Preservation Matters

Newsletter of the Preservation and Conservation Association

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

Spring 2024 Newsletter

CALL TO ACTION:

The Shelford Vivarium and its Teco murals are imperiled. What you can do.

The Victor E. Shelford Vivarium Building at the University of Illinois, circa 1917. *(University of Illinois Archives)*

Shelford Vivarium and its Teco murals are endangered

At a meeting on April 10, 2016, PACA presented its annual Heritage Awards at Community United Church. The Victor E. Shelford Vivarium building was one of the recipients that year for "100 years of research in ecology," according to Rich Cahill, PACA salvage director.

Earlier that day, Cahill had spoken to a *News-Gazette* reporter about the Vivarium, located at 606 E. Healey St. on the University of Illinois campus in Champaign, illuminating its historical significance.

Victor Shelford, an assistant professor of zoology at UI in Urbana, assisted in the design of a new type of laboratory for experimental biology beginning in 1914. It would become what is now the Shelford Vivarium.

After conducting research and meticulously collecting documentation from a variety of sources, Cahill would write an article for the Spring 2016 *Preservation Matters* (Vol. 36, No. 1, p. 1-3). His contribution provided a detailed history of the Vivarium with biographical sketches of Shelford and the building's architect, James McLaren White.

White, a native Chicagoan, graduated from UI's College of Engineering in 1890, went on to study in Paris and Munich, and was appointed supervising architect of the University of Illinois in 1907, then its superintendent of business operations in 1921. In addition to the Vivarium, he designed numerous buildings on the UI campus including the Ceramics building and the Horticulture Field Laboratory.

When Shelford became president of the Ecological Society of America in 1916, he'd recently moved from Chicago to take the professorship at UI, and also worked as a biologist with the Illinois State Laboratory of Natural History.

"Shelford was a champion of experimental ecology, improved laboratory facilities to assist ecological studies, and promoted the preservation of national areas," Cahill wrote. Upon taking up his post at UI, he "championed the construction of a new laboratory to support experimental work."

Unlike other early 1900s vivariums — which are places for keeping or studying land animals — the Illinois Vivarium "occupied a minimal natural setting," Cahill wrote.

A 1961 view of the west elevation of the Victor E. Shelford Vivarium with one of two greenhouses to its side, and a pond in the foreground. Below, a detail of the pond taken in 1981 shows geese and a duck swimming.

The building was a substantial two-story laboratory with two large, climate-controlled greenhouse wings. It had the usual fresh and saltwater aquaria, but like ordinary labs it was a strictly private space ... The grounds were simple. (Cahill 2016, p. 1)

Two shallow ponds on the grounds — homes to several ducks, geese, and turtles (Cahill 2016, p. 3) — served as holding tanks for experimental animals.

This emphasis on lab over setting reflected the dual

View of west elevation of the Shelford Vivarium in 1917, when the pond was still under construction. *(University of Illinois Archives)*

> *purposes for which the Illinois Vivarium was built: to lure Victor Shelford from Chicago and to remedy the university's shortage of facilities for experimental biology.* (Cahill 2016, p. 1)

The Vivarium was dedicated in 1916. UI officially renamed it the Victor E. Shelford Vivarium in 1982 to honor the father of animal ecology.

Over time, however, pond maintenance became time-consuming, costly and burdensome.

> *Up to 7,000 gallons of water a day had to be pumped into the ponds to maintain water levels. In 1988 ... the ponds were drained and filled, some trees and most of the iron fence was removed, and the area (was) converted into lawn. In 2005 the original west greenhouse was demolished and replaced with a new greenhouse.* (Cahill 2016, p. 3)

The Vivarium certainly was a unique structure by itself, but what makes it stand out most prominently is its sculptural tile installations and ceramic features.

The building is flanked on each end by "two of the most important ceramic installations in America," according to Richard D. Mohr, professor emeritus of philosophy and the classics at UI. Mohr is a frequent contributor to the *Journal of American Art Pottery Association* and author of a book on pottery, politics and art.

Mohr notes that the aforementioned installations — sculpted, glazed terra cotta murals — were made in Illinois by the Teco art division of the American Terra Cotta Company in Crystal Lake.

'The Teco murals are ... exceptional pieces of art. It is hard to imagine any other ceramic works more deserving of preservation.'

Richard Mohr

Professor Emeritus,
University of Illinois

"The murals," Mohr wrote in an editorial published in the March 19, 2024, *News-Gazette*, "are the best work to come out of this company, itself one of the three or four best art potteries in the United States." The Teco murals are not only exceptional pieces of art, they

are also entirely unique to Illinois, having been crafted by Illinois artisans at every step in the production process.

The Vivarium's two tile installations, which are each 40 inches by 80 inches, depict roiling carp under a braking wave reminiscent of Japanese ukiyo-e artist Katsushika Hokusai's iconic woodblock print, "Under the Wave off Kanagawa" — more commonly known as "The Great Wave."

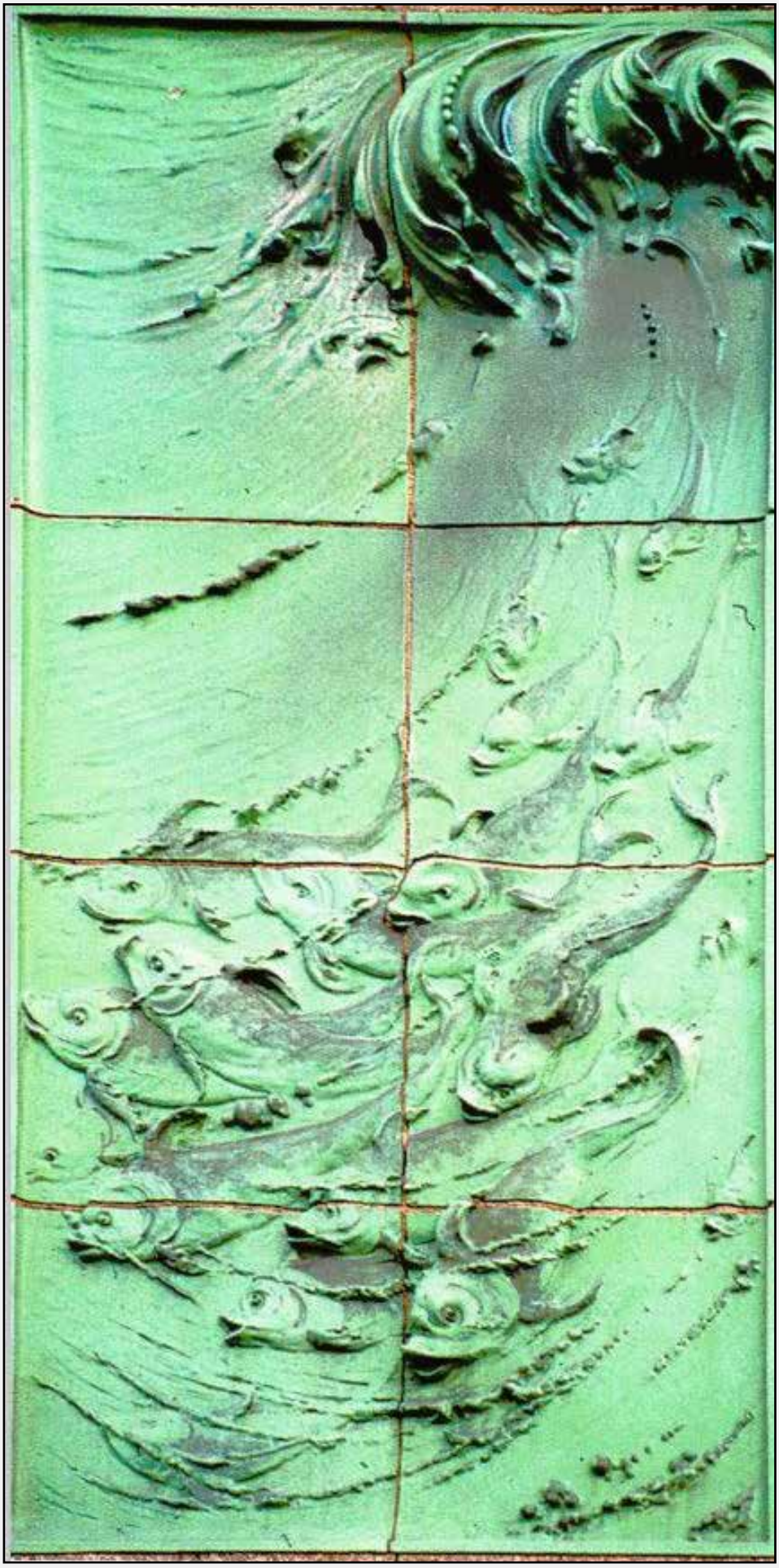
Mohr explains the extraordinary quality of the murals' glaze:

> *The murals are glazed in a sumptuous micro-crystalline glaze, a fine web of overlapping crystals too small to see with the naked eye, but which defuse light randomly, producing a soft moss-like surface without glare — a technical triumph that Teco was the first American company to achieve.* (Mohr 2024, *News-Gazette*)

"This grace of glaze significantly adds to the complexity, depth and drama of the design work," he writes, adding that the murals' placement — up high on the building — has kept them largely out of harm's way. The result is two 110-year-old murals which have endured in near-flawless condition.

"It is hard to imagine," Mohr says, "any other ceramic works more deserving of preservation."

One might assume the murals will be preserved because they have profound historical, artistic, and cultural significance specific to the region. However, the Vivarium is the



At right, one of the terra cotta murals sculpted by the Teco art division of American Terra Cotta Company in the early 20th century is shown on the west side of the Shelford Vivarium. *(Richard Mohr photo)*

The Shelford Vivarium is shown in 1926, view from the southeast. The building is located on the northeast corner of Wright and Healey streets at 606 E. Healey St. The original west greenhouse was demolished in 2005 and replaced with a new one. *(University of Illinois Archives)*

first among several university buildings scheduled to be demolished over the next 10 years, based on the university's campus master plan (Kacich 2024).

Mohr points out that if the murals are destroyed, "it will not be the first time the university has sinned against Teco" (Mohr 2024, *News-Gazette*). In 1958, 50 original Teco terra cotta rondels were torn from the facade of UI's Stock Judging Pavilion and binned. Several of the 2-feet in diameter rondels were rescued from a dumpster and survive, albeit in damaged condition.

Richard Mohr has launched a crusade to ensure the murals are saved from a similar — or worse — fate when the Vivarium building is demolished to make room for a multi-story tower to house students. The Vivarium sits on prime real estate near the campus's main quad, and UI officials appear unlikely to preserve it, despite its historical importance and rare features.

Detail of a planter made by American Terra Cotta Company, founded in 1881. The company became the country's first manufacturer of architectual terra cotta. Its main businesses consisted of the production of drain tile, brick, chimney tops, finials, urns, and fireproof building materials. *(Rich Cahill photo)*

Can we change this course? We certainly can make our opinions heard. Letters to the editors of local papers and to the University of Illinois are vital, as is addressing city council, local politicians, organizations, and pretty much anyone who might listen. Even just a few lines express-

Above, detail of cast iron marquee on the south entry of the Shelford Vivarium. *(Rich Cahill photo)*
Below right, one of 50 rondels, executed in glazed, high relief terra cotta, from the facade of the University of Illinois Stock Judging Pavilion. This rondel, of a Yorkshire pig, was crudely removed and disposed of by the University of Illinois, but later salvaged by a citizen. *(Thomas A. Freeburg photo)*

ing your viewpoint are worthwhile. Please: Make some noise.

Mohr believes the murals are "among the most impressive ceramic surfaces in America. It's hard to imagine any other such works more deserving of preservation."

Thus, he's urging that emails and letters be written to UI's Chancellor at the following addresses:

Robert J. Jones
Chancellor
chancellor@illinois.edu
Swanlund Administration Building
601 E. John St.
Champaign, IL 61820

The situation with the Teco murals — and the terra cotta rondels — is reminiscent of the way the Lincoln Hall war memorial was dealt with several years ago. [Read a detailed description of this by Rich Cahill in PACA's Spring 2015 Newsletter at https://pacacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Springnewsletter.pdf]

To quote Rich's article:

The courtyard and fountain was designed and built by Donald Molnar and was located in the south courtyard of Lincoln Hall outside of the Lincoln Hall Theater.

Central staircase, interior of Shelford Vivarium. *(Rich Cahill photo)*

> *It was dedicated in 1969 as part of a memorial garden and the project was funded by the University of Illinois classes of 1918 and 1919 in memory of classmates who lost their lives in World War I.... The fountain was considered a significant sculpture by the Smithsonian American Art Museum (Control IAS IL000394). The memorial garden and fountain was mentioned in the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois listing of Lincoln Hall as endangered in their 2005 listing of the ten most endangered historic places in Illinois.* (Cahill 2015, p. 1-2)

Initially no one knew what had happened to this sculpture and it was not included in the plans for the renovation of Lincoln Hall. Requests to the University for information went unanswered. Only after pressure from PACA and the local press were they able to "find"and fund this piece's return to its original home.

Longtime PACA members will by now be very familiar with this frustrating dynamic. The University of Illinois administration are the stewards of the largest collection of historic buildings and spaces in downstate Illinois. And they are the best and the worst at taking care of and appreciating what they have in their control. This presents a real challenge to us as preservationists, because it's almost impossible to anticipate whether they will spend millions restoring a place or simply bulldoze it down without warning — and without making any effort to save what can be saved.

There is currently no reliable or organized system for identifying or protecting important historic artifacts once a place has been deemed unnecessary to the University's overall plan, and the primary criteria for evaluation seems to be whether there is some public interest in a particular space, not whether it has any intrinsic value of its own.

The Alma Mater statue (https://will.illinois.edu/news/story/alma-mater-may-return-to-u-of-i-campus-in-april) is celebrated, protected and carefully restored. The Mumford house for which we fought tooth and nail and which now, fifteen years later, sits slowly deteriorating, is a perfect example of demolition by neglect. [See https://pacacc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Vol29No1-2009.pdf]

Preservation is not about keeping everything exactly the way it is forever — It's about learning to understand and value the things and places around us that reflect who and what we are.

Our job as preservationists is to first and foremost educate people about why these things are important, but then also to work to protect them. The Teco murals must be saved of course — by themselves if that's all we can manage to accomplish — but there are larger questions to be asked and answered about places such as the Shelford Vivarium itself, which must also be addressed.

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Note: Tamara Moore, Thomas Garza, Rich Cahill and Richard Mohr contributed to this article.

Where Is Royer?

By Brian Adams

During his long career as an architect in Urbana, Joseph William Royer's firm occupied multiple places in the city. Over nearly 60 years his firm was located in at least seven different places, and during nearly half of this time (1906-1935) his offices were in the Flat Iron Building, which he designed in 1906. Prior to and following time in the Flatiron Building, Royer worked out of other locations, some less well-known than others. In some cases, it's unclear why he moved into different quarters; hopefully additional research can shed light on this question.

Joseph Royer worked as Urbana's city engineer from 1898 to 1906. Research indicates that he was already designing buildings for clients prior to this period. To date, the earliest buildingdesigned by Royer the author has found was the residence for Stanley Boggs in April of 1897. During this period, Royer was residing on West University Avenue. By early 1898, Royer was located in the offices of brothers George W. and Thomas E. Lindsey who ran a real estate and insurance business in the Kirkpatrick-Lindsey block at 115-117 South Race Street (Glass 1898, p. 62).

This section of South Race Street is now occupied by the parking lot of Busey Bank built in 1980. The 1898 Business Directory of Champaign County indicates Royer was working out of 117 South Race Street and misspells his last name as "Royar" (Glass 1898, p. 53).

Soon Royer would relocate his architectural practice to the new City Building, constructed in 1898, at the southwest corner of West Elm and Market (now Broadway) streets where he was employed as city engineer. The 1902-03 City Directory (p. 189) records Royer as "city engineer at Urbana City Hall." At this time, he was boarding at 307 N. Coler Avenue. In the directory, Royer is listed in the "Architects" section (p. 241), at "Urbana City Hall."

Early 20th century view of South Race Street, view to the north from West Elm Street. Royer's firm was in the Kirkpatrick-Lindsey block, on the left (west) side of the street just beyond the drug store on the corner. *(Source: Bial 1994)*

With the start of the 20th century, Joseph Royer was expanding his range of architectural designs. The new century started with the unveiling of Royer & Brown's plans for the new Champaign County Courthouse, built in 1901 (Champaign County News, Saturday, January 20, 1900). Royer had partnered with architect Fred G. Brown of Danville for this project (Champaign Daily News, October 20, 1899, p. 1).

In May of 1903, Joseph Royer and his new bride Adelaide moved from 604 West Elm Street into the new apartments in the Stephen's block on West Main Street, Urbana (Urbana Daily Courier, Tuesday, May 12, 1903). In November 1902 it was announced that Urbana photographer B.F. Stephens had commenced construction on a new brick building to replace an earlier frame structure (Urbana Daily Courier, Sunday, November 2, 1902). By March 1903 it was announced that

> *The outside work on the Stephens building on West Main street has been completed and the finishing touches are being put on the inside. Mr. Stephens will occupy the ground floor with his studio, while the rooms on the second floor will be used for*

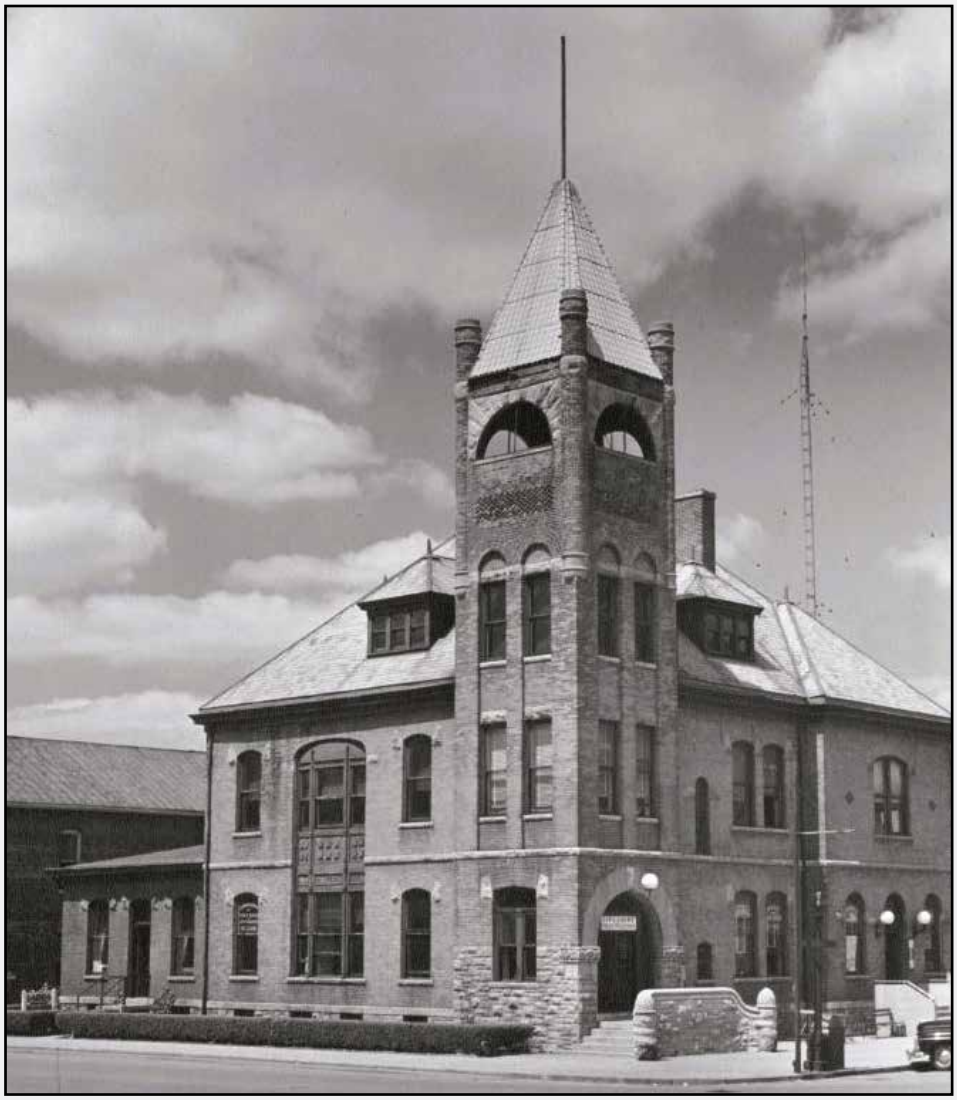
offices. (Champaign Daily News, March 2, 1903)

By 1904 Royer had moved his architectural practice from the city building to the new Stephens Building. The author suspects, but as yet cannot demonstrate, that this building was designed by Royer.

Among Royer's last architectural projects while still employed as Urbana city engineer was downtown Urbana's Flatiron Building, constructed in 1906. His architectural firm would occupy this building, located across Main Street from the Stephens Building, when completed and remain there for nearly 30 years. With the exception of height, the building was to be an exact counterpart to New York City's Flatiron Building, built four years earlier in 1902 and designed by Daniel Burnham (Champaign Daily Gazette, March 1, 1906). The New York City Flatiron Building is 22-stories high while Urbana's version consisted of four-stories. When completed the first floor of the building was occupied by a department store which opened in September of 1906. In mid-September, practically all the office space in the building had been rented (Courier-Herald, September 11, 1906):

> *All of the office rooms but two have been rented in the Flatiron Building. Dr. Burres has two rooms; Dr. Fenton, two rooms; Dr. Yantis, one room; F.M. Green & Son, three rooms; J.W. Royer, three rooms; G.L. Inman, first front room; Snyder & Co., tailors, two rooms. Mrs. Emma Mayfield has rented a suite of three rooms which will be elegantly furnished.*

Royer's firm would occupy space on the third floor. By early November, the joint



Above, the old Urbana City Hall building where Royer was employed as city engineer from 1898 to 1906. Built in 1893, the building was demolished in October 1965. *(Source: Champaign County Historical Archives)* Below, Stephens Building, Main Street, Urbana (1902-03). Joseph and Adelaide moved into an apartment here in 1903. By 1904, Joseph also had office space here.

The Flatiron Building. Royer's firm was initially on the third floor, but later moved to the second floor. *(Source: Champaign County Historial Archives)*

reception room of Drs. Baker, Burres, Fenton, and Yantis was nearly finished, and a building directory had been installed in the lobby by Gilmore & Johnston (Courier-Herald, November 10 & 17, 1906). At the end of December 1906, it was announced that "...Joe Royer has installed in his office a very fine and useful cabinet for plans (Courier-Herald, December 31, 1906). In late October, it was reported that the Beneficent and Pro-

tective Order of Elks (B.P.O.E.) would occupy the building in November, and by early and mid-December, the carpets, furniture, and four billiard and pool tables were installed (Courier-Herald, Thursday, October 25; December 4, 6, 15, 1906). The Elks held their first dance in the banquet hall on the fourth floor in late December, and 25 couples attended (Courier-Herald, Thursday, December 20, 1906). By the end of December 1906, the Flatiron Building was more or less complete and all four floors were occupied.

On January 19, 1924, it was announced that J.W. Royer moved his offices down from the third to the second floor of the building (Daily Illini, January 19, 1924). By this time, he had partnered with his brother-in-law Paul Danely and Hubert Smith and his firm was named "Royer, Danely & Smith." The second floor was remodeled in preparation for this move. The law firm of Green and Palmer occupied Royer's old office space. In 1929, it was announced that the Urbana Elks Club space had been remodeled and was ready to open (Urbana Daily Courier, February 1, 1929, p. 6). While Royer was involved in this project, "…he modestly disclaims credit, stating that the color scheme and drape and furnishing selections were made by Mrs. Royer, whose fine taste in this respect is widely recognized."

On the evening of March 12, 1948, the Flatiron Building caught fire and was gutted. The author suspected that the fire destroyed all of Royer's documents (e.g. plans, drawings, correspondence, etc.) kept in his office space, thus explaining their rarity. However, Royer had vacated the building over ten years earlier in May 1935 (Evening Courier May 31, 1935). At this time the local headquarters of the

Above, fire destroyed the Flatiron Building on March 12, 1948. *(Source: Champaign County Historical Archives)* Below, the Masonic Temple Building at 113-115 West Main Street, where Royer's firm was located from 1945-54.

SUMMARY TABLE OF ROYER FIRM LOCATIONS IN URBANA

Years	Location	Partners	Comments
1898-ca. 1901	Kirkpatrick-Lindsey block, 115-117 S. Race Street	None	None
Ca. 1901-1903	Urbana City Building	Fred G. Brown	Champaign County Courthouse
Ca. 1903-1906	Stephens Building	None	None
1906-1935	Flatiron Building	Royer, Danely & Smith	None
1935-1943	Urbana-Lincoln Hotel	Royer, Danely & Smith	Broadway entrance & mezzanine
1943-1944	Urbana-Lincoln Hotel	None?	108 West Green Streetshop in hotel
1945-1954	Masonic Temple Building, 113-115 West Main Street	Harold B. Davis	None

Utility Operator's Association, the Employees Operating Organization of the Illinois Power and Light Corp. (I.P. & L.), and the Employees Beneficiary Association moved from the I.P. & L. building in Champaign to the Flatiron Building in Urbana.

The Urbana office of the I.P. & L. was formerly located at 118 East Main Street (Urbana Daily Courier June 27, 1927). The company announced in the June 11, 1927, issue of the Urbana Daily Courier that their offices and salesroom would be moving into new quarters at the Flatiron Building on June 15th of that year. In May of 1935, the company occupied the office space on the second floor, up until then occupied by Royer, Danely & Smith. Royer's firm moved from the Flatiron Building at this time to the Urbana-Lincoln Hotel (also designed by Royer). Here.....

> *they will occupy one room on the first floor, Broadway entrance, and a mezzanine floor adjoining (Evening Courier, May 31, 1935).*

Why Royer's firm left the Flatiron Building in 1935 has yet to be determined. It was a fortunate move as the fire would have certainly destroyed all of his plans and documents housed in the building. Hopefully now dispersed documents that were moved to his new quarters will continue to turn up. Royer would maintain office space in the Urbana-Lincoln Hotel until the 1940s.

The 1943 and 1944 city directories indicate Royer had an office at 108 West Green Street, and no partners are listed with him. This address is actually one of three "shops" located on the ground floor of the west wing of the Urbana-Lincoln Hotel. Soon after the hotel opened, these shops were given individual street addresses on Green Street (106, 106, & 108). City directories record the following businesses here: Craddick's Cleaners (1937); Olan Mills Portrait Studio (1939-1941); and the Urbana-Lincoln Barber Shop (1945/46). The building is recorded as "vacant" in 1938 and 1942. Why Royer moved to this location in the hotel has yet to be determined. The lease to the hotel was sold in August of 1940 and extensive renovations were planned. Perhaps Royer's move was due to reconfigured space in the hotel in the early 1940s.

City directories from 1945 through 1950 indicate Royer had office space in the 2nd floor of the Masonic Temple Building at 113-115 West Main Street. At this time his partner was Harold B. Davis.

For the duration of Royer's career as an architect, he maintained office space in downtown Urbana. At times, his firm was located in buildings that he designed, some of which still stand today. Other buildings he occupied are gone, victims of the wrecking ball or fire. Still, those that survive represent a tangible link to his former presence in the city, much of which still

bears the stamp of his skill as an architect.

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PACA Events & News

Above, framed photographs by Jeff Janczewski are installed ahead of the Boneyard Arts Festival exhibit held at PACA in April. Below, attendees mingle and enjoy the artwork on display.

PACA hosts exhibit

Starting with a reception on Friday evening, April 12, and running throughout the day Saturday, PACA hosted an exhibit for the Boneyard Arts Festival at its Architectural Salvage Warehouse, 44 E. Washington St.

Award-winning artists Fraya Replinger, Teresa Ellis, Jeff Janczewski, and Beth Satterthwaite displayed their latest works and projects, many of which featured creative reuse of architectural components.

Changes to the Board

Nathan Beach has been appointed president of the Preservation and Conservation Association's board of directors.

He is a real estate investor and was a professional beekeeper for a decade.

Beach holds a bachelor of science degree in business administration. He says he and his wife have a personal interest in restoring Craftsman and Mid-Century Modern houses.

Tori Beach is the board's new secretary. She has worked as a videographer and video editor since 2008 and runs her own business.

"Since I was little I've loved stories," she says, and video is the art form she feels best "captures a story in a concise, effective, and beautiful way."

Last August, she and her husband Nathan finished restoring a 1928 cottage.

The board's vice president is now Lauren Gramly, and serving as treasurer is Joe Zalabak. PACA welcomes new board members Geoff Bant, Zoe Zapel, Fraya Replinger, and Beth Satterthwaite.

Warehouse a stop on Wine Walk

On May 4, PACA participated in a community event. The warehouse served as one of the stops in the 4th annual Downtown Champaign Wine Walk. As participants strolled along downtown sidewalks, they stopped at 14 venues to sample a variety of national and international wines.

This event was organized by the Champaign Center Partnership and kept the PACA warehouse full all afternoon!

Participants of the 4th annual Downtown Champaign Wine Walk stop at PACA to sample wine.

Meet Scaley, river defender and unofficial mascot

High above antique doors, trim, light fixtures, and hundreds of other salvaged items that line the shelves of PACA's warehouse hangs a colorful, 30-foot-long paper dragon. The dragon, whose body is made from Illinois topographical maps donated by PACA, was created by the DSC Art Collective. Its members named the dragon 'Scaley.'

According to project coordinator and artist Jess Beyler, the dragon was created "to raise awareness about the need to heal and protect the waterways in Illinois which are threatened by phosphorus and nitrate run-off from farm fields, toxic chemicals from coal ash, and the loss of critical wetlands."

The dragon's spine is painted blue, which, Beyler explained, represents the rivers running through the state.

"The head of our dragon is fierce and starry-eyed; both are qualities one needs to fight for our planet," she said.

The DSC Art Collective is made up of numerous individuals with both artistic talent and developmental disabilities who engage in the day program at Developmental Services Center. Thanks to Jess and all the talented artists of DSC Art Collective for this special gift!

PRESERVATION MATTERS

The newsletter of the

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

Spring 2024

If you would like to contribute to the PACA newsletter, email
pacaexdir@gmail.com
pacaexdir@gmail.com

Warehouse: 44 E. Washington St., Champaign, IL
Hours: Tuesday — Friday from 12 p.m. to 4 p.m.
and Saturday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m.
Telephone: 217–359-PACA (7222)
Web: http://www.pacacc.org
Email: pacaexdir@gmail.com

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION 44 E. Washington St., Champaign, IL 61820

MEMBERSHIP STATUS

☐ New ☐ Renewal

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

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☐ Student	$15
☐ Senior Citizen	$15
☐ Family	$40
☐ Corporate	
☐ Bronze	$250
☐ Silver	$500
☐ Gold	$1000
☐ Platinum	$2000

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_____

PHONE: _____

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