

## PRESERVATION MATTERS

### PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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#### Francis and Abbie Solon House Update

It has been a year since PACA received the generous gift of the Solon House from the Morris and Drenckhahn families. In the intervening twelve months, much "behind-the-scenes" work has been accomplished, as well as general cleaning and stabilization by our stalwart PACA volunteers.

Although an auction of the house's contents was held in 1995, many family and miscellaneous household items remained in the house. To date, articles in the main house and attic have been sorted with personal family papers and mementoes returned to the heirs and clothing and miscellaneous items recycled. In addition, a general cleaning of dirt and debris, which accumulated during the decade that the house was uninhabited, has been accomplished and the house aired out. The six room basement, however, remains to be sorted and cleaned. All of this work has been under taken slowly as "house archeology." Each item is evaluated as to its significance for the family, the house, or the community, as the Solon family was involved in the community and owned real estate throughout the county.

PACA has also been working on the physical aspects of the house. Architecture graduate student, Chris Enck, has painstakingly drawn measured floor plans of the house and an extremely detailed roof plan. This work has been supervised by architect Greg Hargus, who previously worked with PACA on the Cattle Bank and Greek Revival Cottage projects. In April, repair work took on a new urgency when a wind storm blew over the south chimney. This collapse damaged a hip and numerous roof rafters and exacerbated a previous roof leak. Based on plans by Enck and Hargus, PACA solicited bids for work on the chimneys, roof, and eaves. Halfar Masonry removed the damaged chimney and two



*This circa 1910 postcard view of the Francis & Abbie Solon House is one of the few historic photos of the house that have been discovered. It shows Francis and Abbie Solon and four of their five children: John, James, Ann, and Ellen. Mary Solon was not born when the photo was taken. The photo shows how little the house has changed since it was built in 1867 even vestiges of the landscaping remain.*

other structurally unstable chimneys on the west to just below the roof line, allowing these chimneys to be rebuilt in the future.

Ron Meister Construction has been hired to continue the work that his company began in the late 1990s. Unfortunately, that work was halted and much of what was done has deteriorated over the intervening years. However, the eaves on the west wing will soon be completed and repair work on the roof rafters and top plates undertaken. The PACA Board is considering different options for a desperately needed new roof. A "temporary" membrane is a quick option. The preferred option is a metal roof, which would be similar in look to the current historic material, but is three times the cost of a membrane roof. To help with this decision, a graduate preservation architecture class has been engaged by PACA to explore various roofing options and report to the board this spring. Since the house is a Champaign Landmark, PACA has sought a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) from the Preservation

Commission for all exterior work.

In addition to cleaning and repair work, PACA has been active in establishing preservation safeguards for the house. In May, the City Council rezoned the property from the IT-MF In-Town Multi-Family District, which would have allowed an apartment building on the site, to IT-SF1, In-Town Single Family District. In addition, a National Register for Historic Places nomination has been prepared for the house and the nomination will go before the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council in March. This listing will allow certain tax advantages to future owners.

The PACA Board of Directors is currently studying various options for the house. These include selling the property with preservation covenants attached to the exterior and significant interior features. In the spring, a fund raising open house is planned once safety issues have been addressed. However, a PACA members-only showing will precede any public viewing. Watch for further Solon House updates next year.



## Stroll through Historic West Urbana (House Tour, continued)

### Lindley House 312 West Green Street

This classic Queen Anne style home, listed as a local historic landmark, was built by Dr. Austin M. and Minnie W. Lindley in 1895, on Lot 27 in J.T. Roe's 2nd Addition to Urbana. The land was first purchased from the U.S. Government by Isaac Busey, Urbana pioneer, on May 2, 1831. After his death in January 1847, his large holdings were divided among his heirs, his daughter Lillis and her husband, James T. Roe, receiving the land defined by Race and Lincoln and Springfield and Illinois streets. Between 1851-54, Mr. Roe had the eastern half of this area subdivided into city lots. He platted his 2nd Addition, in which the Lindley house is located, on January 10, 1852.

The location of the Lindley house was first occupied by a smaller house built by carpenter Gardner Mott, sometime before 1857. Mr. Mott sold his house to Michael Courtney, blind broom maker, and his wife, Rebecca, on March 3, 1857. The Courtneys owned the property for less than two years, selling it to cabinet maker Enoch B. Elkins and his wife Catharina, in November, 1858. In 1860 the house was foreclosed upon by William N. Coler, for non-payment of a promissory note signed two years earlier by former owner, Michael Courtney. On December 30, 1861 John Thornburn and his wife Anna purchased the home, and lived in it for about six years. The Thornburns were from England and came to Urbana around 1859. Mr. Thornburn was a successful farmer, and he is best known for donating the land at the intersection of Springfield and McCullough streets for the 1896 Urbana High School, also known as Thornburn School in honor of him. For twelve years, Mr. Thornburn was commissioner of highways, in which position he was responsible for laying out nearly all the highways and building all the bridges in Urbana township. The Thornburns sold their house on September 18, 1867 to minister Nathan S. Morris, who kept it for four years but did not reside in it.

On August 18, 1871 Nathan S. and Matilda Morris sold the property to Jane



*The Lindley House was built in 1895 from designs of Urbana architect, Rudolph Z. Gill.*

E. Hubbard, wife of Thomas S. Hubbard, successful Urbana businessman. The Hubbards lived next door, at 310 W. Green Street. Mr. Hubbard, a Connecticut Yankee, graduated from Yale University in 1849, and married Jane E. Woodruff, daughter of Dr. Willys Woodruff, prominent physician of Meriden, Connecticut, the same year. The couple moved to Urbana in 1854, and the following year Mr. Hubbard opened Champaign County's first banking business on Urbana's Main Street. Subsequently, he established a highly successful hardware and tinware store, Hubbard & Sons, on the SW corner of Main Street and Crane Alley. Mr. Hubbard was an Urbana alderman for eight years, and both he and his wife were founding members of the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana (602 W. Green Street), which was established in 1856. Champaign County historian, Judge Joseph O. Cunningham, noted that before the church could afford a regular pastor, Mr. Hubbard was instrumental in inviting visiting preachers, whom he had entertained in his home to such an extent that his house became known among the pioneers as "The Preacher's Hotel."

On March 1, 1895, Jane and Thomas Hubbard deeded the corner lot at 312 W. Green Street to their daughter, Minnie, except for the north thirty-three feet with the barn which housed the horses and carriages for Mr. Hubbard's downtown business. Their daughter, Minnie, who was born on March 13, 1858, married Dr. Austin M. Lindley, Urbana physician and surgeon, on November 17, 1886. Austin was born on September 18, 1856, in Frederickstown, Ohio, the oldest child of Dr. Mahlon Lindley and Salome Meyer.

His parents came to Urbana in 1857, and his father was one of the city's early physicians. Austin grew up in Urbana, and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1878. Two years later he received his medical degree from the Cincinnati College of Medicine and Surgery, after which he became associated with his father in the practice of medicine. They worked together in their private office at 119 W. Main Street for forty-one years. Austin Lindley also served as the surgeon of the Big Four Railroad Company for more than fifty years, and was the president of the Urbana Board of Health for many years. Both Minnie and Austin Lindley were members of the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana, and they were both musically talented. Mrs. Lindley played the church organ for years. She was also interested in all musical activities as a young woman, and with her husband playing the flute participated in many musical productions. Although the Lindleys had no children of their own, they raised Minnie's niece, Ida Insley Fisher, from the age of five, and a nephew, Austin Hubbard, also lived with them for several years.

After Minnie's parents deeded the lot at 312 W. Green street to them, the couple immediately set about erecting a new home. As architect, they hired Rudolph Z. Gill, son of Zachariah E. Gill, early Urbana carpenter-designer and contractor who was known as the builder of most of the early brick buildings in Urbana. Rudolph was a graduate of the University of Illinois (1887), and had formerly worked with noted Chicago architects Holabird and Roche. He designed the Urbana (Thornburn) High School, the city halls in Danville and Monticello, and many of the finest Urbana business buildings and residences. The construction of the Lindley's elegant and expensive residence, built at the cost of \$6,000, was closely followed by the local newspapers. The September 21, 1895 issue of the *Champaign Daily Gazette* reported: "Dr. Lindley has overlooked nothing to make this a home of convenience and comfort. The house was provided with gas, electric lights, steam heat, bathroom, speaking tubes, and in fact everything that tends to complete a first class, up-to-date, modern home." A month later the *Urbana Weekly Courier* wrote: "the mansion is a subject of envy and speaks well for Dr. Lindley's business success." The home's first floor was used as Dr. Lindley's office, and the second floor as



the family residence. The Lindleys lived out their lives in their stately home, and both died in that home - Dr. Lindley on September 13, 1932, and Mrs. Lindley on May 15, 1935. Mrs. Lindley willed the house with the back barn and her parents' house next door to her niece, Ida Insley Fisher, whom they had raised.

After Mrs. Lindley's death, Ida Insley Fisher, who was a graduate of the University of Illinois (1915), and her husband, Guy Fisher, postal carrier, became the home's new residents for the next fifteen years. The Fishers were both in their early 40's when they moved into 312 W. Green Street, and were the parents of one son, Austin. On March 25, 1950 they sold the house to John M. and Grace Grobb, and moved into the former home of Ida's grandparents next door, at 310 W. Green. Two months later, on May 22, 1950, Mr. Fisher died of a sudden heart attack in their new home. Mrs. Fisher outlived him by twenty-three years.

The new owners of 312 W. Green Street, John M. and Grace V. Grobb, former Florida residents, moved into the house, and Mr. Grobb, who was an interior decorator, also operated his business from it. Anticipating their move back to Florida, the Grobbs sold their house in February 1959 to Walter A. and Eleanor A. Bennett, Jr., and Joseph R. and Lou M. Laughlin. The new owners used the house as a gift shop called "Crossroads," and resided elsewhere in Urbana. In February 1974, Donald B. and Dorris M. Dunn became the new owners. The Duns had extensively renovated the house, and converted it to office space. They operated Crossroads Real Estate Co. on the first floor, and rented the second floor to law offices. The barn in the back was also put to vari-

ous commercial uses at this time.

In June 1986, the property became home to a non-profit music school, the Conservatory of Central Illinois, which was started by University of Illinois music instructors, Claude and Ian Hobbson and Roger Brown. In 1995, the property was put on the market, advertised as "tear-down."

Urbana businesswoman Carolyn Baxley and her husband Norman Baxley purchased the building. Mrs. Baxley restored the house and converted it to a bed and breakfast, which she named the Lindley House in honor of its first owners. In 2003, the property was sold to Silvia and Ernie Sullivan, who continue to operate it as a bed and breakfast, and use the carriage house as their home.

#### Unitarian Universalist Church 309 West Green Street

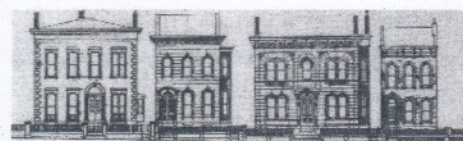
This English Gothic style building was constructed in 1913-14 on top of the brick foundation of an earlier sanctuary built at this location. The first sanctuary was a two-story brick building erected in 1870-71 by a group of Universalists who had been meeting as a congregation since 1859. The 1870 cornerstone can still be seen in the north wall of the basement. Noted Urbana architect, Joseph W. Royer designed the present building. Mr. Royer was an Urbana native and UI graduate (1895); between 1898-1906 he worked as Urbana City Engineer. He was the designer of a number of important public buildings in Urbana, among them the Champaign County Courthouse, the Urbana High School, the Urbana Free Library, the Urbana Post Office, and the Urbana-Lincoln Hotel. He also had experience as a church architect, having designed the second sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana (dedicated 1902, replaced 1964). The present



*The Unitarian-Universalist Church was built in 1913 from the design of Urbana architect, Joseph Royer.*

Unitarian-Universalist sanctuary was built of Bedford stone with a slate roof. Interior wood pews, rostrum, and rafters are oak, and the design is typical of the turn-of-the-century Arts and Crafts era. The leaded stained glass is Tiffany in style. Over time, the original rose window deteriorated, and in 1963 was redesigned as a spectrum of colors which radiate out from a changeable enter. The colored glass was imported from France and set in the original woodwork. The modern east wing addition, housing offices, classrooms, and meeting space was built in 1963-64.

*This article was expanded from the tour brochure research principally done by Ilona Matkovski with help from Brian Adams and Perry Morris.*



## P.A.C.A. MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

- ☐ Adult \$15
- ☐ Student \$10
- ☐ Senior Citizen \$10
- ☐ Family \$20
- ☐ Corporate \$75

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MAKE CHECKS PAYABLE TO PACA

**Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.**



## Landmarks Illinois

Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) has changed its name to *Landmarks Illinois*. The group celebrated its thirty-fifth anniversary this year. The new name is intended to help the group to increase statewide interest in historic preservation with an even broader audience. The acronym, LPCI, will remain the same as will their website: landmarks.org.

## Heritage Award Nominations Needed

The Heritage Award Committee is seeking nominations for the 2006-2007 Heritage Awards. Last year's awards were delayed due to the 25th Anniversary celebration. Award categories include residential, commercial, institutional, landscape, and landmark projects. Special Heritage Awards are also given to individuals/groups who have worked to preserve a special aspect of our heritage or who have advanced the cause of historic preservation in our community. The nomination process is easy; a form is enclosed with this newsletter or can be picked up at the salvage warehouse. Self nominations are encouraged.

## Board Nominations Sought

Board members Richard Cahill and Robert Nemeth will be leaving the PACA board at the next Annual Meeting. If you would like to help develop PACA policies and programs, please contact us for more information about serving on the Board of Directors. New terms will start in April and run for three years. Board meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month starting at 7 pm.

**Preservation Matters: newsletter of the Preservation and Conservation Association**  
P.O. Box 2575, Station A, Champaign, IL 61825

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Tom Garza  
Bob Ringler  
Ben Ringler  
Dave Puckett

## Gordyville Antique Show VIPS

*PACA thanks the following for their set-up and staffing help at the PACA information booth.*

Bob Swisher  
Betty Swisher  
Judy Gratkins  
Neil Lasater  
Kathy Reeves  
Elisabeth Jenicek  
Jerry Schmidt  
Ann Schmidt  
Tedra Ashley-Wannemuehler  
Suzanne Ashley-Wannemuehler  
Susan Frobish  
Dan Leasure

*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.*

## New & Renewing Memberships

(received since the last newsletter)

### Charter Members (1981-1983)

Anne A. Ehrlich  
Rex & Karen Kummer  
Mary Blair

### Fantastic Supporters (Over Twenty Year Members)

Alice Berkson

### Eleven to Twenty Year Members

Victoria Corkery  
David & Jan Sholem  
Sheryl & Joe DeBarr  
Bruce & Colleen Brodie

### Five to Ten Year Members

Donald Walden  
Bill & Blaney Bogner  
Tim Kinkead  
The Pawn Shop (Corporate)  
Fran Turquette  
Bill Rauwolf  
Darcy & Kelly Bean

### One to Four Year Members

Clifton & Laura Bergeron  
Brett & Holly Barnhart  
Douglas Brewer & Ann Hutflies  
Michael Moynihan  
Rita & William Trankina  
Kathleen Jones  
Kris Stauffer

### New Members

Katherine Couch  
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Rob Parker & Linda Evans  
Richard L. Sumption  
James D. Marshall  
Scott & Jeanne Martin



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and Architecture of Champaign County**