

PRESERVATION MATTERS

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

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NUMBER 1

PACA helps restore Homer's historic First Street (to brick, not "gooey mud")

by Wendy Harris

Many PACA volunteers may still be thinking "lift with the legs, not the back" after spending hours and hours cleaning and stacking brick pavers at Champaign Public Works. The original 292,000 pavers were purchased in 1999 in East St. Louis by the City of Champaign. Since then, these, and those held by the City of Urbana, have been stored and used locally. Several times in the past few years, it has been necessary for both Champaign and Urbana to clean and stack their stockpiles.

Cue the PACA volunteers! An untold number of pavers have been stacked over the years, most recently in 2011. In return, PACA has received over 67,000 pavers for the purpose of reuse in local projects. The largest purchase, 34,000 pavers, went to the town of Homer to complete the restoration of First Street.

In an October 1957 interview in the *Champaign News-Gazette*, former Homer Mayor H.M. Smoot recalled the days when the streets were still unpaved. He described "gooey mud," sometimes requiring four horses to pull a wagon down the street. According to period *Danville Press-Democrat* newspapers, the idea of paving First and Main Streets in Homer originated in November 1908. A segment of the population was against the work, and used uncertain cost estimates, illegal taxes, and poor maps as evidence in court hearings. By May, the

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Contractors cut the straps from a PACA-packed palette of pavers. (Photo courtesy of Ray Cunningham.)

Seeking volunteers for PACA newsletter and communications group

PACA has several opportunities for volunteers interested in helping with our communications activities.

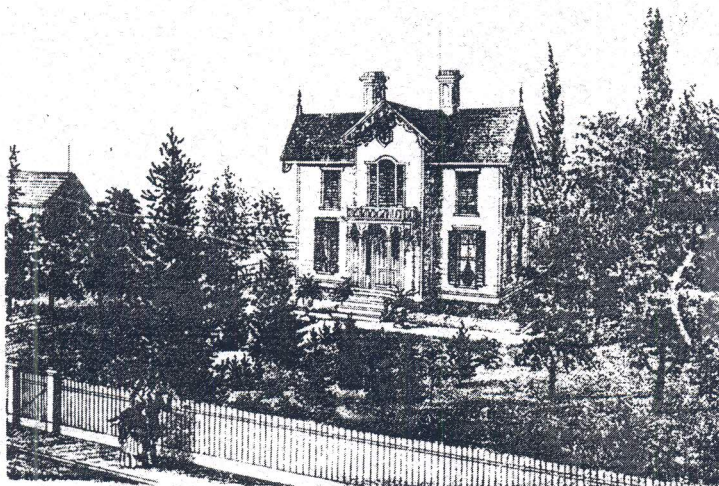
First, we are looking for someone to serve as editor of *Preservation Matters*. The editor works with writers and a designer to assemble this quarterly newsletter, developing story ideas in cooperation with writers and PACA board members.

Second, we are seeking a person to prepare the newsletter using desktop computer software. This person should have some experience with a layout program such as Adobe InDesign, QuarkExpress, or even PageMaker (from the olden days). We will be looking into adopting the free, public-domain page layout program Scribus, so knowledge about that would be a huge benefit. This would be a great job for a creative soul as we consider updating the newsletter's look

Third, after recruiting a great new feature writer (look to your left!), *Preservation Matters* would like to find one or two more volunteers interested in authoring short articles about PACA activities, membership events, or any other topics related to PACA's mission. This material would also be used on PACA's new website, currently being developed for relaunch this spring.

To express interest in any of these positions, please send a note to the PACA Board of Directors in care of pacaexdir@gmail.com for more information and encouragement.

Next to nothing was remembered about the residence of one of the area's most prominent forefathers. Research reveals the story of a historic landmark lost unintentionally to the relentless march of time.



RESIDENCE OF C. R. GRIGGS, Esq. URBANA, CHAMPAIGN C. ILL.

The obscure and untimely fate of Urbana's C.R. Griggs house

by Brian Adams

Clark Robinson Griggs is best known for his successful campaign to locate the Illinois Industrial University—now University of Illinois—in Urbana. A shrewd, tireless politician and businessman from Massachusetts, Griggs settled in Champaign County in 1859 with his wife and three children and established a large, successful farm near Philo (*The Union and Gazette*, 18 December 1867; *The Illinois Democrat*, 14 August 1868). A civil merchant (sutler) involved in the lucrative cotton trade on the Mississippi River during the Civil War, Griggs significantly increased his wealth. After the war, the Philo farmer purchased property in Urbana where, in 1865, he built a new home. He served as Mayor of Urbana in 1866 and 1867, and was later elected to the Illinois General Assembly.

Less well known than Griggs' role in University of Illinois history is his accomplishment as a railroad entrepreneur. As a result of his efforts, the Danville-Urbana-Bloomington-Pekin Railroad (D.U.B.&P. R.R.) was chartered in 1867 and completed in 1869, making it the first railroad to pass through Urbana. Construction of the railroad created quite a stir in the city. The *Champaign County Gazette* reported (14 July 1869) "a few days since, there arrived for the D.U.B.&P. R.R. a construction train consisting of a very large and fine engine, named C.R. Griggs, and 15 well built

cars. The train is expected in Danville about September 1st." A week later the same paper reported that "the new construction engine and construction train of the D.U.B.&P. R.R. are ready for work and track laying commenced in dead earnest yesterday. Before another issue of our paper, the iron-horse will be snorting through the streets of our neighboring city, Urbana, for the first time since its existence" (21 July 1869). By 1870, a new four-story hotel, station, depot, and railroad headquarters had opened in Urbana. The hotel was named Griggs House as a tribute to C.R. Griggs. Although he protested (*Champaign County Gazette*, August 17, 1870), the name of the hotel was retained.

In 1871, Griggs bought a home back east, in Delaware, and eventually moved there. He often returned to Urbana, though, continuing business and launching several building projects after the 9 October 1871 fire that swept through downtown Urbana. These projects included a "new and elegant" hotel (*Champaign County Gazette*, 18 September 1872) and a "mammoth business block" (*Champaign County Gazette*, 13 November 1872). In 1876,

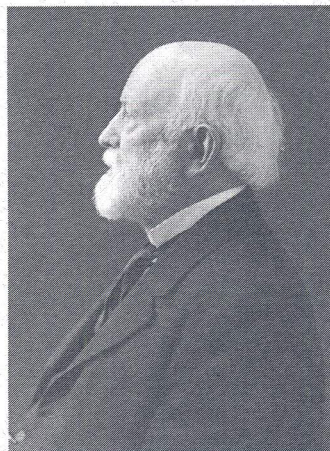
Griggs moved again, this time to New York City (*Champaign County Gazette*, 17 December 1876).

In October 1874, Griggs' son Albert married Anna Harvey of Wilmington, Delaware (*Champaign County Gazette*, 21 October 1874), and settled in Urbana. Griggs built the newlyweds a brick Italianate style house at 505 West Main, Urbana, now listed on the National Register of Historic Places and imprecisely known as the "C.R. Griggs House." The Albert Griggs house still stands at 505 West Main, Urbana, as a historic landmark. Strangely, however, almost nothing is known of the famous father's residence.

As noted above, Griggs built a new home in Urbana before selling his Philo farm. For this he purchased the estate of the late Dr. Jacob F. Snyder, an Urbana physician who had died in 1862. The Snyder family's two-acre estate occupied the land between McCullough and Orchard Streets, and Springfield Avenue and Elm Street. Dr. Snyder's widow and children sold the Elm street estate to Griggs on 9 September 1864. Shortly after the purchase, the *Central Illinois Gazette* (24 February 1865, p 3) announced: "Mr. S.C. (*sic*) Griggs is gathering the materials for the erection of a fine resi-

dence on the beautiful site formerly occupied by the late Dr. Snider (*sic*)". The new structure was a large, two-story wood-frame building located in the center of the estate.

Before departing Urbana, C.R. Griggs deeded his Elm Street home to his daughter and son-in-law, Mrs. and Mr. W.W. Graham. They owned it for 4 months, then sold it on 22 September 1873 to Royal A. Sutton, an Urbana brick manufacturer, who owned it for 16 years. In April 1874, Sutton was elect-



"No man ever lived in Champaign County who exercised greater influence or accomplished more good for the county..." *Early History and Pioneers of Champaign County*, 1891:63

ed Mayor of Urbana and served for one term. The residence was the site of lavish parties and weddings attended by the most prominent members

of Urbana society. Sutton died at 44 on 17 April 1881 after an extended illness. In May 1889, Elizabeth Sutton and her two children subdivided the family estate into four lots.

As a result of this transaction, the former Griggs residence now became the residence of Dr. and Mrs. William Lew Pillsbury. Dr. Pillsbury was Secretary of the Agricultural Experimental Station and the first Registrar of the University of Illinois (1893–1910). Born in New Hampshire in 1838, Pillsbury graduated from Harvard (1863) and had served as the first principal of Normal College, Normal, Illinois, until 1870. Marion Pillsbury, his English-born wife, taught kindergarten in Normal. In 1898 the Pillsburys decided to move the former Griggs/Sutton house to the west part of their property.

Pillsbury retired from the university in 1910, and in 1914 the family moved to Boston. Mrs. Pillsbury died there in March 1917, and he died in Chicago in June 1924. In 1902 the Pillsburys had sold the east half of their property—the original location of the Griggs house—to Mrs. Alice Jane Freeman, the wife of one Gus Freeman. The Freemans built an elegant two-story Classical Revival style wood-frame residence on that lot (now 504 W. Elm), which was designed by Joseph W. Royer, Urbana's premier architect between the late 19th and mid-20th century.

Following William Pillsbury's retirement from the university, the Griggs house (506 West Elm) had sev-

eral owners and occupants. Based on city directories, the house was occupied by Emerson Grant Sutcliffe in 1916. Sutcliffe was an assistant in the English Department at the university who went on to teach there and, later, at Cornell in Ithaca, NY. He authored *Emerson's Theories of Literary Expression* (1923), an analysis of the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

By 1920 the house was owned and occupied by the Jacob Becker family. During this period, the family evidently rented rooms to tenants (*Daily*

Illini, 17 April 1921; 18 November 1921; 28 September 1922). In June 1922 a fire broke out in the attic but was successfully extinguished (*Urbana Daily Courier*, 15 June 1922). In 1924, a room with kitchen and alcove was advertised in the *Urbana Daily Courier* (31 January), and in 1925 tenants are still listed in the city directory as residing with the Beckers.

The Becker family is listed at the address until about 1945, but the 1946 city directory shows one Claude J. Douglas as the only resident. Then,

between 1947 and 1954, the Griggs house was owned by the Verne M. Wrisk family, who also had tenants.

Beginning in 1955, in contrast with its patrician origins, the Griggs house was used solely as a rental property, with six occupants commonly enumerated. In July 1964, a Dorothy Vanderpol advertised a quiet, two-room unfurnished apartment for rent to a graduate student at the address (*Daily Illini*, 9 July 1964).

Just short of 20 years later, on the cold Tuesday afternoon of 28 December 1983, a fire broke out in a second-floor apartment and quickly spread to the

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Left: the house at 506 W. Elm, Urbana, in the 1970s, a forgotten historic landmark converted to four rental units. Below: the last day, some history goes down in flames. Note 504 W. Elm in the background, the Freeman house designed by Joseph Royer, saved by firefighters.



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: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

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

Vol 32 No 1

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Springtime for PACA!

Annual Meeting April 28, 2012

This year's PACA Annual Meeting will be held at the Community United Church of Christ at Sixth and Daniels, Champaign, on 28 April 2012 from 2:30-4:30 p.m. The event will begin

Griggs house fate

(Continued from page 3)

attic (*News-Gazette*, 28 December 1983). Fortunately, the seven tenants, all University of Illinois students, were away for the Christmas holidays. The fire was so intense that Urbana city and university firefighters had to hose down the Royer-built house next door to protect it. Firefighters spent over 2 hours quenching the blaze, which destroyed the building. The next day's *News-Gazette* reported that the fire apparently started as a maintenance worker thawed frozen pipes upstairs with a propane torch. A detail lost to the newspaper that day: a monument of Urbana civic history succumbed to the dull fate of a household accident.

with a short business meeting conducted by the Board of Directors. The meeting will include the induction and introduction of PACA's incoming new directors.

The highlight of the meeting will be presentation of the 2012 Heritage Awards, which recognize the accomplishments of Champaign County residents, businesses, and construction contractors in the areas of preserving or rehabilitating historic properties. Other highlights will include refreshments (!), and there is a rumor that one person may appear in his Sunday's Best. For all others, however, casual dress will feel appropriate, if that is what you prefer.

Website is being rejuvenated!

You may have noticed that our website has been frozen in time for more than a year. The Board has recently voted to invest in an upgrade, including features that will make it easier to post timely news about salvage operations, preservation issues, and even special finds available at the warehouse. Watch for it!

Homer paver restoration

(Continued from page 1)

town had won the right to pave, and to tax the locals as needed for the work. In June, Hoffman and Townsend (Marion, Illinois) began paving Main Street. In August 1909, locals were still fighting the paving of First Street, but by early November paving began there, too. By the time the work was completed, the total cost was \$28,787, but the locals received a 5% rebate on their assessment.

Just over 100 years later, the addition of a sewage collection system required that First Street be pulled up. This time the work was completed by a local company, Cross Construction, and the pavers were sold to the town of Homer by PACA. Total cost for the pavers, and their stacking, loading, and transport, was estimated to be \$35,400. A thank you to all those who helped save the pavers, and to those involved in their reuse to maintain the historic look of Homer!

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