

Historic N. O. Nelson Campus featured by Landmarks Illinois

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GODFREY – Lewis and Clark Community College’s historic N.O. Nelson campus in Edwardsville is one of 20 places being featured as part of Landmarks Illinois’ “20 Years, 20 Stories” to commemorate the 20th anniversary of its Most Endangered Historic Places program.

Landmarks Illinois’ Most Endangered Historic Places list was created in 1995 to help draw attention to endangered historic buildings. Through this program, Landmarks Illinois has identified more than 200 of these sites over the past 20 years.

Just 20 of those stories are being told at <http://2020.landmarksil.org/> to highlight how historic landmarks can be used in new ways.

When the N.O. Nelson campus was added to the list in 1999, as Nelson Factory, it was in disrepair.

“The Nelson campus demonstrates how historic buildings can be repurposed to meet modern needs, in this case the conversion of a factory to educational facilities,” said Frank Butterfield, director of the Springfield office of Landmarks Illinois. “It is an excellent example of how preservation projects can fill a local need, put people to work, promote great places to visit, and maintain vibrant neighborhoods. I hope others see this transformative impact of historic preservation and join us in saving historic places in their community.”

The N. O. Nelson campus is named for the late N. O. Nelson, who built the factory for his plumbing fixture manufacturing business in the late 1800s.

Nelson believed in more than building a successful business. Because he wanted to make sure that his employees and their children were educated and had good living conditions, he founded the Leclaire School and Leclaire Village, which are located near campus.

Wagner Electric Corporation purchased the buildings in the late 1940s, but eventually closed in 1957. The site remained vacant until 1964, when the Southern Illinois University Foundation purchased the property. Southern Illinois University Edwardsville deeded the property to Lewis and Clark Community College in 1999.

L&C began to refurbish the original buildings in 2002, and broke ground that same year on a building addition, now known as N8. In 2004, the N7 building became the first restored building to house classes. Today, the refurbished campus is home to L&C classes and is used by Edwardsville High School as well.

“This campus is special to me because I’ve been here since day one and I have seen the remarkable restoration,” said Tim Bell, N. O. Nelson Campus manager. “Every time I look at the pictures in the halls, I remember what the buildings used to be before they were restored.”

L&C is no stranger to preserving historic buildings. The college’s Godfrey campus was once Monticello College, a seminary for women, founded by Captain Benjamin Godfrey in 1838. There are a number of historic buildings on the Godfrey campus, two of the most notable being the Main Complex and the Benjamin Godfrey Memorial Chapel. In 1994, the Lewis and Clark Community College Foundation purchased the Benjamin

Godfrey Mansion, which is a national historic landmark that resides just north of the Godfrey campus.

“At Landmarks Illinois, we see every day that historic places not only enrich people’s lives, but build communities,” Butterfield said. “Our work as the statewide historic preservation nonprofit is not possible without the dedication of local citizens, communities and partners, such as Lewis and Clark Community College.”