

PRESERVATION MATTERS

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PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

PACA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS—REFLECTIONS

by Rich Cahill / PACA Board Member & Salvage Coordinator

If you've been following local news over the last few months, you've likely read about recent difficulties that PACA has had gaining access to University of Illinois properties slated for demolition. In fact, two very nice historic houses went down not long ago—a Craftsman style apartment house on Nevada and a large Queen Anne on Oregon—and as far as we have been able to ascertain nothing was saved out of either of them. It all went to the landfill.

Longtime PACA members will likely be puzzled by this state of affairs given the fact that PACA has had a close relationship with the University of Illinois since its founding in 1981. We've monitored the university's historic buildings over the years and although we have sometimes disagreed with their development plans, we've also honored the many projects that were well done. We've provided resources for university students in terms of project materials and volunteer opportunities, and salvage materials have found their way into sets in plays at Krannert Center. Recently, in fact, we created a scholarship fund for students studying Historic Preservation in the Department of Urban Planning. Nevertheless, our relationship deteriorated to the point that in August of this year it became the subject of headlines in the local paper.

Because of this, we felt it was important to bring PACA's members up to date on the situation and so this article reviews our past ties with the UI and the outlooks for a brighter future.

In November 2012 a house was torn down at 1107 West Nevada by the UI. Requests we made to gain permission for salvaging were never answered. In the late spring of 2013 PACA contacted staff at UI Facilities and Services (F&S) about salvaging houses at 59 and 57 East Armory. The occupants of the house were being moved to new locations and they were vacant. In response to this contact PACA received an updated UI "Request for Removal of Salvage Materials" that had been in place since 1994. The form was filled out and returned to the UI on July 8, 2013. However, in August—while we awaited a reply—the UI demolished a house at 1203 West Oregon, and we were told a day or so later by F&S that PACA's request to salvage material from the two houses was denied.

I decided it was time to call the *News-Gazette* (NG).

THE POWER OF THE PRESS

On August 27 the headline in the *Champaign News-Gazette* read: "Salvaging a relationship: PACA seeks to recover materials from UI-owned properties slated for demolition, but UI now wants state's OK first." The article included pictures of the front of the two houses and some of the architectural details. The following day the editorial in the NG was: "Wise leader would intervene: Memo to University of Illinois Chancellor Phyllis: Please call John Dempsey, the executive director of the Facilities and Services Department and order him to stop acting like a bureaucrat." On August 21 we were back on the front page with "UI agrees to suspend demolition: Campus to create a process to give groups like PACA routine access for salvaging purposes." This was followed by a troubling article on August 31: "UI never reported PACA's request to state." The editorial on September 24 stated "Land fill spared unneeded waste; the silliness surrounding the planned demolition of two university properties shows once again that sunshine is the best disinfectant."

Along with these articles the NG published letters from Tom Garza (8/27), Robert Nemeth (8/28), Marilyn Upah-Bant (9/1), and Lee Stoops (9/4). Lee's and Tom's letters—"The university should work to recycle" and "Wasting salvageable property is a disgrace"—pointed out that a picture had appeared in the August 16 issue of a UI house being demolished at 1203 West Oregon, Urbana, with all of the original doors and trim being destroyed. Marilyn's letter—"Doomed residence has quite a history"—noted that 57 East Armory had been the residence of Professor Max Beberman, a world-renowned professor in mathematical education, and that the house could be thought of as the cradle of the "New Math." On September 26th the *Daily Illini* published an article entitled "University to postpone historic home demolition, Association works for preservation before University finalizes teardown," which included an interview with one of the daughters of Professor Beberman who grew up in the house in the 1950s. A photo of the Beberman kids taken in front of the house in 1956 was included. She recalls playing on the columns and platforms at the entrance of the living room



Demolition of 1203 West Oregon in August 2013; Krannert Center for the Performing Arts and Espresso Royale in background

where her father often worked late writing textbooks. She noted that this work was in response to Sputnik's launch and would change the way math was taught forever.

MEETING WITH THE CHANCELLOR

After the first articles in the NG appeared, longtime PACA member Bob Swisher requested a meeting with the chancellor which was granted on September 17. The meeting included Chancellor Phyllis Wise, Allan Stratman (New Executive Director F&S), Scott Rice (Campus Legal Counsel), Mike DeLorenzo (Associate Chancellor), Bob, and myself. The meeting was very cordial. We were given an opportunity to review the history of PACA's ties to the UI noting that in the past we worked closely with staff from the fire training institute, police department, and F&S's asbestos abatement crews. We stated our concerns and fielded questions from the chancellor and her staff, and our final recommendation was that we hoped an agreement between the UI Inventory Control and Central Management Services of the State of Illinois could be re-instituted to allow for the UI to make decisions locally on this issue in the future.

A HISTORY LESSON

PACA was officially incorporated in March of 1981 by a network of people who shared a commitment to preserve our natural and built environment. PACA founders hoped to encourage appropriate renovations of public and private buildings and adaptive reuse as an alternative to demolition. Much of our initial efforts involved raising public awareness through educational activities, including house tours, and since 1985, PACA has given Heritage Awards to various properties and individuals that have done significant rehabilitation/preservation work over the past year(s). Formal salvage operations began in 1983 to ensure that when all other options fail that at least we save what can be saved. In 1983 the salvage committee led by Bob Swisher made contacts with the University of Illinois in an attempt to gain some latitude in dealing with contractors who had received bids to demolish university property. In 1985 groups named the V.I.P.s (Volunteers in Preservation) and S.A.V.E. (Salvage of Architecturally Valuable Elements) were created. In 1986 PACA began renting space at 65 East University, Champaign, and in 1998 it purchased its current location at

44 East Washington. The heritage grant program that began in 1994 was made possible from sales of architectural salvage materials and to date PACA has given out \$100,000 in grants to community groups in east central Illinois for amounts ranging from \$50 to \$5,000 for education activities, as well larger sums for historic restoration projects. Salvage sales have also allowed PACA to take on the restoration and eventual sale of the Nathan C. Ricker House at 610 West Green, Urbana.

RENOVATE

Large classroom buildings have often undergone major renovations. In 1991 work began on total renovation of the historic Harker Hall that was threatened with demolition. PACA was allowed three weeks to save a significant amount of architectural materials including: slate chalkboards, light fixtures, interior doors, oak shelving, and trim. Today Harker Hall is the striking home of the University Foundation. Renovation projects have included: Arcade Building, English Building, Engineering Hall, Gregory Hall, Henry Administration Building, Lincoln Avenue Residence Hall, Noyes Chemistry Laboratory, Talbot Laboratory, and, most recently, Lincoln Hall. PACA was given permission to save architectural items from these projects working in cooperation with the UI and the contractors involved. This often saved the contractors money in labor and demolition expenses.

RELOCATE

The UI is often faced with difficult decisions in maintaining older building on campus, in particular former residences that had been acquired over the years that were converted to office use. In some cases there have been successful relocations of these buildings.

The Greek Revival Cottage or "Workman's Cottage" is thought to be one of the oldest buildings in Champaign-Urbana, dating from the 1850s. It was located at 1205 West Springfield, Urbana, on the UI campus, but in 1976 the house was slated for demolition to build a parking lot. Vice Chancellor Joseph Diana gave preservationists one last chance to save the house. Led by Bud Baker and Pat Miller an agreement was reached, and the UI agreed to transfer title to the Champaign County Historical Museum which moved the house to Leal Park at 303 West University, Urbana, in 1977. After initial work was completed, CCHM faced shrinking funds. In the 1980s the project was completed by PACA and now is the headquarters for the Urbana Park District.

In 1981 the Lorado Taft House located at 601 East John, Champaign, was relocated to 1401 South Maryland Drive to become College of ACES Information and Technology and Communication Services Center. The 1873 house was the boyhood home of Lorado Taft and also where he lived while he earned his BS and MS degrees from the UI. The house is a combination of Italianate



The Lorado Taft House at 601 East John Street prior to its move in 1981.

July 33 No 5



The Lorado Taft House was cut in half before moving it down Pennsylvania Avenue. The Stock Pavilion is in the background.

and Swiss cottage styles and one of the few of that era that survived. It was purchased by the UI in 1949 and its last use was for Office of Campus Parking. After a flurry of activity concerning the future of the house Vice Chancellor Wendel and President Ikenberry reaffirmed the UI decision to preserve the structure in recognition of its architectural and historic distinction.

Steve A. Forbes House, located at 1209 West Springfield, Urbana, was moved to 508 East Church Street, Champaign, in 1993. Stephen Forbes established what the Illinois Natural History became in 1877. He also was a professor in zoology and entomology. The house was built in 1885 in an Italianate style. After being acquired by the UI it had become the Botany Annex. By the early 1990s the house had fallen

into a state of disrepair and suffered from vandalism. After a major fundraising effort that included a contribution of \$5,000 from the UI, it was successfully moved and restored as the new home for The Center for Women in Transition.

A number of agricultural buildings associated with the UI South Farms along St. Mary's Road and First Street needed to be removed for the construction of the UI South Research Park. In 2004 the 1912 Sheep Barn was deconstructed by PACA member Jim Sasser and relocated to Tennessee. In 2007 the 1917 Beef Barn was deconstructed by Trillium Dell Timberworks of Knoxville, IL, and moved to Monticello for the Piatt County Museum. The museum paid the UI \$15,500 for the barn. The cost of disassembly was about \$270,000. Sadly,

the museum could not raise the money necessary to complete the project. An attempt was made to move a 1925 bungalow that was the UI Poultry Manager's house but the cost of the relocation of utilities made the project financially impractical and the house was demolished in 2007. Finally, in 2013 the century-old Cruse Family barn west of the research part was deconstructed by Trillium to make way for a 20.5 acre solar farm. The UI provided \$55,000 toward the project and the barn is being reconstructed near Bloomington, IL, as an agriculture building. Student groups at the UI were instrumental in pressuring the university to save the barn.

REMOVE

When funding is available for major new construction projects, it is unfortunate that buildings must be demolished to make room for new construction in the core of the campus. In 1991 the UI announced plans to build a new Engineering Library and Quad to be located at the site of the Woodshop Foundry Building and Aeronautical Laboratory B. As it turned out, this project began the process that greatly altered the face of the engineering campus. PACA led a vigorous campaign to save these historic buildings that went to the UI Board of Trustees. Despite the unsuccessful campaign Aero Lab B, Woodshop and Foundry, Electrical Engineering Laboratory, Electrical Engineering Annex, and University Fire Station were demolished. PACA was still allowed to salvage a considerable amount of architectural materials from this project. In some ways this major salvage operation provided the funds that allowed us to eventually buy our warehouse building and take on other major projects.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

PACA BOX 2575, CHAMPAIGN, IL 61825

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

- New Renewal

NAME: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

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

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

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

vol 33
no 4

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

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The newsletter of the



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OR CURRENT RESIDENT

UI has given PACA the opportunity to save significant quantities of architectural elements of the structures that were demolished. Among the buildings salvaged were the former Japan House, School of Music Annex, Ornamental Horticulture Building, Vegetable Crop Science Building, Hydro systems laboratory and warehouse, and numerous buildings that were acquired over the years for parking.

WHAT IS NEXT

Recently the UI granted PACA a chance to tour the two houses on East Armory (see NG 11/14). We have been assured that we will be allowed to save what we can once the UI receives written permission from Central Management Services of the State of Illinois. It is PACA's hope that this process can be handled in the future with officials from UI Office of Business and Finance in cooperation with UI F&S.

I would like to thank Julie Wurth from the *News-Gazette* for taking a profound interest in the pursuit of this story. PACA would also like to thank the numerous staff at the University of Illinois who have been supportive of PACA programs over the last 30 years. This has included Steve Hesselschwerdt, David Garner, Gary Biehler,

Cliff Carey, Morgan Johnston, Brian Brauer, and many other UI staff members who have served on the PACA board of directors, volunteered, and been local customers.



UI students from the Society of Architectural Historians spent a long day salvaging during the remodeling project in Noyes Lab. Most of the doors, trims, etc., are now part of the Blind Pig Pub in downtown Champaign.

vol 33 no 4

4