

**NATIONAL TRUST
NAMES
PHILIP SIMMONS'
WORKSHOP AND
HOME IN
SOUTH CAROLINA
ONE OF AMERICA'S
ENDANGERED
HISTORIC PLACES**

***Home of 95-Year-Old Master Blacksmith and
Cherished Local Legend
Needs Preservation
Before it Succumbs to the Elements***

Washington, D.C. (June 14, 2007) –Today, the **National Trust for Historic Preservation** named the Philip Simmons Workshop and Home in Charleston, S.C., to its **2007 list of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places**.



**Home (left) and Workshop of
Philip Simmons
30 1/2 Blake Street**



This workshop was originally built by Guy Simmons (*no relation and also a slave*) who gave it to his son Peter in the late 1800s. Peter hired Philip at age 13 and left him the shop in 1952.

Over the course of an 80-year career, Charleston's beloved master blacksmith Philip Simmons has been called the "gate keeper" because of the hundreds of exquisite wrought-iron gates he's made to adorn the homes, churches and gardens of his cherished hometown. Symbolically, the title is apt because Simmons, at the age of 95, is truly the last of his breed, a master artisan keeping alive the tradition of generations of African-American blacksmiths who created works that were both utilitarian and beautiful. Born on Daniel Island in 1912, Simmons moved to Charleston as an 8-year-old child and began an apprenticeship at age 13 with a blacksmith who was a former slave. The advent of the automobile meant less demand for horseshoes, so young Philip developed his skills while repairing and replacing corroded pieces in existing ironwork throughout the city of Charleston. It was in the late 1940s when he began creating the elaborate pieces of ornamental ironwork – gates, fences, stair rails and window grills that he is known for today -- many with intricate designs of animals and trees. A local treasure, Simmons has been recognized with a National Heritage Fellowship Award from the National Endowment for the Arts and a 1994 induction into the South Carolina Hall of Fame. In 1998, Governor David Beasley presented him with the state's highest honor, "The Order of the Palmetto."

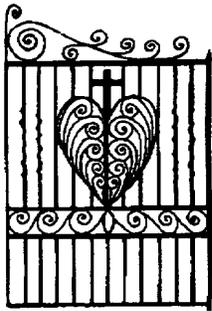
Simmons' workshop, a lightweight standing seam tin Quonset hut, is the same one used by his mentor, who died in 1952. With his blacksmith tools ever ready, Simmons takes great delight in welcoming students and tourists to his workshop and sharing his story. However, the modest buildings that comprise his home and workshop need to be secured, preserved and adapted for educational purposes. In addition, while there have been efforts to catalogue and document Simmons' work, his legacy is vulnerable because of a lack of documentation, interpretation, funding, estate planning and even severe weather.



A portion of the workshop is original (1800s). During the years of continued use, corroded pieces of the tin building were replaced by Mr. Simmons.



Mr. Simmons bought this site in 1960 after moving the workshop seven times. His office is off the front porch where he created many of the ironworks that he is known for today.



The Philip Simmons Foundation, Inc., established in 1991 by the Vestry of St. John's Reformed Episcopal Church, 91 Anson Street, is preserving his legacy. Donations toward the purchase of his home and workshop may be sent to:

Philip Simmons Home and Workshop Fund

Coastal Community Foundation
90 Mary Street
Charleston, SC 29403

Photographs by: Steve Lepre of Sunhead Projects.
Walkway Gate by: Philip Simmons.

“Philip Simmons is an American legend whose artistic contribution to his hometown of Charleston and to the nation is immeasurable,” said Richard Moe, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. “This is the story of a man, his workshop, his home and his personal accomplishments that had an impact on the style of Charleston and so many other southern communities. Philip Simmons is now 95 years old, we cannot allow his legacy to be compromised.”

History: Philip Simmons’ work is a significant character-defining feature in Charleston, a city that prides itself on its historic architecture and its preservation ethic. In the early 1930s, Simmons was one of 15 blacksmiths operating in the community, but now his forge is one of only two on the Charleston peninsula.

Threat: Since Simmons did not mark all of his earlier pieces, he can’t recall everything he has made. There have been efforts to catalogue his work and every week, Simmons is driven around the city to hunt for his creations. More than 550 pieces have been located to date, but this task is made more difficult because many homeowners don’t know they own a piece of Simmons’ work or aren’t aware of his reputation. While the Philip Simmons Foundation has done an extraordinary job with little resources, greater visibility, funding and interpretation would assure that Simmons’ work survives. (www.philipsimmons.org/documentation)

Simmons’ workshop draws tourists daily, but it desperately needs to be stabilized; currently, the structure has no interior walls or insulation and is not anchored, making hurricanes a constant threat.

Solution: A resource as important as Philip Simmons’ home and workshop should not remain in private hands, especially when Simmons himself is concerned about its preservation. One option is to assist the Philip Simmons Foundation to raise funds to purchase the site from Simmons and then provide him with a “life estate,” which would allow him to continue to live at the home he’s known for 48 years.

For more information about the sites on the 2007 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places, visit www.nationaltrust.org/11most/

The National Trust for Historic Preservation is a private, nonprofit membership organization dedicated to protecting the irreplaceable. Recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the Trust was founded in 1949 and provides leadership, education, advocacy, and resources to save America’s diverse historic places and revitalize communities. Its Washington, DC headquarters staff, six regional offices and 28 historic sites work with the Trust’s 270,000 members and thousands of local community groups in all 50 states. For more information, visit the Trust’s web site at www.nationaltrust.org.

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