The summer months have proven to be very busy for the Orpheum Committee. On July 7, 18 volunteers spent the day “peeling” the aluminum facade off the theater and adjacent building to once again expose the original facades. (The aluminum was recycled.) The Orpheum's facade was in surprisingly good condition, although tuckpointing, painting, and general rehabilitation work are needed. As expected, the cornice is no longer extant, but “ghosts” of its size and location remain. The Committee gives a special thank you to the clean-up crew and Michael Markstahler, the project coordinator and supervisor.

The needs assessment consultant chosen by the Committee arrived in late July for a site visit. Michael Hardy of ArtSoft Management, Inc. spent an action packed two days visiting with local politicians, city administrators, businessmen, developers, and arts affiliated individuals. Over 60 people attended a public meeting to express their concern about the future of the Orpheum and to suggest possible uses for the building.

Hardy was very impressed with the Orpheum Theater and its good state of preservation. A key factor for the theater’s redevelopment is the attached warehouse building to the south, since this is pure “development space.” Although Hardy’s final report is not expected until September, some preliminary suggestions for possible reuse include a children’s museum, second-run theater, film production studio, or civic auditorium. The Committee is following up on all the suggestions and invites further ideas.

The Committee hopes to schedule a study session with the Champaign City Council for October at which time proposals for the theater’s reuse will be presented. PACA strongly encourages all interested individuals to attend this very important meeting to show their support for the theater. The date and time will be announced later.

Although the theater is structurally in good condition, the Committee is
FOCUS ON: ALPHA XI DELTA HOUSE

Alpha Xi Delta was founded as a national fraternal organization on April 17, 1893 at Lombard College (now Knox College) in Galesburg, Illinois. The Kappa Chapter, with a membership of twelve, was established at the University of Illinois on December 15, 1905, the sixth social sorority on the Urbana-Champaign campus. Kappa is the only Alpha Xi Delta chapter remaining in the founding state.

Kappa Chapter was originally located in two rooms at 405 East Green Street which were used for chapter meetings, informal gatherings, etc. They moved to a rented house which provided living facilities in 1906. As the chapter grew, additional space became necessary. Because of the youth of the chapter, they were unable to acquire sufficient funds to build or buy a house of their own. In 1908, Kappa Chapter moved into a rented house at 312 East Daniel in Champaign, a house built for them by Mr. and Mrs. Riley, members of the Busey family with whom Alpha Xi Delta had begun to develop close ties. Around this time, the alumni began a house fund so that Kappa Chapter could build a house of their own rather than continue renting. The Daniel Street house proved inadequate to serve the growing chapter. Alpha Xi Delta purchased the property at 715 West Michigan Avenue from Paul Busey in 1928 after plans to build on lots purchased in what had become the fraternity district around Washington Park fell through. The Busey property was quite close to a sorority "district" which was being developed on the east side of campus.

The women of Alpha Xi Delta have traditionally been active in sports and dramatics. During the twenties, Alpha Xi Delta was continually represented on the basketball, track and tennis teams as well as in the hockey club. Alpha Xi Delta was also involved in philanthropy, with many volunteers and officers of the Y.W.C.A. The thirties saw an expansion of Alpha Xi Delta activities into many areas of university life, including positions held with the Daily Illini and the Illio, senior sports manager of the Women’s Athletic Association, and involvement in the Terrapin swimming organization and the Orches dance group. Community involvement included activities in the League of Women Voters.

Architecture

The Alpha Xi Delta house was designed in 1914 by Joseph William Royer for the Matthew W. Busey family. Royer, who graduated from the University of Illinois with a degree in architectural engineering in 1895, was city engineer for the City of Urbana from 1898 to 1906. Royer is responsible for several Tudor Revival structures in Champaign-Urbana, including the Urbana Lincoln Hotel (now Jumer’s Castle Lodge), Lincoln Lodge, the Alpha Rho Chi professional/social fraternity house and his own residence now used by the Omega Tau Sigma professional veterinary fraternity.

The Alpha Xi Delta sorority house is a good example of Royer’s Tudor Revival projects and is an excellent example of the Tudor Revival style. Its brick first story walls with elaborate decorative patterns are contrasted with half-timber and stucco cladding on the upper stories as is typical of the Tudor Revival style. Other typical Tudor Revival features present in the Alpha Xi Delta house include the two steeply-pitched front facade cross gables; tall, narrow windows in multiple groups with multipane glazing; and tall chimneys constructed of patterned brickwork. Only minor alterations with respect to...
The Alpha Xi Delta sorority house faces north onto West Michigan Avenue at the southeast corner of Busey Avenue. The main or north facade of the original building has three bays in a symmetrical arrangement. The outer bays each have a ground story casemented bay window, surmounted by a half-timbered projection with four casements at the second story and a broad half-timbered gable above with deep overhang and carved verge boards. Between the gables, the central bay has a red-gray slate roof interrupted by three small equally spaced dormers, each with a single casement and steeply-pitched slate gable roof. Except for the dormers, the roof pitches appear to be about 12 on 12.

The first story brickwork is in common bond for the lower half and English bond in the upper half, with an alternating soldier course of three vertical and three horizontal bricks separating the two halves. The gabled east and west ends are dominated by large twin-pot brick chimneys constructed in an overlapping diamond shape in plan. The second story of the building is stucco and half-timbering.

The structure's windows are multi-pane, wood casement, three lights wide in most cases. The main windows on the first floor are primarily 18 lights, while those on the second floor are 15 lights. The main entrance to the structure is a Tudor arch with multi-pane, side-by-side doors. A brick patio runs the length and width of the structure on the north and west sides, and is enclosed by a knee-high brick wall. A secondary entrance on the west side is an ordinary rectangular multi-pane door.

One of the two original arched driveway entrances still remains adjacent to the far southeast corner of the new addition at the rear of the structure. The two arches, which formed a covered passageway between the house and the original garage, have been bricked in, enclosing an extension to the new addition.

The plan of the original structure was L-shaped with a three bay facade and a three bay depth. Sometime after 1938, a garage in the rear of the structure was converted and expanded and the original carriage way enclosed to provide extra study room. The resulting plan is S-shaped. The addition has a hipped slate roof and hipped dormers, which are visible only from the rear.

Other alterations to the structure include the enclosure of the rear first floor patio area and carriage shed. These areas were located underneath the second story rear porch and were enclosed unobtrusively using similar brick and multi-pane casement windows. Since the area was originally under the roofed structure, it is difficult to distinguish it as a later alteration without inspecting the original blueprints. The area now serves as an informal television/sitting area. To the east end of the dining room, a two-story addition was constructed to provide a larger dining area. The first story continues the detailed brick pattern as well as use of multi-pane windows. The second story stucco and half-timbered portion is a glass-enclosed sun room with 15-light windows running the perimeter of the three exposed sides.

The interior of the structure is dominated by the use of dark mahogany. The first floor living room walls are covered with three-quarter height carved mahogany wainscoting. Although the large ceiling beams remain unaltered, the smaller cross beams have been covered individually with dry wall and painted. Thus, the beam effect remains, but not in the original dark beam appearance. The central fireplace in the living room has been sealed off and the chimney removed as a result of excessive structural deterioration.

The entry hall area is dominated by a mahogany staircase leading to the second floor. Three arched entryways leading from the living room are framed in mahogany. The original multi-pane doors to the dining room are still intact. Wainscoting, which originally extended out away from the dining room walls and served as waiter storage cabinets, has been removed to allow more seating. A dumb waiter running to the second floor hallway has also been removed.

The master bedroom on the second floor has a fireplace with an inlaid ceramic tile front and original beam mantle. A small, circular safe remains unopened in the side of the chimney. Off the master bedroom is an adjoining dressing room and bathroom. The dressing room retains its original floor-to-ceiling built-in wardrobe closets in mahogany. The doors on the wardrobe have the original crystal handles as well as beveled, leaded-glass mirror panels. The bathroom, like others in the house, has been modernized with porcelain fixtures and ceramic tile.

The large second story rear porch is accessible by two entrances. One of the entry doors is off the master bedroom dressing room and the other entry is from the small bedroom adjacent to the master bedroom.

The two other original bedrooms have their own bathrooms, which have been modernized. The bedroom in the northeast corner has the adjacent sun room addition above the dining room.

The garage addition at the rear of the house provides additional kitchen storage and study rooms on the first floor. The area which originally served as a second floor sitting room at the rear of the house is now a hallway from the original structure to the addition. The second floor of the addition includes student rooms and living facilities for the house mother.

“...The past is a mixture of the natural environment and the human environment—a unity that informs the present, that teaches us lessons about who we are and where we’ve been.” — former Arizona Governor Bruce Babbitt, keynote speaker at the 42nd National Preservation Conference
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