



# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Volume 17

September-October, 1997

Number 5

*The outcome of the November 4 sales tax referendum will impact on the future of both the historic courthouse and the sheriff's residence. If the referendum is approved, the courthouse will be preserved and converted to offices for court services. Although the historic jail will be demolished for the new courts building, the 1905 sheriff's residence will be kept and converted into much needed court-related space. This action will preserve an increasingly rare, but very important example of county jurisprudence—a courthouse and sheriff's residence sharing the courthouse square. If the referendum fails, the future of these buildings is unknown.*

## Champaign County Courthouse

The history of Champaign County's courthouses is an interesting one, especially since it is hard to discern exactly how many courthouses the county has built. Some people say the current building is number four, others think it is number five. It all depends on whether one counts temporary buildings and if major "remodelings" count as new buildings. The following courthouse history was gleaned from information found in county histories, newspaper accounts, and the vertical files of the Champaign County Historical Archives.

### Early Courthouses

Champaign County was organized in 1833, when it was separated from Vermilion County, and an order for a temporary courthouse was issued in 1836. The lowest bidder was John Craig, who did not finish the frame building by the June deadline; therefore court was continued to be held in private houses. This first building was sold and removed from the lot by Asahel Bruer, who clapboarded the structure and it became his hotel, the "Urbana House."

In June, 1840, the County Board requested bids for another temporary building to be completed by September, 1841. A frame one-story building, 20 x30 feet,



*A 1906 view of the "remodeled" Champaign County Court House which opened in 1901. In the distance is the 1905 Sheriff's Residence and Jail. Both buildings were designed by Joseph Royer. Courtesy of Champaign County Historical Archives.*

was constructed by Moses D. and William Harvey for \$346. Eventually it was considered inadequate and was ordered sold. In 1848 it was moved to a site later occupied by the Methodist Episcopal Church and was sold in 1849 to the Urbana School District, which used the building for a school until 1855.

### First Brick Courthouse

In late December, 1847, the County Commissioners appointed a committee to draw up the necessary specifications for a new courthouse and report back the next day. This was done and the plans, by T.L. Dennis, were approved; twenty days later bids for construction were opened. (Imagine such speed and decisiveness in a time without phones or fax machines!) The contract was given to Edward O. Smith and Benjamin Dillehunt, of Decatur, for a total of \$2,744. This brick building was 30 x40 feet with two stories and a bell tower in the center of the roof.

Ten years later, however, the 1848 courthouse was considered spatially adequate

for public use, nor was it fireproof and therefore 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. At the same time, rapidly growing West Urbana (now Champaign) was agitating to move the county seat to the new town, and the voting populace probably would have supported such a move.

### The Ater Courthouse

The Urbana-dominated County Board, under the direction of Judge Edward Ater, interpreted the need for fireproofing the courthouse quite liberally and hired an architect to plan an "addition" to the courthouse. The plans by architect Alex. Bowman were approved by the County Board, but when executed in 1859, actually resulted in the razing of the 1848 courthouse to its foundations, leaving one wall standing and a new fireproof building in its place. A contract was made with contractor B.V. Enos of Indianapolis to con-

struct 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 building was completed in 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. In addition, by merely building an "addition" to the current building, the County Board circumvented the need for public approval for a new building and thus foiled the attempt of West Urbana to have a new courthouse built there.

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.

### The 1901 Courthouse

Continued growth of the county necessitated the need for a larger and better courthouse. Again, to avoid a county-wide vote on building a new courthouse, it was decided by the Board of Supervisors to "remodel" the 1859-61 building and one wall of the old structure was to be incorporated into the new building. Urbana architects Joseph W. Royer and Frederick Gage Brown (Royer & Brown) designed a three-and-half story brick and sandstone building in the Romanesque Revival architectural style. Valentine Jobst and Sons of Peoria were awarded the contract and the old building was vacated in May of 1900 so work could begin; the finished building cost \$150,000.

Royer supplied the following description for the 1901 dedication booklet:

*The remodeled Champaign County Court House is a building covering an area measuring 108 by 116 feet. It is three stories in height. The treatment of the exterior is in the Romanesque style of architecture, the materials used being red sandstone and mottled brick. The stone work extends from the grade line to the second story. From that point up to the cornice the walls are of mottled brick with stone trimmings. The main cornice is of terra cotta, of a color to match the stone, with heavy leaf ornament. The building is covered with a heavy steel roof, composed of steel trusses and rafters,*

*upon which is a three-inch layer of concrete, which carries the outer covering of red tile. The construction throughout is fireproof, all floors and walls being either of brick or hollow tile. The floors are constructed of steel beams with flat tile arches between, the whole being covered with about three inches of concrete before the finished floors are laid.*

*The building faces the north, fronting on Main Street, the main entrance being in the tower. The tower is 135 feet high, being surmounted by a tile roof with dormers on each face and turrets at the corners. Directly below the roof is an open balcony from which an excellent view of the surrounding country may be had. The two stories of the tower below the balcony are occupied by the clock works, the four clock-faces being just below the balcony.*

*The building has three entrances, the main or tower entrance being on the north. The west entrance is in the center of the west side, and the south entrance directly in the rear of the building. All entrances lead through vestibules and corridors to the main corridor on the first floor. This is a room 55 x 53 feet, on either side of which is a marble stairway leading to the second story.*

*On the first floor are the offices of the Circuit Clerk, Recorder, Supervisor of Assessments, Treasurer, Coroner, Surveyor and Sheriff.... On the second floor are the offices of County Clerk, County Superintendent of Schools, State's Attorney, Board of Supervisors, and the County Court.... On this floor are also public toilet rooms.... The third floor is given up almost entirely to the use of the Circuit Court. On the south is the Circuit Court, a room 42 x 72 feet, the bench being on the east. Connected with the court room are the judge's private office, the attorneys' room, the law library, and the corridor leading to the three jury rooms. Besides the rooms already enumerated there are on this floor the grand jury rooms, with waiting rooms for both sexes attached, and the general committee rooms and toilet rooms.*

*The interior of the building is treated, as far as is consistent, in the same style of architecture as the exterior. All corridors and lobbies have marble floors with marble wainscotting four feet high. All door and window finish is of quarter sawed white oak. The side walls and ceilings are of plaster, all the offices having ornamental plaster ceilings and cornices, the court room and corridors having the ceilings intersected with heavy plaster girders.*

*The entire building is frescoed, the general idea being to keep it in accord with the style of architecture used in the construction. The work on the Circuit Court room is especially elaborate and in keeping with the use to which it is to be put.*

*The heat for the building is to be furnished by the central heating plant now being installed in the city of Urbana. The building is piped for gas and wired for electricity. Elevator service is provided for passengers and freight.*

A three-story addition was added to the building in 1936; only the south attic dormers and a faint line in the brick give the addition away. Numerous lightning strikes damaged the building over the years, with a severe strike in 1949 destroying the tower's roof.

Joseph Royer, now of Royer and Davis, remodeled the exterior in 1953. The tower was lowered some 14 feet for safety's sake and a new, much simpler, roof constructed. The cut-down tower was given a top which followed the traditional lines of the removed portion, according to the *News-Gazette* article reporting on the job. Other changes included the removal of loose decorative pieces on various parts of the building, sandblasting and tuck-pointing, new window sills, and new doors. Interior remodelings and various annexes were constructed during the 1960s and 70s, but generally the integrity of the current courthouse remains.

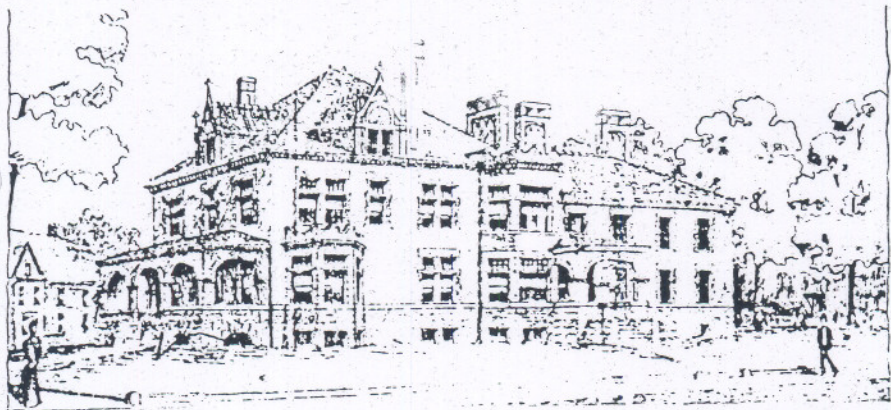
### Sheriff's Residence and Jail

Three jails have served Champaign County since 1833, not including the current 1980 jail. Colonel M.W. Busey built the first jail in 1839-40 for \$850; it was of hewn logs, 18 feet square and two-stories high. The only entrance was on the second floor and prisoners were taken through a trap door into the dark cell below lighted only by two barred openings between logs.

After numerous escapes, the county built a jail and jailor's residence of brick and iron in 1857 at a cost of \$7,000; E. Jacobs & Co. was the contractor. Many additions and improvements were made, both to the jail and jailor's residence, according to J.R. Stewart's *History of Champaign County*. But these changes were not sufficient to meet the requirements of a "wealthy and advanced" county so a new building was erected in 1905.

Architect Joseph Royer designed the new jail and sheriff's residence in the Romanesque style to compliment the recently completed Courthouse. *The Urbana Courier* described the building as follows in its opening day article.

*In the composition of the exterior, rock face Bedford stone is used for the foundation and extends up to the first story window sills. The windows and door openings are also treated with rock face stone burnt to accentuate the design. The cornices are of terra cotta with relief ornament. The roof is of red tile in harmony with the pressed brick used for facing the building. A special feature of the building is the construction of porches. The porches are three in number and consist of cement floors and brick columns and arches. The columns are ornamented by stone capitals.*



1905 rendering of the new Jail and Sheriff's Residence from the CHAMPAIGN DAILY NEWS.

The interior of the building contains the sheriff's residence and the different apartments of the jail proper. The residence portion of the building contains large rooms, together with halls, closets, pantries and bath rooms, all of which are very commodious and finely finished in hardwood. The walls of the residence portion are handsomely decorated in very pleasing colors.

The Champaign Daily Gazette described the jail. As to the construction of the jail itself, there is none stronger in the country. In the minds of people who have examined its equipment, it seems impossible for a prisoner to escape from the building. To escape there are five locks and bars that must be made way with, before freedom is gained. There are twenty-six cells, including a padded cell for insanes, a debtor's cell and women and boys' cells. The debtor's cell, as provided by the statute, is furnished befitting a residence. It is set apart from the jail by itself, and should they have occasion to use it, the prisoner will in most cases fare better than if he had not of-

fended. A trap has been placed between the first and second floors in case of an execution. A hospital room is on the second floor. The construction of the building is model in every detail being erected at a cost of \$42,000.

Currently, a portion of the Sheriff's House is used as office space by the State's Attorney and the Jail is used for record storage.

### Heritage Award Nominations Sought

The Heritage Award Committee is seeking nominations for the 1998 Awards. Categories include: Commercial, Adaptive Use, Residential, Landmark, Institutional, Landscape, Neighborhood, and Special. Nominations are due by January 15, 1998.

### Salvage Crew Receives Statewide Recognition

PACA's Board of Directors is pleased to announce the receipt of a Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) award for its architectural salvage program. A 1997 Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award was presented to PACA's all-volunteer salvage crew at LPCI's annual statewide preservation conference held this September in Galesburg. Salvage Committee co-chairs Robert Swisher and Richard Cahill accepted the award on behalf of all of PACA's salvage volunteers.

According to LPCI Executive Director, Donna Ann Harris, "The judges were very impressed with this innovative fundraising program. By recycling architectural fragments and historic building components these volunteers are creating the perception of value in something that was considered so useless that it should be demolished. By recycling the proceeds from the sale of these items back into preservation projects, the Architectural Salvage Crew has turned their program into a win-win situation for the community."

Over the past 16 years, PACA has established working relationships with the cities of Champaign and Urbana for demolition contacts. These contacts have been extended to area contractors and developers as well as other governmental bodies such as schools, churches, park districts, and hospitals. Many individuals also donate items removed from their property during remodeling.

## 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

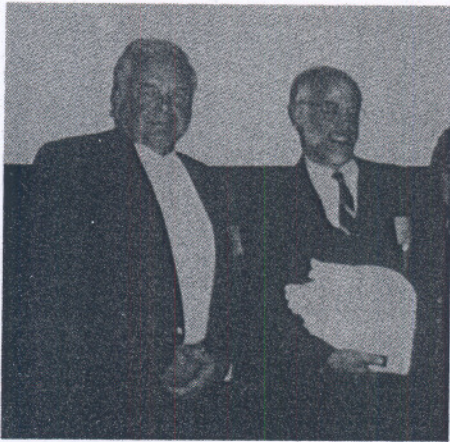
- NEW
- RENEWAL

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

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

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



Salvage Co-Chairs Robert Swisher and Richard Cahill accepting the LPCI Driehaus Award for PACA's Salvage Program from LPCI Executive Director Donna Ann Harris. Photo by Susan Appel.

Proceeds from salvage sales are funneled into local preservation projects. Salvage funds have paid for a new roof and tuckpointing on the Orpheum Theater, restoration of the Greek Revival Cottage, and stabilization of the Wood/Robeson and Ricker houses among other projects. Since most of the items offered for sale are from local sources, PACA has initiated a Heritage Grant Program that gives directly back to the community 10% of the profits from salvage sales. These grants are offered yearly to area non-profit organizations and can be used for brick-and-mortar work on a historic building or for heritage related projects. Past grants have funded stain glass repair, microfilming of historic church records, and interior replastering and painting.

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

Bob Swisher  
Gary Perkins  
Rich Cahill  
Cheri Chenoweth  
Pius Weibel  
Dick Elkin  
Al Friederick  
Matt Riggs

#### Salvage Donations

City of Champaign  
University of Illinois  
Kevin Hunsinger Enterprises  
Elizabeth Rogers  
Mamie Miller  
Mr. & Mrs. James Evans  
Mike Strange

#### Inside Urbana Tour A Success

PACA would like to thank all of our volunteers for donating a beautiful Sunday afternoon to making this year's fall tour a success. Thanks are also due to all of the businesses that opened the doors of their great office spaces for the tour and to County officials for opening the Courthouse and Sheriff's House to tour participants. A special thanks goes to the *News-Gazette* and *The Octopus* for their great tour publicity and to Kent Snodgrass for his exceptional poster design.

Participating tour businesses included Baxley Media; Illinois Institute for Dispute Resolution; Media Cafe; RoundTable Media; Busey's Hall; Princess Theater; Law Offices of Novak, Weaver, Solberg; Brian Silverman & Associates; Urbana Free Library; First Baptist Church, and Lindley House Bed & Breakfast.

#### New & Renewing Members

Perry C. Morris  
Sharon Irish & Reed Larson  
Richard Cahill  
Pamela Todd  
Daniel Wurl Family  
Hiram & Jean Paley  
Robert & Sarah Nemeth  
James & Mare Payne  
Gary & Michele Olsen  
Velma Kurzweg  
Ruth Miller  
Harold & Pat Jensen  
Fred & Nancy Delcomyn  
Mr. & Mrs. Jack Richmond  
Mrs. Helen Levin  
Rita Gentry  
Sheryl DeBarr  
Dr. Albert C. England, III  
Lawrence Mate & E. Paige Weston  
Art Zangerl  
Roy & Nancy Holt  
Timothy Bartlett  
Tony & Beth Foyle  
Trent Shepard  
Erin L. Gaines  
Siegrid Trummer  
Jane & John Anderson  
James S. Larsen  
Frank DiNovo  
Monica Cox  
Kathy Reeves  
Rex & Karen Kummer  
Catherine Barbercheck  
Linda Jensen  
Shirley Stillinger

*Remember to check your mailing label for your membership renewal date. The date shown indicates when you last renewed; membership runs for one year from that date.*

#### PACA Newsletter

Jeffrey Gordon, President  
Bruce Creamer, Vice-President  
Tony Bamert, Secretary  
Rich Cahill, Treasurer  
Karen Lang Kummer, Exec. Director



328-PACA: Telephone & Answering Service

Printed on recycled paper

NON-PROFIT  
ORG.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
CHAMPAIGN, IL  
PERMIT NO. 133