Peabody Designated National Historic Landmark

George Peabody College for Teachers was officially designated a Registered National Historic Landmark as a part of its annual Founder's Day ceremonies Monday, Feb. 20.

George W. Fry, representative of the National Park Service of the U. S. Department of the Interior, said he believes Peabody is the first college in the state and one of “very few” in the nation to hold this distinction.

Fry, superintendent of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, represented Secretary of the Interior Stewart L. Udall and National Park Service Director George Hartzog in presenting the bronze plaque and framed certificate indicating Peabody “possesses exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States.”

Horace G. Hill, Jr., Peabody trustee, officially received the plaque and certificate. Hill’s late father, H. G. Hill, also was a Peabody trustee and their combined service to Peabody totals almost half a century.

Historic Sites Act

Fry, in explaining the Historic Sites Act of 1935, said it established a “national policy to preserve for public use historic sites, buildings and objects of national significance for the inspiration and benefit of the people of the United States.” He quoted from Proverbs, Chapter 22, Verse 28, “Remove not the ancient landmarks, which thy fathers have set.”

Peabody observes Founder’s Day on or near the Feb. 18 birthday of George Peabody, New England philanthropist who gave $80,000 in 1855 to help the South after the War Between the States. It also is the birthday of two Peabody College giants, Dr. Bruce Rhynard Payne, president from 1885 until his death in 1897, and Dr. Charles McMurry, national pioneer in elementary education.

Dr. Clifton Hall, professor of education, delivered the Founder’s Day address, paying tribute to some of the distinguished men who have helped to build Peabody.

He said the most striking and important quality they had in common was that they did not fear to be themselves.

Dr. Hall declared “a college can be equipped with millions of dollars worth of apparatus and it can be administered with the greatest skill and efficiency, and it will fail if it is not staffed by capable teachers.”

Dr. Hall said men like Dr. Payne had a sense of direction and criteria which they kept clearly before their students.

He urged students attending the convocation to look for such a criteria. “As to where we should look for such criteria, I would suggest that the answer is a simple one: Look around you, and, occasionally, look behind you.”

Peabody traces its history to 1785 and the founding of Davidson Academy, first school in Davidson County, chartered by the State of North Carolina within a few years after the first settlers arrived here. The college has graduates in every state and many foreign countries, including more than 40 college presidents.

Acting President Henry H. Hill of Peabody presided at the ceremonies, and Vice Chairman Thomas P. Kennedy, Jr., of the Board of Trustees introduced Trustee Hill.

Screening Process Explained

Fry said that under the Historic Sites Act, the National Park Service has been conducting a National Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings to determine which possess exceptional value in commemorating or illustrating the history of the United States.

“As the Survey progressed it became apparent that there was urgent need to encourage greater historic conservation efforts than any one agency in the Federal Government could possibly undertake.

Only through the cooperation of Federal, state, and local groups and individuals could we hope to accomplish the vast scope of necessary historical conservation.

“To encourage this cooperation the Secretary of the Interior initiated the Registry of National Historic Landmarks. This program has a two-fold purpose: First, to recognize and encourage the continuation of preservation efforts being conducted by state, local, and private organizations; and second, to call attention to those sites of exceptional value which should be preserved,” he explained.

The selection of these sites is a cooperative process in which state and local agencies and individuals share their knowledge with the professional staff members of the National Park Service, Fry said. Their findings are then evaluated by a Consulting Committee for the National Survey.

The Secretary’s Advisory Board on National Parks, Historic Sites, Buildings, and Monuments. These two appointive bodies are composed of eminent authorities in various fields of knowledge. This double screening is to assure that no important site is overlooked, and that no sub-standard site is included in the Registry.

Thus, historic conservation under this program is a work in which the Federal Government, state agencies, private organizations, and individuals all share and cooperate. The long-range benefit of the program to the American people will be the preservation of that part of our cultural heritage existing in nationally significant historic objects, sites and buildings. From them we are better able to understand and appreciate our past; and hopefully future generations will understand and appreciate the national heritage we pass on to them,” Fry said.

In concluding his talk, Fry said, “Let us always remember the warning given by the British historian, Lord Macaulay, ‘A people that takes no pride in the accomplishments of their remote ancestors will probably produce nothing worthy of recollection by their remote descendants’.”

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