

# 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.

## OBITUARY

Bob Swisher

(1931 — 2022)



## INTRODUCTION

By Thomas Garza

PACA celebrated its 40th anniversary a couple of years ago and while talking to people about how best to mark the occasion I was reminded of how quickly time passes and memory fades. There weren't very many people that I spoke to who knew much about PACA's early history. For many of today's current members, PACA

has just always been here.

Yet the PACA you see today didn't just appear 40 years ago, it was put together in response to perceived needs in the community and its form was designed to generally emulate established national preservation organizations of the time.

Then it grew from there.

PACA's beginnings were fairly modest. To quote from 'Preservation and Conservation Association: A Reflection on Our First Twenty Years' by Trevor Jones:

*"The Preservation and Conservation Association of Champaign County (PACA) was officially incorporated as a not-for-profit organization on March 6, 1981, but the idea for the group originated years earlier with the Champaign County Historical Museum. In the 1970s, the museum's preservation sub-committee identified historic sites for the Bicentennial, held house tours, moved and preserved the Greek Revival Cottage and placed it on the newly es-*

*tablished National Register of Historic Places. ... As founding member Patricia Miller stated, the group hoped to develop a "network of people who shared a commitment to preserve our natural and our built environment."*

The founders believed they needed to raise awareness about the importance of Champaign County's historic structures and the need to preserve them.

PACA's growth over the years was both organic — as a response to specific events — and guided — reflecting the interests and priorities of the members who were active in shaping it.

One of those members whose contributions particularly stand out is Bob Swisher, a longtime CU resident and PACA volunteer who recently passed away.

As Bob had been in poor health for some time prior to his passing, I knew that I was going to want to write something about him, but I didn't

feel competent to properly tell his story because my association with PACA didn't begin until sometime after the organization's formative years. By the time he and I began working together, he had stepped back from his more active involvement and was mainly participating to the extent that his time and energy allowed.

It's safe to say Bob had a larger-than-life persona — and he left his mark in many places around the community. For our newsletter, I wanted to primarily concentrate on his involvement in the formation and character of this organization, and to try to give the reader some idea of how he helped shape the PACA you see today.

To that end I recruited our current Salvage Director and longtime PACA member Rich Cahill. Rich also has been involved with PACA for many years, and aside from his own personal reminiscences, he spent hours combing through old records and talking to others who'd worked with Bob in order to put together his article.

Some of the names and events Rich mentions will be new to you, and others you may recognize from other contexts. Neil Strack, for example, is a well-known local architect who was president of our board of directors from 1983-84. He also designed PACA's first logo, which can be seen in a stained glass panel on the wall behind the counter at our warehouse. Lachlan Blair (after whom our Lachlan Blair Education Fund is named) came up with the organization's name. Hank Kaczmarek is the director at the Illinois Simulator Laboratory at University of Illinois and was a very active salvage volunteer for many years.

But for an entire generation

of PACA customers, Bob was the face of the organization. Eventually he also became its voice as well through his newspaper column, as well as his prolific storytelling. People would come into the warehouse on Saturday mornings just to sit and listen to Bob talk about his adventures.

In a very real sense, our salvage warehouse is Bob's most visible and enduring legacy as it relates to his time at PACA. He prioritized saving material from the landfill, and he took what had been primarily an advocacy organization and gave it an active, hands-on involvement in local affairs. Re-use and recycling became important components of our overall preservation work largely through his efforts.

To be fair, this created a conflict in the minds of some members and associates. Whose side were we on anyway? Were we trying to save a historic building or just get its parts for our warehouse? And honestly, depending on who the most active volunteers were at a given moment, the answer to that wasn't always as clear as it should have been.

Personally, I would say that both saving a historic structure and saving its parts are import-

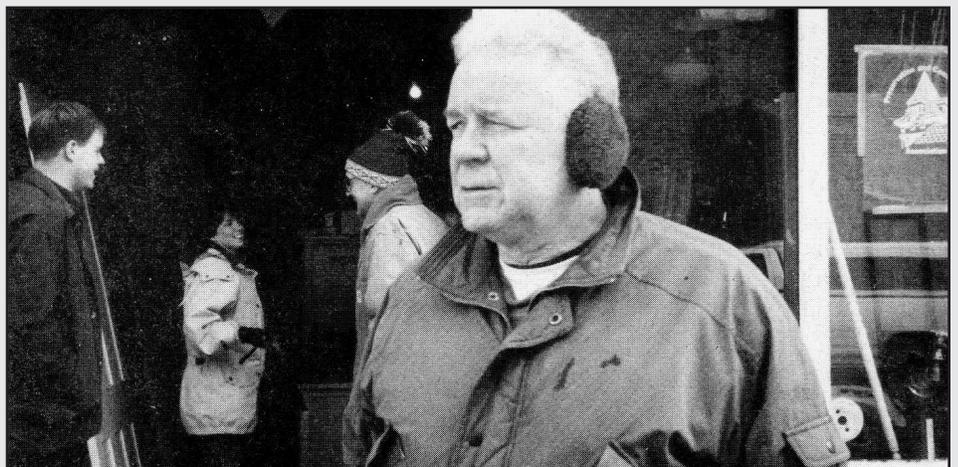
ant, in different ways and for different reasons. If it sometimes seems like we do more of the latter, that's mainly because it is sadly sometimes all we can manage to accomplish — not because it's what we tried the hardest to achieve.

Be that as it may, Bob brought a wealth of knowledge to the organization. He knew how to get things done. Through him, PACA was able to accomplish a great deal we wouldn't have otherwise. I hope that through the following article you will get some sense of the important role he played in making PACA what it is today.

## **Bob Swisher — The face of PACA for years and his contributions**

**By Richard Cahill**

Bob Swisher passed away on Dec. 18, 2022, at the age of 91. He had been in poor health for the last few years, which limited his activities. He grew up in Urbana and served in the US Navy. He worked for years for Albana Press and was an enthusiastic antique collector and held widely anticipated antique sales. He raised four



Bob, then salvage co-chair, is shown at PACA's salvage warehouse in January 1996.



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**WE AREN'T ONLY INTERESTED IN STRAIGHT RESTORATION ACTIVITIES – WE ALSO SEEK TO HIGHLIGHT PROJECTS THAT HAVE BREATHED NEW LIFE INTO OLDER SPACES WHILE STILL HONORING THEIR HISTORIC CHARACTER.**

**IF YOU KNOW OF ANYTHING SUITABLE, PLEASE CONTACT US AT [PACAEXDIR@GMAIL.COM](mailto:PACAEXDIR@GMAIL.COM) OR FILL OUT THE FORM ON OUR WEBSITE.**

sons with his former wife, Carol. He was married to Betty for nearly 20 years.

I first heard about PACA in 1988. We had just moved into our new (old home) on High and Orchard, Urbana, and needed building parts. We'd heard there was a warehouse on University and Water Street in Champaign that was open Saturday mornings. At a PACA garage sale in 1998 at the Grants

Department store in downtown Champaign we bought a display case that had been salvaged from a cigar store in Danville. A few days later Bob Swisher and Hank Kaczmariski delivered it to our house.

Later that year Sharon and I helped the group salvage a house, and I soon started coming to the warehouse regularly to organize and help customers. I got hooked, and in 1993

was elected to the board of directors.

It was hard not to like Bob. He and I worked well together, even though we did not always agree. However, we both had a passion for saving as much as we could from buildings that were getting torn down. One of the first projects we did together was meet with the school board in Farmer City, Rantoul, and Tuscola to promote PACA's

mission to save architectural elements of buildings. Bob's knowledge and connections in town opened many doors.

Bob's formal involvement with PACA began in 1988. Neil Strack nominated Bob to serve on the PACA board after Karen Miller resigned. He first served from 1983-1985. His impact was immediate. He outlined his vision for architectural salvage as a source of revenue and a way to prevent wasting valuable resources. He asked us to think: What do we salvage? Where do we acquire these items? How do we store the items we salvage? And how do we inventory, sell, and dispose of our acquisitions? Most of his suggestions have been followed. Some were later found to be untenable. It was decided that Champaign County should be the prime marketplace and that the items we salvaged should be used for their original, historic intended purpose.

Thanks to Bob's connections and perseverance, in Dec. 1986 Bob rented PACA's first warehouse space at the Avenue building at 65 East University for \$50 a month. The hours started at 9:30 on Saturday mornings.

In 1987 Bob expressed his frustration with the University of Illinois in denying PACA permission to salvage several houses being razed. By the following year, that situation was resolved. Bob continued to coordinate efforts at the warehouse — which included annual cleanup days and sidewalk sales. This was the era when UI was acquiring houses in the campus area for parking and future expansions, and Bob was instrumental in keeping PACA involved.

After having toured Hark-



Bob Swisher, Mike Talkington, and Laurie McCarthy at the original PACA Salvage Warehouse on March 12, 1990.

er Hall the previous April, PACA was given from Aug. 12 to Sept. 8, 1991, to salvage material from this historic building before it underwent a model remodel. PACA hauled 48 truckloads of material, saving the contractor \$5,000 in landfill tipping fees. The haul included 65 doors, 50 slate blackboards, hundreds of linear feet of trim, restroom marble, and discarded furniture. Bob stepped up at this time when Hank decided to leave PACA. A search for a new warehouse was becoming a high priority given the burgeoning space limitations.

In 1991 the UI announced its plan for the future of an engineering campus that would result in the demolition of several historic buildings. PACA mounted a vigorous campaign to delay or modify the plan. The university held firm, but PACA was allowed to salvage the Woodshop & Foundry Laboratory and the Filtration Plant in early March 1992.

As warehouse space increasingly became an issue, a search ensued with several failed bids and rejected offers. Finally, negotiations began on a property at 44 East Washington in the summer of 1998 and concluded with a fast-track sale for \$90,000 on Oct. 27. Work began immediately to prepare the new space — including adding door racks and removing a wall. In December, a big move occurred, and we opened for business on Jan. 9, 1999.

In June 2006 Bob formed the warehouse/salvage committee of Dan Leasure, Brian Duffield, Mike Miller, and Suzanne Ashlely-Wannemuehler. It established salvage procedures; investigated OSHA regulations for non-profits; made recommendations for upgrades and maintenance on the warehouse; and prepared an annual salvage report.

Bob rejoined the PACA board of directors in 2008 and served until 2010.

The selling of bricks from Champaign and Urbana street and sidewalk projects became a big money maker for PACA thanks to the demanding work of Bob and his ability to organize cleaning and stacking crews and market the pavers to landscaping companies as far away as New York. In 2013 pavers sales alone amounted to \$25,000.

In 2009, Hank Kaczmariski coordinated the salvage operation for the remodeling of Lincoln Hall. Bob arranged to rent space in an old freight depot building to store the four semitruck loads of material salvaged from Lincoln Hall and hold several public sales. Total sales were more than \$13,000.

At the Sept. 2012 board meeting Bob and Betty Swisher announced they were going to retire from active participation.

But Bob had one last important contribution to make. In April 2013, he arranged a meeting with Chancellor Phyllis Wise and others regarding salvaging some properties. After a disappointing experience with those projects, something good result-



Bob Swisher, 1931 – 1922.

ed: The university made it a policy from that point forward that any future bidders on university contracts were to arrange ahead of time for PACA to salvage architectural items. This policy has worked at several large projects — including the renovation of the Natural History Building, partial demolition of the Hydro System Labo-

ratory, renovations at Talbot Laboratory; the removal of several houses along Sixth, Nevada, and Mathews streets; and most recently Illini Hall.

Bob Swisher's legacy and importance to PACA will never be forgotten by those who knew him. His tall tales will live on in the lore of PACA.

## OBITUARY

### Linda Lee Lorenz

(1943 — 2023)

Linda Lee Lorenz of Urbana passed away on April 17 at the age of 79. She graduated from Urbana High School and received her bachelor's degree from the University of Illinois. After graduating, she served as an AmeriCorps VISTA vol-



unteer in Philadelphia, where her social consciousness deepened while working with underserved inner-city children. Later, she went on to earn her graduate degree in library science and worked as a librarian in Boston.

Linda returned to Urbana to care for her parents in their final years while working for the University of

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# Ulysses Grant Norman and The Norman Apartments, Champaign, Illinois.

By Brian Adams

If you picked up a copy of the Champaign Daily News on April 24, 1914, and turned to page 10, you would see the following advertisement:

## FOR RENT—HOUSES AND FLATS.

FOR RENT—Nearly new modern flats; telephones, gas range and garden plot furnished. U. G. Norman, 611 West Healey street, Bell phone 1444.

These flats were most likely in one of the “Norman Apartment” buildings in the 600 block of West Healey Street in Champaign. Built between about 1910 and 1927, these three brick buildings still stand today, and seem somewhat out of place in an early nineteenth century neighbor-

hood once dominated by single-family frame residences.

The buildings are located just east of the intersection of New and Healey streets, in Lots 2, 3, and 4 of “Norman’s Replat” of Block 1, John C. Clark’s Subdivision of Champaign. Champaign contractor Ulysses Grant (“U.G.”) Norman had the building constructed, beginning with 616 West Healey around 1910, followed by 618 West Healey around 1911, and finishing with 620 West Healey in 1927.

U.G. Norman was born April 14, 1867, in Hagerstown, Indiana. He moved to Illinois at the age of two with his parents, who settled on a farm north of Urbana. He eventually moved to Champaign,

and on June 12, 1895, married Minnie Belle Osborne in Mansfield. He was a contractor and builder, and for five years he worked as building inspector for Champaign architect C.R. Clark. Among Norman’s projects were the old Champaign city building, the nurse’s cottage at Burnham Hospital, and the old Atchison building in Champaign. He and Minnie resided across the street from the Norman Apartment buildings, at 611 West Healey Street.

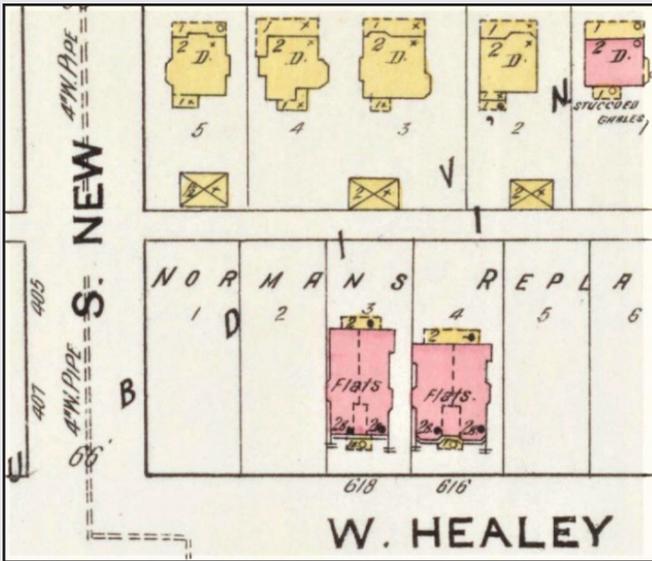
The three buildings have shallow setbacks and parking lots in the rear accessed by an alley. Inspection of the Sanborn Fire Insurance map from 1915 indicates the building footprints have remained relatively unchanged over time.

Based on a variety of sources a chronological sequence of construction can be established for the three buildings. The first to be built was at 616 West Healey Street, constructed around 1910. It is a symmetrical two-story building with bay windows on the façade and sides located on Lot 4 of Norman’s Replat. There is an open, flat roofed porch at the entryway.

As mentioned previously, the footprint of the structure as depicted on the 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance map is identical to the current plan, indicating a great deal of exterior structural integrity. The roof is flat, and a band of corbels wraps around the parapet just beneath the roofline. Two slightly projecting bands of bricks surround the building,



The Norman Apartment Buildings, 618-620 West Healey Street.



Above left, location of the Norman Apartments depicted in the 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map; the building at 620 West Healey Street (Lot 2) would not be built until 1927. Above right, 616 West Healey, façade.

one between the first and second floors, the other beneath the first-floor windows. Window sills are of roughhewn stone, as are the capitals of the brick porch supports at the entrance. The rear of the building is dominated by a more recent wooden stairway providing access to the back doors on the second floor. Likewise, a more recent entryway has been added to access the first-floor apartment on the west side of the building.

The building at 618 West Healey was built around 1911. It is a two-story building on a raised half exposed basement located on Lot 3 of Norman's Replat. Once again, comparison with the 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map indicates the building's footprint has changed little over time. It is symmetrical with a flat façade and bay windows on sides. There is an open, flat roofed porch at the entryway topped with a balcony accessible from a door on the second floor. Like its neighbor to the east, the roof is flat, and a band of corbels wraps around the parapet just beneath the roofline. A continuous decorative band of roughhewn stone runs around the façade and sides

of the building, also serving as the second-floor window supports at the entryway extend through porch roof and are also capped with roughhewn stone. There is a three-

brick wide decorative band of yellow bricks between the basement and first-floor windows on the façade and sides of the building. The rear of the building is dominated by a more recent wooden stairway



620 West Healey Street, façade; view to north.



At left, 620 West Healey Street, façade; view to northwest. Above, 620 West Healey Street, entryway detail.

and porch providing access to the back doors on the first and second floors. Access to the basement is through a central door. The area beneath the first-floor rear porch has been enclosed with concrete blocks. Finally, a square chimney rises from the eastern portion of the roof at the rear of the building.

The third building constructed was 620 West Healey Street, built around 1927 on Lot 2 of Normans Replat. It is the largest of the three flats, consisting of three stories on a raised halfbasement, a flat roof and English bonding brickwork of alternating single rows of headers between six stretchers. The entrance exhibits a flat, pointed arch porch with parapets and inlaid decorative tiles above the stairway. The transom above the front door has the name “Norman”

in gothic-style letters. Window boxes on the first floor are decorated with mosaic tile patterns, and windows are multi-paned casements. The façade parapet exhibits multi-chromatic decorative brickwork. Compared to 616 and 618 West Healey, the rear of this flat is rather plain, with no porch or staircase. A single central doorway provides access on the first floor. This door is flanked by two basement-level windows.

The Norman Apartments consist of three buildings of similar construction, yet each one with unique details. They date to a period in the early twentieth century when the city’s population was growing and there was an increased need for affordable, comfortable living spaces. That these century-old buildings are still meeting the needs of Cham-

paign residents is a testament to Ulysses Grant Norman’s skill as a developer.

## Sources

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1913 Standard Atlas of Champaign County, Illinois. Chicago.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps.



Residence of Ulysses Grant and Minnie Belle Norman at 611 West Healey Street, Champaign. Ironically, this house, which was located across Healey Street from the Norman Apartments, has since been razed and replaced by an apartment building. (George A. Ogle & Co. 1913, p. 155)

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Illinois Physics Department as a student adviser. She was a tireless advocate for feminism, environmentalism and pacifism.

Linda was a longtime member of the Urbana-Champaign Friends Quaker Meeting. It was the Quakers who cared for her in the last few years, and after her death held an estate sale at

her home at 409 W. High St. on May 26-27.

All proceeds of the sale went to three charities, of which PACA was one. The other two were The Idea Store and Twice Is Nice thrift store at the Urbana Presbyterian Church. Linda spent a lot of time making sure things got reused or recycled. She partnered in informal ways with all three charities.

Customers at the estate sale were asked to pick the charity they wanted their money to go to. In rough numbers, the total collected from the sale was \$5000. Of that, PACA received about \$3000, The Idea Store \$1200, and Twice Is Nice \$800.

PACA very much appreciates this final gift from a kind, sincere, and principled friend.

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## OBITUARY

### Lou Simpson

Lou Simpson, 68, of Urbana, died March 4 after a short illness. He was two months short of his 40th wedding anniversary with wife Trinia. Lou operated Simpson Accounting Services for more than three decades. Lou was a devoted charter member and officeholder in the CU Sunrise Rotary Club. He tended a memorial garden in Champaign's Mattis Park built by Sunrise Rotary to honor a

club member which features a decorative piano keyboard that he designed and built. He was part of the Arcola's Lawn Rangers that marched in the inauguration parade of Barack Obama, as well all over Illinois.

Lou served on the PACA board of directors from 2001-2003, for two years as treasurer. After his term was up, he continued to be PACA's accountant until his retirement. Lou always provided sound financial advice and helped PACA navigate tricky financial dealings with the IRS and with State of Illi-

nois grants for the Solon House Restoration. His big smile will be missed.



# PRESERVATION MATTERS

The newsletter of the



PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION  
44 E. Washington St.  
Champaign, IL 61820

Summer 2023

- President: Joe Zalabak
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- Newsletter Editor: Tom Garza
- Newsletter Layout: Tamara Moore

If you would like to contribute to the PACA newsletter, email [pacaexdir@gmail.com](mailto:pacaexdir@gmail.com)

Warehouse: 44 E. Washington St., Champaign, IL  
 Hours: Tuesday – Friday from 12 p.m. — 4 p.m. and  
 Saturday from 10 a.m. — 4 p.m.  
 Telephone: 217-359-PACA (7222)  
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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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