



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820

“The Past Has A Future”

Volume 5

July-August, 1985

Number 4

Despite five months of work and twelfth hour calls to area banks, the plan to move the historic Sims House failed for lack of financial planning. A rather sensational article appeared in the NEWS GAZETTE concerning PACA's last minute salvage efforts at the house. For the benefit of PACA members the entire five month process will be related.

On February 18, Mrs. Margrete Ekstam called PACA Executive Director, Karen Kummer, upon the recommendation of the Champaign County Historical Archives, and asked for advice concerning the disposition of her rental property at 803 West Green Street. She knew the house was historically and architecturally significant; it had been in her family since the 1930's. However, an apartment developer had been pressuring her for a number of weeks to sell and the maintenance and utility bills were getting to be too much for her to handle. Mrs. Ekstam asked PACA for assistance — what should she do? Ms. Kummer emphasized the significance of the house to Mrs. Ekstam and asked for time to find a sympathetic buyer for the house. Mrs. Ekstam gave PACA one week to find a buyer.

After many frantic phone calls, Board discussions and consultations, PACA found a buyer who would restore the house on the site. Ms. Marylee MacDonald exceeded the developer's initial offer of \$65,000, offering Mrs. Ekstam \$70,000 for the house and land. Ms. MacDonald is an experienced restoration contractor who had the knowledge, expertise and devotion to make the project a success.

Mrs. Ekstam went back to the developer, who offered her \$75,000; rather than become involved in a bidding war, Ms. MacDonald dropped out. It should be noted that the very deteriorated condition of the house made rehabilitation costs quite high; therefore, the initial

SIMS FARMHOUSE

803 W. Green St., Urbana
c. 1865—1985



purchase price had to remain reasonable in order to make the project economically feasible. Mrs. Ekstam sold the property to the developer for \$75,000 cash plus the right to keep all the rents until June 1 and to move the house from the property by July 1.

At this point, Mrs. Ekstam came back to PACA offering to give PACA the house to move in exchange for a charitable donation. Although rather disturbed at having the offer to restore the house *on-site* refused, PACA agreed to accept Mrs. Ekstam's offer and facilitate the moving of the house. However, she was fully informed of the fact that moving the house would be extremely difficult for a number of reasons. The house's size and poor physical condition, the lack of suitable nearby lots with accept-

able moving routes and the very short timetable made the project a “long-shot” at best.

PACA began advertising the house's availability and started looking for suitable lots, while working with the Urbana Community Development Division on location, route, zoning, setback and other requirements. Local newspaper and television spots generated interest in the project and a number of people responded. PACA arranged for tours of the house, distributed rough floor plans and the names of potential house movers. The Board decided that the most equitable way to proceed would be for all interested parties to submit a written proposal stating that they had considered the following points: lot size

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and set-back requirements; deed and zoning restrictions; cost of new foundation; moving route, cost estimates and financing; basic renovation plan including financing and timetable. The proposals were due on May 13, at which time the Board met and chose Robert Auler's proposal as being the most feasible.

Mr. Auler had one month to move the house; Mrs. Ekstam's verbal agreement (the legal contracts were never executed for various reasons) with PACA gave PACA until June 15 to find someone to move and renovate the house. Mr. Auler's task was hampered by Mrs. Ekstam because access to the building was limited by a lack of keys, by tenants remaining beyond the June 1 deadline, and by furniture and appliances being left in the building. This made it difficult to produce the necessary working drawings and building specifications required for moving and relocating a building in Urbana. Problems were also encountered in finding an available mover; however, PACA was able to help in this regard and continued to work as facilitator between Mr. Auler and Mrs. Ekstam.

The June 15 deadline was waived by Mrs. Ekstam because she was assured, as was PACA, by Mr. Auler that everything was under control and that, while the plans were progressing slowly, a reasonable time frame had been established. An extension beyond July 1 was received by Mr. Auler from the new property owner and developer, Douglas Larson, so that he would have until mid-July to move the house. Mr. Auler also obtained City Council approval for the move and was working on the last requirements of the code and public works departments.

Although Mrs. Ekstam's legal rights to the property terminated at the real estate closing on July 1, she was kept informed of the project's progress by Mr. Auler's project coordinator, Neil Sheehan, and PACA. In fact, she continued to hold keys to the house and removed furniture, fixtures, and other items from the property after the transfer of ownership.

Preparation work for the actual moving of the house began Monday, July 22. On that same day, however, Mr. Auler received word from the bank that his loan was denied; all work was stopped. PACA was informed late Monday afternoon of the situation and Monday evening and all day Tuesday were spent by PACA revising the pro-

ject's scope and cost estimates and contacting numerous loan officers. The job was hampered by Mr. Auler's initial application to only one bank and by the fact that he was on vacation and unavailable to talk with loan officials. PACA was continuing to look for financial backing when Mr. Auler's office called late Wednesday morning stating that he had withdrawn from the project and had so informed the developer.

PACA immediately contacted the developer, Mr. Larson, who already had obtained the necessary demolition permits, and was informed that the house would be demolished the next day. PACA received permission from him to salvage items from the building that evening. The little time remaining was spent by Ms. Kummer recruiting salvage volunteers and dealing with unexpected personal obligations.

Upon arriving at the house at 2:30 p.m., Ms. Kummer informed Mr. Ekstam, who was removing furniture from the building, of the situation and that the house would be torn down the next day. He was told that he should take anything they wanted from the building that day. It was assumed by Ms. Kummer that Mr. Ekstam would inform his wife of the situation. Apparently, he did not.

Salvage volunteers began work about 4:00 p.m. and continued working through the evening without supper or breaks and in very high humidity. A stranger stopped by and asked for permission to remove some new kitchen cabinets. Although legally no longer owned by the Ekstam's, Ms. Kummer felt the cabinets might be something that they would want for their own use or to sell; consequently, she told the gentleman that he would need to ask the Ekstam's. He called Mrs. Ekstam, who gave him permission, but she also learned of PACA's salvaging efforts from him (not from her husband). Upset at the turn of events, Mrs. Ekstam called the Urbana police and went over to the site.

Upon assessing the situation as related by PACA and Mrs. Ekstam, the policeman informed Mrs. Ekstam that she had no legal right to interfere (which she acknowledged) and asked her repeatedly to leave the site since she was visibly upset and emotionally distraught. Mr. Larson also came by and reaffirmed PACA's position. Both Mr. Larson and PACA offered Mrs. Ekstam anything she wanted from the house, but Mr. Larson repeated that the house would be demolished the next day.

Mrs. Ekstam refused to leave, but rather continued to harangue PACA about how she had given PACA the house and had refused offers to sell the staircase since the house was to be moved. Ms. Kummer repeatedly informed Mrs. Ekstam that the very quick turn of events with less than twelve hours notice and the fact that PACA had done its very best but had no legal right to stop the demolition, necessitated the rapid removal of the building's salvagable features or they would all be destroyed. Mrs. Ekstam was told that any or all of the salvaged items were hers if she wanted. PACA does not salvage for profit, but to save irreplaceable architectural elements. PACA also offered to help her remove any items she wanted from the building.

It should be stated that after hearing the complaints of Mrs. Ekstam and after working in the heat for an extended length of time, a few PACA volunteers were upset. They were frustrated and disturbed at the knowledge that the last frame Italianate house in Urbana was being torn down — and that it need not have been so, if it had been sold to PACA's buyer rather than to the developer.

The Sims Farmhouse was the second attempt by PACA to save a house from demolition by relocation. The first project, the Little House in Rantoul, was successful; PACA helped Saint Malachy's Parish find an interested developer who moved and will restore the house. Our second project, the Sims Farmhouse, was much more complicated and had only a limited chance for success. PACA has learned quite a lot from the experience, which should prove to be helpful in future projects. Hopefully, through continued survey and planning projects and the education of the community to the value of historic architecture, future situations will have positive results.

PRAIRIE CONFERENCE

Plans have been finalized for the 1985 **Central Illinois Prairie Conference** on September 21-22 at Mahomet-Seymour High School in Mahomet. Saturday's schedule begins with registration from 7:30 a.m. to 8:45 a.m. At 9 a.m. Dr. James King of the Illinois State Museum will deliver the opening keynote address, "Prairie Frontiers — What Was."

At 10 a.m. concurrent sessions on a wide variety of prairie topics will begin. There will be discussions of grassland ecology, history of the Grand Prairie region, prairie wildlife, mycorrhizal re-

relationships and prairie, legalities of land acquisition, managing degraded prairies, rare plant restoration, and other issues. Lunch at noon will be followed at 1:15 by a second keynote speaker, Dr. Paul Risser of the Illinois Natural History Survey, who will discuss "Prairie Frontiers — What Is." At 2:10 p.m., concurrent sessions will be presented on such topics as the prairie garden, prairie soils, prairie education for the public, central Illinois' remaining prairies, prairie successes, music of the prairie, introducing children to the prairie, prairie restoration, and conservation ethics and agriculture. The closing address will be delivered at 4:15 by Dr. Robert Betz, North Eastern Illinois University, who will talk about "Prairie Frontiers — What Will Be." At 7 p.m. there will be the annual meeting of the Grand Prairie Friends, primary sponsor of the conference. Ivan Sherburn will discuss the role of forest preserves in prairie preservation. The evening will conclude with entertainment. On Sunday there will be three field trips of varying lengths to prairie sites. Registration for the conference is \$15 for those who register by September 1; after that the fee is \$18. The fee includes lunch and entertainment Saturday and the Sunday field trips. For more information, contact the **Grand Prairie Friends**, P.O. Box 36, Urbana, IL 61801.

(Reprinted from the Illinois Heritage Association Newsletter)



Hoopes-Cunningham mansion. Photo courtesy of Mr. & Mrs. Peter Krimble.

Roads to Research and Records

The **Champaign County Genealogical Society**, in cooperation with "Ye Olde Genealogie Shoppe" of Indianapolis, Indiana, invites you to an all-day genealogical conference to be held at Jumer's Castle Lodge, 209 S. Broadway Ave., Urbana, Illinois, September 21.

- 8:00- 9:00 Registration. Pick up packet; Browse in Displays; Meet other Registrants
- 9:00- 9:15 Introductory Remarks by the President
- 9:15-10:15 "Searching for Buckeye Branches" (Ohio Research)
- 10:15-10:35 MORNING BREAK
- 10:35-11:35 "Digging in Land Records Requires More Than a Shovel" (Land Records)
- 11:35- 1:00 LUNCH. Browse in Displays
- 1:00- 2:00 "Stop the Presses While I Get My Ancestors Out" (Newspaper Research)
- 2:00- 2:20 AFTERNOON BREAK
- 2:20- 3:20 "Charting Your Way Through" (Maps and Atlases)
- 3:20- 3:30 Announcements and Door Prizes

For more information call 367-2148.

National Register News

PACA is pleased to announce that the Hoopes-Cunningham Mansion (Vermilion Co.) has been nominated to the National Register of Historic Places.

The house was originally built as a two story Italianate in 1879-80 by Thomas Hoopes, founder of the City of Hoopeston. After his death in 1893 the house was purchased by Hoopes' niece/adopted daughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. James A. Cunningham. It was the Cunninghams who remodeled the home to its present Queen Anne style. The Cunningham's granddaughter and her husband, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Dyer purchased the home in 1925. The Dyers altered the home's appearance by removing the veranda and coating it with a white epoxy cement.

The home remains the only one of its kind, historically and architecturally, in Hoopeston and the surrounding area. Historically, it is the only remaining structure that can be directly associated with Thomas Hoopes and his descendants. Beyond building one of the grander homes of his time, James Cunningham was also well known as an economical and political force in Hoopeston. He owned approximately 3600 acres in the town and the surrounding area; helped found and was president of the Hamilton and Cunningham Bank; was an organizer of the Illinois Canning Company, which in 1900 merged with American Can Company; owned the Cunningham Hotel; and was a part owner of the Hoopeston horse nail factory. He was mayor of the town from 1903-1905 and politically active on the county and state level. Subsequent owner Charles Dyer was a prominent attorney in town, politically active, and lived in the home until his death in 1981. Architecturally, the home is unique. It is the largest residence in Hoopeston; the only remaining "grand" home of its time. The only other buildings approaching comparison are the Carnegie library, founded 1904, and a Greek revival brick home remodeled at the turn of the century. All other magnificent turn of the century homes that used to be in Hoopeston have either burned or been demolished.

For Sale: Samuel Love House: c. 1870 frame Italianate, \$149,000. Completely restored & updated. Original wood floors & woodwork. Only two owners. 2 miles east of Philo. 1-684-2862

NOTES

The last issue of the Newsletter contained two articles about Property Tax Abatement for historic houses. These were excerpted from the newsletter and fact sheets published by the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois. For more information, contact LPCI at 312-922-1742.

Volunteers In Preservation

- Robert McClintock
- Kevin Price
- Trent Shepard
- Gene Jacobs
- Janet Page
- Mark Replogle
- Norman Baxley
- Carolyn Baxley
- Joanne Chester
- John Peterson
- Judy Huisinga
- Lindell Huisinga

- Bob Swisher
- Greg Hargus
- Wayne Dillner
- Donna Milner
- Bruce Rittman
- Jane Henneman
- David Sholem
- Jill Winfield
- Roger Day
- Neil Strack
- Marylee MacDonald

- Mrs. Helen Levin
- Mr. and Mrs. Robert Shair
- Joanne Chester and family
- Mr. and Mrs. Louis B. Wetmore
- Cecile M. Dixon
- Mr. and Mrs. Lachlan Blair
- Helen Curley
- Mr. and Mrs. James Page
- Mr. and Mrs. R. T. Milner
- Neil Strack
- Mr. and Mrs. Peter Krimbel
- Richard Smiraglia
- Mr. and Mrs. Scott Anderson, Sr.
- Wendy Garrison

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

- Greg Hargus
- Bob Swisher
- Eugene Jacobs
- Dr. and Mrs. Kummer
- Helen Bess Cone
- Joan and John Severns
- Mrs. William Youngerman



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ASSOCIATION OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY
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ARTS COUNCIL OF CHAMPAIGN COUNTY

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- Vice President: Hermenia Kruidenier
- 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

CIVIC

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

CORPORATE

- \$ 50.00

Additional Contribution _____

NAME _____

RENEWAL NEW MEMBERSHIP

ADDRESS _____
Street State Zip

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