

UNITARIAN CHURCH OF URBANA
1209 West Oregon Street
Urbana
Champaign County
Illinois

HABS IL-290
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS
FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

UNITARIAN CHURCH OF URBANA (The Channing-Murray Foundation)

HABS No. IL-290

Location: 1209 West Oregon Street, Urbana, Champaign County, Illinois located on Block 3 of the former Nina B. Bronson Subdivision on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus, facing north onto Oregon St. and west onto Mathews Ave.

The coordinates for the Unitarian Church of Urbana are 40.106718 N, -88.225160 W. These coordinates were obtained in March 2012 from Google Earth, and with, it is assumed, WGS 1984. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Present Owner/
Occupant:

The Channing-Murray Foundation and The Red Herring Restaurant & Coffeehouse

Present Use:

Religion/Religious Structure
Recreation and Culture/Auditorium
Social Meeting Hall

As the Unitarian-Universalist Campus Center at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the building serves as a gathering space for activities such as music, food and “nonjudgmental spiritual exploration.” The Red Herring, a vegetarian restaurant, is located in the basement.

Significance:

Walter C. Root was a prominent architect in the Kansas City, MO area, and worked extensively throughout Kansas as well. He was the younger brother of the famous John Root of the architecture firm Burnham and Root and for a period of about six years worked for his office. The project was also completed under the supervision of Nathan Ricker, the first person to graduate with a degree in architecture in the United States and first dean of the School of Architecture at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: 1908. The building was officially dedicated October 18, 1908.
2. Architect: Walter C. Root, under the direction of Nathan Ricker.

Walter C. Root was the younger brother of the John W. Root, of Burnham and Root fame. Walter Root worked for the elder Root for a period of about six years at the beginning of his architectural career in 1880. He soon left his brother's office to work for himself in Kansas City, MO where he formed Root and Siemens with George M. Siemens. His work throughout his

career consisted primarily of mansions and high-end commercial buildings. Root also designed ten buildings for St. Mary's College in St. Mary's, Kansas.

Nathan Ricker was the first graduate in architecture in the United States and the first Dean of Architecture at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. In addition to his assistance in the creation of the Old Unitarian Church of Urbana, Ricker also designed five other buildings on campus: Harker Hall (originally the Chemistry Buildings), the Kenny Gym Annex (Drill Hall), the Natural History Building, Altgeld Hall, and the Mechanical Engineering Building (originally Aeronautical B, and since demolished). He also published several books on the structures of roofs. Ricker was also instrumental in the creation of a state law requiring licensing of architects.

3. Original and subsequent owners, occupants and uses: The Unitarian-Universalist Church of Urbana, 1908 to present. The original use as a religious structure for worship, recreation, and socializing remains today.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:
General Contractor: English Brothers, Champaign, IL
Contractor: C.F. Smith
5. Original plans and construction: unknown
6. Alterations and additions:

In 1909 tie rods were added in the chancel to stabilize the building. Nathan Ricker had objected to the exposing of the roof beams originally, but as he was the only dissenter among those designing the building was overruled. Within a few months of occupation it became apparent that the structure as built was incapable of supporting the roof. Tie rods were added shortly after to remedy this problem.

In the 1930s a forced air heating system was installed under the direction of Seichi (Bud) Konzo, an engineering professor at the University of Illinois.

In 1948 the building was raised so a basement could be added. The church had outgrown its available space and used the basement originally as a day care area for those attending services and classes in the building. The space is now occupied by The Red Herring, a vegetarian restaurant that shares ties to the Channing-Murray Foundation.

B. Historical Context:

Illinois was in a targeted area for missionary work by the American Unitarian Association (AUA) during the 19th and early 20th centuries. Those involved with the AUA believed that religious life was expressed through acts of "humanism," which have translated throughout the years into educational and social service projects.

The Unitarian Church of Urbana was formed to give a religious structure back to those students of the University of Illinois who, having never experienced education separate from religion,

were finding it difficult to reconcile differences between the two. This church was the first at the University that was specifically built for the purpose of housing a campus ministry. The founding of the church found support from many University and surrounding community members. The Dean of Sciences from 1888-1906, Professor Stephan A. Forbes was a co-founder of the establishment. Financial contributions were made by the University of Illinois, University of Illinois President Edmund James, Senator William McKinley, the First National Bank of Urbana, the First National Bank of Champaign, and Isaac Kuhn of the Sinai Temple in Champaign.

The design was based on suggestions from a guidebook produced by the AUA, Plans for Churches, based on ideas put forth by Jenkin Lloyd James. James felt that it was important for future religious structure to be without those architectural elements he felt people found foreboding. As a result, Unitarian architecture of the time was based on a human, domestic scale. Walter C. Root designed the All Souls' Unitarian Church in Kansas City, MO for the AUA in 1905-06. This structure subsequently burned, making the Unitarian Church of Urbana the oldest example of these guidebook inspired designs.

PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: The building style encompasses examples of Tudor Revival Style (in its material usage), Bungalow/Craftsman Style (in its massing), and Gothic Revival Style.
2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall Dimensions: 59.0' x 49.5'. The building is two stories, with a basement.
2. Foundations: The basement walls are constructed of concrete block and fired brick and are eight inches thick. Buttressing elements flank the exterior walls along the north and south facades.
3. Walls: Above grade the foundation walls continue as red fired brick to the height of the window sills on the north, east, and south facades. On the north and west façade ashlar masonry makes up the full height of the west tower, and the main body of the west façade to the gable. Above the points of termination of ashlar masonry and brick the walls consist of white limestone stucco with an English cottage finish segmented by decorative red-painted half-timbering. The south façade also features 3 window wells built in conjunction with the addition of the basement in 1948.
4. Structural System, framing: Wood-frame construction on fired brick foundation.
5. Porches, stoops: Series of precast concrete slabs used to create front stoop.
6. Chimneys: The building has two interior brick chimneys.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance on Mathews Ave. is located on the west façade and is comprised of double unglazed batten doors. Doors are original to building. East and south doors are not original. Exterior basement door is original to remodeling.
- b. Windows and shutters: Windows are wood-frame, single-pane, double-hung units. Select windows are fixed, wood-frame units. Those on the south and west facades and several in the west tower contain stained glass. These are of a “cat’s paw pattern” consisting of sea-green, amber tinted glass with a border of yellow glass.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof is a cross-gable sheathed with asphalt shingles.
- b. Cornice, eaves: The wide, overhanging eaves have exposed rafters.
- c. Towers: Two towers exist, on the northeast and northwest corners of the building and are accessed from the interior. Both have steep pitched pyramidal shaped roofs with asphalt shingles. The west and east towers were used historically as a library and minister’s residence, respectively. Currently the west tower is used for office space and the east tower is rented as an apartment.
- d. Interior: The roof structure is exposed in the main sanctuary space, as per guidebook recommendations.

C. Description of Interior

1. Floor plans: Original floor plans are lost or missing. The overall the building has an irregular footprint and is dominated by the sanctuary space.
2. Stairways: The building has three stairways. One straight-run stairway runs from the first floor for access to the west tower. A second straight run stairway runs from the first floor for access to the basement. A third winder staircase allows access from the first floor to the east tower.
3. Flooring: Original red oak hardwood flooring throughout first floor and second floors of towers. Hardwood has been covered with carpet in the entry vestibule. Basement flooring is linoleum.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: Plaster finish walls with white paint throughout first floor. Plaster finish ceilings with white paint throughout first floor with the exception of the sanctuary space. Sanctuary space ceiling in finished pine wood.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: Folding doors between sanctuary and living room. These folding doors allowed for an opening-up of the sanctuary space into the more intimate space of the living

- room for certain church events. All top panels of the doors are of stained glass, matching the stained glass of the windows.
- b. Windows: Windows are wood-frame, single-pane, double-hung units. Select windows are fixed, wood-frame units. Those on the south and west facades and several in the west tower contain stained glass. These are of a “cat’s paw pattern” consisting of sea-green, amber tinted glass with a border of yellow glass.
- 6. Decorative features and trim: All existing molding are original and of wood. Those that are missing have not been replaced.
 - 7. Hardware: All original hardware, except in cases of non-original doors.
 - 8. Mechanical Equipment:
 - a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: Current HVAC system was put in place in the 1930s and is a forced air heating system.
 - b. Lighting: Hanging and rectangular wall-mounted light fixtures in sanctuary space are original and of stained glass. The circular wall-mounted light fixture in the sanctuary space was installed after the removal of the pipe organ. All were electric from their installation.
 - c. Plumbing: The original plumbing system remains in the building.
 - 9. Original Furnishings: Original organ moved to another Unitarian church in Urbana. Altar original to building construction. Additions to the altar which cover the original stairs do not match, but are not permanent and easily removed.
- D. Site: The building faces west towards the Main Quadrangle of the University of Illinois.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews:

Irish, Sharon, Ph.D., Architectural Historian, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

B. Bibliography:

<http://www.arch.uiuc.edu/about/history/ricker/>

http://www.ks.shs.org/resource/ks_preservation/kpjanfeb04root.pdf

<http://gis.hpa.state.il.us/hargis/PDFs/200832.pdf>

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Historians: Jamie Gay, Melissa Robb, Michelle Zupancic

Project Information: This report was prepared by students for the course ARCH 518 Recording Historic Structures at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the Fall of 2010, Professor Paul Hardin Kapp, instructor: Scott Farbman, Lauren Garvey, Jamie Gay, Jonathan Klocke, Erma Maves, Melissa Robb, Korey White and Michelle Zupancic. The project was supported by the Channing-Murray Foundation at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It was submitted to the 2011 Peterson Prize competition.