

Preservation Matters

Newsletter of the Preservation and Conservation Association

To foster and encourage preservation and conservation, focusing on the built environment of Champaign County and East Central Illinois.

What does PACA do?

By Thomas Garza



When new people come into the warehouse they frequently ask me “where do you get all this stuff?” My stock reply is: “we are primarily a preservation organization, but when we can’t save a house or building, we try to go in and at least save some of the pieces“.

I sometimes say a bit more than this, but for the most part I’ve paired my response down to match the curiosity level that usually inspires the question. If they want to know more they’ll ask, and if they don’t,

I’m probably just annoying them by elaborating.

Generally speaking this is about as much about PACA as the average person knows, and it is true even for quite a few people who live in this community too. Thankfully most people approve of that sort of activity so the public’s perception of PACA is overall fairly positive, but this isn’t all that we do. It isn’t even the reason the organization was created. Salvaging came a bit later, as a result of PACA members watching buildings go down and feeling that they at least needed to try to save something.

So what does PACA ‘do’ other than salvage interesting old building parts and sell them to the public?

Well, our mission statement says that we were created to: *“foster and encourage preservation and*



conservation, focusing on the built environment of Champaign County and East Central Illinois” which tells you a bit about the ‘where’ but isn’t too specific about the ‘what’. The reason for this is because what we’re mainly trying to do is get other people to do things, but it doesn’t sound very pro-active if you put it that way so our mission statement just vaguely alludes to this part by using the words ‘foster and encourage’. We strive to be, for lack of a better way to put it, a voice of conscience for the community. Our main work is to try in various ways to convince people that preservation

matters, and that it is an important point to keep in mind whenever changes to our ‘built environment’ (i.e. things we’ve constructed) are being considered.

Shouldn’t we try to do more than just talk other people into doing (or not doing) things? It would be nice if we had that ability but that takes power, and that’s not something this organization has very much of, at least not in the ‘hard power’ sense of the word. (I’m using the term hard power here as in power that is coercive, like legislative or economic power for example. Soft power — which is what PACA does have to some extent — consists of things like persuasion and influence.) On account of this fact PACA really can’t do much but try to persuade. We can ask, we can point out why something ought to be done a certain way, and we can use whatever influence we have to get others to join us in making these requests, but in the end what happens is up to someone else. A property owner, the city council, a developer, and so on.



So when I say that we are ‘trying’ to save a house or building, I mean more that we are trying to convince someone who has that kind of hard power — the power to make legal or business decisions that result in real change — that these places should be saved.



How do we go about doing that?

First and foremost we need to stay in touch with what’s going on in our community. We read the newspaper, watch the news, talk to people, and keep our figurative ‘ears to the ground’ so to speak. One regular agenda item for our board meetings is called ‘endangered buildings’ and we use that time every month as an opportunity to compare notes and discuss places that we know or suspect may be threatened by development or neglect. Secondly, once a genuine threat has been identified, we collect information on the various stakeholders and try to identify a course of action that is most likely to have some effect on the unfolding process. This includes things like attending public meetings, writing letters to interested parties, identifying neighborhood groups and letting them know how their area may be affected and so on. We may also make public statements, contact the news media, or publicize the situation via social media.



All of this behind the scenes work is why most people aren’t aware of what we’re doing. We could, if we had a huge budget, publicize all of these activities and make sure to inform the press every time we attended an event or spoke to anyone about anything, but this would, in actual point of fact, be counterproductive more often than not. You don’t persuade anyone by immediately forcing them on the defensive, and we only resort to that kind of ‘naming and shaming’ when there appears to be no productive conversation to be had, and all that is left for us to do is to try to sway public opinion.



This part of the job is harder than it sounds because it is often difficult to articulate why any given place should be saved in terms that are easy to understand for people who don’t generally pay attention to this sort of thing.

Why shouldn’t someone put up an apartment building, lay down a parking lot, or just knock down some old place that they feel is inefficient or ‘too expensive’ to maintain? People do it all the time and nobody says a thing, so why is someone complaining now?

Answering those questions can be tricky because it is true that more often than not we don’t say anything

when a building is coming down. The reasons why we speak out in some instances and not others seem obvious to us, but probably appear arbitrary to those who aren't steeped in these kinds of issues. In truth, the reason any particular place should be saved depends very much on either its specific attributes or its context in the community generally. Or both. There are places that have important historic or architectural value all by themselves — regardless of what else is around them — and then there are places that are valuable mostly because of where they are, not so much what they are. For example, some places are important simply because they are located in neighborhoods that are valuable because of the historic character or integrity of the area as a whole, and not because of any specific attributes of its individual structures.



Because of all of this, deciding that we are going to fight for a place to be saved is not an automatic 'given' whenever a demolition is announced. When we do decide to act it is because we've taken into account a variety of different aspects of the situation. We look of course at what the threatened structure is unto itself — what is important or valuable about its architectural details, what kinds of materials went into its construction, who lived there, who was the architect, and so on — but

we also consider its historical context locally or nationally, its cultural context, and its situational context as well.



Change and growth are of course inevitable and indeed necessary to any healthy community, but that doesn't mean that any change and all growth should be accepted as a foregone conclusion. What we seek to do as preservationist's, is to properly and effectively manage the growth and development of our built environment so as to keep it healthy. Think of our work as a type of preventative maintenance for our community, in much the same way as a gardner might prune a plant -- removing the unhealthy parts and preserving the ones that do the most for its beauty, health, and character.



Preservation doesn't slow growth, it actually stimulates it in healthy ways, and our work is to communicate this message to the community in a manner that people will understand.

This leads me to our educational activities. It's been awhile since we were able to hold any public



educational events, but PACA has a long history of offering house tours, lectures, and hands-on events designed to teach people how to identify historic places, research the history of their own house and the places they see around them, and even how to properly maintain their older homes so that they will continue to be great places to live for future generations.



All of this takes thought, time, and effort, and frankly we have a great group of volunteers who time and again go above and beyond to achieve these goals, but if we want to do more, we're going to need more people pitching in and that's where you can help, by volunteering today!



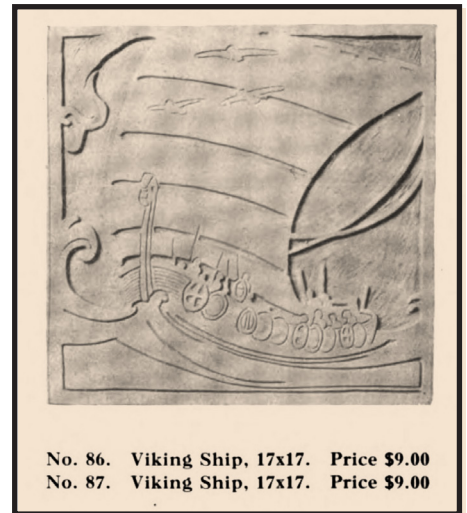
In Small Things Forgotten

Part II: More Overlooked Architectural Details in Historic Buildings

By Brian Adams

In a previous newsletter, I discussed how the various ornamental features of historic buildings are generally overshadowed by the structures of which they are a part. These features, such as weathervanes, hardware, and mantels, were often the products of companies which no longer exist. While recently going through some of my historic preservation files, I came across a couple of more examples of how products produced by once celebrated but now defunct companies or studios have been incorporated into historic buildings in our neighborhoods.

First among these are decorative ceramic tiles produced by the Batchelder-Wilson Company of Los Angeles, California. Ernest Batchelder established a tile making studio in 1910 in Pasadena, California. Here he produced decorative tiles, as well as elaborate ceramic mantels and fountains. Batchelder's works are typical of the Arts & Crafts Movement; his designs were inspired by medieval themes that were popular in the early twentieth century. A delightful example of his work can be seen in Paul Danely residence in the 300 block of West Indiana Street in Urbana. Here in



No. 86. Viking Ship, 17x17. Price \$9.00
No. 87. Viking Ship, 17x17. Price \$9.00

'Viking Ship' tile from 1920 Batchelder Tile catalog.

\$120 today).

Other Batchelder tiles have turned up in the former residence of Urbana architect Joseph W. Royer on West Oregon Street in Urbana. A later resident of the Royer house found some ceramic tiles here that were stamped "Batchelder" on the back. The author was able to track down two of these in Batchelder catalogs from the 1920s. Both depict old Spanish missions from southern California. One (No. 13) represents the Santa Barbara Mission, and the other (No. 12) depicts San Gabriel Mission. Both tiles cost \$1.80 at the time, about \$24 in today's currency. Both tiles had been broken, and it is possible they were formerly incorporated into interior decorative elements



Batchelder Tile: Viking Ship. Paul Danely House (1925)

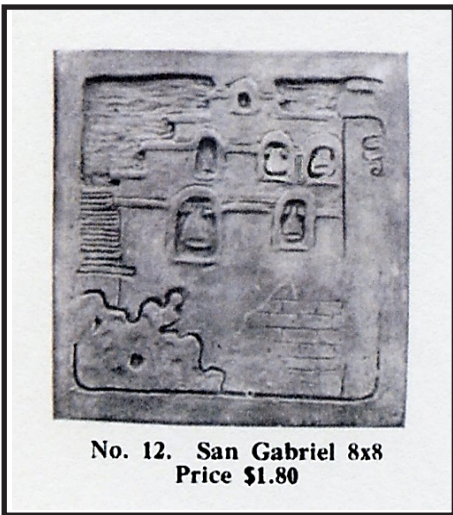
the gable of the north-facing façade is the striking image of a Viking ship under full sail in a stormy sea; three gulls fly before the sail. The 1920 "Batchelder Tiles" catalog identifies this as tile number 86 with a price tag of \$9.00 (about



Cover of the 1923 Batchelder Tiles Catalog



Batchelder tile of San Gabriel Mission, found in the Royer House, 801 West Oregon St. Urbana



San Gabriel Mission tile from 1920 Batchelder Tile catalog.

in the house, as were many of Batchelder's tiles, and damaged when removed. To date the author has not found the other tiles in any of the catalogs, but based on their medieval themes, are most likely also from the Batchelder studio.

The Batchelder tiles from the Royer and Danely houses illuminate other interesting pieces of Urbana history. Joseph Royer's sister-in-law, Nell Brooker-Mayhew, was an accomplished artist who, in 1908, eventually settled in the same community

in southern California as Ernest Batchelder where she established a renowned art studio. Nell pioneered a unique color etching process and for which she became famous. Around 1920, she began a series of etchings of the old Spanish Missions in southern California. By the early twentieth century, the missions, which were established between 1769 and 1823 by Franciscan friars from Mexico, were in poor condition and rapidly disappearing from years of neglect. Fearing the loss of these historic monuments, a grass-roots movement developed to save and preserve the remaining missions. Nell joined this movement by visiting the surviving missions and producing a series of color etchings that were exhibited throughout American and Europe, including displays in Urbana and the University of Illinois. One of her etchings, "The Bell Tower, San Gabriel Mission", is a near copy of the Batchelder tile titled "San Gabriel". It is interesting to speculate if one work inspired the other, as the two artists undoubtedly knew of each other. Nell may have brought the Batchelder tiles back to Urbana when she exhibited her works at the University of Illinois in the 1930s. The Viking ship tile incorporated into her brother Paul Danely's house on West Indiana Avenue may have been a gift she brought or sent from California. One of the other tiles found in the Royer house resembles Nell's artwork; it depicts a tree with drooping branches and large leaves, beneath which are flowers and a bird. Did Nell produce this tile, or did Batchelder base the



Ceramic tile found in the Royer house. The details of the tree, flowers, and bird are reminiscent of Nell Brooker-Mayhew's artwork.



Sketch of a of Nell Brooker-Mayhew's artwork.

design on Nell's artwork? Finally, a possible Batchelder tile can be viewed in the Royer-designed "Mother-in Law" cottage on Busey Avenue, immediately west of the Royer House on West Oregon Street and part of the Joseph W. Royer Historic District. Royer designed this small, picturesque English Revival style house in 1923 for his mother-in-law Ella Danelly. The east, or main, façade, exhibits many Arts & Crafts elements, including an entry door with applied strap hinges, a stucco chimney with randomly placed fieldstones, a metal lantern and hanging bracket, and a cream and blue ceramic plaque featuring a bird surrounded by foliage. It is not possible to view the back of this plaque for a name, but it is clearly in the style of Batchelder's works.

While not decorative architectural elements, products made by Urbana's first foundry, the Enterprise Foundry, can still be seen in Urbana-Champaign. The foundry was established by Abram Snedeker in 1872. Thomas Wright purchased the Enterprise Foundry from Mr. Snedeker in December 1881 and took possession of the business in January 1882. Wright was from England, arriving in Champaign County in 1880. Wright's Enterprise Foundry was bought by Dr. H.W. Leavitt of Tuscola, whose factory there specialized in the production of sickle lawn mowers that were sold around the world. Upon acquiring the Wright business, Leavitt immediately took steps to improve the facility. In 1903, Leavitt hired Urbana architect Joseph W. Royer to remodel the foundry. Royer's



Cistern lid in Urbana bearing the name "T. Wright and Son".



Storm Sewer Grate in Champaign bearing the name "T. Wright and Son".

modifications included an addition to the front measuring 30-x-32 feet, a new roof, and other unspecified improvements. In addition, the foundry name was changed to The Leavitt Manufacturing Company and was officially established on July 1, 1903. Over the years, the foundry manufactured a wide range of products, including sewer grates, cistern lids, window sash weights, and coal and ash chutes.

While architectural elements produced during Abram Snedeker's ownership of the foundry have yet to be identified by this author,



Storm Sewer Grate produced by the Leavitt Mfg. Co. of Urbana, Clark Park neighborhood, Champaign



Manhole Cover in Champaign produced by the Leavitt Mfg. Co. of Urbana

Building Supplies
Series Advertisement No. 4

The Leavitt Coal Chute or door is made of cast iron throughout with the exception of an apron to protect the brick wall at the bottom. This apron is made of No. 10 sheet steel.

This door is made without hinges and locks from the inside, so that it is absolutely burglar proof.

Very inexpensive, and a neat, substantial chute.

Can be Bought at Any Hardware Store in the Twin Cities.

LEAVITT MFG. CO. URBANA ILL.
Grass, Bronze, Aluminum and Grey Iron Castings

1914 advertisement (*Urbana Courier-Herald*)



Leavitt Mfg. Co. Coal Chute Door.



Leavitt Mfg. Co. Ash Pit Door.

items produced during the ownership of Thomas Wright and H.W. Leavitt can still be seen in Urbana-Champaign. While these items are more functional than decorative, they nevertheless shed light on a former local, prosperous industry that has been more or less forgotten. Products produced during Thomas Wright's tenure as foundry owner, while uncommon, include cistern lids and sewer grates bearing his name; to date the author has not identified any forged metal elements produced for incorporation into a standing structure.

The "small things forgotten" in historic buildings provide windows into the aesthetic tastes of past generations and can teach us about former businesses and

industries that once flourished in our communities. They are tangible objects that show us not only what makes our communities unique but also how they developed and were part of nation-wide artistic and industrial trends



Volunteer opportunities at PACA

A comment that I've frequently heard from people is that they'd like to volunteer at PACA but they aren't sure how to get involved.

Generally speaking volunteer opportunities at PACA fall into three main categories. We need people to work with the salvage crew, help us out at the warehouse, and take on administrative tasks.

As far as salvaging and the warehouse goes, these are two parts of a greater whole. We need people to work in the actual process of salvaging itself, and afterwards in de-nailing, sorting, and putting things away at the warehouse. Any and all skill levels are welcome as the work can be as heavy or light as it suits you. There's plenty to do in every aspect of the process from prying boards off of walls and carrying doors up and down stairs, to unscrewing light covers and door plates and dealing with the hundred and one little things that we find in old houses.

At the warehouse there is an endless amount of sorting and stacking to be done, and these are ongoing needs that exist throughout

We just want to remind everyone that November was our renewal month and so if you haven't done so already, please renew today.

Thanks for helping to keep PACA strong!

the year, not just when a salvage is going on.

On the administrative side of things, in line with our strategic plan we will be setting up a number of committees to deal with various aspects of running the organization (and keeping organized), so we'll be looking for people to sit on those committees, and we also need website work, help posting on social media, and things like filing, organizing, digitizing old photos and so on.

There's a lot to do so please join us! You can contact us by calling 359-7222, or writing to pacaexdir@gmail.com



PRESERVATION MATTERS

The newsletter of the



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

PACA BOX 2575, Champaign, IL 61825

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

New Renewal

NAME: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

ADDRESS: _____

- Adult \$25
- Student \$15
- Senior Citizen \$15
- Family \$40

PHONE: _____

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

E-MAIL: _____

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:

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