



# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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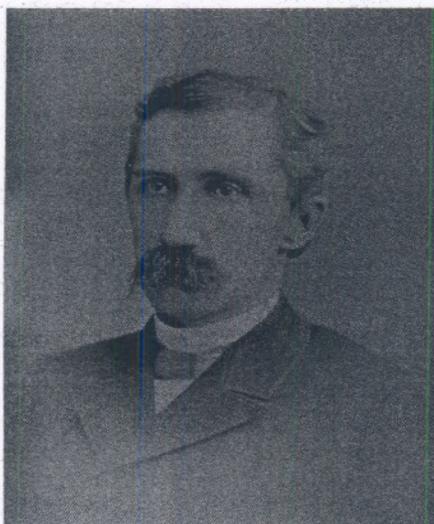
## Our Good Old House

Research on structures in Champaign County normally depends on the use of public records. The researcher always searches for some definitive information about the building or about the people who once lived in it. Therefore, it was unexpected to find first-hand accounts concerning the history of the Forbes House in the Stephen Alfred Forbes Archive of the Illinois Historical Survey at the University of Illinois Library. Not only did a number of the over 250 letters in the files make reference to the house, but there were even photos of its interior! These photos will be invaluable resource if anyone desires to restore the house to the way it looked during the 30 years the Forbes owned it (1884-1914).

Knowing certain key dates in the lives of the Forbeses helped when selecting which letters to read. Although Stephen A. Forbes wrote enough about the house to make it interesting, he comments more than once that his wife, Clara, generally writes most of the news of home. Unfortunately, very few of her letters are in the Archive.

The person we have to thank for the Forbes Archive is Stephen and Clara's daughter, Ethel (b. 1881, d. 1969), who took an interest in history. In one of her memoirs, she gives us some information that indicates the Forbes House was actually at least ten years older than originally thought. There was a previous owner (probably the builder) named Edward Snyder who arrived the opening year of the Illinois Industrial University in 1868 as Instructor of Bookkeeping and German. We find him listed as living on the north side of the street railroad in the *C-U City Directory* of 1870-71. At that time the street railroad ran between Springfield and Greet streets through what is now the Engineering campus.

Forbes was acquainted with Professor Snyder. Both were veterans of the northern forces of the Civil War. There is a letter in the Forbes file from Professor



*Stephen A. Forbes. Illinois Historical Survey*

Snyder, but since Snyder was the recording secretary of the Board of Trustees at the time of the hiring of Forbes, this letter is written on behalf of the Illinois Industrial University and deals only with employment. However, later Forbes mentions to one of his daughters that he has received a nice letter from Professor Snyder who retired in California. Ethel goes on to say Professor Snyder liked to make his own wine and left an extensive grape arbor plus a small cherry orchard. These, along with other mature trees, vegetables and perennial flowers, made up the garden at 1209 West Springfield Avenue. Over the years, Forbes mentions adding a variety of tulips he saw at Lincoln Park in Chicago as well as a dozen varieties of phlox. Although the whole family worked in the garden, the Forbeses had help from a hired gardener.

Besides a horse named Kate, the Forbeses had a Jersey cow, a Newfoundland dog, chickens, rabbits and "an unlimited supply of cats." It was son Ernest (b. 1876, d. 1966) who cared for the animals. They were not the only family on Springfield to have a cow. When daughter Bertha Forbes (b. 1874, d. 1959) was ten years old, she wrote to her father that it was common to see from two to three cows in

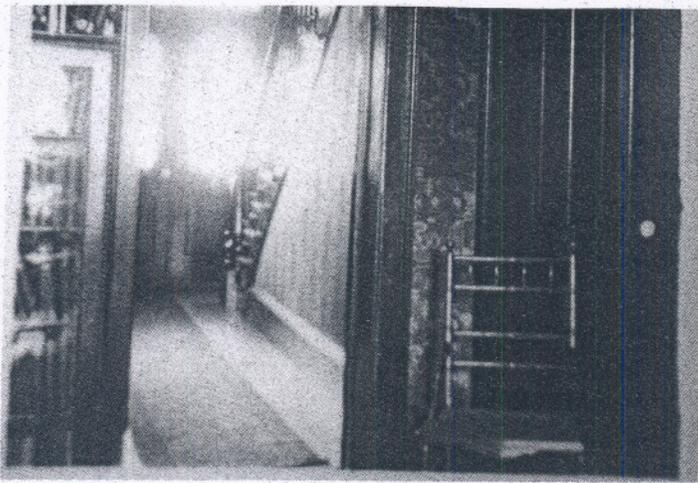


*Clara Forbes. Illinois Historical Survey*

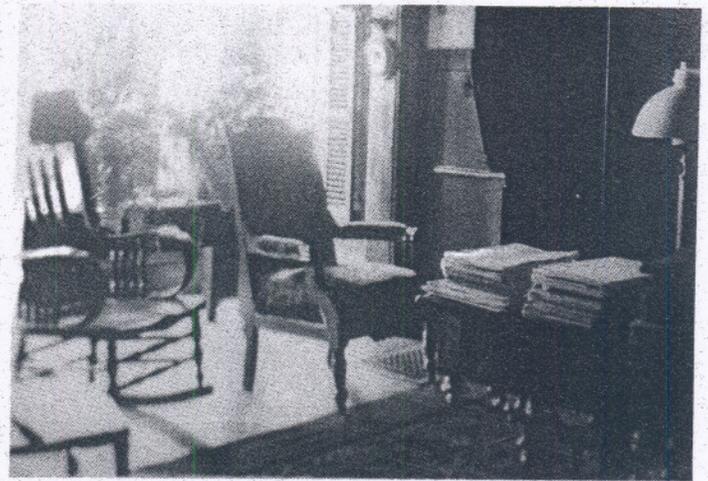
their yard every morning.

As for their interior furnishings, in 1884 the Forbes bought their large square stove (The Grand) in Bloomington-Normal and had it delivered by freight to Urbana for \$40. Professor Forbes expected it to heat his large parlors as well as the upstairs bedrooms. Carpet is mentioned as well as parlor furniture and a kitchen stove. Letters were exchanged between Forbes and his family after he was hired as Professor of Entomology and Zoology at the Illinois Industrial University because Stephen had to stay on in Bloomington-Normal to complete some unfinished work. He mentions in a letter written in November, 1884, to his elder sister Flavilla, "My family have been two months settled in Champaign. A change I made partly to avoid moving in cold weather and partly because I had to take a house early or else take Hobson's choice where there were not many to choose from at best." He writes to another sister that Clara and the children are enjoying their new home and were finding it pleasant and convenient. Clara oversaw a few alterations made to the house by a carpenter as arranged long distance by Forbes.

The house was located just north of the Interurban Railroad line. Forbes'



*Forbes House front hallway showing original doors (extant) and banister (missing); taken from rear parlor. Illinois Historical Survey*



*Forbes House rear parlor, with bay window (extant) and interior shutters (missing). Illinois Historical Survey*

grandson, Thomas William Scott (b. 1918) recalls that his mother Ethel, when but a little child, boarded the train and rode a few blocks before the conductor discovered he had a non-paying passenger and made her get off.

Soon after their arrival in Urbana, Clara and Stephen became active in either organizing or joining existing clubs. In 1893, Clara became secretary of a committee of the Champaign Social Science Club to study the need for a hospital in the area. Shortly afterward A.C. Burnham donated \$10,000 towards the project. This was the seed money that produced Burnham Hospital. The Theatrical Club, University Club, Natural Science Club, Philosophy Club and Theory Club are all mentioned in letters. In 1906, Clara Forbes was one of the founders of the Tuesday Tea Club which eventually became the University of Illinois Women's Club. Along with the Drapers, Kinleys and Daniels, the Forbeses chaperoned dances at fraternities on campus. After the Forbeses helped found the Unitarian Church in 1907, Unitarian suppers were held at the house where Clara "toddled around with a smile on her face like a little girl with an armful of dolls..."

Forbes writes his eldest daughter Bertha, who teaches in Chicago, of her younger sibling, Ethel doing Latin homework Sunday evenings at the dining room table while brother Ernest "toasts himself at the fire." Forbes often read aloud to the children and Clara as she sat sewing.

In 1905 and 1906 the Forbeses spent their summer vacation in West Virginia where others from C-U, including the Davenportes, the Greens, the Knowltons and the Carmans vacationed. During their absence from "our good old house," it was lived in by others temporarily in need of a roof.

Occasionally "the kitchen waste pipe"

gets "plugged or frozen up" and boxes of apples would freeze. Forbes' attitude about these problems was as follows, "I have ordered a man out to investigate and at the worst, things will thaw out next summer."

Ethel, after traveling to Paris, France in 1906 and working in Vermillion, South Dakota, decided to return to Urbana and "the old house" was open to her. "You are to live with us if we have to lock you up in your bedroom... Of course you know, and always have known, that this is your very own home, to come to whenever you can and will stay in at your dear pleasure." The Forbes' nieces and friends of their daughters also often lived with them during the school term.

Although it is never mentioned in the letters, the Forbeses could not have been oblivious to changes which were occurring in their neighborhood on Springfield Avenue. In 1893, the large frame Trinity Church was constructed diagonally across the street from them. This structure was hit and destroyed by lightning in early July of 1894. Rebuilt in 1896, it was called the most expensive church edifice in Urbana. This church is gone and has been replaced by a University building. Soon the University began to purchase land near their home. In 1905 two lots on the west side of Mathews and north of Green Street were bought. Eight lots from Mathews to Goodwin between the Interurban Railroad tracks and the Boneyard were acquired in 1911 and 1912. Finally the Forbeses sold their home for \$10,000 to the University "releasing us from an intolerable situation," writes Forbes.

In June of 1914, "We are beginning to start loads of things, one at a time, over to 1003 West Oregon where the paper-hangers are hard at work." July 4th finds them still moving. "I found your mother still at our one time home, but with the last load of our belongings on the

wagon." Eventually, "today by traveling about 20 miles—at least 1/2 of it up and down stairs, we have got several rooms (at 1003 Oregon) in order" and by July 9th they seem to have truly left 1209 West Springfield and, with a "tea wagon, are looking forward to luring passing friends for chat on the porch" of their new home.

With that the squeaky door was closed on the "good old house" and the University of Illinois became its caretaker and custodian.

*This article was written by Sandra Batzli, a PACA member who has done extensive research on the Forbeses and their Springfield Avenue home. Batzli served on PACA's Forbes House Relocation Committee and was the keynote speaker at the 1995 PACA Annual Membership Meeting.*

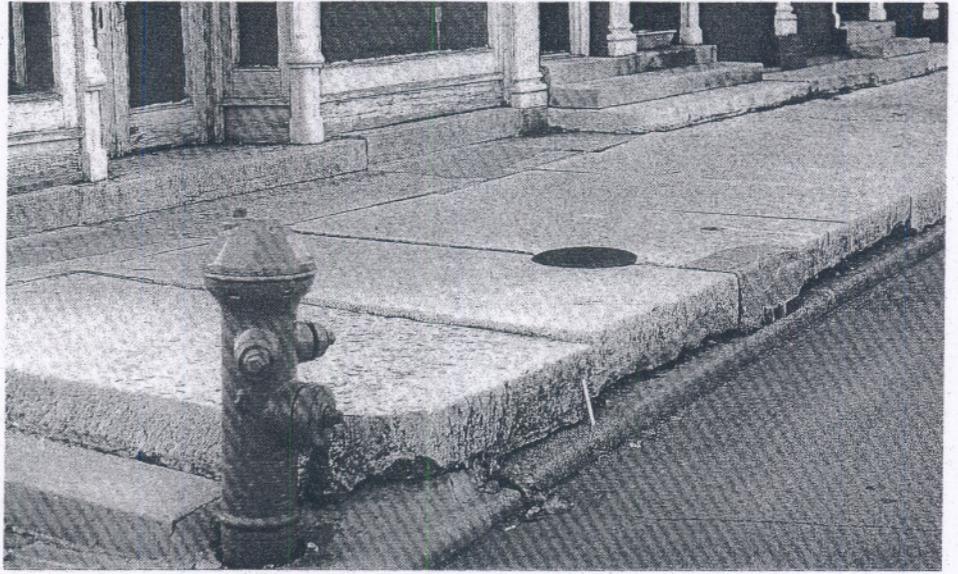
*Forbes House front parlor with wallpaper above picture molding. Illinois Historical Survey*



## Champaign's Historic Sidewalks

A unique part of Champaign and Illinois heritage can be seen at 203-205 North Market Street. The large stone slabs in front of these storefronts may be the only example of a nineteenth-century stone sidewalk remaining in the county. The concrete sidewalks that we take for granted today did not become common until the turn-of-the-century when Portland cement came into widespread use. In the early nineteenth century, most sidewalks were wooden. By the late 1800s, however, more durable sidewalks became necessary, especially in high-traffic commercial areas. Bricks were unsatisfactory for this purpose, and the only other building material available was stone. The first stone sidewalks were constructed using rough-quarried flagstones, which were uneven and irregular in size and shape. Large sawed and planned stone slabs made the best sidewalks and, although expensive, their use was widespread by the 1890s.

The stone for the sidewalk at 203 North market was quarried in the Lemont-Joliet building stone district in northeastern Illinois. Quarrying in this region began in the 1850s when high-quality building stone deposits were discovered during excavation of the Illinois and Michigan Canal. Initially, most of the stone quarried here was shipped to Chicago for use in commercial buildings, churches, and homes of the wealthy, and it was in especially high demand following the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. The stone eventually became widely recognized as an excellent building material and its use spread



Sidewalk at 203-205 North Market Street, Champaign. Donald Mikulic

to other parts of the State and throughout the Midwest. The Illinois State Capitol Building in Springfield and the Rock Island Arsenal are notable examples of large structures made from this stone.

As towns and cities became more urbanized, curbs and sidewalks were installed or upgraded. Lemont-Joliet stone was considered the best stone for sidewalk slabs and curbing in the Midwest, opening a vast new market for this quarry district. During the late nineteenth century, most communities throughout the region, particularly those along major transportation routes like the Illinois Central and Chicago & Alton railroads, imported this stone for just such municipal improvements. While the majority of cities once had these stone

sidewalks, most were replaced with concrete during the last hundred years. Nearly all of the known stone sidewalk remnants in Chicago have disappeared just in the last ten years.

Although considerable interest and effort are directed toward restoring and preserving historic properties and districts these days, little thought is given to their surroundings such as sidewalks and curbs. For example, parts of Chicago's noted Prairie Avenue Historic District have nineteenth-century paving-stone streets but twentieth-century sidewalks and curbs of concrete.

Ironically, a stone sidewalk survived within a few hundred feet from that district's famous Glessner house, but it was torn up and replaced with concrete

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only a few years ago. Even Joliet, once the center of this stone industry, has experienced the recent loss of many of its remaining stone sidewalks in the downtown area as the result of casino-funded "beautification" projects.

The stone slabs in front of 203 North Market in Champaign are an excellent example of Lemont-Joliet stone sidewalk construction. Their large size and smooth surface reflect the effort that was expended to produce good sidewalks in the last century. Now worn by more than 100 years of foot traffic, the fossil trilobites, brachiopods and crinoids in these slabs testify to the 400 million-year-old origin of this rock. The slabs in front of 205 North Market definitely were not quarried in the Lemont-Joliet district, at Kankakee, or at other well-known quarry areas; they may be of more local origin in central Illinois or Indiana. The sidewalk at 203 North Market is one of the best examples of Lemont-Joliet stone sidewalks remaining throughout the entire region, both it and the adjacent stone sidewalk should be preserved and recognized as historic landmarks. They recall an important, but now largely forgotten, Illinois industry that literally had helped to build the Midwest.

*This article was written by Donald G. Mikulic, Illinois State Geological Survey, and Joanne Kluessendorf, University of Illinois.*

## Architreasure Winners

PACA would like to salute three great building sleuths—the 1995 winners of the *News-Gazette* and PACA sponsored Architreaasures Contest held in May during Historic Preservation Week. This year's contest involved correctly identifying building parts from area schools. As part of their "winnings," the following people will receive a year's complimentary membership in the Preservation Association. Congratulations to Heather Kirkpatrick and Kevin Beermink, Urbana; Mary and Mark Tate, Champaign; and John and Marilyn Hancock, Champaign.

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