibly the only building of its type in East Liberty. Set atop a grassy slope along a mostly residential Negley Avenue, the original temple has a massive stone rotunda with tall arched stained glass windows. The main building a three-tiered drum form with Roman arches and an entry porch, which has a vaulted ceiling constructed of Guastavino tiles. The main roof is a wood truss rotunda with a span of approximately 120 feet.

Currently, the temple is not being used by the Urban League Charter School. There is some major plaster damage and water damage to the ceiling due to water infiltration from the roof. There is some minor stone and terra cotta damage on the exterior of the structure. There are no plans for demolition at this time, but without proper attention, the water damage may cause the loss of architecturally and religiously significant features.



If this temple were restored, it would serve as a critical location for community meetings, weddings, cultural performances, and other community events. There are many community based organizations who would like to hold meetings and events in the East Liberty neighborhood.



Pittsburgh's Industrial Legacy

10. Armstrong Cork Factory



PROPERTY INFORMATION

Property Name	Armstrong Cork Factory
Year Built	1901-1913
Address	23rd Street & Railroad Street Pittsburgh, PA 15201 Strip District Neighborhood
County	Allegheny
Square Feet	104,016 total lot area
Zoning	Commercial

OWNER INFORMATION

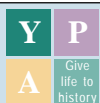
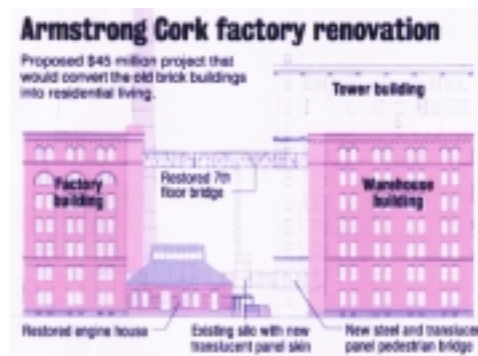
Owner Name	CDC Properties, Inc.
Owner Address	C.L. Hammell III 2213 Chardonnay Circle Gibsonia, PA 15044

HISTORY & BACKGROUND

The Armstrong Cork Factory was designed by the masterful Pittsburgh architect, Frederick Osterling in 1901 and 1902, with an addition added in 1913. The factory has three sections all constructed in red brick in the Richardsonian Romanesque style, a popular style for industrial buildings during the early 1900s. It stands as the physical legacy of Thomas Armstrong who purchased a small cork-cutting operation in 1860 on Smithfield and Diamond streets, in Downtown Pittsburgh. Forty years later, he built the massive factory, one of the largest cork processing facilities in the world in the early 1900s. By 1930, it employed 1,300 people. Armstrong Cork Factory left Pittsburgh in 1974, when employment at the factory had dwindled to about 300.

There have been numerous developers who have attempted to put together workable plans for reuse of the site, only to walk away from the deal. Jules Marling of Chicago, the most recent developer to try his hand at restoring the property, bought the building in 1996 for slightly more than one million dollars. In October, 2002, the *Post-Gazette* reported that he successfully pitched a \$45 million proposal to the city Planning Commission to renovate the vacant buildings into luxury loft apartments. According to an interview with Marling conducted in April 2003, his firm had just received federal Historic Tax Credits.

But lining up financing for this massive structure's restoration will be a challenge.



YPA's Service Area and Top Ten Best Historic Preservation Opportunities in the Pittsburgh Area 2003

