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## **Preservation League adds two historic Buffalo properties to Seven to Save list of endangered places for 2010**

ALBANY, February 25, 2010 – The Preservation League of New York State has named two of Buffalo’s distinctive historic properties, **169 East Ferry** and **Willert Park/A.D. Price Courts**, to the nonprofit group’s annual list of the Empire State’s most threatened historic resources, *Seven to Save*. These properties exemplify the potential for historic tax credits to revitalize neighborhoods and the struggle for equality in housing.

### ***169 East Ferry Street***

The handsome three story building at 169 East Ferry Street has been a community anchor since its construction c. 1890. Built of brick and stone, it retains considerable architectural integrity on the exterior and in the interior commercial spaces, stairwells and layout of multiple residential units. Always a mixed use building, it is well known in the neighborhood as the home of Harris Hardware, the first hardware store in Buffalo owned by an African-American family and in continuous operation for 40 years. Today, owner Glenn Banks is locally regarded as a hardware and window repair specialist, serving his almost exclusively pedestrian clientele.

Despite its sturdy construction, the building is suffering from deferred maintenance. Roof leaks have caused serious water damage to the apartments and exterior walls. The building is especially vulnerable to demolition as it has not been listed as a local landmark. It has been determined eligible for the State and National Registers of Historic Places but no nomination has been prepared. Landmark designation at the local, state and national levels would elevate the building’s significance, help make its rehabilitation a greater local priority, and open the doors to state and federal tax credit programs, making rehabilitation more feasible.

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### ***Willert Park / A.D. Price Courts***

In 1938-1939, the U.S. Housing Authority constructed the Willert Park Courts specifically for African-Americans, following the “separate but equal” public policy of the time, despite the fact that the neighborhood included African-Americans, Jews, and Italian-Americans. It was significantly smaller than public housing provided for other ethnic groups. By 1941, there was a waiting list of nearly a thousand eligible African-Americans whose applications had been refused for available housing in other public projects around the city on the basis of their race.

Owned and operated by the Buffalo Municipal Housing Authority, the property was managed by A.D. Price from its opening in 1939 until his death in 1968. For many years Mr. Price was the only African-American senior district manager for the local housing authority and the property was later renamed in his honor.

Additional significance is found in the Courts’ association with the Federal Arts Project (FAP) which operated between 1935 and 1943 under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). Impressive, allegorical bas relief plaques mounted on the buildings are the FAP projects of Robert Cronbach and Harold Ambellan. The designs, executed in tinted concrete, depict African-Americans and celebrate the themes of work and working class life.

The complex is in danger of being demolished and replaced with new construction.

“Seven to Save designation has a proven record of mobilizing community leaders and decision-makers to take action when historic resources are threatened,” said Jay DiLorenzo, President of the Preservation League. “Through this program, we provide targeted support to seven of New York’s most important and endangered historic resources, which are threatened by insensitive, ineffective or insufficient public policies, general neglect, and, in some cases, outright demolition.”

Preservation Buffalo Niagara nominated both properties, and is seeking assistance from the Preservation League in identifying additional and alternative means to protect them.

According to Terry Robinson, a Trustee of Preservation Buffalo Niagara and a resident of the city’s east side, “These designations are a validation of historic preservation and its role in revitalizing our community. The listing of Willert Park / A. D. Price Courts recognizes the great importance of Buffalo’s African American social and cultural history. Similarly, Harris Hardware’s building illustrates another significant asset and neighborhood. A better appreciation of these two neighborhoods will help to reverse the bulldozing, reverse the dynamic of disinvestment, and begin to build pride of place as well as recognition of the historical importance of the social and physical history of our community.”

“Lots of people do not know the story of Willert Park, which was the heart and birthplace of Black political power in Buffalo in the old 5<sup>th</sup> Ward, now the Ellicott District,” said

George Arthur, President of the Nash House and past President of the Common Council of Buffalo. “This place represents a lot of work by our people and our history in Buffalo. Sherman Walker, the first Black elected official, was very active in developing Willert Park; he ensured that the design and feeling represented the people. Mr. Sherman surveyed the people and developed the seven symbols used by the artists, translating their desires into bricks and mortar. It is important to keep this place -- protecting this site is the only right thing to do.”

“The Preservation League of New York State has extended important recognition to two threatened neighborhood properties, buildings that sustained the connectivity and vibrancy of those local communities for decades,” said Catherine Schweitzer, Preservation Buffalo Niagara Chair. “In both cases, by revitalizing these properties to showcase their historic and architectural significance they can again add social and economic value to their neighborhoods. Harris Hardware, a small business owned by Glenn Banks and essential to this residential area at 169 East Ferry, retains its unique historic character. It is ideally located to build off the significant public investment on Jefferson Avenue, the new Performing Arts High School one block to the west, and the planned public-private investment for several buildings at Main and Ferry streets, hopefully adding even more value and increased density to an entrepreneurial zone on the east side of our city.”

The inclusion of these Buffalo properties on the *Seven to Save* list provides the opportunity for the League to work with local advocates to protect the buildings. “We are looking forward to providing strategic attention, extra effort, and new tools to secure the future of these endangered resources for generations to come,” said Tania Werbizky, the Preservation League’s western regional Director for technical and grant programs. “We are delighted to report that through the community involvement and preservation strategies we have created together with local advocates, many significant properties have been saved.”

Since 1999, publicity and advocacy resulting from *Seven to Save* designation has led to the rehabilitation and reopening of the **Oswego City Public Library**, the rebirth of **Montauk Manor** on Long Island, and the stabilization of **St. Joseph’s Church** in Albany along with successes at several other locations.

The 2010 Seven to Save designees are:

- Kenwood, Albany, Albany County;
- Hamlet of Rensselaerville Historic District, Rensselaerville, Albany County;
- Stone Opera House, Binghamton, Broome County;
- 169 East Ferry Street, Buffalo, Erie County;
- Willert Park Courts / A.D. Price Courts, Buffalo, Erie County;
- John W. Chorley Elementary School, Middletown, Orange County; and
- Alasa Farms, Alton Hamlet/ Sodus, Wayne County.

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The Preservation League of New York State, founded in 1974, is a not-for-profit organization dedicated to the protection of New York's diverse and rich heritage of historic buildings, districts and landscapes. From its headquarters in Albany, it provides a unified voice for historic preservation. By leading a statewide movement and sharing information and expertise, the Preservation League of New York State promotes historic preservation as a tool to revitalize the Empire State's neighborhoods and communities.