



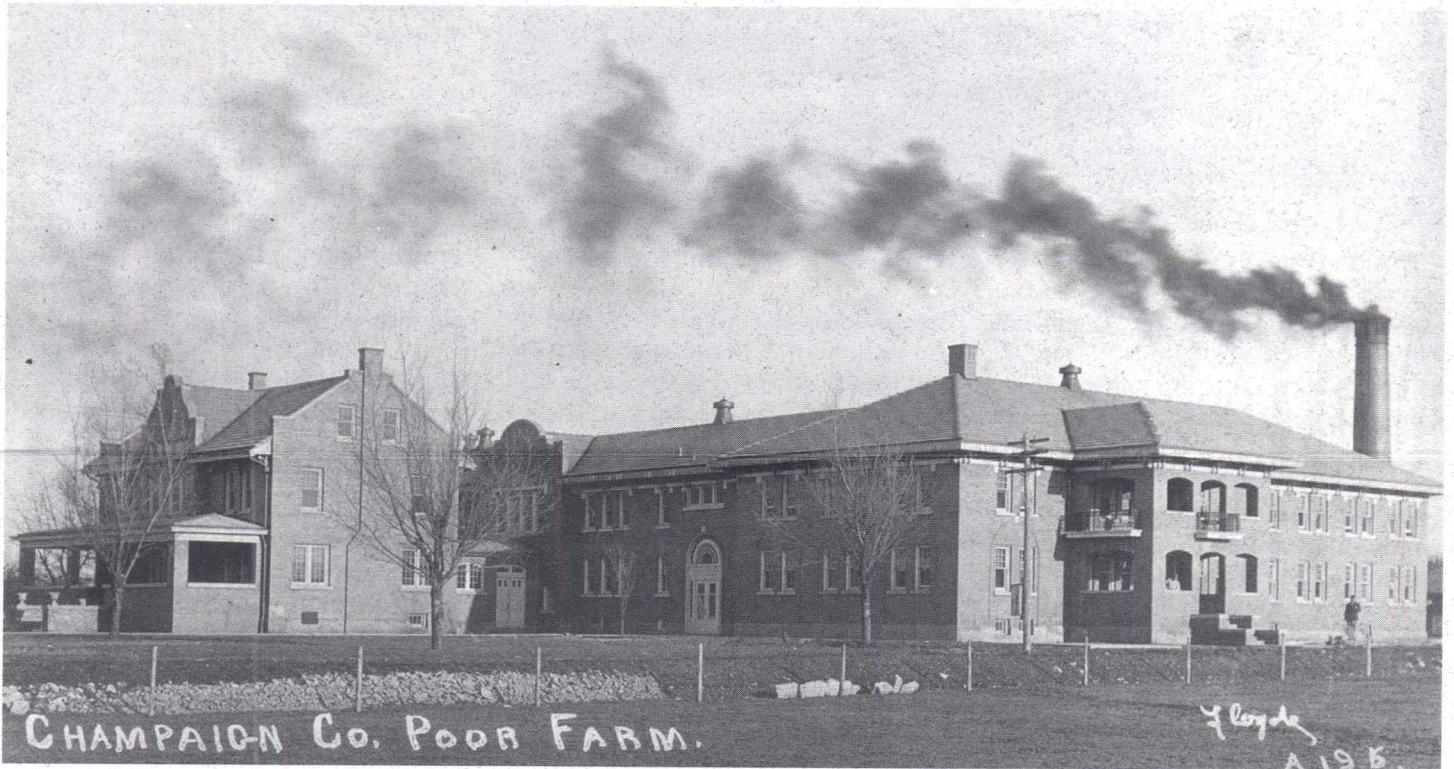
## PRESERVATION MATTERS

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

VOLUME 30

MAY-JUNE 2010

NUMBER 3



### A Humble Urbana Landmark Turns 100

By Brian Adams

This year marks the 100th anniversary of groundbreaking for the Champaign County Poor Farm, also called the County Farm, the Almshouse, and sometimes simply “the Farm.” The Poor Farm was designed by noted Urbana architect Joseph W. Royer, who was responsible for other Urbana landmarks including the Champaign County Courthouse and the Urbana Free Library. Part of the original complex of farm structures still stands at 1701 East Main Street, in Urbana.

In the early history of Champaign County, paupers were either temporarily cared for by “overseers of the poor” or were “auctioned off” and cared for by low bidders (Cunningham 1905, p 735). In 1858, the county’s first “poor farm”—a log cabin—was built on 80 acres in Section 7 of St. Joseph Township. However, this location proved too distant from the county seat, so in 1865 a new farm was constructed about 1 mile east of the county courthouse in Urbana. According to Cunningham (1905, p 735) “incurable insane paupers, returned to the county from the State hospital” were cared for at the poor farm.

### Improving care for the poor

The history of the Royer-designed County Farm began in early 1909, when a special committee was formed to discuss plans for a new building at the site of the existing Poor Farm (Urbana Daily Courier, 27 February 1909, p 5). A grand jury committee appointed to assess the condition of the current facility had earlier concluded that the 40-year old buildings “have long since outlived their usefulness and have become unsanitary and entirely inadequate” (Urbana Daily Courier, 16 September 1909, p 4). The cost of the new farm complex was first set at \$60,000, but it eventually

