



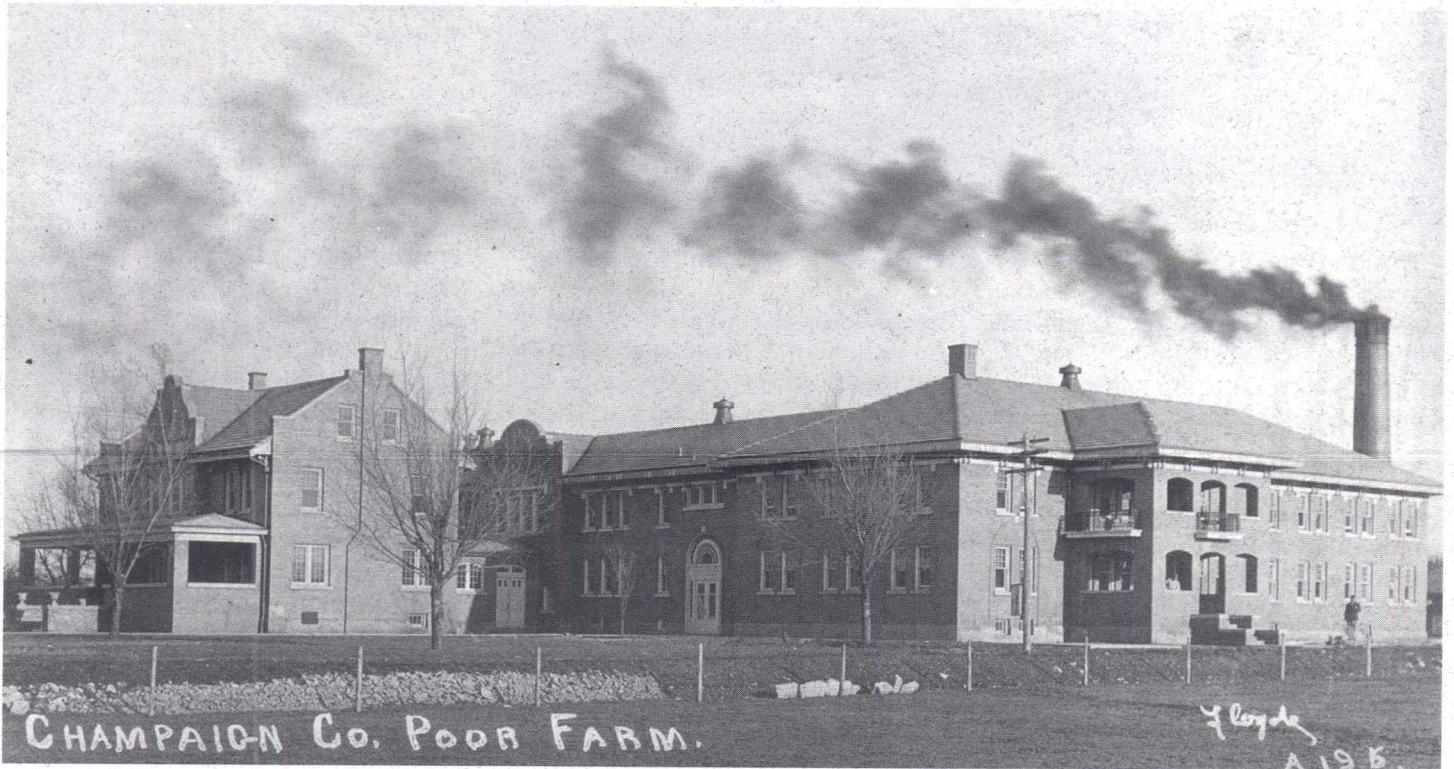
PRESERVATION MATTERS

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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



Jacobean Anglo-Dutch style gables distinguish the farm superintendent's house.

ended up costing \$91,285.63, including Royer's fee of \$4,498.93 (Daily Illini, 28 July 1926, p 12). The Champaign County Board of Supervisors appointed a special building committee to oversee the project. The members were F.E. Boyd (chairman), E.A. Kratz, H.V. Cardiff, I.S. Raymond, and Spencer E. Huff. Royer was appointed as project architect on 30 September 1909. He immediately began work on the plans, completing them by the end of January 1910 (Champaign County News, Saturday, 8 January 1910). On 30 March 1910, a construction contract in the amount of \$72,613.75 was awarded to English Brothers of Champaign. Ground was broken on 12 April 1910, and construction proceeded through much of the following year.

By mid-August 1910, the second-floor walls of the dormitory building were in place and the concrete floors were being poured (Champaign County News, Wednesday, 17 August 1910). Also at this time, the building committee sought bids for construction of a new sewer line to connect with the Urbana sanitary system. The contract for electrical work was awarded to Max Caldwell of Champaign in January 1911 (Urbana Daily Courier, 26 January 1911).

The building committee inspected the facility on 27 September 1911, and finally accepted the work on 12 January 1912. Early in the year there were up to 63 residents, but by June 1912, nineteen had been discharged and one had died (Urbana Daily Courier, 12 June 1912, p 1). In April 1912, the county had voted to also house delinquent children at the Poor Farm to avoid "jail stigma" (Urbana Daily Courier, 17 April 1912). Then, in June 1912, the Poor House and Farm Committee was authorized to set up a "hospital" (infirmary) in the complex and hire a nurse. At this time, the average cost of caring for a patient was approximately \$2.22 per week.

Working farm, historic revival style

Occupying about 122 acres, the main buildings at the County Farm were a superintendent's residence, a male/female inmate residence with hospital on the second floor, and a building for the "insane" that was later converted to a storage building (Daily Illini, 28 July 1926, p 12). The exterior was constructed of red and brown brick, and concrete was used for the floors. Typical of Royer's work, the buildings represent an historic revival style. The superintendent's building exhibits characteristics of the Jacobean Anglo-

Dutch style (Foster 2004, 320). Chief among these are the parapeted gables on the north façade and east and west elevations, and these also were featured on the residence building. These three buildings still stand today, complete with the 1910 cornerstone emblazoned with the name of Royer, as architect, and English Brothers, as the general contractor. In addition to the residential and administrative buildings, the farm complex included silos, barns, outhouses, and an engineering building. Over time, a wide variety of utilitarian buildings were constructed and, later, razed as the Poor Farm mission evolved.

Farm inmates tended livestock and a vegetable garden. One account specifies a stock of 10 dairy cows, 14 calves, and 40 swine. "Every fall about 40 hogs are killed and the meat cured," according to the Daily Illini (28 July 1926, p 12). "Over 4,000 quarts of fruit are also canned."

The 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance map depicts a stable, a corn crib, and chicken houses as outbuilding south of the main complex. The men's ward is depicted as the west wing of the structure, adjacent to the south side of the superintendent's residence. The women's ward occupied the east wing of the structure. Between the men's and women's wards were toilet rooms, a laundry room, dining room, and the kitchen. The 1923 Sanborn map depicts the following outbuildings: two hog houses, a stable for cattle, a farm machinery building, an implement house, a corn crib, a meat shop, and a rendering kettle.

In 1917, the Champaign County Poor Farm was selected by the State Charities Commission as one of the best of its kind in Illinois (Urbana Daily Courier, 21 April 1917, p 5). Photographs of the complex were on display at the National Conference of Charities and Corrections held in Pittsburgh in June 1917.

On 28 September 1952, a memorial to veterans of the Spanish-American War (22 April 1898–11 April 1899) was erected on the north side of the farm complex, and it is still in place today.

The surviving buildings on the site are currently vacant, having most recently been occupied by the Champaign County Nursing Home. Currently, the brick superintendent's residence and the inmate residences are attached on the east to the ILEAS Foundation (Illinois Law Enforcement Alarm System), a not-for-profit corporation chartered to administer federal homeland security grants for local law enforcement.

Author's note: In addition to the newspapers cited in text, the following sources were consulted:

Cunningham, Joseph O. 1905. *The History of Champaign County*. Reprinted 1984, Frederick A. Schlimpf, Editor. Urbana, Illinois: Champaign County Historical Archives, The Urbana Free Library.

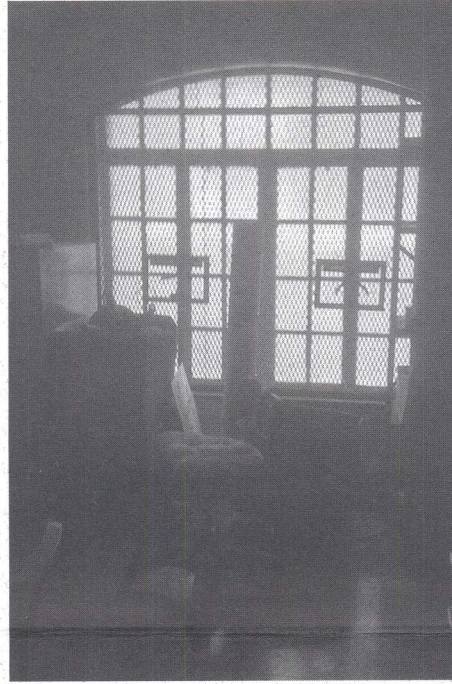
Foster, Gerald. 2004. *American Houses: A Field Guide to the Architecture of the Home*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Lincoln Hall salvage saves thousands of vintage items from landfill

Over the past several months PACA volunteers completed one of the group's largest salvage operations ever: diverting truckloads of architec-

tural components and furniture from the landfill to second life in homes, offices, and businesses.

The salvage was organized by the PACA Salvage Committee, under the direction of Hank Kaczmarek, in close cooperation with the University of Illinois. It was part of the first



Volunteering for salvage work gives you access to historic spaces you would otherwise never have a chance to see. This basement cloister in Lincoln Hall has been the home of the University of Illinois Sociology Department.

phase of rehabilitating historic Lincoln Hall, on Wright Street near Armory. The comprehensive project involves preservation of key historic architectural features of the building, structural repairs, and major rehabilitation of the building envelope for weather tightness and energy conservation. The university released large inventories of furniture and architectural fixtures that were reusable but not suitable for the objectives of Lincoln Hall rehabilitation. In addition to desks, chairs, and shelving units, PACA volunteers removed fully hung doors, individual door slabs, and tons of slate chalkboards stubbornly affixed to classroom walls.

Over most April and May Saturdays this spring, volunteers systematically packed five semi tractor trailers at the work site. A few weeks later, in preparation for a series of salvage sales in July, the trailers were unloaded at the freight depot on North Walnut, Champaign, by special arrangement with the depot's owner, Dr. William Youngerman. Mark Bush, of Bush Brothers, Inc., moved the trailers for PACA. The first sale date netted more than \$4,000 for the organization. After five other sale dates in July, PACA earned about \$13,500 in total. Proceeds from the salvage and sale will support projects such as long-overdue repairs and essential improvements to the PACA warehouse on Washington Street.

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: _____

ADDRESS: _____

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

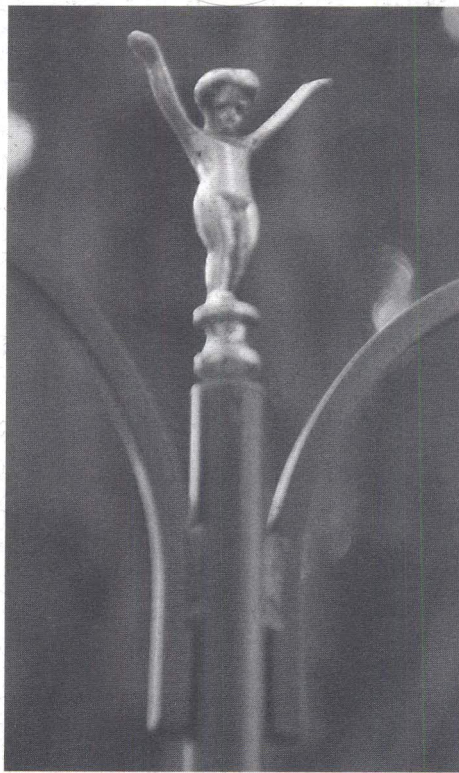
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More Than The Kitchen Sink

You can't tell by looking at the photo, but the stout figure balancing on top of my two-hook bird feeder pole (right) gleams like King Tut's cufflinks even on the most overcast day. He silently witnesses the neighborhood cardinals, finches, and nuthatches squabble with the local "junk" birds for the seed and suet hanging a foot beyond his reach.

This golden icon is a mighty guy—solid brass and heavy as a roll of half-dollars. I don't know his "provenance" before the Saturday when I spotted him laying on a shelf of "miscellany" at the PACA warehouse. A fallen idol of some kind, I guessed, dating from the era when they really knew how to fabricate a bowling trophy. Better yet, a lamp finial (from the days when they really knew how to blah blah blah). Whatever his origin, the brass homunculus was, in my opinion, underemployed. I examined the machine screw threads under his urn-like pedestal, and another set



that spiraled down into his headbone. Two mounting sites; a dozen possibilities. And I would not have balked a moment at his price tag even if I were

still a poor, 22-year-old thrift store prowler. Three months later, there he is, making me smile every time I look out the kitchen window.

Like many PACA members, I have a stack of reclaimed baseboards, a kitchen sink—whatever—selected to meet the precise requirements of my next impressive project (which keeps slipping, start-date-wise, for some reason). But for years, the most fun I've had visiting PACA has been the discovery of oddball decorative artifacts: a cast-off heavy machine part, a piece of prop artwork from a high school theatrical set, an enigmatic sign from a school or office building. The things archeologists would be interested in 12 centuries from now. My point is that you don't have to be restoring a craftsman bungalow or overloaded with cash to find value at the warehouse. Don't overlook the random Americana scattered around the premises, or the possibilities it has to add some charm to your home.

—Gordon Cohen, Editor

Telephone: 217-359-PACA
Web: <http://www.pacacc.org>
E-mail: pacaexdir@gmail.com

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P.O. Box 2575, Station A
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