



# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Number 2

## Preservation Week: May 14-20

"Real People, Real Places, Real History" is the theme of this 22nd annual celebration cosponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and PACA.

Preservation Week 1995 will be observed by the Preservation Association in a number of ways including the annual "ARCHITREASURES" contest cosponsored by the *News Gazette*. PACA will also be announcing the recipient of this year's Heritage Grant, a newly established annual program that returns some of PACA's architectural salvage revenue to the community by means of a \$2,000 grant to a local not-for-profit organization. The award must be used for a project involving preservation, conservation and/or education related to history, architecture, or archaeology in Champaign County.

In addition, the award winning Kids Building Fair, begun in 1992 in conjunction with The Discovery Place, will be held this year on Saturday, May 20 from 11:00 to 4:00 in front of the Orpheum Theatre. The Fair is a fun family affair where kids of all ages learn about the building trades. Volunteer contractors including carpenters, painters, electricians, plumbers, tile specialists, masons, and others contribute a day to teach about their special trade. Hands-on science demonstrations are also part of the Fair and the children's museum will be open. Volunteers to help with this event are still needed; call PACA to volunteer.

*R*real People,  
*R*real Places,  
*R*real History.



Varsity Theatre, 51-53 MainStreet, Champaign, circa 1993.

## Focus On: Varsity Theatre

Moving pictures were a novelty act in the old opera houses. When played as the last act on the bill, managers used them as a way to clear people out of the house for the second show of the evening. However, people came to love the moving pictures and many entrepreneurs recognized their potential and began converting storefronts into small houses exclusively for the showing of moving pictures. These houses came to be known as nickelodeons. A combination of the French word for concert hall—odeon, and the price of admission—a nickel, although the price in Champaign-Urbana was more typically a dime.

On Monday, October 22, 1906, a page one story in the *Champaign Daily Gazette* announced that Champaign would have a permanent picture show. The Stimmel & Morris Amusement Company had leased a room at 30 Main Street and was remodeling it for a movie theater. The company had been in business for some time with locations in several towns and was now coming to Champaign. Smith Stimmel, jr., said he believed Champaign was a good place and that he expected his company would be successful here. He

promised clean exhibitions and wholesome entertainment. The shows would be presented daily, in the afternoon and evening, with the films changing twice a week.

The Varsity Theatre opened Saturday, October 27, 1906. Business was good for the opening night program of 2,000 feet of film. Within a year of the opening of the first nickelodeon in the United States, Champaign had its own permanent moving picture house. The Varsity Theatre was the first theater to open in Champaign-Urbana devoted exclusively to moving pictures.

Within the next year, Samuel Kahl, the manager of Champaign's Walker Opera House, had established the Varsity Amusement Company and had taken over the Varsity Theatre. The company operated two theaters for a few years. In addition to the Varsity in Champaign, in 1909 it opened a second theater, also known as the Varsity, at 109 West Main Street in Urbana. It moved to 106 West Main in 1910. By then, the Champaign Varsity had moved down the street to 53 Main Street.

By 1943, the old Varsity Theatre, already having had four owners, was about to begin its series of name changes. The

theatre was completely remodeled over several months. Seating capacity was 330, kept small to allow wide aisles and extra space between the rows of seats. The color scheme included shades of cream and tan and a blue and gold ceiling. Indirect lighting was used in the lobby and in the auditorium. New leather seats and aisle lights were installed. Two easily accessible exit doors, one on either side of the screen, were installed at the rear of the building. A new ventilating system provided plenty of fresh air and was designed so that air conditioning could easily be installed at a future time.

Two of the latest projection machines and a Western Electric sound system were installed. Particular attention was paid to fire-proofing the projection booth located above the lobby. The booth's ceiling, walls, and floor are all concrete, the furniture steel, and it had a special ventilating system.

The Rex Theater opened the evening of Friday, October 1, 1943, with the movie "Iceland" starring Sonja Henie and featuring John Payne, Jack Oakie, and Sammie Kaye and his orchestra. Short subjects on the program included the "March of Time", "Along the Texas Range," "Lift Your Heads Comrades," and a cartoon.

On June 29, 1948, the Rex Theater was purchased by M & M Platz of Monticello along with Dr. Caldwell, director of the Syrup of Pepsin Company. The theater reopened as the Illini Theater on July 16, 1948. Ernie Panos bought the Illini in 1950.

On August, 1952, a fire at the Main Recreation Center, the neighboring building (49 Main Street), caused smoke damage at the Illini Theater, closing it for about a week for clean-up. The theater was repainted, the wall murals were reworked by Jim Sullivan and Tom Hermann, the seats reconditioned, rugs cleaned, and a new blue-white type screen installed. The Illini Theater reopened with two releases, "Black Swan" and "Shores of Tripoli."

The Art Theatre Guild, Incorporated, based in Columbus, Ohio, bought the Illini in 1958, and operated it until mid-June, 1959. The Guild then leased it to a Columbus, Ohio, businessman.

In March, 1963, the Art Theatre Guild re-named the Illini the Encore Theatre. As the name implies, the theater featured older films. It was more than a second or third run house, though, as the audience was encouraged to suggest which movies they would like to see again, and the movies could be of any age. Suggestion boxes were provided at both the Guild's theaters, the Art and the Encore.

This policy continued until February, 1966, when the Art Theatre Guild

changed the name back to the Illini Theater. Richard J. Lynch was manager at the time. Along with the name change, a new policy was initiated. The Illini was now an "adult theater" showing X-rated movies.

The theater building was sold in August, 1983. The sales contract prohibited an adult business in the building forcing the theater to close. However, the arcade in the west half of the building was allowed to remain until its lease expired two years later.

The theater sat empty until Jon and Debbie Callahan moved the Harvest Church into the building in 1987. Around June 7, they moved into the arcade space at 51 Main Street. Then, around August 1, they expanded into the theater using it as an auditorium for church services and the arcade space for classrooms. By early 1995, the Harvest Church had outgrown the building and moved out; another church, New Restoration Urban Ministries, moved in.

The building is a two-story red brick structure in basic early twentieth century commercial style. Its ground floor has always been evenly divided into two spaces by the entrance to the upstairs. The street level facade has been remodeled over the years. Originally, the theater side was one large archway, but was divided into two with a box office placed in the center. Some round windows on both the front and rear elevations have been bricked up. The upstairs, unused for several years, was originally a boarding house. All the decoration on the upper story is formed by the arrangement of seven windows and the way the brick is laid. Pilasters, stringcourses and the corbelled cornice are formed by brick.

The interior has not changed a great deal since the 1943 remodeling. Office and storage space have been added at the back of the auditorium, reducing the seating capacity, and the lighting fixtures have changed. The walls are beadboard wainscoting topped with flat plaster, the murals having long since been painted over. Very attractive metal ceilings, in excellent condition, remain in both sides.

It is a fairly common practice to house churches in old theaters, and it is generally a sympathetic reuse, depending on how much "remodelling" the church does. Both institutions having similar space and layout requirements, a church can very often make excellent use of abandoned theaters, extending the useful life of some of our fine old buildings.

*This article was written by PACA Board Member, Perry Morris, who is researching all of Champaign-Urbana's historic theater buildings.*

## Annual Membership Meeting

The National Register-listed Channing-Murray Foundation was the location for the 1995 Membership Meeting held February 26. After a short business meeting in which 1994 preservation activities were reviewed, three members were elected to the Board of Directors to serve through 1997: Daniel Wurl, Bruce Creamer and Jeffrey Gordon. Currently serving are Alice Edwards (96), Art Zangerl (96), Susan Appel (96), Carolyn Baxley (95), Perry Morris (95), and Richard Cahill (95). PACA wishes to thank retiring board member Marianna Murphy and two-term board member Steve Roemmel, who also served as PACA President for two terms. A very moving presentation on the personal side of Stephen Forbes, owner of the historic Forbes House, as revealed through his correspondence was given by Sandra Batzli.

The 1995 Heritage Awards were also presented. The following is a list of this year's award winners:

### Residential Heritage Award

D.J. & Jann Meyer  
801 South Vine Street  
Urbana, IL

Larry Birch & Steve Skillestad  
602 West Hill Street  
Champaign, IL

Scott-Dollahon House  
Jo & Hank Kaczmarski  
Karen & Rex Kummer  
407 East Oak Street  
Mahomet, IL

### Commercial Heritage Award

BankIllinois - Campus Branch  
633 East Green Street  
Champaign, IL

Prillaman Law Offices  
Roger & Terry Prillaman  
Karen & Steve Miller  
117 North Broadway  
Urbana, IL

Sew-Sew Sisters Shoppe  
Teri Daly & Cindy Hoss  
114 East Holden  
Tolono, IL

### Adaptive Use Heritage Award

The Discovery Place  
Orpheum Theatre - Phase I  
346 North Neil Street  
Champaign, IL

Jillian's of Champaign  
Coke-Cola Plant  
1201 South Neil Street  
Champaign, IL

Shurts Carriage House  
710 West Oregon  
Urbana, IL

**Institutional Heritage Award**  
Harker Hall Exterior Restoration  
University of Illinois Foundation  
Urbana, IL

Exterior Restoration  
First Presbyterian Church &  
Wickersheimer Engineers  
Champaign, IL

Alpha Omicron Pi Sorority House  
706 South Mathews Ave.  
Urbana, IL

**Landscape Heritage Award**  
Divan-Wojnar Residence  
Dr. & Mrs. Victor Wojnar  
212 East University Ave.  
Champaign, IL

**Neighborhood Heritage Award**  
Maple-Vine Neighborhood Association  
Champaign, IL

**Special Heritage Award**  
Fred Manthei  
Repairing Historic Tombstones  
Middletown Cemetery

Brian McIntosh  
Eagle Scout Project Documenting  
One-room School Houses in Piatt Co.

## 15th Annual Illinois Preservation Conference

Grassroots Preservation is the theme of this year's program to be held in Rock Island, June 1-4. Tours, workshops and even receptions are designed to highlight the importance of "doing" preservation at the local level.

Workshops and tours will emphasize activities that promote preservation at the local level. Topics are broad-ranging from monument restoration to property rights challenges—but each provides practical information for strengthening preservation in communities. Many of the following workshops will feature successful programs carried out in the host community, Rock Island.

- In *Expanding the Scope of Preservation* speakers will identify resources (rivers, historic highways, etc.) which could and should be tied in to a community's preservation and heritage tourism program.
- *Preservation Pays* explores in more depth the economic issues raised by Keynote Speaker Don Rypkeman. Critical and timely economic information useful to all preservationists will be presented.
- Participants can roll up their sleeves and talk advocacy strategy during *Grassroots Preservation*. Winning strategies and building a strong local organization will be highlighted.
- Creative solutions to the downtown parking problem will be presented in

the *Main Street, Rock Island Renaissance and the "Parking Problem"* workshop.

- Preservationists care about property rights and property values, yet are being challenged by "property rights advocates." Hear about these challenges—and responses—at the local, state, and national levels at the *Property Rights* workshop.
- In *Rock Island Success Story: Historic Neighborhoods*, Rock Island can boast of its thriving, mixed income historic neighborhoods. Public-private partnerships have contributed to this success.
- *Technical Tracks* features state-of-the-art information for "hands-on" preservationists. Adaptive use, continued use, in-fill construction and materials conservation are some of the topics.

Three tours are part of the conference. Chippiannock Cemetery, founded in 1855 and designed by Almerin Hotchkiss, is listed in the National Register of Historic Places for architecture, landscape architecture and art. Midwest Architectural Woodwork is one of the Midwest's oldest woodworking companies and will be open for a behind-the-scenes tour. Arsenal Island, a National Historic Landmark, remains an operating munitions factory, but during the Civil War it housed a notorious Confederate prison camp known as the "Andersonville of the North." Quarters One (commander's house), Officers Row, and the Colonel George Davenport House are included on the tour.

For more information about the conference and registration, contact PACA.

## Membership Application P.A.C.A.

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

#### INDIVIDUAL

<input type="checkbox"/> Adult .....	\$15.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Student (1/2 time or more) .....	\$10.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Senior Citizen .....	\$10.00
<input type="checkbox"/> Family .....	\$20.00

#### CORPORATE

..... \$75.00

#### ADDITIONAL CONTRIBUTION \_\_\_\_\_

NEW MEMBERSHIP  
 RENEWAL

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

**Warehouse Clean-up & Sale**  
**June 10**  
**9:00 - 12:00**  
**65 E. University**  
**Champaign**

Come join the fun at the annual salvage warehouse organizational party! The morning will be spent organizing, pricing & cleaning. New & "Experienced" Volunteers are welcome.

### Urbana Free Library Expansion

The Board of Trustees of the Urbana Free Library is eager to hear ideas about improving future library service. A public meeting was held May 11 to solicit ideas and written comments are welcome from those unable to attend the meeting. Specific areas that the Library Board would like patron input on include Collections, Readers/Users Space, Public Meeting Space and Access to the Building. They are also asking what patrons like best about the current Library, what they find adequate and inadequate in the current Library, and what new things would be nice in a larger Library. As these comments will have an impact on future library expansion plans (and therefore, will impact on the Jaques House), PACA encourages its members to respond to this survey. Comments should be mailed to the Board of Trustees, Ur-

bana Free Library, 201 South Race Street, Urbana, IL 61801 or drop them off at the Library.

In a related matter, PACA and Library representatives met in March with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency architect, Michael Jackson. A full staff report is pending, but Jackson's initial reaction to the structure was positive. The building's exterior integrity is readily apparent and more of the interior wood-work appears to be original than was previously thought. It was also suggested that the rear wings may actually predate the Italianate portion of the house and, based on brickwork and other Illinois examples, may date to the 1840s. If correct, that would make the brick wings the earliest structures in Urbana. More research to confirm this theory is needed.

### New Officers Elected

At its March meeting, the Board of Directors elected new officers. Elected were Art Zangerl, president; Richard Cahill, vice-president; Daniel Wurl, secretary; and Perry Morris, Treasurer. Board meetings are held the second Wednesday of each month and are open to PACA members.

#### Salvage V.I.P.s

Gary Perkins	Jim Downs
Mike Miller	Hank Kaczmarski
Pius Weibel	Matthew Riggs
Paul John	Chris Young
Gail Taylor	Joanne Chester
Bob Swisher	John Peterson
Rich Cahill	

#### Salvage Donations

Roger Miller Enterprises  
University of Illinois  
Novak & Miller  
Jean Scott

#### New & Renewing Members

David Garner  
Sharon J. Rapp  
Marilyn & Harry Querry  
Elizabeth Rogers  
Mr. & Mrs. Edwin C. Rae  
Milo & Sheoler Ketchens  
Kevin & Kellie Cook  
Michael Murphy  
Debra Sloan  
Marianna Murphy & Laird Thompson  
Joseph & Jane Marriott  
Chris Anderson  
Cheryl & Roger Kennedy  
Tony Novak  
Charles Casad  
Pam Ashcraft  
John C. Stallmeyer  
Shirley Stillinger  
Ruth Fliegel  
Katie Zimmerman  
Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Replogle  
Sharen R. Slade  
Ann Boswell & Keddy Hutson  
Mrs. Harold Kurzweg  
Andrew B. White Family  
Earl & Lynda Creutzburg  
Susan Appel  
Joe Donahue  
Lawrence E. Johnson  
Fletcher Johnson  
Daniel & Kimberly Wurl  
Mr. & Mrs. Roger Yarbrough  
Matthew H. Riggs

#### PACA Newsletter

Art Zangerl, President  
Richard Cahill, Vice-President  
Daniel Wurl, Secretary  
Perry Morris, Treasurer  
Karen Lang Kummer, Exec. Director



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