

# PRESERVATION MATTERS

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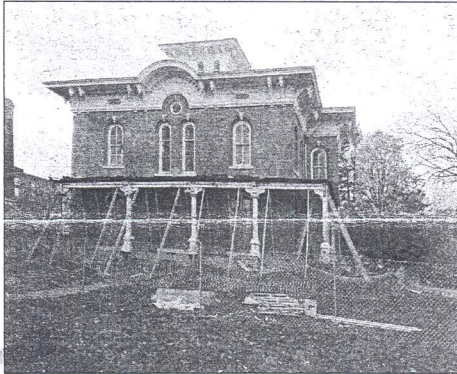
## PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

### EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: The Solon House Face-Lift, Part I

Tom Garza

Many people have been asking me lately "Did someone buy the Solon house? I saw some people working on it. Did something happen to it?," so I thought I'd take this opportunity to try to explain to PACA members a little bit about what has been going on at 503 S. State Street.

First a little history. . . . Some time ago, thanks to the efforts of Representative Naomi Jakobsson and State Senator Michael Frerichs, PACA was awarded two \$250,000 grants from the state in order to help us with our ongoing efforts to save this historic structure. As the state's financial situation was (and in many respects still is) rather shaky, however, we were not sure if we would ever actually receive the money, and for a long time no one could tell us when the money might actually arrive. In the meantime, the board decided to put the



Solon house exterior as of October 25, 2012

house on the market in hopes of finding a suitable buyer. Many years of neglect had left the house in an extremely vulnerable state, and we felt that immediate action was necessary. Unfortunately, although many people expressed an interest, we found no one who was willing or able to take on a project of that magnitude. Time and weather continued to take a toll on the property, while PACA (with our limited resources) was only able to patch up the worst problems and hope for the best.

Fortunately, however, the money from the first of the two grants finally arrived toward the end of this summer, and so we were able to proceed with our stabilization plans.

The first phase of the project has been to remove the rotted portions of the front and back porch and adequately support both of the porch roof structures. We discovered that the structural elements of the roofs are in fairly good shape and can be preserved, though the roofs themselves must be redone eventually. If you drive by today, you will see the dramatic results of the completed demolition and deconstruction phase.

Also, all of the shaky and unstable decking has been removed, leaving the porch pillars, roof structure, and many of the supports remaining. Any pieces of the porch that are reusable have been safely stored off-site. PACA is also storing porch pieces that will serve as models for recreating the original porch style. Doors and windows have been boarded up in order to protect them from damage. A full termite treatment and site survey were also completed as part of this first phase of work.

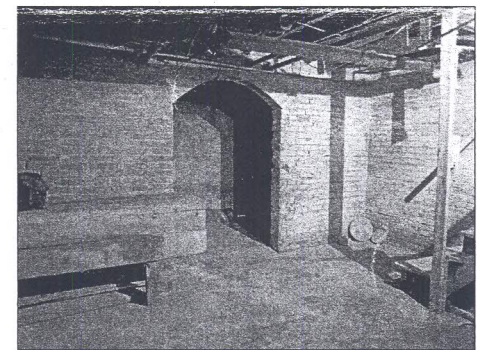
The primary work of this phase of the operation, however, will be to deal with the masonry—the brick above and the stone below. To that end, we have employed two sets of

masons who have been removing bad bricks and replacing them with age and consistency-appropriate salvaged bricks (many of which came from the old Metropolitan building at the corner of Church Street and Main Street in downtown Champaign, which was built with similar materials and about the same time as the Solon House). We have also started digging down to the footings on all sides of the house to enable our mason to work on all of the belowground mortar joints. This will facilitate the addition of a waterproof membrane, that will completely encircle the house and protect the basement from further moisture problems in the future. Once that work has

been completed, the dirt will be replaced and a large portion of the yard around the house will be regraded so as to slope away from the structure. At the present time even though the house sits on a small plateau of sorts, well above the street level, the top of that plateau slopes inward like a shallow bowl, with the house itself sitting at the bottom. Water from the nearby playground and school pours into the property during big storms, and at times has completely flooded the basement.

At present, we have used a majority of the first grant, and 70 percent of the work is complete. We are confident that by the end of November we will have this first phase finished. The site will be sealed until spring, when we will begin phase two, provided the grant money for it arrives in a timely manner.

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Solon house basement



Solon house main fireplace



## URBANA'S 100 MOST IMPORTANT BUILDINGS PROJECT

Rebecca Bird  
and  
Sasha Cuerda

In 2011, the City of Urbana received a Certified Local Government grant from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to create an honorary list of the 100 most important buildings reflecting Urbana's heritage. City staff solicited nominations from the public and then worked with the Historic Preservation Commission to identify the 100 structures that best represent Urbana's architectural history, community heritage, and values. The buildings were selected based on criteria such as integrity and best representation of an architectural style, as determined by the Historic Preservation Commission.

The 100 buildings are featured on the city's website with photographs, an architectural description of each, and a historic narrative for many. The final list includes a variety of buildings ranging from a modest cottage built around 1850 to a house with an uncanny likeness to a UFO that was built in 1954 for a jazz musician; from a bungalow that was ordered out of a Sears catalogue circa 1920 to the mansions of some of Urbana's founding fathers. The list also includes many of the historic buildings in downtown—the library, the county courthouse, and many of the buildings on the 100-block of West Main Street—as well as many of the impressive fraternities and sororities that were built prior to World War II in eclectic styles and designed by well-known architects. The list serves as a revealing blueprint of the development of Urbana and is a resource for residents and visitors alike. There is also a print document containing pictures of all the listed buildings, which is available for download from the City's website.

Below is just a sampling of buildings on Urbana's 100 Most Important Buildings List. Look for a few more descriptions in the Winter edition of PACA's newsletter as well. For a complete list, visit <http://urbanaininois.us/residents/historic-urbana/100mostsignificant>.

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## URBANA NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY, TROOP B, FIRST CAVALRY (1915)

Demolished Urbana Armory Now Known to Have Been Royer Design

Brian Adams

"Urbana issues permit for demolition of old armory." Thus was the death sentence announced in a *Champaign-Urbana News-Gazette* headline (November 11, 2008) for one of the last remaining WWI-era armories in the state of Illinois at 310 West Main Street in Urbana. The story of Urbana's Illinois National Guard Armory for Troop B, First Cavalry begins in 1914 (*Urbana Courier-Herald*, Monday, June 22, 1914). At that time, Captain John D. White of Urbana was attempting to secure a location in Urbana for a modern armory building. On December 1, Captain White wrote a letter to University of Illinois President Edmund J. James requesting permission to organize a troop of cavalry affiliated with the University Cadet Brigade:

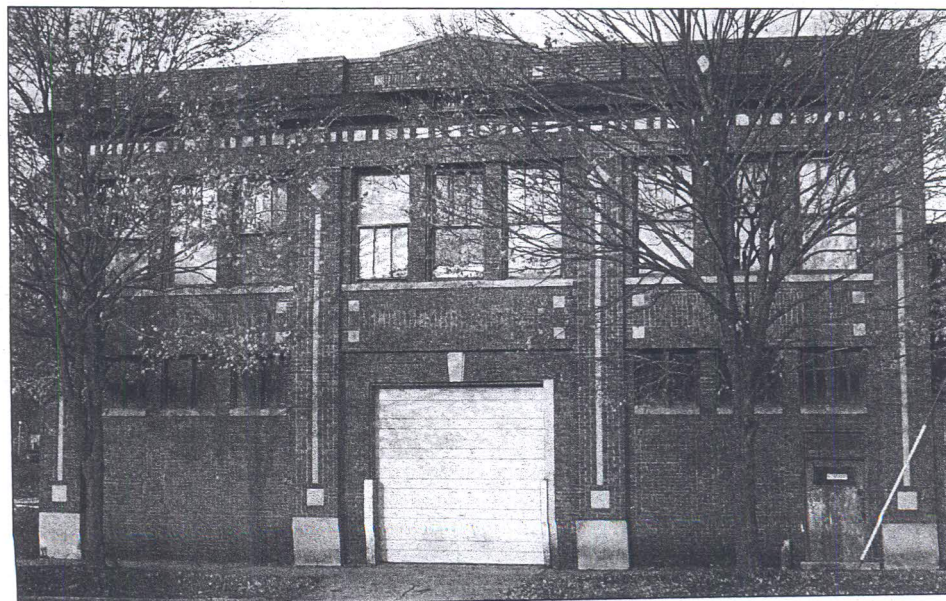
... as there are no vacancies in the Illinois National Guard for mounted organizations I wish to suggest that Troop B, 1st Cavalry, Illinois National Guard, be taken in by the University. ... The only expense to the University or State would be to furnish horses to drill with, and as the troop would drill at night the horses could be used by the Military Department of the University during the day. ... The University would have the services of this troop on occasions of ceremony, cadets could use the equipment for mounted drill ... and it would give many students who are interested in mounted work a chance to get a more extended training ... I would also request authority to use the Stock Judging Pavilion for the mounted drill of Troop B one night a week, if it can be conveniently arranged ... (Report of the Board of Trustees 1916).

White was successful in his request; Troop B secured affiliation with the University of Illinois. Officers were members of the university faculty and administrative staff, and 70 percent of the enlisted soldiers were University of Illinois students (*Alumni Quarterly* 1915: 41).

In December 1914, Captain White was granted authority to secure a location for the permanent quarters for Troop B, First Cavalry (*Urbana Courier-Herald*, December 2, 1914). By the middle of the month, a contract was obtained with Walter W. Stern to construct the armory at Main Street and Central Street, immediately east of the First Christian Church. W. W. Stern of Champaign and F. M. Schulhoff of Mattoon had purchased the property from the Halberstadt estate in September 1914 with the intent of constructing brick business buildings, and so the armory construction began:

Pressed brick is to be used in the construction and the contract calls for completion within sixty days. The first floor is to be 58 and 82 feet (*sic*) and will be used

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Façade, Urbana National Guard Armory, Troop B, First Cavalry (1915)

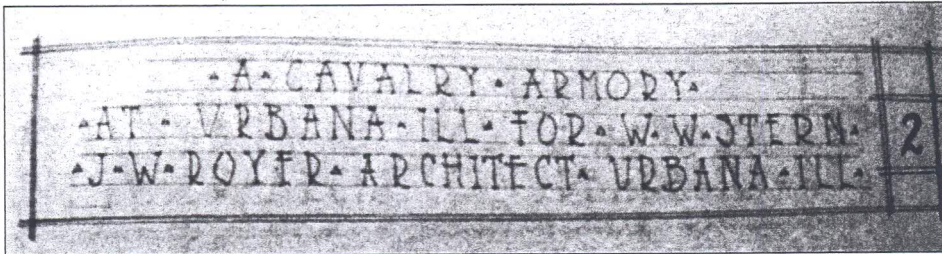


## NATIONAL GUARD ARMORY

(continued from page 2)

for drill purposes only. The second floor will include a captain's room, sergeant's quarters and saddle room, store room, bath and toilet. A mezzanine floor will overlook the drill room. The building is to be used exclusively for military purposes (*Urbana Courier-Herald*, December 10, 1914).

Although W. W. Stern was identified as the contractor, the architect was never identified in the published accounts, and no cornerstone was built into the structure. It would be nearly 100 years before the building's architect, Joseph William Royer, would be recognized.



Urbana National Guard Armory, Troop B, First Cavalry (1915); J. W. Royer Plan

The new armory was officially dedicated on April 16, 1915. The formal ceremony, held inside the building, was attended by a host of dignitaries from throughout the state. From Chicago were Major McNamee, U.S. Army instructor, Sixth Cavalry District; Colonel Milton J. Foreman, commander of the First Regiment, Illinois National Guard; Frank R. Schwengel, adjutant; Captain Walter J. Fisher; and Captain J. W. Mettes. From Springfield were Lieutenants Wood, White, Goodnow, Flood, Merriot, and Spielman. From the cadet corps of the University of Illinois were Major C. A. Wals, Lieutenant Crookston, Colonel Green, Major Elies, and other officers. The ceremony included the presentation of medals to expert riflemen and sharpshooters and music performed by baritonist Clinton Brown and vocal soloist Colonel N. H. Cohen. Small American flags adorned the interior space. At the time, Illinois was the only state with a full regiment of militia cavalry, and Urbana was the smallest city with such a troop (*Urbana Daily Courier*, April 16, 1915; April 17, 1915).

In the summer of 1916, Troop B was sent to the Texas-Mexico border during hostilities stemming from Pancho Villa's raid into New Mexico. Afterward, the troop was stationed for a month at Fort Sheridan, near Chicago. In November 1916, the troop returned to Urbana to a "rousing reception" at the armory, organized by the Commercial Club (*Urbana Daily Courier*, November 17, 1916). However, Troop B soon relocated and reorganized, and the armory sat vacant for a time. By 1917, the armory building was repurposed for other functions. Nearby Thornburn High School used the building for basketball games (*Urbana Daily Courier*, January 6, 1917), and in June of 1919, the Urbana city council discussed the possibility of using the armory as a community center

for boys (*Urbana Daily Courier*, June 28, 1919). Those plans did not materialize, and in December Roy H. Snyder purchased the building and converted it into R. H. Snyder's Automobile Repairing and Hupmobile Service Station (*Urbana Daily Courier*, December 11 and 31, 1919). By this time, Troop B had been reorganized into Battery B, 124th field artillery, and sent overseas. Snyder operated his business in the old armory until his death in 1946. Records show that the armory building was later converted to a warehouse, and by 1987 it was used as a bus storage facility. By the early 21st century, the building was exhibiting definite signs of decay due to neglect of proper maintenance.

Separately, in the summer of 2010, salvage work at the former Smith & Company Fire Proof Storage/Pure Ice Facility in Champaign resulted in the discovery of several sets of blueprints and architectural drawings, among which included a set of plans for the Troop B Armory in Urbana, attributed to Joseph William Royer (Richard Cahill, personal communication). Hugh A. Smith, owner of the

facility, was a former associate of Royer until about 1937. After leaving Royer, he established the firm of Smith, Kratz & Strong. The Smith & Company Fire Proof Storage/Pure Ice Facility was acquired in the 1970s by Dick Ballard, who used it as a woodworking shop while renting unused space for storage. Apparently, Smith's son transferred several sets of plans and blueprints in his father's possession to the facility for storage. The recently discovered Royer plans for the armory were drawn on very thin, light-weight paper with pencil. They are very fragile, and are currently being curated at the Conservation Unit of the Preservation and Conservation Program of the University of Illinois Library. The drawings include plan and façade views, a "door schedule," longitudinal views of the building, and details of roof trusses and "saddle pegs." The main feature of the ground floor plan drawing is the "drill hall" described with a dirt floor and occupying the north portion of the building. The second floor consisted of officers' and enlisted quarters. The southwest room is indicated as the captain's room. Immediately east is the sergeant's room. East of this is the non-commissioned officer's room, followed by the saddle room and toilet at the southeast corner of the building. Immediately north of these rooms were the squad and storerooms.

The armory building exhibited Classical Revival influences as demonstrated by the parapet pediment and full-height pilasters (Alice Novak, personal communication, September 29, 2012). The limestone or concrete inserts suggest Craftsman/Arts and Crafts influences. Thus, the armory represents a unique local fusion of Classical Revival and Craftsman/Arts and Crafts elements.

Unfortunately, the armory drawings were discovered two years after the building was condemned and razed in 2008, adding yet another project to the growing list of Royer's "lost" buildings. Hopefully the demolition of this unique historic structure as a result of neglected maintenance will energize our community to recognize and preserve our unique architectural resources.

I would like to acknowledge Rich Cahill for allowing me to examine the armory plans, Alice Novak for advice on architectural style of the building, and Susan Brannock-Gaul for help with photos.



## 100 MOST IMPORTANT

(continued from page 2)

### 204 W. Iowa Street

#### *Architectural Description*

204 W. Iowa is a small rectilinear and symmetrical Art Moderne house built in 1937. Art Moderne, also called Streamline Moderne, became popular after 1930 when “streamlined” industrial design styles for ships, airplanes, and automobiles crossed

over into architectural design. Art Moderne was a transformation of Art Deco that saw excessive ornamentation discarded in favor of sleek, aerodynamic and fluid curves that emphasized motion and speed. Concrete and glass replaced exotic wood and stone as preferred building materials. Art Moderne was both a reaction to Art Deco and a reflection of the harsh economic climate of the 1930s. Some characteristics of Art Moderne buildings include smooth wall surfaces, curved corners, emphasis of the horizontal with grooving and balustrades, flat roofs, asymmetrical façades, glass-block windows, round windows, and windows turning corners.

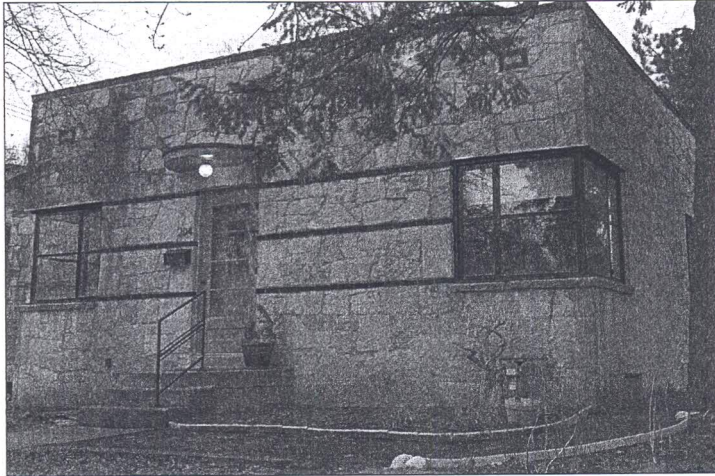
204 W. Iowa has a flat parapet roof with a decorative black brick coping, or ledge, at the roof line. Additional black brick bands across the irregularly coursed yellow stone façade emphasize the horizontal plane between the steel-framed wraparound windows. The symmetrical front façade is simple with no unnecessary ornamentation. A half-circle overhang covers the main entrance.

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#### *Historical Description*

Fred Foster, Professor of Geography, was the longest tenured resident of 204 W. Iowa, having resided there from 1955–87. Foster was recruited to UIUC as part of an effort to transform the cartography department into one of the top programs in the nation. Foster honed his cartographic skills while serving in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during WWII. Geographers were critical to intelligence

gathering during the war, and Foster was a key member of the military intelligence team in the European theater. He was the first Chief of Map Intelligence at the OSS's most important outpost in London in 1944, and quickly rose through the ranks to become Chief of Map Intelligence for all OSS European operations in 1946. While not confirmed, it is likely that Foster knew another key cartographer in the OSS, Paul Child, future husband of Julia Child.



204 W. Iowa Street

### 411 W. Indiana Avenue

#### *Architectural Description*

Built in 1919, 411 W. Indiana is a typical two-story Prairie style house. The walls consist of roughly textured cream stucco and brown wood detailing. The main form of the house is square and the façade is asymmetrical. A typical characteristic of Prairie style architecture is to have simple, clean, unadorned

façades, with no extraneous ornament. The cream stucco is paired with wood detailing on the window frames and banding, which emphasizes the horizontal plane. The roof of the house is a low-pitched hipped roof with widely overhanging eaves, a typical characteristic of Prairie style architecture. Projecting rafters can be seen below the overhanging eaves. A broad, flat chimney is perched on the roof. The chimney has a simple cap on the top. A one-story porch marks the entrance to the house. The porch is supported by massive square pillars, also covered in stucco cream stucco. Two large, stout, round urns flank the porch entrance near the wide pillars. Projecting rafters make up the porch covering. A second-floor balcony—called a window box—sits above the entry porch. A concrete cap is present on the first-floor porch rail, while a thin band of wood trim caps the second-floor balcony rail.

A one-story sunroom projects from the east side of the house. Horizontal rows of large casement windows dominate the walls of the sunroom. The majority of the windows on the house are multi-paned double-hung windows with wooden “surrounds” or window frames. There is a bay window with geometric patterned stained glass adjacent to the entry porch. There is a dormer window with tapered walls in the center of the roof, or attic level, on the north façade that is clad in shingles. This dormer has a hip roof that is inset with small-paned casement windows. There is a regular square-walled dormer on the attic level, of the west side. These characteristics are all common to the Prairie style.

*continued on page 5*



411 W. Indiana Avenue



**100 MOST IMPORTANT**

*(continued from page 3)*

*Historical Description*

The homes surrounding Carle Park, including 411 W. Indiana, were built on lots carved out from land originally owned by Albert G. Carle. After Carle died, his widow, Margaret Morris, set about creating a park to honor her late husband. In March of 1909, Margaret conveyed a large tract of land to C. L. Van Doren in trust for the creation of Carle Park. As per the original conveyance, Van Doren conveyed a portion of the property to the Urbana Park District on Oct 11, 1911. The rest of the property was parceled out into individual lots. 411 W. Indiana was built on Lot 6, Block 4, directly opposite the southwest corner of Carle Park. According to a letter from Bo Willman to Heinz Damberger, the house was "at the edge of town" in 1922. There were no houses to the east, and the nearest house to the west was four lots away, suggesting that 411 W. Indiana was one of the first of the Van Doren lots to be built upon.

Clarence Balke, a professor of inorganic chemistry at UIUC, was the first owner of the lot. He secured a mortgage from Commercial Building and Loan Association to build the home. In 1916, Balke sold the property to Eliot Blackwelder, Head of the Geology Department. Blackwelder, who lived in the house from 1916 to 1919, went on to become the head of the Stanford Geology Department. Upon retiring in 1945, he became an active member of the Atlantic Union Committee (AUC), the key organization supporting the establishment

of NATO. Perhaps one of the most prominent residents of the house was Augusto Ortiz, a University of Illinois medical student who boarded with the Goodwine family in the 1920s. He married Martha Goodwine in a wedding that took place in the living room. Following graduation, the Ortiz family moved to Tuscon, AZ, where they devoted their lives to rural health. He developed a number of mobile health clinics. One of Ortiz's patients was a young Cesar Chavez.

**1806 Pleasant Circle**

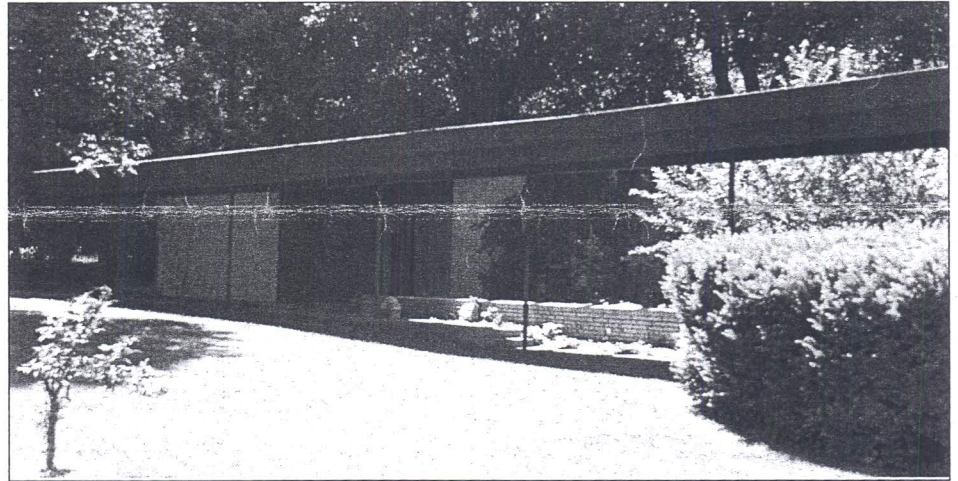
*Architectural Description*

Designed by Donald R. Laz and built for Federal Appellate Court Judge Fred Green and his wife Carolyn in 1958 by Commercial Builders of Urbana, 1806 S. Pleasant is a Mid-Century Modern home with strong Prairie style influences. The Laz house is one story and takes the form of a simple

ranch home. However, the details are meticulously designed and executed.

The roofline is simple and continuous; it is a low-pitched gable roof with wide, overhanging eaves. Large slits, or skylights, can be found carved into the overhanging eaves, creating a space below the roof that is open to the elements. A cutout above the courtyard provides sunlight and rain to a small garden space. Massive exposed fir beams support the entire roof structure. There are no interior load-bearing walls. Tall trapezoidal windows make a strong Mid-Century statement. The house design evokes the Mid-Century Modern and Prairie style themes of connecting the nature outside with the interior spaces. The current owners added a two-story workshop to the property, that houses a furniture studio on the lower level and a design

*continued on page 6*



1806 Pleasant Circle

**MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION**

**PACA** BOX 2575, STATION A CHAMPAIGN, IL 61825

**MEMBERSHIP STATUS**

- New
- Renewal

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

**MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY**

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

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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



**100 MOST IMPORTANT**

*(continued from page 5)*

and glass studio on the second floor. The workshop was designed in a modernist style. Materials, colors, and windows were selected to refer to and extend the design of the main house.

*Historical Description*

In addition to being a well-known and highly respected judge, Fred Green was a University of Illinois Law School graduate and was on the basketball team as an undergrad. A four-year letter winner at UIUC, during his senior year Illinois won the Big Ten Championship, was nationally ranked, and finished third in the NCAA tournament. It was the first time that Illinois reached the Final Four.

Fred graduated from the University of Illinois College of Commerce in 1949 and from the College of Law in 1951. After practicing law in Urbana for five years as an associate in the office of Henry I. Green (no relation), he was elected as a County Judge of Champaign County in 1956. He was sub-

sequently elected in 1964 as a Circuit Judge of the 6th Judicial Circuit and in 1974 as a Judge of the 4th District Appellate Court. He served as an Appellate Court Judge until he retired in 1998 at the age of 75.

**PACA WELCOMES OUR NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

Our former president, Thomas Garza, has accepted the position of executive director. Tom kept the warehouse open throughout the summer in order to help us decide if it would be financially feasible for us to extend our hours. Due to this summer's success, he will continue to oversee warehouse operations during the day, which will also allow him to be available and "on the spot" to take care of PACA's official business in a timely manner. Tom can be reached by e-mail at [pacaexdir@gmail.com](mailto:pacaexdir@gmail.com) or by phone at 217-359-7222.

**NEW PACA WAREHOUSE HOURS**

PACA members, we are pleased to announce that due to the resounding success of our summer hours experiment, we've officially extended the hours that PACA is open to the public. Now, along with the usual Wednesday evening and Saturday morning hours, PACA will be open Tuesday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. We hope you will stop in and say hello and, as always, please feel free to come in and volunteer during any time we are open, as there is always something that needs doing.



OR CURRENT RESIDENT

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PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

*The newsletter of the*

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