

CELEBRATING THE DESIGN GENIUS OF URBANA ARCHITECT JOSEPH W. ROYER



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



JOSEPH WILLIAM ROYER

(1873-1954)

A native of Urbana, Joseph W. Royer was the city's premier architect between the late 19th and mid-20th century. Born in 1873, he graduated from the University of Illinois in 1895, with a degree in civil engineering. In 1898 he became city engineer of Urbana and remained in that position until 1906. Following his employment as Urbana's city engineer, Royer established his own architectural firm in about 1906. His office was located in the Flatiron Building on Main Street, which he designed in 1905. The building burned down in 1948, destroying Royer's architectural plans of a lifetime.

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

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

Text by Ilona Matkovszki · Design by Dennis Roberts

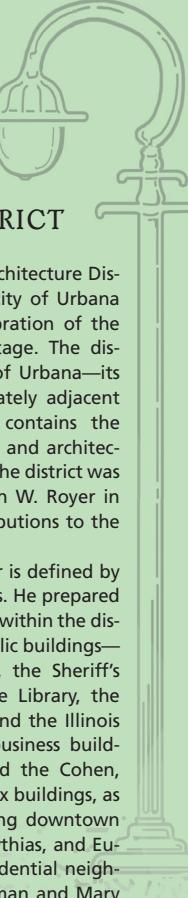
THE JOSEPH W. ROYER ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE DISTRICT

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

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

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

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



THE JOSEPH W. ROYER ARTS AND ARCHITECTURE DISTRICT

In the Heart of Old Urbana



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

1. Freeman House, 1902–03

504 West Elm Street

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



2. Canaan Baptist Church, 1909–10

402 West Main Street

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

3. Illinois Theatre (Opera House) 1907–08

312 West Springfield Avenue
(Destroyed by fire)



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

4. Flatiron Building, 1905–06

301 West Main Street (Destroyed by fire)

Except for the number of stories, this four-story brick building was the counterpart of its namesake in New York City, a 21-story skyscraper, then the world's tallest building, designed by Chicago architect Daniel Burnham in 1902. Construction of the Urbana building required infilling and draining the so-called "Flatiron swamp" and re-routing the Boneyard Creek.

The building site was staked out on March 1, 1906 by Royer, and by August, occupants were moving in. The building originally housed the Flatiron Department Store on the first two floors and in the basement, Royer's architecture offices and law offices were on the third floor, and the Elk Lodge on the top floor. The building burned down on March 11, 1948.

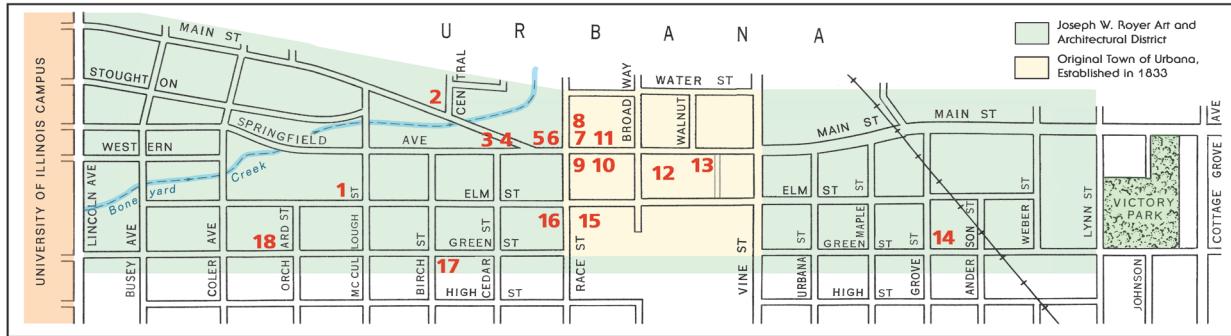
5. Fox Building, 1898

220 West Main Street

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



EXPLORE THE HEART OF HISTORIC URBANA



Joseph W. Royer Arts and Architecture District



6. Knights of Pythias Building, 1903

212 West Main Street

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



7. Cohen Building, 1907

136 West Main Street

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



8. Urbana Post Office, 1906

106 North Race Street

Construction of the city's former Post Office began on April 30, 1906. The Post Office was Urbana's first structure built of concrete blocks, then a new building material. Its foundation was laid of bricks from the old Courier Building formerly at this location. Opened in late October 1906, the Post Office operated here until 1914, when the present Post Office on Broadway opened. Its facade has been covered with a modern veneer, and the building now functions as the Rose Bowl Tavern, with apartments upstairs.



9. Knowlton & Bennett Building, 1926

130 West Main Street

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



10. Tiernan Building, 1914

115 West Main Street

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



11. Eubeling Building, 1901

116 West Main Street

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



12. Champaign County Courthouse, 1900–01

101 East Main Street

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



13. Sheriff's Residence and Jail, 1905

201 East Main Street (Demolished)

Built as Urbana's third jail building and sheriff's residence, this two-story building stood on the east side of the Champaign County Courthouse. The structure was built of red bricks in Chateauesque style with a massive Romanesque Revival style front porch of

brick columns and arches; its foundation was of Bedford (Indiana) limestone, and it had a tile roof. The building was demolished in 2000 for the expansion of the County Courthouse.

14. Lloyd House, 1898

210 South Grove Street

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

15. Urbana Lincoln Hotel, 1923–24

209 South Broadway Avenue



This Tudor Revival style five-story brick building was built by a group of about 100 Urbana stockholders. The hotel opened on January 30, 1924. In 1944 it was sold to Charles R. Webber, Champaign County Judge, and Gordon F. Kamerer, Urbana businessman, co-developers of Lincoln Square Mall which was added to the hotel's southeast facing main facade in 1964. In 1965 the hotel was bought by Carson, Pirie, Scott, & Co., the mall's developer, who in 1975 sold it to James Jumer. Jumer added a banquet and convention center to the hotel's north and east sides in 1983. In September 2006 Lincoln Square Mall, together with the Lincoln Hotel, were listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

16. Urbana Free Library, 1917–18

201 West Green Street

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



17. Unitarian Universalist Church 1913–14

309 W. Green Street

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



18. First Presbyterian Church of Urbana 1901–02

602 West Green Street (Demolished)

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