



## PRESERVATION MATTERS

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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### Unraveling the Mysteries in Two Vintage Photographs

By Mark Chenail

Recently I was given a tattered envelope marked "Old Photos of Champaign," contained a handful of negatives. A friend kindly printed them for me, and most of them turned out to be quite ordinary and recognizable images from around Champaign, probably taken in the late '40s. Two of the photographs, however, presented a bit of a mystery. Neither pictured building looked familiar, but at the same time their locations did seem familiar.

#### A Fashionable Address

One photograph depicted a large, three-story wooden apartment building on a sunny street with large shade trees. The apartments appear to have been rather good-sized. Each one boasted a spacious, airy porch on the front and a profusion of big windows. The roof line was rather odd as it seemed to consist of parallel gambrel roofs, like two small barns, set side by side, pierced by a collection of gables and topped by an attic. The upper porches also seemed to be someone's afterthought. They had posts and trim that did not match the detailing on the first floor porch, and they seemed to have been built on the roof of what had originally been a single-story veranda. I had no idea where the building was until I noticed the building to its left. Surely, that bay window and towering stone façade must be the parish hall of the Methodist Church at State and



*Large, airy, and somewhat odd: an architectural enigma on Church Street, sometime during the 1940s.*

Church streets. Perhaps this apartment house had been located where the education wing of the church, built in the '60s, is now located. The apartments looked as if they dated to the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, so I first took a look at the Sanborn map for 1897. According to that map, there was a single-family dwelling at that location, 208 W. Church, and working backward through the maps revealed that it had been there as far back as 1887. Back then, before the parish hall was built, the jeweler L.C. Garwood lived next door at 210 W. Church. The neighbor to the east at 206 was Francis T. Walker, the principal owner of the Walker Furniture Co., a well established Champaign

firm. Obviously this was a fashionable address. Eventually I found a listing for 208: Mrs. Almira Roberts, widow of Alonzo. I have no idea what Mr. Roberts may have done for a living, but I do not suppose he was the TV weatherman well known to several generations born in 20<sup>th</sup> century Champaign-Urbana.

Next I checked the Sanborn map for 1902. The single-family house was gone from 208 and the apartment house was there. The city directory shows that it was known as the Hessel Apartments, and it was occupied by Mrs. Mary Hessel, the widow of Gustavus Hessel, who had run a large harness and carriage business

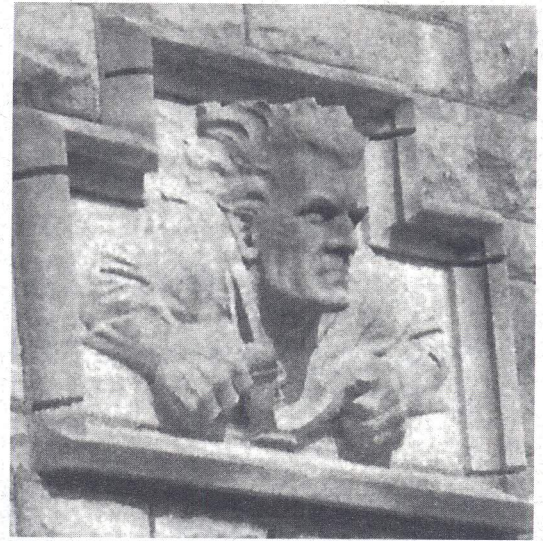
on Main Street. Mrs. Hessel remained in residence there for many years, and upon her death her place was taken by her son, Frank Hessel. Throughout the years, the Hessel was home to a number of prominent Champaign families. Residents included Charles Gulick, the merchant tailor; Samuel Shattuck, a mathematics professor and later Chief Business Manager at the U of I; and George Davidson, whose family had developed Champaign's first gated community—Davidson Park. Probably in the late '30s or early '40s the old large apartments were subdivided, and the building housed as many as 10 families in the years just before World War II. The address was still "respectable," but the tenants appear to have come from more middle- and working-class families. A housepainter, a dressmaker, and a large collection of widows shared the Hessel during those years. According to the 1950 city directory, by mid-century the Hessel had 28 apartments on its four floors and basement, so it must have been bursting at the seams. Finally, in 1957, the Methodist congregation bought the building and tore it down to make room for their new education wing.

### Near "the Other Side of the Tracks"

The second photo depicted a less-fashionable address. The building was

already derelict, judging by the broken windows on both stories. The adjacent houses look to be in rather poor shape, and the entire view seems to be a jumble of railroad tracks, utility poles, and weeds. Add to the desolate ambiance is what appears to be an old-style gasworks looming in the background. With the use of a glass I was able to read the faded sign on the building: THE ILLINOIS CUT STONE CO. The city directory revealed that this company was located at 305 N. Wright Street, hard by the Big 4 tracks. There was indeed a gasworks in the next block, at Fifth and Church. An aerial view of the area gives an idea of the location and the remarkable size of the building. That's the old St. Mary's School and Church in the foreground, with Illinois Cut Stone being farthest background at the top.

Coincidentally, I happened to know a bit about the Illinois Cut Stone Co. It was founded in 1904 by John W. Hoadley and managed by Otto Graf. By World War I, Graf owned the company in partnership with G.W. Swenson, and it was doing a lively business in fine architectural work for many prominent buildings in Champaign and at the University of



*The Greystone Apartments garage, watched over by the "mad driver" shown above, was hewn piece by piece at the Illinois Stone Co.*

Illinois. The company did a good deal of work for George Ramey, particularly in the middle and late '20s when Ramey was designing and building sorority and fraternity houses by the dozens. Perhaps the best known example of Graf and Swenson's work is the Greystone Apartment Building, 107 S. Wright. The Greystone was built in 1924 to keep Swenson's workmen busy during a slow business period. It is a marvelous three-story building of fine cut stone with faintly Gothic and Elizabethan detail work. The Swenson family lived in the large first-floor apartment, and there were four comfortable apartments on the upper floor. The best-known part of the Greystone complex is probably the garage, a delightful folly embellished with a fine cut stone relief on the front façade. It depicts a wild-eyed, windblown driver clutching his steering wheel with white-knuckled intensity. This bit of whimsy has amused passersby for decades. The Greystone is now a designated Champaign landmark, but the immense stone works where it was created disappeared long ago.

Luckily for us, both the Hessel Apartments and the Illinois Cut Stone Co. will be remembered thanks to two faded photographic negatives found one day at the back of an old desk drawer.



*Where stones were chiseled into art and history, falling into ruin, early 1950s.*

## Volunteer Spotlight

### Benny and Lori Dow

Benny and Lori Dow first became acquainted with PACA in 2003 while searching for hardware for a bathroom cabinet they were designing. Not finding it in the warehouse, the Dows were told there might be something of interest to be found at a salvage operation in Urbana — a luxury apartment building slated for demolition. They joined the crew and did find the hardware they were looking for along with an interest in volunteering for PACA. The couple also has a family room displaying vintage oak floorboards reclaimed from that project.

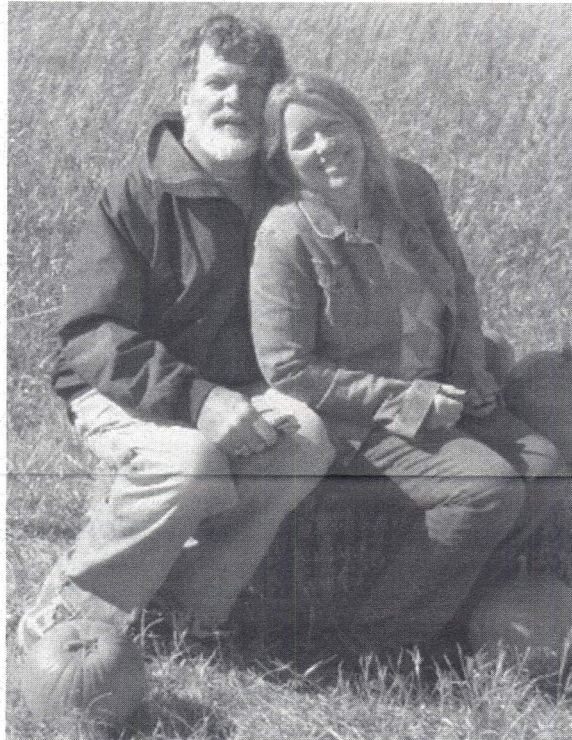
Over the past year, Benny and Lori have been able to dedicate more time to volunteering. "We enjoy the friends and the people we meet every week," Benny says. In April, Benny elevated his involvement in PACA by becoming one of three new volunteers named to serve on the Board of Directors.

Benny is a native of Effingham, and was raised in Newton and Cowden, Ill. Lori was born in Galesburg but grew up in Champaign

and, during high school, Effingham. The two were introduced by a mutual friend in 1974, and events brought both to Champaign within a year. Benny started his career at Kraft in August 1975 and has worked there ever since. They married in October 1975. Lori has worked since 1978, first at Colwell Systems, then Deluxe, and now Patterson Dental. The Dows have two married daughters, Jennifer (husband Mark Hubert) and Stacy (husband Jamie Shotkoski), and they boast three grandkids with a fourth due

in August. Stacy's husband, Jamie, is currently on a tour of duty in Iraq.

The Dows are motor vehicle enthusiasts who enjoy NASCAR events and drag racing. They also own a Harley and a classic 1970 Chevelle SS, which are life-size additions to Benny's more compact collections of model cars and vintage "Redline" Hot Wheels. Lori started as a "forgiving wife," indulging Benny's delight in collecting. But over time she has taken to collecting things herself, such as home improvement projects. That is, each time she comes home from PACA or a salvage operation she has material for another project. But after 22 years of remodeling their house in Mahomet, the Dows are not quite finished: they still need to build the bathroom cabinet to go with the hardware they brought home from PACA seven years ago!



*Benny and Lori, relaxing with the pumpkins.*

### Editor's Note

#### About Preservation Matters

You may have noticed that the publishing schedule for *Preservation Matters* has been irregular this year. Our "transition pains" have been caused by a complete change in newsletter editorial and production staff. Speaking as the new editor, I will make every effort to return the newsletter to a regular publishing schedule. I also intend to explore ways to make the content even more lively and relevant to the interests of PACA members. —Gordon Cohen, Editor

## MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

# PACA

Box 2575, STATION A CHAMPAIGN, IL 61825

### MEMBERSHIP STATUS

- New       Renewal

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

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

- I wish to include an additional contribution of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

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**Note:** Please make your check payable to PACA. Your contribution is tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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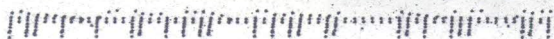
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# New PACA members and membership renewals

Malia Andrus (New)  
 Joseph Bohn (New)  
 Robert Grossman (New)  
 John Karduck (New)  
 James Keating (New)  
 Kirk and Kalah McGraw (New)  
 Lee and Phil Solter (New)  
 Upper Sangamon River Conservancy (New)  
 Jill Wesch (New)  
 Jessica Paris and Jeffrey Wickliffe (New)  
 Joanna Maria Zawada (New)  
 Capel and Martin (Renewal)  
 Allen and Elaine Avner (Renewal)  
 Dick and Carol Betts (Renewal)  
 Bill and Blaney Bogner (Renewal)  
 Jeannie Covert (Renewal)  
 Claire and Brian Deal (Renewal)  
 Scotty R. Dossett (Renewal)

Thomas Fehrmann (Renewal)  
 Al Friederich (Renewal)  
 Bill Gudauskas (Renewal)  
 Mitch and Frances Harris (Renewal)  
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 Jessica Howen (Renewal)  
 Eric and Naomi Jakobsson (Renewal)  
 Nanette Koerner (Renewal)  
 Isotech Laboratories, INC. (Renewal)  
 Ralph Langenheim (Renewal)  
 Steve Leonberger (Renewal)  
 Ann Lowry (Renewal)  
 Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Maddox (Renewal)  
 Michelle Martin (Renewal)  
 Dan McCulley (Renewal)  
 Steve Mechling (Renewal)  
 Jeffrey Mellander (Renewal)  
 Mr. and Mrs. George A. Miley (Renewal)

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 Perry C. Morris (Renewal)  
 Dan Niven (Renewal)  
 Rick Orr (Renewal)  
 Mr. Gary Peters (Renewal)  
 Jennifer Hines Rob Krumm Family (Renewal)  
 Louis and Trina Simpson (Renewal)  
 Sharen R. Slade (Renewal)  
 Greg and Vicky Smith (Renewal)  
 Meg Miner and Janis Sober (Renewal)  
 Shirley Stillinger (Renewal)  
 Bob and Betty Swisher (Renewal)  
 Susan Taylor (Renewal)  
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 Nancy Uchtmann (Renewal)  
 Susan and Dave Warner (Renewal)  
 Ruth Wyman (Renewal)  
 Louisette Zuidema (Renewal)



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