



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Focus On: University of Illinois President's Homes

Part I

The Illinois Industrial University was founded in 1867. Since that time, four buildings have served as the home of the University's presidents. The first was at 709 South Fourth Street in Champaign, the second at 1312 West Green Street in Urbana, the third still stands at 1203 West Nevada Street in Urbana, and the fourth is the present home at 711 West Florida Avenue in Urbana.

The first Regent of the University, Doctor John Milton Gregory, resided in a two and one-half story brick Italianate style house located at what was to become known as 709 South Fourth Street. An 1878 map of Champaign shows the Gregory house at this location, known at that time as 709 Mount Hope Avenue. As early as 1870, a map of the campus in the Board of Trustees Report of 1870-1871 shows a building at this location that can be assumed to designate the Regent's home as a University property. The Champaign city directories of 1883, 1884, and 1885 show this house as the home of the second Regent, Selim Hobart Peabody. It does not appear that acting Regent Thomas Jonathon Burrill resided in this house during the three year search for his successor.

Photos of the Gregory home in the University of Illinois archives, reveal that many of the classic design elements of the Italianate style are evident. Among these features are arched windows that flank the doorway and the three sets of arched windows on the second floor. Paired brackets under the cornice and the cupola with its inverted brackets between each window are other indications of the Italianate style. Evidence of an oriel or bay window on the south elevation can be found in the 1918 edition of the *Illio*.

A verbal description of the interior of the Gregory House was given to Stuart



Regent Milton Gregory's House, 709 South Fourth Street, Champaign. Photo courtesy of the University of Illinois Archives.

Howe by Bill Shaw, who was a resident of the house in about 1918. He recounted the most impressive things in the house...were the two massive marble fireplaces...the one in the living room at the right inside the door was special. That living room was the most popular room in the house. The dining room was in the rear of the first floor and small parlors were at the left on the first floor.

Mr. Shaw was a member of the Alpha Delta Phi fraternity in 1917 when they purchased and moved into the Gregory House. It is somewhat ironic that the home of Regent Gregory became a fraternity house in that Regent Gregory had been strongly opposed to fraternities, calling them "undemocratic, anachronistic, silly and conducive to dissipation." Although Shaw recalled the house as being in "very good shape and accommodating twenty chapter members" and Alpha Delta Phi had promised to move the house when the need to expand became a pressing issue, in 1923 it was decided, due to "tenant limitations," to demolish

the building in order to prepare for the new chapter house.

It is important to note that Regent Gregory was keenly interested in seeing that the Horticulture Department at the University flourished. To that end, he became very involved with the planning and landscaping of the campus. In regard to the Regent's home, it is apparent that some decorative planting and design was undertaken. A brick sidewalk in a herring bone pattern provided the approach to the front entrance. This walk was flanked by two low lying bushes near the porch.

Almost immediately upon his arrival in 1894, Andrew Sloan Draper, the first President of the University, recognized the need for a distinguished home for the president. That house was built at 1312 West Green Street, Urbana, in the University's arboretum. Located at the northeast corner of Green and Wright streets, the house was sited between Green Street to the south and the Boneyard Creek to the north. This site was chosen by the Board of Trustees on June 27, 1895.

The arboretum at Green and Wright streets had been planned in 1870 and planted with fifty species of trees. A published plan of the campus from 1871 shows the arboretum to be between the street railroad and Green Street, and was bisected by the Boneyard Creek. It appears that by 1885 the arboretum was flourishing.

The first building to be erected in the arboretum had been Engineering Hall in 1894. Before Engineering Hall was begun, N.B. Morrison, a member of the Buildings and Grounds Committee had concerns about the consequences of building in the arboretum. Mr. Morrison said

the site selected involves the destruction of our elegant park that is now clothed with beautiful shade trees and has been brought to its present condition by great care, skill, labor, and expense.

In spite of the argument for its protection, the Board of Trustees decided that the arboretum should be further developed, and on September 4, 1895, they hired S.S. Beaman of Chicago to design the house. Beaman is more well known for his design work on the company town of Pullman, Illinois, built by George Pullman for the workers of the railroad coach company.

The following lengthy description of the new President's house was given in the *Champaign Daily Gazette* on March 11, 1896, the night after the official housewarming.

The house was beautifully decorated with palms and cut flowers. The dining room was particularly attractive, the floral decorations being *la France* roses and carnations. The broad window in the library was filled with palms and flowering plants and in the hall and parlors the banks of potted plants made an effective setting for the scene.

The President's house is built in the New England type of colonial architecture, with a veranda thirteen feet deep and sixty-four feet long running across the front and extending beyond the sides of the house. The roof of the veranda is supported by Ionic pillars.

Passing through the front vestibule which is brilliant with beveled plate, the visitor enters the main hall, which runs through the center of the house and terminates in a grand stairway with a broad landing.

The ceiling, elliptical in design, forms just in front of the stairway, an ar-



University of Illinois President's House, Wright & Green Streets, Urbana, circa 1902. Photo courtesy of the Champaign County Historical Society.

chitrave supported by Ionic oak columns, above which is the University badge worked into the fresco decorations. Opening from the hall on the right are the library and dining room: to the left the double parlors.

The main hall, library, and dining room are finished in oak and the parlors in bird's-eye maple. Where the oak finish is used the hardware is copper and bronze, while in the parlors it is of oxidized silver.

The other rooms on the main floor are the servants' sitting room, the pantry, kitchen, and butler's pantry. There is also a back hall and stairway. In the second story are six bedrooms, and serving room, two bathrooms and numerous convenient closets.

The woodwork in the bedrooms is of cherry, the hardware of sandblasted copper. The frescoing of the rooms is of different colors. There is a red room, a blue room, a pink room, and a green room. All are comfortable, commodious, well lighted and ventilated.

The servants' quarters are on the third floor and are as complete in their appointments, including closets and bath room, as are any other rooms in the house.

The floors are of quarter-sawed oak; the plumbing throughout is unusually complete. There is a cistern with a capacity of three hundred barrels, and is pumped to the attic by means of a water motor. The floors of the basement are of concrete, the ceilings are high and rooms well lighted.

There is a laundry with modern improvements, vegetable cellar and coal room. The house is heated by direct and indirect radiation heat supplied from the University central heating plant.

The \$15,000 necessary for the building of this house was gathered through the sale of the last parcel of the University owned Griggs farm and two appropriations from the Legislature of \$2,000 and \$5,000.

This house served the University for the next fifty-two years, although it was home to only two University Presidents, Draper and Edmund Janes James.

During Draper's residence, it was the focal point of many University activities. It is recorded that he often marched with the football team and students from the train depot to the steps of his home in a torch-light parade, where he would deliver inspirational and rousing speeches to those assembled. Among Draper's grand schemes for the University was his little remembered push to

rename the Boneyard Creek to "Silver Creek," but when the student body heard of this plan, they howled the euphemism down.

In 1904, Edmund James became the fifth President of the University of Illinois. James lived in the Green Street house until 1917, the year after his wife died in the house. He moved to another University owned building in order to make way for YMCA housing of soldiers during World War One.

One of the most interesting events during this period was the visit of President Taft to Champaign-Urbana, although there is no specific record of Taft visiting the University's president at this residence.

For its last twenty-eight years, the building housed the University's Health Services Center. Not only did University students and staff benefit from this facility, but it was also used as a location for local school children to receive required shots and physicals.

A map of the campus as it appeared in 1920 shows the drive for the house leading to Burrill Avenue which ran along the east side of the building. Today, Burrill Avenue still exists between Everitt Laboratory, now on the site of the President's House and Engineering Hall. South of the Illini Union, Burrill is now the west sidewalk on the Quad.

University architect James M. White's plan for the campus dated August 14, 1919 called for the removal of the building and replacement by an engineering building. Despite this, the building stood until 1947, when it was razed to make room for Everitt Lab.

The only remnant of the President's residence is a greenhouse that stands north of Everitt Lab. This greenhouse was built in 1898 with later additions through 1911, and was still in active use by the Plant Biology Department as late as the mid-1980s. Although this structure was scheduled to be demolished by the University, the Illinois Preservation Agency and PACA intervened to save it and relocation plans are now being discussed.

This article was written by PACA member David Finet, a recent UI history graduate with assistance and guidance from Professor Christopher Vernon of the UI Landscape Department.

47th National Preservation Conference

September 29 - October 3

St. Louis, Missouri

National Register Status Possible for Downtown Champaign

The URBANA Group, a local planning consulting firm, has been hired by the Champaign Downtown Development Corporation to evaluate the downtown for its potential as a National Register historic district. Organized as a two phase project, phase one: evaluation, began in April and will continue into June 1993 as downtown Champaign buildings are analyzed individually and in groupings for proposed nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. The products of this phase will be black and white

photography, color slide photography, updated Historic Property Inventory forms (initially prepared by PACA in 1984), and a proposed nomination approach presented in a brief report. These products will be presented to the staff of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA), Preservation Services division, for review. This process will include an initial site visit by the National Register Coordinator from IHPA and a meeting with representatives of CDDC. A second trip by the Coordinator will include an evening public meeting presentation on the National Register program and the results of the evaluation for buildings and/or district(s) in the downtown which may be eligible to the National Register.

The second phase of the project will be to nominate as many downtown buildings as possible to the National Register. Phase two: nominations will begin in June or July, upon the conclusion of phase one. The nominations will be prepared to meet the October 1, 1993 deadline for nominations to be considered before the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council at their December 10, 1993 meeting. The Council, composed of fifteen representatives from around the state, in effect determines the fate of the nominations. If approved, the nominations are signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer, then are forwarded to the National Park Service in Washington, D.C. for a final review before being officially listed. Phase two will also include a public program by the Chief Architect of the IHPA to review procedures for the Rehabilitation Investment Tax Credit and appropriate architectural treatments for historic buildings and districts.

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Kids Building Fair A Success

The Second Annual Kids Building Fair was another resounding success! Over 1,000 kids and their parents had an opportunity to try various building trades and take home samples of their work. Mark your calendars now for next year's Fair on May 14.

A great big thanks to all the building tradespeople, donators of supplies and volunteers who made the day possible.

New Salvage Warehouse Sign

Drive by the salvage warehouse and take note of the new fabulous signage! Donated and installed by Mike and Terri Haines, the sign has already helped to increase our visibility and sales. A special thanks to Mike and Terri for their help.

Volunteers Needed

PACA has a large and growing inventory of slides and negatives that need cataloguing. A volunteer with computer experience is needed to help us decide which computer program will suit our cataloguing needs best and to start us on our way.

Also needed is a volunteer to refinish an oak slide cabinet for PACA's growing slide collection. Refinishing and limited carpentry skills needed. Call 328-7222 to volunteer.

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