

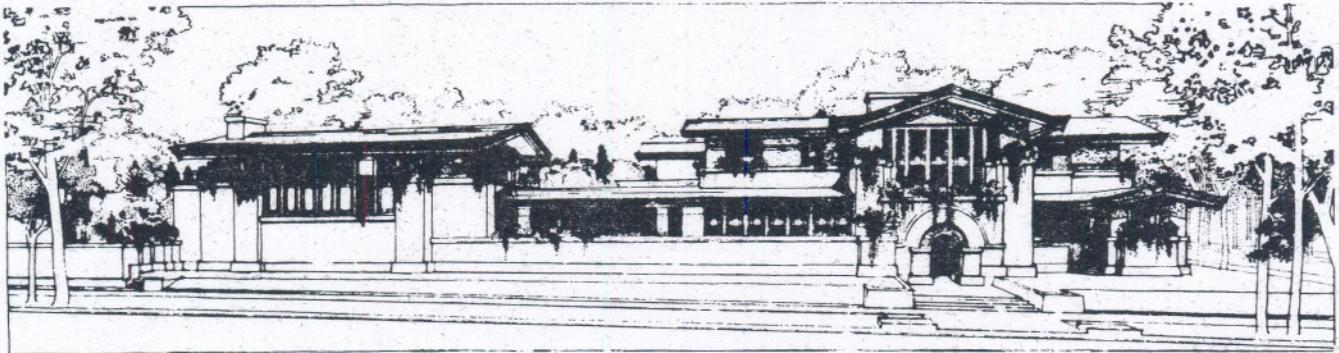


# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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*Dana House, Wasmuth Rendering by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1910.*

## Focus On: The Susan Lawrence Dana House

A thirty-five year old Frank Lloyd Wright described the home he designed for Susan Lawrence Dana as "a home designed to accommodate the art collection of its owner and for entertaining extensively, somewhat elaborately worked out in detail." Mr. Wright's assessment could be considered an understatement, as the Springfield home he designed for Susan Lawrence Dana turned out to be a masterpiece of his Prairie style architecture.

The 12,600 square foot, 35-room edifice began its existence as a remodeling project. The Lawrence family previously resided at the same Fourth Street and Lawrence Avenue location. Their home was an Italianate house that Rheuna Lawrence, Susan's father, had constructed in 1871. In 1901, Rheuna Lawrence died, and Susan became administrator of his estate. Susan decided to remodel the family home, and employed the services of Mr. Wright to execute the project.

Construction of the mansion began

in 1902 and took two years to complete. The original Italianate structure became totally absorbed within the framework of new construction, save for one parlor which was left unchanged as a reminder of Mr. Lawrence and the family home. Frank Lloyd Wright was given a virtually unrestricted budget, both monetarily and artistically, with which to accomplish his vision. Some sixty thousand dollars later he had completed a home with few equals.

Using motifs from nature, most notably the sumac and butterfly, Wright created some 450 pieces of art glass for use in windows, doors, skylights, and light fixtures. Furniture was designed for the house, as well as statuary, urns, and other accessories. The floor plan included a space for seating a chamber orchestra, a necessary amenity for Susan Lawrence Dana's frequent social gatherings.

In 1928, Susan Lawrence Dana moved from her home, and the building gradually fell into disrepair. By 1943, the house was threatened by demolition. At that time, the Charles C. Thomas Publishing Company purchased and occupied the building. In

1981, Thomas Publishing moved out, and the building was sold to the State of Illinois. The state then opened the house to the public, and began restoration planning.

The house was closed from 1987 to September, 1990, while the \$5 million restoration proceeded. The art glass windows were sent off-site for repairs. The remaining furniture was also restored, and some pieces, which had been separated from the house, were obtained from private collectors. Through trial and error, the original wall colors and textures were replicated. Of particular interest is the ornate, exterior plaster frieze, which had to be totally reconstructed. In 1979, this deteriorating frieze had been removed and replaced with plywood.

With the completion of the restoration, the Dana Thomas house is one of the best preserved of Wright's Prairie houses, and contains the most intact collection of original furnishings and fixtures designed by Wright.

Come see the Dana House in person. Join us on the PACA bus trip to Springfield on September 21.



On June 4, Carolyn Baxley, chair of the Orpheum Preservation Project, presented a reuse plan for the Orpheum Theatre to the Champaign City Council. The plan outlines the intention of PACA to convert the theatre into a hands-on, interactive children's museum, *The Discovery Place at the Historic Orpheum Theatre*. The project plan was well received by the Council and PACA has been given permission to clean up and repair the facade of the building and launch a fund raising campaign for *The Discovery Center*.

Planning for a capital campaign is underway. Volunteers are needed to help with planning, fund raising, grant writing, and facade rehabilitation. Please call PACA (328-7222) and volunteer your time and expertise for this exciting project. A project of this magnitude will need the help of the entire community!

The following excerpts from the reuse plan answer some of the common questions that PACA has received about the conversion of the theatre into a children's museum. Copies of the full plan are available from PACA.

#### **What is a hands-on children's museum?**

An interactive, hands-on children's museum is very different from a traditional museum in which most exhibits are behind glass and inaccessible. A children's museum presents concepts concretely in ways that offer people of all ages the opportunity to learn directly from three-dimensional, tangible exhibits. Exhibits in children's museums are excellent aids to stimulate direct experience. The exhibits may be the vehicle for a parent to help a child or for children themselves to break through conceptually, to experience him or herself as a competent learner.

Unlike most public places which place certain restrictions on children's behavior, a children's museum is formed in response to children's behavior. It offers an informal educational setting which, unlike a school, is organized according to space, not time. Visitors, follow their own interests for as long a time as their natural period of concentration lasts. It supplements and enhances the offering of traditional education by providing children with opportunities beyond the classroom to experience concepts directly.

There are over 400 free-standing children's museums in the U.S. today and an additional 300 or so child-related interactive spaces within larger museums or institutions. The number of children's museums open to the public has more than doubled since 1978. Many of them are located in communities smaller than Champaign-Urbana. There is tremendous support for beginning museums from the Association of Youth Museums and the Association of Science-Technology Centers.

#### **Who visits children's museums?**

The majority of visitors are family groups since children's museums foster family interaction; everyone from babies to grandparents visits a children's museum. Adults and teenagers, as well as children, come frequently because there is so much they can learn; typically about 45-50% of visitors are adults. About 35% of the museum visitors come from out-of-town. Senior citizens, students, and parents serve as volunteers. The museums attract people from a broad range of incomes and from every ethnic, cultural, religious, and racial group in the community. In addition, *The Discovery Place* will be fully accessible to people with disabilities. In general, visits to children's museums in communities without significant competing activities increase at the rate of 15 to 125% per year.

#### **Who are the primary groups involved in this project?**

The development of *The Discovery Place* will hopefully be a joint effort among PACA, the East Central Illinois Partnership for Excellence in Education (ECIPEE), and the Junior League assisted by an advisory board of local business people, health professionals, educators, and students. A 501(c)3 (not-for-profit) corporation will be formed with a Board of Directors consisting of members of each of the three primary groups as well as members from the advisory board to carry out the plan, oversee the operation, and raise ongoing support funds for the museum.

#### **Why is the Orpheum Theatre an appropriate location for *The Discovery Place*?**

##### *Physical Suitability*

The Orpheum meets 16 of the 17 desirable characteristics identified as ideal physical requirements for a high quality children's museum by the Association of Youth Museums. The wide open spaces of the Orpheum are ideally suited to a children's museum. We anticipate putting the majority of the exhibits on the floor of the auditorium; some smaller exhibits can be placed in a few of the loge boxes upstairs. Not all the loge boxes are usable for exhibit space since the aisles are too narrow; those closest to the stage would be used for parent observation points to watch their children below. The lobby would be an open space in which school groups can gather with a museum store and food service located in the three existing storefronts. The offices above the storefronts would be renovated and used for administrative offices, tutorials, and a resource room for parents. The stage area will be used as an auditorium with temporary seating until such time as a permanent auditorium can be built as part of an addition in Phase III.

Recent demolition of the warehouse

south of the Orpheum and the lot to the north will provide ample space for expansion into a newly constructed exhibit building (Phase III). Nearly all children's museums experience "growing pains" after only a year or two in their initial space, so it is critical that the location of the museum allow for growth.

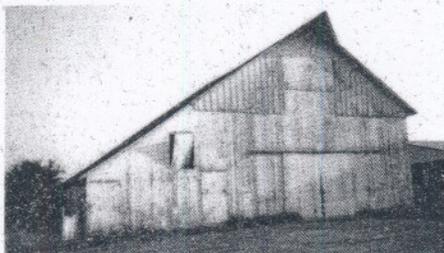
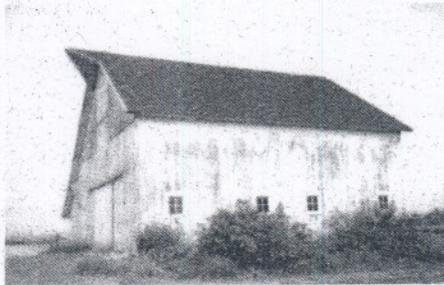
*Historic Value*

In addition to meeting the physical requirements, the Orpheum is a rare and beautiful piece of community history. It was designed by George Rapp, an 1899 alumnus of the UI School of Architecture. The French palatial design was inspired by the Louis XIV era and became the basis of his firm's signature theatre interiors. The Orpheum, one of the firms earliest theatre designs, was placed on the National Register in February, 1991.

The grandeur of the magnificent Orpheum Theatre would most certainly enhance any child's visit to the museum. Except for cosmetic plaster damage and the loss of original murals that were painted on the ceiling, the interior auditorium space is structurally unaltered and retains its massive Corinthian columns and ornate French Renaissance and Baroque friezes and moldings.

**Historic Barn Available**

A circa 1890s dairy barn is available for relocation. The barn measures 40 x 54 feet and is partially of mortise and tenon construction; it was remodeled in the 1930s. The loft is supported by bark covered tree trunks; the timbers, oak flooring, siding, and grainary material is in good condition. The entire barn must be removed from the site. Call Rudy Ebeling (367-7672, evenings) for more information.



**Save the Date:  
Sunday, October 6**

House Tour on West Main Street,  
Urbana

**Prairie Stewardship: Ensuring the Future**

The Third Central Illinois Prairie Conference will be held at Eastern Illinois University, on September 28 and 29. The conference will provide presentations on prairie ecology and management practices. It will also present cultural, aesthetic, historical, and educational perspectives that promote wise stewardship. The keynote speaker will be Illinois Nature Preserves Commission director Brian Anderson, and there will also be concurrent sessions on stewardship, restoration and management practices, prairie ecology and plant identification, threatened and endangered species, and savanna/oak openings. Other features of the conference will be prairie art and other exhibits, a Saturday night dinner with entertainment, and Sunday field trips.

The \$25 registration fee includes lunch and all conference materials. There is an extra registration fee of \$7.50 for the Saturday night dinner.

The conference is sponsored by Grand Prairie Friends of Illinois in cooperation with the EIU Department of Botany. Contact John Ebinger at 217/581-3525 or Mary Hruska at 398-2768 for registration materials.

**Membership Application P.A.C.A.**

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

INDIVIDUAL

- Adult ..... \$10.00
- Student (1/2 time or more) ..... \$ 5.00
- Senior Citizen ..... \$ 5.00
- Family (includes all members of a household with no more than two members being over age 21) ..... \$15.00

CIVIC

- Over 100 members ..... \$100.00
- 50-100 members ..... \$ 75.00
- Up to 50 members ..... \$ 50.00

CORPORATE

- ..... \$ 50.00

RENEWAL  NEW MEMBERSHIP

Additional Contribution \_\_\_\_\_

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
Street

City State Zip

Make checks payable to: PACA, Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61825

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

## Bus Trip to Dana House Scheduled

PACA is sponsoring a bus trip to Springfield on Saturday, September 21. The bus will leave Champaign at 10 a.m. and return about 6 p.m. Springfield stops include the Old State Capitol and a special guided tour of the Dana House. Lunch is on your own, but refreshments will be provided on the bus.

The cost is \$10.00 for PACA members and \$15.00 for non-members. (It has been requested that no children under 12 attend.) Reservations can be made by calling PACA (328-7222); prior payment must be received to guarantee a seat. Seats are limited to 45, so make your reservation today!

## Warehouse Space Needed

The Salvage Committee is looking for new and/or additional warehouse space. A large consignment of UI salvage material is expected this fall, and storage space is **desperately** needed. Please call PACA if you know of a warehouse possibility. Nominal rent can be paid or a tax-deductible donation taken.

Preservation & Conservation Association  
Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61825

### PACA Newsletter

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