

Counting Oregon's eccentric assets

The Historical Preservation League of Oregon has done a service by carefully, thoughtfully identifying Oregon's Most Endangered Places

Lists are, of course, marketing devices. Gimmicky. Fun. Attention-getting. Irresistible.

Last week, the Historical Preservation League of Oregon harnessed this tendency of human nature to peek at lists for Oregon's good effect. After sifting through nominations from all over the state, the league unveiled Oregon's Most Endangered Places.

And what's striking about this list — of 10, although next year it may be more or less — is how low-key, thoughtful and non-gimmicky the choices are. They won't necessarily grab headlines; no, they tend toward the charming, funky and idiosyncratic. And that's exactly what a state's historical treasures so often tend to be.

Many of the places on the list are flat-out gems. The Peterson Rock Garden in Redmond; the Ermatinger House in Oregon City (site of the famous coin toss to decide Portland's name); the Egyptian Theater in Coos Bay; the Baker City Middle School (designed by Ellis Lawrence); the Josiah Burnett House in Eagle Creek; and the Kirk Whited Farmstead (made of lava fieldstone) in Redmond — these all immediately strike us as landmarks that demand to be saved.

It would be very sad to lose the other places, too, even the most comical — Dr. Pierce's Barn. The doctor's "Pleasant Pellets" are no longer in circulation, we trust. Not even the doctor can vouch for their efficacy.

But the Cottage Grove barn that has hawked the pellets "for your liver" for more than a century is medicinal in its own right. It's one of the few remaining barns that boasts such advertising, and passers-by get a kick out of it.

Just to study the list will help Oregonians brush up on their history. But the league has bigger plans than sparking field trips and history-class discussions. The league hopes to serve as a catalyst, providing technical assistance — and inspiration — to galvanize restoration and rejuvenation.

A common misconception, says the league's executive director, Peggy Moretti, is that preservationists want to set places aside to gather dust. Not true. The key to saving historic places is to revive them and reincarnate them with a new use, purpose and productive life. Without that, she says, they get saved only "to fall into disrepair all over again."

Moretti, who has been with the league for the past two years, formerly worked in marketing. It's not a coincidence that the list is

being unveiled on her watch. She's aiming at waking up Oregonians who, all too often, call the league about a building when it's too late to save it.

Under Oregon's land-use laws, historic assets are supposed to be inventoried, just as wildlife assets are. But, in reality, most Oregon communities haven't updated their historic inventories in years. That makes it more likely that eccentric treasures will be lost.

Criteria for selection to the Most Endangered Places list included its significance; its community support; its viability; and the urgency of saving it. "It didn't have to be glorious, architecturally," Moretti said Thursday. "It just had to have meaning."

As a result, the list is a very practical starting point for Oregonians. But don't take our word for it. Read it and study it. As you'll see, it deserves far more than a peek. It should galvanize Oregonians to put some real elbow grease into saving places that give our state flavor and personality. We can't count on keeping those places unless we work to restore and revive them.

Take a look for yourself at www.historicpreservationleague.org/endangered.php.

being the place where I learned the great doctrines of Scripture as a child in Sunday school. It has become **constricted, narrow-minded**, picky, judgmental, and has reduced the dimensions of its perception of God by the same sad contraction of its own mind. God is bigger than our prejudices, bigger than our fears, bigger than all the issues we don't understand." Read and comment at The Stump.

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