



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, Historic Preservation Planner

DATE: June 26, 2008

SUBJECT: 508 West Elm Street (Bills House): Preliminary determination for a historic landmark application, Case No. HP 08-L-02

Introduction

Historic Preservation Case No. HP 08-L-02 is an application by Ilona Matkovszki to designate the house at 508 W. Elm Street (referred to as the Bills House) as a local historic landmark. Julian Gorski is the property owner. On April 14, 2008, JSM Development applied for a demolition permit for this address. The property is subject to Urbana's 45-day demolition delay, during which time the petitioner submitted the landmark designation application.

The Historic Preservation Ordinance requires that the Commission first make a preliminary determination as to whether the proposed landmark is eligible for designation. Should the Commission find that the property qualifies for designation as a local landmark by meeting one or more of the criteria provided in Section XII-5.C of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance, a public hearing will follow within 45 days of the preliminary determination. In this case, the public hearing would be scheduled for August 6, 2008.

If the application is submitted by someone other than the property owner but the owner agrees to the landmark designation by means of a signed Registered Preference form, the Commission may approve or deny the application by a majority vote of the Commissioners then holding office. Otherwise, the Historic Preservation Commission shall recommend to the Urbana City Council whether to approve or deny said application by a majority of the Commissioners then holding office and the City Council will decide whether to so designate the property.

Should the application for designation as a local landmark be approved, the new owner would be required to obtain a Certificate of Appropriateness from the Historic Preservation Commission for future exterior changes to the property, including any proposed demolition.

Background

According to the application, the house was built in 1889 by Frank L. Bills, an Urbana postmaster and prominent businessman. The application states that the structure is an example of the Queen Anne / Classical Revival transitional architectural style.

Based on extensive research and documentation in terms of the criteria for designation, the applicant states that the Bills House:

- Has significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political or social heritage of the nation, state, or community;
- Is associated with an important person or event in national, state, or local history;
- Is representative of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, craftsmanship, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials and which retains a high degree of integrity; and
- Is identifiable as an established and familiar visual feature owing to its unique location or physical characteristics.

Discussion

The action necessary at the July 2nd Historic Preservation Commission meeting is a preliminary determination as to whether the property is eligible for designation as a local historic landmark.

Criteria

Under Section XII-5.C of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance, the proposed landmark must meet one or more of the following criteria for designation. Following each criteria (*provided in italics*) is analysis offered by City staff.

- a) *Significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political or social heritage of the nation, state, or community.*

This criterion raises a question about what constitutes “significant value” in the above-listed categories. The application provides no information on the Bills House having significant value as part of Urbana’s artistic, economic, educational, ethnic, or political heritage, but provides the following relevant information regarding the architectural, civic, cultural and social value of the Bills House. Specifically, this criterion addresses what constitutes significant value as part of Urbana’s architectural heritage in a discussion of the location of the Bills House on one of the most significant streets in Urbana’s history. According to the application, Elm Street was one of the most prestigious residential streets, housing five mayors, two State Senators, as well as judges, industrialists, and professors between 1850 and 1900. An Elm Street Historic District, from Cedar Street to Busey Avenue, would certainly have significant value as part of Urbana’s architectural heritage, and most likely as part of Urbana’s civic, cultural, and social heritage as well. It is important for the Commission to consider whether being on a historically significant street constitutes “significant value.” For further discussion on the architectural value of the house, see Criterion c). Having significant value as part of Urbana’s civic heritage implies a strong

connection with local government or with the duties and obligations of belonging to Urbana as a community. It may be helpful to consider Frank Bills' tenure as an Urbana postmaster to address this question. Cultural heritage could refer to the arts, of which there is no mention in the application, or it could be similar to social heritage. In terms of social history, the application states that the Bills were part of Urbana's social elite and includes several quotes from the local newspapers of the day which discuss the construction of the Bills' house as well as several social activities involving the Bills.

City staff does not find a clear demonstration in the application that the Bills House has significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political or social heritage of the community. The application may marginally meet this criterion in terms of significant value as part of Urbana's architectural, civic, and social heritage due to the significance of Elm Street, Frank Bills' 4-year tenure as an Urbana postmaster, and of the Bills' social standing. However, while Elm Street would most likely meet the criteria for being designated a historic district, City staff does not think that translates into every house on Elm Street being worthy of individual landmark designation. Additionally, while Mr. Bills was a postmaster and the Bills' activities were reported in the local newspapers, City staff thinks that too fails to bestow sufficient significance to individually list their house as a local landmark.

b) Associated with an important person or event in national, state or local history.

As the application provides no connection to a person or event in national or state history or to an event in local history, applying this criterion raises the question about what qualifies as an "important person" in local history. The house was built for Grace and Frank L. Bills. Grace Bills was an officer of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs and a member of the Daughters of the American Revolution. Frank Bills had a watch and jewelry shop, served as an Urbana postmaster for approximately four years, and then went into the telephone business, installing exchanges, and as a manager for Bell Telephone Company. According to the application, the Bills were part of Urbana's high society and their activities were often reported in the local newspapers. The application also documents important people associated with the subject property before it was subdivided and before the house in question was built. (See Exhibit D: Application, page 5, for more information.)

City staff does not find a clear demonstration that the Bills House is associated with an important person in local history. The application presumes media coverage connotes significance, but the information provided in the application does not support this. The information provided regarding the Bills does not demonstrate a specific contribution to Urbana's history which would qualify the Bills as important in local history.

c) Representative of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, craftsmanship, method of construction or use of indigenous materials and which retains a high degree of integrity.

This criterion addresses architecture and raises a question about what constitutes an "inherently valuable" architectural type. The Bills House was built in 1889 in the Queen Anne architectural style, which was the predominant residential architectural style at the end of the 19th century. The steeply

pitched hipped roof with lower cross gables, cutaway bay window, and semi-hexagonal tower are all identifying features of the Queen Anne style present in the Bills House. Avoiding a smooth-walled appearance is a hallmark of this style, generally achieved either through using several wall materials or differing textures or through devices such as bays, towers, and overhangs. Although the building form and massing remain, the Bills House has been covered in wide aluminum siding, thereby obscuring the original wall materials. While the body of the house is built in the Queen Anne style, the porch has elements of the Colonial Revival style, including five classical Doric columns. This is consistent with the Free Classic subtype of the Queen Anne architectural style which became popular around 1890 and has much in common with some early Colonial Revival houses. The first Sanborn Map that includes the 500 block of W. Elm Street is the 1909 map, which depicts the footprint of the Bills House in 1909 to be identical to the footprint today.

The second part of this criterion deals with integrity—the ability of the house to convey its significance. As mentioned above, the original Queen Anne building form and massing remain, but the original siding has been covered, thereby compromising the house’s architectural integrity. The original roof lines remain, as do the cornice returns on the gables, but the original trim and details are no longer visible. It is unclear if they have simply been covered or if they were removed when the aluminum siding was installed. The window openings appear original, but the window trim is no longer visible. The addition of the aluminum siding has negatively affected the integrity of the house.

To provide guidance to the Commission in addressing this question, City staff surveyed Certified Local Governments in Illinois regarding individually-listed local landmarks with non-original siding. Of the 20 municipalities that responded, only one community felt that non-original siding would not be problematic. Many communities said that the building would have to be *very* significant historically (and in a very significant location) to be designated a landmark if it were covered in artificial siding. The following is a chart of the communities who responded with information that might be helpful to the Commission:

City	Landmarks & Districts	Comments on Designating a Landmark with Non-original Siding
Blue Island	37 landmarks 1 district (27 properties)	Blue Island has one individually listed home with artificial siding. The home-owner applied for designation. The house, built in the 1850s, was the home of the first German settler in Blue Island and had great historical significance.
Oak Park	35 landmarks 3 districts (3,500 properties)	The HPC has designated a building with non-original siding as a landmark, dependant on restoration plans—the designation is tied to the restoration.
St. Charles	35 landmarks 2 districts (334 properties)	St. Charles has one landmark with artificial siding. It was designated on the importance of its history, but the Commission noted that although it has artificial siding much of its significant decorative features were maintained and the original clapboards could easily be restored.
Quincy	91 landmarks 3 districts (39 properties)	Quincy has one landmark with artificial siding. The sided area is very small—an area on the 3 rd floor below the eaves—and is located on the rear façade and not visible from the front or side streets.
City	Landmarks & Districts	Comments on Designating a Landmark with Non-original Siding

West Chicago	7 landmarks 2 districts (116 properties)	West Chicago has two landmarks with non-original siding. Both were designated for historical reasons. The owners of both supported the designation.
Joliet	72 landmarks 8 districts (70 properties)	Joliet has two landmarks with aluminum siding. Both were designated for historic significance. One is a documented “Sears” house and the other is the mansion home of a prominent Joliet citizen. The mansion retains much of its integrity despite the siding.
Belvidere	28 landmarks 1 district	Belvidere has two landmarks with artificial siding. Both designations were supported by the owners and have much of the original detailing (soffit and fascia boards are original).
Marion	28 landmarks 0 districts	Marion recently designated a 108 year old home with a significant history even though it is covered in aluminum siding. The house is surrounded by businesses interested in demolishing it and the owner considered designation a form of protection for his house.

City staff finds that the Bills House is representative of the distinguishing characteristics of the Queen Anne architectural style inherently valuable for the study of a period and of the style, but that the addition of the aluminum siding has compromised its ability to convey its architectural significance. Although the eight communities listed above all have at least one individually listed local landmark with non-original siding, they either were not listed for their architectural significance or the designation was owner supported and the building retained much of the original detailing.

d) Notable work of a master builder, designer, architect or artist whose individual genius has influenced an area.

The Bills House does not qualify under criterion d). The application does not provide information about the builder, designer, or architect and City staff has no further information about the builder, designer, or architect.

e) Identifiable as an established and familiar visual feature in the community owing to its unique location or physical characteristics.

This criterion asks the Commission to consider two questions: 1) whether its unique location makes the Bills House a visual feature (a “landmark,” in non-historic preservation terms) in Urbana, and 2) whether its unique physical characteristics identify the Bills House as an Urbana “landmark.” As discussed under Criterion a), the Bills House was located on one of the most prominent residential streets of its day. It may be helpful here to consider whether location on this street identifies the Bills House as an established visual feature. Another point to consider is the location of the Bills House between two local landmarks one property away to the east (Freeman House and Sutton House) and a local historic district (Buena Vista Historic District) one property away to the west (see map below). Additionally, there are two other local landmarks located nearby (Ricker House and Lindley House).



The section discussed under Criterion c) deals with the unique physical characteristics of the house, such as the Queen Anne architectural style and the Colonial Revival details on the porch. The Queen Anne architectural style was the dominant residential style from about 1880 until 1900. It may be useful to consider here, too, the issue of integrity.

City staff finds that the application does not make a clear case that the Bills House is identifiable as an established and familiar visual feature in the community owing to its unique location or its physical characteristics. Although the Bills House is located in a significant neighborhood (one that is most likely worthy of historic district designation), that alone does not establish the house as an Urbana “landmark.” Additionally, the physical characteristics of the house are not particularly unique (unlike the landmarks on either side of the Bills House) and have been at least partially obscured by the addition of aluminum siding.

- f) *Character as a particularly fine or unique example of a utilitarian structure, including, but not limited to, farmhouses, gas stations or other commercial structures with a high level or integrity or architectural significance.*

The Bills House does not qualify under criterion f). The house is not a utilitarian structure.

- g) *Located in an area that has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.*

The Bills House does not qualify under criterion g). City staff and the applicant are not aware of any archaeological significance of the area.

Other Considerations

Several other points may be helpful for the Commission in making a preliminary determination. First, although the Commission may well want to consider the pending demolition of the Bills House in their discussion, the Commission is restricted by Section XII-5.C of the Urbana Zoning Ordinance to evaluating the application based on the criteria discussed above. Second, the Commission may want to think about what it means to be an Urbana Historic Landmark. The criteria in the Zoning Ordinance use language that is general and subjective. The last three landmark applications the Commission considered unmistakably met numerous criteria, which prevented the Commission from being confronted with the questions that this application raises, such as what constitutes “significant value”? With this application, however, it is not clear that any one of the criteria is *unmistakably* met and so the Commission must answer those difficult questions.

It may be useful at this point to review the City’s locally designated landmarks and districts. The City of Urbana has 7 local landmarks and 3 historic districts, briefly described in the following chart.

URBANA LOCAL LANDMARKS AND HISTORIC DISTRICTS		
LANDMARKS		
Sutton House	502 W Elm St	Built in 1889, this house is an excellent example of the Queen Anne architectural style and is one of the few remaining examples of this style executed in brick. Built for the widow of the “Brick King of Champaign County,” it is the only documented residential structure built of bricks from one of Urbana’s important brickyards.
Freeman House	504 W Elm St	This Classical Revival house was designed by Urbana’s preeminent architect, Joseph Royer, for the owner of Urbana’s first movie theater in 1902. Although the house was converted to apartments by the 1950s, the integrity of the house remains.
Lindley House	312 W Green St	This house, designed by a prominent local architect, Rudolf Gill, in 1895 is an excellent example of the Queen Anne architectural style and maintains a high degree of integrity.
Ricker House	612 W Green St	Nathan Ricker built this house in 1892 in the Queen Anne architectural style. Mr. Ricker was instrumental in establishing the architecture program at the University of Illinois and was responsible for the design of many key University buildings, many of which are now on the National Register of Historic Places.
Tiernan’s Block / Masonic Temple	115 W Main St	Built in 1871, the ground floor was a commercial space with an opera house upstairs. The Classical Revival terra cotta façade of the building was designed by Joseph Royer.
Busey’s Hall / The Princess Theatre	120-124 W Main St	This building, originally an opera house built in 1870, was one of the first brick buildings in Urbana. The Princess Theatre alteration occurred in 1915 and the art deco façade was added in 1934.

Gothic Revival House	108 N Webber St	This house is one of the earliest documented houses in Urbana. Built circa 1855, it is one of the few examples of Greek and Gothic Revival architecture in Urbana and central Illinois.
DISTRICTS		
West Main Street	800 Block of West Main St	This district comprises 14 structures on one of the oldest residential streets in the City. Highlights in the district include an Italianate style house with long arched windows and a cupola built circa 1870 for Matt Busey and a 1904 Arts & Crafts style house built for a state senator.
Royer	801 W Oregon St 701 S Busey Ave	The district is comprised of Joseph Royer’s original residence and a “mother-in-law cottage” Royer designed subsequent to the construction of the primary residence. The main house was built in 1905 in the mission architectural style with an Arts and Crafts influence. The cottage was built in 1923 in the English Revival architectural style.
Buena Vista	#1 - #8 Buena Vista Court	This district includes 8 bungalows nestled in two rows with a courtyard between the rows with an original entrance arch and birdbath. The bungalows were built in 1926 and are in the Spanish Colonial Revival architectural style. No two bungalows are alike, but each one compliments the others as they incorporate different elements and characteristics of the Spanish Colonial style.

Summary of Findings

Recommended statements of findings based on the application and Staff analysis are below. The Commission may change the findings based on the Commission’s discussion.

1. Article XII. of the *Urbana Zoning Ordinance* provides the City of Urbana the authority to designate local landmarks and historic districts with the stated purpose to promote the educational, cultural, economic and general welfare of the community.
2. The City of Urbana on May 29, 2008 received a complete application to designate the property located at 508 W. Elm Street as a local landmark.
3. The property located at 508 W. Elm Street and known as the Bills House was constructed in 1889 in the Queen Anne architectural style.
4. The Bills House does not have significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political or social heritage of the nation, state, or community.
5. The Bills House is not associated with an important person or event in national, state or local history.

6. The Bills House is representative of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, and craftsmanship but does not retain sufficient integrity. The property is an example of the Queen Anne architectural style but the original exterior materials have been obscured by aluminum siding.
7. The Bills House is not a notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, or artist whose individual genius has influenced the area.
8. The Bills House is not identifiable as an established and familiar visual feature in the community owing to its unique location or physical characteristics.
9. The Bills House is not a particularly fine or unique example of a utilitarian structure.
10. The Bills House is not known to be located in an area that has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Options

In making a preliminary determination in Case No. HP2008-L-02, the Historic Preservation Commission may:

- 1) Find that the nomination does not meet the criteria for designation as a local landmark, in which case the application shall not be further considered; or
- 2) Find that the nomination does meet the criteria for designation as a local landmark, in which case the application will proceed to a public hearing.

In either case, the Historic Preservation Commission should include Findings of Fact in their motion. The Findings of Fact should summarize the Commission's justification for finding that the nomination either does or does not meet the criteria.

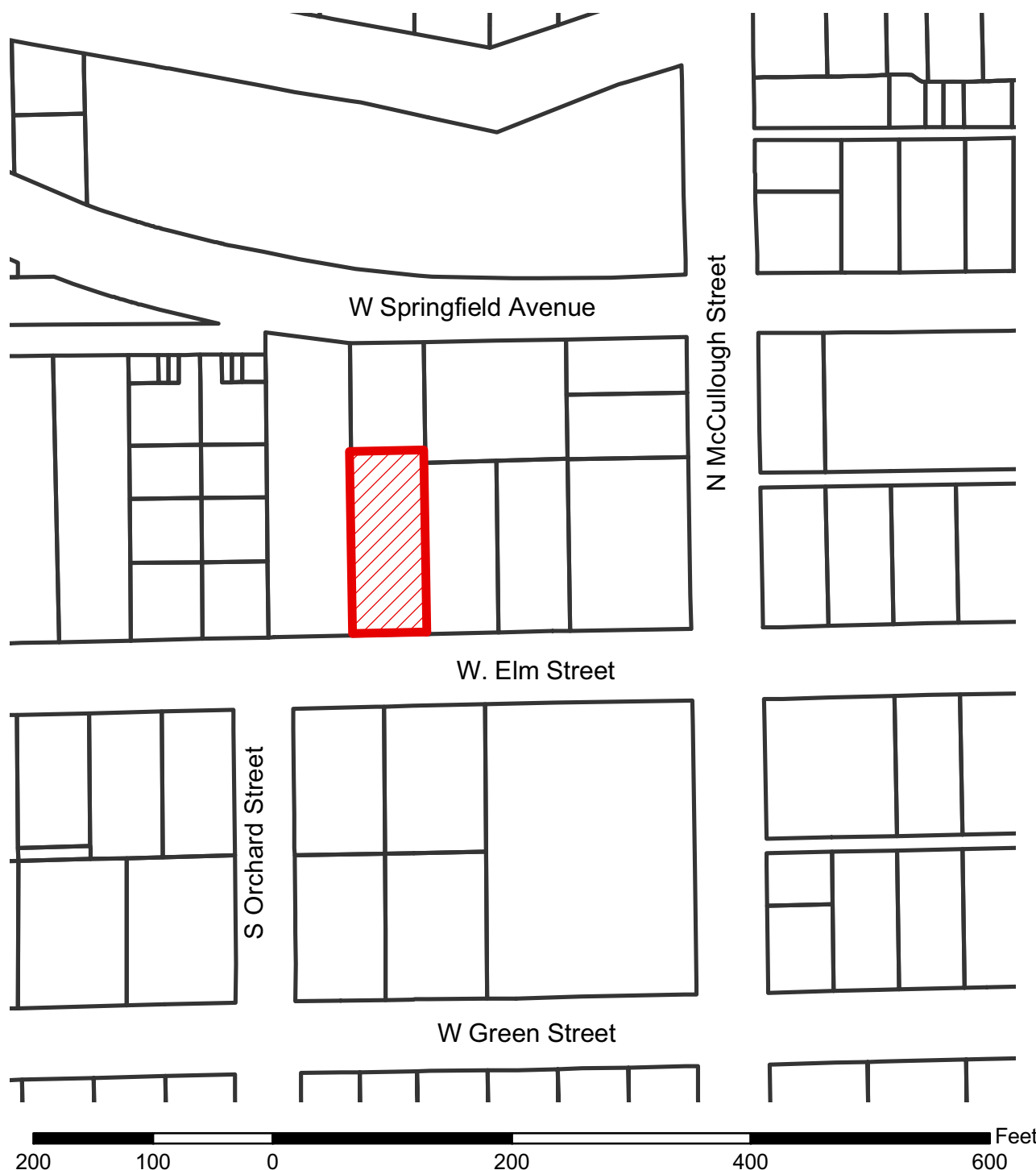
Staff Recommendation

Based on the application and analysis herein, Staff recommends the Historic Preservation Commission find that the landmark nomination for 508 W. Elm Street does not qualify for designation as a local historic landmark based on the criteria set forth in Section XII-5.C of the *Urbana Zoning Ordinance*. City staff finds that although the Bills House would qualify as a contributing building in a historic district and that it marginally meets one or two of the criteria for individual listing, it is not significant enough to designate it as a local landmark, particularly with its integrity compromised by the addition of the aluminum siding.

cc: Ilona Matkovszki, applicant
Elizabeth Tyler, FAICP, Community Development Director
Robert Myers, AICP, Planning Manager
Julian Gorski, property owner

Attachments: Exhibit A: Location Map
Exhibit B: Aerial Map
Exhibit C: Land Use Map
Exhibit D: Application including photographs and maps

EXHIBIT A: Location Map

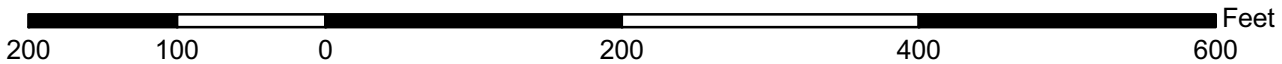
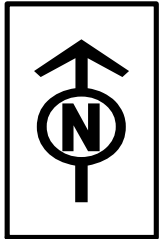
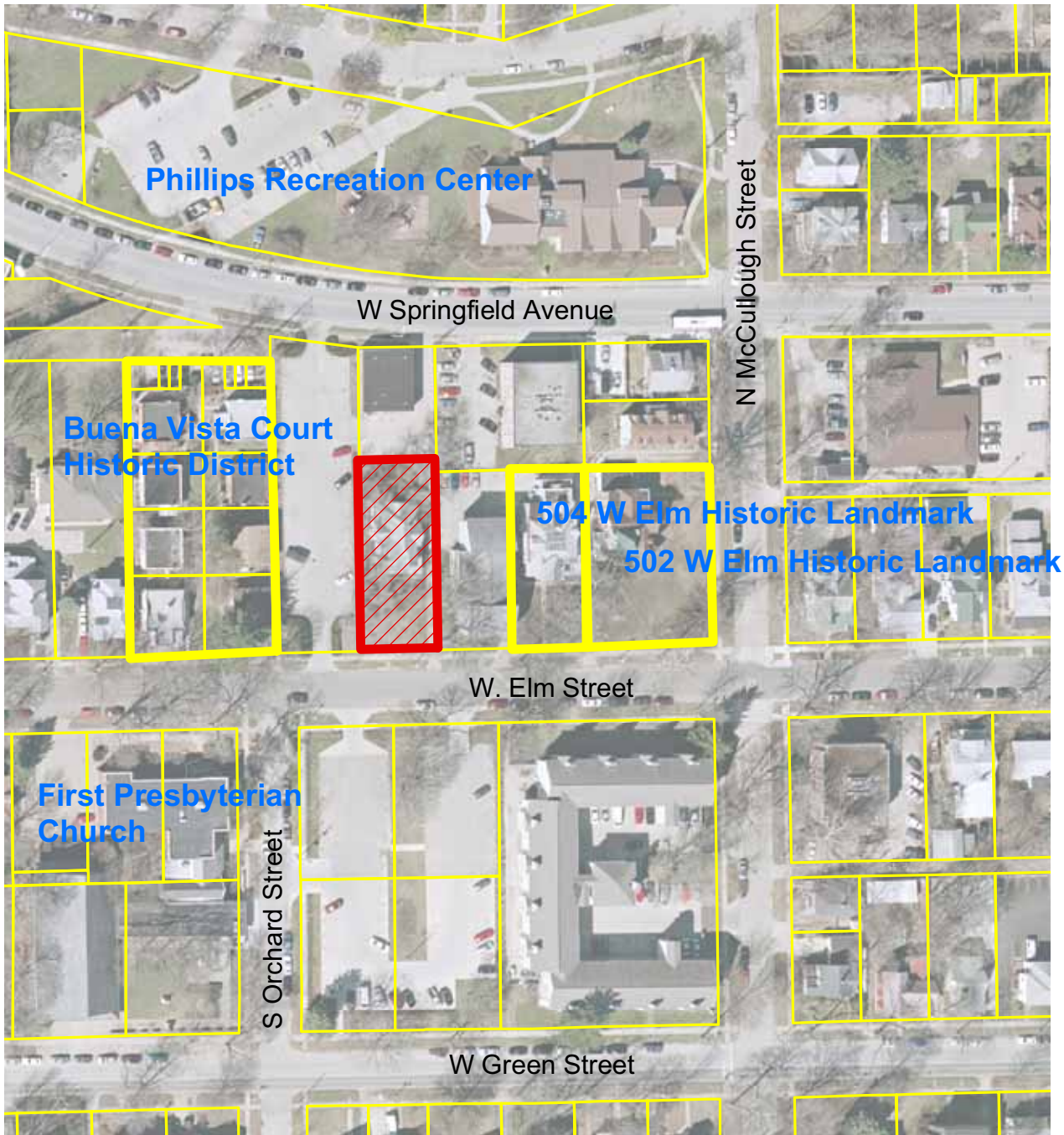


HPC Case: HP-2008-L-02
Subject: Bills House,
Local Landmark Designation Application
Location: 508 W Elm St.
Zoning District: MOR
Petitioner: Ilona Matkovszki



Subject Property

EXHIBIT B: Aerial Map



HPC Case: HP-2008-L-02
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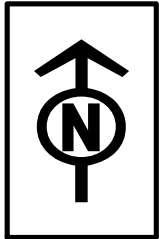
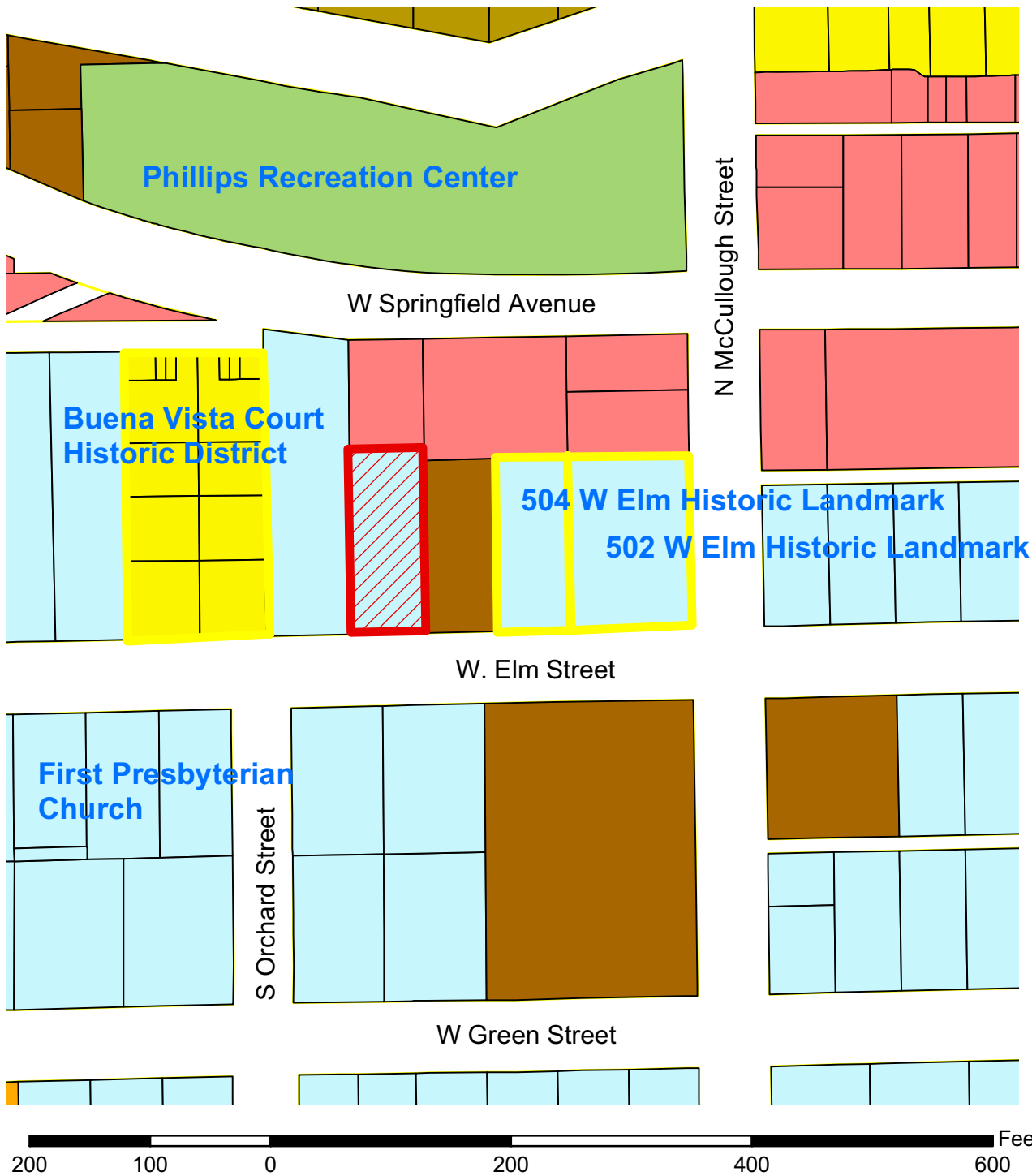
 Subject Property

EXHIBIT C: Land Use



HPC Case: HP-2008-L-02
Subject: Bills House,
 Local Landmark Designation Application
Location: 508 W Elm St.
Zoning District: MOR
Petitioner: Ilona Matkovszki

 Subject Property

-  B2
-  CRE
-  MOR
-  R2
-  R5



Application for Historic Landmark Designation

Historic Preservation Commission

APPLICATION AND REVIEW FEE – NO CHARGE

Although there is no fee to file an application for Historic Landmark Designation, the Applicants are responsible for paying the cost of legal publication fees. The fees usually run from \$75.00 to \$125.00. The applicant will be billed separately by the News-Gazette.

DO NOT WRITE IN THIS SPACE - FOR OFFICE USE ONLY

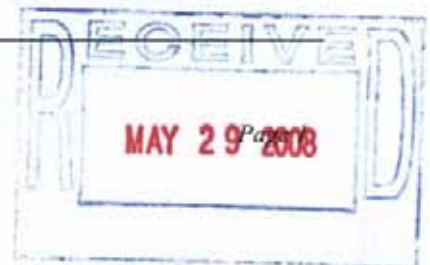
Date Application Filed May 29, 2008 Case No. HP-2008-L-02

PLEASE PRINT OR TYPE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION

1. Location 508 W. ELM STR., URBANA, IL
2. PIN # of Location 92-21-17-110-025
3. Name of Applicant/Petitioner(s) IKONA MATKOVSKI Phone 367-1339
 Address 412 W. Elm, Urbana IL 61801
(street/city) (state) (zip)
4. Property interest of Applicant(s) None
5. Name of Owner(s) Julian Gorski Phone 309-454-5915
 Address 28 Clinton Pl. Normal IL 61761
(street/city) (state) (zip)

DESCRIPTION, USE, AND ZONING OF PROPERTY: Attach an additional sheet if necessary

Legal Description Lot 3, except the North 100 feet thereof, of Sutton's Subdivision of Lot 3 of Assessor's Addition of a part of the Northwest 1/4 of the Northeast 1/4 of the Northwest 1/4 of Section 17, Township 19 North, Range 9 East of the Third Principal Meridian, situated in Champaign County, Illinois.



6. Date of Construction of Structure 1889
7. Attach a map showing the boundaries and location of the property proposed for nomination.
8. Attach photographs showing the important structures or features of the property or structure
9. Indicate which of the following criteria apply to the property or structure (check all that apply). Additionally, attach a statement that describes the proposed landmark and its historic significance; list reasons why it is eligible for nomination; and show how the proposed landmark conforms to the criteria for designation (see attached Suggested Format).
- Significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political, or social heritage of the nation, state or community;
 - Associated with an important person or event in national state or local history;
 - Representative of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, craftsmanship, method of construction or use of indigenous materials and which retains a high degree of integrity;
 - Notable work of a master builder, designers, architect or artist whose individual genius has influenced an area;
 - Identifiable as an established and familiar visual location or physical characteristics;
 - Character is a particularly fine or unique example of a utilitarian structure, including, but not limited to, farmhouses, gas stations or other commercial structures with a high level of integrity or architectural significance;
 - Yields, or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory

WHEREFORE, petitioner prays that this petition be heard by the Urbana Historic Preservation Commission and the Application for Historic Landmark Designation be granted.

Respectfully submitted this 29 day of May, 2008.

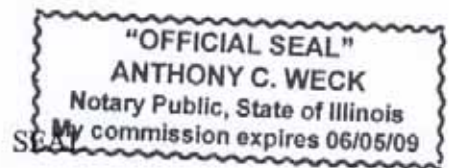
Urova Matkowski
Signature of Applicant

STATE OF ILLINOIS }
 }
CHAMPAIGN COUNTY }

I, *Urova Matkovszki* being first duly sworn on oath, deposes and says, that *Urova Matkovszki* is the same person named in and who subscribed the above and foregoing petition, that *Urova Matkovszki* has read the same and knows the contents thereof, and that the matters and things therein set forth are true in substance and in fact as therein set forth.

Subscribed and sworn to before me this 29 day of May, 2008.

Anthony C. Weck
Notary Public



Signature of Applicant *Urova Matkowski*

Petitioner's Attorney (if applicable) *N/A*

Address *412 W. Elm, Urbana, IL 61801*

Telephone *367-1339*



PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM ONCE COMPLETED TO:

City of Urbana
Community Development Department Services
Planning Division
400 South Vine Street
Urbana, IL 61801

Or Fax to (217) 384-2367

Please call (217) 384-2440 if you have any questions.

Bills House
508 West Elm Street

The Bills House, 508 West Elm Street, is being nominated as an Urbana Landmark under the following criteria. It has significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political, or social heritage of the nation, state, or community; it is associated with an important person or event in national, state, or local history; it is representative of the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, craftsmanship, method of construction, or use of indigenous materials and which retains a high degree of integrity; and it is identifiable as an established and familiar visual location or physical characteristics. The house was built in 1889 by Frank L. Bills, Urbana postmaster and prominent businessman. The structure is an example of the Queen Anne/Classical Revival transitional architectural style. Although modifications have occurred over time, mostly in the conversion of the house to apartments, the integrity of the house remains apparent.

Property Description

This transitional Queen Anne/Colonial Revival style frame residence was built in 1889 by Frank L. Bills. Its asymmetrical massing, irregular plan, and varied roof line are prominent aspects of the Queen Anne style while its classical porch is distinctly Colonial Revival in style. Double-hung one-over-one-light windows are primarily used on the house, but small diamond paned sash are also extant. Both hip and gable components comprise the irregular roof, which is covered with asphalt shingles; the overhanging boxed eaves are covered in artificial siding. The residence is dominated by a two-and-one-half story front wall gable, a southwest corner semi-hexagonal tower, and a cut-away bay on the west elevation.

This two-and-one-half story frame house's original siding (probably narrow clapboard and decorative shingle) is covered by wide artificial siding. Three vertical-light basement sash are placed in the raised brick foundation. Wrapping around the south and east elevations is an L-plan porch supported by five classical Doric columns. The frieze is ornamented with paired consoles over each column. A decorative turned balustrade is set between the columns on the wood deck; a lattice apron is below. Modern wood steps are set at the porch's west end in line with the front door. The off-center entry door is very decorative with a large beveled one-light sash flanked by fluted pilasters and topped by a dentilated cornice and ornament; below the sash is a narrow "shelf" supported on a "keystone." The lower half of the door has five decorative panels. A narrow one-light transom completes the entryway. To the east of the entry, below the porch and at the east corner, is a wide semi-hexagonal bay window with three large one-over-one-light windows. To the west of the entry is the five-sided first story of the southwest corner tower with one-over-one-light windows in each face. The second story of the south elevation continues the angled tower on the west corner, but with only three faces. A single one-over-one-light window is off-center to the west, and there is a wide one-over-one-light window to the east below the tall wall gable. The prominent clipped wall gable has two adjacent diamond/lattice casements, overhanging sided eaves, and cornice returns. A very tall hip roof with lower side gables covers the house; the stub of the brick chimney is off-set to the north.

The east elevation has a partial "T"-plan with a central projecting gable pavilion. To the south of the pavilion is



the clipped corner of the south elevation's semi-hexagonal bay window and a single one-over-one-light window; above the porch there is a single centered one-over-one-light window. The north end of the porch dies into the gable pavilion where an entryway with a similar entry door is located; however, this transom is blind. Wood steps lead down from the entryway/porch to grade. On the first story of the gable pavilion are paired one-over-one-light windows, while the second story has a large centered window. Above, the gable has a twelve-light sash and a full cornice return. To the rear (north) of the pavilion is a small one-story section with a quarter-hip roof and a single window facing east. At the north corner a shed roof porch has been enclosed; on the recessed second story are two narrow one-over-one-light windows set toward the north end.

Continuing around the house, the rear (north) elevation also has a partial "T"-plan with a wide center projecting gable pavilion. The recessed east corner has a one-over-one-light window on the first story and a similar narrow window on the second story. Dominating the elevation, the gable pavilion has a small raised square one-light sash to the east on its first story, a central one-over-one-light window, and a one-light entry to the west. The second story of the pavilion has a tall center one-over-one-light window that opens onto an added two-story wood porch/emergency exit whose dog-legged steps extend down to a small first-story porch and thence to grade. A full cornice return and a one-over-one-light window dress the tall gable. To the west is a blind one-story quarter-hip roof section with a narrow window recessed above.

The north end of the west elevation continues the one-story section which extends south to a central cut-away bay. Three narrow one-over-one-light windows are on first story, while the recessed second story has two similar windows. A semi-hexagonal bay window (three windows) enlivens the cut-away bay, whose corners are decorated with narrow consoles. The second story of the bay has paired windows set off-center to the south; there is also a narrow window on the south face of the bay. Above, the bay's gable has a full cornice return and a rectangular twelve-light sash. Adjacent to the south side of the cut-away bay is a raised square decorative sash of diamond/lattice-paned glass; a one-over-one-light-window (stair sash) is above. On the southwest corner, the two-story tower returns with angled windows on both stories and is capped by a short conical roof.

Historical Significance

Emergence and Early Development of Urbana

According to tradition, the Euroamerican settling of the area which is now Champaign County, began in 1822, three years after the establishment of Illinois as a separate state. In the first decade the influx of pioneer farmers to the area was very slow, due to lack of navigable rivers and decent roads to facilitate transportation, and to the extreme difficulty of cultivating the soils of the tall-grass prairie which, at the time, covered most of the state and was most dominant in East Central Illinois. The early settlers everywhere sought out the few forested areas scattered in the praries -groves and river valleys-, whose friable soils were much easier to farm with the available technology, and also provided timber for the construction of cabins, for fuel, fencing, and the production of tools. In what is now Champaign County there were three major timbered areas: Big Grove, located in the center of the county along the Saline creek, the Salt Fork Grove along the Salt Fork river in the east, and the Sangamon Grove along the Sangamon river in the west. Through the mid-1830's settlement occurred nearly exclusively in these three groves. In December 1832 the residents of Big Grove petitioned the

Illinois General Assembly for the establishment of a separate county, which was granted, and Champaign County was established on February 20, 1833. At the time the county's population consisted of 111 households, or approximately 720 people. The location of the county seat was fixed on June 21, in the southwest corner of Big Grove, near the confluence of the Boneyard creek with the Saline creek, on 43 acres of land donated for this purpose by early pioneer Isaac Busey, his nephew, Matthew D. Busey, and Isaac's old neighbor from Kentucky, William T. Webber. The county seat was named Urbana, and was surveyed and platted on September 3-4, 1833. The original plan consisted of four east-west running streets (Water, Main, Elm, and Green), intersected by four north-south running streets (Vine, Walnut, Market /now called Broadway/, and Race), with a central square reserved for the county courthouse. Later, this first town plan became known as the Original Town of Urbana, and today it constitutes the city's downtown. Due to lack of easy access to the outside world, population and economic growth remained very slow throughout the 1830's and 1840's, and the incoming people were mostly pioneer farmers who settled in the countryside.

Major changes occurred in the 1850's with the arrival of the railroad. The construction of the first railroad to run through Champaign County, the Illinois Central Railroad, which was to connect the northern and southern tips of Illinois, began in 1851. The tracts connecting Chicago to Urbana were finished by July 1854. The construction and arrival of the railroad resulted in a population explosion and economic boom in the entire county, and in the quick urbanization of Urbana and its twin city, West Urbana (now Champaign), which grew up around the railroad depot two miles west of Urbana, in raw prairie land. Between 1850 and 1860 the county's population increased from 2,645 to 14,629 (553%), and the size of Urbana quadrupled by the addition of over a dozen new subdivisions. The pioneer subsistence farmers of earlier years who came primarily from the Upland South (Kentucky, Tennessee, and Southern Ohio and Indiana) were replaced by land speculators, merchants, intellectuals (lawyers, doctors, teachers) and various tradesmen coming from the East (New York, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and North Ohio). Masses of laborers employed in the construction and operation of the railroad, and in the emerging industrial and booming construction businesses had also poured into Urbana. A large number of foreign-born immigrants, mainly of Irish and German origin, also began to arrive at this time.

The opening of large markets and the influx of formerly unavailable supplies and goods through the railroad, had fundamentally changed the local economy. The former dominance of agricultural production for primarily local use began to be replaced by a market economy. By the 1870's all the prairie land was bought up (a lot of it by speculators), and after draining the swampy prairies the land was put under cultivation, and the county was established as a major grain producing area of the state. With the influx of new residents and the opening of new markets, Urbana experienced a boom in construction and production. Along the northwestern outskirts of downtown a variety of factories sprung up overnight, many of them associated with the burgeoning construction industry and agricultural production. These included brick and tile factories, foundry and machine shop, plow and wagon factory, sash and door factory, sawmills, flouring mills, and even a woolen factory, among others. Main Street became a hub of activity, lined with a variety of retail stores, saloons, law offices, banks, real estate offices, and other places of business and entertainment. Hundreds of family homes, and new churches and schools were built across town.

The City of Urbana was incorporated on February 14, 1855, and in February 1867 was chosen as the site of the first land grant college in the state - the Illinois Industrial University (later renamed University of Illinois). Winning the university for Urbana was the single most important event in the city's history, as in addition to initiating the influx of scholars and changing the intellectual climate of this fundamentally rural community, it had also attracted substantial governmental moneys for university construction, and in the long-run it had secured the twin-cities' survival and prosperity, when other small rural county seats and communities fell by the wayside after the collapse of the railroad boom. In February 1867 the first railroad to actually pass through the city of Urbana, the Danville-Urbana-Bloomington-Pekin Railroad (the later I.B. & W and Big Four), was also chartered, and was completed in 1869. This was the first railroad line to provide Urbana direct access to the markets, which to that time was only enjoyed by Champaign, and within a few years it also became one of the city's largest employers, as it located both its headquarters and repair shops (later known as the Big Four Shops) in Urbana. Later developments included the establishment of a gas lighting system in the city's homes and streets, the paving of streets, the construction of an electric rail line connecting the twin cities, the construction of hospitals, and the continued expansion of retail businesses.

Neighborhood History

The subject property is located on Lot 4 of Sutton's Addition, on the northeast corner of Elm and McCullough streets. Sutton's Addition was originally part of an 80-acre parcel that was first purchased from the United States Government by Champaign County pioneer, Isaac Busey, on May 2, 1831. After Isaac Busey's death in 1847, his extensive holdings were subdivided among his children, his daughter Lillis and her husband, James T. Roe, inheriting the northern half of the above mentioned 80 acres, bounded by Race and Orchard Streets and Springfield Avenue and Illinois Street. Between 1851-54, Mr. Roe subdivided the area between Race and McCullough Streets into residential city lots, which sold and were developed quickly, being directly adjacent to the emerging downtown business district. Elm Street, which was one of the original streets of Urbana and lead from this new residential neighborhood directly to the Champaign County Courthouse, quickly became one of the most prestigious streets in Urbana to live on. Between 1850-1900 it was home to five Urbana mayors, two Illinois State Senators, Champaign County judges, early Urbana industrialists, merchants, bankers, real estate dealers, journalists, physicians, architects, musicians, and University of Illinois professors. The July 23, 1879 edition of the *Champaign County Herald* noted: "Elm Street is getting aristocratic...".

The most prestigious part of the city, however, was the area west of McCullough Street, where the subject property is located. This area, bounded by McCullough and Busey Streets, underwent a different developmental trajectory from the area between Race and McCullough Streets. It was not developed as the usual residential city neighborhood, but became a park- or garden-like neighborhood of large estates on the western edge of town, and retained that milieu until the late 19th century. The area between McCullough and Orchard Streets, which was part of Lillis and James T. Roe's inheritance, was sold by the Roes on June 16, 1852, to Mrs. Asenath Snyder, wife of Dr. Jacob F. Snyder, early Urbana physician. Between 1852-53 the Snyders built a residence on the northern two-acres of this land, which they retained as their private estate, and in 1858 they subdivided the southern two-thirds of the land (between Elm and Illinois Streets), which became known as Snyder's Addition. The area west of Snyder's Addition -between Orchard and Busey Streets- was subdivided the same year by Joseph W. Sim, Jr., Champaign County judge, Urbana's seventh mayor, and husband of Sarah A. Busey, daughter of Simeon H. Busey, co-founder of Busey Bank. This area became known as J.W. Sim's Addition.

The lots in Sim's and Snyder's Additions were bought up and occupied by the wealthiest and most outstanding people of the city, who built large and elegant residences on them. Among these people were Mr. Sim and Dr. Snyder themselves.

History of, and Important People Associated with, the Subject Property

The subject property was built on the western edge of Dr. and Mrs. Jacob Snyder's original two-acre estate, which occupied the area between McCullough and Orchard Streets, and Springfield Avenue and Elm Street. From the time the Snyders built the first residence on it, this property remained undivided and single-family occupied until 1889, when Mrs. Elizabeth Sutton, then owner of the estate, subdivided it into four lots. Both as an undivided estate with a single residence, and as a subdivided area with four elegant, large residences on it, this property has been a visually striking site in the city, and the many distinguished persons associated with it either as owner-residents, or as family members or in-laws of the owners, have made this property one of the historically most outstanding and significant locations of Urbana. This is very likely the only property in Urbana that has been occupied by two Urbana mayors -Royal A. Sutton (mayor in 1874-75), and Clark Robinson Griggs (mayor in 1866-67). The history of the site's early occupants is a microcosm of the early history of the city. The families associated with the property while an undivided estate were the Snyder, Griggs, and Sutton families. After its subdivision, the first families to build residences on it were the Sutton, Freeman, Pillsbury and Bills families, the Bills being the owners of the subject property at 508 West Elm Street. A brief history of these families follows.

Snyder family

Dr. Jacob Snyder was a well-to-do early Urbana physician who came to Urbana with his wife and three children in 1850 from Terra Haute, Indiana. After purchasing the Elm Street estate, the Snyders erected a large residence in its central part, as indicated on the 1858 Alexander Bowman Map of Urbana. Aside from Dr. Snyder's status as one of the prosperous citizens and first physicians of Urbana, the Snyders became distinguished through the achievements and affinal associations of their children. Their son, Frank Snyder, is known as the first practical printer of Champaign County, and one of the first, successful newspaper owner-publishers of Urbana. He was also active in local politics, being City Clerk, Justice of the Peace, and Police Magistrate for several terms in each position. The Snyders became associated with one of Urbana's most distinguished families through the marriage of their older daughter, Caroline, who married John S. Busey, son of early pioneer, Matthew W. Busey, and brother of Simeon H. and Samuel T. Busey, co-founders of Busey Bank. John S. Busey was a wealthy farmer and stock raiser, and had also participated in his brothers' banking business. In 1862 he became the first Champaign County resident to represent the county in the Illinois House of Representatives, which was formerly done by politicians from neighboring counties. Through the marriage of their younger daughter, Anna, the Snyders also became associated with Abraham Lincoln who, in the 1850's, was a frequent visitor in Urbana as a practicing attorney on the Eighth Judicial Circuit. Anna married attorney Henry Clay Whitney, who came to Urbana in 1854, and with his father became the first attorneys of West Urbana (Champaign). He was for years a close associate of Abraham Lincoln on the Circuit trail, and the two also became close personal friends. Their friendship and shared work and adventures as circuit riders in Central Illinois were commemorated in the book *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, written and published by Whitney in 1902.

Griggs family

After Dr. Snyder's death in 1862, his widow and children sold the Elm street estate to Clark Robinson Griggs on September 9, 1864. Griggs, a successful Massachusetts businessman and politician, came to Champaign County with his wife and three children in 1860 to change his career to farming. He first settled south of Urbana, on Yankee Ridge, where he established himself as a highly successful farmer, and through his participation in the Civil War as army sutler, and trader of cotton from the South to the North along the Mississippi river, he also accumulated significant wealth. Immediately after his return from the war in 1864, he purchased the Snyders' Elm Street estate to establish residence in the city. Shortly after the purchase, the *Central Illinois Gazette* (February 24, 1865, p. 3) announced: "Mr. S.C.(sic) Griggs is gathering the materials for the erection of a fine residence on the beautiful site formerly occupied by the late Dr. Snider (sic)". The new structure, which replaced the former residence, was a large, two-story wood-frame building located in the center of the estate. After his return from the war Griggs also became involved in the state-wide political battle for the right to locate the state's first land grant college. In 1866 he was elected Mayor of Urbana and representative in the Illinois House of Representatives, and was chosen to head the Champaign County committee in Springfield in the fight for the land grant college. In Springfield he secured the chairmanship of the Committee on Agriculture and Mechanic Arts, from which position he had ultimate control over the proposals for locating the college. Due in large measure to his tenacity, astuteness, and ability as a brilliant political manipulator, in February 1867, Urbana won the right to establish the first land grant college of Illinois in the twin cities. At the same time Griggs also succeeded in obtaining a charter for the Danville-Urbana-Bloomington-Pekin Railroad, the first railroad to run through the City of Urbana, -of which he was elected president-, as well as a charter for the first Gas Light and Coke Company which was organized to provide the streets and homes of the twin cities with a gas lighting system. His son Alfred became vice-president of this company. Griggs' accomplishments for Urbana were widely acknowledged, but none more appropriately than by Milton W. Mathews, Illinois State Senator and L.A. McClain, newspaper editor (both Elm street residents), who wrote: "No man ever lived in Champaign county who exercised a greater influence or accomplished more good for the county than Clark R. Griggs" (in "Early History and Pioneers of Champaign County" 1891:63). In 1873 C.R. Griggs and his wife moved back East and settled in Delaware. He continued in the railroad construction business in which he became a millionaire. Prior to moving out of Urbana, C.R. Griggs and his wife deeded their Elm Street estate to their daughter and son-in-law, Mrs. and Mr. W.W. Graham, who retained it only for four months. On September 22, 1873, they sold it to Royal A. Sutton, Urbana brick manufacturer.

Sutton family

Royal A. Sutton, a native of New York, moved to Champaign, Illinois in 1855, following his brother Joseph. He worked in Joseph's hardware shop, which he bought out in 1860. In 1862 he married Elizabeth T. Waters, daughter of Samuel Waters, well-known Urbana businessman. Samuel operated the Pennsylvania House hotel, located in downtown, across from the courthouse, where Abraham Lincoln was a regular guest while on the court circuit in Champaign County. His visits in the hotel generated several entertaining anecdotes in some of which he and Samuel Waters are the main characters. In 1866 Royal and Elizabeth moved to Urbana, where Royal went into the brick production business. In this he was very successful, and became known as "the Brick King of Champaign County". Sutton's brickyards, located north of downtown, provided bricks for the original buildings of the University of Illinois and for many early business blocks that were built after the 1871 great Urbana fire. In September 1873 the Suttons purchased the Griggs estate and moved into the former Griggs

residence, which became the family's home for the next sixteen years. Shortly after this, in April 1874, Royal Sutton was elected Mayor of Urbana, in which position he served one term. Through Royal's status as leading Urbana businessman and through their prominent in-laws, who were also Royal's business partners, the Suttons were members of the social elite of post-Civil War Urbana. Their Elm street residence became the site of lavish parties and weddings, attended by the most prominent members of Urbana society, and faithfully reported upon in contemporary newspapers.

Subdivision of the Sutton estate

Royal Sutton died on April 17, 1881 at the age of 44, after a long illness. Eight years later, in May 1889, his widow and their two children subdivided the family estate into four lots, and she sold her home (the former Griggs residence), located on the east half of Lot 2 (now 504 W. Elm) to Mrs. Marion Pillsbury, wife of Dr. William L. Pillsbury, Secretary of the Agricultural Experimental Station and first Registrar of the University of Illinois. At the same time Mrs. Sutton also sold Lot 4 on the west edge of her subdivision (now 508 W. Elm) to Mrs. Grace Bills, wife of prominent Urbana businessman, Frank L. Bills. The following month Mrs. Sutton began the construction of a new, brick mansion for herself on Lot 1 (now 502 W. Elm). Being one of the most prominent citizens of Urbana, Mrs. Sutton's transactions were closely followed and duly noted in the local newspapers. The May 1, 1889 issue of the *Champaign County Herald* noted on the first page: "Mrs. R. A. Sutton sold sixty six feet off the west side of her property to Frank Bills for \$1,000. She also sold her dwelling with 120 feet of ground to Prof. Pillsbury, who has charge of the experimental station in this city, for \$3,000. The remaining part of the block was divided into two lots. It is said that Mrs. Sutton will build a neat residence on the corner in a short time."

The Pillsburys and their three children moved into their new home (the former Griggs-Sutton residence) immediately after purchasing it, and resided there until 1898, when they moved the house to the west half of Lot 2 (now 506 W. Elm). The family continued living in the house at its new location until about 1914. After World War II the building was converted to rental property, and in 1983 it was destroyed by fire. The present, stylistically nonconforming modern apartment building standing at this location was built to replace the historic structure in 1984.

On July 1, 1902, the Pillsburys sold the east half of Lot 2 -from where they had formerly removed their house- to Mrs. Alice Jane Freeman, wife of Gus Freeman. The sale price was \$2,500 which, according to the local newspapers, was the highest price ever paid for a lot of that size on Elm street. The Freemans were a definite match in prestige and wealth for the Sutton family. Mrs. Freeman was a member of the Busey family, one of the most prominent and well-to-do families of Urbana. She was grand-daughter of Matthew W. Busey, pioneer founder of Urbana, and daughter of Simeon H. Busey, co-founder of Busey Bank. Her husband, Augustus (Gus) L. Freeman, was a native of Indiana, who moved to Urbana in 1871. He first worked as railroad engineer, then as real estate and insurance agent, and in 1914 he became the owner of the "Princess", Urbana's first permanent movie theater (now the "Cinema Gallery"). The Freemans built an elegant, two-story, Classical Revival style wood-frame residence on the east half of Lot 2 (now 504 W. Elm Street), which was also a match for the other three buildings on the block: Mrs. Sutton's elegant, new, brick residence, the former Griggs/Sutton home now inhabited by the Pillsbury family, and Frank and Grace Bills' elegant, new residence on the west edge of the block. The Freemans spared no expense in constructing their home, which they had designed by Joseph

W. Royer, Urbana's premier architect. Alice and Gus Freeman and their three children resided in their Elm Street home until 1937. After World War II this residence was also converted to rental property, and in June 2007 it was designated a local historic landmark.

508 West Elm Street

The subject property at 508 West Elm Street was built by Grace and Frank L. Bills in 1889, on the lot they purchased for \$1,000 from Elizabeth Sutton, widow of Royal A. Sutton, former Urbana mayor and "Brick King of Champaign County". The Bills' home was constructed at the same time as Mrs. Sutton's brick residence was being built at the east edge of the block, at 502 West Elm Street. The constructions were closely watched and diligently reported upon in the local newspapers. The September 25 issue of the *Champaign County Herald* wrote: "F.L. Bills has commenced his new house on his lot west of Prof. Pillsbury's. The building will cost about \$3,000." On October 23, the same paper reported: "New buildings are being contracted for and others pushed forward toward completion. The residences of Mrs. Sutton, F.L. Bills, C.B. Sims, and L.H. Goodspeed, are fast nearing completion and will, with the exception of F.L. Bills's, be ready for occupancy soon." Mrs. Sutton's home was finished in December, and was described in the local paper as "one of the most beautiful and convenient residences in the city" (*Champaign County Herald*, December 18, 1889, p.1). This residence still stands, and was designated local historic landmark in June 2007. Three weeks later the paper reported: "F.L. Bills expects to occupy his elegant new home on Elm street, this week." (*Champaign County Herald*, January 8, 1890, p.1).

The Bills were part of the Urbana high society, Mrs. Bills having been born into one of the city's most prominent pioneer families, the Somers, after whom Somers township, located directly north of Urbana, was named. Mrs. Bills (nee Grace Somers) was born in 1860, the daughter of Joseph W. Somers and Martha B. Hofferd. Her grand-father, Winston Somers, was an early Urbana pioneer, who came to Urbana from his native North Carolina with his wife and children in about 1843. He was one of Urbana's earliest physicians, and practiced his profession in a circuit centered upon Urbana, riding out to the surrounding communities on a horse or sleigh, carrying his medicines in his saddlebags. He also ran a drug store in Urbana with his sons, and was one of the founders of the city's Universalist Church. He provided for a good education for his children, who became prominent businessmen and obtained important positions in local and federal political offices. Upon his death he also left ample provisions for his family.

Grace Somers married Frank L. Bills on June 27, 1882. Frank was born and raised in Boone County, Illinois, the son of Orlando Bills, a New York native. He came to Urbana as a young man in the 1880's, and was one of the early merchants of the city. By 1889 he was operating the Installment Watch Company, a watch and jewelry business, and employed his brother, F.G. Bills, as traveling agent. By 1893 he was serving as Urbana postmaster, and by 1897 he was in the telephone business, traveling around the country installing telephone exchanges. By 1905, he was one of the managers of the Bell Telephone Company. Bills established telephone exchanges in Illinois (Bloomington, Peoria, Chicago), Indiana (West Baden), and Wisconsin (Janesville, Racine, Milwaukee). While working for the telephone company, Frank Bills lived on the road, and was frequently gone from Urbana for weeks at a time. Yet he always returned to visit his wife and to vote, and this always made news in the local papers.

Both Frank and Grace Bills were committed and important socialites of Urbana, and their parties and activities were closely followed by the local newspapers. Frank was an award-winning hunter, and a member of the Elk's Club, and he liked to dance, his favorite being the cake-walk. He owned a trotting colt, which he purchased for \$1,000 -the price of a small house-, and by 1905, he was also the owner of a new electric touring automobile. Grace was an officer of the Illinois Federation of Women's Clubs, and a member of DAR - Daughters of the American Revolution. Their new home on Elm street quickly became a place of socializing and entertainment. In June 1890 it was reported that

"Mr. and Mrs. F.L. Bills gave a Musicate Friday evening, at their home... . About fifty guests were present and enjoyed the hospitality of their host and hostess as well as the excellent musical program arranged for the occasion." Other social events reported in 1892 were:

Mrs. F.L. Bills will give an afternoon reception, Wednesday, at her home on Elm street, from 3 o'clock to 5.",
and

"The Ladies' and Gents' Duplicate Whist club will meet with Mr. and Mrs. F.L. Bills on West Elm street, next Friday evening."

The Bills lived at their home at 508 W. Elm Street until 1896, when they purchased Mrs. Sutton's new brick mansion at 502 W. Elm Street. The Sutton mansion remained their residence for the next forty years, where they continued their lavish socializing and entertaining. In June of 1898 the following article was published in the *Champaign County Gazette*:

"A Pleasant May Party. Mrs. Frank L. Bills gave a cotillion Monday evening, at her home on West Elm street, to a number of her friends. The dancing music as well as the vocal music rendered by the guests was fine. Refreshments were served. Those present were Miss Ida Brown, Maude Girty, Myra Burt, Minne Weber, Gertrude Richards, Jessie Besore, and Mrs. M.W. Busey and Messrs. M.W. Busey, Gary Baker, Harry Oldham, E.E. Rea, Walter Hollis, Clarence Riley, Lew Little, Zack Oldham, and Mort McCown."

The *Champaign County Gazette* published this article in 1901:

***The Urbana No Regrets Club. Entertained Last Night by Mrs. F.L. Bills.** Mrs. F.L. Bills entertained the No Regrets club at her home, West Elm street, Urbana, Thursday evening. Nearly all the members of the club were out, and it was pronounced one of the most enjoyable meetings ever held by the club. Cards was the feature of the evening and a delightful luncheon was served. The No Regrets club is composed of prominent people of Urbana, and as its name implies, no excuses are taken when the club is to be entertained.*

The Bills had no children, and for the last 20 years of his life, they spent their summers in Melbourne, Brevard County, Florida, while retaining their Elm street home as their primary residence. Frank Bills died in Florida in 1931 at age 74. Grace outlived him by almost twenty years. She died in 1950 in Seattle, Washington. Both of them were buried in Urbana. Among Frank's pallbearers were such illustrious Urbana residents as Joseph W. Royer, architect, Garrett H. Baker banker and builder of Buena Vista Court on Elm street (directly across from the Bills' residence), and Charles Kiler, University of Illinois graduate and author of the book "On the Banks of the Boneyard".

Following the Bills, the residence at 508 W. Elm Street changed hands many times, and was used both as private residence and as rental property. Of the many owners and residents two families need mention as they owned and resided in the home for over thirty years each: the Colvin and Mathews families. In 1899 Jacob O. Marks became the owner of 508 W. Elm Street, and resided there until 1904. His daughter, Sarah Jane Marks, became owner of the house in about 1905. She and her husband, Thomas Jefferson Colvin, and their three sons were owners and residents of the home until about 1938. The Colvins were an outstanding business family of Urbana: Thomas Colvin with his sons was the owner of Urbana's premier meat market, located at 204 W. Main Street. Mr. Colvin was born in Lexington, Indiana in 1858, the son of Irish immigrants, John Colvin and Catherine Goblen. His mother died shortly after his birth, and in 1867 his father brought his family to Champaign County, Illinois, and settled on a farm near Tolono. His father became an outstanding citizen of Tolono where he owned a meat market, and became postmaster and mayor. Thomas Colvin moved to Urbana in 1878, where he opened his own meat market in 1882, having gained experience previously in his father's shop in Tolono and in a couple of Urbana and Champaign shops. First he worked for himself, and then in partnership with his sons. During this time he accumulated substantial real estate holdings - a half section in Tolono township, a 240-acre ranch near Colorado Springs, Colorado, a 20-room sorority house at 1106 W. Oregon Street, and his Elm Street home. Mr. Colvin was a member of the Knights Templar, and Mrs. Colvin was a founder of Alpha, Delta, Phi, and a member of several women's organizations. After the Colvins' death their sons remained owners of the family home which they used as rental property. The home remained in the Colvin family until about 1936.

In 1848 Ernest G. Mathews, University of Illinois professor and his wife, Jeanne, became owners of 508 W. Elm Street. After Mr. Mathews' death his widow remained in the home, and rented part of it. The home remained in the Mathews family until about 1981. Currently the house is a rental property.

Architectural Significance

The Bills House at 508 West Elm is a transitional residence that incorporates characteristics of both the Queen Anne and Colonial Revival styles.

By the late 1880s, the Queen Anne style was the dominant American architectural style that lasted through the turn of the twentieth century. Elements of the style include varied wall treatments, asymmetrical facades, steeply-pitched irregular roof lines, and elaborate porches, often wrapping around two or more elevations. Roots of the style may be traced to a group of English architects who named and popularized the style. However, the style actually had little to do with Queen Anne or the more formal architecture that dominated her reign (1702-1714). Instead, the style took from the earlier Elizabethan and Jacobean architectural periods. In America, early examples of the style more closely follow the English precedents with half-timbered and patterned masonry; however, later and more popular American examples use spindle work and classically inspired motifs in a distinctly American interpretation.¹

The general theme of the Queen Anne style is variety. Steeply pitched roofs, multiple gables and/or hips, asymmetrical facades and large porches are common elements. Grouped windows, cut-away bays and varied wall cladding (clapboards, shingles, "half-timbering"), spindles and incised decoration can also be found.

Typical is a dominant front gable with decoration.

Early examples of Colonial Revival style overlap the Queen Anne, but the Colonial Revival extended for a broader period of time (1880-1955). The style was a revival of American and Old World building traditions, inspired by the Philadelphia Centennial of 1876, which stimulated an interest in colonial architecture. The earliest examples of the style were more free interpretations with merely colonial detailing, rather than historically correct copies of period architecture. Queen Anne-influenced details were often intermingled with the colonial so that transitional or combinations of the two styles were fairly common. By the turn of the century, however, architects had generally shifted to more carefully researched copies with correct proportions and details, especially on the east coast. This change was due to the existence of architectural periodicals and books which were dedicated to the promotion of the Colonial Revival style through measured drawings and photographs of original sources. After the Depression and World War II, however, the style was simplified, with examples showing the influence of the style, rather than being accurate copies of Colonial originals.²

Features of the Colonial Revival include a rectangular or square symmetrical form, gable or hip roofs with dormers, and Palladian or bay windows. Entries often have decorative fanlights and large double-hung windows are used. Porches have simple classical columns, balustrades, modillions and dentils. Frame examples of the style are clad in clapboard siding.

The Bills House had elements of both the Queen Anne and the Colonial Revival architectural styles. Its asymmetrical massing, irregular plan with projecting gabled pavilions, and varied roof line (both hip and gable) are prominent aspects of the Queen Anne style as are the cut-away bay of the west elevation and the faceted corner tower. The wrap-around porch is both Queen Anne (large L-plan) and Colonial Revival (classical Doric columns, turned balustrade, and consoles). Semi-hexagonal bays can be found in both styles, but large double-hung windows are usually associated with the Colonial Revival style, while multi-light and diamond/lattice sash are distinctly Queen Anne. Although the house is now covered with wide artificial siding, it most likely was originally covered in clapboards, possibly with decorative shingles in the gables, varied wall cladding indicative of the Queen Anne style. However, the Colonial Revival is again featured in the quite handsome entry doors with their beveled glass, pilasters, and cornice details.

Although 508 West Elm has been altered with the addition of wide artificial siding, its original architectural style and details are readily apparent. It is a good local example of the popular turn-of-the-century transitional Queen Anne/Colonial Revival architectural style and complements the nearby local landmarks, the Sutton and Freeman Houses.

Context

Placement of the Property within the Community

As indicated above, the area west of McCullough Street, where the subject property is located, was originally a neighborhood of large estates on the western edge of the city. These estates were gradually subdivided into city lots in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. At that time, a second building boom started on Elm Street and nearby streets, driven by the second and third generations of the Urbana well-born and well-to-do. During this process many of the original, old residences of the area were replaced with more modern houses. As a

consequence, the majority of the present building stock in the area consists of turn-of-the-century late Victorian and early post-Victorian structures. Starting around the time of the Second World War, many of the old residences on Elm Street and surrounding streets were sold out of single family ownership, and were converted to rental properties. This resulted in the influx of new classes of residents to the area, including students and middle-class citizens. From the 1960's - 1970's many of the beautiful and historically important, old residences on Elm Street were demolished and replaced with unsightly and cheaply constructed apartment buildings which significantly undermine the historic character and aesthetic quality of this once important street and neighborhood. The subject property is one of the few structures remaining on Elm Street from the elegant buildings of this by-gone era.

Relationship to Other Properties of Similar Architectural Style

The transitional Queen Anne/Classical Revival style seems to have been one of the most popular styles in residential construction in the late 19th and early 20th century in Urbana. On West Elm Street itself there remain at least four other substantial homes built in this style, these being numbers 302, 309, 412, and 612. Based on photographs of homes which have since been demolished on Elm street, there were once several other large mansions built in this style. Several other neighboring streets also feature residences built in this style. It may thus be concluded that 508 W. Elm Street represents a style that was the characteristic, and apparently preferred, style of substantial homes on Elm Street and in other parts of old Urbana in the late 1800's and at the turn of the century. Among the remaining Elm street buildings number 508 is unique in that it retains its original porch with its stately columns, wide banister, decorative turned spindles, and decorative brackets. On all the other existing buildings the decorative porch elements have been fully or partially replaced with simple, modern architectural elements. The residence at 508 W. Elm is also unique in that it has a small tower -which is lacking on all the other buildings-, and its rooms have tin ceilings, which are apparently original to the building. These ceilings are very unique in that they are ordinarily used in commercial, but not in residential buildings. The subject residence is also the only one on Elm Street with a very large setback, which was a characteristic feature of only the most elegant and expensive homes.

508 W
Elm St





508 West Elm Street. South elevation



508 West Elm Street. South elevation, porch detail.



508 West Elm Street. Southwest corner tower.



508 West Elm Street. South elevation, clipped wall gable with diamond/lattice casements.



508 West Elm Street. East elevation.



508 West Elm Street. West elevation.



508 West Elm Street. West elevation, diamond/lattice-paned glass window.