



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Focus On: Smith Memorial Hall

The Tina Weedon Smith Memorial Hall is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C, in the area of architecture. Erected between 1916-1920 to the plans of University of Illinois architect, James M. White, the building is an example of the Beaux Arts Classical style on a campus of primarily Georgian Revival structures. Integrity of design has been maintained over the years. Since its completion in 1920, the building has housed the expanding School of Music and was the School's only building during its formative period when hundreds of undergraduate and graduate students were influenced by its renowned acuity and visiting performers to the music department.

Introduction

"...To raise the general level of education of the people and to train leaders." This was the motto strongly promoted by Professor David Kinley during his tenure as president of the University of Illinois (1920-1930). He accomplished this vision by stimulating prospective benefactors among the alumni. Initiating this era of patronage, sprung the architecturally significant Smith Memorial Hall. The Tina Weedon Smith Memorial Hall, completed in 1920, elegantly stands east of Foellinger Auditorium and just to the north of the two National Historic Landmarks, the Morrow Plots and the Astronomical Observatory, a historically significant part of the main quadrangle at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

History

As an officer in the federal army in the Civil War, Captain Thomas J. Smith halted the company he was commanding on March 6, 1863 during a march in pouring rain outside a home in Woodbury, Tennessee. Smith's men entered the house and devoured all the food they could find. After being informed by the owner, Mrs. Weedon, of the invasion, Smith or-



The Tina Weedon Smith Memorial Hall, 805 S. Mathews Ave., Urbana, was recently nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in honor of the centennial of the School of Music.

dered the men out when, for the first time, he laid eyes on Miss Tina Weedon. The following year, Captain Smith struggled through enemy lines to marry Miss Weedon, whereupon he reestablished himself in Champaign, Illinois with his new bride.

Mr. Smith practiced law and was an active member of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees from 1897-1903, where he became a vocal proponent of music education. Mrs. Smith was a light-hearted and high-spirited woman, with a particular fondness of music. On August 22, 1903 Tina Weedon Smith died.

In memory of his beloved wife, Captain Thomas J. Smith donated real estate holdings totaling \$250,000 for the construction of a music building for the University of Illinois Department of Music. Never before had the University been so honored in accepting such a generous gift that was not state appropriated. In Smith's own eyes he noted, "While I am in no sense a musician, there is nothing nearer to my heart than the development of music. It is the greatest thing in the world and contributes more to the happi-

ness and pleasure of people than anything within my knowledge, aside from the necessary living expenses of human beings."

James McLaren White, university architect and professor, was chosen to be the supervising architect for the project. White was the supervising architect of the University of Illinois for almost a quarter of a century, proving his participation as a great contributor to at least eighty of the major buildings on the campus. His first major building project was the old Library (Altgeld Hall) designed with Nathan C. Ricker in 1896. Prof. White was stated to have been more influential than any other man on the material development of the campus during his 43 years on staff at the University. As Rev. H. Clifford Northcott addressed at James White's funeral, "Here's to the man who plans things- Builds things- Makes things- Who prates not of wonders of old, Nor seeks to acquire treasures of gold, But takes off his coat, and takes ahold, And does things."

Smith was asked by Edmund J. James, President of the University of Illinois, to

examine the plans carefully and give his opinion. The reply was as follows: "I have gone over again with the Supervising Architect and his assistants the plans of the Music Building and I can see no grounds for criticism whatever. They are so completely satisfactory to me that I hardly need to say anything more except that I hope all possible dispatch will be made use of in getting a start and continuing until completion." With this, White was authorized to proceed with the excavation and the construction of the foundation of Smith Memorial Hall.

"This is the happiest moment of my life," said Captain Smith, as he took the beribboned spade in his trembling hands and broke the sod as the formal signal for excavation to begin on October 24, 1916. Not only was Mr. Smith excited, but also the many students and faculty who would be able to be a part of the new and expanded School of Music. In James White's opinion this added one more piece to his master plan, begun as early as January 1912, for the University of Illinois. His modified plan of 1919 consisted of the development of a main quadrangle, an engineering quadrangle to the north, and an agricultural quadrangle to the south. Complying with this idea, the University campus has developed according to the pattern planned by this architect.

As construction of the new music building progressed it was evident that Smith's health was deteriorating. Efforts by the Board of Trustees helped in the financial security, so that the structure might be completed before Smith's death. Despite all of the efforts, Captain Thomas J. Smith died at the age of 82, two years prior to the completion of Smith Memorial Hall. Shortly before his death, he so beautifully expressed his thoughts when he wrote: "From the commencement of business in Champaign, Illinois, I have lived a life that is free from harm or evil as well as was in my power and now at this stage of my career, I want to say before my departure from this life that I bear no evil thoughts nor harbor no evil mind against any human being and feel at this time that if I had my life to repeat, I doubt whether I could have improved it or not." Completed in 1920 and dedicated on April 27, 1922, the Tina Weedon Smith Memorial Hall was a proud reminder of the Smith family and their generous donation to the School of Music at the University of Illinois.

While a new home was being erected to house the growing School of Music enrollment, renowned organist Frederic Benjamin Stiven became director. The new and needed space that the Smith

Memorial Hall brought allowed Stiven to expand interest in music education through changes in music curricula with the addition of theory, conducting, and instrumentation courses. By the time of his death in January 1947, he had established graduate programs, recruited excellent faculty, organized the departmental library, and had instituted much that was to characterize the school for the next half-century.

Starting in the 1920s, distinguished performers and faculty have been an integral part of the University of Illinois School of Music. Among the renown faculty were the following. Russell Hancock Miles was a composer, choral conductor, and organist for Illinois from 1922-1963, whose best known work is the cantata, *The Chambered Nautilus*, based on a poem by Oliver Wendell Holmes. Velma Kitchell Wilson, appointed to the faculty in 1928, was a pianist and choral director, who emphasized music appreciation and music education. Her 1939 music appreciation class had 171 students enrolled, one of the largest enrollments of the time. She also advocated using radio programs as part of a music teacher's curriculum. Viennese immigrant Hubert Kessler began teaching in 1930 and was the author of a number of textbooks based on music theory and philosophy. He did much to promote an understanding and appreciation of Heinrich Schenker's theory of music analysis. William G. Hill, the school's first musicologist, was a major contributor to the development of the music library. Under his auspices, the library expanded to fill the needs of the school's graduate programs.

Bruce Foote, an accomplished singer and familiar voice to radio audiences, became a faculty member in 1933. Foote performed on WGN radio's "Theatre of the Air" and in many opera and oratorio programs. Duane Branigan, appointed to the piano faculty in 1936, became the highly successful twenty-year director of the School of Music in later years. Pianist Stanley Fletcher was a well-known interpreter of Chopin and continued to tour after his faculty appointment, including two Town Hall concerts in New York City. He also contributed significantly to the Festival of Contemporary Arts. The Godfather of Brass, John Philip Sousa, conducted concerts here in the 1930s. Upon his death, he left his library to the University of Illinois for continued use by the School of Music. Luminaries such as Igor Stravinsky, Sir Leopold Stokowski, John Cage, Harry Partch, Leonard Rose, Joseph Szigeti, Georges Enesco, and Aaron Copland were among the many who visited the School of Music to per-

form and teach in the early decades of the 1900s.

The Recital Hall continues to enlighten the delicate space with inspiring music. A Champaign local and renown singer, William Warfield, headed a combination of talents for a fund-raising performance in 1990. Warfield is known internationally for his singing in productions like "Show-boat" and in concerts and on records. On January 22, 1990, pianist Ian Hobson performed Beethoven's *Fantasy for Piano Chorus and Orchestra* with an orchestra of University of Illinois faculty and students for a fund-raising campaign.

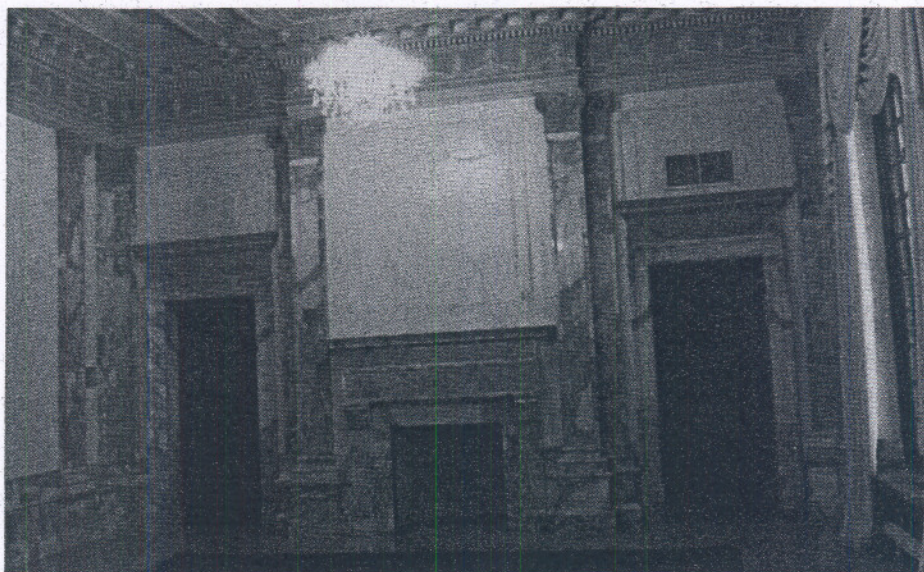
Architecture

In addition to the history which made Smith Memorial Hall possible and the talents that have since kept the auditorium full of breathtaking sounds, the actual architectural "symphony" which was composed here is also significant to this memorial building. Identifying features of the building comprise the Beaux Arts Classical style. Based on academic principles expounded by France's famed architectural school, the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, the style was quickly adopted by America's leading architects. This formal, academic style was well suited to the monumental buildings built in the early twentieth century and quickly became the style of choice and symbol of the City Beautiful movement in the United States. Inspired by classical Renaissance architecture, the Beaux Arts Classical style has an exuberance of surface decoration that is seldom found in other classical styles. This style is characterized by bilateral symmetry; the use of Greek and Roman idioms, often freely mixed; smooth masonry walls accented by quoins or rusticated stonework; figure sculpture and cartouches, especially at the roofline; one-over-one or multi-paned windows, paired columns flanking large barrel- and round-arched vault openings; flat, low-pitched, or low hipped roofs with balustrades and foliated brackets; grand stairways and lavish interiors. Entry porches with roofs supported by classical columns are common as are cornice lines accented by elaborate moldings, dentils, and modillions. Wall surfaces are decorated with garlands, floral patterns, and shields; and elaborate window and door surrounds are typical.

Smith Memorial Hall possesses a most striking temple facade and basilica-type plan unlike any other campus building. Classical tetrastyle Ionic columns have been placed in antis to strongly address its main entrance, while distyle in antis side elevation porticos echo the facade. Made of fireproof construction, the build-

ing is comprised of red brick laid in English bond above a high stone foundation accentuated with limestone ornamentation of elegant craftsmanship. Symbolic musical detailing is arranged throughout the entire building, both exterior and interior, emphasizing the musical strength intended for the memory of Mrs. Tina Weedon Smith. This ornamentation includes the inscribed names of famous composers (Haydn, Palestrina, Beethoven, Bach) in the frieze, lyres in the stepped stone parapet, musical symbols in the entryway entablatures, and even the metal lamp posts have musical symbols embossed thereon. The frieze of the Recital Hall is greatly embellished with different musical instruments including cymbals, flutes, xylophones, horns, and string instruments.

Classical details are used liberally on the building and are not limited to the monumental classical Ionic order with full entablature used at the entrances. The frieze is enlivened with garland wreaths and foliated scrolls, the cornice has dentils and the pediment is topped by acroteria plinths. The entrance doors have classically molded surrounds with bay leaf garland transom bars and egg-and-dart flat cornices. An entablature using anthemion and palmette moldings is above the second story windows. The side axis entrances are also classically detailed with full pedimented surrounds with dentils and classical moldings; the metal spandrel panels above are heavily ornamented with foliated swags and shields. Although the side elevations west of the side axis entrance porticos are simpler in design than the main facade,



The Memorial Room, a most glorious Italian Renaissance room, is one of most ornate rooms on the entire campus. It served as the music library from 1940 to 1972.

Beaux Arts style elements are still found in the grouped double hung windows with transoms, stone keystones and paneled lintels, and stone entablature with ornamental brick frieze.

In plan, the circulation is incorporated through a corridor which wraps around the interior's periphery leading to studios, offices, and classrooms. Elaborate three-story corner staircases provide vertical circulation and continue the Beaux Arts style with corner niches, classically-detailed plaster walls, and highly detailed coffered ceilings. Within the center core lies the acoustically designed Recital Hall whose walls are highly decorated with classical ornament above the first story wood paneled dado.

Among the classical elements found are highly ornamented pilasters; a full entablature with festoons, triglyphs and metopes (with bas-relief musical instruments); and egg-and-dart and dentil moldings among others.

Smith Memorial Hall possesses most importantly the Memorial Room, used from 1940-1972 as the music library. It is a most glorious Italian Renaissance room, one of the most ornate on the entire campus. Located on the second floor directly behind the large columns of the main facade is a cornucopia of cream and tan marble and richly detailed designs of cream, pink, and apple-green plaster. Two marble fireplaces address the two short walls, while pilasters make up the long

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sides. The room is a virtual symphony of classical ornament as found on the marble pilasters, fireplaces and door surrounds and as applied to the plaster walls, full entablature and coffered ceiling. Every surface is covered with richly ornamented classically-detailed moldings including the use of egg and dart, guilloche, anthemions, palmettes, acanthus, fret work, Egyptian, bead and reel, and dentils. Portraits of Mr. and Mrs. Smith hung triumphantly in this room at one point in time, but have now been moved to either end of the corridors. An oriental rug, donated to the University by President John Corbally and his wife, covers the floor. Chandeliers donated in 1984, in memory of Professor Dorothy Gunsalus (1916-81) & Professor Grace Wilson (1918-82), hang from the coffered ceiling. This intricately designed room enhances the meaning which Smith Memorial Hall bears.

Conclusion

The Tina Weedon Smith Memorial Hall is most importantly a memorial to Captain Thomas J. Smith's wife. In concordance, the auditorium has held many significant events which continue to enlighten the space with beautiful music, as Mr. Smith intended. As Captain Smith so elegantly said, "...this is a beautiful structure that will ere long stand forth as a fitting memorial of love and devotion to the memory of as pure a character as has ever lived in this world." Significant treasures as this should be cherished and admired for its character that is rarely found today.

This article was taken from the National Register nomination by Amy Lamb and Karen Kummer; it was passed by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council in December.

PACA Newsletter

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PACA Annual Membership Meeting will be held in February

Details to follow

Nominations Sought: Heritage Awards & Board of Directors

Nominations are still being accepted for the 1996 Heritage Awards. Categories include: Residential, Commercial, Institutional, Adaptive Use, Landscape, Neighborhood, and Special Heritage Awards. The Committee is actively seeking nominations from individuals, organizations, and architectural/engineering firms for projects substantially completed in 1995. Self nominations are encouraged.

Nominations are also being sought for the Board of Directors. Three Directors will be elected at the Annual Meeting and will serve terms of three years. Contact PACA with your suggestions.

Membership Renewals

To help reduce mailing costs, PACA is asking its members to check their mailing label for the date of their last renewal. Each label is marked with the day, month, and year of the last time a membership check was received. Lapsed members are especially encouraged to renew before being deleted from the mailing list.

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