

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.

The Grand Reopening of the Orpheum Event Space



By Susan Appel &
Phyllis Williams

Chris Enck and his partners hosted a grand opening for the Orpheum as an event space by imagining a wedding reception on Feb. 28, and hosting the 40North, 88West annual fundraiser, “Untitled” No. 9, on Feb. 24.

These events featured the debut of the new risers — removable raised flooring that at last has solved the problem of utilizing the Orpheum auditorium with the old sloping

floor for theater seats.

Beginning past the concrete tiers at the auditorium entry, the carpeted risers fit perfectly together, solid and secure, yet comfortable — perfect for dancing. The risers form a rectangle in the center of the space with room for banquet seating of 150 and cocktail style, largely standing, capacity of 250.

The building has been treated to some paint (lobby spaces and storefront interiors), refreshed bathrooms, repurposed stage curtains

from the Parkland College theater, and an arrangement of the first story storefronts as dressing areas for wedding parties.

PACA member and KCPA lighting director Lisa Kidd is working with Chris Enck on restoring many of the original interior light fixtures.

This summer, the owners hope to refurbish the lot to the south (leased from the city) as an extension of the usable space. People attending both events seemed very impressed, and we are hopeful that the new business will be a success.

Photography by Phyllis Williams





Undated historic photograph of 204 W. Nevada Street. Note trellis/ pergola over entrance and facade windows. The car is a 1937 Plymouth/Dodge. (Courtesy of the Champaign County Historical Archives)

Three More Houses Designed by Joseph W. Royer Identified in Urbana

By Brian Adams

Upon completion of my biography of Urbana architect Joseph William Royer in 2011, I thought I had tracked down every reference to a Royer-designed building, both locally and throughout the country. However, since publication, I have identified several additional Royer buildings, usually while conducting research for other architectural projects. Many of these I was able to identify by using online, searchable historic newspapers and other publications which I hadn't utilized while researching the biography, instead at that time primarily painstakingly searching years of microfilmed newspapers in the Champaign County Historical Archives in the Urbana Free Library. The appendix in the 2011 biography records 115 Royer projects between 1897 and 1954; since then, I have identified an addi-

tional 91 projects, expanding the list to 206 projects.

Among these recently rediscovered projects are three residences in Urbana that still stand today. First among these is the Richards-Latowsky House at 305 W. High Street in Urbana. This house, which is an Urbana Local Historic Landmark, was built in the Craftsman Style in 1910. The Champaign Daily News published the following on May 14, 1910 (p. 5):

*LETS CONTRACT FOR
NEW HOUSE*

*C.W. Richards of Urbana Will Build
at Cost of \$6,000*

As the online landmark nomination form for the house details, the house was built for Chester W. Richards, an attorney and Urbana Mayor from 1917-19, and

his wife Amelia and continues: *"It is a good example of a Craftsman style house, a style relatively uncommon in West Urbana. The home maintains a high level of integrity today. Although not relevant for landmark status, it must be noted that the interior of the home is well-preserved with exquisite wood floors, trim, and built-in cabinetry, typical of Craftsman homes..." it is... "a two-story historic residence, built of wood frame construction and stucco and clapboard-clad in the Craftsman style. It was constructed circa 1911 and the architect and builder are unknown. The house is wrapped in a brown-painted clapboard base, which extends to the first story window sill level. This treatment is consistent with historic photos of the home taken in the 1920s."*

The Urbana Courier-Herald

wrote on May 6, 1910 (p. 5):

“C.W. Richards is having the old house removed from 305 West High street, where he will build a new modern home.”

The razed house was the late 1860s home built by carpenter Lewis C. Higgins and later occupied by plasterer John Leroy and his wife Eliza (Matkovszki et al. 2006).

On September 28, 1910 (p. 5) the *Urbana Courier-Herald* wrote:

“Work is progressing rapidly on Attorney C.W. Richards new house at 305 West High street.”

The landmark nomination records subsequent owners of the house after the Richards left in 1916:

Other significant owners include Charles Creek, a long-time Urbana jeweler and Erwin Latowsky, a longtime Urbana banker. John H. Manley resided in the home for two years as a student. Manley would go on to be a key scientist coordinating experimental physicists for the establishment of the Manhattan Project at Los Alamos.

When nominated as a landmark in September 2008, owners John and Betsy Cronan hadn't been able to determine who the architect or contractor were, and estimated, quite closely, that the house was built in 1911. The 1910 *Champaign Daily News* article identifies Royer as the architect and Baird & Howe as the contractors. It also states that interior trim on the first floor is “red



Above, Richards-Latowsky House, 305 West High Street. View to southwest. Below, Richards-Latowsky House. View to southeast.



Richards-Latowsky House. View to southeast.



Arthur Birely House. View to northwest. 510 W. High Street.

gum, supplied by Hunter, Rourke & Co., who make a specialty of this material.” Baird & Howe had several contracts locally and throughout the state, including the contract for construction of the new Urbana High School in 1913-14.

The second residence, also located on High Street, is the Birely House. It was also built in 1910 for Arthur Birely and his wife. Birely ran grocery stores in Champaign and Urbana. The *Champaign Daily News* wrote on May 20, 1910:

Without doubt Arthur Birely has the most unique residence in the twin cities. It is at 508 West High street [now 510 West High Street]. Its unusual feature is a roof in which there are no square corners and which weaves and crinkles at the edges like poppie (sic) petals. The purpose of the unusual shape of the roof is to make it resemble thatch. Another feature that places this house in striking contrast to other houses is the color scheme. Below the window sills wide board siding is painted

dark brown. All other outside wood trimming is brown, window sash are (sic) bright red, the stucco cream and the shingles green...A small stoop is the only approach to a porch on the front of the house but on the east is a large porch, the street end of which is in the form of a flying buttress, being plastered as the rest of the home.

The article identifies Royer as the architect and Charles Smith as the contractor. The *Urbana Courier-Herald* (1910b) reports the house cost \$3,200. Heitzman (1974) identifies the style of this building as “Art Nouveau & English Domestic,” while the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission classifies it as “Arts & Crafts.” The unique “thatched” appearance of the roof is reminiscent of Royer’s “Ella Danely/Mother-in-Law Cottage” at 701 South Busey Avenue, built in 1923, part of Urbana’s first Historic District (Kummer 2001) and recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places (April 18, 2022) together with the neighboring Royer Residence (1905)

(Adams 2022).

Contractor Charles Edmund Smith worked on other Royer projects, including the First Christian Church (now Canaan Baptist Church) in Urbana in 1910. Smith also managed a Coal Company in Urbana (*Daily Illini* 1931; *News-Gazette* 1931).

The third house is the Theodore and Daisy Ellen *Clingan* Bercher residence at 204 West Nevada Street, built at a cost of \$3,600 (*Urbana Courier-Herald* 1910c). The *Urbana Courier-Herald* (1910a) reported on July 31, 1910:

Alderman Bercher to Build
Alderman Theodore Bercher will soon begin the erection of a fine new dwelling on his lot at 204 West Nevada street. When completed it will be one of the most convenient and attractive residences on that street.

And on August 20, 1910:

Alderman Theodore Bercher today started excavating for his new \$3,000 residence at 204 W. Nevada street. When completed the building will be one of the finest on that thoroughfare.

Theodore Bercher was a contracting painter and member of the Urbana City Council as 5th Ward Alderman and City Treasurer, and later served on the Champaign County Board. The Bercher house has been described as an example of the Craftsman architectural style (Wroblewski 2004). Like the Richards-Latowsky and Birely houses, the Bercher House exhibits typical Craftsman elements including wooden

clapboarding on the ground level, above which is a stuccoed exterior.

In December 2011, Bob Bercher, grandson of Theodore and Daisy Bercher, donated historic photographs of the house and other related documents to the Champaign County Historical Archives.* In his letter he states:

Originally there was a back porch and outside door from the kitchen to the back yard. That area was enclosed and made into a downstairs bathroom in approximately 1949-50. The back room off the pantry and living room was a dining room and was made into a bathroom at the same time. There were two garages in the backyard off the service alley. The first one was torn down and replaced about 1950.

The letter also states that the contractor was Charles Smith, who worked with Royer on the Birely House, also in 1910.

This brief article demonstrates that there likely are still more Royer-designed buildings waiting to be discovered. As I've learned, references to these often turn up when and where you least expect and add to the growing inventory of "lost" buildings designed by Joseph W. Royer and his firms during the late 19th through middle 20th centuries.

*In Bob Bircher's letter to the Champaign County Historical Archives of December 19, 2011, he states the architect of the house at 204 W. Nevada Street was Joseph "Rayer". This is clearly a misspelling of "Royer." Based on its year of construc-



Above, the Bercher House, 204 W. Nevada Street, view to northwest. Below, the Bercher House, view to northeast.



Undated historic photograph of 204 W. Nevada Street. Note trellis/ pergola over entrance and facade windows. Also, the porch on the east is open and arched. (Courtesy of the Champaign County Historical Archives)



Theodore and Robert Bercher in front of 204 West Nevada Street and 1915 Model “T” Touring Car ca. 1917. Note the trellis/pergola surrounding the door and above the 1st floor windows. This was removed and replaced with the current entrance door canopy sometime after 2004 (see Wroblewski 2004). (Courtesy of the Champaign County Historical Archives)



204 W. Nevada Street ca. 1916. Note the porch on the east is open and arched. (Courtesy of the Champaign County Historical Archives)

tion, architectural style, and similarity to the Richards-Latowsky and Birely houses, and employment of Charles Smith of Urbana as contractor, the architect of this house was undoubtedly Joseph

Royer. The author has been unable to identify any architects named “Rayer” working at this time in Urbana-Champaign or the United States.

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Salvage Notes: One Last Pass at Illini Hall

By Phyllis Williams

The daytime high temperature was 22 degrees when some of the toughest salvagers anywhere saved entry doors, heavy pocket doors, and stacking bookcases from Illini Hall during a second opportunity in the building.

Illini Hall — which was part of the College of Liberal Arts & Sciences at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign — was demolished in early February.

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The bitter cold meant working as fast as possible, and we had a short window of time, so the trim was moved to PACA West and piled up to sort later.

The PACA Board members organized a nail-pulling party prior to the Warehouse and West sale on Feb. 11.

Photography by Marty Savoie and Elyse Harshbarger



The Champaign County Plaza Building: A salvage with a view

Story and photography by
Phyllis Williams

The County board and the good folks at Broeren-Russo gave PACA access to the Plaza building for salvaging prior to the remodel to convert this space to county offices. With heat, electricity, and running water, this salvage was exceptional for comfort and a chance to see Urbana from the fifth-floor windows, a treat we know will not happen again.

We salvaged over 2,000 linear feet of clear, red oak trim, three 9-foot doors, white boards, and certain cabinets.

There were fifteen different break/kitchen style areas in the building to be removed. We were able to refer this part of the salvage to Habitat for Humanity and got them started by deconstructing the kitchens on the fifth floor. (Tip: For wall cabinets, start from the ends and work towards the corner cabinet.)

We did not salvage the Diebold vault, but we do need to share this photo as the vault was stunning and surrounded by “absolute black” granite. Everyone involved is determined to find a new home for this gem!



PRESERVATION MATTERS

The newsletter of the



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION
44 E. Washington St.
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MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

44 E. Washington St., Champaign, IL 61820

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

New Renewal

NAME: _____

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

ADDRESS: _____

Adult \$25

Student \$15

Senior Citizen \$15

Family \$40

PHONE: _____

Corporate

E-MAIL: _____

Bronze \$250

Silver \$500

Gold \$1000

Platinum \$2000

I wish to make an additional
contribution: \$ _____

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