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## Boynton Beach poised to designate first historical home

February 27, 2012 | By Erika Pesantes, Sun Sentinel

Boynton Beach — The city is preparing to designate its first historic home to launch its historical-preservation program and begin protecting its past.

The first home is linked to one of the Barefoot Mailmen.

Audrey Gerger, who owns the pink 1927 Mission-style duplex at 331 NW First Ave., sought out the honor.

"It needs to be saved. It's a beautiful home," Gerger said, "It's a special house. It has a lot of good history behind it."

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The preservation program, which [Boynton Beach](#) established in 2010, is voluntary, and designation requires City Commission approval. To be considered, a site must be architecturally significant or associated with a historical figure, not just old.

The city last conducted a survey of potentially historical sites in 1996 that included structures at least 50 years old. Now, the list to survey is more than 1,000 properties.

Still, age doesn't necessarily make a building historical, preservationists said.

For Gerger, her home's historical elements begin at her front door.

Margaret Garnett Harris — daughter of [pioneer](#) and citrus grower Andrew Garnett, who also was one of the Barefoot Mailmen, who carried mail on foot from Palm Beach to Miami in the late 1800s — dropped by her former home in 1995, looking for its new owner and offered insight into the home's past.

Harris' husband, Clyde Harris, was a botanist and principal of the city's 1927 high school and 1913 elementary school, which is on the National Register of Historic Places.

While the home's original staircase, Dade County pine wood floors and fireplace have been preserved, it's unique for the mirror-image layout of both living spaces that exists nowhere else in [Boynton Beach](#), said Warren Adams, city historic preservation planner.

Earlier this month, Kendall Harris, the Barefoot Mailman's grandson, visited from Tennessee and stopped by his childhood home where his family lived in 1940-48.

"I think it's good to give people some connection with the past," Harris, 73, said, "The world changes so rapidly that it's an important perspective to have at least a little exhibit of what things were a generation or two before."

Trying to promote the historical-preservation program, the city offers up to a 10-year tax incentive on improvements to a [property](#).

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The preservation program, however, can't protect all of [Boynton Beach's](#) history. The city's oldest home, built in 1902, was knocked down late last year, board vice chairman Ginger Pedersen said.

Since then, new rules would bring the demolition of any potentially historical building to the board's attention, she said, although the board would have no [power](#) to stop a wrecking ball.

Preservationists said there is value in the "intangibles" of historic preservation, which could help stabilize and even increase property values.

"Beyond the monetary, we also have the cultural. It draws cultural tourism to the area," board chairman Eric Jones said. "There's a value to preserving and making your area a museum of [Boynton Beach](#)."

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