

*Historic
Urbana*



*A self guided tour of the Home
of the University of Illinois*

History

History

Early Settlement

What is now central Illinois was occupied by native people whom the French called the Illinois. They still lived in the region in the 1830s, when they were forced to emigrate. The white settlers, who in the 1820s moved to the area known today as the City of Urbana, grew substantially in numbers by the 1850s. The establishment of several mills and the Illinois Central Railroad Depot in “West Urbana,” modern day Champaign, were responsible for much of the growth. Several hundred commercial buildings and houses were erected within a year of the arrival of the railroad. Urbana was chartered as a city by the state legislature in 1855 and on June 2, Archa Campbell was elected as the first mayor. In 1863 the first streetcar, drawn by mules, began operating between the newly incorporated Village of West Urbana depot and the Urbana courthouse. After the Civil War, African-American people leaving the South arrived; the 1870 census records indicate that 40 Americans of African descent lived in Urbana.

The Downtown

The location of the county seat in Urbana has always played an important role in ensuring the vitality of the downtown area, drawing ordinary and even renowned persons, such as Abraham Lincoln, into the city. The completion of Clark R. Grigg’s Indianapolis, Bloomington, and Western Railroad in 1869 also contributed to the growth of the Downtown. The I.B. & W. provided a direct rail route that enabled Urbana to become a stable and independent trade center. Merchants were no longer dependent on the streetcar railroad to transport shipments of goods from the Illinois Central depot in Champaign. To service the ever-growing railroad industry, the Big Four rail car repair shops opened in Urbana in 1871 and became a major employer in the city.



Main Street

Originally many of the buildings along Main Street were of wood frame construction. When these were destroyed in the 1871 Urbana fire, brick became



the dominant construction material. Some of the original buildings that lined Main Street were Tiernan’s, Busey’s Hall, Knowlton–Bennett Drugstore, Peterson Café, the Columbian Hotel, Hubbard Drug Company, and Dickenson’s grocery store. Many of the architecturally significant homes and public buildings were constructed in the late 1800s and early twentieth century. Prominent individuals who built their homes on Main Street near the downtown, included Dr. Austin Lindley, Clark R. Griggs, Samuel Busey, and Frank Marriott. Notable public and semi-public structures include the Unitarian Universalist Church, the United States Post Office, the Champaign County Courthouse, and the Urbana High School.

University of Illinois

Nothing has influenced the economy, land use, traffic, and development of Urbana as much as its relationship with the University of Illinois. A member of the state legislature, Clark R. Griggs, is credited with bringing the University to the county. In 1867, Governor Richard J. Oglesby signed the bill to establish the Illinois



Industrial University, now the University of Illinois. A number of resources associated with the early development of the University remain in Urbana. Some of the oldest surviving of these landmarks are the experimental Morrow Plots, the South Farms, Harker Hall, the Astronomical Observatory, the Natural History Building, and Altgeld Hall.



Local landmarks

Urbana has five local landmarks. A local landmark property is a building, structure, site, or object which is worthy of rehabilitation, restoration, and preservation because of its historic and / or architectural significance to the City of Urbana.

1. *The Nathan Ricker House*

612 West Green Street - built 1892



The Ricker House was designed and built by Nathan Ricker, founder and head of the Department of Architecture at the University of Illinois from 1873 to 1910. Gables containing overlapping wood sawn shingles and the

large full-width front porch are prominent features of the Queen Anne home. Ricker lived there until the time of his death in 1924. The Preservation and Conservation Association restored the home during the 1990s using private loans, grants, and volunteer efforts.

2. *Busey's Hall / Princess Theatre*

120-124 West Main Street - built 1870

Originally built in the Italianate style to house the Busey Brothers' Bank and other local businesses, this was the first brick "block" building constructed in Urbana and one of the few buildings that survived the 1871 fire. Busey's Hall, an opera house situated on the top floor, was the first Opera House in the area and has remained substantially unaltered since 1903. In 1915, the first floor of 120 West Main housed the Princess Theatre, which was renamed the Cinema Theatre in the 1960s. It closed in 1994. The Art Deco façade was added in 1934 and the steel and porcelain entrance in 1949.



3. *Tiernan's Block / Masonic Temple*

115 West Main Street - built 1871



Urbana native and University of Illinois graduate J.W. Royer was the architect that designed this building with a terra cotta façade. Originally this structure housed Frank Tiernan's grocery store at street level, a lawyer and dentist's

offices on the second floor, and an Opera House on the 3rd floor. In 1994, a parapet was added to the current facade. The building was the site of the Urbana Masonic Lodge for nearly 100 years.

4. *The Gothic Revival Cottage*

108 North Webber Street - built circa 1850

This pre-Civil War house is the oldest local landmark in one of the oldest neighborhoods in the city. Its steep gabled roof, decorative bargeboard, and narrow lancet windows are all features of the Gothic Revival style, rare to this region. Because of its proximity to the railroad, it is thought to originally have been provisional housing for men who were mechanics, cooks, and waiters for the Big Four Railroad.



5. *The Lindley House*

312 West Green Street - built 1895



This Queen Anne house was built for Dr. and Mrs. Austin Lindley from the designs of Urbana architect and 1887 University of Illinois graduate, Rudolph Zerses "Doll" Gill. Dr. Lindley was a prominent surgeon and physician who used the first floor as his

office and the second floor as the family's residence. He and his wife, Minnie, lived in the home until 1922. Characteristics of the Queen Anne style, include varied roof lines, wall treatments, wood trim and shingles, and varied window sizes and shapes. Before being converted to a bed and breakfast in 1996, it was used as a music conservatory.

Royer District

National Register

A Historic District is a group of buildings, structures, sites, or objects within a defined geographic boundary that are historically and/or architecturally significant to the City of Urbana.

6. Joseph W. Royer House

801 West Oregon Street - built 1905

This house was the original residence of Joseph W. Royer, a prominent Urbana native and architect. It was built in the Mission architectural style with an Arts and Crafts influence. It is believed that Royer was inspired to construct the home after seeing the “California Building” at the 1904 World’s Fair in St.



Louis. The home has a brick foundation, a stucco façade, and a clay tile roof. A second story constructed of modern wood siding was added in 1968. Royer and his wife, Adelaide, lived in the home until the 1950s.

Ella Danely Cottage / Fairy House

701 South Bussey Avenue



Originally designed by Royer as a cottage for his mother-in-law, Ella Danely, this home was constructed after the primary residence at 801 W. Oregon. The house was designed in the English Revival style of architecture. Both houses in the Royer District have stucco facades, which relate them visually. Some of the most prominent features of the home are its arched, eyebrow entrance and the chimney finished in stucco with randomly placed fieldstones, which have remained largely intact and unaltered.

Authorized under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, the National Register is administered by the National Park Service. Properties listed on the Register include districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that have local, state, or national significance in history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and/or culture. In addition to one or more of these criteria, properties must also have integrity. Anyone can fill out a nomination form for properties that meet these criteria. Twenty properties within the City of Urbana are listed and are eligible for Federal tax benefits and funding.

7. Alpha Delta Pi Sorority House

1202 West Nevada Street - built 1926

The narrow site for this substantial, formal brick house is balanced by a steeply pitched roof. Notable details are the oriel window on the Goodwin Street side and the tie rod that connects the tall chimney to the slate roof. The building echoes those constructed by the wealthy during the French Renaissance.



8. Alpha Xi Delta Sorority House / Opus Dei

715 West Michigan Avenue - built 1915



This house was designed by University of Illinois grad Joseph Royer in the Tudor Revival architectural style. The home was designed for the Matthew Bussey family, one of Urbana’s early prominent families.

9. Altgeld Hall, University of Illinois

Wright and Green Street - built 1896-1897

Nathan Ricker worked with James McLaren White to design Library Hall, later known as Altgeld Hall. This Richardsonian Romanesque structure was the last of Ricker’s designs. It houses the famous bell tower from which “Hail to the Orange” and other familiar tunes can be heard daily at 12:50 p.m.



National Register

10. *The Chemistry Laboratory / Harker Hall* *University of Illinois* 1305 West Green Street - built 1878



Harker Hall is one of the original buildings located on the quadrangle. Formerly known as the Chemistry building, it was designed by Nathan Ricker in the Second Empire Style with a raised main story and a mansard roof.

It currently houses the University of Illinois Foundation offices and is the oldest standing academic building.

11. *Clark R. Griggs House* 505 West Main Street - built 1871

This example of Italianate architecture was built by Clark R. Griggs. Griggs served as mayor of Urbana and was president of the Indianapolis, Bloomington, and Western Railroad. After being elected to the Illinois General Assembly, Griggs worked to bring the University of Illinois to the area after gaining the 1865 federal land grant for the University.



12. *Elm Street Court/ Buena Vista Court* 1-8 Elm Street Court - built circa 1925



The court consists of eight Spanish Mission style cottages that face a central courtyard. This architectural style, while common in California and the southwestern U.S., is unusual in the Midwest. The

single-story cottages are stucco over tile construction and have flat roofs and wrought iron window décor.

13. *Experimental Dairy Farm Historic District* *University of Illinois* 1201 West St. Mary's Road - est. 1902-1913

The South Farms were designated as a historic district in 1994. The property contains barns, silos, outbuildings, and farm houses that tell a story of the University's scientific progress in agriculture. The Three Round Dairy Barns, built between 1902 and 1913, served as a model dairy farm and were part of the agricultural experiment station. Popular legend maintains that the barns were built round in order to appear smaller to tax assessors.



14. *Gamma Phi Beta Sorority House* 1110 West Nevada Street - built circa 1910

Though built around 1910, the Gamma Phi Beta chapter did not purchase this house until 1918. The house has been enlarged and remodeled, yet the main element of the building, the



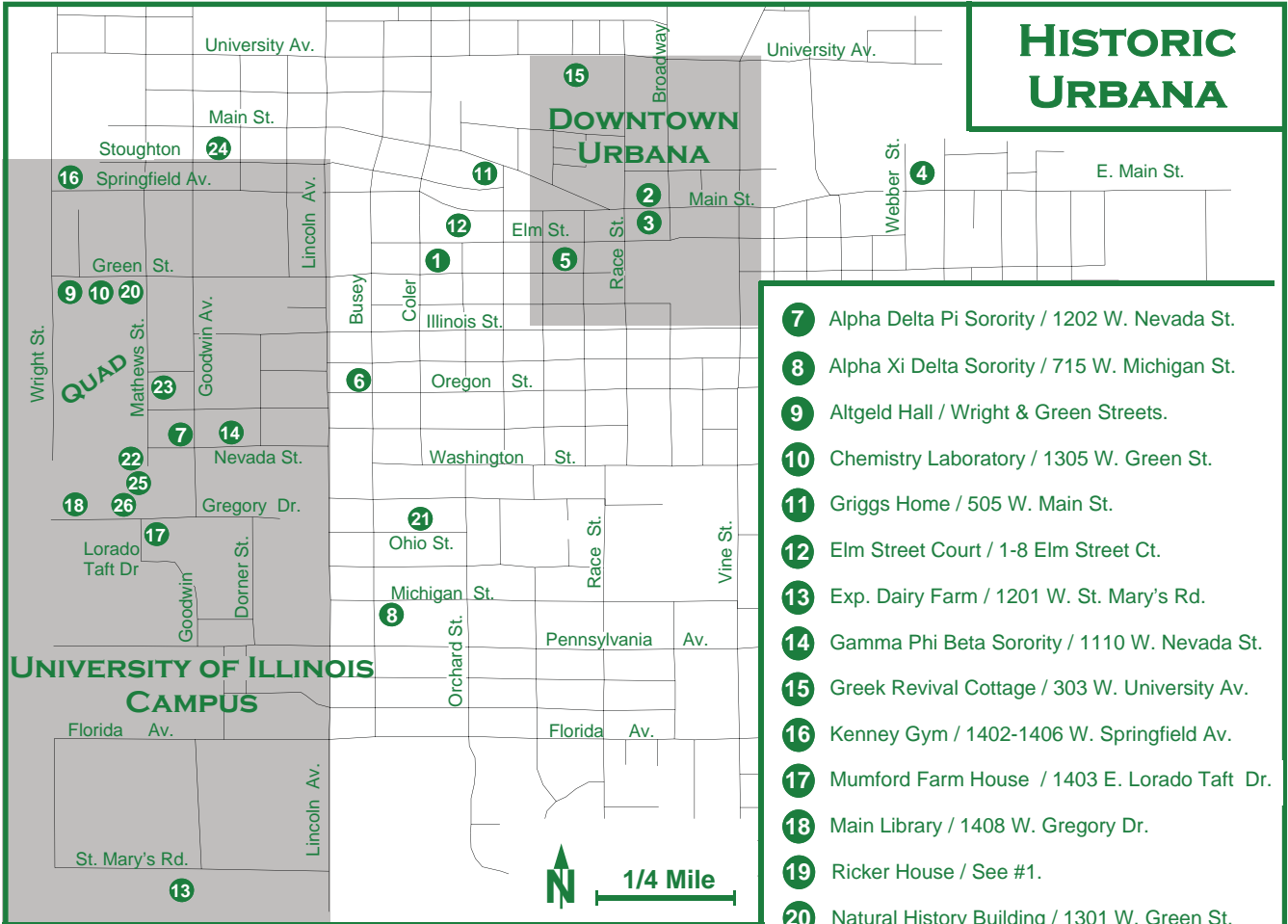
central three-story rectangle with the asphalt shingle roof, remains largely intact. Greek Letter Society dwellings are historically significant because they provided much needed housing for pre-World War II students and established a means of socializing.

15. *Greek Revival Cottage* 303 West University Avenue, Leal Park - built circa 1854

This is the best example of the Greek Revival style in the area. The house was originally located on Springfield Avenue and was relocated to Leal Park and restored in 1987. Leal Park is located on Boneyard Creek and contains graves of early Champaign County settlers and Native Americans. Currently the cottage houses Urbana Park District offices.



Map



HISTORIC URBANA

- 1 The Nathan Ricker House / 612 W. Green St.
- 2 Busey's Hall / Princess Theater / 120-124 W. Main St.
- 3 Tiernan's Block / Masonic Temple / 115 W. Main St.
- 4 Gothic Revival Cottage / 108 N. Webber St.
- 5 The Lindley House / 312 W. Green St.
- 6 Royer Historic District / 801 W. Oregon St. & 701 S. Busey Av.
- 7 Alpha Delta Pi Sorority / 1202 W. Nevada St.
- 8 Alpha Xi Delta Sorority / 715 W. Michigan St.
- 9 Altgeld Hall / Wright & Green Streets.
- 10 Chemistry Laboratory / 1305 W. Green St.
- 11 Griggs Home / 505 W. Main St.
- 12 Elm Street Court / 1-8 Elm Street Ct.
- 13 Exp. Dairy Farm / 1201 W. St. Mary's Rd.
- 14 Gamma Phi Beta Sorority / 1110 W. Nevada St.
- 15 Greek Revival Cottage / 303 W. University Av.
- 16 Kenney Gym / 1402-1406 W. Springfield Av.
- 17 Mumford Farm House / 1403 E. Lorado Taft Dr.
- 18 Main Library / 1408 W. Gregory Dr.
- 19 Ricker House / See #1.
- 20 Natural History Building / 1301 W. Green St.
- 21 Phi Mu Sorority / 706 W. Ohio St.
- 22 Smith Memorial Hall / 805 S. Mathews Av.
- 23 Unitarian Church / 1209 W. Oregon St.
- 24 Warm Air Research House / 1108 W. Stoughton
- 25 Astronomical Observatory / 901 S. Mathews Av.
- 26 Morrow Plots / Gregory Dr. & Mathews Av.

National Register

16. H.E. Kenney Gym & Kenney Gym Annex, University of Illinois 1402-1406 W. Springfield Avenue - built 1901 & 1890

The Drill Hall (later called the Kenney Gym Annex) was designed by Nathan Ricker and initially used for student military instruction, primarily during the time between WWI & WWII. It contains a large, unified space, the result of Ricker's innovative use of wood- and metal-trussed framework that left the interior free of support structures. The Kenney Gym, formerly the



Men's Gymnasium, was designed by Nelson Strong Spencer, a student of Ricker. His architectural design closely imitated that of the nearby Drill Hall, exemplifying the then current architectural engineering techniques.



17. Mumford Farm House University of Illinois 1403 East Lorado Taft Drive - built 1871

This farm house is the oldest surviving structure on the University of Illinois campus. It was built three years after the University opened on what was then the horticultural grounds. It was designed to provide a model of what a modest farmer's house should look like, "tasteful in appearance, economical in cost, and compact and convenient in arrangement." Several important University professors and staff lived in the house, including Thomas J. Burrell, George E. Morrow, Dean Eugene Davenport, and Herbert W. Mumford.



18. Main Library, University of Illinois 1408 West Gregory Drive - built 1924 - 1929



This Georgian Revival building was sited and constructed in accordance with the 1921 University Campus Plan by architect Charles A. Platt. It is the fifth largest library in the country, the third largest academic library, and the largest state supported university library in the United States.

19. The Nathan Ricker House 612 West Green Street - built 1892

This house was designed by Nathan Ricker, who in 1873 was the first person in the nation to receive a degree in architecture from the former Illinois Industrial University. Gables containing overlapping wood sawn shingles and the large full-width front porch are prominent features of the home's Queen Anne architectural style.



20. Natural History Building, University of Illinois 1301 West Green Street - built 1892

The Natural History Building is another Nathan Ricker creation. Designed in the American High Victorian Gothic style, the building brought a change of architecture to campus. Additions in 1909, 1910, and 1923 completed the original design as intended by Ricker.



21. Phi Mu Sorority House 706 West Ohio Street - built 1927-1928



This three-story Spanish Eclectic style building is constructed of rough tan and orange brick with a side-gabled tile roof. Its style was influenced by the 1915 Panama-Pacific Exposition where the public was exposed to Spanish and Latin American architectural styles.

National Register

National Historic Landmarks

22. *Smith Memorial Hall, University of Illinois* 805 South Mathews Avenue - built 1920



This structure was designed as part of the Blackall Olmsted plan between 1912-1920. Smith Hall terminates the vista of the east-west axis down Nevada. The formality and rectilinear organization of space continues on the Quad.

23. *Unitarian Church of Urbana Chapel* 1209 West Oregon Street - built 1908

This modified Tudor Revival building looks much the same as it did when it was built in 1908. This architectural type was promoted and distributed by the American Unitarian Association especially in the Midwest, to develop new congregations.



24. *Warm Air Research House* 1108 West Stoughton - built 1922-1924



The National Warm-Air Heating and Ventilating Association constructed this 2 1/2 story, Colonial Revival house in Urbana to conduct experimentation with the heating systems. During this time the completely furnished house, resembling real living conditions, served

as a research laboratory. Mechanical engineering professors, including Arthur C. Willard, and students at the University of Illinois installed and studied the various furnaces for over twenty years. Willard devoted his career to searching for ways to heat homes more effectively. In 1940, the house was sold to a private individual when researchers turned their attention to smaller housing types that were becoming more commonplace after WWII.

The Astronomical Observatory and the Morrow Plots have the honor and distinction of both National Register and National Historic Landmark status.

National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant historic places designated by the National Park Service and Secretary of the Interior because they possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States. Today, fewer than 2,500 historic places in the country bear this national distinction.

25. *Astronomical Observatory,* *University of Illinois* 901 South Mathews Avenue - built 1896



The observatory was the first University building of permanence situated south of the former University Hall (Current location of the Illini Union). This structure has been an important element in the development of the science of astronomical photoelectric photometry. The observatory still contains the original telescope used for examining the universe.

26. *Morrow Plots,* *University of Illinois*

Gregory Drive at Mathews Avenue - est. 1876

The Morrow Plots are the nation's oldest experimental fields in continuous rotation. Over the years results have demonstrated that the use of science and technology has increased crop production over four-fold. In 1969, the Undergraduate Library was constructed underground to prevent shading of Morrow Plots because of their importance to the University.



Royer

Joseph W. Royer (1873-1954)

Joseph W. Royer was a prominent architect in Champaign County from the late 1890's through the mid 1900s. He lived in Urbana his entire life and studied architecture under the instruction of Nathan Ricker. While working as an engineer for the City of Urbana, Royer designed many distinguished buildings in the city,



including the Masonic Temple, County Courthouse, and Sheriff's residence (demolished 1998). He also designed the Urbana Free Library, Urbana High School and the Urbana Lincoln Hotel (currently the Historic Lincoln Hotel). After working at the city he started his own firm which was originally located in the Flat Iron Building and later moved to the Masonic Temple when the Flat Iron Building burned down in the late 1940s. Some of Royer's buildings featured earlier in this brochure include, the Alpha Delta Xi/Opus Dei House, Tiernan's Block/ Masonic Temple, and the Ella Danley Cottage. Others of local significance are pictured here.



Urbana High School
1002 South Race Street



Historic Lincoln Hotel
209 S. Broadway Ave

Alpha Delta Xi/Opus Dei
715 West Michigan



Flat Iron Building
Main & Springfield
Burned down in 1948
Present site of Kirby
Firestone building

Urbana Post Office
202 S. Broadway



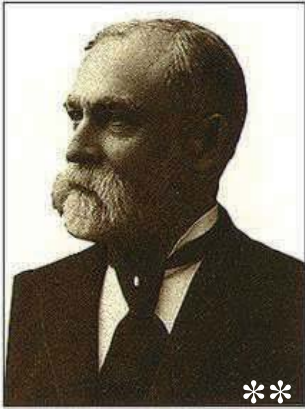
Urbana Free Library
201 South Race

Ricker

Historic Landmark & District Criteria

Nathan Clifford Ricker (1843-1924)

Nathan Ricker was born on a farm in Acton, Maine in 1843. He became a country school teacher at the young age of 18 and taught himself Latin, French, Geology, and Botany. He later worked in a factory making piano cases, and then in a wagon and



blacksmith shop. Striving to do more with his life Ricker enrolled in the newly founded Illinois Industrial University in 1870 (the present day University of Illinois), and became the first American graduate in architecture. In 1873 Ricker assumed a permanent teaching position at the U of I. He also held many important

offices within the College of Engineering, including Dean, and Head of the Department of Architecture. Ricker retired in 1911 after the death of his wife, Mary Carter Steele, niece of Judge and Mrs. J.O. Cunningham, one of Urbana's founding families. During his career, he designed five buildings for the U of I, including the Natural History Building, the Kenney Gym Annex, Altgeld Hall, the Aeronautics B Lab (Metal Shop), and Harker Hall (Chemistry Laboratory). Ricker's home at 612 West Green is the only known residential building he designed. Ricker emphasized technology, building design, construction, and history; subjects still integral to the architectural curriculum at the University today.



The Urbana Historic Preservation Commission considers the following criteria for designating local historic districts:

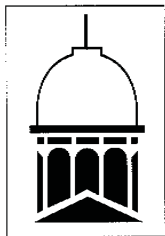
1. A significant number of buildings, structures, sites, or objects meeting any of the standards required for historic landmark status (see below).
2. An area containing a contiguous grouping of properties having a sense of cohesiveness expressed through a similarity of characteristics of style, period, or method of construction .
3. An area of sufficient historical integrity to convey a sense of time and place.

The following criteria are considered for local historic landmarks:

1. Significant value as part of the architectural, artistic, civic, cultural, economic, educational, ethnic, political, or social heritage of the nation, state, or community.
2. Associated with an important person or event in national, state, or local history.
3. 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.
4. Notable work of a master builder, designer, architect, or artist whose individual genius has influenced an area.
5. Identifiable as an established and familiar visual feature in the community owing to its unique location or physical characteristics.
6. Its character is a particularly fine 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.
7. Areas that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

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Washington, D.C. 20240

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