



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820

"The Past Has A Future"

Volume 6

Jan.-Feb., 1986

Number 1



AREA PRESERVATION NEWS

PACA is involved in preservation activities throughout east central Illinois and has members from surrounding counties. In acknowledgement of this activity, the membership voted at its recent meeting to drop "of Champaign County" from the name of the organization. This will make it easier to comment on area preservation issues and to solicit members from surrounding communities. PACA will, however, actively encourage local participation in local preservation issues and seek the formation of local preservation groups. Hopefully in the future each county will have its own active preservation group and PACA will be able to concentrate solely on Champaign County.

Danville

Stony Creek Bridge: Efforts are underway in Danville to save a segmental arch bridge — the only one remaining in East Central Illinois. Although the bridge is structurally sound, the leaking roadway is causing weathering and deterioration of the stone. With water seepage and subsequent freezing, cracks are developing and some stones are coming loose. The state had planned to replace the bridge with a concrete and steel span; however, numerous local residents and PACA expressed concern over the Illinois Department of Transportation's apparent lack of interest in the historic character of the bridge. Upon further investigation, IDOT declared the bridge historically significant and the Vermilion Valley History Round-table has also filed to nominate the Stony Creek Bridge to the National Register of Historic Places.

Suggested rehabilitation involves pouring an eighteen inch concrete arch inside the stone arch, and a concrete mat foundation in the creek bed, binding the arch into a single structure. This would strengthen the bridge and allow



Stony Creek Bridge
E. Main

it to carry bus traffic. The roadway would be resurfaced as well. The current sandstone block guardrails are not as strong as modern concrete ones, and engineers are considering installing interior guardrails or using steel bolts to reinforce the stone.

Judy Coate of the Main Package Store has offered to open up her property next to the creek for public viewing of the bridge and has suggested that a platform with a staircase to the creek would allow for better viewing.

Stony Creek Bridge was built in 1895 by three term Mayor John Beard. The bridge, which spans the Stony Creek between Collett and Buchanan on East Main Street, opened up the land to the east for development by providing a wide easily crossed structure where previously the creek could only be crossed by fording or by narrow bridges. The new bridge allowed street-car lines to be extended, creating a "suburbia,"

of sorts. Beard won the original \$8,900 contract, but Professor Ira Osborn Baker, a University of Illinois civil engineer and project consultant, questioned the quality of the sandstone in Beard's quarry. Beard "overbuilt" the bridge, using 30-inch thick blocks when 22-inch were required. He also agreed not to be paid until Baker inspected and approved the finished structure. It has never been altered since except to upgrade the road-bed.

Grand Opera House: Danville's opera house, previously known as the Fischer Theater, opened in November 1884 as Henley's Grand Opera. The building was remodeled in 1929 and had air conditioning installed in 1938, but remains basically unchanged. It closed in January 1982 because it was too expensive to heat. Its sister theater, the Palace, was to remain open as a dollar house; however, it also closed soon after. Efforts are now underway to

continued on page 2

save the historic and lovely Grand Opera.

In April of 1983, Don Wilson of Wilson-Jones Architects in St. Louis assessed the building and pronounced it in fundamentally good condition. The main floor had been gutted of seats, and the opera boxes were sagging, but the opera house has good acoustics, and the architectural details and features are unlike any used now.

Peter Sortino, a senior planner from the Urban Planning Corporation of St. Louis, spoke to the Mayor's Committee for the Grand Opera House last June. He estimated renovation at about \$3 million. He explained that most renovated theaters operate at a loss, and depend on contributions, grants and subsidies to make up about 36% of the total revenue. He also stressed that community support is the key to success, with a volunteer staff, and coordinated use by community arts groups being major factors in keeping a theater going.

If the Civic Center Authority expanded its geographical area to include all of Vermilion County, either through special state legislation or action by the Vermilion County Board, the state Civic Center Support Program would pay up to 75% of the necessary renovation funds.

There has been some opposition by downtown businesss to the plan. They are not convinced that the theater is worth the cost. They feel the property could be better used as a parking lot or a new entertainment center, divided into movie houses, disco, restaurants and a youth center. Others are worried that it will take business away from the existing Civic Center. But Dick Geyer, general manager of the David R. Palmer Civic Center, supports plans for the Arts Center. The Opera House holds only 800 seats, as opposed to thousands, and would be suitable for many smaller uses such as home base for a symphony, limited music productions, small dance performances, magic shows, and art exhibits. Perhaps the Red Mask and Danville Light Opera would like to relocate to such an historic setting.

Architects suggest that the Palace be torn down and replaced by a courtyard, plantings, and an outdoor entertainment area. The old store fronts at the Fischer Theater would be eliminated and an elegant lobby with a grand staircase to the second story reception be installed in their place. The upper two front levels would be used for offices and rehearsal halls.

On a visit in July, comedian Jerry Van Dyke, a former usher at the theater, suggested a benefit performance to help raise some of the 25% needed to match

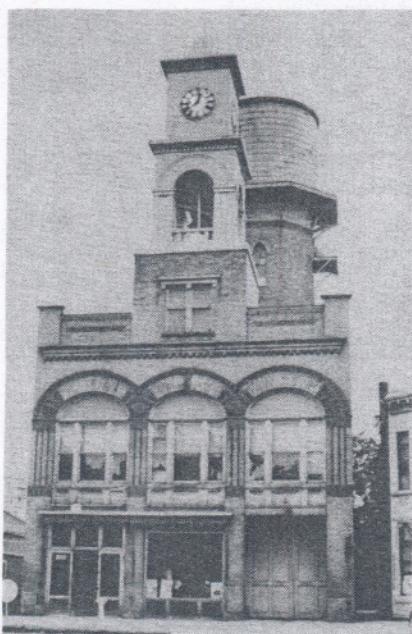
state funds. The Kerasotes family has offered to give the building to the city if there is sufficient interest in renovation. But if anything is to be done to help save this relic of a bygone era, it must be done soon. The past winter has been relatively mild, but continued exposure to the cold of winter may destroy the lovely plaster decorations that add so much to the atmosphere of this once elegant opera house.



Fischer Theater,
162 N. Vermilion

Paxton

The Paxton Foundation has saved one of the state's oldest water towers and pumping stations, and has completed exterior restoration according to the plans of Kenyon & Associates of Peoria. The Water Tower and Pump House is located at 145 South Market Street and was designed by Fairbanks, Morse and Company in 1887. Once slated for demolition by the City of Paxton, the Foundation succeeded in listing the octagonal tower on the National Register of Historic Places, worked with University of Illinois



Paxton Water Tower and Pump House
Photo by John Garner

students to produce architectural drawings, and raised \$15,000 for restoration. The City has now committed \$15,000 for a new cap and roof. Future projects are interior restoration and replacement of the wooden tank that stood on top of the tower. The landmarks will be used as an observation tower and community meeting place.

Railroad & Prairie Preservation

A unique opportunity exists in this area, at this time, to preserve and display the Midwest landscape . . . what it is and what it was.

The opportunity is a Illinois Central and Gulf railroad, which is closing down but could be saved and modified as a way to help visitors and ourselves better understand and enjoy the prairie terrain and the culture that derived from it.

The railroad crosses an unusual variety of the features of our heritage: the moraines and outwash plains, the prairies and the forests, the agriculture and businesses and the readily recognized symbols of prairielands, spires and elevators.

The railroad runs from Decatur to Clinton with a leg into Champaign. A portion of the Champaign leg has been removed, but there are possibilities for a prairie trail along that segment that parallels Route 10 and rises up over the Cerra Gordo Moraine.

Further along the line, from Whiteheath to Monticello, the Monticello Railroad Museum is making moves to buy seven miles of track, which could become part of a prairie preserve track system. Again the track traverses typical terrain, including prairie.

West of Monticello, the railroad passes industrial areas, then a four-mile stretch of virgin soil and prairie — which could be of interest to biologists and tourists — adjacent to the University Allerton Park.

Further west, to Cisco and Decatur, the Cisco Grain Elevator has bought 15 miles of track to transport grain and, again, prairie preservation agreements might be possible.

The Clinton leg of the track moves from Whiteheath across the Sangamon River and excellent bird watching bottomlands to the grain elevators of Lodge, Deland, Weldon and Lane. Here, if the track remains operational, cooperative use of the rails for conservation, recreation and transport could take place, with \$20 million worth of grain stored in the elevators being moved by rail rather than road.

At the western end, the line moves

across bottomlands near the Clinton power plant and could be used to connect the natural areas there with those at Weldon Springs.

The hub of the railroad would be a visitor center at Monticello.

In addition, a section of the Norfolk and Western railway line from Monticello north to Lodge might also be included in a prairie railway system if a joint operating agreement is reached. The addition of that piece of line would make possible a 20-mile recreational circuit through Monticello, White Heath and Lodge. A restaurant car could travel the circuit, providing dinner on the rails for visitors.

The recreational railway, if it could be created, could become a major new tourist attraction in central Illinois, serving both visitors and residents from nearby cities such as Champaign-Urbana, Rantoul, Decatur and Clinton. It could also provide jobs, both in improving the rails and interpreting the "flat and uninteresting" Midwest to visitors.

Best of all, it could preserve a lot of Illinois' rapidly vanishing natural history.

If the project is to succeed, it will need a great deal of help from the community. If you support such a project, please write to the governor, suggesting its value in the context of the Build Illinois Program and tourism. Illinois cannot hope to attract people to the area in competition with other states if we do not provide opportunities of this kind. The only remaining prairie exists along the railway lines, and it will be lost forever, along with the rails, as the railroads close down.

In addition, volunteers are needed to help with planning and coordinating the project. If you have ideas or special skills to contribute, please write or call ERES, 115 N. Market St., Champaign, IL 61820, 351-1911. You can help make a difference.

Help for this article was received from Ruth Ann Nichols-Nine, the Danville Commercial News, Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, and David Monk.

PACA ANNUAL MEETING

The fifth Annual Membership Meeting was held February 2, 1986 at the newly renovated Architectural Spectrum, 11 Main Street, Champaign. About forty-five members and guests attended.

The business portion of the meeting was conducted by President Gregory Hargus. Reports were given on the following topics: Salvage, Surveys, Endangered Buildings, Activities, Projects, and Consultations. Programs for 1986

were then previewed: 1986 budget, Campus survey, Preservation Week activities, and other upcoming events.

The membership elected three directors to serve on the Board until 1988: Hermenia Kruidenier, Marylee MacDonald and Joan Severns. Currently serving are Kevin Cullen (86), Norman Baxley (86), Lachlan Blair (87), Gregory Hargus (87) and Neil Strack (87); there is one open board position. The constitutional amendment to delete "of Champaign County" from the name of the organization was also approved.

After the business meeting, the second Annual Heritage Awards were presented by Thomas Napier (see related article). Wayne Price, chairman of the Illinois Historical Society's Save Our Barns Committee, presented a very interesting and informative slide program "American Influence on Illinois Barns."

SECOND ANNUAL HERITAGE AWARDS PRESENTED

Presentation of the second Annual Heritage Awards was made by Committee Chair Thomas Napier at the Annual Membership Meeting. The purpose of the Heritage Awards is to increase awareness of the important buildings in the community and to promote the interests of preservation and conservation. Nine buildings/sites were chosen for having either architectural or historical significance for the community or for having undergone a recent restoration or renovation.

This year's recipients are:

Outstanding Heritage Contribution Award: University of Illinois Foellinger Auditorium. Honorable Mention: Huston-Dighton House, 915 North State, Monticello.

Landmark Heritage Award: Hoopes-Cunningham House, 424 East Penn, Hoopston.

Landscape Heritage Award: Crystal Lake Park, Urbana

Residential Heritage Award: Matthew Busey House, 804 West Main, Urbana. Honorable Mention: Jones House, 712 West University, Champaign.

Institutional/Commercial Heritage Award: Architectural Spectrum, 11 Main Street, Champaign. Honorable Mention: Elite Diner, 210 East Elm, Urbana.

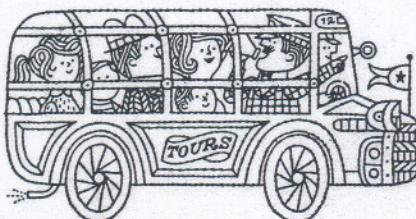
Environmental Heritage Award: Champaign County Courthouse Clock, Main Street, Urbana.

A special award was presented to Mrs. Barbara Roberts, recently retired director of the Champaign County Historical Archives of the Urbana Free Library. Mrs. Roberts and her staff have developed a massive historical collection that is invaluable to researchers, and have always been extremely helpful and willing to "go that extra mile" for an elusive fact or clue.

OLD HOUSE JOURNAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

"A Century of Memories, Troubleshooting Windows, Post-Victorian Houses, Making a Hallway Liveable, Tricks of the Trade, The Romanesque Revival." Got you interested? This was the table of contents from the Jan.-Feb. issue of the *Old House Journal*, the only magazine devoted to restoration and maintenance techniques of the old house. And GOOD NEWS!, new subscriptions or renewals of current subscriptions to the *Journal* at the reduced rate of \$14 (normally \$18) per year are being offered through PACA again this year. But we need at least twelve subscriptions to take advantage of this offer. So for the best how-to information in the old house field, send your check for \$14 (payable to PACA) along with your name, address and new or renewal information to: PACA, P.O. Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, IL 61820.

Free copies of the *Journal* are available from PACA for those unfamiliar with this publication. Back issues are also available to people needing help with a specific problem.



SPRING BUS TOURS

PACA and the Champaign County Historical Museum are co-sponsoring a series of tours of historic sites in Champaign County this spring. On Sunday afternoons from 1-4 p.m., guests will be chauffeured via a narrated route to various sites throughout the county such as the old Homer fairgrounds, the Flatville Church and historic houses in Tolono and Mahomet. There will also be a tour highlighting the sites of Champaign-

Urbana. The dates for the tours are:

April 6—Northern Champaign County
April 20—Champaign-Urbana
May 4—Southern Champaign County

Call PACA or CCHM to make your reservation.

In addition, a special tour is currently being planned to sites in Decatur and Springfield for Saturday, May 10 as part of Historic Preservation Week. Sites under consideration include the Governor Oglesby Mansion, the Millikin Homestead, and the Dana House. More information will be available soon.

NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS

Harriet E. Wallace
Hiram Paley
Kevin Cullen
Patricia Miller

Mr. & Mrs. John Duitsman
John & Cynthia Jakle
Richard Cannon
Dan McCollum
Susan K. Appel
William D. Youngerman
Eugene Jacobs
Samuel Gove
Joe & Jane Marriott
Ruth S. Walker
John S. Garner
Richard & Doris Harvey
Sharib J. Rapp
George T. Clayton
David Garner
Dr. & Mrs. Victor Wojnar
Linda Bastyr
Mr. & Mrs. M. G. Snyder
Mrs. William M. Youngerman
Dr. & Mrs. Joseph Zalar, Jr.
Rebecca Ehler
Ken Carls

Georgette Van Buitenen
Frances Roehm
Mr. & Mrs. Peter Krimbel
Mr. & Mrs. Tony Graham
Mr. & Mrs. Harry Querry
Bernadine Evans Stake
Mr. & Mrs. Scott Finet
Mr. & Mrs. L. E. Doyle
Rodney D. Reid
Walter Allen
Mary Altenbernd
Allen Weller
Mr. & Mrs. R. Johns
Dr. & Mrs. Robert Sutton
Ruth P. Ross

VIP's

Douglas Miller
Thomas Napier
Mark Replogle
Debbi Gottlieb
Ruth Ann Nichols-Nine
Gene Jacobs



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION .
ASSOCIATION
Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
CHAMPAIGN, IL
PERMIT NO. 133

PACA Newsletter

Published by the Preservation and
Conservation Association

President: Gregory Hargus
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 (½ 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.