

Buffalo Rising May 7, 2025



[Preservation](#)

Preservation Alert: Big Win for The Turtle

By [queenseyes](#) May 7, 2025

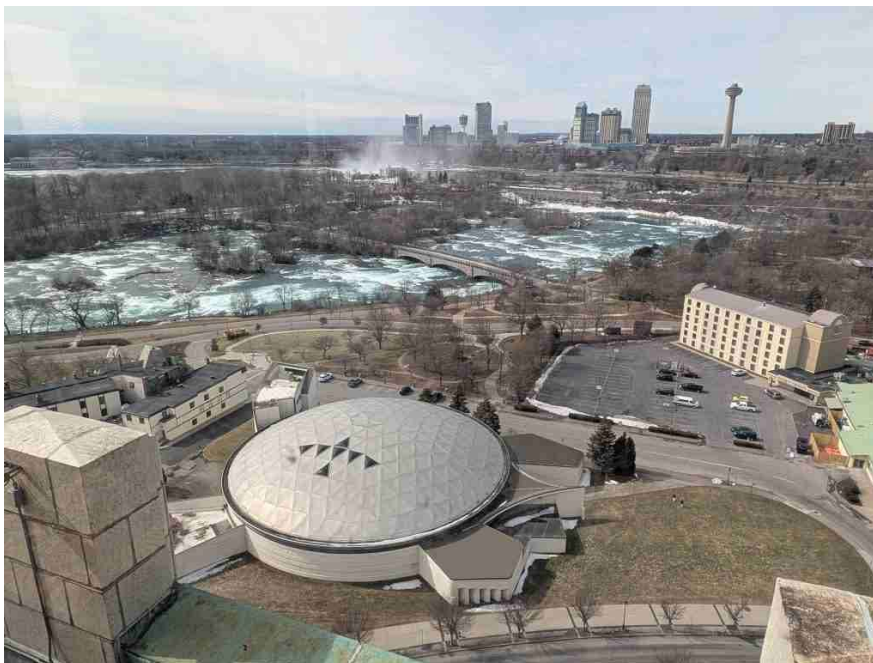


The three-story zoomorphic building is 67,000 sq. ft. with eagle skylights. Its unique shape, with a geodesic dome roof “shell” and large porthole “eye” windows, invokes the Haudenosaunee creation story of the earth forming on the back of a giant turtle. | Photo by Carl Skompinski

The National Trust for Historic Preservation has named the iconic Turtle building in Niagara Falls, NY to its 2025 list of [America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places](#). This news follows in the wake of an article that we [posted last August](#), when the unusual structure received a determination of eligibility for National Register of Historic Places. The annual list “raises awareness about the threats facing some of the nation’s greatest treasures,” according to the organization’s [website](#).

A press conference being held this morning features a host of speakers including Shaun Wilson (Mohawk, Turtle Clan), board chair of Friends of the Niagara Turtle, and Di Gao, senior director of research and development for the National Trust. Doh-Bid Pierce (Seneca, Hawk Clan) will perform a new song dedicated to the Turtle – the song is meant to honor the landmark while reawaken the Turtle, which, for 15 years, served as a cultural center for the Native American community nationally; it was the largest center for Indigenous arts in the Eastern United States.

“As we approach the 250th anniversary of the United States, we must acknowledge and support the Indigenous history that has so often been hidden and forgotten,” stated president and CEO of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Carol Quillen, who touted the structure as a prime and exceedingly rare example of a cross between Postmodern and Indigenous architecture. “The plans to ‘reawaken’ The Turtle would provide exactly the celebration of tribal heritage and culture that we need more than ever.”



The Turtle building, at 25 Rainbow Blvd., is an iconic building designed by distinguished Northern Arapaho architect Dennis Sun Rhodes.

The Turtle was constructed in the mid-70's with the intention to collect and preserve Haudenosaunee arts and culture. This was especially important because of the negative impact of the Indian boarding schools created by the United States Government from 1819 to 1969. The schools that ripped children from their families were meant to strip them of their cultural heritage. The intention was to assimilate the children by teaching them Euro-American customs. Native American students were also rid of traditional clothing, hairstyles, and even their traditional birth-given tribal names.

For 15 years representatives from the Smithsonian Institution visited The Turtle and incorporated some of its features into the design of the Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC.



Photo: [Wikimedia](#) – 2012, from *The University of Nebraska Lincoln Library (Joseph Messana Architectural Image Collection)*

The introduction of The Turtle was meant to preserve Native American culture, which helping to reverse the centuries of the United States Government's control over tribal life.

Unfortunately the fate of The Turtle took a turn for the worse when it shuttered after serving the public for just 15 years. Since 1995, The Turtle has remained vacant, which led many to be concerned about its uncertain future. 30 years of sitting empty can take a toll on any building.

This newly bestowed endangered landmark designation of the Turtle, currently owned by NFR Turtle LLC, a subsidiary of Niagara Falls Redevelopment (NFR), owes a great deal of thanks to the non-profit Friends of the Niagara Turtle. The coalition, which includes Indigenous representatives, including the only tribally affiliated indigenous architect in New York, museum professionals, historic preservation specialists, tourism promoters, and scholars, worked tirelessly to bring this significant accreditation to the building.

Lead image: The Turtle building, formerly home to the Native American Center for the Living Arts, located at 25 Rainbow Blvd, Niagara Falls, NY 14303, United States. [Wikimedia](#)