

“Ottawa’s Lost Treasures”
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Older, historical buildings can add much to the character, beauty and economy of a city. Ottawa is a good example. We who live here can take pride in the uniqueness of our community’s architecture, a treasure which also captures the attention of visitors and prospective businesses.

Unfortunately, some of that richness has been lost through the years. Landmark structures have fallen not only to fires and floods, but also to progress and lack of care.

It certainly is not possible or practical to save every structure of historical or architectural significance. However, it is worth reflecting during National Historical Preservation Week, this week, on some of the major landmarks that have disappeared in our city. In effect, they are the lost treasures of Ottawa.

Numerous fine homes have been razed through the years, two of which were once landmarks on South Main. The Stine-Marshall house at the corner of Seventh and Main was built by a banker and once played host to William Jennings Bryan. It was razed in recent years for Franklin Savings.

Nearby was a handsome house, built in the 1880s, by W. H. Clark, a local abstractor. It, too, lost out to a commercial building in what had been solely a residential area. The Southwestern Bell building now stands on the site.

Of similar style was the beautiful late Victorian home of Milo Harris. Designed by George Washburn, the house stood on the southwest corner of Fourth and Willow, and was torn down for the present apartments.

Another Harris house that Ottawa lost several years ago was that of J.P. Harris, a prominent leader in the community and president of People’s Bank. His home, complete with a round corner turret, stood on the southwest corner of Fourth and Locust.

One of the earliest mansions in Ottawa was built by attorney Harlan P. Welsh prior to 1872 on a rise of ground near Second and Ash. In 1972, the city of Ottawa had the venerable century-old home leveled to make way for the Department of Public Safety headquarters. But the city then built the station next door, leaving an empty lot where the Welsh-Cochrane house once stood.

Perhaps the most tragic, however, was the loss of the unique and historical Skinner-Scott house, built in the 1880s, a striking 2 ½-story stone and shingle edifice at the corner of Eighth and Cedar. It was designed by Stanford White, one of the most prominent architects in America at the end of the 19th century.

White, incidentally, was later murdered by a jealous husband in a sensationalized case which was depicted in the movie “Ragtime.”

Despite efforts to have it restored, Ottawa’s only Stanford White house, and probably the only one in this part of Kansas, was bulldozed just a few years ago to make way for the Kensington Apartments.

Ottawa is proud of its downtown, but several of its landmarks also have fallen under the wrecker’s ball.

A building that briefly served as the capitol of Kansas once stood on Main Street. The structure was built at the now extinct town of Minneola, which served as the capitol of Kansas Territory for a few weeks in 1858. After being moved to Ottawa in 1864, the building stood on

the northeast corner of Second and Main. It was moved twice more, and the razed. If it were still standing, the old Minneola capitol would be the most historically significant structure in the city.

The Zellner building was built in 1880 as a business and opera house. After 103 years as a downtown landmark, the structure was allowed to collapse and had to be razed. It was an anchor of the downtown district that is on the National Register of Historic Places.

A striking edifice that no longer graces the courthouse square was the old jail. Built in 1906 for \$13,000, the jail had handsome stone columns which contrasted with its red brick façade.

Churches, too, have not been sacred when in the way of the wheels of progress. An especially beautiful stone church, with two stunning spires, once stood on the northwest corner of Fourth and Walnut. Originally built for a Methodist Episcopal congregation, it was later used by Lutheran parishioners. It was destroyed a number of years ago.

Much more recently, the 100-year-old Christian Church on Cedar was leveled to make way for a city parking lot.

While many of Ottawa's architectural treasures are permanently lost, still others can be considered as buried treasures. They are buried under detracting and sometimes structurally damaging sidings or additions.

Others are poorly maintained or have had elaborate porches, bay windows, gingerbread, decorative shingles, steeples and towers removed or altered. The buildings are still there, but their uniqueness, character and beauty are sadly missing, at least for now. There is always hope that someone will care enough to restore them to the jewels they once were.