



# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Volume 15

September-October, 1995

Number 5

## Champaign's Sesquicentennial Neighborhood

### An Early History of the 200 Block of West Vine Street, Champaign

The broad neighborhood from just north of the Wabash and Big Four tracks south to Washington, and from Neil St. west to Elm St. is all part of the Columbia/Vine/Maple Neighborhood Association. Most of this area is Champaign's oldest existing residential neighborhood. With pride it is called "Champaign's Sesquicentennial Neighborhood" as its 150th year anniversary is just a few short years away.

The 200 hundred block of West Vine was not the first area to be built upon in the neighborhood, although it was one of the earliest; but rather, it is unique for the extent and quality of its preserved historic residences. The 200 block of West Vine is the archetype of where Champaign's downtown small business owners, managers, head clerks and skilled craftsmen lived.

#### Useful Resources

Research on the history of individual houses requires the use of a variety of resources and, at times, reasonable guesses. Early maps and county and city directories are a prime resource. The directories do have some inaccuracies, but they are still a major source of aid. The files of the Champaign County Historical Archives are helpful for identifying long-time residents in the area.

Legal records, especially mortgages, can indicate the approximate date of construction of a house. A large increase in a recorded mortgage over the vacant lot sale price often indicates the financing of construction. It is important to compare contemporary vacant lot sales to help sort out construction from mere appreciation and inflation. Subsequent large increases in mortgages could indicate large additions to a house. It was not uncommon to demolish the first house and build a new one in its place. Another practice was to

1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map showing lots (#1-6 and #19-24) and buildings. Current addresses are shown toward the middle of the street.

move entire houses. Either of these may have happened in the 200 block of West Vine. Unfortunately, it would be difficult to verify such an occurrence.

There are several early "Birdseye View" maps of the City. The 1858 map combines Urbana and West Urbana. There are also two maps of the City of Champaign dated 1869 and 1884 respectively. These maps depict actual streets, yards and houses in existence at the time. They provide excellent benchmarks for determining construction dates. There are also maps created for insurance ratings called the Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps which also show lots and buildings. They are much less picturesque than the Birdseye maps but are very accurate as to detail and scale. Unfortunately, the first of these maps that shows all of Champaign is from 1909.

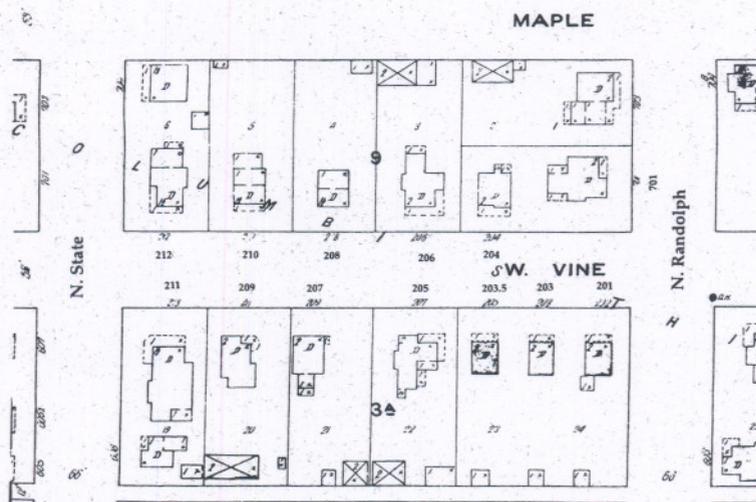
Using this combination of maps, the approximate age of houses can be determined. This reduces the amount of material that needs to be searched to determine actual age. The maps are a great help as there are no building records from those years. Nor are there tax assessor documents that might indicate construction of a house. Other aids are newspapers, marriage certificates, court cases,

abstracts and death certificates from the era. Actual street addresses did not come into use until the end of the 19th century. When they were first used there was not a clear system in place and many early addresses were later changed. Only current addresses have been used in this article.

#### Lot Sales

The 200 block of West Vine Street is part of Curtis F. Columbia's third addition to the City of Urbana filed on July 8, 1858. At this time Champaign was known as the Village of West Urbana. The first two lots (209 & 211 W. Vine) were sold on January 30, 1860 with the bulk of the lots sold before the end of the Civil War. The last lots, 22, 23 & 24, were sold in 1888 to George Beardsley, owner of the Beardsley Hotel.

The first sales of lots were often to speculators. Celestia A. Wolfe was an early player. The Langley family (he was a lawyer and county judge) also bought and sold lots in the new addition. Two other early speculators were George Beardsley and grocer James Dodson, Jr. In the majority of cases, houses were built as rental property rather than the owner's residence.



was not built by 1890. 203 does straddle the middle of the original lot line. This does suggest the possibility of a later infill. Street numbers are being used in the 1890 *Directory*, and six houses are listed for this block face. The 1893 *Directory* lists seven houses sequentially numbered from 201 to 213. This numbering is a confirmation that all of the houses on this side of the block were built by this date.

The argument can be made that 201 was the first house to be built. Next would be 203.5 W. Vine, built after the 1888 lot sale and by 1889 (it is listed in the 1890 *Directory*). Finally, 203 W. Vine was likely built by 1893 (extracting from the sequential street numbering in the 1893 *Directory*). The 1885 *Directory* may have made a mistake with the listing of Merrill on the southwest corner of Randolph and Vine. Perhaps he was on the southeast corner or was actually at 207 W. Vine.

The 1890 *Directory* lists Newton Taylor, a commercial traveler, living at 205 W. Vine. The Birdseye Map of 1884 did not show this house. By 1890 it is occupied. Thus it had to have been built between 1884 and 1889. It is more likely that it was the later part of this period as the 1885 *Directory* still shows no one at that address. This is further sustained by the 1888 sale price of \$300 which Coffman paid to Beardsley for the lot. The sale was late in the year, likely too late for construction. This brackets the construction of 205 W. Vine to the year 1889.

Another property can be documented by following the listing of John B. Weeks through the various directories. He appears in Lothrop's 1870-71 directory living one door west of Neil on Maple St. and working as a clerk. He lived there with his father, a drayman. In the 1878-79 *Directory* he is listed working in his father's trade as a drayman but now living on the north side of Vine one door west of Randolph; this would be 206 W. Vine.

In the 1890 *Champaign-Urbana City Directory* J.B. Weeks still lives at 206 W. Vine but now works as a bookkeeper. Weeks would continue to own 206 W. Vine until he sold it to Thomas J. Baddeley July 29, 1891.

The 1893 *Directory* lists J.B. Weeks as a salesman and bookkeeper residing at 701 N. Randolph. It would seem reasonable to assume that 701 N. Randolph was built by Mr. Weeks as his own home. The house is positioned to face Randolph thus getting the 701 N. address rather than a 202 W. Vine address. The above directory dates indicate that 701 N. Randolph was built after 1890 and before 1893.

John B. Weeks purchased the south halves of lots 1 and 2 together from Colum-

bia in 1882. 701 N. Randolph sits on the south half of lot 1. Lot 2 seems to have been 701 N. Randolph's backyard and garden area for several years. Not until the 1906 *Directory* is anyone indicated as living at 204 W. Vine St (Lot 2). That individual is John H. Weeks, the younger son of J.B. Weeks. The directories of 1895 through 1903 list John H. as living at 701. On September 10, 1901 John H. married Daisy Cook in his father's home at 701 N. Randolph. There are no recorded mortgages for 204 W. Vine from J.B. Week's first purchase in 1882 until far into the 20th century. The directory information and the wedding date are the only information on construction that has been found. There is a gap in directories between 1903 and 1906. It seems reasonable to assume that the house was built between 1903 and 1905.

The 1893 *Directory* shows the last house to document, 209 W. Vine, as being occupied by a Fred Webber, an engraver, and Frank Turnell, a printer. If we can assume that it was not built in 1890 then it would be bracketed by the dates 1890 and 1892 for a construction period. Thus the block was full by no later than 1905.

#### Naming the Homes

John B. Weeks was born in 1839 in Elmira N.Y. He served as a private in the Civil War with the Illinois 72nd Infantry and fought in the siege of Vicksburg. He settled with his parents near Champaign in 1857. He married Josephine Hasbrook in 1861 in Champaign. By 1900 Mr. Weeks is the manager of Alexander Lumber Co. Directories and deed records also indicate a Miss Eva Weeks, a daughter. On June 28th, 1923 Mr. Weeks died at home and was buried in Mt. Hope Cemetery. His widowed wife and daughter would continue to reside in the house for several more years. Eva would live there until her death at home in 1945. The *Champaign News Gazette* carried a large front page obituary and tribute to Mr. Weeks with his photograph under the title "Pioneer is Dead." He was commonly and affectionately know as Uncle John. In a side bar on the front page, the paper's editor wrote in part, "Champaign has lost a dear friend—he truly loved this community. Both were children together. As a youth J.B. Weeks came to Champaign. It was then but a village nestled in this black cornbelt district of Illinois. Its streets were of mud. Its sidewalks of wood. Pastures and barnyards dotted here and there where now stand our business district and most beautiful residences... In early life the sweetheart of his youth became his bride. They were married in a little frame house where the

Kaufman Store now stands... The life of J.B. Weeks was most successful. He made friends, the most worthwhile possessing in life. He was a blue blooded American gentleman. J.B. Weeks, you were a grand old man—and we loved you." It seems obvious that 701 N. Randolph is the "John B. Week's House." In fact, the house was in the Weeks family until 1987.

The house next door, 204 W. Vine, was also a Week's house. John H. Weeks and his first wife Daisy lived there for several years. There is little known about Daisy other than the information of the reverse of their marriage license. Interestingly, the 1908 *Directory* lists John H. living back at 701 N. Randolph. Then on March 29, 1910 he married Carrie Shiels. For many years to follow John and Carrie are found residing at 204 W. Vine. A review of the death certificates for Champaign County from 1903 through 1907 does not indicate Daisy's death. What happened to Daisy? The house finally left the family when Frank C. and Caroline Weeks sold the house in 1965. Clearly 204 W. Vine is the "John H. Weeks House" and there is more to find out.

The three brick houses, 201, 203 and 203.5, were built by George Beardsley after buying the lots from Columbia in 1888. While he sold 201 in 1892, 203 and 203.5 stayed together through various sales until they were split in May of 1929. It appears that all three have almost always been rentals. It seems fitting to name all three houses together as "The Beardsley Row."

Lothrop's *Directory* had J.N. Crannell as the first confirmed resident of 212 W. Vine. However by the 1878 *Directory* Crannell is no longer living in either Champaign or Urbana. Edward Smith Scudder has taken his place. Langley purchased both 210 and 212 W. Vine in August 1867 for \$475.00. In 1869 Langley sold 212 W. Vine to Prudence M. Morain for \$1,800. This indicates that the house was built in 1868.

On May 12, 1879 Mr. Scudder purchased 212 W. Vine where he had been living since at least 1877. Mr. Scudder and his wife Mary E. continued to live at 212 W. Vine until his death on July 4, 1917. His obituary indicates that he came to Champaign in 1863 and started work for the Illinois Central Railroad as a fireman in 1864. He stayed with the Illinois Central for 40 years until his retirement at age 66. He worked his way up from fireman to freight train engineer to passenger train engineer. His last few years with the railroad were as an inspector. Their daughter, Adell, was born in 1864. She was 13 when she moved to 212 W. Vine. She lived there until she died at

## City Directory Listings of Early Residents

The earliest information indicating individuals at specific addresses is J. S. Lothrop's *Champaign County Directory of 1870-71*. This directory was written before street addresses so residents are indicated by number of doors from a particular street intersection. The following is a list of individuals living on the block in 1870.

- Chris Clary, Vine St. 5 doors west of Randolph (211 W. Vine)
- N. Crannell, a carriage maker, north east corner of State & Vine (212 W. Vine)
- Reverend T.P. Emmerson north side of Vine, first door west of Randolph (206 W. Vine)
- L. Ewing, wheelwright, Vine Street, third door west of Randolph, (207 W. Vine)
- B.W. Hamlin, confectionery dealer, Vine, 6 doors west of Randolph (212 W. Vine)
- William Jordan, boarding, Vine, 2 doors west of Randolph, (208 W. Vine)
- G.H. Mott, carpenter, first door west of Randolph (206 W. Vine)

This accounts for all of the houses on the 1869 Birdseye Map except for 210 West Vine Street. It may have been empty or the residents may not have been home when the canvas for the directory was taken. Since it appears on the 1869 map, one could assume that 210 W. Vine was built by the time of the *Lothrop Directory*; this will be later corroborated by mortgage reviews.

Both the 1893 and the 1895 directories indicate that the residents of 211 W. Vine had a live-in maid. In 1895 residents of the block included the Weeks family and the Scudder family. Other residents included the foreman and head marble cutter for S.P. Atkinson & Co. and William Schweizer of Schweizer and Wood Clothiers. Additionally there was a saloon keeper and a maker of custom plaster moldings.

The 1900 *Directory* lists a wide range of occupations on the block including painters and wallpaper hangers; a store manager and his son, a student at the U of I; a machinist; a chemist at the U of I; a retired couple; and a mother and her adult daughter, who worked as a clerk. Two houses are occupied by the owner of a department store in Champaign, who lived at 211 W. Vine, and his son, who worked at the store and lived at 206.

## Construction Starts

By comparing the location of houses on the Birdseye maps to an actual plot plan, addresses can be determined. The 1858 map shows no houses. The 1869 and 1884 maps show the same houses at the following addresses: 206, 207, 208, 210, 211 & 212. As these homes appear on the 1869 map they must predate 1869.

No houses other than the first six appear on the 1884 map. Therefore, all of the remaining houses in the 200 block of West Vine were built during or after 1884. The 1909 Sanborn Insurance Map shows all of the present homes in place. Thus the houses at 701 N. Randolph St. and 201, 203, 203.5, 204, 205 & 209 W. Vine were built in the twenty year period between 1884 and 1909.

Large mortgage increases are recorded for 211 in 1871 and for 209 W. Vine in 1874. This suggests that before these dates houses were in place on the lots. The next two lots to sell were 3 and 4 (206 and 208 W. Vine) which sold on the same day, January 21, 1864, to Wolfe and Langley respectively. A large increase in the mortgage occurs for 206 W. Vine on April 27, 1867. This would correspond with the Birdseye Map and indicates a construction date prior to 1867. Fitting the construction season into the above dates, the house can be dated between the January 1864 lot sale and the end of 1866.

The Langleys acquired lots 3 through 6 by 1867. Thus, except for 204 W. Vine and 701 N. Randolph, the Langleys owned the entire north side of the 200 block of W. Vine. They then rapidly sold off their holdings—lot 5 in January and lot 4 in April 1868, and lots 3 and 6 in April 1869. Sale prices indicate that the Langleys, during their short ownership, had houses built on lots 4, 5, and 6.

207 W. Vine sold in March of 1865 for \$200 to James M. Fisher. He sold it again at the end of 1865 for \$500 which strongly suggests the construction of a house over the spring and summer of 1865. There is another increase in the mortgage to \$684 in 1869. The 1869 Birdseye Map indicates a house on this property, however the size shown is much smaller than the present house. There is another increase in mortgage in 1898 to \$2,800. Could the original home have been razed and a new one built, or a major addition constructed? John B. Weeks purchased the house in 1871, and held it for two and a half years before selling to William Munhall.

201, 203, and 203.5 W. Vine are nearly identical two story brick houses. The 1885 *Directory* lists Frank Merrill, butcher, on the southwest corner of Randolph and Vine. This might indicate that the first of

the three brick houses, 201 W. Vine St. was built in the time between the publishing of the 1884 Birdseye Map and the 1885 *Champaign County Directory*. There are no listings in the 1885 directory for the next two brick houses, therefore, one can reasonably assume that 203 and 203.5 did not exist at the time the canvass for the 1885 *Directory* was taken.

At this time it was not uncommon to place two houses on one lot; this was often done as families expanded. However, this almost always occurred when each house had frontage onto a street or alley. The three brick houses in question were built across two lots (#23 & #24) all with the same set backs and all facing the same street with no regard for lot lines. Given that each house is the twin of the next and that lot lines were disregarded, it would be reasonable to assume that they were built with the intention to keep them together as a row of rental houses.

The 1890 *Directory* lists a Mrs. Sadie Rifenberick living in 201 W. Vine, where the butcher Merrill was listed in 1885 as being on the southwest corner. It also lists a commercial traveler, Frank Weeks, living at 203.5. Rifenberick's and Weeks' listings are an additional confirmation that at least two of the brick houses were built by the end of the 1880s. The sale price for these lots in 1888 was less than \$800. The low sale price suggests vacant lots. Could the 1885 *Directory* be wrong about Mr. Merrill residing on the southwest corner?

Beardsley sold lot 22 (205 W. Vine Street) to David Coffman for \$300 in 1888. This price indicates that no structure was on the lot at the time of the sale. According to the original abstracts for lots 23 and 24 Beardsley sold these two lots, except for the east 44 feet of lot 24, to Oliver C. Black for \$3,000 on October 1, 1895. Beardsley had already sold the east 44 feet (201 Vine) to Frederick J. Schweyer in 1892 for \$1,500.

The Birdseye Map of 1884 shows lots 22, 23 and 24 as vacant. With 201 W. Vine St. not part of the Beardsley/Black \$3,000 sale in 1895 this could indicate a \$1,500 per house price (203 and 203.5 W. Vine). This would match the 1892 \$1,500 sale of 201 to Schweyer. Contemporary sales of other houses on the block are in the \$2,800-\$3,000 range (207 W. Vine was mortgaged for \$2,800 in September of 1898). It is hard to imagine that there were any houses on the three lots when Columbia sold them to Beardsley for \$800 in 1888. A strong argument can be made that Beardsley built the houses between 1889 and the early 1890s.

The 1890 *Directory* only lists residents in 201 and 203.5 W. Vine St. Perhaps 203

home at age 35 in 1899. She is listed in the directories as a clerk and bookkeeper. For several years, Mr. Scudder's mother-in-law, Laura Perry, lived with them. Born in Connecticut in 1815, she died at 212 W. Vine in 1895.

Mary Scudder did not survive her husband by many years, dying at home in 1920. At that time the home was sold as per the instructions of Mrs. Scudder's will with most of the household furnishings going to a relative from the Perry family in Rantoul. In addition to their residence at 212, the Scudder's owned several rental houses in other areas of Champaign. Certainly 212 W. Vine should be the "Scudder House."

Since 206 through 210 W. Vine were all built by the Langleys perhaps these are "The Langley Houses."

207 W. Vine was first built by James Fischer in 1865. For the rest of the 1800s it changed hands often. In 1919 Frank Schaede purchased the home for his family. The Schaedes stayed until 1947 when the Floyd Davis family bought the house and made it their home. The Davis family sold the house in 1965 to Virgil Krone who has used it as a rental property since then. Perhaps 207 is the "Schaede-Davis Home."

#### Conclusion

The 1909 Sanborn Map shows all of the properties with outbuildings, with the exception of 204 W. Vine and 701 N. Randolph. Additionally, 205, 206, 207, & 209 all had their own stables. The 1909 map has a second small house built behind 211 W. Vine with the address of 606 N. State. By the time of the 1935 Sanborn Map all

of the original outbuildings and stables have disappeared. The 1935 map shows seven of the houses with new automobile garages. Additionally there is a large new house at 605 N. Randolph directly behind 201 and 203 W. Vine.

Today all of the block's original thirteen houses still stand but all of the "new" 20th century garages present in 1935 are gone, with the exception of the garage at 207 W. Vine. Moreover, the block's two most recent homes, 606 N. State and 605 N. Randolph, have also disappeared although the cut in the low concrete wall along the sidewalk still exists where 606 N. State's sidewalk came out. Thus the block is a near perfect historical preserve of residential architecture of early Champaign. Unlike W. University Ave., with its large homes for the new rich, West Vine Street was always the residence of Champaign's skilled craftsmen, head clerks, managers, and small business owners. Very likely the 200 block of West Vine is the best preserved such street in the City.

*This article was condensed from a report by Michael Markstahler & Rebecca Henry. Copies are available for \$1.50. Please do not reproduce without permission from the authors.*

#### 1996 Heritage Award Nominations Sought

Fill out the enclosed form with your nominations for the 1996 Heritage Awards. Categories include: Residential, Commercial, Institutional, Adaptive Use, Landscape, Neighborhood, and Special Heritage Awards.

#### PACA Donates Books

As part of a continuing educational mission, PACA recently donated preservation-related books to Champaign-Urbana elementary school libraries. The following letter was received in response to the donation.

*Thank you very much for your generous gifts to the Thomas Paine School library. Your book gifts help us to offer many more choices to the staff and students at Thomas Paine for their information and reading enjoyment.*

*We are pleased that you donated the books, ARCHITECTS MAKE ZIG-ZAGS, I KNOW THAT BUILDING, OLD-HOUSE DICTIONARY, and WHAT IT FEELS LIKE TO BE A BUILDING. A special bookplate has been placed in the front of each book commemorating your gift. What a nice way to help our students learn more about the preservation and conservation of buildings. We are sure that our students will enjoy your book selections very much. They are a nice addition to our collection. Thank you so much for helping our school library in this way.*

*Sincerely,*

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## Illinois History Symposium

The Sixteenth Annual Illinois History Symposium, sponsored by the Illinois State Historical Society in cooperation with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, will be held December 1-2 at the Springfield Renaissance Hotel. Topics for the sessions include the following:

Women, Railroad Law, and Lincoln; Election Returns and a Pivotal Election; Black Experiences in Modern Illinois; The Lake and the Canal; Civil War and Reconstruction Issues; Architectural Landmarks; The Social Composition of Marginal Groups; Higher Education in the Twentieth Century; The Illinois Roots of James Jones; Pullman, Illinois; The Writing of a Local History; Band Music in Illinois; Religion in the Nineteenth Century; Early South Suburban History; Perspectives on the Emergence of the Women's Movement in Illinois; Celebrating the Diamond Anniversary of the Illinois League of Women Voters; Native Americans and Blacks in Early Illinois; Jacksonians in the Civil War Era; Immigrant Experiences; Sources of Legislation, Local and National; Chapters in Cultural History; Two Antebellum Lawyers; Strikes in Social Context; and The Fourth Estate and Recent Constitutional Amendments.

For further information contact the Illinois State Historical Society, 1 Old State Capitol Plaza, Springfield, IL 62701-1507; 217/782-2635.



### Identification of Prize-Winning Cottage Sought

The September, 1928 issue of *The Building Developer* illustrated prize-winning cottages of the "Better Homes in America" campaign of 1928 including one in Champaign County. Designed and shown by the Better Homes Committee of Champaign County, it cost \$5,503, including the garage. PACA is seeking help in identifying the location of this house.

Better Homes in America was an educational institution with two avowed purposes: (1) to make accessible to all citizens knowledge of high standards in house building, furnishing, and home life. (2) To encourage the building of sound, beautiful, single-family houses; and to encourage the reconditioning and remodeling of old houses.

Annual campaigns called "Better Homes Week" were initiated and carried out each year through the local committees and these included local demonstrations of model homes.

If you recognize the above house, please call PACA with its location.

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Manssour Moeinzadeh  
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