



# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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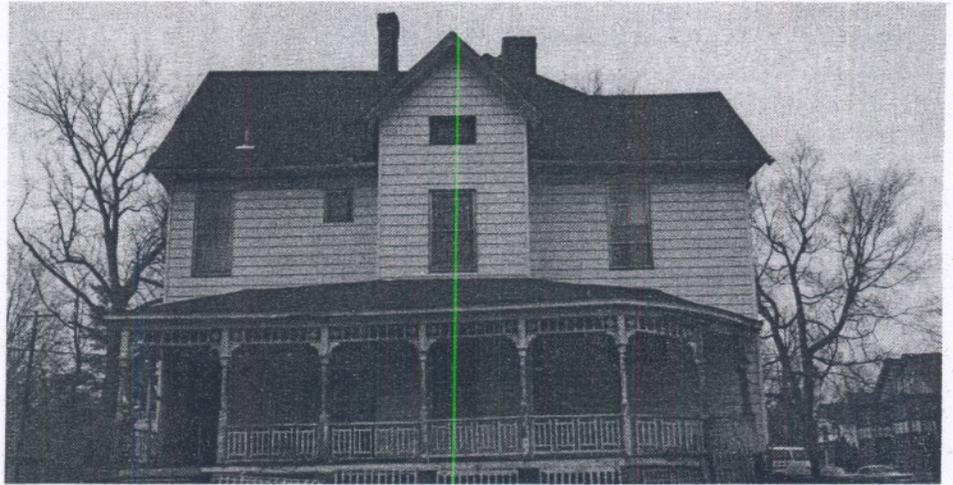
Number 3

## PACA Purchases the Ricker House

In late May, PACA undertook a major financial commitment with the purchase of the historic Ricker House at 612 West Green Street, Urbana. For a number of years, PACA had been monitoring the continued deteriorating condition of the residence and its companion carriage house. The house was featured on the 1994 PACA Endangered Building List; the carriage house was demolished under city order in 1993, but PACA recorded the building through black and white photographs. A number of reuse schemes were proposed over the years, but the owner's high selling price made the plans economically non-viable.

Last fall, the property was listed with a commercial realtor and the price was reduced, although still not to the point where a preservation reuse plan was feasible. Apartment developer James O'Malley took an option on the property contingent on getting his building plans approved by the City. Since the property has Mixed Office/Residential zoning, the site plan was required to be approved by the Development Review Board (DRB) which is charged with reviewing the plan with regard to, among other things, parking requirements, set backs, floor area ratio (FAR), and compatibility with the neighborhood. In addition, the proposed land use should conform with the purpose of the MOR District and the project design should be harmonious with adjacent land uses and the character of the surrounding neighborhood.

At the first DRB meeting in January, PACA and nearby property owners testified against the proposed site plan and apartment use based upon its incompatibility with the character of the neighborhood and because the intent of the MOR District was not being followed. The stated purpose of the District is to  
...promote the economic viability and preservation of older residential structures while protecting the aesthetic and residen-



*The Nathan C. Ricker House, 612 West Green Street, Urbana, was built c. 1885 and is thought to have been designed by the noted architect. A fire in 1917 severely burned the attic story. PACA archival photograph.*

*tial character of the area.... This district is intended to encourage the adaptive re-use of these older residential structures as an incentive to preserve and extend the useful life of such structures while also allowing compatible new development.*

The MOR District is also intended to promote the conservation of buildings and neighborhoods, which in combination or individually, are of unique community and neighborhood significance.

The historic significance of the building, i.e. its association with Nathan Ricker, was stressed, as well as its Queen Anne architectural details, now largely hidden under artificial siding. If restored, the building would serve as an elegant anchor for West Green Street and the campus to downtown corridor.

PACA noted that an EPA permit would be required for site work in connection with public water and pollution control and that the capacity of existing utilities and sewers was a DRB criteria. PACA requested that such a permit be obtained before the site plan was approved. Based upon the above concerns and others raised by the DRB Board, the meeting was continued until March.

In March, the DRB Board decided that the EPA permit question was outside the

City's jurisdiction, but cautioned the developer that he would be liable for all necessary permits. PACA again testified as to the impact the proposed development would have on the neighborhood and requested that the site plan be denied. However, in an unexpected move, the developer James O'Malley offered to relinquish his option on the property if PACA could raise the purchase price within sixty days. PACA accepted the challenge to raise \$115,000.

The PACA Board pondered a number of fund raising and reuse schemes including establishing a limited partnership to develop the property or obtaining a conventional mortgage. The situation was also circulated to PACA members with expertise in financial and development matters. To PACA's great surprise, a concerned PACA member heard about the Ricker House preservation effort and offered to loan PACA the purchase price. This individual, who wishes to remain anonymous, was interested in preserving the Ricker House and the historic look of West Green Street.

With the loan of \$115,000, repayable in two years, PACA purchased the Ricker House in late May. Efforts to date include securing the house, boarding broken win-

dows, mowing the grass, and documenting the current condition of the house. Plans are also underway to stabilize the deteriorating front porch, fix a damaged dormer, and reroof. PACA has also established a Ricker House Committee which is directing the rehabilitation work and looking into long range reuse plans for the building. One possible use involves the establishment of a non-profit Ricker House Foundation which would buy the property from PACA and develop it, focusing on an architectural-related purpose in keeping with its association with Nathan Ricker. Other ideas, suggestions, and offers of help are welcome.

PACA wishes to thank the concerned and farsighted individual who came forward with the loan. Without this loan, the Ricker House would most likely have been demolished and the community would have lost another piece of its history. Although much work lies ahead, the first and most important step has been taken and PACA is grateful to the individual who made it possible.

## Nathan C. Ricker

Nathan Clifford Ricker was born in Acton, Maine on June 24, 1843. He moved to Springvale at the age of 13, where his father erected a mill. After school, Ricker studied surveying largely on his own, in addition to working at his father's mill. At 18 he replaced a country school teacher, using his earnings to purchase books for self-instruction in Latin, French, geology, and botany. It was then that he began translating scholarly works, a practice he continued throughout his career. He was concurrently developing his mechanical skill, as evidenced by his clever adaptation of a water wheel to the purpose of threshing grain.

After working for two and one half years in a factory making piano cases, Ricker grew restless and came to La-Harpe, Illinois, in 1866, ostensibly to visit his uncle for no more than a year. The lure of a half-interest in a wagon and blacksmith shop held him there for three years, but his desire to further his education was even stronger. He heard about the opportunities at the newly founded Illinois Industrial University and sold his interest in the business, using the \$750 profit to enroll in 1870.

Up to this time, architectural education depended primarily on the apprenticeship system, a gentlemanly arrangement by which young men gained the necessary experience by studying in the offices of masters. Illinois Industrial University Regent John Milton Gregory had recommended to the Board of Trus-



*Nathan C. Ricker. Photograph courtesy of the University of Illinois Archives.*

tees and more equally accessible program of formalized architectural education. Trustee John Mills Van Osdel, a leading Chicago architect, strongly supported the proposal, but it was Ricker who finally initiated the program by being the first to request it.

Ricker's instructor was Swedish architect Harald M. Hansen, the first of a long line of European teachers in American architecture schools. He was strongly influenced by Hansen, who taught in the rigorous fashion of the Berlin Bauakademie. There, in direct contrast to the French Ecole des Beaux Arts, the teaching of all branches of engineering as well as architecture was, according to Ricker, "based on individual attainments and examinations...and not on pure competition of students with each other..." Ricker was so proficient at his studies that in 1872, when illness prevented Hansen from teaching, Regent Gregory provided Ricker with the unique opportunity to direct his own studies as well as teach three fellow students. In March of 1873, the following year, Ricker became the first American graduate in architecture, just months before M.I.T. and Cornell (the only other architecture schools in the nation at the time) conferred degrees upon their first graduates.

Gregory extended Ricker's teaching role to a permanent position in that same year, provided that Ricker spend the next six months traveling and studying in Europe. Ricker headed directly to the Bauakademie. From Berlin he traveled to Vienna, where he was particularly impressed by the new development of the Ringstrasse region under Gottfried Semper. It was in Vienna, at the 1873 Exposition, where Ricker also became familiar with the Russian system of instruction in mechanical engineering through carefully arranged shop practice. He was the first to introduce this system in the United States. Ricker's version con-

sisted of a graded series of exercises in which the students learned the uses of the different tools in succession. His system focused entirely on the training of the student and was later adapted by all but one of the school shops in America. Most remarkably, Ricker adapted this system to architectural instruction many years before the Bauhaus, or even Walter Gropius, did so.

For 37 years, from September 1873 to September 1910, Nathan Clifford Ricker was the Head of the Department of Architecture at the University, serving one year as Instructor, one as Assistant Professor, and thirty-five as Professor. He was the sole instructor in the Department for twelve of those years, from 1873 to 1895.

The guiding principles of the Department of Architecture under Ricker were that the architect should first be a safe and economical builder, second a man of business capacity, and third an artistic designer. His educational methods have more than successfully withstood the test of time, barely differing from those employed today. Functional applications and sound construction technology were given priority. Students began by drawing and sketching, then commenced in a series of increasingly difficult building design problems. They culminated in the design of a large building, approached as if it were a real problem in professional practice requiring plans, details, and specifications.

The pervasive influence of Ricker as an instructor and a designer of five campus buildings is attested by the additions to his buildings, the last of which was made in 1927. All but one of the additions were done by Ricker's students in styles consistent with the original designs, maintaining the integrity of the existing buildings and complementing their styles. The final addition to the Natural History Building, by William Carbys Zimmerman, was the only one not done by a Ricker student. However, even Zimmerman, who was State Architect at the time, repeated Ricker's design across his own facades, thus emulating Ricker's original building style even more exactly than Ricker's students had. The exterior facades of Nathan Clifford Ricker's campus buildings have not been substantially altered since 1927.

Nathan Clifford Ricker was an outstanding innovator in education, perpetually striving to ameliorate the inadequacies of the system. In response to the dearth of appropriate texts on architectural construction, history, and graphic statics he single-handedly initiated the production and compilation of over 2000 pages of notes, abstracts, and illustrations for his students. In addition, he translated

over 40 volumes on architecture when English texts on particular subjects were not available for his students, including Viollet-le Duc's *Dictionnaire raisonnee de l'architecture francaise due Xle. au XVIe. siecle* and the second edition (1899) of Otto Wagner's *Moderne Arkitektur*.

Ricker's introduction of graphic statics and his lectures on the subject led to the publication of his *Elementary Graphic Statics and Construction of Trussed Roofs* (1885), the first book published by any faculty member while connected with the University. Later publications included *Treatise on Design and Construction of Roofs* (1912); *Simplified Formulas and Tables for Floors, Joists and Beams; Roofs, Rafters and Purlins* (1913) and three bulletins published by the Engineering Experiment Station.

While teaching, he continued his own studies and received his Masters of Architecture (the second such degree to be conferred in the United States) in 1878, the same year he was elected Dean of the College of Engineering while continuing as the head of the Architecture Department. He continued both administrative positions as the responsibilities grew. In addition, he served concurrently as University Architect, primarily responsible for several major university buildings as well as many smaller construction jobs. His contributions to the physical environment of the university remain with us as a tribute to this great educator. His campus buildings and residence survive as a tangible reminder of the man responsible for the beginnings of architectural education as we know it today.

Ricker was actively involved in campus administration and planning until his

retirement in 1916. His concern for the planning of the campus is evident from his letter to Supervising Architect James M. White in 1910 offering his own suggestions for White's campus plan.

Ricker's efforts to improve the architecture profession extended beyond the classroom. It was through his efforts, combined with those of Dankmar Adler of Chicago, that the Illinois Architectural Act was passed in June of 1897. This legislative act, which requires the licensing of architects as well as provides for their registration, was the first of its type in the United States. He served as a member and chairman of the Board of Examiners for nearly twenty years and served from 1911-1917 as Chairman of the Commission to codify the building laws of Illinois. His commendable participation in civic and university events spanned fifty years of service to the University and community.

*This article was taken from the "University of Illinois Buildings by Nathan Clifford Ricker National Register Thematic Nomination" written in 1986 by Amy Cassens, Bret Johnson, David Garner and Janice Stein.*

### Architresures Contest Winners

Once again, Preservation Week featured an Architresures contest co-sponsored by the *News-Gazette* and PACA. This year's contest featured details from National Register-listed buildings, but to make the contest harder, no list of these buildings was provided! However, this did not stump a number of intrepid sleuths; in fact, the contest winners had to be decided by a drawing. The following

are the official winners, but PACA salutes all the contest participants for their knowledge of local architecture.

David Thompson, Urbana  
Robert M. Doyle, Champaign  
Marcie Uihlein & Joseph T. Morris, Champaign

### Two Heritage Grants Awarded

PACA awarded its third round of annual Heritage Grants as part of Historic Preservation Week. Over \$1,000 was awarded to two area churches to assist in the preservation of archival material and to restore stained-glass windows.

St. Patrick's Roman Catholic Church received a grant to help in the micro-filming of the parish's archival material. The church has been working for five years to put this material in good order in preparation for the 100th Anniversary of the parish in 2001. Parish records are valuable resources as they contain much information of help to local history and genealogical researchers.

The Channing-Murray Foundation will use its grant for restoration of the stained-glass windows in the chapel. The windows date from the church's construction in 1908 and are in dire need of repair. The PACA grant will enable the church to begin phase one of a three phase restoration effort. Channing-Murray Foundation is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The Heritage Grant Program is made possible through revenues from PACA's Architectural Salvage Warehouse. Historic building materials are rescued from

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

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

- Adult .....\$15.00
- Student (1/2 time or more) .....\$10.00
- Senior Citizen .....\$10.00
- Family .....\$20.00
- Corporate.....\$75.00

- NEW
- RENEWAL

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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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

demolition by an active volunteer salvage crew throughout the year. The volunteers also staff the warehouse, which provides PACA with the largest portion of its operating budget. Much of the architectural material is donated by individuals, businesses, and other organizations throughout the community. Overall, the salvage operation prevents the unique historic building materials from becoming landfill, and provides numerous home owners and businesses with the opportunity to reuse these valuable materials.

### Daniel Burnham Exhibit

The Art Institute in Chicago is sponsoring an exhibit of the work of architect Daniel Burnham. "Daniel H. Burnham and Mid-American Classicism" runs through September 2 in Galleries 24 and 277 at the Art Institute and celebrates the 150 anniversary year of his birth. Burnham was a renowned Chicago architect responsible, through his firm Burnham and Root, for numerous downtown buildings including the Field Museum, Orchestra Hall, the Rookery Building, the Monadnock Building and the Reliance Building. He was also the man behind the plans for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition and the Washington DC mall. The show consists of 90 drawings, models and photographs from the museum's permanent collection. For further information call 312/443-3600.

### A Special Thank-You

PACA wishes to extend very special thanks to the caring individual who graciously offered to lend PACA the money to purchase the historic Ricker House. Without this loan, the residence would most likely have been razed for an apartment building and the community would have lost another historic landmark. Thank-you from current and future PACA members!

### New Salvage Warehouse Needed

PACA is seeking 2,000-2,500 square feet of warehouse space. Dry, clean space with electricity is preferred in an easily accessible area. Nominal rent can be paid. Contact PACA at 328-7222 if you can suggest a building.

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

Bob Swisher  
Gary Perkins  
Rich Cahill  
Dick Elkin  
Al Friederich  
Chris Stohr  
Julia Goldberg  
Neil Strack  
Cheri Chenoweth

### New & Renewing Members

Matthew H. Riggs  
Charles Casad  
Cheryl Kennedy  
Sharen R. Slade  
Susan Appel  
Ann Boswell & Keddy Hutson  
Ginny Dewar  
Douglas Brewer & Ann Hutflies  
Chantelle Houglund  
Lynda & Earl Creutzburg  
Walter C. Allen  
Arthur & Glenna Bartell  
Bruce C. Creamer  
Andrew B. White Family  
Steve & Kathy Roemmel  
Erin L. Gaines  
Dr. & Mrs. Robert Sutton  
James Fallon  
Mr. & Mrs. Louis B. Wetmore  
Mrs. M.G. Snyder  
Sandra & George Batzli  
Mrs. J.L. Fairchild  
Mike & Maureen Holtz  
Bill Roberts

### Salvage Donations

Charles Casad  
University of Illinois  
Darrel Foste  
Shirley Merriman  
Eric Griffith  
Dale Steffensen  
Bruce Komadina  
Mrs. Kurland

### PACA Newsletter

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