



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Volume 18

November-December, 1998

Number 6

Focus On: The Sagamore Building

The structure at 804 N. Neil, currently known as the Sagamore Building, has a rich history and significant value as part of the historical and cultural history of the community. The building was at one time the street car barns for the twin cities' electric streetcar railway, operated by the Urbana and Champaign, Railway, Gas and Electric Light Company. This company was part of the Illinois Traction Company, one of the largest interurban rail systems in the United States, stretching across the entire state of Illinois. City directories from the early part of the twentieth century refer to the building (at 803 Hickory Street) as simply "I.T.S. Barn" (for Illinois Traction System). "Interurban barn" is another common reference. The street railway in Champaign-Urbana is an important part of local history and a prominent part of the development of the two cities. For thirty-seven years this system was the only form of public transportation. The tracks and cars of the interurban have disappeared. The buildings that once housed them are some of the last vestiges of the days of streetcars

In many ways, this over 22,000 square foot building remains true to its early appearance. Additions to the original Hickory Street Car Barn have been altered, but the main building's exterior is intact. Other tenants of the space were Champaign-Urbana City Lines Incorporated, a subsidiary of National City Lines, who used part of the building to house twenty of its buses in the 1940s. Illinois Power retained ownership of the building from its streetcar days, going by older names like "Illinois-Iowa Power Company" and "Illinois Power and Light Corporation." The structure was built to last and remains a viable industrial and commercial property, recently housing the corporate operations of Garcia's Pizza and currently housing Sagamore Publishing (the owner), Management Learning Laboratory, and Rad Art Screenprints.



The Hickory Street Car Barns, which date to the 1890s, have been altered, but still retain their functional integrity. PACA file photo.

It is unknown when this building was first constructed. Its presence is first documented in the Sanborn Fire Insurance maps of 1909. Beginning in the late 1860s, the Sanborn Map Company produced maps of cities for the purpose of identifying fire hazardous buildings and industrial sites for insurance companies and underwriters. Maps of Champaign prior to 1909 do not provide outlines of this building. One source, an article published in the *Champaign-Urbana Courier*, indicates that the building was built in 1893-4 after Benjamin F. Harris, Jr. bought the Urbana-Champaign Railway, Gas and Electric Company from William B. McKinley in 1892. No other evidence of this construction date has been found.

After 1909, the history of the building is much clearer. Through the use of Sanborn maps, we can see the changes that took place at this property over the years. Changes in use and ownership are documented. The first map that documents the property is the 1909 edition. The map shows the building divided into two sections, "Hickory St. Barn" and "Neil Street Barn." Collectively, this and two other properties across Hickory were labeled as Urbana and Champaign Railway, Gas and Electric Light Company. The Hickory Street structure is twice as large as the

Neil Street barn. The 1924 Sanborn map shows the same arrangement, with the Neil Street section labeled as "garage and Meter Test Room." Between 1924 and 1927 this part of the building was apparently demolished. The 1929 map illustrates a new addition in place of the old one. This section was flush with the north side of the Hickory Street barn, fronting Tremont Street. The map indicates that the addition was built in 1927. It is labeled as "Stock and Office Building 'Semi F.P.'." This 1929 map also shows a third section of the building, labeled as a garage, fronting Neil Street to give the entire structure the fully rectangular shape it maintains today. This is not to say that the current "southwest section" addition is the original that was constructed between 1924 and 1929. It has undergone significant changes in structure (exterior materials, for instance) and use that indicate several demolitions and reconstructions. This is all the more likely since it is the smallest and simplest part of the building, having one story. In addition, Sanborn maps in 1959 and the 1960s label this addition as "OFF. [office] Noncomb - 1956. Concrete floor. Metal deck roof."

The entire structure is currently all brick and, as explained above, a connection of three major sections. The entire

building has little architectural detail, showing only minor brick detailing around windows and doors. The first section is the rear part fronting Hickory Street. This section is distinguished on Sanborn Fire Insurance maps as early as 1909 as the "Hickory Street Car Barns." Since no evidence of the property exists prior to 1909, it is entirely possible that it was an independent structure at one time, predating the original Neil Street Barn. It has a stepped front parapet. This section of the structure is a tall one story with a monitor roof pitch adding a second story space in the middle. The north and south sides have ten bays, five groups of two bays. The north side has particularly well preserved twelve-light single-pane windows. All of this section's windows are treated with triple rowlock segmental arches. Partially intact windows remain on the south side as well. The rear facade was obviously once the focal point of the structure. It is the most detailed, with two large twenty-light windows at the north end and a large round window (now bricked over) at the top center surrounded by a double rowlock border. While there are now two loading docks on this facade, the brick pattern suggests that the majority of this rear facade may have been open and covered by doors. This may be supported by an undocumented photograph which does not mention the structure in the background. The photo shows several workmen in front of a barn with cars situated in three of the four large open doorways.

The second section of the structure is the large northeast corner. This is the tallest part of the building, two stories with a flat roof. The side walls of this and the "Hickory Street Barn" section mesh well, the break in the roof line providing the best physical indication that the two were separately constructed. Pre-1929 Sanborn maps show a building orientation different from today's for both of the two non-Hickory sections. Sanborn documentation indicates that the current second section was added in 1927. This large, two story addition has many large multi-light windows, all with rowlock borders above them. The north wall (fronting Tremont Street) has a loading dock and several groups of three adjoining multi-light windows. The front extends nearly to Neil Street, showing brick detailing at the top of this front facade.

The third and final section of the building is a flat-roofed, newer one-story addition, presumably adding some office space to the warehouse. This section's front face is flush with the previous section's, with its south facade fronting

North Street. This facade is also flush with the Hickory Street section, giving the entire structure its complete rectangular shape. Both exterior fronts are brick in construction. This adds to the difficulty in assessing the date of this addition because the later maps indicate concrete block construction. From 1927 until sometime between 1949 and 1959, it was used as a garage. All later indications (including current observation) point to the use of the space as office/reception. The major difference in this section of the building is the shape of the windows, which are smaller and more modern than the others on the building.

The development of the area north of downtown Champaign, in which the street car barns are located, is a district heavily effected by the railroads that frame it. The property was bordered on the south by the Illinois Central Railroad's Havana Line. It was just a half-block from the "Big Four" (Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad), and just a few blocks away from the juncture of the north-south line of the Illinois Central and the Big Four. Many of the establishments in this area were formed to serve or be served by the railroads. Just south of the barns was the Arlington/St. James Hotel, which once thrived on railroad passengers. Before its demolition, just across Hickory Street from the barns, was the power house for the Urbana-Champaign Railway, Gas and Electric Light Co., later the Illinois Power and Light Corporation. One could easily see why this part of the city was a natural location to house the street cars that ran on electricity generated across the street by the same company.

Street railways were an important part of the operation of the city economically and culturally, playing a formative role in the city's development. In the fall of 1869, Edward Ater, Daniel Gardner, Clark R. Griggs, and other investors organized the Urbana and Champaign Horse Railway Company to serve the transportation needs of the city. Street railway did exist prior to the formation of that company, though. According to local history, mules were used before this corporation's existence. For many years, the street railway was vital to the industrial and commercial needs of the city. With the aid of this system, any of the cities' commercial enterprises had access to many railroads, Champaign's economic lifeblood. In these early days, the twin cities' street railway contributed to economic development by providing the only access Urbana industries had to the Illinois Central before the Indianapolis, Bloomington and Western Railroad began operation in the

1870s. In 1890, twenty-one years after the introduction of horses, utility magnate and later US Senator William B. McKinley was elected president of the Urbana and Champaign Railway, Gas and Electric Company (which evolved from the Urbana and Champaign Horse Railway Company) and things would soon change in Champaign and many other cities in Illinois.

Not long after McKinley took the helm of the railway, he switched from horse to electric power. A year after that monumental change, he sold his business to local banker, B.F. Harris, amidst a financial crisis. It was shortly after this sale (1893-94) that the *Courier* article claimed the History Street Car Barn was erected. In 1898, McKinley repurchased the railway and acquired the local gas and electric utilities. This would soon become a pattern for McKinley in many cities across the midwestern United States. When he purchased the Danville Street Railway in 1901 and extended it to Champaign-Urbana, the Illinois Traction System had begun. It was pointed out that

Although Illinois Traction System was lettered on all of the line's equipment, and was used by everyone who spoke of it, there was never a time when that was its official title. The system instead was made of many companies, financed by the same syndicate, organized as the Illinois Traction Company in 1904...But as time went by, some of the smaller companies consolidated with each other until 1923, all electric lines became Illinois Traction Incorporated.

For forty years, from 1903 when the first trip from Danville to Champaign was made, to the 1940s when parts of the Traction lines were scrapped, the interurban linked Illinois cities, enhancing the mobility of Champaign's residents and shaping the way Illinois developed. As written in 1918, *The railroads of Champaign County, both steam and electric, have completed its mediums of development, originating in its great wealth of the soil and its remarkable intellectual spirit which received such an early and permanent impetus.*

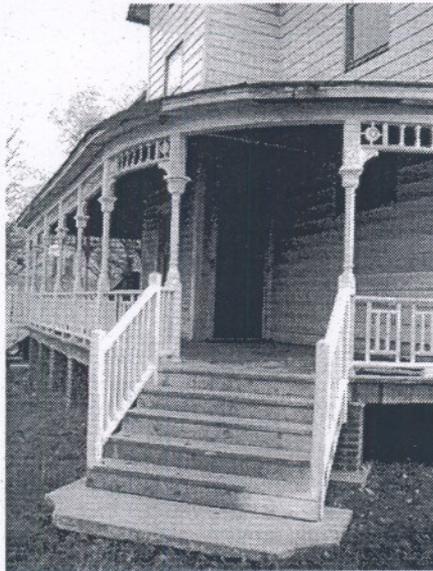
This does not mention the use of the streetcars within the city. The streetcars of the twin cities played an integral role in the everyday lives of many citizens. The streetcars allowed residents to have more choice in where they lived, making a daily commute to work a possibility.

The social importance of streetcars is illustrated in their use for such events as college fraternity parties (it was quite fashionable to rent a car and ride around town all night) and funeral processions. The street railway also was important for recreation. Parks, both public and private,

were built along streetcar lines, enhancing the lives of the city's residents. When B.F. Harris was running the streetcar operation in the 1890s, he built a full-down amusement park along the line—a common practice in those days designed to enhance ridership. The West End Amusement Park was located on Church Street at what was then the western city limit of Champaign. The park was an inducement to riders on the Urbana and Champaign Railway streetcars. Highlights of the park facilities were a shooting gallery, a six-hundred seat summer theater, and a roller coaster type of ride.

Many Illinois Traction buildings have been destroyed in other cities. The legacy of the days of streetcars in many cities has been forgotten. Fortunately, citizens of Champaign have showed commitment to preserving its cultural past by saving old railroad facilities, including the one-time ITS station and ticket office (41 E. University). As it moves ahead to the future, the city and region should remember that it was rail that made the city and helped it grow and prosper.

This article was based on the Landmark application prepared by Jeremy Hayes; it was designated a landmark last August.



The Ricker House porch is almost completely restored thanks to countless hours of volunteer labor. Photo by Cahill.

Ricker House Update

A wonderful, albeit slow, transformation is occurring along West Green Street in Urbana. The exterior of the Ricker House is gradually being brought back to its former grandeur. Two years ago the chimneys and porch piers were rebuilt. Major work was also done to repair the porch including rebuilding the deck and stripping all of the columns and the decorative frieze. These elements have since been reinstalled and primed. This past summer, industrious volunteers have built and installed new porch railings and two sets of steps, they also finally conquered the porch roof sag and have leveled out

and stabilized the roof. An appropriate donated front door is also in place, replacing the wood storm door that had been providing security.

Since October, Frederick E. Kruger Roofing of Georgetown has been slowly and *very meticulously* stripping off old roof layers (which varied from one to four), infilling the original underlayment gaps which date from when a wood shingle roof was in place, and repairing the soffit edge of the roof where necessary. Mr. Kruger's attention to detail is shown in the careful work he undertook to remove the cornice from the curved bay, repair the roof edge and carefully reinstall the curved cornice. At press time about 80% of the roof has been either reshingled or stripped and covered with roofing paper; all major leaks have been dealt with and the house is more weather tight than it has been in years.

Spring plans include finishing the porch (roofing and skirting lattice) and if enough donations are forthcoming, removing the unsightly aluminum siding and restoring the clapboards and decorative shingles. Historic paint colors are under consideration now. However, this is a large task and PACA looking for monetary donations and donations of clapboards and shingles to help fund this undertaking.

A large thank-you to our dedicated volunteers: Art Zangerl, chair; Robert McClintock, Elizabeth McClintock, Jane McClintock, Kathe Brinkmann, Lisa Zangerl, Daniel Zangerl, Ben Reynolds, Rich Cahill and Michele Arntz.

Heritage Award Nominations Sought

Categories include: Commercial, Adaptive Use, Residential, Landmark, Institutional, Landscape, Neighborhood and Special. Nominations are due by January 15, 1999.

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 _____

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.



Moving day at the warehouse! Over the course of two weekends, 95% of the stock was moved. over two weekends Photo by Taylor.

PACA Notes

- **Salvage:** We wish to thank everyone who volunteered with the major salvage warehouse move in December. Our feature article in January will highlight the move and the new space.
- **Barn Tour: Save the Date - April 11** when eight historic barns will be open for a special tour. Details in the next newsletter.
- **Annual Meeting:** Plans are underway for the Annual Membership Meeting, to be held in early March.
- **Board of Directors:** Nominations are being sought for three positions on the PACA Board. Please consider serving.
- **New Phone Number:** In conjunction with the warehouse move, the PACA phone is being relocated to the warehouse. The new number is 359-PACA (359-7222).

PACA Newsletter

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

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Salvage Donations

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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.

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