

NH adds landmarks, districts to historic list

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As heavy snows collapsed roofs last winter, preservationists in the Mount Washington Valley worried for the fate of a building that once housed the locomotives crucial for trains to get to Crawford Notch.

Would it hold? Or would a tough New Hampshire winter buckle the wooden beams and break their hearts?

The roof rafters weakened, but the old rail hub in Bartlett withstood its 120th season of snow and ice. Another dream has come true for those seeking to save it:

The Bartlett Engine House is now on the state Register of Historic Places.

"Hopefully we'll save it from further deterioration," said Scott Mallett, president of the Bartlett Roundhouse Preservation Club, a new non-profit group. "If we have another winter like that, that roof is on the ground."

The state Division of Historical Resources yesterday announced the Bartlett property and the Pelham Library and Memorial Building are the newest additions to the list. Three historic districts were also named: Bennington Village Historic District, Francestown Mill Village Historic District and Francestown Main Street Historic District.

The Pelham Library and Memorial Building was built in 1896 to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the town and to honor Civil War veterans. It was Pelham's first and only library until 2003.

New Hampshire established the state Register of Historic Places in 2001. Listing can help preserve a property in different ways, including possible qualification for state financial assistance, according to the state Division of Historical Resources.

A property on the list does not impose restrictions on private owners, who are free to maintain, manage or dispose of their property as they choose. Eligible properties must be at least 50 years old and retain the qualities that make them irreplaceable.

The state's Historic Preservation Officer said the latest properties reflect a great appreciation of community roots.

"These communities and individuals have done a terrific job of understanding and valuing their historical resources," Elizabeth H. Muzzey said in the announcement. "These listings represent a great deal of dedication of citizens to protect our state's heritage and special places."

Some make the list as an example of local architecture or construction. Others make the list for the story their existence tells.

Such is the case for the Bartlett Engine House, which was in operation between 1887 and 1958.

"Historically, of course, Bartlett was a railroad town," said Paul Hallett, operations manager for the Conway Scenic Railroad. "There's not much left in Bartlett of those days."

Built by the Portland and Ogdensburg Railroad, the Bartlett Engine House emerged as a hub for the mountain division of the Maine Central Railroad. It's also known as the Bartlett Roundhouse. The six locomotives stationed there would assist trains over the grade leading to Crawford Notch, which opened the White Mountains more to tourism and logging.

Besides transforming the region's economy, the engine house served a critical role in moving supplies during World War I and World War II, according to Mallett.

The state of New Hampshire owns the property, which is located on the rail line Conway Scenic operates.

Mallett said his group is in talks with the state on legal issues and user agreements. He estimated a restoration project would cost at least \$1 million. He hopes a place on the state register will help raise his small organization's profile, as well as raise money for the work, starting with some bracing to support the building's roof.

The building has sat idle since 1958, though the state had used one stall to store sand and salt, some of which remains on site. Vandals have knocked out the windows and damaged parts of the interior.

"It's pretty much on its last legs," said Mallett, who was born and raised in Bartlett. Four generations of his family have worked, in some fashion, on the Maine Central Railroad.

He said the immediate goal is to stabilize the building. And he hopes for a more mild season next winter.

Mallett allows himself to dream of one day transforming the dilapidated engine house into a research library, stocked with hundreds of books, thousands of photographs, and railroad artifacts already donated to the club.

"This history won't be lost," he said.