ORPHEUM THEATER UPDATE

On August 8, PACA sponsored the first community meeting on the future of the Orpheum Theater. Over thirty people attended and expressed their concern for preserving the theater. The building is currently threatened with demolition by the City of Champaign which is considering building a parking structure on the site.

At the meeting, the current status and condition of the theater building was reviewed, slides and pictures of the interior and the original facade were shown, and future uses for the building were suggested. It was clear to everyone that a new function must be found for the building and that some funding mechanism for its rehabilitation is required. In a letter addressed to the meeting participants, Mayor Dannel McCollum stated that while his sympathies were with saving the Orpheum Theater, a viable use and money for rehabilitation were needed in order to save the building. He also stated that time was short.

The meeting resulted in the appointment of a Steering Committee, Fund Raising Committee, and Publicity Chair to help guide the preservation effort. If you would like to volunteer to help, please contact PACA (328-PACA). In early September another group meeting will be held to update the community on efforts to date and to further publicize the Orpheum's plight.

Attendees at the meeting were in agreement, however, that the entire community must become involved with preserving the Orpheum Theater. Everyone who is concerned about preserving the Orpheum must contact the Champaign City Council (102 North Neil Street, Champaign, IL 61820) and express their views on the matter. A letter to the Council or to your representative, if you live in Champaign, is preferable, but a phone call will do. The important thing is for the City Council to understand that the citizens of Champaign County are not willing to let the Orpheum Theater be demolished.

The Orpheum Theater is a monumental example of the past generation's commitment to the future of Champaign-Urbana. It would be unforgivable for us to destroy that trust.
FOCUS ON: THE INMAN HOTEL

(The following is excerpted from the National Register for Historic Places nomination prepared by PACA members Dana Pratt and Brian Kolde of the URBANA Group.)

The Inman is important as a local representative of a type of hotel which was being constructed in smaller communities throughout the nation during the period between 1900 and 1930. Its layout, architectural design, and construction materials are typical of the hotels built in growing communities like Champaign. Similarly, as with other commercial hotels, it widely acclaimed and advertised its “modern fire-proof construction” and conveniences including steam heat, electric lights, private baths, a vacuum system, and telephone service. These hotels were designed to offer as many services and luxuries to the guests as possible. In the case of the Inman, three classes of rooms were available based on size, furnishings and consequent price. Guests were served by a dining room as well as a short order cafe. Similarly, a drugstore and a billiard room both adjoined the lobby while a barber shop, Turkish baths, and a clothes presser were available in the basement to cater to patrons’ needs.

The Inman is the only remaining commercial hotel in Champaign County that maintains its original integrity. Other hotels of its character were the Urbana Lincoln Hotel (1923 - now Jumer’s Castle Lodge) which has been significantly altered by modern additions, and the Hotel Beardsley (1896) which was razed in 1967.

The inherent ideals of classical culture and architecture were important to Americans of the early 20th Century. In a truly American fashion, however, the rigid rules of the classic styles were modified while maintaining the overall effect of classicism. The simple classical motifs of the Inman illustrate this tradition while using brick rather than stone masonry and terra cotta ornamentation. Its straightforward hotel design and handsome construction materials make an important architectural statement in downtown Champaign. The use of the yellow brick is unusual for the area and complements nearby buildings including the commercial style red brick Illinois Traction Station (1913) next door, and the Art Deco City Building (1937) across the street. The U shape of the hotel was highly regarded since it allowed light to enter all of the rooms of the Inman.

The Inman was constructed at a time of growth in the City of Champaign. Money was being invested in paving streets, beginning new businesses; and building theatres and schools in the attempt “to make Champaign one of the cleanest and prettiest in central Illinois and one of the most desirable seats for a University in the country.” The Inman was the anchor building in the “center of a newer business district which (had been) rapidly developing” in Champaign. It played a key role in the development of the southeast portion of the downtown area since it was built on the edge of what was once a swamp. The local newspaper issued at the grand opening acclaimed the “rapid strides” by the southern portion of the business district in which the new Inman Hotel would come to play a primary role.

The hotel contributed to downtown commercial activity as it attracted guests from across the country as well as offering services to local citizens. Tucker & Bongart’s drugstore — one of the largest local pharmacies until the 1960’s — was originally located in the northwest corner storefront of the building. The billiard room, barber shop, banquet hall and cafe also catered to the public. Similarly, hotel guests were within easy walking distance of other downtown businesses and restaurants.

The success of the hotel was critically tied to its direct access to the major transportation networks of the community. N. door to the Inman was the home office of the Illinois Traction System which operated interurban cars from East St. Louis to Danville with stops in Springfield, Decatur
and Champaign (Determined Eligible for the National Register - 1984). Streetcars are operated in the community until 1955. The hotel letterhead proudly advertised "all interurban and city cars stop at our door." The Inman was also less than one block away from the major Champaign train station (Illinois Central) and the hotel supplied a special bus and transfer wagon which met all incoming trains.

Throughout the years, the hotel fulfilled expectations as it quickly became the center of social activity. For decades, in addition to serving travellers and conventions as the finest hotel in the community, the Inman became the "gathering place for celebrations before and after University of Illinois athletic events, and for a number of fraternal groups and professional organizations." Since there was no Union building on the campus until the 1940's, the Inman filled a critical need for lodging University visitors. In addition, service clubs, weddings, civic and political meetings and a variety of banquets have been held in the building.

The Inman continued in use as a hotel operation until 1974. A prominent local television station, WICD, had its studios in the hotel from 1965 through 1978. In 1975 the building was purchased and renovated for use by the National Academy of the Arts, a high school for talented students of dance and music. The Academy sold the building in 1987 and the Inman currently awaits rehabilitation into housing for the elderly.

COHEN HOUSE HITS THE ROAD!

On July 6, after eight months of hard work, the historic Cohen House moved 13 blocks east to its new location in the 700 block of East Green Street, Urbana. This move could not have taken place without the generosity and expertise of the following people: Rod Kammermann, Hank Kaczmarski, First Presbyterian Church of Urbana, Garrelts Concrete and House Moving, Jim Darling (City of Urbana), Craig Grant (City of Urbana), Urbana City Council, Longs Garage, Rebecca Mabrey, and Diane Meisenhalter. Our PACA hats-off to them!

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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

**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** ..........................................

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

Contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.
NEW AND RENEWING MEMBERS

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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 & Kathy Roemmel
Hank Kaczmarski

SALVAGE DONATIONS

anonymous donation
Phi Sigma Sigma
Mr. & Mrs. Steven Roemmel
Christopher & Sara Stohr
Lynn Pointer
Mr. & Mrs. McClure
Tom Ennis Excavation Service
University of Illinois
Urbana Free Library

Free "Paca Rats" to Salvage Volunteers

$7.50

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