



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Focus On: Ater-Jaques House

Part II: Francis Jaques

Francis G. Jaques was born in New York City in 1839 and was educated at Madison (Colgate) University in Hamilton, New York. He began his law studies in the east, but came to Illinois in 1858 to join his brother, Theodore, and finished his law education under Colonel William N. Coler. A subsequent partnership with Col. Coler lasted until Coler enlisted in the Civil War; in 1861 Jaques formed a partnership with Jairus Corydon Sheldon, also a former student of Coler, which was very successful financially. Sheldon retired from the legal side of the practice in 1866, taking the real estate portion of the business with him. Jaques continued a solo practice for the next twenty-five years, but also became increasingly involved in the development of Urbana.

Jaques was the owner and operator, with his father-in-law, William Park, of the Urbana & Champaign Street Railway from 1863 to 1890. This was the first street railway outside of Chicago and operated initially by mule power. It was eventually purchased by William McKinley and became part of his Interurban system. He was also involved in building the Champaign & Eastern (or Southeastern) Railroad in 1881, the forerunner of the Wabash Railroad branch line from Sidney into Urbana and Champaign. Previously (1880), he purchased and improved the street railway system of Logansport, Indiana. He was also responsible for the founding of the Urbana Building and Loan.

Besides being a successful attorney and businessman, Francis Jaques was perhaps best known to the citizens of Urbana during his lifetime for his philanthropy. Each Christmas he delivered food and clothing baskets to needy people; the food was grown by one of his tenant farmers. This charity was still remembered forty years after his death. However, historically, he is best remembered



The north elevation of the Ater-Jaques House shows the one-story law office Francis Jaques added around 1872. The ornate window hood molds, double front doors with arched transom and wide overhanging eaves with brackets date to the main house's construction in 1857.

for his long-time association with the Urbana Free Library.

In late 1872, fifty-two men, including Francis G. Jaques, organized the Young Men's Library Association, the name of which they changed in 1873 to the Urbana Library Association. It was a subscription library with dues of \$3.00 a year and was located above the Tiernan Bros. Grocery Store. The library was a great success with the reading public, since even non-members could use the reading room free (they were not allowed to check-out materials, however); but the association did not have enough paying patrons to operate successfully. In July 1874, the association petitioned the City Council to take over the library because, "it appears that the reading room and library is patronized more by laboring men and men of small means who cannot well afford to pay dues as the businessmen of the city." The City agreed to the transfer, and the assets of the Urbana Library Association were conveyed to the directors of the Urbana Free Library.

The prime mover in both the forming of the Association and its transfer to City control was Francis G. Jaques, who is justly termed "the founder of the Urbana Public Library." A plaque outside the

Champaign County Historical Archives states, "THIS HISTORICAL ROOM IS DEDICATED TO [the] MEMORY OF FRANK G. JAQUES, THE FOUNDER OF THE URBANA PUBLIC LIBRARY." Jaques was treasurer of the association from its beginning and continued in that role, under city ownership, until his death in 1896. When the last meeting of the association was held in 1874, Jaques was instructed to keep all the association's papers in his vault, which he did. He organized the book catalogue that was in use before the Urbana library instituted the Dewey classification system in 1918. As a director, Jaques made book-purchasing trips to Chicago and New York, and when no public money was available, he collected funds or books from friends and library patrons. His daughter Minnie recalled, "Father always went to Chicago to select all the books personally from the jobbers' shelves." Minnie continued as the library's treasurer for another fifty years until her retirement in 1947. Another family connection with the library was Miss Ida Hanes, who served as librarian from 1874 until 1924; she was Eliza Jaques' cousin and lived with the Jaques at 207 West Elm Street.

The Urbana Free Library was, and continues to be, a strong cultural force in Urbana. It has continued a steady growth through the years, starting with 886 volumes in 1874, growing to 1120 books in 1875. At this time the Library had quarters in the Masonic Temple on Main Street. The transfer of the association's assets to the City and its becoming a public body enabled the library to take advantage of a new law that allowed cities to establish free public libraries and to support them through a mill tax. In 1875, the first mill tax was paid the library, amounting to \$863.40. The amount of the tax was quite small, but it increased steadily and allowed the library to pay its bills. In 1876 the library's operations were moved to quarters on the second floor of the building on the southeast corner of Main and Race streets (site of the current Knowlton & Bennett building); in 1884 there was a total of 4,237 books on the shelves. When the city built a new city hall in 1893, a special area was designed to hold the collection; in 1892 the library had 27,953 visitors and circulation was over 14,000 books. By 1912 there was movement to build a library building and two lots were eventually obtained at the corner of Race and Elm streets, coincidentally just to the east of the Ater-Jaques House. It was not until 1917, however, that a donation of \$35,000, from Mary E. Busey for a library building to be erected as a memorial to her husband, Samuel T. Busey, allowed the construction of a suitable library. Since that time, the library has continued to grow, adding a large addition in the 1970s

Like Judge Ater, Francis Jaques was closely involved with the development of Urbana. As a lawyer and businessman, he was quite influential. However, he is best known and remembered for his involvement with the formation and continued growth of the Urbana Free Library, located just to the east of his residence at 207 West Elm Street. His house, occupied by him from 1866 until his death in 1896, continued as family property until 1954, and has been owned by the Library since 1977. It is the only remaining building in Urbana closely associated with his life, as the current Urbana Free Library building was built in 1918 after his death.

Architecture

The Ater-Jaques House, constructed in 1857, stands at the west edge of the downtown Urbana business district. Located west of the Urbana-Free Library building, the house faces north on West Elm Street and sits atop a low rise on a small urban lot in a historically mixed

commercial and residential area. The building rises two stories and carries the qualities typical of a sidehall plan Italianate style residence. Built of brick with ornate metal window hoods and sills, the house's detailing includes double entrance doors set in a surround, double-hung windows and a low-pitched hip roof. The original residence consisted of a two-story block with a one-story service wing on the southwest (rear) corner. Two, one-story brick wings, historically added in the later nineteenth century, are attached to the rear of the building. A c.1867 addition to the service wing projects further south on the southwest corner and a c.1872 office wing is on the southeast (rear) corner with a 1963 addition along its south (rear) wall. The house's landscaping is quite handsome along the north (main) and west elevations as the Champaign-Urbana Herb Society has maintained an extensive herb garden there since 1981. A low retaining wall outlines this portion of the lot. To the east is a vacated alley now used for pedestrian access to the Urbana Free Library; to the rear the lot has been paved to provide parking for the previous commercial tenants of the building.

The Ater-Jaques House has been used for various commercial office functions since the late 1950s. In order to accommodate these various uses, minor spatial modifications have been made to the floor plan of the original residence and historically added wings. However, most of these alterations are reversible and the original floor plan and residential function of the building is readily apparent.

The first story of the two-story main block has tall ceilings, plaster walls with added chair rails and narrow oak flooring. The original Italianate baseboards and window and door surrounds are primarily intact, although a few door surrounds have been changed; the doors are four-panel in style. The double door entry opens directly into a hallway whose principal feature is a curving Italianate-style staircase with a rounded newel post and tapered balusters. The original passageway to the rear of the stairs has been partitioned off and a half-bathroom inserted below the staircase. Entry to the northwest parlor is from a stairhall doorway. The northwest parlor is plain except for wide ornate window surrounds consisting of various molding profiles. A door in the southeast corner leads into a large secondary parlor behind the stairhall. This room provides access to the half-bathroom, whose ceiling retains the curve of the staircase, and to a smaller southwest room; the east elevation ell entrance also provides exterior access to

this room. A fireplace centered in the south wall is not original and consists of rowlock bricks atop a brick hearth; the chimney location, however, is historic.

The smaller southwest room may have been used as a dining room as it leads directly into the original rear service wing. Similar in detail to the other rooms, it now has an acoustic tile drop ceiling with recessed lighting panels, although its ceiling height is still comparable to the other first story rooms. A fireplace is located in the northwest corner; also comprised of rowlock bricks, it has a raised curved hearth. Its location is probably original as attested by the interior end chimney of the west elevation.

The surfaces of the rear one-story service wing have been covered with removable modern materials. The walls have modern wood paneling and modern woodwork, the floor is covered with modern synthetic tiles and the ceiling is covered with acoustic tiles. An original door in the south wall leads to the rear porch while directly opposite, in the north wall, is a small closet.

Two, one-story brick wings were added historically to the rear of the original residential block creating an irregular L-shape to the south elevation. On the interior, these added wings are connected to the original service wing via an L-shape interior passageway. This passageway is now paneled and has an acoustic tile ceiling; the east leg leading to the office wing has shelving and its plaster ceiling is exposed. The rear (south) service addition also has a modern synthetic tile floor and acoustic tile ceiling; the north, east and west walls are covered while the south wall's brickwork is exposed, as are the wood lintels over two doorways. These doorways lead into small secondary store or work rooms. The east room has been converted into a modern bathroom. The west room's plaster walls are evident, although the drop ceiling and tile flooring is modern. There is an original brick fireplace with chimney located in the north wall; its center opening has been modified with wood shelves. A service pass-through to the north room is to the west of the fireplace.

The east addition was used as a law office by Francis Jaques and is a step lower than the passageway and rest of the building. An exterior doorway is located on the north wall to the west of a four-over-four window that has been altered with an air-conditioning unit. Centered on the east wall is a brick fireplace and hearth; a doorway to the 1963 addition is located on the south wall. An ornate built-in vault forms the west wall. The exterior of the vault door and its metal surround

have Italianate detailing, while the interior door surface is decorated in paint and inscribed with the name of the company, "Mosler, Bahman and Company, Cincinnati, Ohio." The walls of the office wing are plaster, as is the ceiling, which has a center Italianate ceiling medallion; the floors are modern synthetic tile.

The 1963 concrete block addition runs along the south elevation of the office wing and is at the same level, one step lower than the rest of the building. It serves as a hallway providing sheltered access to the two historically added wings.

The second story of the main block consists of a hallway, modern bathroom, and three bedrooms. Except for the bathroom, which has covered walls and modern flooring, the original plaster walls, plaster ceilings and narrow oak flooring is extant. Like the first story, most of the original woodwork remains, including four-panel doors with rimlocks and porcelain doorknobs; all of the transoms have been blocked. The ceilings of the second story are quite tall, approximately eleven feet, and rise up to the roof framing; there appears to be no attic space between the roof framing and the ceilings.

The staircase curves upward to the second story central hallway; however, the upper portion of the stairs has a fire-separation partition added along the hallway side of the railing. A round-headed archway divides the hallway into two sections. To the north of the stairs, in the northeast corner, is a modern bathroom, while across the hall is a bedroom with an added closet along its east wall. The southeast and southwest rooms were also originally bedrooms, but

the southeast room now has the addition of a kitchen sink and cabinets along its north wall; linoleum also covers a portion of the floor. An enclosed narrow and steep staircase in the southwest corner of the room provides access to the roof platform. The southwest bedroom is plain with a small historic closet in the east wall below the roof stairway.

An unimproved storage cellar is located below the original portion of the house, except for the front hallway, with access provided by a bulkhead on the west elevation of the service wing. The floor is dirt and the original straight sawn oak floor joists are exposed. Below the front hallway is a large crawl space where intact fill has been uncovered. Foundation remnants and floor joist framing suggest that a large built-in cast iron cook stove was once present in the rear service wing. The historically added wings are located over crawl spaces and have circular sawn pine floor joists; the foundation of the vault can be seen. Modern wood supports have been added to provide additional load carrying capacity to the first floor when the building was used for commercial purposes.

Except for the small 1963 addition on the rear of the office wing and the removal of the original porch, the Ater-Jaques House exhibits a high degree of integrity. The floor plan of the interior is remarkably intact in spite of the building's most recent use as commercial office space; the few modern alterations are easily removable.

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

Ater-Jaques House Update

While PACA still feels that keeping the Ater-Jaques House at its current location is the best option from a preservation standpoint, after meeting informally with members of the City Council, the Board recognizes that this option may no longer be viable. A solution to this difficult problem is one that not only clears doubts about the path for westward expansion, but also clears doubts about the fate of the Ater-Jaques House. The following compromise was conveyed to the Library Board and City Council in October; to date, no response has been received.

1. The Ater-Jaques House should not be moved until the Library has obtained most of the funds needed for the project. This is simply a way of avoiding the embarrassing situation of having moved a historic landmark only to find that the project lacks funds to proceed. However, it is agreed that once a substantial portion of the funds are obtained, the house can be moved.

2. Once the fundraising goal is met, the house should be moved to another location on the same block. Such a move would minimize the impact to the historical and physical integrity of the building. The house would continue to be situated near the library and close to its original site. For several reasons, the site where the current Winkelmann Building sits is ideal. First, the house would be situated in a location that would be safe from future expansions of the library building. Second, this site is already owned

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by the City; and third, its location there would leave a large unbroken area to the west for future building and parking expansions.

3. After the house is moved, PACA agrees to devote time and resources to begin the renovation of the building and find an appropriate use for it.

1996 Illinois History Symposium

December 6-8 are the dates set for this year's *History Symposium* sponsored by the Illinois State Historical Society in cooperation with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. The symposium will be held at the Holiday Inn East, Springfield; for further information contact ISHS at 217/782-4286.

Inside Champaign Tour A Success

Thanks are due to all of the great volunteers who donated their Sunday afternoon to make the Fall Walking Tour a success. Over 200 people toured the interiors of nine special historic downtown buildings. Included on the tour were: Burnham Athenaeum, Springer Building, Virginia Theater, Buzard Pipe Organ Craftsmen, Piano People, Orpheum Theatre, Lincoln Building, 10 1/2 Main Street, and Architectural Spectrum. Special thanks are also due to the owners of these buildings who shared their space, expertise, and time with tour participants.

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