

MEDIA RELEASE

To: Area Media
From: Save the Manfred House, Inc.
Date: March 15, 2021
RE: DNR Plans to Demolish Manfred House

For Immediate Release

Minnesotans interested in maintaining sites of historic, literary, and architectural importance in our state parks should be concerned that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has announced it intends to “deconstruct” the historic former home of author Frederick Manfred in Blue Mounds State Park.

All three of the concepts for future use of the area proposed by the DNR would require the house to be demolished; none of the concepts attempt to preserve a structure with unique historical and aesthetic value that has long been integral to the park.

Save the Manfred House, Inc. was organized in late 2019 by his daughter Freya Manfred, her husband Thomas Pope, and former Luverne resident Tom Brakke because they feared that the DNR would remove the house without fully exploring alternatives to preserve it for future generations.

According to Rolf Anderson, a Twin Cities architectural historian, “The Manfred House should be preserved because of its distinctive architectural style and Manfred’s significant contributions to literary and cultural history.”

Manfred, who coined the term “Siouxland” to describe the prairie region that encompasses parts of Minnesota, Iowa, South Dakota, and Nebraska, wrote more than thirty books, which chronicled life in the Upper Midwest from Native times into the latter part of the 1900s. Many of those books were written at the home he built on the Blue Mounds.

The Minnesota State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) has determined that the house is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, because of its unique design and architecture, and for its literary and cultural history related to Manfred.

“We asked the DNR to support listing the house on the National Register of Historic Places,” Manfred said, “but they declined to do so.”

“We call for a more public review of the decision process that led the DNR to its conclusion to raze the house,” she added.

Manfred and others are troubled by these facts:

The DNR has not cared for the house properly for many years. “The DNR says that ‘deferred maintenance is not a primary cause’ of the condition of the house,” Manfred said. “We believe the DNR’s neglect has been a significant factor.”

The request for proposals regarding alternatives was written to assume demolition of the house. “We believe that the DNR did not undertake a full review of the alternatives for the house,” Brakke said, “which would include consulting with historic preservation experts.”

“Instead, we believe the DNR set up the process to result in the solution that it favors,” he added.

The existing conditions assessment on the house prepared for the DNR was inadequate. “There are questions as to whether the proper team was hired by the DNR to assess the house and the cost of repairing it,” Anderson said. “Those charged with inspecting it were only ‘allowed limited visual access from the doorway of the house.’ We believe estimates given for the possibility and costs of renovation are therefore speculative.”

Over the years, the DNR has been erasing Frederick Manfred from the history of the park. Pope noted that, “The Manfred name no longer appears on park maps or the ‘About the park’ description on its website, even though he built the house, lived in it for nearly fifteen years and wrote *Scarlet Plume* and many other books there.”

“The drawings for the proposed trailhead on the site of the house make no mention of him or the site’s significance, instead calling the area ‘Eagle Rock Vista.’ And no proposal being offered includes the preservation of Manfred’s writing studio or a recreation of it, a telling oversight,” Pope said.

The DNR is seeking comments about its [proposals](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/proposals) online through a survey at bit.ly/2ODYS8g, but only through April 5. “We hope that people will reject the options that are presented and ask that the Manfred house be maintained for future generations,” Manfred said. “In addition, please spread the word by talking to friends, posting on social media, or writing a letter to the editor.”

“Once this historic and architecturally significant house is gone, it’s gone.”

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For further information, see our website at savethemanfredhouse.org.

info@savethemanfredhouse.org; Box 746, Luverne, MN 56156

Freya Manfred and Thomas Pope (tpope@mcad.edu)
Tom Brakke (tom@tjblc.com)
Rolf Anderson (RolfTAnderson@gmail.com)