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Estate Whim Museum Named Among America's Most Endangered Historic Sites

The National Trust for Historic Preservation emphasizes the need to save integral pieces of diverse American history, including the storied Estate Whim Museum in St. Croix

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The Estate Whim Museum in Frederiksted

On Wednesday, the National Trust for Historic Preservation announced its annual listing of America's 11 most endangered historic places. The Estate Whim Museum in Frederiksted, St. Croix was named among those at risk.

Carol Quillen, president and CEO of the National Trust, highlighted the shift in recognizing and preserving a broader scope of American history. "Our collective idea of American history has

expanded to include those previously left at the margins. This year's list reflects that broader perspective, recognizing sites across all U.S. territories as integral parts of our national narrative," said Quillen.

A site steeped in rich but tumultuous history, Estate Whim traces its origins back to the Danish colonization of St. Croix. Initially a plantation producing cotton and sugar, it operated from 1743 to 1848 using the forced labor of enslaved Africans and their descendants. Even after the emancipation spurred by the 1848 revolt, oppressive labor conditions persisted on the estate, which provided the backdrop to the 1978 Fireburn labor revolt. Acquired by the U.S. government in 1932 following the U.S. purchase of the Virgin Islands, the 12-acre site now functions as a museum, maintained by the St. Croix Landmarks Society since 1954.

The museum houses artifacts including Crucian furniture and decorative arts, housed in structures including the original sugar mills and slave quarters. However, Estate Whim's historic buildings suffered extensive damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. The slow recovery efforts that followed have left the museum reliant on temporary solutions such as tarpaulins to protect deteriorating structures crafted by 18th-century enslaved masons and carpenters.

The Landmarks Society knows that the site is in urgent need of repair, however support and resources are needed to execute this important task. The thought is that by highlighting the museum's endangered status, it could galvanize supporters to come together to formulate and execute a strategy to preserve this important piece of USVI history.

Even as the museum was being listed as one of the most endangered historic places in the country, an initiative was being announced that could result in the eventual full restoration of the facility. "We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Government of the Virgin Islands' Office of Disaster Recovery which will expedite long-awaited repairs to the museum properties," said Valencio Jackson, chair of the St. Croix Landmarks Society. The MOU designates ODR as the managing entity for the restoration project.

According Mr. Bryan, who signed the MOU, "Estate Whim Museum is not only a treasured historical site but also a living testament to the resilience and spirit of our people...Let us move forward together, fortified by our past, as we rebuild and revitalize this cornerstone of Virgin Islands history."