

# PRESERVATION MATTERS

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PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

## The Captain Edward Bailey House, 606 West Church Street, Champaign



Bailey House, 606 W. Church, Champaign, South Facade facing Church. (Photo by author)

By Susan Appel

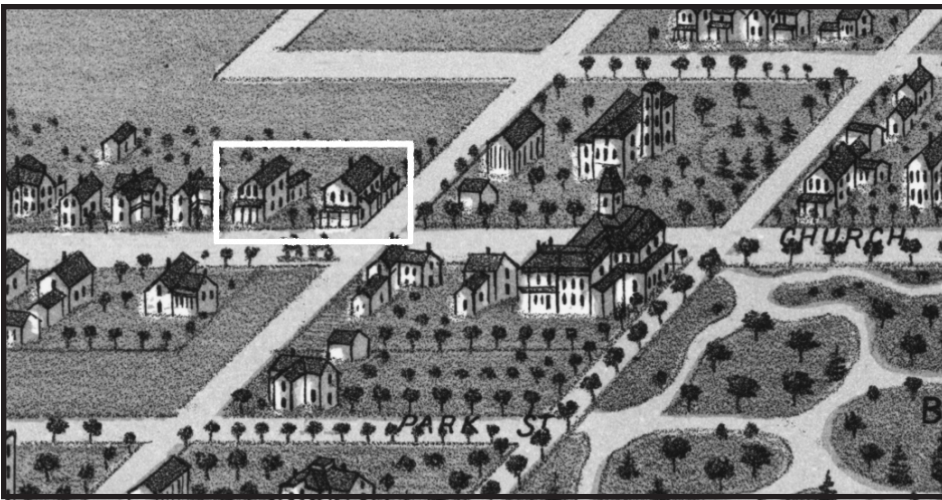
The fine Queen Anne house known today as the Captain Edward Bailey House (Ill. ) at 606 West Church Street, Champaign, is the only 19th-century structure remaining of a larger group of vintage houses already demolished to expand Central High School. This house still stands only because the athletic fields that will replace it will not be started for awhile. There is still time to learn more about it and, potentially, to consider the possibility of moving it to another location, rather than losing it, too, to demolition.

What we think of as the Bailey House

is not quite what it seems at first glance. The house only took on the current Queen Anne style in 1888, but there was a house here – and probably, at least to a degree, the same house – as early as 1869. Between 1869 and 1888, the house changed in form prior to changing hands, from B. D. Harbison to Edward Bailey. The earliest known image of that earlier house comes from the 1869 Ruger bird's-eye map of Champaign, which shows a house on the site that only later would be numbered 606 West Church. It was part of a neighborhood that had begun acquiring important houses associated

with major local figures, including John P. White, Col. W. N. Coler, and B. F. Harris and his son, Henry H. Harris. The evolution of both neighborhood and house lend interest and importance to what became the Bailey House.

In 1869 (Ill. ) this house was a two-story front-gabled structure facing south to Church Street. To its east was an open lot, then a similar house at the northwest corner of West Church and North Lynn. While this image is a tiny detail from a much larger map, it shows concern for some detail. Rectangular in plan, with one shorter



Detail from 1869 Ruger Bird's-Eye View of Champaign.

side facing Church, the house had a one-story porch across its front and three windows in the second story below the gabled roof. Its longer east side had two windows on each story, and a one-story extension projecting from the rear (north) wall.

We know that B. D. Harbison resided in this house thanks to the earliest surviving Champaign city directory of 1870-71, which listed him as living on the north side of Church Street, two doors west of Lynn. The next available directories, those of 1883-84 and 1885 show Harbison at the same location. By that point, however, the house itself changed somewhat, suggesting changes in Harbison's situation as well. So who was Harbison, and how does this house reveal anything about him?

Baxter D. Harbison came to Champaign in 1863 from his birthplace in Shelby County, Kentucky, as part of a wave of land speculation in Illinois that preceded the outbreak of the Civil War. About 1857, Harbison, his four brothers, and other wealthy investors from that same Kentucky county spent what would today be over \$2 million buying almost 13,000 acres in Champaign and Piatt Counties. Baxter Harbison

moved here to manage that land and its sale for the benefit of the investors. Although the city directory called him a "farmer," Harbison should really be considered a major land owner heavily involved in the development of this part of Illinois. He continued in that role until his death in 1905.

Harbison's financial success may well have allowed him to expand the house of 1869, since by the time of the 1884 bird's-eye view of the city, the house was shown as more cubic in form (Ill. ). It still featured a one-story porch across its front and three windows above in the second story. The roof, however, was now more pyramidal in form, presumably to cover the now-broadened block of the house below.

These changes seem less a full rebuilding of Harbison's house, and more a remodeling that enlarged the building while keeping some of its original features. The changes also suggest that the owner had the financial wherewithal and ambition to build larger, perhaps in accord with B. D. Harbison's financial success between 1863 and 1884. This now-larger house also established the basis for still more major changes that came with a new owner, Captain Edward

Bailey.

In February 1888 a local newspaper article reported that Bailey and Harbison had "exchanged"\* houses, which apparently meant that Bailey headed to Church Street, while Harbison acquired the brick Italianate house Bailey had lived in at White and Elm Streets. According to the 1890 city directory, Harbison had moved to the house at the northwest corner of West Church and North Lynn, while Edward Bailey and family now resided in what would be today numbered 606 West Church. Within about two months after the sale, the Champaign Daily Gazette reported that "Capt. Ed. Bailey is making many alterations and improvements upon the Church street residence property he purchased recently from B. D. Harbison."\* Those "alterations and improvements" transformed the house into the lovely Queen Anne that it remains today. The question that arises here is why Bailey chose the Queen Anne style, and what that says about his intentions, along with the changing architectural tenor of the 1880s.

As noted above, this neighborhood was already developing in 1869, and by the mid-1880s, it featured the increasingly grand homes of some of the major local figures in finance and banking. In 1863 (the same year Harbison arrived), B. F. Harris, prominent since the pioneer days of the 1830s, moved into the large Italianate house built by John P. White in 1858 and centered in the 500 block of West Church. Perhaps ten years later, Harris' son, Henry H. Harris, moved into the quite splendid home built in 1870 for Col. W. N. Coler at Church and Elm Streets by Champaign's first permanent architect,



Seely Brown. The Harrises founded the First National Bank of Champaign in 1865, and B. F. was its president (until his death in 1905), while Henry H. really ran the institution. Yet another banker, Albert C. Burnham, with his wife Julia, commissioned Burnham and Root of Chicago to design their very large house in 1883-84 at Church and Lynn, just across the street from Harbison's house.



Burnham and Root (Chicago), Burnham House, 603 W. Church, 1883-84, photo of c. 1890.

Burnham and James B. McKinley founded the first bank in the city in 1861-1862. After McKinley's retirement in 1876, the firm became Burnham, Trevett & Mattis, and their success led all three partners to build houses of substance in this vicinity. While Burnham's was diagonally across from B. F. Harris's on Church, Ross Mattis's still stands at Elm and Park, south of the site of Henry Harris's, and John C. Trevett's is at Elm and University (although the current house is a c. 1910 replacement for Trevett's 1880s house).

In other words, the neighborhood into which Captain Edward Bailey sought to move was one of distinction and position, and suggests his ambition to express his own, perhaps rightful place there in his own significant house. That ambition was no secret, as a local paper's comment indicated,

about the time Bailey purchased his house from Harbison: "Capt. Bailey has for some time desired to get into a pious neighborhood, and has at last succeeded in doing so."\* It seems that such a description had little to do with religion and much more with another meaning for the word pious, i.e., marked by self-consciousness in virtue or display. No doubt Bailey felt it fitting that he should live in this

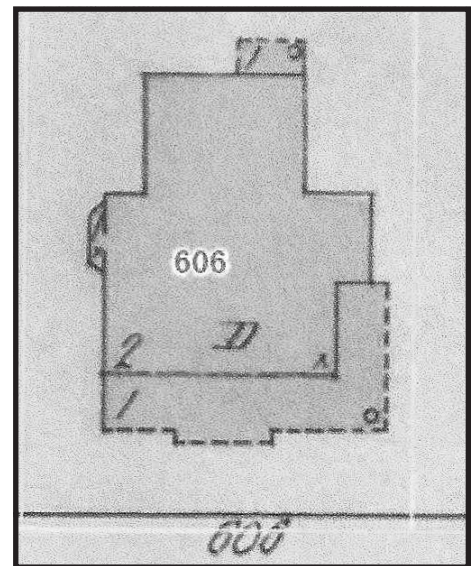
area, since he too was a part of the banking world. He helped form a private bank in 1879 that in 1883 was chartered as the Champaign National Bank, of which Edward Bailey served as president to his death in 1925.

A concern for self-conscious display through architectural richness, evident among his neighbors, could easily explain why Edward Bailey transformed Baxter Harbison's house into something far more "current" in style. Where other houses nearby tended to feature the older Italianate style, a new style – the Queen Anne style – had only recently been introduced in the Burnham House directly across from Bailey's. The Queen Anne valued irregularity – in plan, elevation, materials, textures, sizes and forms of windows, doors, porches, etc. The Burnham House was an excellent example of a high-style, architect-designed version of this style (Ill. ).

While the Bailey House aspired to many of the same features, it did so with a more measured and orderly flavor. Instead of being highly

asymmetrical, the main façade is here far more symmetrical in design. Its clearly stressed central axis organizes all the features on its several levels into balanced arrangements that include some classically inspired elements, like the triple round-arched windows at attic level and the beautiful Ionic columns and pedimented porch entrance on the ground floor. Those classical features may remind viewers familiar with the varied faces of the Queen Anne of another of its names – the "Free Classic" style.

The only thing that strongly alters the symmetry on the south wall is the extension of the porch, which now shoots off substantially to the east, then turns north to wrap around and shelter about half of the east wall. That east wall, along with the south and west walls, is not at all symmetrical, nor are the west and south walls, thus giving expression to the asymmetry inherent in the Queen Anne style. A later plan of the house (from a 1924 Sanborn Insurance map, Ill. ) reveals a fairly squarish arrangement at the core, but with extensions on the east, south, and west that are reflected in the off-centered



Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, 1909.

placement of gables above each wall. The squarish core is reminiscent of Harbison's earlier broadening of the narrower 1869 house here.

While the symmetry of the façade echoes the cubic core, the house's projections on other walls show that the interior of the Bailey House is not symmetrical at all, even if the centered entrance suggests otherwise. Inside the entrance an elegant stair rises on the east wall of an otherwise off-center hall. The hall leads to three major "public" rooms set asymmetrically on the first floor. To its east is a large sitting room with extensive woodwork and a long bowed window sheltered by the north run of the porch. To its west a library opens with very tall double doors. To its northwest is a rich dining room with built in cabinets and an ornamental leaded-glassed oriel window that, from the exterior, is the main feature of the outside of the house's west wall. Beyond the dining room to the north is a now-modernized kitchen, set in an addition to the main block of the house.

The varied dates of the major parts of the house – this addition, along with the original narrow house of c. 1869 or before, and the broader cubic shape of the house by 1884 – are all reflected in their foundations. What must be the original Harbison house, present by 1869, is the western part of the main block, rising above a heavy rubble foundation of yellow stone, likely Joliet limestone. By contrast, the east part of the main block rises from a foundation of coursed yellow limestone blocks, which likely represents the earlier 1880s' broadening of the house by Harbison. Different from both is the brick

foundation of the northwest section of the house, where the kitchen is located. That portion of the house, while two stories high, is less tall than the main block, its roof tucking in just below the eaves of the along the north side of the main block's roof (Ill. ). The addition's date is unclear, but it may well be more recent than the sections built above limestone, perhaps being part of the 1888 alterations undertaken by Bailey.

Capt. Bailey lived at 606 West Church until his 1925 death, and his widow and two unmarried daughters continued here to their deaths in 1936, 1942, and 1944 respectively. Since then, the house has changed hands several times, sometimes as a single-family house, sometimes with multiple residents. At some point between 1915 and 1924, the charming carriage house was added to the north of the house, its upper level serving as an apartment until very recently, and the property's acquisition by the Unit 4 School District.

Given its interesting history and architectural beauty, another question arises. Should this house, one of the last vestiges of a highly significant and historic neighborhood, be allowed to be demolished, like too many of its former neighbors? To save it from destruction would require the open-mindedness of the School Board to entertain the possibility of moving the Bailey House to a new location. Such a location would have to be found, but there are some lots open within a reasonable distance of the current site. Most importantly, there would have to be someone capable of and willing to organize and facilitate financing of the considerable expense involved. There is time, but not a lot of time,

to develop such an effort, but is there the public will to do so? Or will Champaign simply let it go, one more of a growing list of historic buildings lost to progress for our inability or unwillingness to act? If you are interested in doing something about this, please contact PACA, and soon.

\*Note: Direct quotations are from the Champaign Daily Gazette of February 10 and April 20, 1888. The information contained in this article is drawn from the Landmark Application form for the consideration for landmarking, which was researched and written by this author. A copy of the application may be found at the Champaign County Historical Archives, Urbana Public Library. The application was denied by the City Council, principally on the grounds of owner objection by the Unit 4 School District.



## Upcoming events

On April 28th from 1:20pm to 4pm all PACA members are invited to attend our Annual Members' Meeting and Awards Ceremony at the Natural History Building on the University of Illinois Campus (1301 W Green St. Urbana)

A short tour of the building will occur at 1:30 so please meet at north door, east side of building, by 1:20 if you're interested in participating.

The Annual Meeting will take place on the third floor in room 319 "the Core".

Parking is available at University lots, at Krannert Center for the Performing Arts, and on Mathews Avenue.

\* This meeting is for current PACA members. If you need to pay for your yearly membership or are interested in joining PACA, please email [pacaexdir@gmail.com](mailto:pacaexdir@gmail.com), call

359-7222, or stop by the warehouse during business hours to sign up.



PACA will celebrate Preservation Month by sponsoring a screening of the film *An American Home* at the Art Theater in Champaign on May 13 at 7:00 p.m. Tom Desch, the co-producer, writer, and director of the film will be present for a question and answer session following the screening. The film is approximately one hour in length and is not rated. The event is open to the public free of charge.

The film addresses the architec-

tural significance of Frank Lloyd Wright's B. Harley Bradley House in Kankakee, Illinois, a work situated at the very beginning of the architect's Prairie Style. It also describes the tumultuous history of the home and the battles to preserve it. Today, the home is available for public tours under the sponsorship of Wright in Kankakee, a not-for-profit organization.

PACA President Dr. Susan Appel describes the film as being like "balm for the soul" after the losses faced in recent historic preservation efforts in Champaign. The film serves as a reminder of the power of architecture to inspire pride and a sense of place, as well as contributing to the economic well-being of a community.

*An American Home* has been named an Official Selection for the prestigious Architecture and Design Art Film Festival.

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New       Renewal

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

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  
 217-359-7222 \* [www.pacacc.org](http://www.pacacc.org)

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