



# PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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## Focus On: Women's Town Club

The Women's Town Club (formally known as the Business Women's Club) was a vital aspect of the community, giving businesswomen a place where they could both socialize with and offer support for other women with similar working experiences. For a building to serve in this capacity was especially important at a time when women had difficulty joining the workforce and were often deemed outcasts for their personal choices. The existence of a building dedicated solely to professional working women functioned as an icon of the community and displayed society's acceptance of women in the business field. The Club also made it feasible for women to join the workforce by making it possible for them to live in close proximity to their jobs for a reasonable rent.

Since its founding in December of 1897, the Women's Town Club has been a longstanding, respected organization for women of Champaign and Urbana. The group was formed "To provide quarters for the rest and comfort of its members; to provide lunch or dining rooms for its members; to assist business and professional women to form wholesome associations; to establish and develop opportunities to bring its members into relations of mutual helpfulness, and to do all and everything necessary or convenient for the accomplishment of any of the purposes or objects and powers above mentioned or included thereto." They wished to improve their community through aiding local hospitals, visiting the county jail, making donations at local charities, giving gifts to the needy, and other causes they felt would leave a positive impact upon the community.

One of the longstanding goals of the group was to eventually obtain their own building. Attaining a building within the city would allow the Women's Town Club to achieve all of their fundamental goals. Most importantly, it would allow them to aid young businesswomen by

providing a place to stay while working in the city. This long-term goal soon became reality when the club asked William B. McKinley for his help.

McKinley is one of the most prominent leaders in the history of Champaign County. He made significant contributions to the community, and was responsible for much of the political, business, and social growth within the county. In the late 1800s, he owned the Western Electric Light Company, and organized the United Manufacturing Company. McKinley's promotion of public utilities brought water, electric and gas service to both Champaign and Urbana. Not only was he responsible for the first electric streetlights, but also the establishment of an electric railway that connected the twin cities, making it easier for residents to instigate commerce between the towns. McKinley was also elected to the U.S. House of Representatives in 1904 and the U.S. Senate in 1920.

Equally important, however, were McKinley's generous donations to various organizations throughout the community. McKinley gave money to

build both the McKinley Presbyterian Church and McKinley Hospital. He was also responsible for the establishment of the McKinley Presbyterian Church Foundation, as well as both the campus Y.M.C.A. and Y.W.C.A.. Therefore, when informed that many working women in Champaign-Urbana needed a place to live, McKinley began his search to find an appropriate building for the Women's Town Club.

In 1896, the Hotel Beardsley was built on the corner of Hill and Neil streets in downtown Champaign. A hotel annex was built on the neighboring lot to the west of the original building the following year. The Hotel Beardsley followed the trend of many other businesses. Prime locations for any business were near the railroad tracks, which was the center of all activity within the county. The railroad was responsible for great growth, especially within Champaign.

The Hotel Beardsley was a magnificent structure. It towered over all of the neighboring houses. This hotel became a favorite among travelers for its "quieter locale." The Doane House, the only



*The Women's Town Club, 112 W. Hill Street, is now home to the Buzard Pipe Organ Craftsmen company; it became a Champaign Landmark in August. Photo used with permission of the Champaign County Historical Archives.*

major hotel in downtown Champaign throughout the nineteenth century, lost its popularity because it was too close to the railroad. Hotel guests constantly complained of whistles and bells throughout their stay. Therefore, a combination of elegant surroundings and prime location near the train depot made the Hotel Beardsley a focal point for travelers.

McKinley purchased the Hotel Beardsley Annex for the Women's Town Club in 1917. The building's sixty-two rooms made it a perfect place for the Club and the women who were to live there. McKinley purchased the building for \$45,000, and then spent an additional \$15,000 for remodeling the living room, dining room, kitchen, stairs, and elevator. McKinley also reportedly furnished the building with "the best furniture available of the local markets."

The money received from the boarders went to the operation of the Women's Town Club. McKinley, however, remained the official owner of the building until his death on December 7, 1926. At that time, the building and all of its contents were deeded to the Women's Town Club. The building stayed as a boarding house for women until the late 1970s, although the Women's Town Club retained its ownership until 1980. Short-lived attempts at reuse of the building included the "Strictly Teens" club. Recently, the building received a unique function within downtown Champaign, accommodating the Buzard Pipe Organ Craftsmen.

The Hotel Beardsley Annex was built in 1897. The building's architectural detailing, as well as the symmetry that results from its three bay arrangement with central entry, makes the annex a good example of the Romanesque Revival style. Due to the common use of semicircular arches, this style was often referred to as the "Round Style" during the years 1850 through 1880, when it was most common. The Romanesque Revival style was typical of churches and public buildings built in that era. The Salem Baptist Church, another existing example of this style in Champaign, also uses these features. Other characteristics of the style include: symmetrical orientation, monochromatic brick, brick corbelling, and belt courses. All of these elements are present in the Hotel Beardsley Annex.

The bearing walls of the annex are constructed of red brick in American bond; the foundation walls are concrete. After a fourth story was added to both the annex and hotel in 1909, the roof was transformed from a gable to a shed. A large, historic, front porch, a later addition dating from the 1910s or early 1920s, was

removed in the early 1990s. The heavy overhang and large supportive brick columns of the porch detracted from the original structure. Presently, dark green canopies are over the first floor door and windows. The canopies give the building an eclectic, but non-obtrusive appearance. A sunroom on the west side of the building has now been converted into an enclosed loading area for the company.

The fenestration throughout the building has a one-over-one sash pattern. Most have rough stone sills, the exception being the fourth floor addition, where the windows have cut stone lug sills. The first and second stories have identical arched end windows with sidelights and transoms. There is also a large header arch over each of the four windows. The central entry door also incorporates the round arch with sidelights and transom.

Above the third floor windows is a stone belt course connecting all of the windows with a soldier course above. Originally, this constituted the base of the cornice. The fourth story windows have round arches with stone voussoirs. There is significant brick corbelling above the soldier course and at the cornice. The cornice has brick belt courses across the top with decorative brickwork above.

The fourth story windows on the east and west sides of the building have cut stone lintels and lug sills, whereas the rest of the windows have double header course arches and rough stone lug sills. The east side of the building has a unique oriel window on the second floor with supportive brick corbelling. Various openings are bricked in, including the original openings on the east side of the building that connected the annex through ten-foot long hallways to each floor of the Hotel Beardsley. The east side of the building, with its non-uniform window sizes, was never intended to be a primary facade, yet after the demolition of the hotel in 1967, this side of the building suddenly became completely exposed.

At the turn of the century, the Hotel Beardsley (later the Tilden Hall hotel) rose above all of the surrounding houses on the block. Now, as the turn of the next century is approaching, the building is still the tallest in this area of downtown. The building stands as a monument to Champaign's past. It serves as both a reminder of a once grand hotel and also as a symbol of the beginnings of women's liberation.

*This article was taken from the Application for Landmark Designation of 112 West Hill Street prepared by Stephanie R. Sodke. The building was approved for landmark status by the City Council on August 18.*

## Champaign Preservation Commission

The Plan Commission was very busy on July 29 when public hearings were held on ten landmark nominations. All but one, Hillel Foundation, were forwarded to City Council with positive recommendations. The City Council has since acted on all of these nominations with the result that six landmarks and two historic districts have joined the New Orpheum Theatre as designated historic buildings; two nominations were not approved by the City Council. The eight new Champaign City landmarks are:

- Wojnar House, 212 E. University
- 1-8 Villard Court Historic District
- Park Theatre, 126-128 W. Church
- Sagamore Building, 804 N. Neil
- Illinois Central Railroad Historic District
- Women's Town Club Building (Buzard Pipe Organ Craftsmen), 112 W. Hill
- Salem Baptist Church, 500 E. Park
- Phi Delta Theta, 309 E. Chalmers
- Harwood-Solon House, 503 S. State

PACA wishes to thank all of the individuals who attended two Plan Commission sessions and the City Council meetings in support of the nominations, especially the Harwood-Solon House. This nomination was approved by the City Council over the objections of its owners due to the significance that this Civil War-era Italianate building has for the City of Champaign. Two nominations, the Hillel Foundation and the Coca-Cola Bottling Plant (Jillians), were not approved over their owners' objections.

## Frank Lloyd Wright Conference

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy has scheduled their annual conference for September 23-27 in Chicago. "The Genesis of Genius: Frank Lloyd Wright and his Vision for the American Prairie" is the theme of the conference to be held at the Regal Knickerbocker Hotel. Vincent Scully, Professor Emeritus, Yale University, will give the keynote address at the Auditorium Theater and the gala dinner will feature director Ken Burns in the landmark Rookery Building. Tours and events will be held in various Wright early masterworks in Hyde Park, Oak Park and Springfield. Contact the FLW Building Conservancy for further information at 312/663-1683.

## Urbana Preservation

In July, Urbana joined over sixty-five other Illinois communities in passing a Historic Preservation Ordinance. The ordinance establishes a Preservation Commission that will review and recommend nominations to the City Council, which has final approval. The ordinance protects the exterior features of a designated building, with changes requiring a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Commission. This is similar to the procedures now in place under Champaign's Preservation Ordinance and in other communities around the state.

Applications for positions on the new Preservation Commission are now available from Mayor Satterthwaite's office (384-2456). All interested Urbana members are encouraged to apply.

## Preservation and Progress at the Urban Edge

September 17-19 are the dates for the 19th Annual Illinois Historic Preservation Conference sponsored by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. The conference will be held in the old Fox River town of Elgin which has a complex history of growth, decline, and revitalization.

In edge cities and rural places, the pace of development and growth has both startled and renewed us. As preservationists, we frequently witness progress creeping into our towns and countryside without warning and often without the consent of planning. This year's conference theme, "Preservation

and Progress at the Urban Edge," focuses on the dilemmas posed by this much-desired growth and the effects this development has on cultural identity and a community's preservation ethic.

Three conference tracks with concurrent sessions on Friday and Saturday illustrate the conference theme: Urban/Rural Revitalization and Planning; Urban/Rural Coalitions; and Local Preservation Commissions Workshops. Fifteen different subsessions focus in detail on topics such as curbing urban sprawl, tax credits, facade programs, building community consensus, funding, design review and preservation commissions. Four guided tours are also available to conference participants. For further information contact LPCI at 312/922-1742.

## "Marketing Museums"

The Illinois Association of Museums is holding their annual conference at the Cliffbreakers Conference Center in Rockford on October 7-9 with the theme, "Bringing the World to Our Doorstep: Marketing Museums." A workshop on designing outdoor exhibits will open the meeting and fourteen sessions follow on topics such as working with the media, developing bus tour connections, marketing by mail, generating revenue through special events, and developing partnerships with tourism representatives. Presenters will be coming from a wide range of museums and collaboration partners across the state and Rockford area museums have opened their doors for the conference. For further information contact IAM at 217/524-7080.

## The 52nd National Preservation Conference

"The Art and Economics of Preservation" is the theme for this year's National Preservation Conference sponsored by the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Savannah College of Art & Design. This conference will offer more sessions than ever before, with 70 educational sessions, and 30 different field sessions. It will be held October 20-25 in Savannah, Georgia; further information about registration and hotels is available from the National Trust at 800/944-6847.

A special focus of this year's conference will be the interplay of historic preservation and the arts in revitalizing landmark buildings and communities of all types. This interplay is dramatically demonstrated by the Savannah College of Art and Design which has rehabilitated 40 historic buildings for its facilities in the heart of the city and attracted the talents of thousands of students to Savannah.

Colorful social events and tours will give conference attendees many opportunities to explore Savannah and the surrounding countryside and to enjoy Southern hospitality at its very best. Also at the conference will be the 14th annual Preservation Action Auction, "Dancing in the Streets." The auction, a major funding raising event for Preservation Action, the national lobbying body for historic preservation, features a silent auction of vacation packages, artwork, and collectibles from across the country and abroad as well as a live auction on October 23.

## 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

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

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ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

e mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

## Preservation Grants Awarded

In May, in honor of Historic Preservation Week, the PACA Board of Directors distributed Heritage Grants to local preservation projects for the fifth year. Four area non-profits and one school project received grants totalling \$3600. The PACA Heritage Grant program was established to share proceeds from the PACA Architectural Salvage Warehouse with the community. A large part of PACA's annual budget is derived from proceeds from historic building materials and furnishings that are salvaged by dedicated volunteers throughout the year and sold at the warehouse on Saturday mornings.

The following groups received grants:

- The Celebration Company - \$250 for new flooring in the lower dressing room of the Station Theater
- St. Patrick's Parish - \$300 for Phase II of microfilming historic parish records
- Urbana High School, Bilingual Program - \$50 for supplies for a C-U history bilingual project
- Orpheum Children's Science Museum - \$1,000 for replacement of an oak front door
- Octave Chanute Aerospace Museum - \$2,000 for help with moving their B-47 plane.

## Salvage V.I.P.'s

Bob Swisher  
Gary Perkins  
Rich Cahill  
Cheri Chenoweth  
Dick Elkin  
Pius Weibel  
Al Friederick  
Darrel Foste  
Mike Barcelona  
Galen Robinson  
David Spears

## Salvage Donations

City of Champaign  
University of Illinois  
Kyle Curtis  
Debbie Robin  
Kim Keys  
Roger Miller

## Ricker House V.I.P.'s

Art Zangerl  
Rich Cahill  
Eric Knott  
Kathe Brinkmann  
Daniel Zangerl  
Elizabeth McClintock  
Robert McClintock  
Michelle Arntz

## Membership

Charter Members (1981-1983)  
Elaine & Allen Avner  
Patricia Miller

## Ten to Fifteen Year Members

Melanie & Chris Hill  
Mark Netter  
Sandra & George Batzli  
Bonnie & Mike Irwin

## Five to Ten Year Members

Anne S. Fejes  
Tim & Barbara Kinkead  
Lianne Anderson  
Fletcher Johnson  
Dr. Lawrence K. Richards

## One to Five Year Members

Valerie Woodruff  
Julia Saville  
Eugene Stern  
Laura Huth  
Louisette Zuidema  
Robert Hurst  
Mr. & Mrs. Gerald Brighton  
Kevin Fahey  
Mary Ellen Fleichli  
Patrick Roberge & Ellen Deason  
Larry Pethick  
Carl Holtz  
Darrel J. Foste

## New Members

Robert & Elizabeth McClintock  
Chris Hanson  
Gale Walden  
Glenna J. Weith  
Andrew Phillips & Brenda Koenig

*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.*

### *The Show Must Go On!*

*PACA encourages all of its members to support the Virginia Theater's Fund Raising campaign. The 500 Club is a fun way to both support the campaign and enjoy theater productions. Call 356-9053 for more information.*

## PACA Newsletter

P.O. Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, IL 61825

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