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Focus On: Ater-Jaques House

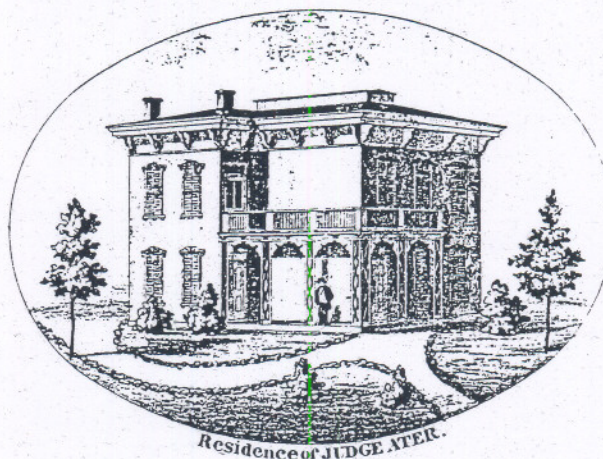
The Ater-Jaques House was officially listed on the National Register of Historic Places on August 1, 1996. It was listed for both its architectural significance, as a good example of the Italianate style, and for its historic associations with two important figures in the history of Urbana. The following is an excerpt from the nomination on the significance of the house's builder, Edward Ater. The next newsletter will discuss Francis Jaques.

Judge Edward Ater

Edward Ater was born in 1815 in Pickaway County, Ohio, the son of Thomas Ater and Elizabeth (Brown) Ater. The Aters moved to Vermilion County, Illinois to homestead one year after this territory was approved as a county (1826). After living in Vermilion County for eleven years, and one year after Edward Ater married Lydia Greene, the Aters moved to near Willow Branch Township in Piatt County. In 1840 Edward taught the first school in Piatt County, a log structure located on Willow Creek. He also served as Piatt County Assessor in 1843, at the time the court house was built, and was elected the second sheriff of this county.

Champaign County was established in 1833 with Urbana designated the county seat. In 1846 Edward and his wife moved to the town of Urbana and in 1850 he was elected sheriff of Champaign County. He also began investing in numerous properties throughout Champaign County. In partnership with William N. Coler and Thomas S. Hubbard, Ater erected the first bank building in the county in the fall of 1855, and in the following spring started in Urbana the Grand Prairie Bank. This was a bank of issue, with a circulation of about \$800,000, secured by Missouri State bonds. They also opened a branch, the Cattle Bank, in West Urbana (Champaign) in 1856, with Ater as president.

The West Urbana branch was initially opened on the northeast corner of Main



Engraving of the 1857 Ater-Jaques House, 207 West Elm, Urbana from the 1858 Alexander Bowman Map. The L-shaped porch was removed around 1900 and Francis Jaques added an office wing on the east c. 1872.

and Oak streets while an appropriate bank building was being constructed on University Avenue and First Street. Until this building was finished in 1858 and the vault secured, money was transported at the end of each day to the main bank in Urbana. Management of the branch was provided by Chalmers M. Sherfy, who was also County Treasurer in 1856. When the new bank building opened, the Urbana bank closed. "On April 1, 1858 the Grand Prairie Branch Bank will be discontinued and its business will be conducted by the Cattle Bank." Ater's association with the Cattle Bank was quite brief, as he resigned the presidency in November 1859, and was succeeded as president by cattle baron B.F. Harris. The bank soon failed due to a general failure of the stock security banking system in 1861. However, by May 1861, Edward Ater was president of "E. Ater & Co., Bankers," and occupied the old Grand Prairie Bank building in Urbana. This Main Street building is no longer standing.

On the 20th of June, 1857, three months after the death of his wife Lydia, Edward Ater purchased for \$400 the land on which the Ater-Jaques House now stands. Construction on the house started soon after, as the *Urbana Union* newspaper in

August described its "advanced state of construction." John Paten is listed as the master builder; unfortunately, no other information about him has been uncovered. Interestingly, Ater did not file the papers for this property until October 14, 1859. Ater married Margaret Cramer of Ladoga, Indiana, before October 1859, as she is listed on a mortgage entered into with Henry C. Butler on October 10, 1859.

On September 4, 1857, Ater was elected County Judge of Champaign County, a position he held for four years; he also served as Mayor of Urbana from 1861 to 1864. On February 25, 1867 Edward Ater, Daniel Gardner, Clark R. Griggs, and others organized the Urbana-Champaign Horse Railroad Company as incorporators with capital of \$10,000. Ater was honored for his service to Urbana with a street named for him; unfortunately, it has since been renamed Nevada Street.

The 1870 city directory lists Edward Ater as the innkeeper of the Griggs House hotel in Urbana. Built around 1870, the Griggs House was known as one of the grandest buildings in Urbana. It was located on the south side of the new railroad tracks of the Danville, Urbana, Bloomington & Pekin Railroad that was later consolidated into the In-

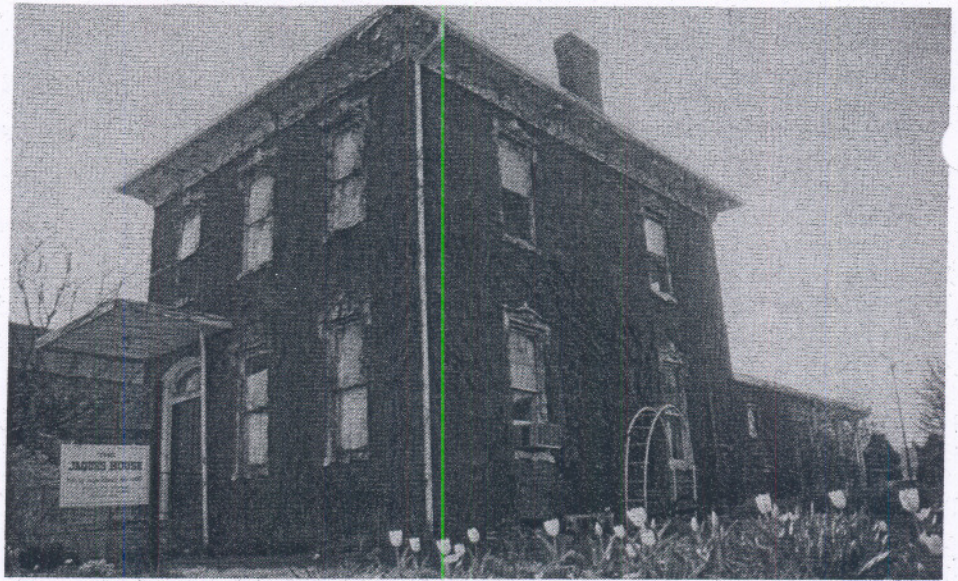
dianapolis, Bloomington and Western Railway. It was named for Clark R. Griggs who was instrumental in seating the Illinois Industrial University (University of Illinois) in Urbana-Champaign and was the prime promoter and president of the new railroad. By 1871, however, Edward Ater had returned to Piatt County, where he still had family, and he died in November, 1893. He is buried in Mount Hope Cemetery, Urbana.

Although politically active through his various offices and development activities, Ater's principal influence was felt, and continues to be felt, through his position as County Judge in the late 1850s. It was through this position that he successfully endeavored to keep the county seat located in Urbana, a fact far from certain at that time.

With the completion of the Illinois Central Railroad to West Urbana (now Champaign) in 1854, there began a movement to move the town of Urbana, or at least the county seat, to be near the railroad. A number of prominent men, including Edward Ater, however, stood in strong opposition to such a move. A bill was introduced in the General Assembly in January 1855 to incorporate the City of Urbana. The territory that was included in this bill encompassed not only the boundaries of Urbana but also the land on which the Illinois Central depot stood, ostensibly a large part of the current city of Champaign. However, the residents of West Urbana successfully protested this tactic to the General Assembly and succeeded in fixing the western boundary of the City of Urbana at the center north and south line of Sections 7 and 18. This left all of the land west of that line free to incorporate into another town at a later date. West Urbana was incorporated as Champaign in 1860.

West Urbana's connection with the Illinois Central Railroad fostered rapid development: in 1855 the population was 416, but in 1857 it was 1,202. Urbana was still without a railroad connection, as the Danville, Urbana, Bloomington & Pekin Railroad would not be completed until 1870, and without a shipping connection its growth was quite limited. Increasingly, there was activity to move the county seat to the new town, and the voting populace probably would have overwhelmingly supported such a move.

To counteract the growing importance of West Urbana, the County Board, the members of which in the early 1850s were old citizens of the county and supporters of Urbana, acted to impede the growth of West Urbana by refusing to lay new roads to the new town. Before the railroad arrived, all the county and state roads in



The north and west elevations of the Ater-Jaques House remain remarkably unchanged since the house was built in 1857. Ornate window hoods and sills grace the double-hung sash and a wide bracketed cornice crowns the side-hall plan Italianate-style cube. The north section of the rear service wing is original to the house, the rear portion was added c. 1867.

the area went to Urbana, and in order to reach West Urbana without first going through Urbana required new public roads. The County Board refused to grant the petitions of West Urbana for roads going directly to the new town. This situation was a major issue in the County Board election of 1857.

The election consisted of a County Judge and two Associate Justices of the Peace. These officials had control of all county affairs and the erection of public buildings. West Urbana put forth three candidates for County Judge; Urbana placed Edward Ater, a former Sheriff, as their candidate. Ater was elected over all, with John P. Tenbrook and Lewis Jones as Associates. Jones died in office and was replaced by Fielding L. Scott in 1859.

John P. Tenbrook was born in Pennsylvania in 1809 and moved to Indiana with his parents in 1818. His father died when Tenbrook was thirteen, and at that young age he undertook to support his mother and siblings. In 1837, he relocated to Monticello in Piatt County, Illinois, where he engaged in the hotel business. Tenbrook moved to Champaign County in 1850 to farm, locating on the north side of the railroad in what became the village of Sadorus, where he built the first house (it is no longer standing). In addition to his position on the County Board from 1857 to 1861, Tenbrook was a police magistrate, and represented two different towns, at different times, on the new board of supervisors.

Fielding L. Scott, who replaced Lewis Jones on the County Board, was born in Kentucky in 1807 and moved with his wife, Julia A. Herriott, to Illinois in 1830.

They first settled in Vermilion County, but soon moved (1835-36) to a farm near Mahomet in Champaign County, where he resided until his death in 1877. Scott is credited with plowing the furrow that became the road from the Sangamon River at Mahomet to Urbana in 1835. An engraving of his house appears on the 1863 Champaign County Map; it is no longer standing.

The courthouse of that time had been built of brick in 1848 and was considered spatially adequate for public use; however, it was not fireproof and was considered unsafe for the storage of public records. Succeeding grand juries and the courts complained to the County Board about this defect and called for the erection of fireproof offices. The newly elected County Board interpreted the need for fireproofing quite liberally and hired an architect to plan an "addition" to the courthouse. The plans were approved by the County Board, but when executed in 1859, actually resulted in the razing of the 1848 courthouse to its foundations and a new fireproof building built in its place. A contract was made with contractor B.V. Enos of Indianapolis to construct fireproof additions to the old building "for the security of county records and greater comfort of the public and convenience of the officers of the county." The contract cost was specified to be \$22,000; the total cost of repairs and additions was about \$30,000. The signatures of Enos, Ater (Judge), and Tenbrook and Scott (Assistants) appear on the building contract. The building was not completed, however, until 1861.

The building of an essentially new

courthouse in Urbana for what was then seen as an extravagant amount of money caused an uproar in the county. The County Board was vigorously attacked, as such an expenditure would have the effect of making Urbana the permanent county seat over the desire of West Urbana for the position.

The authorities of the county were friendly to Urbana and probably thought, as did the citizens of Urbana to set to rest at once and forever the countyseat question by the erection, even in advance of the wants of the county, a court house so complete as to render another building unnecessary for many years to come and so costly as to make it improbable that it should ever be discarded for another. This evident intention to forestall public needs and opinion for the benefit of Urbana met with fierce opposition in West Urbana from which place it radiated to other parts of the county and operated to overthrow the county board... (J.O. Cunningham)

One result of this controversy was the replacement of the county board system of government with the adoption of the system of township organization in the November 1859 election. It was at the time of conversion to township government that West Urbana citizens voted to form the city of Champaign.

Ater ceased being a County Judge after the change to the township form of government. But he continued in politics, being elected Mayor of Urbana from 1861 to 1864. He continued to be active in the development of Urbana, being involved in the banking business and in the development of a street railway, until he moved back to Piatt County in 1871.

Ater was quite important in the early

development of Urbana. One mark of his influence can be seen in the number of political offices he held: County Sheriff, County Judge, and Mayor of Urbana. However, his most important and long lasting influence is most assuredly seen in the role he played in securing the continuation of Urbana as the county seat. Since Urbana did not get a railroad connection until 1870, nearly twenty years after West Urbana, its growth and prosperity was greatly hampered. It was only due to its position as a county seat that Urbana continued to attract professional men and businesses which located around the courthouse. The courthouse he contracted for in 1859 was in use until 1901, when the present courthouse was erected. His house at 207 West Elm Street is the only remaining structure in Urbana associated with this prominent and influential person.

This article was taken from the National Register nomination prepared by PACA members Sandra Batzli and Karen Kummer.

50th National Preservation Conference

The theme of the 50th National Preservation Conference, "Preserving Community: City, Suburb and Countryside," reflects the fact that we live in different types of communities, each with its own unique preservation needs, challenges, obstacles and opportunities. Grassroots action usually remains the most effective tool for dealing with purely localized issues, but as relationships between urban and rural areas become increasingly complex and interdependent, the need for developing a regional perspective becomes more apparent. The National Preservation Conference will help groups develop such a perspective.

In addition to the three conference plenary sessions, more than 60 educational sessions will explore major issues in each of these types of communities—urban, suburban and rural—emphasizing successful strategies that illustrate the use of preservation as a means of making all kinds of communities more livable. Sessions also highlight the development of effective regional strategies for addressing preservation issues that cross political boundaries.

The conference will be held October 16-20 at the Palmer House Hilton in Chicago. PACA has been invited to participate in a special Heritage Education Marketplace of Ideas on October 18 from 1:00 to 4:00 pm. The award winning "Kids Building Fair" will be the focus of PACA's exhibit.

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Old House Journals Needed

PACA has spent the summer cleaning and organizing our small office/storage space located in the Greek Revival Cottage. During the course of organizing the preservation resource library, it was discovered that PACA does not have a complete run of *Old House Journals*, a ready and easy-to-use source of rehabilitation advice. The following is a list of needed volumes. If you are done with your old issues, please consider recycling them to PACA. They can be dropped off either at the Cottage, 303 W. University, Urbana, or at the Architectural Salvage Warehouse.

- 1973 - Vol 1: #2
- 1974 - Vol 2: #3, #4, #8, #10,
- 1975 - Vol 3: #2, #7, #8, #9
- 1976 - Vol 4: #3, #4, #9
- 1978 - Vol 6: #4, #10
- 1980 - Vol 8: #4, #6, #7, #8
- 1982 - Vol 10: #11
- 1984 - Vol 12: #7, #8, #9
- 1985 - Vol 13: #1, #2, #4, #6, #8, #9, #10
- 1986 - Vol 14: Need all but #9
- 1987 - Vol 15: Need all but April & June
- 1988 - Vol 16: Need all
- 1989 - Vol 17: Need all but May/June & Sept/Oct
- 1990 - Vol 18: Need all but May/June
- 1991 - Vol 19: Need Jan to April
- 1993 - Vol 21: Need Nov/Dec
- 1994 - Vol 22: Need all
- 1995 - Vol 23: Need Jan/Feb, Mar/April

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Save the Date!

Inside Champaign

A walking tour of interesting
downtown interiors

Sunday, October 27
1:00-5:00

PACA Newsletter

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