



PRESERVATION MATTERS

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 29

JANUARY-FEBRUARY, 2009

NUMBER 1

Mumford House A Preservation Success!

At their March 11, 2009 meeting, the University of Illinois Board of Trustees affirmed that the historic Mumford House would not be moved. This decision was the outcome of the groundswell of support for keeping the house on its original site organized by PACA, Landmarks Illinois (LPCI), concerned alumni, and the community at large. The grassroots campaign succeeded!

The Issue

Last year, Facilities and Services at the University of Illinois, revealed a plan to relocate Mumford House (1870), the oldest building on campus, from its central South Quad location to a new site near the corner of South Race Street and Windsor Road - a move of about two miles. Previously, the Mumford Barn (1880) and one chicken laying house (1925) had been moved to the same location from the historic Poultry Farm to make way for new tennis courts. The plan was to create a College of Agriculture Visitors Center and agricultural museum at the far eastern edge of the South Farms. However, funding for the center and museum is not in place and the house would languish until the projected \$2 million was raised.

Although a visitors center is a commendable project, its implementation using significant historic structures was not well thought out. Moving historic buildings should only be the choice of last resort when no other option is available. That was not true with Mumford House, which is not in the way of any planned building, but was only being moved for open space and to complete an idea for a "Military Axis." Since the 1909 campus plan showed a bell tower on the South Quad (the recently completed MacFarland Memorial Bell Tower) and did not show Mumford House, an argument was made that the

Mumford House, the oldest building on the UIUC campus (1870), will remain on its original site thanks to a successful state-wide grassroots campaign.



house should go. However, numerous campus plans beginning in 1905 (Blackall Plan), continuing with the 1922 plan (Platt Plan), and through a series of modern era plans, rarely, if ever, have included the Mumford House, the Morrow Plots, or the Observatory. Nevertheless, they have remained.

An argument was also made that the historic context of the house was gone, as it was no longer surrounded by farm outbuildings and fields. However, that only reinforces the significance of Mumford House's original location. Little is left from the early years of that original agricultural campus. Two remnants remain: the National Historic Landmark Morrow Plots and the National Register of Historic Places Mumford House. They are the tangible reminders of the University's agrarian foundation. Once surrounded by farm buildings, Mumford House now sits in the midst of monumental buildings. But historic context is constantly changing. The Chicago Water Tower, built the same year as Mumford House, is now surrounded by shopping malls and high rise towers. Yet it is celebrated as a significant landmark in Chicago's history. In St. Louis, the Old

Cathedral (1834) and the Old Court-house (1839) are bordered by interstate highways and the 1966 St. Louis Arch. But they are important parts of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial Park.

Public Law "707"

Since Mumford House is a state resource and state monies would be involved in its move, the Illinois State Agency Historic Resources Preservation Act (Public Act 86-707) came into force. This law ("707"), requires that any state action which affects a historic resource or involves state funds or permits be reviewed by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) for its effect on that resource and seeks a way to mitigate that effect. The UI and IHPA have been involved in this review process for many years. Since state money is involved in virtually all building and rehabilitation projects on campus, review should be standard. However, for various reasons, including changes in university administrators, the review process has not always been followed in recent years.

Most reviews are handled quickly and efficiently if enough information is supplied to IHPA in a timely manner. Others,

