LANDMARKS OF DEMOCRACY
Preservation Week, May 10-16, 1987
NATIONAL TRUST FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION

PREHIVATION WEEK 1987 FOCUSES ON LANDMARKS OF DEMOCRACY

1987 marks a milestone in American life, the 200th anniversary of the United States Constitution, and offers a remarkable opportunity to celebrate our "Landmarks of Democracy" — the theme for the 15th annual National Historic Preservation Week, May 10-16, cosponsored by the Preservation and Conservation Association and the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

In a special message from the White House, President Ronald Reagan commended the National Trust for Historic Preservation "for their continuing efforts to preserve our nation's history," and urged all Americans "to work to preserve and carry on our heritage during Historic Preservation Week and throughout the year."

Thousands of preservation groups in neighborhoods across the United States will join the celebration and pay tribute to the enormous contribution landmarks of democracy make in shaping our national identity. Historic places of natural as well as state and local significance will form the backdrop for celebrating the beginnings of our democratic form of government.

Here in Champaign-Urbana, Preservation Week 1987 will be observed with the "Washington Heights — Hill Street House Walk" on Sunday, May 17. PACA wants to make the public aware of the major contribution historic preservation and rehabilitation make to the cultural vitality of America's cities, towns and rural areas. This heritage is of the utmost importance to the culture of our nation.

PRESERVATION PROFILE:
HOMER, ILLINOIS

Homer, Illinois, located about twenty miles southeast of Urbana, has been in existence since the early days of non-Indian settlement of Champaign County. Homer's development has been highly original, as reflected in the landscape and relics remaining from bygone eras. Several features of this area deserve special consideration and county-wide recognition because of their historic significance.

Early progress continued and Homer was soon known as "the emporium" of the eastern side of the county. At the time, there was talk of further dividing the county, with Homer as the seat of a new county embracing the east side of Champaign County and the west side of Vermillion County. Nothing ever came of it, but it does indicate the level of esteem afforded early 1800's, westward-migrating pioneers traveled on the nearby Fort Clark-Danville Road, formerly a buffalo trail. Some of these people put down their roots at the site of the original town of Homer, which was platted in 1837, just four years after the formation of Champaign County. By 1890, this settlement, known today as "Old Homer," was the second largest in the County, with only Urbana, the county seat, having a larger population.

The Great Western Railroad (now Wabash Railroad) publicized plans to lay tracks one and a half miles south of Old Homer. The townspeople had to decide whether to stay where they were, and be bypassed by the railroad, as was the case in Urbana, or to move the whole town alongside the proposed railroad route. One of the area's more enterprising individuals, the owner of the lands adjacent to the proposed railroad track, offered to trade lot for lot, so that a new town could be laid out similar to the old. One of the unique features of pioneer American life was the sight of "houses moving from place to place." Moving a town was not unheard of in these days, although Homer is the only known instance in Champaign County.

In January of 1855, most of the town's structures were moved by oxen-drawn sleds to the new site. It took six weeks to move twenty-seven structures, mostly one and two room cabins, at a cost of five dollars each. All that remains of Old Homer are its cemetery, where the area dead can still be interred and the abutments from a covered bridge that had spanned the Salt Fork at that location.

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this progressive community by its inhabitants.

Homer in the 1880's was "a bustling community," still second only to Urbana in size. Many of the town's commercial buildings date from the years spanning 1880-1910, the period of Homer's greatest economic growth.

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a group of veterans of the Civil War, platted a cemetery on the north side of Homer in 1887, and within its parameters built a monument to all those who had participated in the conflict. Veterans as well as others were interred here. In the early 1920's, the aging GAR turned over the operation and maintenance of the cemetery to the American Legion Post No. 290. This cemetery, covering ten acres, is believed to be the only one in existence owned and maintained by an American Legion Post.

By the turn of the century, Homer was a thriving center of commerce and culture for the surrounding community. In addition to the commercial buildings and homes, churches and public buildings were erected. The Illinois Traction system, an interurban line, connected Homer with the rest of the county. This direct connection (in part funded by local merchants) brought large volumes of area people and money into Homer.

Homer Park, a "popular picnic and amusement park," was built on the Salt Fork in the early 1900's. People from throughout Champaign County rode the interurban to the park for picnics, boating and swimming. To area residents the Fourth of July wasn't the Fourth without a trip to Homer Park, located near the site of Old Homer and spanning both banks of the river. The park contained a miniature zoo with Nellie the bear and other animals, footbridges, rope swings, a bandstand, and facilities for dancing, roller skating, and the viewing of silent movies.

In the early years of this century, Homer's able-bodied men, twenty-one years of age and older, each contributed two days of their labor per month to such community improvement projects as the planting of maple trees, the constructing of sidewalks, and the laying of brick streets. These works were regarded as a form of poll tax exacted from "all men in the district able to work on roads."

With the advent of good roads in Champaign County, people had mobility. They were not constrained to use the resources available through the interurban. The large park-going traffic became a thing of the past. The amusement park closed in the late 1920's when automobiles made the interurban obsolete. Homer's "heyday" was essentially over.

In the late 1960's and the early 1970's the State of Illinois, with the aid of a federal grant, built an earthen dam and constructed the park and its facilities at Homer Lake. Since that time, additional acres have been added to the park. People come from all over the county to fish, hike, and enjoy the beauty of the natural environment.

All of these activities and historic events have affected the development of Homer and the immediate vicinity. A brief survey shows that much survives from the 150 years of settlement. Several small homes within the town of Homer purportedly trace their history back to the move in 1855 from "Old Homer." These are simple one and two room cabins that have had rooms and appendages added on over the years. Many other homes of varying architectural designs have survived from 1869, as seen on the birds-eye map of Homer. These include the Burkhardt Home on Coffeen Street, also known locally as the "House of Seven Gables," and the Brown House on Ellen Street.

The two-block long business district is unique in that many of these turn of the century commercial buildings have been well-maintained and some are of outstanding quality. The Opera House, built in 1902, has the original painted fabric backdrop on its stage and the wooden trim in the auditorium intact. The lower floor has been converted to municipal office space and is in use daily. Other structures of outstanding quality include the Odd Fellows Building, the Masonic Lodge Building, now shared by the U.S. Post Office and Courson's Hardware store, the Old Township Building, other commercial buildings, and several churches.

American Legion Post No. 290 has continued to maintain the GAR cemetery, its grounds and markers, and the Civil War Memorial. One well-maintained five block length of brick road remains from the early days when the men of the community contributed their time to public works projects.

On the south bank of the Salt Fork, north of town, the cemetery for "Old Homer" survives surrounded by trees. The moss-covered concrete abutments are remnants of the old covered bridge, one of only two ever built in Champaign County. On the north side, within the wooded river bottom, stands a giant stone bird bath, once the center of Homer Park. Across highway route 49, on the heavily-wooded south bank are found chunks of concrete and brick, reminders that a dam, other structures and walkways had all previously been a significant part of the landscape there. Two chimneys, relics of the summer cottages on that bank, are all that remains of the many small cabins that had dotted the area.

The present day town of Homer numbers over 1,300 in population. Many townspeople are aware and proud of their unusual heritage, and they have had an active historical society since 1977. It is housed in the "Old Township Building" in the heart of the business district. Recently, their united efforts helped save the building from demolition. It now serves as the museum as well as society headquarters. A full-time volunteer historian and others care for the collection, give talks to interested groups and school children, and generally are available for questions regarding Homer's history.

Contributed by Frances Roehm

CAMPBELL CENTER FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDIES
1987 Summer Workshop Series
Museum Collections
• Computerization for Museum Collections, Introductory Workshop, July 13-17.
• Computerization for Museum Collections, Advanced Workshop, July 20-22.
• Care and Preservation of Paintings, June 22-24.
• Advanced Costume & Textile Restoration, June 20-22.
• Curatorial Conservation of Works of Art on Paper, June 22-25.
• Care of Historic Collections, June 15-19.
• An Introduction to Metals Conservation, July 13-17.
• Firearms Conservation and Restoration, July 27-29.
Furniture Conservation
• Hands-On Furniture Conservation, Aug. 3-7.
• Conservation of Gilt Wood, July 7-10.
• Conservation of Traditional Transparent Coatings, July 13-17.
• Veneers, Veneering and Surface Decoration Systems, July 6-10.
• Furniture Conservation and Treatment, July 6-10.
Architectural Preservation
• National Register: How to List Place, June 15-16.
• Measuring and Recording Historic Buildings, June 22-26.
• Rehabilitation of Wooden Structures, July 20-24.
• Masonry Conservation: Cleaning and Repair, July 27-29.
Park, the town square, where a Loredo Taft sculpture of Lincoln and Douglas marks the site of their sixth debate. Historically, the most important documented structure is the 1835 Greek Revival John Wood Mansion, designed by master builder John Cleveland for Quincy's founder. The home is beautifully restored as a house museum. Other well-known architects working in Quincy have included William Boyington, Joseph Lyman Silsbee, Mifflin Bell, Burnham & Root, Isaac S. Taylor, and Holabird & Root.

Italianate was the style most favored in houses and commercial buildings from the late 1840s through the 1870s. It can be found in all parts of town, in all materials and treatments. The Campbell/MacFadon and Richard Eells Houses (late 1840s), Lorenzo Bull House (1852), Charles Henry Bull House (1857), James T. Baker House (1868), Matthew Finlay House (1861), Morgan-Wells House (early 1860s), The Union Block (1865), The Isaac Lesem House (1870), and the Jonathan Parkhurst House (1870s) are outstanding examples.

Quincy's first recognized architect, Robert Bunce, arrived from England in 1868. He is best known for large buildings, especially churches, in Second Empire and Gothic Revival styles. Brother Adrian Wewer, OFM, did Gothic Revival churches and schools. Favoring the Romanesque Revival style were Swiss-trained John Batsch, who arrived in 1886, and Quincy-born Frank Tubbesing, who opened his office after a stint with Bunce and local contractors. John McKean built major landmarks in Second Empire, Gothic Revival, and Renaissance Revival styles. Another Quincy native, Harvey Chatten, worked with Bunce and succeeded to his practice around 1882.

Three Quincy-born architects, George P. Behrensmeier, Martin J. Geise, and Ernest Michael Wood, are responsible for all of Quincy's Prairie style architecture. The three made important contributions in residences, schools, churches, and commercial and industrial buildings. Wood had great admiration for Frank Lloyd Wright, and for several years went to Chicago monthly to visit him.

Quincy's rich architectural heritage will be presented in tours during the 1987 Illinois Preservation Conference sponsored by LPCI. The seventh annual conference features workshops on a variety of preservation, tourism, and development issues. For more information, contact Sean Murphy, LPCI, (312) 922-1742.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

We are well into 1987 but many of you have not yet renewed your 1986 memberships. We ask that you take this opportunity, use the form in this newsletter, and renew your membership today!

If you are not sure of your renewal dates, check your mailing label. The month/year indicates your last renewal; a letter instead of a number signifies that you are receiving a complimentary newsletter for a limited time only. If you are receiving a complimentary newsletter, we would welcome your membership. Also, if you know of any individuals or organizations that would be interested in joining PACA, let us know and we would be happy to send them membership information.

Remember! All of PACA's operating budget comes from membership dues, salvage donations, and tour receipts, so

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Membership Application P.A.C.A.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY:

- 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 .....................

NAME ________________________________________

ADDRESS ............................................ Street State Zip

Make check payable to: PACA, Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820.
plumbing, heating and cooling materials, insulation and drywall. The labor to install these things has, for the most part, been already donated. If you would like to donate materials to the Campaign or if you know a likely source of donations, please let PACA know. We really do need the interest of the entire community in this project to make it succeed.

Please make your contribution to the Cottage Capital Campaign today. When spring arrives and the work begins, we will need the supplies on hand to coordinate the project smoothly. Don’t delay, send your check today!

NEW S.A.V.E. WAREHOUSE
The Salvage of Architecturally Valuable Elements Committee has found a new permanent warehouse. Located at 65 East University Avenue, Champaign, the location has high street visibility and two storefront windows for display. All salvage material has been moved to the new warehouse and is available to area residents who are renovating local homes and businesses.

A sample of the inventory includes three staircase railings and newel posts, pine and oak panel interior doors, four sets of pocket doors with hardware, numerous corner blocks of various designs, miscellaneous pine, oak and fir woodwork, doorknobs and face plates, one clawfoot bathtub, one oval shower rod for use with clawfoot tub, one old wood tank toilet, one high wall-mounted wood toilet tank, four cast-iron fence/staircase posts, three multi-lite beveled glass doors, and ten 7’x3’ oak framed glass panels suitable for use as wall dividers with three different glass pattern.

For further information call Bob Swisher, Salvage Chair, at 359-1100.

NEW & RENEWING MEMBERS
Samuel Gove
Sharon Rapp
John & Mariellen Gilpin
Karen Sommerlad
Linda Bastyr
Kent Stanford
Richard Cannon
Dannel McCollum
Mrs. Mary Altenbernd
Roger Day
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Please submit material for publication in the next newsletter before 15th of month.