



## DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

*Planning Division*

### **m e m o r a n d u m**

**TO:** The Urbana Historic Preservation Commission

**FROM:** Rebecca Bird, Community Development Associate

**DATE:** February 28, 2008

**SUBJECT:** Final Comments on the Joseph W. Royer Arts & Architectural District Brochure

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### **Introduction & Background**

At the August 1, 2007 meeting of the Historic Preservation Commission, Ms. Ilona Matkovszki and Councilmember Dennis Roberts proposed creating a district to honor local architect Joseph W. Royer. At this meeting, Ms. Matkovszki and Councilmember Roberts presented a draft of a promotional brochure, with pictures and descriptions of the Royer designed buildings in the proposed district. The Commission supported the concept of the district and the brochure.

Since then, the Historic Preservation Commission and the Urbana City Council have discussed the district and promotional brochure several times:

- On September 10, 2007, the Committee of the Whole of the Urbana City Council discussed the concept of a Royer District and supported the promotional brochure. The Committee directed City staff to work with the HPC to improve the wording and content of the brochure in collaboration with Ms. Matkovszki and Councilmember Roberts and to apply for a grant from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for printing the brochure.
- On November 7, 2007, the Historic Preservation Commission voted to support the concept of the district and the brochure.
- On November 9, 2007, City staff applied for a small grant from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to fund printing the brochure.
- On December 17, 2007, the Urbana City Council passed a resolution establishing the Joseph W. Royer Arts and Architecture District.
- On January 31, 2008, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency awarded the City of Urbana a grant to publish the Joseph W. Royer Arts and Architecture brochure.

## **Discussion**

Ms. Matkovszki and Councilmember Roberts have prepared a final draft of the brochure for review by the Historic Preservation Commission (attached). Earlier versions of the brochure had 4-folds and were printed on 8.5 X 14 paper, whereas this latest version has 5-folds and will be printed on 11 X 17 paper and then trimmed to 8.5 X 17. This change is due mainly to the need to include the text required by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in the grant agreement. Ms. Matkovszki has also added several buildings to the brochure. The first draft had 13 buildings; the final draft has added the Illinois Theater Opera House, the Fox Building, the Knights of Pythias Building, the Urbana Post Office, the Eubelling Building, and the McWilliams House to have a total of 19 buildings.

The layout of the final draft may still need some tweaking in the individual panel widths to allow folding of the brochure.

Councilmember Roberts is planning to celebrate the Joseph W. Royer Arts and Architecture District at the April 18-20 Urbana 175<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration. In order to make this deadline, the Historic Preservation Commission should make any changes necessary at their March 5 meeting. Once the Historic Preservation Commission has provided final comments on the brochure, it will be sent to the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency for approval.

## **Recommendation**

City staff recommends that the Historic Preservation Commission provide any final comments on the Royer Arts & Architecture brochure at their March 5, 2008 meeting.

Attachments: Revised Joseph W. Royer Arts & Architectural District brochure

THE  
JOSEPH W. ROYER  
ARTS AND  
ARCHITECTURE DISTRICT

The Joseph W. Royer Arts and Architecture District is the first district of the city of Urbana dedicated to the arts and the celebration of the city's historic and architectural heritage. The district coincides with the oldest part of Urbana—its historic downtown and the immediately adjacent residential neighborhoods—and it contains the greatest concentration of historically and architecturally significant buildings in town. The district was named after Urbana architect Joseph W. Royer in recognition of his exceptional contributions to the city's architectural heritage.

The district's architectural character is defined by Royer's masterfully designed buildings. He prepared plans for a total of nineteen buildings within the district. Among these are five major public buildings—the Champaign County Courthouse, the Sheriff's Residence and Jail, the Urbana Free Library, the former Post Office on Race Street, and the Illinois Theater. Royer also designed five business buildings—the Cohen, Knowlton & Bennett, Flatiron and Fox buildings, and the Urbana Lincoln Hotel—as well as new façades for three existing downtown buildings—the Tiernan, Knights of Pythias, and Eubeling buildings. In the adjacent residential neighborhoods he designed the Freeman House, the Lloyd House, and the McWilliams House, and three churches—Canaan Baptist Church (the former Christian Church), the Unitarian Universalist Church, and the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana.

Royer not only designed buildings in this area, but he also lived here. After his marriage in 1902, he and his wife resided first on West Green Street, followed by 218 West Main Street (where Royer also had an office) and 604 West Elm Street. Their permanent home at 801 West Oregon Street and his mother-in-law's cottage next to it—both designed by Royer—are designated an Urbana Historic District.

In addition to the buildings designed by Royer, the district also contains most of Urbana's designated landmark buildings outside the university campus area, as well as several buildings designed by other noted Urbana architects. Most important among these are Rudolph Z. Gill, a contemporary of Royer, and Nathan C. Ricker, the founder and first head of the Architecture Department at the University of Illinois and reportedly the first person in the nation to receive a degree in architecture.

CELEBRATING THE  
DESIGN GENIUS OF  
URBANA ARCHITECT  
JOSEPH W. ROYER



The Mary Lloyd House, 210 South Grove Street, East Urbana



JOSEPH WILLIAM ROYER  
(1873–1954)

A native of Urbana, Joseph W. Royer was the city's premier architect between the late nineteenth and mid-twentieth century. Born in 1873, he graduated from the University of Illinois in 1895 with a degree in civil engineering. In 1898 he became city engineer of Urbana and remained in that position until 1906. Following his employment as Urbana's city engineer, Royer established his own architectural firm in about 1906. His office was located in the Flatiron Building on Main Street, which he designed in 1905. The building burned down in 1948, destroying Royer's architectural plans of a lifetime.

Royer's earliest known building designs in Urbana date from 1898. The Lloyd House in East Urbana is an example of these early designs. His earliest known public building in Urbana is the Champaign County Courthouse, which he designed in 1900, at the age of twenty-seven. This project brought him instant local fame and prestige and launched him on a highly successful career. Royer and his firm also designed a large number of buildings outside of Urbana; they were particularly well-known for their period revival high schools and county courthouses across the state.

Joseph Royer lived out his long life as a member of a very creative family. His wife, Adelaide Danely, a graduate of Northwestern University, Chicago, was a poet, writer, and interior designer. She cooperated with him in this capacity on several of his projects. She is well known as the author of the *Fairy Book*, a children's book featuring her mother's cottage (designed by Royer) and the surrounding gardens as the dwelling and playing places of fairies. The book was illustrated by her sister, Nell Danely Brooker Mayhew, a nationally known painter. Adelaide's brother, Arthur, who lived next door to the Royers, was also an architect and worked for years as Royer's partner.

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Brochure designed by Dennis Roberts and Ilona Matkowszki drfm design

THE  
JOSEPH W. ROYER  
ARTS AND  
ARCHITECTURE  
DISTRICT

In the Heart of Old Urbana



The Gus Freeman House, 504 West Elm Street, West Urbana



**1. Freeman House, 1902-03**  
504 West Elm Street

This elegant two-story Classical Revival-style residence was built for Gus Freeman, early Urbana railroad engineer and later founder and owner of the Princess, the city's first permanent movie theater. His wife, AlicJane Busey, was the daughter of Simeon H. Busey, co-founder of Busey Bank, and granddaughter of Matthew W. Busey, early Urbana pioneer and one of the city's founders. The building was designated a local historic landmark in June 2007.

**2. Canaan Baptist Church 1909-10**

402 West Main Street

Originally built as the second sanctuary of the Christian Church, this building has been home to Canaan Baptist Church since 1978. Built of concrete blocks locally manufactured by the Somers brothers, the church is one of Urbana's earliest all-concrete structures, including the exterior details and ornaments. The building has ninety-six windows, all leaded stained glass, except the basement windows.



**3. Illinois Theater (Opera House) 1907-08**

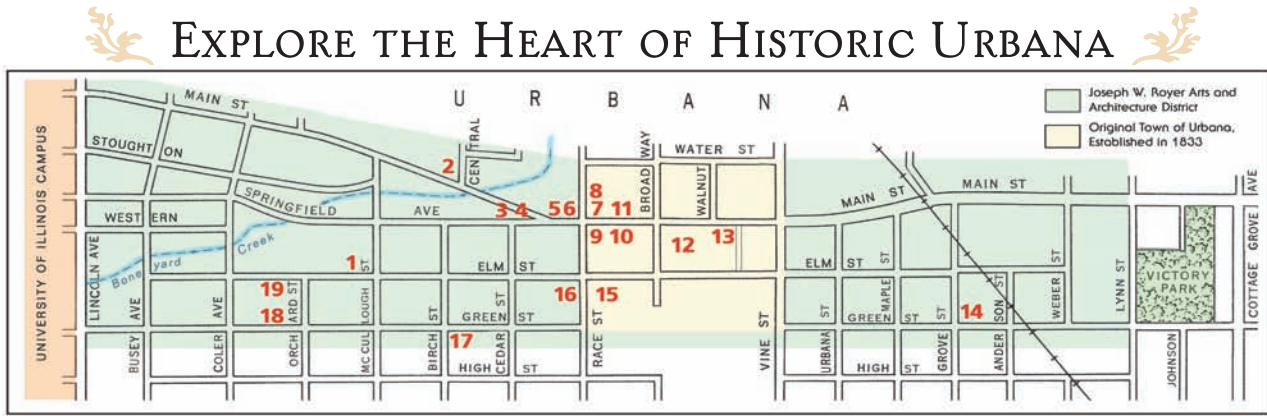
312 West Springfield Avenue  
(Destroyed by fire)

This four-story brick structure was built by a group of Urbana stockholders on land donated by the Flatiron Building Association. Construction began in early June 1907, and the new theater was formally opened on March 3, 1908. Local and nationally known artists such as Enrico Caruso, Al Jolson, Jenny Lind, and Sarah Bernhardt performed in the theater. From 1923 the building was owned by the Zenith Amusement Company, a Ku Klux Klan organization, which used it primarily for Klan activities. On April 3, 1927, the theater burned down. The walls survived, and the "Tuscany" Apartments were built in the burned-out shell.

**4. Flatiron Building, 1905-06**

301 West Main Street  
(Destroyed by fire)

Except for the number of stories, this four-story brick building was the counterpart of its namesake in New York City, a twenty-one-story skyscraper, then the world's tallest building, designed by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham in 1902. Construction of the Urbana building required infilling and draining the "Flatiron swamp" and re-routing the Boneyard Creek. The building site was staked out on March 1, 1906, by Royer, and by August, occupants were moving in. The building originally housed the Flatiron Department Store in the basement and on the first two floors. Royer's architecture offices and law offices were on the third floor, and the Elk Lodge was on the top floor. The building burned down on March 11, 1948.



**Joseph W. Royer Arts and Architecture District**

**5. Fox Building, 1898**

220 West Main Street

This single-story brick building is the oldest known business building designed by Royer in Urbana. The building was commissioned by Samuel C. Fox, funeral home owner and mayor of Urbana (1899-1901 and 1905-07) to house his funeral business.



**6. Knights of Pythias Building 1903**

212 West Main Street

In spring 1903, Royer was commissioned to design a new front for the Knights of Pythias Building, to be built of pressed brick and supported by the "latest steel front." The updating also included extending the front to the façades of adjacent buildings and the installation of plate-glass windows and ventilated doors on the lower level. In recent years the façade has been extensively modernized.

**7. Cohen Building, 1907**

136 West Main Street

This two-story business block was built in 1907 by Nathan Cohen, Urbana cigar manufacturer and avocational opera singer. The building housed Cohen's cigar factory on the second floor and the Urbana Banking Company and a barber shop on the first floor. Built of red bricks with ivory-colored terra cotta decorative elements, the structure replaced an earlier building, built by Cohen in 1886. Nathan Cohen and his wife, Addie Bernstein, were both excellent singers and leading figures in Urbana's music and theatrical life, and their home at 511 West Elm Street was a center of music until the death of their musician son, Sol Cohen, in 1988.



**8. Urbana Post Office, 1906**

106 North Race Street

Construction of the city's former Post Office began on April 30, 1906. The Post Office was Urbana's first structure built of concrete blocks, then a new building material. Its foundation was laid of bricks from the old Courier Building formerly at this location. Opened in late October 1906, the Post Office operated here until 1914, when the present



Post Office on Broadway opened. Its façade has been covered with a modern veneer, and the building now functions as the Rose Bowl Tavern, with apartments upstairs.

**9. Knowlton & Bennett Building 1926**

130 West Main Street

This two-story brick building was erected in 1926 by George M. Bennett to house the Knowlton & Bennett Drug Store. The building was decorated with wire-cut buff bricks, terra cotta ornaments, and polychrome shields. A drugstore has continually existed at this location since 1871. In 1885 Everett M. Knowlton took over the store and in 1887 he formed a partnership with his brother-in-law, George M. Bennett. Under their management the store became one of Urbana's leading businesses, which stayed in operation until 1971.



**10. Tiernan Building, 1914**

115 West Main Street

The white-glazed terra cotta façade of this building was designed by Royer in 1914. The façade was superimposed on the Italianate style front of a three-story brick building built in 1871 by Frank Tiernan, Urbana businessman and founding member of the Urbana Public Library. The building originally housed Tiernan's grocery store on the first floor and Tiernan's Hall, an early opera house, on the third floor. The first reading room of the Urbana Public Library was also located in this building (1873-76). In 1889, the building was bought by the Masons who used the third floor as their lodge and converted the second floor to a banquet hall. The building was designated a local landmark in February 2000.



**11. Eubeling Building, 1901**

116 West Main Street

This two-story Italianate brick building was built in the 1860s by Alexander Eubeling, pioneer shoemaker and merchant, to house his business. In 1901 Royer was commissioned to redesign the storefront. The remodeling included "an up-to-date front and a handsome show window." After Alexander Eubeling's retirement the store was managed by his son, Frederick E. Eubeling, who was also active in Urbana politics. In 1893, he sold the shoe store to Ninian A. Riley.



**12. Champaign County Courthouse 1900-01**

101 East Main Street

The present courthouse, built on the original central city square of Urbana, is the city's fifth courthouse. Construction began on May 1, 1900, with dedication on August 25, 1901. Built of red sandstone and mottled red bricks, the building has a tile roof, and a front clock tower facing Main Street. Both the exterior and the interior were built in the Romanesque Revival style, with marble floors and wainscoting and elaborate frescoes in the interior spaces. The tower's spire and belfry were repeatedly hit by lightning over the years, resulting in their removal and the present bastion-like tower. The recent addition on the east side of the building was completed in 2001-02.



**13. Sheriff's Residence and Jail 1905**

201 East Main Street

(Demolished)

Built as Urbana's third jail building and sheriff's residence, this two-story building stood on the east side of the Champaign County Courthouse. The structure was built of red bricks in Chateausque style with a massive Romanesque Revival-style front porch of brick columns and arches; its foundation was of Bedford limestone, and it had a tile roof. The building was demolished in 2000 for the expansion of the County Courthouse.



**14. Lloyd House, 1898**

210 South Grove Street

This Queen Anne-style cottage is the earliest known building designed by Royer in Urbana. The house was built by Mrs. Mary Lloyd, former wife of George A. Lloyd, railroad worker, and daughter of Alexander Spence, pioneer Urbana businessman. In the 1990s the Lloyd House functioned as an artists' colony occupied by University of Illinois graduate students. Urbana's School for Designing a Society and the Performers' Workshop Ensemble were established by the colony's residents at this location.



**15. Urbana Lincoln Hotel 1923-24**

209 South Broadway Avenue

This Tudor Revival-style five-story brick building was built by a group of Urbana investors. The hotel opened on January 30, 1924. In 1944 it was sold to Charles R. Webber, Champaign County Judge, and Gordon F. Kamerer, Urbana businessman, co-developers of Lincoln Square Mall, which was added to the hotel's southeast facing main façade in 1964. In 1965 the hotel was bought by Carson, Pirie, Scott, & Co., the mall's developer, who in 1975 sold it to James Jumer. Jumer added a banquet and convention center to the hotel's north and east sides in 1983. In September 2006 Lincoln Square Mall, together with the Lincoln Hotel, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places. "Lincoln the Lawyer," a bronze statue by Lorado Taft, former Urbana resident and University of Illinois student, originally stood at the front entrance of the hotel. The statue was a gift to the people of Urbana from Mr. and Mrs. J. O. Cunningham. In December 1927, the statue was moved to Carle Park.



**16. Urbana Free Library 1917-18**

210 West Green Street

Founded in 1874, the Urbana public library did not have its own building until 1918. On January 2, 1917, Mrs. Mary E. Busey offered a donation of \$35,000 for the construction of the library as a memorial to her late husband, Samuel T. Busey, co-founder of Busey Bank. Built of Bedford limestone with front porch and balustrade, the library was dedicated on July 18, 1918. The building was expanded to the west in 1974-75, and again in 2003-05, replicating Royer's original design.

**17. Unitarian Universalist Church, 1913-14**

309 W. Green Street

This English Gothic Revival-style building was erected over the foundation of an earlier brick sanctuary built by a group of Universalists in 1870-71. The 1870 cornerstone can still be seen in the north wall of the basement. The new church was constructed of Bedford stone with a slate roof and an Arts and Crafts interior. The original rose window was replaced with stained glass imported from France.



**18. First Presbyterian Church of Urbana, 1901-02**

602 West Green Street  
(Demolished)



This Romanesque Revival-style church was built as the second sanctuary of the First Presbyterian Church of Urbana. Royer was appointed architect and superintendent of construction on May 14, 1901, and the new church was dedicated on April 20, 1902. The church was built of red bricks with arched, limestone-framed windows and a bastion-like bell tower. The large arched windows under the gable were adorned with leaded glass. The church was demolished in 1963 to be replaced by the present sanctuary.

**19. McWilliams House, 1901**

607 West Elm Street

This elegant, Classical Revival-style two-story residence was built for Miss Louise McWilliams (1860-1951), Urbana milliner. McWilliams opened her first shop in Urbana in the 1880s and worked as Champaign County's best-known hat designer and store owner for over seventy years. Her store was located at 214 West Main Street in downtown Urbana.



Joseph W. Royer's advertisement as architect in the 1904 Urbana City Directory

