



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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Joseph W. Royer Historic District

The Joseph W. Royer Historic District consists of two residential buildings, 801 West Oregon Street (Joseph W. Royer House) and 701 South Busey Avenue (Ella Danely House). The district was nominated under Criteria one, two, and three. Under Criteria One, the district is "associated with an important person or event in national, state, or local history"; it is "representative of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, craftsmanship, method of construction or use of indigenous materials and which retains a high degree of integrity"; it is the "notable work of a master builder, designers, architect or artist whose individual genius has influenced an area"; it has "significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political, or social heritage of the nation, state or community"; and the buildings are "identifiable as an established and familiar visual location or physical characteristics." Under Criteria Two the district "contains a contiguous grouping of properties having a sense of cohesiveness expressed through a similarity of characteristic of style, period, or method of construction." Under Criteria Three, the district "contains sufficient historical integrity to convey a sense of time and place."

The Joseph Royer House was designed and built in 1905 by the noted Urbana architect, Joseph William Royer as his personal residence. In 1923, Royer designed and built the small cottage at the south end of his property for his mother-in-law, Ella Danely. The large main house is a good example of the Mission Style with Arts and Crafts influence, while the cottage is a picturesque rendition of the English Revival architectural style. Neither residence has been significantly altered and both retain a high degree of integrity.



The Joseph W. Royer House, 801 West Oregon, was recently designated an Urbana Landmark as part of the Joseph W. Royer Historic District. The house was built in 1905 and served as the residence of the prominent Urbana architect until his death in 1954. Photo by Dan Leasure

History

Joseph William Royer, Urbana's most prominent architect, designed both buildings contained within the Joseph W. Royer Historic District. Royer was born in Urbana in 1873, the son of John D. and Mary Royer. He graduated from the University of Illinois in 1895 with a degree in civil engineering and worked as Urbana's city engineer from 1898 to 1906 during which time he designed the 1901 Champaign County Courthouse; he also was responsible for the Sheriff's Residence and County Jail, constructed in 1905. The firm of Royer and Brown was formed about 1905. At other times the firm was known as Royer and Smith; Royer, Danely, and Smith; and Royer and Davis. Other well known local buildings designed by Royer include: Urbana High School (1914), Urbana Lincoln Hotel (1924), Urbana Christian Church (1910), Urbana Free Library (1918), Alpha Rho Chi Chapter House (1927), Champaign Country Club (circa 1895), Urbana Flat Iron Building (1906), and the Urbana

Country Club (1922).

Royer purchased the lot at 801 West Oregon in 1902 for the sum of \$1250; this was the same year he married Adelaide Danely. Adelaide was a noted poet and interior designer, who collaborated with her husband on some of his projects. Most likely he felt that with the successful completion of the County Courthouse project his architectural career was set; he continued in practice, both locally and statewide, until his death in 1954. The lot on Oregon was bought from the estate of Thomas S. Hubbard with the following condition:

It is hereby expressly agreed by the grantee, his heirs and assigns that no house shall be erected on the said land of a contract value less than \$2000; that the front wall of any such house shall be at least 30 feet from the front Street line of said land, that the grade in front of said house shall be uniform with that of adjoining lot and when walks are laid in front of said land, they shall be of concrete and uniform with adjoining walks.

This area of Oregon and Nevada streets had not yet been developed. Royer, as city engineer, was hired by the trustees of Hubbard's estate, George W. Hubbard, Harry T. Hubbard and Austin M. Lindley, to plat this area as T.S. Hubbard's Elmwood Addition to Urbana. This resulted in Royer's property becoming Lot 27 in Block 3 of the new addition with an address as 801 West Oregon Street.

Royer fulfilled the terms of the sale by erecting a large and commodious house on his property; beginning construction in 1904. He was in the forefront of the new Mission architectural style movement and incorporated influences of the equally avant garde Arts and Crafts style. His house was described in the *Champaign Daily Gazette*

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Royer will occupy their new residence on West Oregon Street about April 1. The house was designed by Mr. Royer and is built on the style of an old Spanish Mission House. Those who saw the California State Building at the World's Fair in St. Louis saw an almost exact counterpart. It is a striking contrast to the many residences that surround it.

While his house may not be an exact counterpart to the California Fair Building, it certainly must have been and continues to be a unique residential building. The Mission influence is seen in the cement stucco wall covering, low walled terrace, arched windows, and balconies. Its tile roof and arched pergola bespeaks directly of the California building.

Joseph and Adelaide continued to reside in the house until their deaths in 1954. Adelaide died in September, while Joseph died in November; they had no children. The house was rented by Royer's heirs, Anna Lindsey (his sister), and Elizabeth (his niece) and Vaughn Dolahan, until they sold it to Dr. & Mrs. Lorenz E. and Mary L. St. Clair in 1962. Dr. St. Clair was a professor of anatomy at the College of Veterinary Medicine. An addition over the second floor of the kitchen was added by the St. Clair's in 1968. The St. Clair's sold the house on contract in 1969 to the Theta Club, a chapter of Omega Tau Sigma, a professional veterinary fraternity. The fraternity occupied the house until a fire occurred in 2001; the dwelling is now under contract to be sold.

The Ella Danely Cottage at 701 South Busey Avenue was designed by Royer for his mother-in-law. Ella was the widow of Alfred Marion Danely, a Methodist minister; he died in 1918. Royer purchased the lot on South Busey on contract from Albert M. Adams for \$1250. He paid \$300



The Ella Danely Cottage is the second half of the Joseph Royer Historic District at 702 South Busey. Designed by Royer for his mother-in-law in 1923, the house was the centerpiece of numerous children's stories about the "Fairy House." Photo by Dan Leasure

down in May, 1913, but did not receive a deed for the property. Adams died in Indiana in November of 1913 before Royer finished paying off the contract, which caused the property to become part of Adams' estate. Royer filed a Chancery Court case against Kate B. Adams, et al, to resolve the situation. The result was that Royer paid the \$950 balance plus interest in return for a deed to the property.

Royer did not build on the lot until 1923, when he built the English Revival cottage for Ella Danely, his wife's mother. His brother-in-law, Alfred M. Danely, Jr. and his wife Isabelle lived next door at 703 S. Busey; Alfred was now the city engineer for Urbana. From at least 1914, Alfred and Isabelle had lived in this house, which was initially addressed as 1003 S. Busey. According to *City Directories*, Ella lived with them in 1923 while her house at 701 was being built; she is listed in 1924 as living at 701 S. Busey. As an interesting fact, Dr. & Mrs. St. Clair lived at 703 S. Busey before purchasing Royer's house on Oregon Street.

The romantic quality of the cottage was not lost on Mrs. Royer. She penned a children's story about the house, "Fairy House," which detailed the adventures of elves in the house and in other local areas. This was one of several books Mrs. Royer wrote for the "Round Window Series," the name of which was based on a window in the Royer House. Mrs. Danely died in October, 1953, at age 100, just months before her daughter, Adelaide, and her son-in-law, Joseph Royer died. The house and its lot had been joined together with Royer's Oregon Street

property and was part of his estate. When the St. Clair's purchased 801 West Oregon, the cottage on Busey Avenue was part of the purchase. From the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s, the cottage was rented; when the Royer House was sold to the Theta Club, the St. Clair's moved to the Danely Cottage and split the two lots apart. However, as part of the sale, an easement of ingress and egress for the cottage across the rear of 801 West Oregon was attached to the deed.

The St. Clair's built an addition onto the rear of the cottage in 1967 and may have added the dormers at this time also. A second building permit was issued for a driveway and the brick wall between the two properties was probably constructed then. Lorenz St. Clair died in 1975, but his wife remained there until 1994, when the property was sold to Ann Kerlin now Ann Wymore. Ms. Wymore is the current occupant of 701 South Busey Avenue.

Significance

The Joseph W. Royer Historic District is both historically and architecturally significant to the City of Urbana. Although the district is small, both properties are distinctly related to each other and were built for the family of Joseph Royer. The dwellings are expressions of his individual architectural design skills and show how adept he was at avant garde designs. He was at the forefront of his profession when he designed his house in the Mission Style with Arts and Crafts influences in 1905 and stylistically mature when he built the Danely Cottage in 1923.

Both residences retain a high degree of integrity and convey a sense of time and place.

801 S. Oregon was one of the first residences to be built on this block; next door, 803 West Oregon, was built before 1909, but the remainder of the block was only gradually infilled. Its residences were mostly single family with a scattering of fraternity and boarding houses. Although multi-family housing is now found in the area, the historic residential quality of the neighborhood is preserved. This quality is only enhanced by the Royer residences.

The Royer Historic District is both stylistically and spatially united. The respective architectural styles used on the two residences compliment each other and were designed to be united through landscaping. Royer purchased the land for the Danely Cottage ten years before the house was built and he joined it to his property. Visually, the two buildings are united through landscaping and the historic brick and stone wall. Although subsequently divided into separate parcels, the properties remain united historically and architecturally.

The Joseph Royer Historic District was designated by the Urbana City Council in November, 2001 as Urbana's first historic district. All changes to the exterior of either residence will require a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission. This article was adapted from the district nomination as prepared by PACA.

List of Known Buildings Designed by Joseph Royer

- Urbana City Engineer (1898-1906)
- Boggs House on West Illinois (1898)
- Champaign Country Club (Adelaide did interior, c. 1895)
- Champaign County Courthouse (1901)
- Sheriff's Residence and Jail (1905)
- Joseph W. Royer House, 801 West Oregon, Urbana (1905)
- Flat Iron Building, Urbana (1906)
- Champaign County Poor Farm (1909)
- Christian Church (now Canaan) (1910)
- Urbana High School (1914)
- Addition to Building for Judge Cunningham (1913)
- Residence for Fred Silver (1913)
- Residence for H.H. Bubes (1913)
- Residence for Bowen Busey (1913)
- Masonic Temple Facade, Urbana (1914)
- Mathew W. Busey House, 715 W. Michigan, Urbana (1915)
- R. E. Hieronymus, 702 West Pennsylvania, Urbana (1915)
- Baptist Church, 314 E. Daniel, Champaign (1915)
- Villa Grove High School (c. 1915)
- Sigma Pi Fraternity (1920)
- Rantoul High School (1920)
- Chi Psi Fraternity House (1921)
- Green Street commercial buildings (1921)
- Urbana Country Club (1922)
- Danely Cottage, 701 S. Busey, Urbana (1923)
- Urbana Lincoln Hotel (1924)
- Charles W. Bailey House, 908 West Healey, Champaign (1926)
- Alpha Rho Chi (1927)

- Leal School, Urbana (1935)
- Niles Township High School (1937)
- Homewood Municipal Building (1938)
- 200 housing units near Chanute Field Public Buildings Administration (1940)
- Junior High School, Urbana (1954)
- Lincoln Lodge, Urbana
- 307 West Indiana, Urbana
- 309 West Indiana, Urbana
- 401 West Indiana, Urbana
- High School, Dubuque, Iowa
- Clay County Courthouse
- Marion County Courthouse
- Douglas County Courthouse
- Grundy County Courthouse
- Winnebago County Courthouse
- Petrie Mills Memorial Library (Adelaide did interior furnishings)
- Cohen Building, Urbana
- First Baptist Church, Champaign
- Franklin County Sheriff's House and Jail

Historic Garrett House Available

The Urbana School District is offering the 1898 Garrett House for relocation. Located at 201 East Washington Street, the nine-room house is in pristine condition with two full baths and four bedrooms, a modern kitchen, an ornate oak working fireplace, original woodwork including sliding doors, and hardwood floors. Interested parties should contact Carol Baker of the School District at 384-3642.

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Help for Historic Barns

The Senate version of the Farm Bill currently under discussion in Congress has two noncontroversial and widely supported preservation amendments. The National Historic Barn Preservation Act (S.1604), introduced by Senator James Jeffords (I-VT), is part of the Senate bill's Rural Development Title. It authorizes \$25 million over the next five years for grant funding to protect historic barns. Also included, as part of the Conservation Title, is the Conservation Security Act (S.932), which authorizes \$5 billion over 10 years to encourage farmers to adopt conservation practices. Historic buildings, structures, objects, and archaeological sites on farmlands are included as eligible categories for funding.

Unfortunately, although the House bill does include a companion version of the Conservation Security Act, it does not contain the barn preservation provision. National preservationists are convinced that there will be strong support in the House for the measure, but fear that the program may be overlooked when the competing House and Senate bills are conferred. In a \$73 billion bill, a \$25 million program for historic barn preservation should be supported by midwest constituents.

PACA members are urged to contact Reps. Timothy Johnson (217.403.4690) and David Phelps (202.225.5201) who are members of the Agriculture Committee in the House and ask them to have the Chair of the Committee include these provisions in the final version.

Heritage Award Nominations are due in January. Be sure to nominate your favorite rehabilitation projects soon!

PACA Newsletter

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