



**Preservation
League of NYS**

Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church One of New York's "Seven to Save"

This biennial list from the Preservation League of NYS highlights the most at-risk historic places across the state

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Watertown, NY, 05/16/2022 — Since 1999, the Preservation League has highlighted New York's most endangered historic sites through its Seven to Save program. The League works closely with local advocates over the course of the two-year listing and beyond, raising visibility, assisting with advocacy, and providing extensive technical services. **The League is thrilled to include the Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church on the 2022-2023 Seven to Save list.**

"The Friends of Thomas Memorial Coalition is ecstatic about the Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church being selected as one of the historic sites for the Seven to Save program," said **Shameika Ingram, Founder of Preservation in Color**. "We are looking forward to working with the Preservation League to continue efforts of engaging the community to work towards the preservation of the church. The church is an important attribute to the city of Watertown as well as to the entire North Country. It serves as a focal point for documenting the history of the local African American community."

The Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church is a testament to the struggles and achievements of Watertown's African American community. Its original congregation was formed in 1878, consisting of many railroad workers, some of whom were formerly enslaved and many who were active abolitionists. Under the leadership of Frank Thomas, for whom the church is named, members of the congregation built the church themselves in 1909. Descendants of Frank Thomas continue to live in the community, linking the past to the present. From its early days and connections to the Underground Railroad to its consistent use for worship service through 2012, the church long served as an anchor for the African American community of Jefferson County.

The Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church has been without a caretaker since 2017, but an active coalition has formed to save it from demolition. Preservation and reuse of this building will recognize the contributions of the African American railroad workers who were vital to Watertown's economic success in the 19th century. In addition to this, a previous caretaker would provide tours of the church to the local students to discuss the significance of the Underground Railroad and the role the church played in supporting the early years of forming



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the local African American community. Working with local stakeholders to find a use that will best serve its community today, this modest building has the potential to educate and inspire in Watertown, throughout the North Country, and beyond.

“Alleviating threats and in some cases outright saving these seven sites from demolition will make for challenging approaches,” said **Preservation League Seven to Save Committee Chair Caroline Rob Zaleski**. “The Preservation League staff are up to the task, as has been shown with the Seven to Save program’s remarkable 20-year track record in forming partnerships to help save and protect historic resources in New York State. Our selection committee chose to feature a diverse range of sites: a small African American church reflecting optimism and ingenuity; a Frederick Law Olmsted park during Olmsted’s bicentennial year; three urban districts – rife with history and varied important architecture; a recently closed 400-acre State hospital complex on Seneca Lake; and lastly a wooded site in Eastern Long Island, where the extant studios of two important Abstract Expressionist artists wait to be restored for public view.”

“The individual sites included on this year’s Seven to Save list embody key preservation issues affecting places across New York State,” said **Preservation League President Jay DiLorenzo**. “From the negative environmental impact of senseless demolition to bringing little-known, but important, histories to light, the League is excited to work alongside on-the-ground advocates to save each of these seven at-risk places.”

2022-2023 Seven to Save List

- **Thomas Memorial AME Zion Church, Watertown, Jefferson County**
Threat: Deterioration; Demolition
- **Genesee Valley Park, Rochester, Monroe County**
Threat: Demolition; Development Pressure; Lack of Public Awareness; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity
- **Proposed South of Union Square Historic District, Manhattan, New York County**
Threat: Demolition; Development Pressure; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity
- **Penn Station Neighborhood, Manhattan, New York County**
Threat: Development pressure; Demolition
- **Downtown Oneonta Historic District, Oneonta, Otsego County**
Threat: Demolition; Deterioration; Lack of Public Awareness; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity; Vacancy
- **Willard State Hospital, Romulus, Seneca County**
Threat: Demolition; Deterioration; Development Pressure; Lack of Public Awareness; Loss of Visual/Architectural Integrity; Vacancy
- **James Brooks / Charlotte Park Home & Studios, East Hampton, Suffolk County**
Threat: Demolition; Deterioration; Lack of Public Awareness; Vacancy

The League collaborates with property owners, elected officials, and other stakeholders to craft preservation strategies and put these plans into action. Through partnerships with groups and individuals, threats to dozens of at-risk buildings, landscapes, downtowns, and neighborhoods have been reduced, and in many cases, eliminated by the Preservation League’s Seven to Save listing and subsequent actions



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For more information about the Seven to Save program and this year's list, please visit preservenys.org/seven-to-save

Interviews with representatives from the Preservation League and all the Seven to Save sites are available by request.

About the Preservation League of New York State

Since its founding in 1974, the Preservation League has built a reputation for action and effectiveness. Our goal has been to preserve our historic buildings, districts, and landscapes and to build a better New York, one community at a time. The Preservation League of New York State invests in people and projects that champion the essential role of preservation in community revitalization, sustainable economic growth, and the protection of our historic buildings and landscapes. We lead advocacy, economic development, and education programs across the state.

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