



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820

“The Past Has A Future”

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CATTLE BANK REVISITED

The rental spaces in the Cattle Bank have remained vacant for over a year. This has left many within the community wondering about the building's status. Were construction costs too high causing the rental price to be non-competitive, is the physical space inadequate, or is the location not right? Why is the investment of a fully modernized National Register property having such problems?

In order to get an update on the situation and in light of recent discussions about the possibility of the property's sale, Cattle Bank Committee Chairman, Greg Hargus, recently spoke to the owners and developers, Edward Haas and Leon Jeske. The following questions and answers have been paraphrased and edited for space requirements.

Q. One year, two months after completion of construction and over three years from when you purchased the building, can you review the current status of the Cattle Bank?

A. Still vacant.

Q. What is the current status with regards to overall rental of the four office spaces? (2 floors of the Cattle Bank, 2 floors of the Oakley Building)

A. The Oakley Building next door is rented. The first floor to Illinois Times, the second floor to Maxicare.

Q. Now that the Oakley Building has been rented by Maxicare and Illinois Times, why do you feel that the space in the Cattle Bank has not been rented?

A. My own opinion is because of the area. I still say it's the area. When people think of the Cattle Bank, they know that it's over there at First and University. Right? They don't associate the annex, 104 East University, with 102 East University. In essence, when we rented to Maxicare and Illinois Times, we are



Before renovation. (Courtesy of the Champaign County Historical Archives)

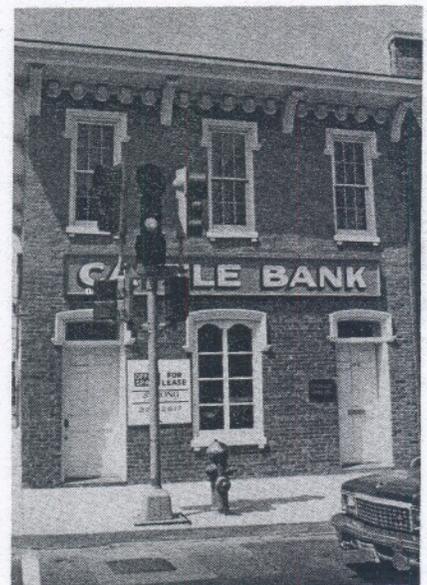
talking about two out-of-town companies that came into town and didn't know anything about the north end.

Q. And they have come, rented, and are happy?

A. Sure, of course. People from Chicago and Springfield will come and rent it but our own people won't. Because they are being told by realtors that they don't want to go in that part of town, it's a bad part of town. Illinois Times told us, "you know you are getting bad mouthed around town from the realtors saying that's a bad part of town." Of course they won't tell us who the realtor was. Just that it was happening.

One of the reasons why the building next door was rented before the Cattle Bank was because of heating and air conditioning considerations. Because the Oakley Building only has north and south walls with windows and the Cattle Bank has west walls too. They thought that would be more efficient. Which it is.

Q. Do you feel the purchase and restoration of a National Register building is a good investment?



After renovation.

A. It's a good investment if you receive more assistance from the federal and state in terms of grants. They told us after we had finished our project that the state had just come out with a restoration program where they reimbursed you 50%. (This was a one-time grant program funded by the Emergency Jobs bill.)

Q. *You did receive \$13,500 in terms of a grant, that was at the time, (1981), the very last grant. The Illinois Department of Conservation was excited about it. Here was a grant for the Cattle Bank and somebody better start using that money or the money was going to be gone or not available.*

A. The \$13,000 was from the City, I think, and there was \$20,000 from the state. I guess that was something they had left over that they needed to use.

Q. *That was the very last state preservation grant. So in terms of the Cattle Bank, you were very fortunate to receive one of those very last grants available.*

A. However, if we had waited one year, we could have received 50% of the total construction costs.

Q. *For the Cattle Bank as well as the Oakley Building?*

A. Both. The Cattle Bank is the most expensive one, the Oakley Building really didn't matter. It didn't cost us a lot, it's not really strapping us like the Cattle Bank is. If we were in this just for the idea of restoring a building and selling it, we could have just put in garbage, we could have just made this look pretty. But we didn't do that because we don't want to sell, we did this to have forever. So consequently, we put the best of everything into it. But it didn't pay off in this instance.

Q. *Do you feel that you spent too much money on the interior restoration and renovation?*

A. Well, no.

Q. *Do you feel that construction overspending might affect rentability because of high rental rates?*

A. No, I will tell you why I can't say that. We did this restoration basically, for ourselves, our pride; but we also kept in mind that we have to keep the integrity of this building up for thirty years. We figured that if we are going to have it for thirty years, we wanted to put the very best into it so that every year when we have to let people walk through, they'll have pride. "There's the Champaign Cattle Bank." So it's two things. It's ownership for us, but

it's a little pride for the people of the State of Illinois to look on the map and say "let's go through Champaign and see that Cattle Bank that is dated 1856 or whatever."

Q. *The plan for the purchase and remodeling of the Oakley Building was an afterthought to the Cattle Bank restoration. What value do you feel the Oakley Building has been to the Cattle Bank building?*

A. It modernized it. If we would have just done the Cattle Bank we'd have a beautiful looking structure in a block of garbage. So what we've done is the Cattle Bank and the structure adjacent to it. We can't restore the whole block, so that gave this corner a little bit more . . .

Q. *Incentive?*

A. No, a little bit more . . ., well look at it. The whole corner looks like its good. If we would have just done the Cattle Bank it would have been like a postage stamp sitting on the corner of an envelope. This way, when we did two buildings, it took care of a big space on the corner.

Q. *Of course the building directly across the street, (Champaign Police Department) certainly has been a major improvement to the whole neighborhood. Many other people were very aware of what you were doing here and they were supporting you with comments that where going to City Hall. Some of the other property owners have been doing improvements, but you really think that the Cattle Bank has instigated neighborhood growth. Do you think it would have occurred anyway?*

A. No, I don't think it would have occurred if they'd left the Cattle Bank in the state that it was. You were talking about two dilapidated buildings that made an intersection, one of the busiest intersections in Champaign-Urbana, look like the slums of St. Louis.

Q. *So you're actually saying that if the Cattle Bank building hadn't been done your neighbors certainly wouldn't have done any improvements?*

A. They wouldn't have because this was a dead building. And the proof of the pudding is old photos. I was looking at mine the other day and saw what a mess it was. I said to Leon, "you and I are crazy. Look what we did, we have got to be nuts. You couldn't give me that building and here we took it. And had to pay a dollar for it too!" It's the truth though. I mean, when you look at those pictures, you say, holy mackerel.

But, I got to make one comment. The north end has not changed. They've

done some painting, some minor things. Because their intention is to doll the joint up, not to draw up the neighborhood, but to make it attractive because their thinking is the City someday is going to come and buy it and they're going to get big bucks. But most of these businesses—they have a front door to the business, but you do business in the alley.

Q. *The Cattle Bank and the Oakley project(s), would you have done them differently, looking in retrospect?*

A. We wouldn't do them any different.

Q. *Both of you concur on that. Not a thing different. Same level of quality?*

A. Same level of quality.

Q. *Same realtors?*

A. Same everything.

Q. *Same architect?*

A. Same everything. Same preservation group to work with us.

Q. *That's a very good plug for PACA, right?*

A. That's right. In all honesty, it would have been a hell of a job to tackle without your group. No kidding. Because every time we hit a wall and it came down, you guys were the ones that picked us up and said hey come on. You guys, especially Bruce Hannon, did a tremendous amount of work. It is not seen.

Q. *What are your future plans for the Cattle Bank?*

A. Hoping that it will rent. Hoping we'll be able to rent it and we can keep our head out of the water and keep it for the next thirty years so our kids can say, "That's my dad's, he did that." . . . you know, it's pride. And that's why we went into it in the first place. It's pride in having a gorgeous building that we can say we restored when everybody said it couldn't be done. People a lot smarter, who at least thought they were a lot smarter than us, said it couldn't be done and the proof of the pudding is, it's done.

Q. *Your personalities have been wrapped up in the building. You've done high level, quality workmanship here and you've put yourselves into the building. You won't be selling it for any other reason than financial.*

A. No other reason. If we could pay our bills we would never sell.

Another thing. The money that Joan Severns raised, I think she had between \$4,000 and \$5,000, was divided up so we ended up with a check for \$432. So you know, it's as though the

impression the community has is that we took this project in order to stuff our pockets with money. Obviously, there's no way you're going to do that. We didn't, and we knew that we weren't going to stuff our pockets with anything.

Q. To summarize: the major issues that we've just talked about are: 1) you're personally involved with a building very important to the City of Champaign; 2) you're very pleased with the level of quality you've established here; 3) money is a major concern with rentability the key issue. If you had this place rented and could keep it rented you would see no problems maintaining the building. So the key issue is rentability?

A. Right. Rented, we could just about make our payments. We owe on the notes several, several thousands of dollars. Just to give you an idea, last year we paid in interest \$18,000. In interest. Forget the payments, in interest. The state only gave us \$20,000, so in essence we got no grants. We got \$13,700 from the City and with the \$2,000 left from the state money we got, in essence, \$15,000 to restore the building. Free money. And I would say that by December 31, 1984, it will be a totally lost project, because our interest will be another \$18,000.

Q. Well, one major consideration for this project is the tax breaks, the depreciation that you do have. We don't want to give other individuals the thought that you aren't getting depreciation. You are certainly getting depreciation.

A. Right. But you need to write that off against income.

Two concerns have been brought up in this interview and deserve some further discussion:

The funds that were accumulated by Joan Severns were collected prior to the purchase of the Cattle Bank by the developers, Jeske and Haas. When the building was sold to these developers it was questioned whether the contributors would want their funds distributed to a private party. Thus, individuals who contributed over \$100 were asked by the Champaign County Historical Museum how the funds should be distributed. The results were not under the control of the City.

Secondly, the issue of "red lining" the Cattle Bank by realtors has not been a goal of any realtor according to other knowledgeable parties. Of the tenants shown the building by past realtors, "image" of neighborhood was seen as a major detriment to placing a business at this address.

THE PROBLEM SOLVER

The plaster ceiling of my old house is peeling and badly patched. It also has a few minor cracks. Are there any quick repair methods that do not require a professional plasterer?

There are several methods of covering damaged plaster ceilings with substitute materials, but none is quick. These alternatives also are not suitable for ceilings decorated with raised plaster because the decoration would be destroyed in the process. But for plain plastered ceilings that you do not wish to replaster and repaint, one historic method still valid today is to apply wallpaper or fabric over the entire ceiling. More modern methods involve fiber-glass sheeting and special adhesives. Application procedures here, however, are more complex than traditional wallpaper or fabric applications. Moreover, because these products are fairly new, their long-term effects on paint and plaster as well as their bonding capabilities are less certain.

We recently had the dining room of our 1885 townhouse professionally replastered, and then we painted the plaster ourselves with oil primer and finish coats. Now, much to our dismay, the surface is discolored and blistering. What caused this reaction?

You did not mention how long the plaster was allowed to dry after it had been applied, but you may not have waited long enough. Fresh plaster (as well as fresh concrete, mortar and stucco) must be permitted to cure before it is painted. If the building temperature is above 50 degrees Fahrenheit and the relative humidity below 70 percent, three to four weeks is generally sufficient drying time. If the surface has to be painted before curing, a good latex primer can probably be applied successfully. Because latex is water-permeable, moisture from the drying plaster is able to escape. When you applied an oil paint, which is far less permeable, over your uncured plaster, the evaporating moisture caused the surface to blister. You should scrape and sand all affected areas, wait until you are certain the plaster has cured and then apply a high-quality oil finish coat, which should adhere.

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vation Press, National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, for \$9.95 plus \$2.50 postage and handling.

NOTES

An exciting new book commemorating the 150th Anniversary of Champaign County is now available. This publication provides an updated overview of county history. Its purpose is to increase understanding of the historical development of the County and its contributions to the state, the nation and the world.

A Commemorative History of Champaign County, Illinois: 1833-1983 by Willis "Bud" Baker and Patricia L. Miller. Printed in limited number by Walsworth Publishing Company. Hard cover. \$29.95. Contact the Illinois Heritage Association, 359-5600.

In the last issue of the newsletter, *The Problem Solver* discussed *The House Collection*. Unfortunately, we neglected to mention that the collection is located at the The Urbana Free Library.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP MEETING

The annual PACA membership meeting is scheduled for Sunday afternoon, January 27, 1985 in the old Masonic Temple, 115 West Main Street, Urbana. The business meeting will begin at 2:00 p.m. and will include a review of 1984's activities and plans for 1985, the presentation of the 1985 budget, and the election of three members to the Board of Directors. Only members in good standing are allowed to vote in the election (your mailing label shows the month/year of your membership).

Following the business meeting, Lachlan Blair, professor of Urban and Regional Planning and PACA board member, will present a slide presentation "Hysterical Travels through Historical Champaign". The first annual Heritage Award presentations will also be made. After the meeting, tours of the Masonic Temple building will be available.

The meeting is open to the general public, so mark your calendars and bring your friends!

THE OLD HOUSE SCHOOL

Learn the "3 R's" of the old house—retrofitting, renovating and remembering—at PACA's new old house school. A series of informal, but informative workshops on all aspects of the old house will be held monthly beginning this January.

The programs are aimed at people who are renovating their own homes, but are open to anyone who is interested in learning renovation/remodeling techniques. Topics such as insulation, plaster repair, roofing problems, exterior painting, landscaping, masonry and chimney repair, will be covered.

The first three sessions will be held Thursday evenings beginning at 7:00 p.m. at the Urbana Free Library Auditorium.

January 31—Insulating the Old House

February 28—Plaster Repair

March 28—Furnace and Radiator Problems/Efficiency

For more information call PACA, 359-0114.



The following are new or renewing members:

Mrs. Mary Altenbernd
Francine Weinbaum
A. Richard Williams
Lynn Manley
Jack Waaler Family
Michael J. Lambert



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Vice President: Gregory Hargus

Treas.: Norman Baxley

Exec. Director: Karen Lang Kummer
359-0114

Please submit material for publication in the next newsletter before 15th of month.

Membership Application P.A.C.A.



MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

INDIVIDUAL

- Adult \$10.00
 Student (1/2 time or more) \$ 5.00
 Senior Citizen \$ 5.00
 Family (includes all members of a household with no more than two members being over age 21) \$15.00

Additional Contribution _____

CIVIC

- Over 100 members \$100.00
 50-100 members \$ 75.00
 Up to 50 members \$ 50.00

CORPORATE

..... \$ 50.00

NAME _____

RENEWAL

NEW MEMBERSHIP

ADDRESS _____
Street State Zip

Make check payable to: PACA, Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820.