A View From The Cupola

The high cupola of a nineteenth century house provides a unique perspective of our surroundings. Let us, figuratively, climb the stairs into the fanciful architectural logogram of the Preservation and Conservation Association of Champaign County and observe the changing landscape that surrounds us.

We are first impressed by the green of the tree-tops catching the sunlight, and peacefully changing hue in waves with the breeze and cloud shadows. Breaking the surface in every direction rooftops, towers, and entire buildings punctuate the ongoing revolution in our built environment.

Dramatic construction is evident in the downtown areas, with massive new banking buildings, sprawling criminal justice facilities, parking facilities, even a hotel addition. In other parts of our communities, new offices, laboratories, stores, hospital additions, and a few new homes seem to belie our talk of hard times. We also see unused stores, abandoned schools, have-been gas stations, and empty restaurants ripening for recycling.

The current recession seems to have given us no respite from the process of environmental change. We continue to tear down the old and build the new—and some of each is good. But, bit by bit, our progress-hungry society eats away at many of those things that lend character to the places we know. What can be done about these losses? What is PACA doing about them?

As the current board president, I would like to tell what PACA members can expect from our association—to state goals and hopes for the future. I shall have to do that primarily in personal terms, suggesting possible directions for us all to consider rather than stating officially adopted policy. But before we look ahead, a backward glance at PACA’s first year will give us a base for optimism.

Under Karen Miller’s able leadership, we did a good bit to advance the appreciation and care of our built heritage through walking tours, speakers’ bureau, The Old Houseworks TV series, the Urbana workshops, and in many other ways. Our members were involved in the saving of key buildings, and in saving pieces of buildings, and the groundwork was laid for the establishment of a preservation revolving fund. PACA has become an active voice in the development of Champaign County’s future.

Much is yet to be done. Ideas for useful projects abound, but as our resources in both people and money are limited, choices will need to be made. To continue building environmental awareness, we are planning more tours (in Urbana and elsewhere) and more frequent communications to inform people about preservation events and sites in our communities worth keeping. We hope within the next year to make the Revolving Loan Fund a reality with funding from more than one of the grant applications we have submitted. We hope to reach each member of the association for involvement in PACA activities, and are indeed fortunate to have Karen Kummer as our Executive Director to help coordinate the volunteer efforts that make PACA run.

PACA is not alone in its interest in preservation and related matters. I feel our effectiveness will grow as we cooperate with other organizations; sharing our concerns, not just locally, but statewide and nationally. There are new opportunities with Federal income tax credits, and pending Illinois legislation for property tax incentives which can greatly help local rehabilitation efforts. Access to the new benefits for property owners requires action by local governments to identify and recognize areas and buildings worth keeping. I foresee our association taking a vital role in the (continued next page)
CUPOLA continued

coming year helping both Champaign and Urbana, some villages, and perhaps the County to qualify as Certified Local Governments under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1980. PACA’s assistance will insure that these governments have active, informed voices in preserving the heritage and shaping the future of our communities. We need your help.

Lachlan F. Blair
President, PACA

THE STRONGEST INCENTIVE EVER SEEN

President Reagan and Secretary Watt, last year supported and helped pass what Michael L. Ainslie, President of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, calls, “the most important new incentives for historic preservation we have ever seen in this country.” The provision for a 25% tax credit for “certified rehabilitation” is an important part of the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981. It is clear evidence of the commitment of our national government to stimulate the retention and improvement of older buildings by means of a public-private partnership approach.

The new law, effective last January first, allows three levels of investment tax credits (ITC) for the costs of substantial rehabilitation: 15% for buildings over thirty years old; 20% for those over forty years; and 25% for historic buildings listed on the National Register of Historic Places or located within a historic district either nationally or locally authorized. The rehab expense must exceed $5,000 or the adjusted tax basis of the property, whichever is greater. The property must be income-producing, limiting the 15% and 20% ITC’s to commercial and industrial uses. However, the 25% ITC may be applied to residential structures as well. The tax credit is deducted from the amount of taxes owed, and may be carried over into future years.

The result of the new ITC provisions is a tremendous surge of interest in private investment in older structures, expected by the National Park Service to exceed $5 billion next year. Developers are fast learning that “saving old buildings is now the greatest thing going in real estate,” according to a leading Chicago tax attorney. There are some constraints, however—the building must be certified by the State Historic Preservation Officer, and for the 25% credit, the rehabilitation must meet the standards and guidelines of the Secretary of the Interior. The 25% credit can be deducted from the adjusted basis of the property, but the 15% and 20% credits cannot. The Tax Act also has provisions affecting amortization and recapture which vary with the particular situation of the taxpayer or property, making it essential that expert accounting and legal advice be sought.

In Champaign County we have many buildings thirty and forty years old and older suitable for rehabilitation with 15% and 20% investment tax credits. There are only eight historic county properties listed on the National Register today, and only three of these are in or soon to be in private ownership, eligible for the 25% ITC. Many more could become eligible for the credit by inclusion in historic districts.

Although several historic districts have been suggested in Urbana, Champaign, and some of the County’s villages, none has yet been officially recognized. There are nearly 1000 such districts throughout the nation, and over fifty within Illinois. Decatur has a district with more than 1000 eligible buildings in it. Identification and certification of a historic district or districts in Champaign County is needed if local investors are to share the opportunities introduced by the Economic Recovery Act of 1981.

UCDC SEMINAR

The Preservation and Conservation Association has just completed presenting a series of six seminars on neighborhood conservation. The goal of these seminars was to present a program to employees of the City of Urbana which would assist them in improving their performance, while broadening their background and knowledge of important architectural, technological and historical aspects of the City of Urbana. In addition, the program was designed to acquaint the participants with new and updated operational methods and techniques which may be applicable to their fields of endeavor.

This program was made possible by a grant from the Urbana Community Development Subgrantee Program. The City felt the need to be more aware of preservation needs in its activities.

The training program consisted of six three-hour sessions held on Friday afternoons at the Webber School or the Urbana Free Library. Approximately twelve City employees, as well as interested individuals from the general public, attended from February through June. PACA provided the instructors and the instructional materials, and obtained the rights for re-use of course material for similar programs. The training program operated much like an intensive University class with proposed activities for each session.

The first session provided the rationale for neighborhood conservation and a background of the historic development of the county, city, and specific neighborhoods in Urbana. The fundamentals and techniques of historic preservation were covered in the next two workshops as preparation for a field survey which was conducted by participants during the fourth session. Findings and survey methods were evaluated in the fifth meeting and
means of implementing the findings for rehabilitation and tax credits were presented. The final workshop evaluated the role of neighborhood conservation and historic preservation in the context of the city development programs. Participants were given an opportunity to evaluate the series and certificates of completion were awarded. The material provided during the course was kept in notebook form, and incorporated into standard training activities for City employees.

Instructors for the project were individuals from the University of Illinois and the Champaign-Urbana Community including architects, urban planners, architectural historians and library archivists. Other guest instructors included Mr. Bruce E. Lynch, Architectural Conservator from Evanston, Illinois and Ms. Patricia M. O'Donnell, Architectural Historian from St. Louis, Mo.

The program was received quite well and was worth the time and energy expended by the PACA members and City employees who participated. PACA is presently studying future areas where similar programs can be initiated.

NATIONAL TRUST THREATENED

The National Trust for Historic Preservation may become an "endangered species" if Interior Secretary James Watt has his way. He has recommended that state preservation programs and the National Trust be cut from the federal budget beginning in 1983. Federal grants are used by state offices to identify and nominate buildings to the National Register of Historic Sites, to review federal projects which affect historic sites, and to certify property rehabilitations for the new federal tax credits.

The National Trust, which receives 43% of its operating budget from the Historic Preservation Fund, was established by Congress as a private-sector organization to help government save and protect our nation's landmark heritage. It actively rescues and protects significant properties, provides direct assistance to over 800 communities annually, and is helping to revitalize downtowns and inner-city neighborhoods through consulting and funding programs. In addition, the National Trust is the national advocate for preservation—to the federal government, through lobbying and advocacy of preservation principles in the courts—to the populace, through public education and the encouragement of private involvement and investment in preservation.

The loss of federal funding will cripple the work of the National Trust and preservation efforts nationwide. "Preservation is not a luxury to be discarded in these hard-economic times; it is part of the solution to the problems of unemployment, poor housing, blighted and depressed inner cities, declining small towns and energy conservation." (Alan S. Boyd, Chairman, Board of Directors National Trust for Historic Preservation)

You can help by calling or writing your Representative and Senators today and telling them about the benefits of preservation and the importance of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. If you are interested in helping the Trust by becoming a member, please contact Karen Kummer or a PACA board member.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

INDIVIDUAL

□ Adult ........................................ $10.00
□ Student (1/2 time or more) ................. $ 5.00
□ Family (includes all members of a household with no more than two members being over age 21) ..................... $15.00
□ Additional Contribution

CIVIC

□ Over 100 members .......................... $100.00
□ 50-100 members .......................... $ 75.00
□ Up to 50 members .......................... $50.00

CORPORATE

□ ................................................ $ 50.00

□ RENEWAL  □ NEW MEMBERSHIP

NAME

ADDRESS  Street  State  Zip

Make check payable to: PACA, Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820.
Home Renovation Workshops
PACA, the Champaign County Historical Museum, and the Urbana Park District are sponsoring a series of "hands-on" workshops on home renovation techniques at the Greek Revival Cottage. The series will begin September 11 and run for six Saturdays from 9:00 AM to Noon. Cost will be $60 ($50 for members of sponsoring organizations). Class size will be limited to ten. Register at the Champaign County Museum.

Rantoul "Little" House
PACA helped St. Malachy’s Church in Rantoul find a new owner for the Little House, which presently stands on property needed by the church for expansion of its school. After a tour of the house by several PACA members, newspaper and television coverage was arranged to publicize the availability of this "free" house. Twelve people contacted the church as a result, and a Rantoul contractor, Kenneth Roessler, was awarded title to the house. He will move the house soon and plans to restore it for commercial use. He hopes to have it placed on the National Register.

Old Houseworks Sponsorship
PACA and Architectural Spectrum’s co-sponsorship of the Old Houseworks program on WILL-TV ended June 12. Anyone interested in sponsoring this program should contact the station. Cost is $24 per program.

New Board Member
The Board of Directors welcomes Jim Mathien. Jim was recently selected to fill the one year term vacated by Kent Stanford. Jim is already actively involved in the formation of the PACA Revolving Fund.

Urbana Walking Tour
Plans are under way for a walking tour of the original nine square blocks of Urbana. The tours will take place during Urbana Historic Week in October. Guided and self-guided tours are being planned by Mark Replogle’s committee.

Tax Incentive Conference.
PACA will be co-sponsoring a half day seminar on preservation tax credits to be presented October 12 or 13. The sessions, which are being presented in cooperation with the Champaign County Board of Realtors and the Champaign and Urbana Chambers of Commerce will present the new tax law and case studies to people working in real estate and investment. Contact Karen Kummer for more information.

Darkroom
We would like to add quality photographs to the newsletter. If anyone has a darkroom or access to a darkroom that could be used by the newsletter editor for black and white processing, please call Michael Lambert at 352-4766.

PACA COMMITTEES
PACA is continually looking for members to serve on various committees or to volunteer for specific activities. Please indicate what your interests are and how you would be willing to help.

FINANCE
MEMBERSHIP
NEWSLETTER/PUBLICITY
PROGRAM (purpose is to arrange programs for meetings of members and community groups)

Specific activities of interest:
initiate ideas
type
television
survey neighborhoods
organize a neighborhood association
give accounting advice
solicit funds

SALVAGE
SPECIAL PROJECTS
(a troubleshooting committee)
TOUR (purpose is to develop, research and conduct tours in the county)

do research
do physical work
provide transportation
provide a vehicle
contact public officials
give legal advice
other (explain)

NAME:

PHONE NUMBER:
The Cattle Bank—in the recent past, a dilapidated commercial building in a deteriorated section of town; at present, a construction site; and in the near future, a key piece in the revitalization of historic "West Urbana." The exterior restoration of this 125 year old building is nearly completed, stabilizing it for interior renovation, and for posterity. New wood shingle roofing with copper flashing and gutters, replacement wood trim and windows, and the fully restored masonry surface will be unveiled at the removal of the pedestrian barrier that surrounds the building.

Proposed interior plans, which include the joining of the adjacent Oakley Building with the Cattle Bank, are in the design development stage. The creation of new door openings in their shared wall on the first and second floors will provide additional usable floor area. All mechanical systems will be located in the Oakley Building.

PACA helped private developers Leon Jeske and Edward Haas to acquire the building from the City of Champaign and continues to serve as consultant. Members Bill Schmidt, Greg Hargus, and Bruce Hannon have been meeting weekly with the developers, and will continue to do so through the period of the grant from the Illinois Department of Conservation. A photographic record of the restoration is being made, and these slides and video tapes will be used as educational tools by PACA. Board members reviewed the slide presentation at a recent meeting in the Cattle Bank.

The Champaign City Council is currently considering proposals by the developers and PACA to restore the sidewalks around the building to their original appearance. The proposed changes include the installation of wood plank sidewalks and electrified replicas of the gas lights that were once used on Champaign streets. Nearby business owners have also shown an interest in the proposals.

The Cattle Bank project has been a valuable learning experience for the developers, the City, and PACA. It is proof that private enterprise and public interest can work together to bring about adaptive reuse of historic landmarks and aid in the renewal of deteriorated neighborhoods. It is, hopefully, the beginning of a long and continually more sensitive approach to the preservation and protection of our heritage.

PACA HIRES EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The Preservation and Conservation Association’s first year of activity in Champaign County has brought an increasing load of correspondence and administrative duties that require prompt attention. The Board of Directors is pleased to announce the appointment of Karen Lang Kummer to the newly created position of Executive Director. Karen has her Masters Degree in Architectural History from the University of Virginia, with an emphasis on historic preservation. She has worked with the Historic Richmond Foundation, a non-profit organization; and the Virginia Historic Landmarks (continued next page)
Commission. She is currently setting up a private consulting business to do research and complete National Register nominations for private and city developers.

The duties of Executive Director, as defined by the Board, include maintaining official records; preparing reports, correspondence, and grant applications; researching funding sources, legislation, and preservation tools; acting as a representative of the association at meetings and conferences of local, state, and federal agencies and organizations; as well as coordinating volunteer activities.

Karen sees the job as an opportunity to educate the community about the benefits of historic preservation. She feels that Champaign needs to catch up with the rest of Illinois in terms of involvement in preservation. She is surprised at the lack of interest and activity in this area, especially with the presence of the University of Illinois' fine architecture school. She is excited by the challenge of helping PACA to become a vital part of the County's development.

Karen is already busy monitoring the preservation scene and collecting resources to serve as references for PACA members. She is helping to coordinate the committee activities and is taking on much of the burden of PACA's day-to-day business. Members are welcome to contact Karen directly with questions, suggestions, or resources; and especially if they are interested in volunteering on PACA projects. Phone 359-7404 or write PACA, Box 2555 Station A, Champaign 61820.