

# PRESERVATION MATTERS

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PRESERVATION AND CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

## The David Phillippe Mansion

by Brian Adams

*This home, one of the show places of the city, is one of the most attractive and artistic in Champaign. The substantial and spacious house is set in the midst of beautiful grounds that constitute an entire city block, and the home is known as a center of gracious and refined hospitality, with Mrs. Phillippe as its popular chatelaine.*

Such was a description of the Phillippe Mansion at 500 West Church Street in Champaign during its tenure as a residential home. While no longer "...set in the midst of beautiful grounds..." the mansion still retains its historic, palatial character. A separate carriage house was built to the west of the residence, and the two were connected by a winding pergola depicted on the 1915 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Historic photographs show the mansion surrounded by a manicured lawn, trees and shrubs.

Built between 1909 and 1910 by B.F. Harris for his daughter Rachel and her husband David Andrew Phillippe, the house was expected to cost \$60,000-\$75,000, and was occupied by the couple in 1910. David Phillippe was a lifetime resident of Champaign County. Born in Hensley Township on August 29, 1843, he spent much of his life farming (Smith 1927). His family arrived in Illinois around 1818, and by the time of David's birth, had acquired extensive landholdings in Hensley Township. He attended schools in Urbana and Wesleyan College in Bloomington, and eventually was sole heir to his family's extensive landholdings. A profile published in a local newspaper during the early 20th century described him as "...one of the oldest pioneers in the county and one of the best loved,



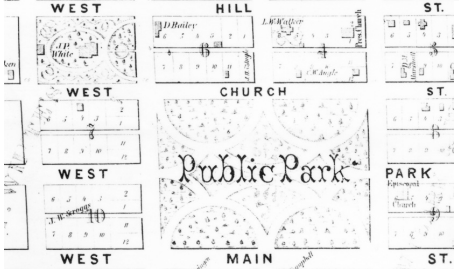
Phillippe Mansion

greatly esteemed and most upright men during his whole life". Apparently he was known as "The Old Gentleman" throughout Champaign County, and was called "Andy" by family and friends. David Phillippe personally oversaw operations at the family farm, the Phillippe "Greenlawn" estate, as well as "South Farm", a large farm south of Mahomet acquired following his marriage to the daughter of B.F. Harris. David Phillippe was a Republican, and a member of the Methodist Episcopal Church and the Masons Lodge. He died in 1922 at age 79.

In 1874, David married Miss Rachel J.R. Harris, a daughter of Benjamin F. and Mary (nee Heath) Harris. B.F. Harris was a successful cattleman, owning 5,000 acres in western Champaign County. He resided near Mahomet and eventually became one of the largest cattlemen in the country. In 1865, he was

principal founder of the First National Bank of Champaign. David and Rachel Phillippe had five children: G. Prank, Harris (died an infant), Ida, Olive, and Edith. Edith eventually married John W. Armstrong, and the couple resided in the Church Street mansion following the death of her mother in 1936.

At the age of 67, David and Rachel moved from their old country homestead to the newly built mansion at 500 W. Church Street in Champaign. The *Champaign Daily Gazette* announced the Phillippe's plans to build in May of 1908. Prior to the commencement of construction, an existing house on the lot was to be razed. This occurred in June and July of 1908. Like the later Phillippe residence, this older home, built in 1856 by John F. White, occupied the center of the 500 block of West Church Street. The 1869 Bird's Eye View of Champaign depicts this house on a lot with trees, a circular



John F. White Residence (1856) (later B. F. Harris residence) at future location of the Phillippe Mansion (from 1858 map of 'West Urbana')

drive on the east, and what appear to be a barn and small outbuilding along Lynn Street to the west. The house, originally built by John F. White in 1856/1857 in the Italianate style, was of brick construction and faced east. B.F. Harris, Sr. later resided here until his death in 1905." The residence was of brick construction and faced east.

The Phillippe's were in Champaign in September of 1909 inspecting progress on their new house (*Champaign Daily Gazette* 29 September 1909). In November of 1909, the *Champaign Daily Gazette* announced that:

*For several weeks past men and teams have been employed in the grading of the Phillippe block of ground on West Church, Lynne, and Elm streets. It is the hope of Mr. Phillippe to have the hardest of the preliminary work done this fall so that the finishing touches may be put on the grounds next spring (Champaign Daily Gazette 11 November 1909).*

The *Champaign Daily Gazette* reported on 19 March 1910 that final interior finishing work was underway at the Phillippe home, and that the house was to be ready for occupancy within three months. Work on the carriage house started at the end of March 1910. The

*Urbana Daily Courier* announced on 19 November 1910 that "Andrew Phillippe has moved his family from Hensley township to his new home on West Church street".

The Phillippe Mansion and carriage house are examples of the Jacobethan architectural style, a "hybrid" of medieval Jacobean and Elizabethan styles (Gordon 1992). The style has roots in the 19th century, but didn't become popular until the early 20th century. Typical of the style are large projecting window bays beneath small balconies; steep, front-facing gables rising above the roofline; and turrets/towers. Jacobean architecture is not common in America as its cost restricted its use to the very wealthy. The mansion measures 5000 ft<sup>2</sup> and originally had six bedrooms. The carriage house housed horses, carriages, and the steam heat source for the mansion (Earp 2002). The boiler and horse stalls were located on the north side of the ground floor; the southern half of the first floor was used as a workshop for carriage operators and servants. A loft in the north half was likely used for hay; servants and staff had living quarters on the second floor.

In 1927, Senator William B. McKinley bequeathed \$200,000 to purchase a building for a YMCA in Champaign-Urbana. However, the onset of the Great Depression delayed the project until 1937, when \$35,000 of the funds were used to purchase the Phillippe



Carriage House as seen today

property. A fundraising committee was formed to raise additional money to remodel the building. Additions included a pool, gym, locker rooms, and tennis courts. The McKinley Memorial YMCA opened in 1938, and was a thriving facility for years. In 1950, Thompson Hall was added to the west side of the complex. When a new YMCA was built in 2012, the old YMCA became the McKinley Fitness Center. The carriage house later functioned as a pre-school, located in the south half of the ground floor; the northern half still housed heating equipment. Recently, the property was purchased by Leon Jeske from the YMCA for \$450,000. Jeske converted the former carriage house on the west side of the property into apartments.



Thanks to Alice Novak for advice on architecture, and the staff at the Champaign County Archives at the Urbana Free Library.





## Historic Preservation Conference 2015



by Thomas Garza and Brian Adams

Recently Brian and I attended the 2015 Main Street and Historic Preservation Conference in Carbondale Illinois (June 23-25). It was the first year for both of us and this year IAHP (Illinois Association of Historic Preservation Commissions) got together with Illinois Main Street, Carbondale Main Street, IHPA (Illinois Historic Preservation Agency), City of Carbondale and Landmarks Illinois in order to offer attendees what might best be described as a more business friendly conference than I've been given to understand has been the norm in years past.

I put it this way because even though the preservation of historic homes and buildings more often than not turns out to be good for business too, the value added because a place is 'historic' isn't very easy to quantify, and therefore the topic of preservation is not usually a big part of your average business discussion. Indeed the relationship between preservation and business is as often as not a fraught one, as the two groups have differing priorities and tend to value old houses, buildings, and spaces in entirely different ways.

This year however, Main Street brought

to the conference a whole range of powerful and persuasive arguments for why including preservation in one's business plan can be a wise investment for both the business owner and the entire community

The Illinois Main Street Program is part of a national movement, developed by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in 1980, to revitalize traditional downtowns, neighborhood business districts, and urban corridors. The program works with communities to provide technical and consultative assistance, training and resources to improve the economic, social, cultural and physical aspects of each unique commercial area. One important aspect of the program is its emphasis on the physical environment and capitalizing on a communities' best assets, such as its historic buildings. Currently there are about 1,700 communities in the program throughout 46 states.

Unfortunately, neither Champaign nor Urbana participates in this program and after seeing the way it brings together downtown business owners and helps to build pride in the community, I think this is definitely a loss for both of our towns and a situation that should be remedied.

The conference consisted of 12 Concurrent Sessions and so we were only able to attend some of the talks, but in general we felt that almost everything presented seemed to be tailored to and directed at city planners and administrators. The result of this was that the otherwise positive addition of Main Street to the conference tended to muddy the waters a bit, at least from a historical preservation perspective. Whenever it was mentioned it was primarily discussed in terms of how it related to business so that any mention of preservation for its own sake almost felt gratuitous, like something tacked on as an afterthought. And while I left each session feeling like I ought to go shop downtown – the incen-

sant boosterism was certainly working its magic - I didn't feel like I'd learned very much about the topics that I actually went there to find out more about.

There were some highlights of course. I particularly enjoyed the tour of downtown Murphysboro and a chance to see the Riverside Park Band Shell designed by U. of I. educated architect Rudolph Z. Gill in 1939.



Riverside Park Band Shell

Gill designed this structure of white poured concrete in the Modern style, with plain, curvilinear lines. It was funded by the WPA and the Murphysboro Park District, and has been nominated to the National Register

The Creative Placemaking for Main Street panel was interesting to me in that it offered some useful terminology to use when talking to developers who are trying to decide how best to utilize a particular space. The panel included many ideas/examples of how historic preservation can be incorporated into urban design plans to build and strengthen connections within a community; encourage social interaction; increase collaboration; emphasize the importance of local art and thus create and/or strengthen a sense of "place" (the word 'space' being used to describe any specific area and 'place' being used to describe an area that has an easily recognizable identity or character).

The presentation entitled: Keeping the Freeze Hot: Promoting the Tax Freeze in Your Community centered around a discussion of the use of the "Property Tax Assessment Freeze" incentive for

historic, owner-occupied housing. This talk was well organized and detailed, and both Brian and I felt that for us this was one of the highlights of the conference.

This tax incentive provides for an 8-year freeze on the assessed value of a historic property. After 8 years the assessed value steps up over a period of 4-years until it reaches the equivalent of other homes in that area. By the time this has run its entire course property owners have received 12 years of reduced assessed value, which can be a not insignificant savings.

The great thing about this incentive is that the community doesn't suffer a loss in revenue by offering it. Assessed value is simply frozen at its current level, not reduced or waived.

In order to qualify the property must be rehabilitated in a manner that meets 4 key provisions in order to earn a "Certificate of Rehabilitation" from the IHPA.

The 4 provisions to be met are:

The building must be owner-occupied.

The project must involve a historic building: listed on NRHP; or a contributing property within an NRHP historic district; or individually listed on the Illinois Register of Historic Places; or designated a local landmark in a community that has an approved preservation ordinance; or a contributing property within a local historic district.

It has to be a substantial rehabilitation with a budget whose eligible expenses equal or exceed 25% of the property's fair cash value for the year the rehabilitation started. ("Substantial rehabilitation" is defined as interior or exterior rehabilitation work that preserves the historic building in a manner that significantly improves its condition.)

And finally, the rehabilitation project must be done in accordance with the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The Keynote speech at the SIU Student Center was quite effective. Entitled

"Where Am I", speaker Ed McMahon (Senior Resident Fellow and Charles E. Fraser Chair for Sustainable Development and Environmental Policy, Urban Land Institute) offered a very enthusiastic and passionate presentation of how unique historic structures and environmentally sensitive policies and practices in a community can benefit its economy and quality of life.

New Life for Old Buildings was a presentation about the importance of identifying historic buildings and learning how to market them to attract developers or owners.

Another useful session was entitled Incentives for Historic Commercial Buildings. This was a discussion of various of topics including historic tax incentives, how to list downtown buildings or commercial districts in the NRHP, and how incentives can save historic buildings, provide jobs, and improve the local economy and revitalize downtowns.

There were many other sessions and events as well, some more and some less relevant to our interests, but they were all interesting and nicely done and overall we really appreciated the hard work and energy required to put this conference together.

In conclusion I think it's safe to say that there was enough useful information to be found, and opportunities for helpful contacts to be made that it was certainly worthwhile for us to attend this conference, but I think we'll both be looking carefully at the types of sessions being offered and the list of speakers before deciding to sign up to go again next year. Hopefully they will achieve a better balance between the Main Street folks and the Preservation community.



Murphysboro courthouse

## Free Home and Woodworking Magazines

Recently the Urbana Library donated a variety of titles from their collection and we have been trying to find good homes for them. So far we've made contributions to several other libraries, the CU Woodshop, and the Idea Store, but we still have a few titles left and it's more than we can reasonably store in the warehouse so we'd like to offer them to members. Ideally you'd take a complete set of a given title even though not all of the sets themselves are complete. What we have left are:

American Heritage  
Feb 2003 - April 2011  
  
Family Handyman  
Feb 2003 - December 2013  
  
Home  
Jan 2011 - December 2013  
  
Home Mechanix  
Feb 1990 - August 1996

Homeowner  
Oct 1984 - March 1991  
  
Old House Journal  
March 1994 - February 2014  
  
1001 Home Ideas  
March 1990 - June 1991  
  
Victorian Homes  
August 199 - Winter 2013  
  
Please call Tom at 359-7222

## Special Sale Items

We recently received a large lot of oak doors and trim from a 1920s era apartment building. It is unusual for us to have so much matching material in stock at one time and this would be an

excellent opportunity for someone who is working on a large project to get everything they need all at once.

Please call Tom at 359-7222

14 Two panel Oak Doors with hardware	28x84	\$50
5 Two panel Oak Door with hardware	28x78	\$40
7 Two panel Oak Door with hardware	32x84	\$65
8 Two panel Oak Door with hardware	36x84	\$75
6 Two panel Oak Door French Doors	28x84	\$125 set
Oak Casement Trim	3 3/4x78 Lots	\$1/ft
Oak Casement Trim Headers	Various Lots	\$1/ft



MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION      PACA BOX 2575, Champaign, IL 61825

### MEMBERSHIP STATUS

New       Renewal

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

### MEMBERSHIP CATEGORY

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

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

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

PHONE: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

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

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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