

The post-flood recovery process included an evaluation of the damage and the potential for salvaging or preserving Grand Forks' historic treasures. Although some structures ultimately were lost, many were saved. Here are a few of the historic preservation successes in the aftermath of the 1997 flood and fire:

South Junior High School ♦ 1224 Walnut Street

Built in 1932 in the Collegiate Gothic style. Sustained more than 50 percent damage from flood. Evacuated by school district. Placed on National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) and converted to low-moderate income housing. Has charming sculptures of children reading classic books over entrances on Walnut.

Reeves Drive ♦ East side between Fourth and Eighth Avenues South

Homes threatened with demolition or removal in order to provide land for a new flood protection levee. Residents and the Grand Forks Historic Preservation Commission saved the structures because of persistent questioning of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The street now anchors the Near Southside Historic District, listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thomas D. Campbell House ♦ 2405 Belmont Road

Circa 1879. Built by the parents of "The Wheat King." The house and grounds were threatened with removal to make room for the new flood protection levee. Both were saved through extensive negotiations with the Corps of Engineers that resulted in the acquisition of land to relocate outbuildings. The house was moved westward on the property. The National Register of Historic Places agreed that the move was necessary and the house continues to be listed on the Register.

Boomtown Building ♦ 216 S. 3rd St. (moved from 201 S. 3rd St.)

Circa 1884. One of the last two extant wooden buildings from the first flush of town development in the late 1870s and early 1880s. This building was moved across the street from its original location to make room for the flood protection levee. It is listed on the National Register as contributing to the Downtown Grand Forks Historic District.

Third Street from Kittson to University Avenue

Historic "Main Street" of Grand Forks that faced possible demolition. Initial flood protection project plans showed construction of a new levee down the middle of the street, requiring that everything on the west side be demolished to accommodate the new flood-control structure. Extensive negotiations resulted in the building of a floodwall behind the buildings, saving much of the historic fabric of downtown and providing the basis for the Downtown Historic District.

Metropolitan Opera House ♦ 116 S. 3rd St.

Built 1890. Once known as the “finest opera house between Minneapolis and Seattle,” the Met was a bar and bowling alley at the time of the flood. Though the building sustained serious flood damage and was difficult to clean out afterwards, the Opera House is the best example of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in Grand Forks. It was saved through partnerships among the Grand Forks Office of Urban Development, the building owners, the Historic Preservation Commission and JLG Architects. Funding enabled the cleaning and stabilization of the structure, which has now been converted to high-end loft apartments.

St. Michael's Hospital and Nurses' Residence ♦ 813 Lewis Boulevard

Built in 1907 and 1913 respectively, the buildings commonly were known as St. Anne's, the name of the nursing home that was there from 1952 to the 1980s. The buildings had been connected and converted to low-moderate income housing units before the flood. These buildings, too, lay in the line of the proposed levee and the Corps of Engineers proposed demolition. However, concerted efforts by the Historic Preservation Commission helped save the structures. The commission formed partnerships with the Grand Forks Fire Department, the city's Inspections department and the Corps to build a specialized wall that would protect the building's occupants, meet fire safety standards and city building codes. The cost of the resulting wall was about half that of demolition AND the buildings were saved.

Residential development

Individual houses throughout Grand Forks were lost because of failed basements or other flood causes. This left holes in otherwise well developed neighborhoods. The city's Office of Urban Development, in conjunction with the Historic Preservation Commission, developed a plan for in-fill development on city-owned lots that would complete the neighborhoods with housing that matched in scale, size, set-back and style. The new houses are not replicas of the older housing in the neighborhood but they “fit.” Examples: 523 Cherry St., 1006 Cherry St., 1512 University Ave., 735 N. 5th St., 711 N 5th St., 420 Cottonwood.