



PRESERVATION MATTERS

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Historic Schools: The Endangered Heritage in Your Community

(PACA is concerned about the future of Champaign's historic neighborhood schools. This is part one of a three-part series on preserving historic schools.)

Older, historic schools are beset by choices of value and economics. These represent conscious choices for parents.

For many reasons inner city schools, especially those in areas undergoing restoration, are often the core of the community. Children walking to and from school can make a neighborhood feel complete. Children grow up with opportunities to develop a strong sense of place as they pass the same trees and gardens nine to ten months of the year. Walks with classmates provide time to develop close friendships, share secrets and tales of adventures and humorous experiences. Children who walk to school grow up with confidence, feeling a part of a diverse neighborhood and they often later describe this sensation as "being rooted" and full of rich memories. They develop a connection to an extended family. It is for these reasons and more that many parents choose to move into mature neighborhoods with historic schools at their cores, with schools within walking distance of home.

Proximity to schools and classmates allows for yearlong bonding opportunities. Easy access to schools provides parents time to support the school and participate in after-school events, and it further offers parents opportunities to connect to the community by meeting and getting to know their children's friends and their parents. When parents recognize their children's friends out on the street the safety factor tends to increase. With this web the community becomes connected. Parents who chose to live in neighborhoods where the school is an integral

component do so with these thoughts in mind.

Parents who consciously select these schools do so expecting quality education and anticipating a smaller school, one where students receive more individualized attention and where neighbors (and parents) participate in after-school civic and community activities. With the school being only a few minutes from home parents can easily choose to participate in school activities. These tend to be small, community-centered schools that serve as anchors for the neighborhood.

Neighborhoods undergoing urban restoration, or gentrification, are older and tend to have historic schools at their core. Such schools add value to the houses for urban pioneers. Yet all too often school officials deem these historic buildings inadequate for current educational needs.

"The School District Announces Plans Today To Relocate Fairweather Elementary to the Edge of Fairweather"

Parents' first knowledge of a planned move is often through local news reports, and they feel both outraged and helpless at having been omitted from the process. In both the article and at future meetings with parent organizations, officials will opine that the school is substandard, the rooms are too small, the general square footage is insufficient, and it is too expensive to operate. The school district feels that the best step, all things considered, would be to replace the school in another part of town, thus yanking the anchor from the community. This statement



Historic Southside School (1924) is an important element, both visually and socially, in its historic neighborhood.

sounds emotional, but it's nothing compared to the outpouring of emotions that follows announcements of relocating schools. What are parents to do? See *Why Johnny Can't Walk to School* (National Trust for Historic Preservation). It is important to understand the community being served by the historic school before making these decisions. It is equally important to recognize that many parents have consciously invested in their homes, the community, and the school.

Before attempting to preserve a historic school it is necessary to step away from the emotional need to preserve and to understand the real-world issues surrounding school district concerns. Budget constraints and government mandates to meet changing educational standards drive school districts to pursue the decision to vacate a historic school in favor of a new school. Though some school districts are losing students as families migrate to suburban districts with higher standardized test scores, many other school districts are facing population shifts within their boundaries. Demand for new schools in their suburban/rural communities makes renovation of older schools seem unrealistic. School boards are forced to consider the economics of renovating an older school and building a

new school *vs.* building one larger school that can accommodate all students.

School Districts are Trying to Do What's Best for the Students

There are many barriers to renovating schools. It is often considered easier and more economically practical to build a new school. Barriers for preserving historic schools as fully functional educational facilities are enormous. Key barriers include:

- Out-dated structures incapable of remaining current with advancing technological requirements for education
- Inefficient energy designs, making them prohibitively expensive to heat and cool;
- Insufficient space for the size of classrooms
- Structurally sound schools that do not meet safety requirements and codes;
- Accessibility requirements (ADA);
- Inadequate parking for staff and other site-related restrictions;
- Insufficient space for outdoor recreation;
- State education policies for siting schools;
- Poor air circulation and ventilation; and
- Health-related problems caused by sub-standard environmental quality.

An additional barrier may be the inability to obtain historic building status due to extensive remodeling with only remnants of the original architectural design remaining. Yet while exteriors may no longer be architecturally accurate, interiors may retain numerous historically significant features. While historic, they need maintenance and perhaps restoration. The cost to provide the required work can be very high. The pool of craftsmen capable of providing this service is small in most communities.

Because of these barriers, school administrators and school boards believe that the cost of renovating an older, historic school is far greater than building a new school. The Council of Educational Facility Planners International (CEFPI), The School Building Association, provides a list of commonly perceived misinformation school districts hold. (From this point on the term "school districts" will be used to identify the combination of school boards and school district administrators.) In their 2004 publication, *A Primer for the Renovation/Rehabilitation of Older and Historic Schools* (<http://www.cefpi.org>)

CEFPI identifies some of the following misconceptions:

- Rehabilitation is always more expensive than new construction;
- Small schools are not cost-effective and economies of scale can be realized through consolidation;
- Older or historic schools are prohibitively expensive to operate and maintain
- Indirect costs are irrelevant; and
- Simple mathematical formulas can be used to determine whether renovation or new construction is more cost-effective.

Before accepting these as truisms, parents and school districts must address these points (and any additional barriers) through a formal process. Many schools around the country have overcome these and other deterrents and their case studies are frequently accessible. School districts are often quite proud of the end results and their collective efforts to examine options. A number of references are provided at the end of this article that will assist with initiating the process. One simple set of guidelines provided by the National Trust for Historic Preservation (NTHP), *Historic Schools: A Roadmap for Saving Your School*, identifies strategies for addressing each of these issues.

Conducting feasibility studies is one obvious preparation requirement. NTHP offers *Renovation vs. Replacement & The Role of A Feasibility Study* to help guide school districts and parents through the process of assessing the true needs of the school.

In looking at an example of deciding to construct a new house *vs.* buying an established home, we can gain insight and draw comparisons to building a new school. While the cost of building a new house may be similar to that of buying a more established house, there are hidden costs that are generally unanticipated. Landscaping and fencing the yard, putting up shelving in storage areas and the garage, and window covers are some such unanticipated, but necessary costs. These structures are frequently completed and included in the cost of the established home. When building a new school, many of the actual costs are appropriated through a variety of different budgets. Some services are donated and are not considered capital expenditures. The costs of razing the older school and removal of waste can be surprisingly costly, especially where landfills refuse demolition waste.

It is universally agreed that older schools are not adequate for today's educational requirements, but what are the true costs of renovating *vs.* the costs of building new schools? One of the first arguments that parents face is that of wiring and retrofitting the building to meet technology needs. Students need access to computers and the technology offered through internet and electronic resources. Current wiring in older schools can barely handle the energy needs of one computer, let alone 12 to 24 in a classroom. This technology requires electricity and internet connections, and it requires accessibility as the technology frequently changes. One suggestion that has been considered for school districts with older schools is to take advantage of the higher ceilings, not taking the cables through drop ceilings, but rather raising the floors. This allows for wiring and cable access to each desk. Using the space under the floors additionally provides opportunity for other needs of heating, air conditioning, and ventilation. Additionally, with rapidly changing technology wireless internet may soon become a realistic option eliminating the need for internet connections.

Considering the true value of an existing, somewhat outdated school can be economically and politically beneficial. As previously stated, many schools serve as community centers and focal points of neighborhood activity. Local residents attend civic meetings at the school, they participate in their children's education and after-school activities, and once renovated a neighborhood school often becomes a source of pride and an important component of a broader revitalization effort for the community.

This article is the first of three that examine processes for preserving historic schools. The second contribution in this series will present techniques and recommendations (as well as identify some resources) for overcoming many of the misperceptions and barriers to renovating an older school. The third installment will highlight case studies and success stories and the values of their successes to the school's economy, efficiency, and learning environment as well as the value to the community.

Architecture makes community.

Online Resources for Identifying Barriers, Needs and Initiating the Process

A Roadmap for Saving Your School

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/school_study_roadmap.pdf (10-page report with advice to parents interested in saving their historic schools)

Assessing the Fit between Educational Programs and Older Buildings

<http://schoolstudio.engr.wisc.edu/assess-fit.html> (This was presented to the School Facilities Pre-conference Workshop/ Mississippi Pupil Transportation Administrators' Conference, April 21, 1999, and contains the full power point presentation, <http://schoolstudio.engr.wisc.edu/PowerPoints/Assessing%20the%20Fit%20PP.pdf>)

Hard Lessons, Causes and Consequences of Michigan's School Construction Boom

Michigan Land Use Institute <http://www.mlui.org/downloads/hardlessons.pdf>

Historic Neighborhood Schools Deliver 21st Century Education

by Constance E. Beaumont (National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities) http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/schools_21st_edu.pdf (16-page document with examples of successful efforts to preserve historic neighborhood schools and quality education)

Historic Neighborhood Schools Success Stories

<http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/studies.html> (40 Schools and their Case Studies including four in Illinois)

Historic Schools Day, If These Schools Could Talk (Teacher's lesson plan)

<http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/HistoricSchoolsDay.pdf>

Preserving Historic School Buildings

Ohio Historic Preservation Office
<http://www.ohiohistory.org/resource/history-pres/toolbox/schools.html>

Renovation vs. Replacement & The Role of A Feasibility Study

http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/school_feasibility_study.pdf
Smart Growth Schools Slide Presentation Guide, National Trust For Historic Preservation http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/schools_21st_edu.pdf (First 11 pages are text to accompany the power point slide presentation)

State Policies and School Facilities: How States Can Support or Undermine Neighborhood Schools and Community Preservation

by Constance E. Beaumont. http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schools/schools_state_policies.pdf (34-page report on state laws and policies that affect historic schools)

Why Johnny Can't Walk to School
<http://www.nationaltrust.org/issues/schoolsRpt.pdf> (54-page PDF on the relationship of suburban sprawl and its impact on historic schools; also shows what places have done to protect their historic schools)

This article was written by Carol Knepp, PACA Board Member, educator, and education specialist/coordinator of Greening Schools (www.greeningschools.org), with the Illinois Waste Management and Research Center, and former director of a nature preserve in Texas. She spends much of her free time restoring and renovating an 1896 house in Central Illinois.

New PACA Board Member

Kathleen Jones recently accepted a position on the PACA Board of Directors to fulfill the unexpired term of Art Thoma, who resigned due to time constraints. Jones, an old house enthusiast and historic house owner, lives in East Urbana.

PACA Parties!

Thanks to the organizational skills of Rich Cahill, everyone who attended the annual PACA Membership and Volunteer Recognition Party had a great time. Attendance at this year's event was the highest ever, possibly due to the fact that this year's party was held directly after the House Tour. Thus, tour participants, home owners, and volunteers could continue preservation networking all evening. The party is held to thank our members for their continued support; to recognize and honor our hardworking volunteers, who give so much of their time to the organization; and to have a fun time. Next year's party will again be on Columbus Day weekend.



Betty & Bob Swisher (r) conversing with PACA members at the Annual Membership Party.

P.A.C.A. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

- Adult \$15
- Student \$10
- Senior Citizen \$10
- Family \$20
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- Additional Contribution _____

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Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.



Tour participants at 1018 West Church, a designated Champaign local landmark.

Fall House Tour a Success!

Promenade on Park Avenue, PACA's Fall House Tour, was a resounding success. In fact, additional tickets had to be printed that day to meet the demand. Over 600 guests and volunteers toured eight historic houses and one historic duplex in the West Park, Church, and University neighborhood. Ticket sales and donations totaled almost \$4,900; expenses were \$330. PACA's Board of Directors voted to cover tour expenses from general funds. As a result, PACA will donate \$5,000 toward historic preservation efforts in the hurricane damaged areas of Mississippi and Louisiana.

PACA would like to thank our wonderful volunteers (over fifty people helped on the day of the tour) and our gracious homeowners. Special thanks go to Kent Snodgrass, Elizabeth Davis, Dan Leasure, Michael Miller & Lori Malatesta, David & Renee Malone, Mr. & Mrs. Charles Keeling, Alan & Kristine Chalifoux, Joseph Squire & Cheryl Louviere, Dan & Kim Wurl, Ashley & Josh Pollet, Mellisa Breen & Lisa Oakley, and Kay Bock & David Irwin.

Salvage VIP's

Rich Cahill
Bob Swisher
Mike Richards
Dan Leasure
Bette Swisher
Maria Velazquez
Darrel Foste
Kathy Reeves
Mike Miller
Brian Duffield
Neil Lasater
Bogner Family
Dorothy Newman
Dave Spears

Salvage Donations

Loda Public Library
University of Illinois
Barr Real Estate
Wakeland Rentals
Danville Area Community College
Ed & Antje Kolodziej
Bill Jackson

New & Renewing Memberships

(received since the last newsletter)

Charter Members (1981-1983)

Mrs. Helen Levin

Over Ten Year Members

Kevin Fahey & Ann Bergeron
Monica Cox
Ruth Miller
Art Zangerl & Kathe Brinkmann
Pat & Harry Jensen
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Suzanne & Tedra Ashley-Wannemuehler

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Ann Zahner
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Deb Smith
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Ed Wilhite
David Irwin & Kay Bock
Chris Rymas
Thelma Fite
Ian Hill
Charles Lozar

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.

Preservation Matters: newsletter of the
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Past into the Future**

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