



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61820

"The Past Has A Future"

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#3

ORPHEUM THEATER ENDANGERED

The City of Champaign has purchased an option on the historic Orpheum Theater in downtown Champaign. The building site is one of several under consideration as the location of a new parking lot or parking garage. If the Orpheum site is chosen, this historic and architecturally significant building will be demolished. PACA is in the midst of organizing a campaign to save this important building and needs your help.

What Can You Do?

Call PACA and let us know of your interest in saving the theater. More importantly, let the City of Champaign know of your concern for saving the Orpheum: Call or write Mayor Dannel McCollum and your city council representative (102 N. Neil St., Champaign). The issue is two-fold, 1) the Orpheum Theater site is not the optimum location for a parking garage whose purpose is to serve the entire downtown area, and 2) the Orpheum Theater is too important a building to lose. A Letter to the Editor of the News Gazette could be helpful as well as any activity that lets the City and other citizens know how important the Orpheum Theater is to the community is a good idea.

PACA is also looking for developers and/or investors willing to help bring this wonderful building back to life. A small group of concerned citizens has started this process, but they need willing and able volunteers. Because of the historic and architectural significance of this building, the State Historic Preservation Agency has given a preliminary determination that the building is eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, and is also eligible for rehabilitation tax credits. If you would like to help this group develop a plan to use the Orpheum for a community theater/meeting center,

or help "brain storm" on other ideas contact PACA. This is an exciting project that needs lots of citizen input.



Original facade of Orpheum Theater from *Great American Movie Theaters* by David Naylor.

Historical Background

The Orpheum Theater was constructed in 1914 as a vaudeville theater, but was also equipped to show "moving pictures." The architect was George W. Rapp, a 1899 alumnus of the University of Illinois School of Architecture; Joseph M. Finn and Marcus Heiman were the owners and builders of the theater. F & H Amusement Company and the Western Vaudeville Managers Association were also associated with the Orpheum. Details on the interior

design of the building were kept quiet until the opening of the theater.

The Orpheum Theater's architect, George Rapp, was a principle founder of the renown architectural firm of Rapp and Rapp. The firm was famous for its theater designs and was responsible for over 400 theaters including the Chicago Theater (1921), Bismarck Hotel and Theater (1926), and the Paramount Theaters in New York (1926) and Aurora, IL (1931). The majority of their theaters were built in the 1920s, therefore the Champaign Orpheum is important as an early Rapp theater design. Most of their theater designs were derived from about eight schematic types, modified and combined according to the requirements of each program. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century French classical sources provided the primary inspiration for their lavish interiors, and the Orpheum is a good example of their early French palatial style. The Orpheum design was the basis for the Versailles-inspired Ringling Memorial Theater (1917) in Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Opening night for the Champaign Orpheum, Monday, October 19, 1914, proved to be a well-attended and splashy event. Numerous Chicago businessmen came down for the opening, and local residents thronged to see the new theater. Although the seating capacity was over a thousand, people had to be turned away since there was not enough room to accommodate them. Champaign Mayor Dobbins attended the opening and declared the theater the finest in the area.

Great care was taken in the construction of the building. It far surpassed the fireproofing requirements of the city, and the heating and electrical systems were quite advanced. Air was admitted into the theater in stages through a giant ventilator in the

dome of the ceiling. This ventilator still remains. The stage had its own ventilating system so that in case of fire the stage curtain could be dropped and the area, self-contained. In addition, originally there was a fountain in the entrance foyer. The Orpheum was the most ornate and elaborate theater in the area, and much of this original integrity still remains.

In 1930 the theater was taken over by the RKO movie chain and since that time some remodelling and updating has taken place. New seating was installed in 1965, and in 1967 between \$50-60,000 was spent on modernization which included installing the metal grid facade (the original facade, minus the cornice, still remains behind this "skin"), new glass doors, the box office, the refreshment stand, a "space-age" screen, new projection equipment, new carpeting, and remodelling of the restrooms and the front lobby.

Kerasotes purchased the building from the RKO chain in 1971. Since then only some cosmetic repainting of the interior features has taken place. The theater was used as a Revival-Art Film theater in 1982, but has been closed since 1983. Since then the interior of the theater has deteriorated, but it is not beyond saving.

(The above information was compiled from "The Orpheum, An Arts Center for Champaign County," by Vivian Young, 1981; "Rapp and Rapp," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects; *Great American Movie Theaters* by David Naylor.)

HISTORIC CHURCH TOUR

Over 65 people gathered for the First Historic Church Tour conducted by PACA on Sunday, May 21. At the first tour stop, Holy Cross Catholic Church, participants were fortunate to have the history of the parish and the recent renovation work explained to them by noted church renovation designer Harry Breen. As at all of the churches, tour participants were encouraged to walk around and examine "up close and personal" different aspects of the sanctuary.

Sue Feuille hosted the group at Emmanuel Memorial Episcopal Church. The history of the church and its architectural significance as a liturgically correct "English Parish" church as designed by the well known New York architect, Ralph Adams Cram, was delightfully presented. The group was also presented with details of the exciting renovation work planned for Emmanuel Memorial in the very near future.

At the third stop, First Presbyterian Church, the tour was met by a short, but wonderful organ recital. Paul VanArsdell, the church historian, gave some brief highlights of the congregation's past, at this, Champaign's oldest church building.

Orrie Fairchild and Dr. Gary Fritz of the First United Methodist Church explained the history of the congregation and its large church complex. Tour participants were encouraged to explore the entire building, even the third floor gymnasium. The contemporary sanctuary, dating from a 1965 remodeling, was a surprise to those only familiar with the Gothic Revival exterior of the building.

PACA wishes to thank all of the congregations for opening up these special places for our tour group. A special thanks to all of the hosts who gave up their Sunday afternoon and who shared their church with us in an exciting and knowledgeable fashion.

FINANCING THE RESTORATION OF AN OLD HOUSE

Preserving an old house can be an expensive venture. And unfortunately, there are no federal funds available for restoration of historic properties used only as residences unless the property qualifies as low income housing. If this is the case, the Department of Housing and Urban Development does have special funding for certain projects.

Currently there is only one federal tax incentive for the restoration of historic houses and that is for properties included on The National Register of Historic Places (or those within a National Register district) that are to be used for income-producing purposes. The National Register is the official national list of historically or architecturally significant buildings and is maintained by the National Park Service. If you are considering an income-producing use for your property, you should contact your State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO) to follow proper guidelines for the Investment Tax Credit. In Illinois, contact the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, Old State Capitol, Springfield, IL 62701 217-785-4512.

There is one national loan program for restoration of historic residences which might be of interest. It is entitled "Fannie Mae's Rehab Program" and is sponsored by the Federal National Mortgage Association (FNMA). The program is administered on the local level through most financial institutions. You should contact any Fannie Mae-approved lender and inquire

about this program. Should you require further information, contact the FNMA manager of public information at 202/752-6527.

At this time the National Trust for Historic Preservation does not offer financial assistance to individuals restoring residential properties. Although the Trust is not able to provide financial assistance for individuals, it does administer several grant and loan programs for nonprofit organizations. The Trust regional office serving your area can answer specific questions about these programs.

Additional References:

Preservation Easements. Available from Maryland Historical Trust, 21 State Circle, Annapolis, MD 21401. (301) 269-2212.

The Landowners Options: A Guide to the Voluntary Protection of Land in Maine. Available from the Maine Coast Heritage Trust, 335 Water Street, Augusta, ME 04330. (207) 622-1576.

"Charitable Gifts of Partial Interests in Real Property for Conservation Purposes". *The Tax Lawyer*, No. 69, Fall, 1975.

Virginia's Heritage: A Property Owner's Guide to Resource Protection. Lois Snyderman, Samuel N. Stokes, and A. Elizabeth Watson, edited by Constance K. Chamberlin. Available from Department of Conservation and Historic Resources, 203 Governor Street, Richmond, VA 23219; 1988.

The Conservation Easement Handbook. Janet Diehl and Thomas S. Barrett. A complete "how-to" guide. Available from Land Trust Exchange, 1017 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314; 703/683-7778. \$19.95 plus \$2.75 postage and handling (for one copy) prepaid.

Preserving Family Lands: A Landowner's Introduction to Tax Issues and Others Considerations. Stephen J. Small, Esq. Available from Powers & Hall Professional Corporation, 100 Franklin Street, Boston, MA 02110, 1988.

Tax Policy: Federal Estate Tax on Historic Properties. Report to the Honorable Paul S. Trible, U.S. Senate, March 1988. U.S. General Accounting Office, Post Office Box 6015, Gaithersburg, MD 20877; 202/275-6241. First five copies free.

(Prepared by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.)

RESTORE THE REHAB CREDITS

In February, legislation was introduced in Congress to restore the vitality of the historic rehabilitation tax credit. Since 1986, the passive activity rules contained in the Tax Reform Act have significantly reduced the use of both the rehabilitation tax credit (by about two-thirds) and the low income housing credit.

Known as the Community Revitalization Tax Act of 1989 (H.R. 796, S. 342), the legislation would:

1. exempt the rehabilitation and low income housing credits from passive activity rules. Losses from rehabilitation and low income housing projects would remain subject to the rules.
2. tighten the limitations on individual tax payer use of all business tax credits, including the rehabilitation and low income housing credits.

Taxpayers would be permitted \$20,000 of credits in a year plus an amount equal to 20 percent of additional tax liability. The credits would no longer be tied to a \$7000 limit or based on the amount of passive income a taxpayer could claim.

Representatives Cardiss Collins, Charles Hayes and Lynn Martin of Illinois are three of the bill's 65 sponsors. PACA urges you to contact your representative and Senators Dixon and Simon to promote passage of this important legislation. Its enactment means the preservation of thousands of historic buildings nationwide.

From Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois June Newsletter.

LEGISLATIVE ISSUES IN ILLINOIS

Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois (LPCI) has been very active this spring with preservation legislation in Illinois:

The Illinois State Agency Historic Resources Preservation Act (SB 69) was written by LPCI with the cooperation of several state agencies. The bill, introduced by Sen. John D'Arco (D-Chicago), will require all State-funded projects to undergo a review to determine their effect on historic resources. The bill would not block a project if it damages or destroys a historic resource, but would provide a negotiating period where the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency (IHPA) or private groups can work with the agency involved to develop alternatives.

The legislation is popularly called "State 106" after Section 106 of the National Preservation Act. Currently, all federally funded projects must undergo review by the IHPA. Staff at the IHPA state that agencies understand the need for such reviews and are cooperative. In many cases, the Federal 106 review has resulted in a compromise to help save an historic resource. Brad White, LPCI's Vice President for Legislation states "LPCI believes that the State of Illinois should lead the way in preservation. If this bill is passed, the example set by the government can encourage more private citizens and developers to act responsibly with our historic resources." SB 69 has passed the Executive Committee and awaits a second reading on the Senate floor.

SB 1613, the "Archaeological and Paleontological Resource Protection Act," introduced by Senator D'Arco at the request of LPCI and the IHPA, would protect archae-

ological and paleontological sites on state property and give the IHPA exclusive right to survey or excavate such sites. The bill would penalize those who disturb sites on state land without IHPA permission. For sites not containing human remains infractions would be misdemeanors, with penalties of prison and a fine up to \$5,000. Any violation of human remains would be a felony.

SB 1420, introduced by Senator O'Daniel (D - Mt. Vernon), would provide a tax abatement for historic farm buildings. At a hearing of the Senate Revenue Committee, over 20 individuals and groups were ready to testify in favor of the bill. Staff member Sean Murphy was asked by the Committee Chair to testify on behalf of the Illinois preservation community. The bill would allow farmers to apply for a tax abatement on farm buildings that are over 50 years old and have 75% of their original walls intact. Residences are not covered under the bill. Rural Illinois has been dramatically altered in the past decade as traditional farm structures have been replaced by non-descript aluminum warehouses. Illinois has lost more barns and out buildings than all other large midwestern states. Though it is more economical for farmers to rehab existing structures than to replace them, the resulting higher taxes have wiped out the potential savings. It is hoped that this tax abatement will reverse the trend to replace traditional structures. The bill has passed the Senate Revenue Committee.

LPCI has also assisted State Sen. Judy Baar Topinka in drafting a resolution creating a Task Force on Sacred Spaces to investigate the preservation of significant historic religious properties.

From the June Newsletter of LPCI.

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

RENEWAL NEW MEMBERSHIP

Additional Contribution _____

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

Street

City State Zip

Make checks payable to: PACA, Box 2555, Station A, Champaign, Illinois 61825

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

PACA BOARD NEWS

PACA Board members often get asked what role they and the organization play in the community. To help answer that question for our new members and to keep our old members informed of Board activities, here is a summary of some of the larger projects PACA is currently involved in.

Orpheum Theater — PACA is trying to save this historic building from demolition. See related story.

Cohen House — During the month of June, PACA should be resolving the future of the Cohen House, 511 West Elm, Urbana. If things go as planned, the house will be moved to a new location in east Urbana, otherwise a salvage sale will be conducted by the First Presbyterian Church. PACA has been involved in this project since last November.

Phillips Farmhouse — PACA is involved with the UI's Historic Sites Committee in trying to find a new and affordable use for this building. The Phillips Farmhouse is a two-story log structure built circa 1850 and currently owned by the University.

Hazen Bridge — PACA is working with bridge neighbors and Newcomb Township officials to find a party willing to take over ownership of this historic and scenic metal truss bridge which spans the Sangamon River north of Mahomet. A new span is slated to replace the old bridge, but county officials are willing to save the historic bridge if a new owner is found.

"Presidents Greenhouse" — Another UI/PACA project is to find a new "home" for the 1898 North Greenhouse located on Burrill Avenue on the engineering campus.

While not in immediate danger of demolition, the curvilinear greenhouse is slated for removal in the future. PACA would rather not wait for a "crisis situation" but is working now to find a new location for this significant building.

Governmental Dealings — PACA is actively involved with the Campus to Downtown land use study currently being conducted by the Urbana Plan Commission. PACA has met with Plan Commission staff and testified at public hearings on behalf of historic preservation and the possible establishment of historic districts. The Champaign Intown Study has also been closely monitored by PACA; staff discussions and public testimony have also been given. The Board is currently reviewing Illinois historic district ordinances in preparation for the submission of an ordinance to the Champaign City Council for their consideration. In addition, PACA testified on behalf of the Inman Hotel's conversion to elderly housing and supported the necessary parking waiver.

In addition to the above activities, the Board is involved with the Salvage Warehouse operation, the planning of events such as the church tour and annual membership meeting, and the answering of requests for preservation information and help from outside parties. All of our members are encouraged to discuss any of the above projects with Board members, volunteer to help on any project and/or attend any Board meeting. Meetings are held the second Monday of the month at the Greek Revival Cottage basement beginning at 7:30 pm. Bring your ideas and enthusiasm.

NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

Mr. & Mrs. Donald Miller
Helen Peterson
Caroline Hibbard
Steve & Kathy Roemmel
James & Mare Payne
Mrs. Donald V. Dobbins
Lynn W. Manley
Tony & Mary Graham
Debbie Nelson & Paul Joffe
Arthur & Glenna Bartell
Mr. & Mrs. Robert Rogers
Mr. & Mrs. David Lazarus
Mr. William J. Donaldson
Mr. & Mrs. Roger Prillaman
Mrs. Thomas D. Roberts
Fred & Nancy Delcomyn
Shirley Stillinger
Mrs. Nina Rubel
Trent Shepard
Louisette Zuidema
Carol Davis

Salvage Donations

Champion Federal
Ron Larkin
anonymous donation
Mr. & Mrs. Daniel Corkery

Volunteers In Preservation

PACA wishes to thank the following volunteers for their gifts of time and talent to further historic preservation in Champaign County.

Steve Roemmel	Hank Kaczmariski
Kathy Roemmel	Rex Kummer
Susan Appel	Bob Swisher
Dick Davis	Mark Replogle

PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION
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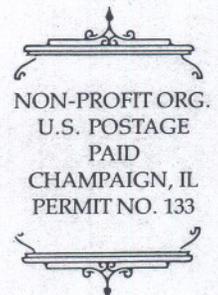
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Vice President: James Dobrovolny
Secretary/Treasurer: Patricia Jensen

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