

PRESERVATION MATTERS

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Hubert A. Smith: Urbana's Forgotten Architect

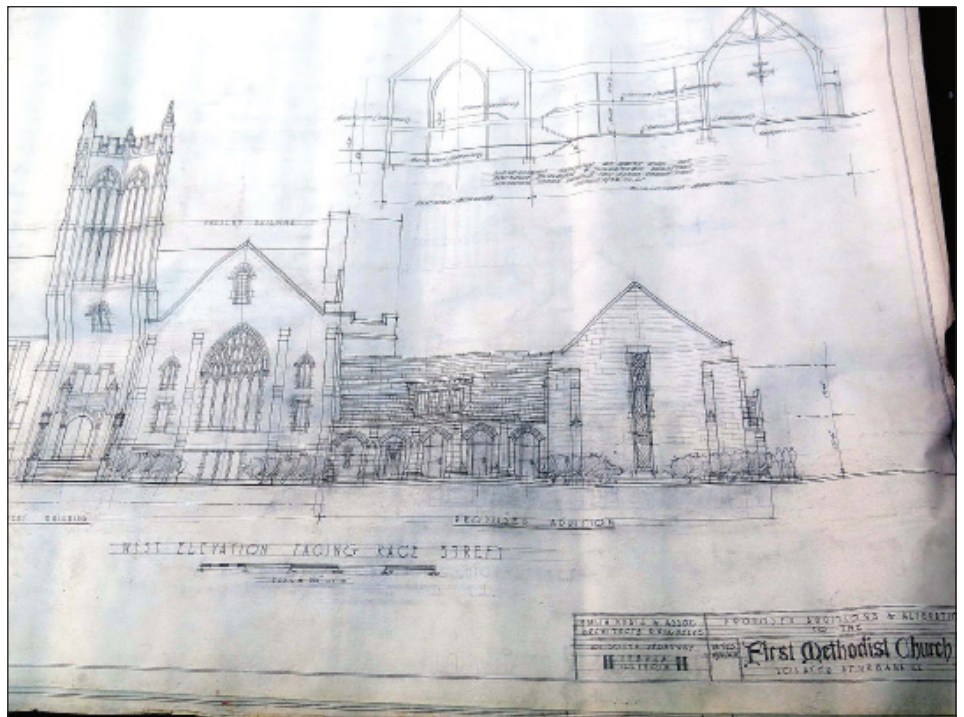
by Rich Cahill

Hubert A. Smith is usually thought of as one of the junior partners in the architectural firm of Joseph Royer. However he had a long career as head of his own firm designing educational buildings and residences across Illinois. His early designs show the influence of Royer, but his later works stand on their own.

This article is based in part on an inventory of 50 architectural drawings and blue prints, recovered while salvaging the former Smith & Company Fire Proof Storage, and Pure Ice Facility at 811-813 North State, Champaign. The "ice house" was in operation from the early 1900's to 1970's. Dick Ballard acquired the building in the 1970's and used the manufacturing area as a wood-working shop and rented the remainder of the building as storage. The City of Champaign bought the "ice house" in 2010 and it was demolished in 2014. Additional photographic records and biographical information was obtained at the Champaign County Archives housed in the Urbana Free Library.

Background

Hubert A. Smith was born in Clinton Illinois on May 20, 1892, the son of Marion and Elma Smith. He graduated from Urbana High School in 1912, and received a technical degree in architecture from the University of Illinois in 1916. He married Bertha Lidey in January 1917 in Urbana and had two sons: Robert N Smith and James E Smith. He first worked as a draftsman and designer of cemetery monuments for C.N. Clark & Company of Urbana. In 1914 he became a draftsman and designer for Joseph W. Royer of



First Methodist Church addition

Urbana and by 1930 he was in charge of Design and Drafting Room and Office Manager for the firm Royer, Danely & Smith. In 1932 he completed a B.S. Degree in Architecture from the University of Illinois. The same year he became the Assistant District Engineer for the Civil Works Administration in charge of Engineering personnel for eight counties in eastern Illinois, consisting of approximately 125 field engineers and a local staff office of 15. In 1934 he formed an architectural firm with co-partners Elvin Kratz and Thurmond J. Strong that was located at 101 South Broadway in Urbana. The firms specialized practice in public works, particularly Public School and College Buildings

Smith lived in Urbana, first at 301 West Illinois Street, and later at 405 West Michigan Avenue. He served on the Urbana Zoning and Planning commissions, as well as the Urbana Board of Education. He was a member of the First United Methodist Church of Urbana and the Urbana Rotary Club. Hubert Smith died on November 26, 1972 at the age of 80 and is buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.

Blueprints and Drawings

A total of 50 blueprints and architectural drawings were recovered in the summer of 2010 from the "ice house". Forty-seven of the drawings were attributed to the



firm of Smith, Kratz & Strong. Royer, Danely & Smith was the firm listed on four sets of drawings that are now at the UIUC Archives after having been digitally scanned and professionally conserved and preserved by the UIUC conservation laboratory. They included plans for a proposed high school for the Bloom Township High School District in Chicago Heights (1929), two buildings for McMurray College in Jacksonville, Illinois (1927, 1929), the Zeta Tau Alpha Sorority House (1929) in Urbana, and an undated plan for a World War I Armory in Urbana, Illinois. The blue prints associated with Smith, Kratz & Strong included residences, church additions and a number of university and public school building. Nineteen of the blueprints were associated with Illinois Women's College which became MacMurray College in Jacksonville Illinois. These dated from 1927 up to 1970. These blueprints and drawings were donated to the archives of the Henry Pfeiffer Library at MacMurray College library that he designed.

Two examples of the quality of the designs is a proposed addition to the First Methodist Church in Urbana and a Community High School in Washington, Illinois. Plans were also found for three residence in Champaign and five residences in Urbana. Plans included additions to McKinley Hospital on the University of Illinois campus, Wiley Elementary School in southeast Urbana

(dedicated in 1952), additions to Urbana High School in 1955, and the Renner-Wikoff Funeral Chapel in Urbana (1963).

Information at the Champaign County Archives lists 32 schools and college building associated with Smith, Kratz & Strong from between 1930 and 1951. There is also a collection of photographs of an additional 27 schools built between 1919 and 1930 by Royer, Danely & Smith.

Urbana High School

In 1954, the Urbana school board found the Urbana High School to be much too small for the growing student population. The school had a maximum capacity of 500 to 600 pupils, and the school population was already nearing 800 pupils. Drastic measures were being put in place, including having students walk across to the newly constructed Urbana Junior High School building for a number of classes each day.

After months of deliberation, the school board decided to construct an addition to the existing high school building. Bids by several architectural firms were reviewed. One was Joseph Royer's firm of Royer-Danely, the architect of the original UHS building in 1913-14, as well as the first addition in 1916-18. It was, however, the firm of Smith, Kratz



Pfeiffer Library dedication



Pfeiffer Library, MacMurray



MacMurray Jane Residence Hall

& Strong that won the bid for the high school addition. Joseph Royer died shortly afterward, in 1954.

MacMurray College, Jacksonville IL

The college decided after quite a bit of deliberation on the architects from the firm Smith, Kratz, and Strong of Urbana, Illinois to design the library. The firm designed two different buildings. The first was a standard Georgian Revival building, while the other was a wonderful mixture from both Georgian Revival and Greek revival traditions. It combined the focus on multiple large windows, a common trait of Georgian architecture, with the large Corinthian columns stemming from the Greek tradition. It is unclear which blueprint won the bid, but all articles regarding the building classify it as Georgian Revival, suggesting it was the first design selected, but later changed to the latter. However, the latter sketch most closely resembles the building, so it is ambiguous as to which design was actually bid on. Regardless, nearing the end of the completion, plans for the library's tower changed, creating a need for a larger budget (and more fund raising). The tower was raised six feet to allow for a clock that was not called for in any of the original plans. Later, the Class of 1941

would donate a significant amount to install bells in the tower. (Source MacMurray College archives)

President McClelland of MacMurray College speaking at the dedication of the Pfeiffer Library on October 19, 1940. Board chairman James MacMurray and chief architect Hugh Smith listen to his left. (Source MacMurray College Archives). View of Library in 2013. Photographs of the McClelland Dining Hall



MacMurray Dining Hall

and Jane Residence Hall MacMurray College circa 1920's (Source Champaign County Archives, Urbana Free Library.

The legacy of Hubert Smith include his many contributions to the firms of Royer, Danely & Smith; Smith, Kratz and Strong and Smith, Kratz and Associates. His skills in architectural design and planning, business administration, public relations and service to commissions and boards in Urbana are indeed under appreciated.



Champaign Schools

by Thomas Garza

Not long ago we published a special edition newsletter titled Saving Our Schools in response to a plan by the district to relocate Central High School to a parcel of land on the edge of town. The plan also included the demolition and rebuilding of the historic Dr Howard school on its original site.

At the time we expressed grave concerns about the impact these changes would have on the community generally and especially how it would affect the neighborhoods where these buildings are currently located.

Thankfully the voters spoke with a nearly unified voice and both of those plans were resoundingly defeated, but it was clear that this result would only be a first step in a long and involved process where all of the interested parties would have to find a way to balance the community's desire to keep these schools intact and in use with the need to keep the facilities themselves up-to-date and viable.

Recently you may have heard that the district has advanced a new proposal that acknowledges some of these concerns and seeks instead to create a new and larger campus for Central High at its current location. Unfortunately, although this plan does indeed 'keep Central central', it sadly misses the point when it comes to maintaining the school as a part of the existing fabric of the neighborhood.

In pursuit of their plan the school board has optioned several properties to provide space for expansion in an area that is currently a mix of historic older homes and intrusive high-density multi-unit apartment buildings.

The idea itself is a good one since there are a variety of different congruent parcels that could be put together in this area without affecting the historic character of the neighborhood (except perhaps in

a positive way since these later additions negatively impact their surroundings), and any one of these groupings would allow the school to grow organically outwards from its current site.

Sadly however, the proposal perversely chooses every single one of the historic homes in the vicinity of the school to option instead, a plan that -- if allowed to come to fruition-- would hollow out the very heart of the neighborhood, irrevocably changing its character.

This is absolutely unacceptable on its face and all the more so given that it is completely unnecessary.

In the coming weeks and months we will be tracking the progress of this plan and providing regular input to the school board as well as giving our members updates about what's going on, but we wanted to alert everyone to what we know so far, so that our members can begin having the necessary conversations with their friends and neighbors right away.

The following are some photos of the houses that will be lost if the current plan is adopted unchanged.

603 W. Church (The Albert C. & Julia F. Burnham House)



Former McKinley YMCA/Phillippe Mansion, 500 Block of W. Church



203 N. Lynn



201 N. Lynn



Christian Science Church (602 W. Church) & Reading Room (605 W. Hill)



606 W. Park (originally the Burnham Carriage House?)



Annual Meeting

by Thomas Garza

PACAs annual membership meeting is coming up in April, and I'm reminding you about this so that I have the opportunity to invite you to attend of course, but I also want to take a moment and talk to you about why it's important that you do.

A couple of years ago we decided to increase our open hours at the warehouse from two to five days a week in order to give more people a chance to stop in and see what we have here, but we also made that change in order to make us -- PACA the organization -- more accessible to you too.

For far too many people PACA is just the group who runs a salvage warehouse, and while saving interesting and unique architectural items is also a part of our work, it's not all that we do. It is, however, the most visible thing that we do, so it's no wonder that this is primarily what we're known for and that is a big part of the reason you should consider attending the annual meeting.

The importance of preserving what is still valuable, and re-using what is still usable, has never been greater, and PACA's members are involved in every aspect of preservation in this community from fighting inappropriate development, to attempting to influence legislation, to saving architectural components for future re-use.

It's great that we have so many members doing so many different things, but we are strongest when we work together, and even though those of us who are responsible for doing the business of PACA attempt to represent the interests of all its members, we are more successful when those members share their thoughts, ideas, and expertise with us and each other.

That's why events like our annual meeting are so very important. This is when we hold elections for new board members for one thing, and these are the people who actually dig into the day to day details of the business and they decide how to allocate resources, which defines our direction.

Your vote helps insure that we have the right people in place to represent your

interests.

The annual meeting is also when we host our Heritage Awards, and it's a good chance to see what other people in the community are doing to help maintain its historic character.

Finally, it's just a great opportunity for you to meet and interact with other members, and to talk to the people who are working on your behalf.

The nature of our work makes it so that much of what we do isn't visible to anyone who isn't directly involved in it, and I think that fact makes it difficult for us to grow and share our message, but it also makes it difficult for you, our members, to really have a good sense of everything that's going on and the annual meeting is the perfect place for you to find those things out.

This years Annual PACA Membership Meeting will be held at the Community United Church 805 South 6th Street in Champaign, on Sunday April 10, 2016 from 2-4pm and I hope to see you there.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION PACA BOX 2575, Champaign, IL 61825

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

New Renewal

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MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

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- Student \$15
- Senior Citizen \$15
- Family \$40

PHONE: _____

- Corporate
 - Bronze \$250
 - Silver \$500
 - Gold \$1000
 - Platinum \$2000

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Note: Please make your check payable to PACA. Your contribution is tax-deductable to the extent allowed by law.

I wish to make an additional contribution: \$ _____

PACA is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of our natural and built environment. Offices are located at our salvage warehouse:

44 E. Washington St, Champaign, IL 61825
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*If you would like to contribute
to the PACA newsletter, email
pacaexdir@gmail.com*

OR CURRENT RESIDENT

Warehouse: 44 E. Washington St., Champaign, IL

Hours: Tues. 10-4, Wed. 10-7, Thurs. & Fri. 10-4,
Sat. 9-12

Telephone: 217-359-PACA

Web: <http://www.pacacc.org>

E-mail: pacaexdir@gmail.com