Topeka Worth Saving

Endangered Properties – 2014

Submitted by the

Topeka Landmarks Commission

on behalf of the

Citizens of Topeka

to the

Topeka City Council

May 13, 2014

2014 is the inaugural year for the **Topeka Worth Saving Endangered Properties List**. The intention of this program is to provide the citizens of Topeka the opportunity to voice their concerns regarding the future of Topeka's architectural and cultural heritage. It is hoped that **Topeka Worth Saving** will call attention to Topeka's most threatened historic resources, and provide the means to communicate their concerns to our city's government, business, and civic leaders.

Properties identified by this list may include a wide variety of structures, such as government buildings, private and individual homes, churches, commercial buildings, and community schools, all spanning the architectural history of our city and nation. All of these properties are also threatened by neglect, insufficient funds, public policy, or insensitive development.

Topeka Worth Saving is not a commemorative or celebratory list, though the unveiling of the list draws much-needed awareness to threatened historic sites across our city. Communication of this list to the broader public may raise local awareness of the threats facing these icons of our history, and facilitate the generation of resources necessary to address these threats. While we expect many of these properties identified as endangered to be saved or rehabilitated, the announcement of the list acknowledges there is still much work to be done.

The following pages represent the collective list of endangered properties, as nominated by the citizens of Topeka, in 2014.

Sumner Elementary School –

This structure is the 5th building in Topeka's history to bear the name of Charles Sumner. Sumner was a leader of anti-slavery forces in Massachusetts during the American Civil War. He is noted within the history of Topeka for his delivery of the anti-slavery speech "The Crime against Kansas" in 1856, before the US Senate.

The original Sumner Elementary School building was constructed in 1867, and was used by African-American children until it burned in 1885. It was immediately replaced by a two-room, one-story frame building that could not hold all of the African-American students in attendance. This second building was destroyed in 1898 by high winds.

The 3rd Sumner School was built in 1901, and was used for white students, only. This school was used for some of the city's first junior high school students, before it was damaged by fire in 1915. The damage was contained by removing the top floor, and was used again until 1936, when the current structure was built as an all-white elementary school.

Sumner Elementary School, as it stands today, was designed by architect Thomas W. Williamson in the Art Deco style of architecture. Mr. Williamson used an unusual amount of stone detailing in its exterior facades, all of which are still visible and present to this day. The building retains most of its original features, including light and bathroom fixtures, clocks, carved woodwork, a marble-rimmed fireplace in the kindergarten, and carved stone friezes that decorate the exterior of the building.

The quality and design of the building was unique in its day. It is a two-story framed building, constructed of cast-in-place columns and beams, with the exception of the auditorium, which utilized a composite structure of steel columns incased in concrete. Because the exterior walls were not load bearing, this enabled Williamson to employ the use of structural clay tile and stone, and a brick exterior-wythe.

This building is perhaps best known for its association as the all-white school which was the basis for the lawsuit Brown v Board of Education in 1954, which permanently ended racial segregation in America.

Sumner Elementary School is endangered today, due to its lack of maintenance over the period of several decades, and the lack of a plan or funding for its rehabilitation and reuse.

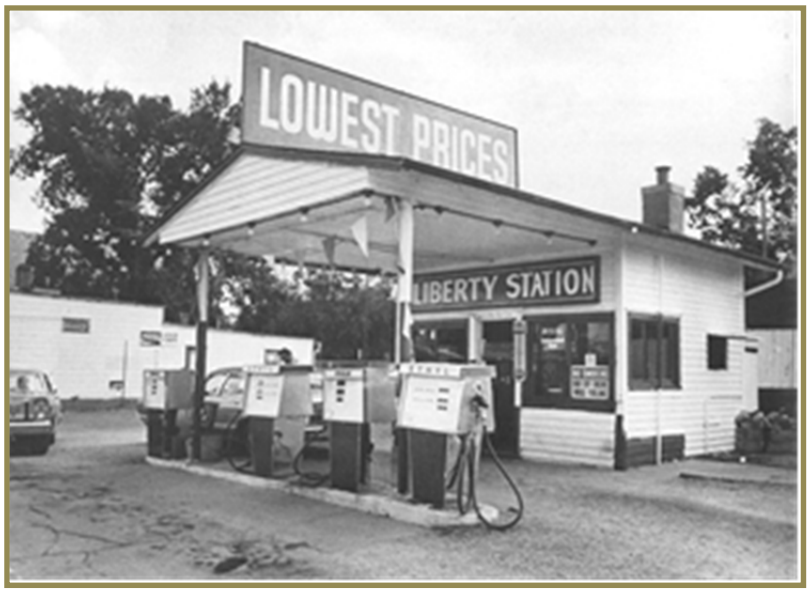
East Topeka United Methodist Church –

The property for the East Topeka Methodist Church was donated as the East Side Mission School by James Gilbert in 1878. Over the next 20 years, the property served as the location of the Parkdale Methodist Episcopal Church under a small number of ministers. The cornerstone of the existing building was set on May 25, 1896. The building's current name as the East Topeka Methodist Church was established in 1969.

This structure predates nearly all of the surrounding development in the area, and is the last remaining building dating to its original development during the 1890s. It does possess distinctive architectural characteristics that are typical of the 1890s time period. It is constructed of wood with stained-glass windows, and a center steeple and bell-tower. The structure pre-dates both sewer and water services.

In 2012, the congregation held its final service within the church, and made plans for its demolition. Several members of the community and former parishioners championed the cause to delay its demolition, but a new owner, and reuse for the building remain uncertain.

Liberty Station –



Liberty Station is located at 1319 SE 6th Avenue, formerly the route of US Highway 40. This Highway served as the eastern gateway to Topeka. Businesses along its corridor near the city capitalized on the frequent traffic by offering lodging, groceries, and with the advent of the automobile, fuel.

Liberty Station was built during the early 1920s as a curb-style service station, to offer fuel to visitors to the Capital City, and to travelers leaving Topeka for eastward destinations. The name of "Liberty Station" was also reflective of US Highway 40's unofficial designation as "Liberty Highway," so-named because of Topeka's status as the Free State Capital.

The Station has existed in its near present form since its establishment as a business in the 1920s. This building is presently endangered due to its lack of function or visual appeal to a new, prospective buyer or business owner.

Docking State Office Building –

Completed in March of 1957, at a cost of approximately $9 million, The Docking State Office Building is perhaps the State's finest example of Modern Movement architecture. This architectural movement spread across the US in the 1950s and 1960s, replacing more classical styles in favor of Modernism's simple lines, minimal ornamentation, and austere designs. The simplicity of this architectural movement bestowed it the status as "a symbol of the new political order" in the years following WWII.

The Docking State Office Building is a critical element in the architectural styles of the State government buildings within Downtown Topeka. Beginning with the Capitol Building in 1866 with its Neoclassical style, all State Office Buildings are premiere examples of the defining movements of American Architecture. The Landon State Office Building (1910) is constructed in the Classical Revival style; Memorial Hall (1914) is representative of the Beaux Arts Style; and the Kansas Judicial Center (1972) is an example of American Brutalist Architecture.

This is one of the first examples of Modern Architecture employed for a government building in the State of Kansas, and also one of the first in the region to utilize an aluminum and glass façade on all sides of the building. When it opened, it was officially the tallest building in the City of Topeka, except for the State Capitol Dome, and was one of the largest office buildings in the state, at over 324,700 sq. ft. of floor space. The windows were also made with energy-efficient glazing of a color that mimicked the patina atop the Capitol Dome across the street.

In 2014, the Kansas State Legislature approved the demolition of the Docking Building, pending revenues from its sale, and the sale of the Landon and Eisenhower State Office Buildings.