

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

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National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

NATIONAL REGISTER

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Unitarian Church of Urbana

other names/site number Channing-Murray Foundation

2. Location

street & number 1209 West Oregon Street

not for publication

city, town Urbana

vicinity

state Illinois code IL county Champaign code 019 zip code 61801

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
1	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
1	0
	Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official *William C. Wheeler, SHPO*

Date *3-28-91*

State or Federal agency and bureau *ILLINOIS HISTORIC PRESERVATION AGENCY*

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register.
- See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Entered in the National Register

*Allores Byrum*

*5/13/91*

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

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

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

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

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Gothic  
Bungalow/Craftsman  
Tudor Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick  
walls Stone/Limestone  
Stucco  
roof Asphalt  
other Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

 See continuation sheet

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Unitarian Church of Urbana

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The Unitarian Church of Urbana (Channing-Murray Chapel) is situated on its original site at the southeast corner of Oregon and Mathews Streets in Urbana, Champaign County, Illinois. The two-story detached religious building was built of limestone, brick, wood and stucco in 1908 in a modified Tudor Revival style. The church now looks much as it did in 1908 when it opened its doors to serve the University of Illinois community. Its domestic scale offers a contrast to the grandeur of the campus quadrangle right across the street. The building housed a large open sanctuary roofed in timber, a library above the tower vestibule, a Fireplace Room for fellowship, and a minister's study and office at the rear. In 1911, a small alcove to the east was added to house a Kilgen tracker organ, once visible in the sanctuary, beyond a raised stage.

The building itself measures 59 feet by 49 feet 6 inches. This rectangular building holds its own on a block now dominated by later additions of fraternity and sorority houses and parking lots. Davenport Hall, the former agricultural school, is directly across the street and faces the University of Illinois Quadrangle. It dates from 1901. Thus like many other buildings on the prairie in the first decade of the twentieth century, Channing-Murray was surrounded by flat fields of the experimental farms, except for Davenport Hall.

Channing-Murray Chapel's Tudor Revival style is well-coordinated with its materials and workmanship. The use of natural materials and the informal plan suit the needs of a congregation wanting to welcome newcomers and provide a comfortable setting for philosophic discussions. The church layout does not resemble the plans of many Tudor Revival houses, though. Its massing and intimate interior spaces recall bungalows and small craftsman houses.

The main west facade is distinguished by a corner stone tower with an octagonal bellcast roof on the north that anchors the building and directs one to the entrance. (Early photographs of Channing-Murray Chapel show a ball topping the apex of the corner tower.) Projecting piers of stone at the four corners of the tower add to its mass and frame the three windows on the west and north that illuminate what was once a library on the second floor. The porch is covered with a gable that is braced by timbers that cross to form an "X". The large (42 feet

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by 32 feet) open space of the sanctuary is obvious in the treatment of the single bay just to the south of the tower. A rough limestone wall, punctuated by three modest windows, is topped by a wide stuccoed front-facing gable roof decorated with a band of half-timbering in a cross pattern and a small tripartite window.

The south side facing a parking lot away from the street, is fenestrated with three tripartite windows and several square windows near the side door, that is reached by a ramp, added in 1987. Half-height brick buttresses brace the south wall.

To the east and rear, a simply framed wood and stucco section rises two stories above a common bond brick base and houses what is now a kitchen and a bedroom (formerly offices.) The rear entrance, under a sloped, bracketed overhang, leads to a stairway that routes one up to the sanctuary and down to the basement. There is also a separate entrance for the basement. This rear section is delineated by vertical and horizontal slats that break up the white stucco facade. Windows fit in between these slats: four evenly spaced on the top floor and one group of three and a small rear window on the ground floor. A horizontal course of wood runs just below the eaves. An alcove designed by Rexford Newcomb in 1911 to house the organ is visible on the east side. A 15-foot by 30-foot meeting room, one story in height, abuts the sanctuary to the north and is identifiable from the outside by the fireplace chimney and two sets of three windows each that run between the stone walls and the eaves. On this north side, the roof slants down from its apex over the sanctuary, changing its incline at the tower to extend over the band of windows.

The interior decoration is modest. Windows with green and amber cat's paw pattern glass (from Kokomo, Indiana) remain in the sanctuary, but clear glass was substituted for the green windows in the Fireplace Room. The windows and art glass were restored within the last five years. Green glazed Roman brick surrounds the fireplace itself, picking up on the green tints of the sanctuary windows. At one time, stencil designs by University of Illinois professor Newton A. Wells were applied on the walls of the sanctuary. When the chancel was redesigned to accommodate the organ, the stencil decorations in the sanctuary may have been covered over. All walls are now plaster, painted white. Over 15 years ago, the Channing-Murray Foundation (the present occupant) removed the pews from the sanctuary to increase the flexibility of the space, but the chapel still has the original chancel furniture and several pews. A mission style bench and several chairs in the Fireplace Room are also part of the original furnishings. Otherwise, the warmth of wood floors and ceiling, and wooden folding doors between the sanctuary

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Unitarian Church of Urbana

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and the Fireplace Room now provide the interest on the main floor. The wooden trusses in the sanctuary are a simplification of a hammerbeam form: the triangular braces carry pointed arches along the rafters up to the ridge.

Most alterations were undertaken to complete a building built on a slim budget. Tie bars had to be installed a year after construction to prevent the peaked roof trusses from thrusting outward. In 1938, the antiquated heating arrangement was replaced with an innovative high-volume forced air system designed by church member Seichi Konzo. The basement was added in the late 1940s, according to the original plans. At some point the railing for the stairs leading from the entryway to the library was walled in and a door added to limit access to the second story. Aside from these changes, and maintenance requirements, there have been no substantial alterations to the building.

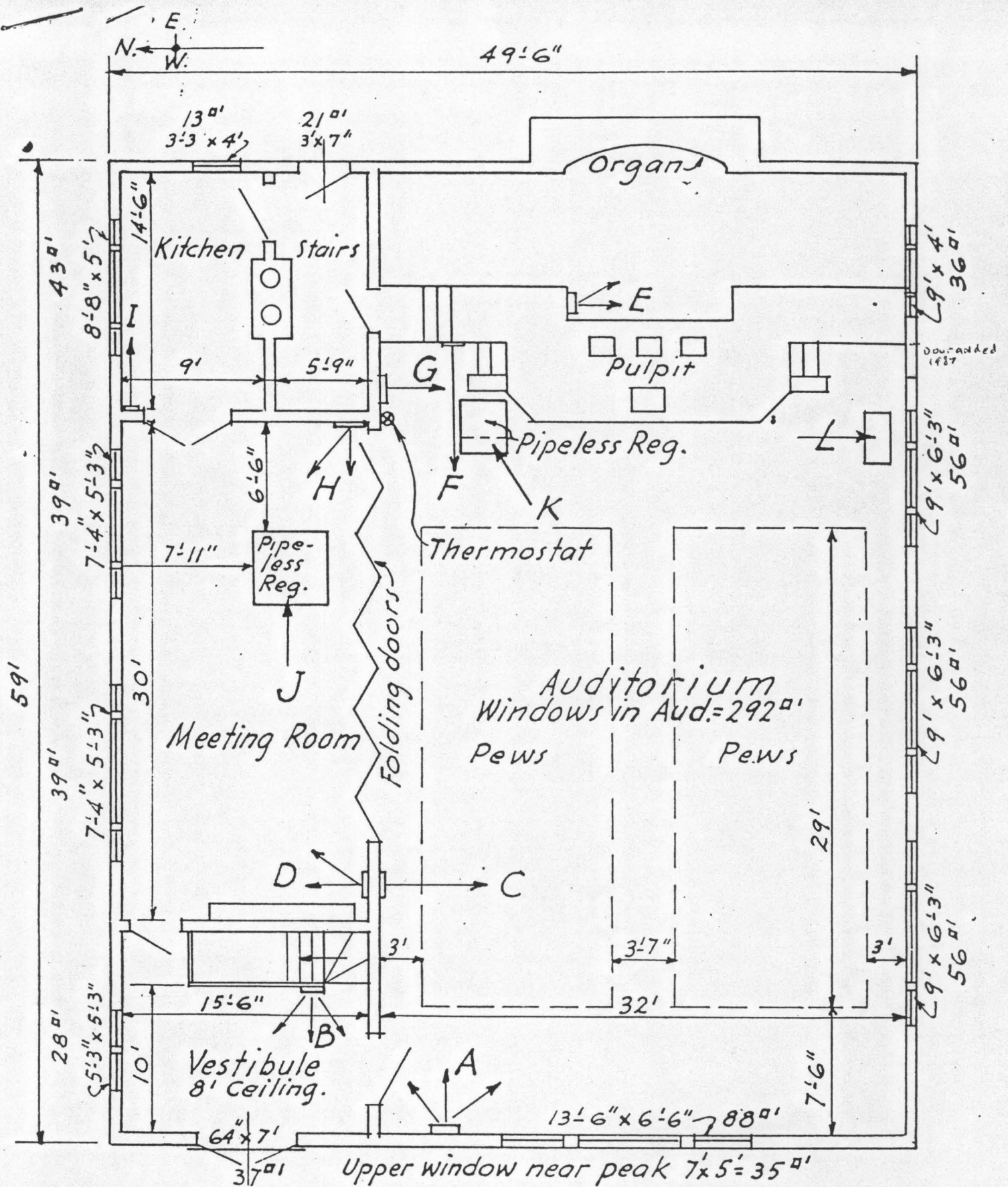


Fig. 2 Floor Plan of Church.  
Unitarian Church of Urbana

A SICK heating plant is like a sick man.  
There are obvious symptoms, certain corrective

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

1908  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

1908  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Root, Walter C,  
Smith, C.F., contractor  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

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See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

**UTM References**

A 

1	6	3	9	5	5	9	0	4	4	0	1	0	0
Zone		Easting						Northing					

C 

Zone		Easting						Northing					

B 

Zone		Easting						Northing					

D 

Zone		Easting						Northing					

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The north fifty-three (53) feet of the west one hundred thirty (130) feet of Lot Five (5) and the west one hundred thirty (130) feet of Lot Four (4) all in Block Three (3) of Nina B. Bronson's Subdivision of a part of the east half of the southwest quarter of the northeast quarter of Section 18, Township 19 North, Range 9 East of the Third Principal Meridian, now a part of the City of Urbana, in Champaign County, Illinois.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundary includes the city lots that have been associated historically with the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Sharon Irish, Architectural Historian

organization Channing-Murray Foundation date October 28, 1990

street & number 608 West Iowa telephone 217-328-6648

city or town Urbana state Illinois zip code 61801

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## SUMMARY

The Unitarian Church of Urbana (Channing Murray Chapel), built in 1908, is locally significant under Criterion C and Criterion Consideration A as an intact example of the standardized church plans from the American Unitarian Association "pattern book." Major architectural leaders, Nathan C. Ricker among them, were involved in the design of the church.

## Context

The Unitarian Church of Urbana is an extant example of an architectural type promoted and distributed by the American Unitarian Association (AUA), especially in the Midwest, to develop new congregations.

The architecture of the Unitarian Church of Urbana was consistent with a set of missionary ideals being promoted by the AUA at the time. The design for the building was derived from a pamphlet entitled Plans for Churches (AUA, 1903). The pamphlet was distributed free of charge by the AUA in 1902-03 to encourage the establishment of new churches, particularly in the West, and to set aesthetic standards for Unitarian missions. The designs promoted by the AUA were architectural expressions of the unity of secular ethics (the home) with religion (the church). This expression was visible already in the design of the Hinsdale, Illinois, Unitarian Church of the 1880's. The minister in Hinsdale, William Channing Gannett, helped design his church with a domestic scale and details to reflect the continuity of home and religious life. Gannett, who was prominent in the Western Unitarian Conference, was a correspondent and visitor to the Urbana congregation. He wrote essays on the development of architectural forms that unify the spiritual and domestic. Similar ideals also appear in the American Unitarian Association plan book and the Urbana Unitarian Church.

Jenkin Lloyd Jones, head of the Western Unitarians for many years, and incidentally, maternal uncle to Frank Lloyd Wright, dedicated a small Chicago church in 1887, saying that there would be no "Gothic pretentiousness [to] frighten away the mechanic and the seamstress...", and that "[Gothic] was very costly yet useless on week days; it promoted the sense of individual insignificance that served authoritarianism and medieval superstition..." (Lyttle, 1952, p. 160). Clearly he was arguing for a more human scale and less of the forbidding elements that were derived from the great cathedrals of Europe. Jones was probably the most influential Unitarian in the Midwest at the time. These comments on the effects of the built environment on the worship experience reflect a great sensitivity to architectural aesthetics. Architecture appropriate to Unitarian ideals, as expressed through domestic details and a human scale, was a significant feature of the architecture of turn of the century Midwest Unitarian churches. The Unitarian Church of Urbana is a representative example of this.

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The first example of the particular plan used to build the Unitarian Church of Urbana was the All Souls' Unitarian Church, built in Kansas City, Missouri, in 1905-06. The Urbana church was the next version built from these plans in 1907-08. The designer was Walter C. Root, the younger brother of the well-known John Wellborn Root of Burnham and Root in Chicago. Walter Root had worked for the Chicago firm from 1879-1887. Walter Root then managed the Burnham and Root projects in Kansas City, and established his own firm, Root and Siemens, in Kansas City by 1889. (Monroe, 1896). Root's All Souls' Unitarian Church burned in 1957. The Unitarian Church of Urbana, therefore, is the oldest extant example of this design. Photographs of the Kansas City church show that although the exterior look of the church, the scale and the plan were derived from suggestions in Plans for Churches (AUA, 1903) and were identical to the Urbana version, the interior was more opulent in its design than the Urbana version (see Illustration). The scale was domestic: a 1923 article states that the church was designed to fit in with the residential neighborhood in which it was built (*Kansas City Star*, 1923). The details were derived from the AUA's suggestions. The folding doors, window groupings and pew arrangements were the same in both churches.

There were several other versions of Root's design that followed. In Quincy, Illinois, there is a church of the same design as the Urbana church which is still in use. It was built in 1914 after consultation with the Urbana congregation. The Quincy church is also very similar to the Root design in Kansas City. Versions in Peoria, Illinois, Massachusetts and California are mentioned in the 1923 article (*Kansas City Star*, 1923), but have not turned up in photographs. However, a search of the photos of churches in the files of the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston yielded some close matches in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Duluth, Minnesota. Clearly these five churches represent an important pattern in the architectural history of America, demonstrating the AUA's successful dissemination of a church type.

The booklet distributed by the AUA presents eight model churches with ground plans, perspectives and practical advice on fundraising, building and decorating. Five of these model churches resemble the Urbana Unitarian church in plan or in details. Two are very similar in exterior treatment (see Illustration). Details which are intact in the Urbana church include, for example, the vertical sliding partition to divide chapel from parlor in examples two, three, four and five, the use of native stone, simply dressed, as mentioned on pages 6-7, 24 and 34 in the booklet, and the diamond leaded glass. Other aspects of the building that reflect the AUA influence include the corner location, low walls, the combination of wood, stone and stucco, tinted watercolor on the interior plaster, domestic scale and details such as the side parlor with a fireplace.

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While the Building Committee and the congregation agreed on the design of the Unitarian Church of Urbana, the committee decisions about the details did not always sit well with the rest of the members. The Plans for Churches (AUA, 1903) pamphlet stated: "The windows...have often been made hideous by the inharmonious colors of the glass used. Pale amber-colored cathedral glass, cut and leaded in diamond-shape pattern, ... is almost always appropriate." After the local building committee went to Kokomo, Indiana, to choose a fine handmade "cat's paw pattern" craftsman style glass, the congregation protested: "[A] serious point of controversy was the color of the window glass. In Dean Newcomb's words: ... 'the glass in place in full sunlight produces an effect far different than the samples from which the selection was made'" (Scott, 1957, pp. 9-10). The windows are sea green with an amber tint. Many said that the color was too green and not amber enough.

The AUA booklet also suggested that "the roof may be quite high, and it is recommended that the structural timbers be allowed to show inside" (AUA, 1903, p. 8). The Urbana Unitarian church followed this idea, even though the church from which their plans came had a flat plastered interior ceiling with enclosed timbers. Of all the architects involved, only Nathan Ricker objected to the open timber roof. Within a year of the construction, tie bars had to be added to the Urbana church to resist the roof's thrust (Scott, 1957, pp. 9-10).

The Building Committee of the Unitarian Church of Urbana included prominent professors of art and architecture at the University of Illinois, who were also founding members of the church: Nathan C. Ricker, Rexford Newcomb and Newton A. Wells. The committee chair, Nathan C. Ricker, Dean of Architecture and Fine Arts at the University of Illinois from 1873-1910, and of Engineering from 1878-1906, had designed many buildings on the original campus, some of which are still in use today. Ricker's works have been put on the National Register because of their significance to the history of architectural design and engineering in the United States. Ricker, the first graduate in architecture from an American public university (University of Illinois), also is recognized as a pioneer of architectural education. His organization of the University of Illinois architecture program featured hands-on learning in engineering and design.

Ricker was the director of the entire Unitarian Church construction project and, with charter member Newton A. Wells, he collaborated on the decoration of the Church. Wells also worked with Ricker on the stenciling and murals in Ricker's still extant Altgeld Hall of 1896 at the University of Illinois. Ricker first saw Wells' work at the World's Columbian Exposition. Wells had studied painting at the Academie Julien in France and became professor of the history and practice of painting in 1903, remaining on the faculty until 1919.

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Unitarian Church of Urbana

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From this professional relationship grew a friendship between Ricker, Wells and Rexford Newcomb that strengthened with their involvement in liberal religion and the construction of the Urbana Unitarian Church. Rexford Newcomb graduated in architecture from the University of Illinois in 1910 after studying with Ricker. In 1918, after teaching and studying Mission architecture in California, Newcomb returned to the University of Illinois as professor of architectural history.

Later, as Dean of Architecture and Fine Arts, Newcomb developed the architecture department into the world's largest at that time, boasting 372 students in 1927, which was twice as large as the next largest in the country (Newcomb Papers). Throughout his deanship he remained deeply involved in the church, reaching out to new audiences with his lectures and writings on spirituality in architecture and church architecture. Many of his ideas were first given expression at the Unitarian Church of Urbana.

#### Background on Unitarianism and the Unitarian Church of Urbana

**The Unitarian intellectual tradition embraced rationalism, science, and humanism, which influenced the ideals of Urbana Unitarians, among others.**

The Unitarians have been an intellectual force in the development of American thought. Emerson, Thoreau, and Jefferson were influenced by Unitarian thought and vice-versa. Ralph Waldo Emerson helped incorporate ideas of universalism (similarity of all forms of religion) into Unitarianism in the 1830s. He read the religious texts of other cultures, which influenced his writings on Transcendentalism.

By the late 19th century the American Unitarians, particularly those in the West, were defining the concept of religion more broadly than any other mainstream Christian denomination. "Orthodox" denominations generally defined the religious life in terms of a proper and harmonious relation to God. The Unitarians were much more likely to define the religious life in terms of a proper and harmonious relation to humanity, as an expression of the divine within the human. The term "humanism" is often used to describe this trend in religious thought. Through this principle, taking moral action in the world became more important for Unitarians than having pious thoughts. This idea generated many educational and social service projects which were direct expressions of the religious concepts of Unitarianism.

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In the Western Unitarian Conference (WUC) after 1850, Unitarians also equated the religious life with the human search for truth - be it scientific, spiritual, or social. Applications of scientific ideas to religious questions were well established in the WUC by the turn-of-the-century. The scientific search for truth and the moral service to humankind are reflected in the words and actions of the early congregants at the Unitarian Church of Urbana.

**The Unitarian Church of Urbana is a local and successful manifestation of an effort by the AUA to establish missions.**

During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the American Unitarian Association (AUA) supported missionary work in the west, particularly the Midwest, with only a handful of churches West of the Rockies. Illinois was in the center of this missionary field, and Chicago became the headquarters of the Western Unitarian Conference.

The Western Unitarian Conference (WUC) was a very independent branch of the AUA. The missionary strategy of the WUC was to spread Unitarian ideals to widely scattered settlements. This work consisted mainly of sermons and literature rather than financial support. The AUA's strategy for missionary work was different. Churches were established and supported financially in areas where they were most likely to succeed: mostly university campuses and growing industrial centers. The Unitarian Church of Urbana was this type of AUA project, with funding and leadership coming directly from the American Unitarian Association headquarters in Boston. But because the Unitarian Church of Urbana was so close to Chicago, the Western Unitarian Conference headquarters, many of the WUC's more progressive values influenced the Urbana congregation.

Campus ministry as a specialized type of ministry developed in the early 20th century to serve the newly-founded public universities. These tax-supported universities, primarily established after the American Civil War under the Morrill College Land-Grant Act (passed in 1862), provided a different approach to education than that of the older, church-based institutions of higher education. The public university curriculum gave equal weight to the sciences, technical studies, and the liberal arts. Many denominations viewed this secular, often technical, education as a threat to traditional values promoted by classical studies. The challenges of science and Darwinism to the authority of the Bible were of particular concern to these denominations.

This tension between church and public university was visible at the University of Illinois in the early twentieth century. As one of

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Unitarian Church of Urbana

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the first land-grant schools, the University of Illinois was firmly committed to modern, secular education. A Christian pastor in Champaign noted in 1925 that townsfolk still called the University of Illinois

"The Godless State University" (Holiman, 1984). In contrast, the Unitarians saw their denomination as able to make a unique contribution to the University of Illinois because of their philosophical belief that scientific inquiry and spirituality were interconnected.

The Urbana Unitarians saw the University as fertile soil for the establishment of a rational religious center. The Unitarian Church of Urbana was founded in this spirit, and explicitly supported the University's secular educational values in its campus ministry. Many campus ministry churches were planned and built during the first few decades of the century in the U.S., but the Unitarian Church of Urbana holds the distinction of being the first church at the University of Illinois - of any denomination - built specifically to house a campus ministry. The national AUA headquarters in Boston helped the Urbana Unitarians at every step, from selecting and paying the minister, buying the land and paying 75% of the building costs, to paying a part of the operating expenses until 1957 (Scott, 1957).

The Unitarian Church of Urbana was representative of missionary work on public university campuses both within the denomination and across denominations at the time. The difference in Urbana between the Unitarians and the Disciples of Christ, Methodists and other denominations being established at this time was that the Unitarians did not seek to counteract the secularism of public higher education. Instead they saw their religion as a refuge for students who were disoriented by a sudden exposure to scientific ideas which contradicted the Bible (Scott, 1957).

One of the most articulate supporters of this model of Unitarian campus ministry was a co-founder of the church, Professor Stephen A. Forbes (1844-1930). Forbes' agnosticism influenced the choice of wording of the covenant of the Unitarian Church of Urbana ratified on February 9, 1907, at a meeting in his home. It is noncreedal and does not mention God. The Unitarian church of Urbana covenant reads in part: "Avowing as the sole bond of our fellowship a serious purpose to lead pure reverent and useful lives, we seek together love which quickeneth service and truth which maketh free." (Covenant Book, 1907) By "service" the majority of the congregation meant service to mankind in education, charity, and social service. By "truth" they meant

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investigation of the great questions of existence with rationalism and scientific method. The church covenant is almost a direct quote from the Ethical Basis of Fellowship, a covenant statement developed in Chicago by the Society for Ethical Culture in the 1870's. This Society hoped to replace theistic ethics with humanistic ethics. The Society for Ethical Culture had ties to the Western Unitarian Conference through the conference secretary, Jenkin Lloyd Jones. Jones was in correspondence with Professor Forbes and had spoken in Urbana at Forbes' invitation in 1888.

Forbes' scientific ideals and principles were inseparable from his religious philosophy. He was Dean of Sciences from 1888-1906 at the University of Illinois. As a pioneering naturalist and entomologist, considered to be the "Father of Ecology" in Illinois, he founded the Illinois Natural History survey.

The ministry of the church provided spiritual, social and philosophic activities for a number of important persons at the University of Illinois who organized the Unitarian Church of Urbana as a religious counterpart to democratic education. The congregation represented over 1% of the university community, a percentage greater than the average distribution of Unitarians in America. In the first fundraising letter sent out by the Unitarian Church of Urbana, Professor Forbes spelled out their mission as such:

The new society is really a University church, counting among its regular attendants 36 members of the faculty.

We are convinced that a more strategic center for the spreading of liberal Christianity cannot be found in the Middle West. The University of Illinois is the most rapidly growing university of the country. Ten years ago (1897) the attendance was 600; today it is 4000. Its students come very largely from orthodox country districts in Illinois.... In the University and churches of the two cities, orthodox influences are practically supreme. The large number of students who are shaken in their childhood beliefs by scientific study, have hitherto had no place to turn for a new religion. Here is our opportunity to present a religion, born in the spirit of science, which shall satisfy their religious yearnings. The enthusiasm with which they attend our services assures us that we are meeting that need. As time goes on, a continuous stream of students will come to us with doubts and spiritual unrest, attend for a few years our services, and return to their homes established in a new religion and fired with the enthusiasm of a new gospel. We can scarcely calculate the influence of the college-trained young men and women in spreading liberal Christianity.

Ours is not a movement which will be confined to one community, but will minister from the entire Middle West and as the University grows, from the entire country.

(Scott, 1957, pp. 1-3, emphasis added)

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Many non-Unitarians responded to this call for a "religion born in the spirit of science". Financial contributors included President Edmund James of the University of Illinois, a sizeable donation from the University itself, donations from Senator William Mc Kinley of Champaign, the First National Bank of Urbana, the First National Bank of Champaign, Isaac Kuhn of the Sinai Temple in Champaign, and W. O. Davis, editor of the campus newspaper, the Bloomington Pantagraph, of Bloomington, Illinois, and a friend of Abraham Lincoln and a mentor of Rexford Newcomb (Scott, 1957, p. 8).

So it was not just the Unitarians who saw the need for a campus ministry which would support, rather than undermine, the public university. The University of Illinois not only contributed money, but also sold the Unitarians a corner lot adjacent to the central quadrangle of the university. Unitarian faculty members clearly had considerable influence at the University of Illinois in 1907.

The Unitarian Church of Urbana provided an alternative in Urbana because its ministry was ecumenical and international.

The church was the first religious center at the University of Illinois to accommodate international students and/or students of non-Christian faith. One reason for the successful outreach was because the minister from 1906-1918, The Reverend Albert R. Vail, was interested in comparative religion. Vail had just graduated from Divinity School, first attending the University of Chicago, where he became familiar with Western Unitarian Conference leaders, then attending Harvard, where he worked with the American Unitarian Association. He was sent to Urbana from Boston in September of 1906 as a missionary. Immediately he began Sunday morning religious readings and discussions in Morrill Hall until the Unitarian Church of Urbana was built. The religious readings often included Islamic writings, Hindu texts, and other scriptures as well as the writings of religious liberals of the day.

These religious readings attracted many international students to the Unitarian Church of Urbana. Their gatherings came to be called the Unity Club. One member was Rathindranath Tagore, son of the famous Indian poet and Nobel Laureate, Rabindranath Tagore. The younger Tagore became a student pastor to the Rev. Vail before he graduated in 1910. In 1906 Vail was the only religious leader at the University of Illinois who even attempted to understand non-Christian religious ideas.

About the same time that Rathindranath Tagore and his friend and compatriot, Santosh Majumdar, joined Vail's Unity Club, they also began meeting with the unique set of educators, students and citizens that became the "Tagore Circle", a society based on appreciation of the works of Rathindranath Tagore's father Rabindranath. This group had many of

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 10

Unitarian Church of Urbana

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the same members as the Unitarian Church of Urbana. Societies for the appreciation of Rabindranath Tagore were common by 1916, but then, in 1906, the poet was virtually unknown outside of India. This particular group was willing to accept a leader that was exotic in culture yet familiar in religious and social outlook.

In October of 1912 the poet Tagore, his son and daughter-in-law sailed for the U.S, arriving in Urbana on November 1, 1912. (*Daily Illini*, 1912) Rabindranath Tagore stayed at the house of Mr. & Mrs. Morgan Brooks, who were charter members of the Unitarian Church of Urbana. According to Mayce Seymour, Mrs. Morgan Brooks had even visited the poet in Calcutta. His son and daughter-in-law stayed with Professor Arthur and Mrs. Mayce Fries Seymour until the Tagore family could rent a house.

Rabindranath Tagore, the first non-European Nobel Laureate, established lasting ties with the Urbana Unitarian congregation. Tagore's first public lecture and reading of poetry in America was given on November 10, 1912, in the Unitarian Church of Urbana at the invitation of Reverend Vail. His audience included Unity Club students and members of the congregation. The success of this particular reading inspired Tagore to read at subsequent Sunday evening meetings every week. After that he read occasionally on such subjects as poetry and art, both at the church and at the Tagore circle meetings. Tagore remained in Urbana through the winter of 1912-13, and returned in 1916 and 1921. (Mukherjee, 1964).

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2

Unitarian Church of Urbana

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SECTION 9

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY NAME: Unitarian Church of Urbana

MULTIPLE NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: ILLINOIS, Champaign

DATE RECEIVED: 4/05/91 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 4/19/91  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 5/05/91 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 5/20/91  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 91000572

NOMINATOR: STATE

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT  RETURN  REJECT 5/13/91 DATE **Entered in the National Register**

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

acres  
UTMS  
verbal boundary description  
boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

sketch maps USGS maps photographs presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

RECOM./CRITERIA \_\_\_\_\_  
REVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_  
DISCIPLINE \_\_\_\_\_  
DATE \_\_\_\_\_

Signed

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

CLASSIFICATION

\_\_\_count      \_\_\_resource type

STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

FUNCTION

\_\_\_historic      \_\_\_current

DESCRIPTION

\_\_\_architectural classification  
\_\_\_materials  
\_\_\_descriptive text

SIGNIFICANCE

Period      Areas of Significance--Check and justify below

Specific dates      Builder/Architect  
Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

\_\_\_summary paragraph  
\_\_\_completeness  
\_\_\_clarity  
\_\_\_applicable criteria  
\_\_\_justification of areas checked  
\_\_\_relating significance to the resource  
\_\_\_context  
\_\_\_relationship of integrity to significance  
\_\_\_justification of exception  
\_\_\_other

BIBLIOGRAPHY

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

\_\_\_acreage      \_\_\_verbal boundary description  
\_\_\_UTMs      \_\_\_boundary justification

ACCOMPANYING DOCUMENTATION/PRESENTATION

\_\_\_sketch maps      \_\_\_USGS maps      \_\_\_photographs      \_\_\_presentation

OTHER COMMENTS

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to

\_\_\_\_\_ Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



Unitarian Church of Urbana

Urbana, Illinois      Champaign Co

Charles Guy

1990

Channing-Murray Archives

West Front



PRIVATE  
PARKING

NO TOLLS  
NO FEES  
NO RESERVATIONS  
NO CANCELLATIONS

PRIVATE  
PARKING

NO TOLLS  
NO FEES  
NO RESERVATIONS  
NO CANCELLATIONS

Unitarian Church of Urbana, east side  
Urbana, Illinois      Champaigne  
Charles Guy  
1990

Channing-Murray Archives  
East side

Unitarian Church of Urbana, east side  
Urbana, IL



Unitarian Church of Urbana  
Urbana, Illinois  
Charles Guy

1990

Channing-Murray Archives  
North Side



PRIVATE  
PARKING  
NO TRESPASSING

Unitarian Church of Urbana

Urbana, Illinois

Champaign W

Charles Guy

1990

Channing-Murray Archives

South facade



Unitarian Church of Urbana

Urbana, IL

@champaign il

Charles Guy

1990

Channing-Murray Archives

fireplace in fireplace room, looking west



Unitarian Church of Urbana  
Urbana, IL  
Charles Guy  
1990

Champaign Co

Channing-Murray Archives  
South wall of sanctuary, looking east



Unitarian Church of Urbana

Urbana, IL

Charles Guy

1990

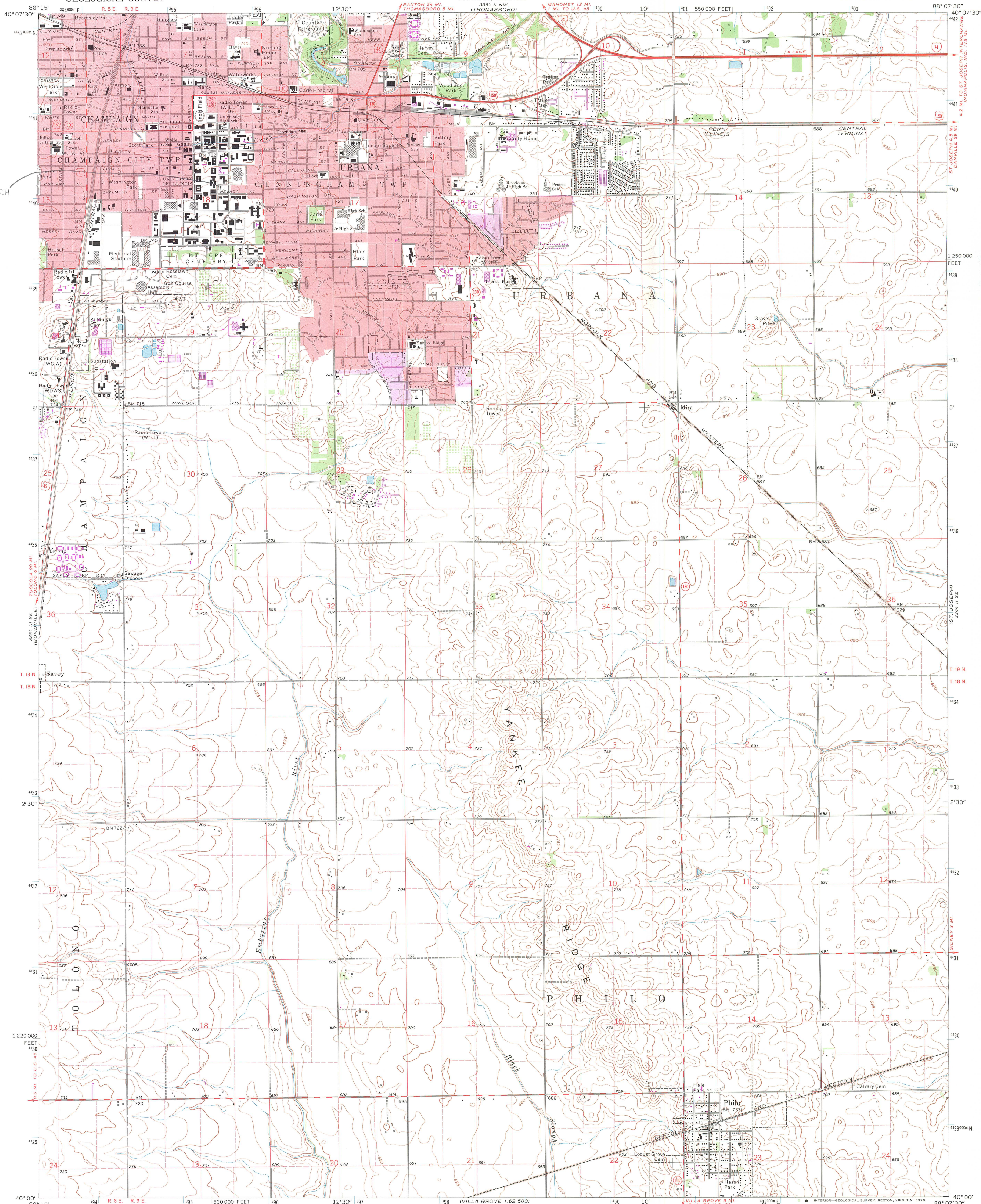
Channing-Murray Archives

Sliding partition between fireplace room and Sanctuary,  
looking north

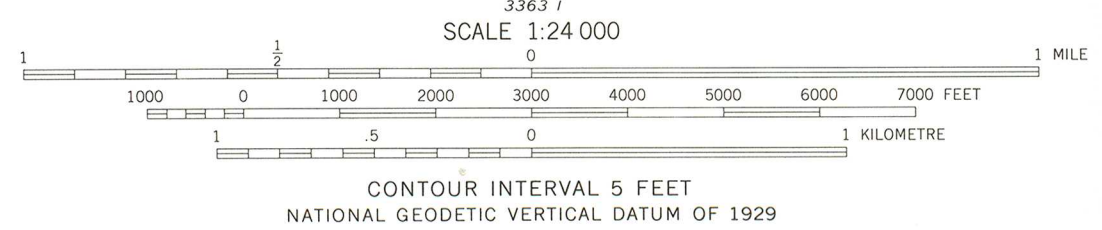
Sliding partition between fireplace room and  
sanctuary

Champaign

UNITARIAN CHURCH  
of URBANA  
Zone 16  
E 395590  
N 4440100



Mapped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey  
Control by USGS and USC&GS  
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs  
taken 1955. Topography by planetable surveys 1949-50 and 1957  
Revised from aerial photographs taken 1969. Field checked 1970  
Polyconic projection. 1927 North American datum  
10,000-foot grid based on Illinois coordinate system, east zone  
1000-metre Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks,  
zone 16, shown in blue  
Red tint indicates area in which only landmark buildings are shown  
Fine red dashed lines indicate selected fence and field lines where  
generally visible on aerial photographs. This information is unchecked  
Revisions shown in purple compiled from aerial photographs  
taken 1975. This information not field checked  
Purple tint indicates extension of urban areas



ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, all weather, hard surface	Light-duty road, all weather, improved surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface	Unimproved road, fair or dry weather

○ Interstate Route   ○ U.S. Route   ○ State Route

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, RESTON, VIRGINIA 22092  
AND BY THE STATE GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, URBANA, ILLINOIS 61801  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

URBANA, ILL.  
SW/4 URBANA 15' QUADRANGLE  
N4000-W8807.5/7.5  
1970  
PHOTO REVISSED 1975  
AMS 5364 11 SW-SERIES V863





**Illinois Historic  
Preservation Agency**

Old State Capitol Springfield, Illinois 62701 (217) 782-4836

Suite 4-900 State of Illinois Center 100 W. Randolph Chicago, IL 60601 (312) 814-1409

APR 05 1991

**NATIONAL  
REGISTER**

April 2, 1991

Beth Boland  
National Register Program  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
1100 L Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Beth:

Enclosed please find the National Register nomination materials and accompanying documentation for the following properties in Illinois which have been nominated by the State Historic Preservation Officer:

Columbus Park, Chicago  
Greene County Almshouse, vicinity of Carrollton  
J. H. Hawes Elevator, Atlanta  
Kenwood Evangelical Church, Chicago  
Price-Prather House, Williamsville  
Turner Town Hall, West Chicago  
Unitarian Church of Urbana, Urbana  
Washington Square, Chicago  
Chicago and Northwestern Railway Depot, Glencoe

Please note that a letter of objection from the private owner of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Depot was received. I have enclosed a copy of that letter.

I am also enclosing an addendum to the Historic Resources of the Chicago Park District Multiple Property Documentation Form, Section F IV. The addendum was reviewed by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council and signed by the State Historic Preservation Officer.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely yours,

Ann V. Swallow  
Survey & National Register Coordinator

encl.