



# THE COMMISSIONER

• Illinois Association of Historic Preservation Commissions •

[www.iahpc.org](http://www.iahpc.org)

Winter 2010

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## Rock Island's Great Unveiling

-Daryl Empen, Rock Island Historic Preservation Commission

For almost twenty years, the Great Unveiling event has been synonymous with the Broadway Historic District in Rock Island. Dozens of our turn-of-the-century homes have been restored to their original character, and a neighborhood has been revitalized in the process.

The Broadway Historic District encompasses 580 homes in the Mississippi River town of Rock Island. Many of these historic homes were covered over with artificial siding in the 1930s and 40s, with the promise of low maintenance. In Broadway in particular, many of these homes were also turned into duplexes and apartments over the years, and the neighborhood lost much of its character in the process. In the 1980s, a small group of dedicated homeowners decided to take action and bring Broadway back to life, by advocating home ownership and historic preservation. The Great Unveiling came out of this initial movement.



Typically in April of every year, neighbors gather to strip off the artificial siding from one to three homes. Thirty to forty residents gather with ladders, pry bars and hammers to tear off the aluminum, asphalt, or other siding. In recent years, the Association has rented a hydraulic lift to make the job easier. The work is swift, and the results can be

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*The Jackson House at 824 20th Street, before, during, and after renovation. The photo at bottom left shows the scar left on the historic clapboards when the original wide front porch was demolished at some point in the past.*



## IHPA and IAHPCC collaborate with our partners to plan Education and Outreach

Thanks to the scores of you who “followed the Monkey” – the Survey Monkey link -- and completed a short ten-point questionnaire to tell us about your needs and preferences for upcoming local historic preservation commissioner training. With input from Chris Morris from the Midwest Office of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and knowledgeable staff at Landmarks Illinois we created a survey to learn about the preferences, needs, successes and failures happening in your communities throughout Illinois. In response we have planned a daylong historic preservation training workshop event to be held on June 18th at Crystal Lake’s historic Dole Mansion in McHenry County. SAVE THAT DATE!

From data collected on the online questionnaire, which was accessible through Survey Monkey’s site, we learned that 52% of those who responded are volunteer appointees to their local HPCs, 17% are staff and 36% comfortably seem to fit both categories. A majority told us that their communities have faced political challenges; including overturned decisions, lack of support from elected officials, threat of amendments that could weaken their ordinance, budget issues and staff cuts.

The poll showed us that the most popular topics for training include: improving public perception; window repair vs. replacement; energy efficiency/sustainability; stimulus fund sources for historic buildings; public perception of the HPC and its authority; and design review challenges among other things.

Currently the biggest issues facing commissions are such things as: the commission's lack of real authority to designate landmarks and regulate appropriate alterations; ordinances that lack "teeth"; property value in historic districts; perceived building materials cost versus demolition ; budget, outreach and lack of funding; public perception, and education for local officials and the public.

Respondents also tagged window replacement/demolition; lack of resources, visibility and attitudes related to conflicting interests of city development and Historic Preservation (working together productively); finding developers to adaptively reuse historic properties; lack of grass roots preservation efforts in neighborhoods; and incentives for cash strapped homeowners to come forward, get reviews and do the right thing, as local challenges.

Our survey gave local commissions a chance to discuss their successes and horror stories such as: a last minute city council maneuver that caused a city wide historic survey to be cancelled; a historic parsonage house (bungalow, possibly Sears built) was demolished for a project that was never built -- the place where the building stood is now grass. One respondent wrote of the challenge of building a new "magnet" school on a property that connects two historic neighborhoods -- from site selection to building design to traffic flow, it is a story that has had its horrors and does not yet have a happy ending.

Occasional triumphs were also detailed: recently uncovered "lost" stained glass window in a church in a historic district was slated to be covered up again..." we were able to help them financially to put a custom storm window over it for protection"; creation of a preservation slide show that can be utilized for various public presentations in the community; landmarking over owner objection; saved house restored for international student housing; floors sanded, pressed metal ceilings saved, stainless steel kitchen! One community wrote of their success of using a not for profit intermediary to allow an owner to take a tax deduction by donating a building to the not for profit which then transferred ownership to a party interested in restoring the building (in which) "...window replacement issue came up...We worked with homeowner to get THEM to want to keep original windows instead of getting replacements." Hats off to them!

Thanks again to all who took time to respond – We look forward to seeing you on June 18th, For the one day HPC workshop where we’ll be looking at the latest in energy efficiency, alternatives to window replacement in older homes and be led in a seminar by Kevin Kirkpatrick of the Wilmette HPC, who will offer his expert “spin doctor’s” prescription for improving the public perception of your local historic preservation program. Registration information will be sent to all IAHPCC members soon, via email.

- Catherine O’Connor  
Editor

## The Commissioner

### Rock Island Unveiling Continued from page 1

brehtaking. Dozens of homes have been unveiled over the years. Photos of many can be viewed at [www.broadwaydistrict.org](http://www.broadwaydistrict.org).

After siding is removed historic clapboards mostly are in decent shape, as they have been protected from the elements by the artificial siding.

Often architectural details have been removed to create a flat surface for the artificial siding. Window sills and hoods, bell-curves along the baseboard, and crown moldings along eaves are typically removed or chopped off.

With the long history of the Great Unveiling, homeowners can have an idea of what they can expect to find and what they should be prepared to replace. Some homeowners begin work immediately, hiring a painting contractor and completing work before the summer is over. Others take on this task them-



*The small cottage at 835 19th Street, in Rock Island has had its charming gingerbread trim restored.*



*This late Queen Anne house and its 1920s-era porch at 921 21st St were given their character back.*



*The unveiling of this corner house at 1049 17th Street in Rock Island has had a huge impact on the neighborhood. Notice the architectural detail in the front gable that was hidden under the aluminum siding!*



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**Rock Island Unveiling** Continued from page 3

selves and may take several years to fully restore the exterior. But all the homes are brought back to their original glory, and all have helped restore the fabric of the neighborhood. More than any other event, the Great Unveiling has brought attention and momentum to the preservation efforts in Broadway.

Heavily promoted locally, the Broadway Great Unveiling has also been featured nationally and regionally in magazines such as *Old House Journal*, *Midwest Living*, *Historic Illinois*, Victorian decorating publications and on the PBS series *About Your House with Bob Yapp*. It is also referenced by other communities in their development studies, such as those by Carbondale, Beloit and Janesville. Wikipedia's segment on the Broadway Historic District even includes reference to the Great Unveiling program.



*This Dutch Colonial's original clapboards and cedar shingles had been hidden by aluminum siding for decades. The Great Unveiling has given back the historic character to the 800 block of 22nd Street.*

“Isn't it amazing what Broadway created with the Great Unveilings?” said Missouri-based historic preservation consultant Bob Yapp just last month. “Everywhere I go folks have used the title for their unveilings. Some have read articles, some saw it on my PBS program and others just word of mouth. The early Broadway pioneers deserve much credit for the entire unveiling phenomenon across the country.”

To learn more about the Broadway Historic District, and the Great Unveiling, check out our website at [www.broadwaydistrict.org](http://www.broadwaydistrict.org) and click on the Great Unveiling link at the top. You can find a much more detailed history about this event, and photos from recent homes. Also check out the Gallery of Renovation link to see more unveiled homes, and before and after photos of dozens of restored homes.

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## **HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE ECOLOGY OF ABSENCE?**

The Ecology of Absence project documents the disease and treatment of the abandonment of the built environment. Its creator and editor is Michael R. Allen, an architectural historian currently serving as director of the Preservation Research Office, a technical assistance and preservation consulting firm. Allen also serves on the boards of the St. Louis Building Arts Foundation, North Newstead Association and Preservation Action.

Ecology of Absence originally was planned as a book about the social and ecological lives of abandoned places in the metropolitan area of Saint Louis, Missouri. The project quickly grew into a website and blog, which present visual and textual information in an attempt to portray abandonment as a systematic occurrence, shaped by political decision-making, economic circumstances and natural forces. Ecology of Absence also documents the recovery and demolition of buildings, and other matters pertaining to architecture and development in and around St. Louis, East St. Louis and other places.

The EOA website and blog <http://ecoabsence.blogspot.com> aim to reveal the odd interaction of social and ecological forces that lead people to build, abandon and reclaim buildings and structures. It draws upon the fields of history, urban archaeology, ecology, sociology and architecture to investigate the troubled urban areas of the Midwest. Send submissions to [michael.ross.allen@sbcglobal.net](mailto:michael.ross.allen@sbcglobal.net).

## From the President's Desk

### -How is Zoning used for Preservation?

The City of Urbana, Illinois has a Mixed Office-Residential (MOR) zoning district in our West Urbana Neighborhood within which are mostly historic but non-designated homes.

This is an underlying zoning district which allows an entire range of residential plus small-scale businesses and offices within buildings constructed as single-family residences. The floor area ratio requirements do not allow lots to be combined to create larger buildings. (See Section VI-3.D of the zoning Ordinance, [http://www.city.urbana.il.us?URL=/urbana/community\\_development/planning/zoning/main.html](http://www.city.urbana.il.us?URL=/urbana/community_development/planning/zoning/main.html))

Design review is required in the district but is not preservation-based, except that there had been an incentive (administrative design review) for the adaptive reuse of buildings. The (This was recently changed to the board reviewing all exterior changes.) The MOR Development Review Board is also granted with the power to grant some minor variances without also having to go to the Zoning Board of Appeals. (See Section XI-12 of the Zoning Ordinance. Although the City has demolition delay requirements within residential zoning districts, buildings in the MOR district can be replaced.

Here's some background. The City's 1950 Comprehensive Plan called for a roughly 20-block area, within walking distance of the University of Illinois campus, to be rezoned from single-family and duplex to apartment zoning. This was because the city then had an acute housing shortage, and City leaders then saw rundown housing (i.e. wonderful but tired Victorians, etc.) as needing replacement. The area was then rezoned to apartments. Over the decades, homeowners felt like they were being squeezed out by apartment houses (usually houses converted to apartments rather than new apartment buildings.) In the 1990's, a large and detailed study was conducted to study rezoning the neighborhood back to single-family. (Downtown to Campus Plan.) Probably two-thirds of the area was rezoned to single-family. About ten blocks, though, were large, historic homes which could not easily be used for single-family purposes. (For one thing, family size since the 1950's had shrunk.) The Mixed Office-Residential Zoning District was created to allow a broader range of uses which were believed to be compatible with the residential character of the neighborhood.

In 2007, the American Planning Association named the West Urbana Neighborhood as one of Ten Great American Neighborhoods. <http://www.planning.org/greatplaces/neighborhoods/2007/westurbana.htm>

*-Robert A. Myers, AICP is the Planning Manager for the Dept of Community Development Services in Urbana and Chairs the IAHP Board. Reach him at [ramyers@city.urbana.il.us](mailto:ramyers@city.urbana.il.us), (217) 384-2440*

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## New MDCR Historic Landscape Preservation Bulletin Now Available

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) is pleased to announce the publication of [Terra Firma #8 – Rooted in History: Preserving Historic Farms](#). Working with Commissioner Scott Soares of the MA Department of Agricultural Resources, Department of Conservation and Recreation developed the bulletin to broaden public understanding of farms as historic landscapes and to build a bridge between agricultural protection programs and historic preservation tools.

The Terra Firma bulletins can be downloaded at <http://www.mass.gov/dcr/stewardship/histland/publications.htm>. Paper copies are available upon request by calling 617-626-1389 or emailing [wendy.pearl@state.ma.us](mailto:wendy.pearl@state.ma.us). Individuals will be asked to send in a postage-paid self addressed stamped envelope to cover the \$1.22/bulletin cost for mailing (Mailing address: Wendy Pearl, DCR, 251 Causeway Street, Boston, MA 02125). Complimentary copies have been sent to legislators, historical commissions, agricultural commissions and planning boards.

## SOCIAL NETWORKING SAVES THE DAY

Here's a tale of how speedy email saved a historic tree in the quaint burg of Kewanee, Illinois. Even though the tree is not a beauty, and its location is not scenic, this story has a happy ending due to the diligence of a dedicated arborist and the speed of email communication.

*"I have some bad news. The city of Kewanee will take down the big hedge tree on Tuesday. Safety hazard they say."*

The osage-orange tree is the lone survivor of a hedgerow planted c. 1840, a concept promoted by Illinois College professor Jonathan Baldwin Turner that became the shelterbelt system saving America's soils from the Dust Bowl of the 1930s. Because of its significance, Illinois arborist Guy Sternberg led a rally to preserve the 170-year-old tree.

Guy first heard of the tree's fate on Nov. 21 from the email quoted left, just days before its scheduled removal. He quickly forwarded the email to 250 of his 'green' contacts and asked, "How many of you ...can jump on this, contact Kewanee, and help persuade them to step back and think it over a little more?"

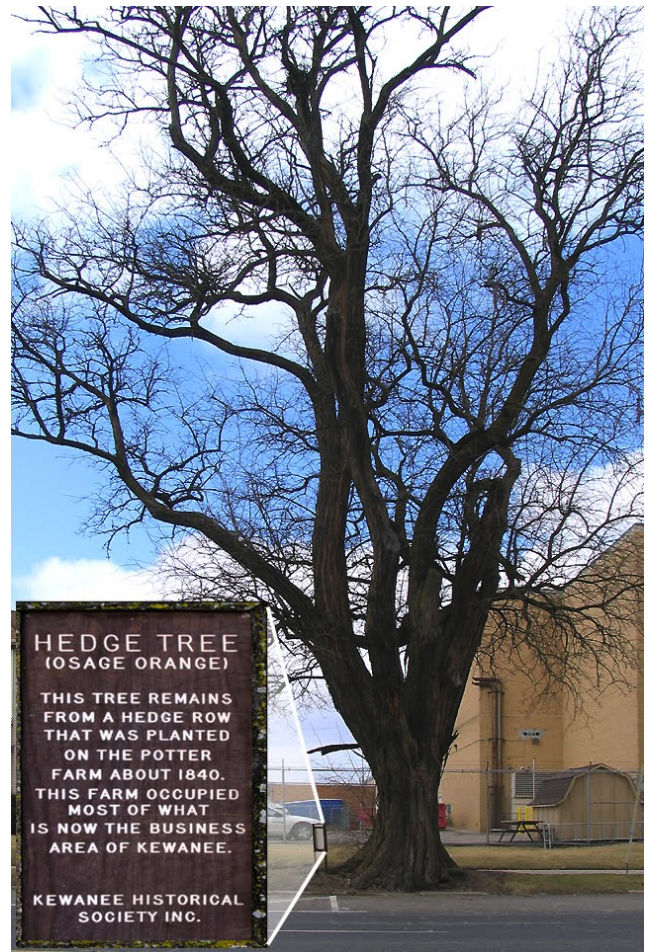
How many? He received about 50 emails within a 48-hour period, and the city received about 40 emails from arborists, forestry professors, and other professionals contributing their expert opinions and support. Others from across the country offered the city donations and technical assistance to help preserve the tree.

At the end of the two-day email blitz, the tree was saved.

The campaign to preserve the tree branched out into other forms of electronic communication. Two blogs, one on the *Better Homes and Gardens* website and another on the *Plantra* website, include pictures of the tree after safety pruning on November 24. Also online are articles from the *Star Courier* newspaper and three podcast interviews with Guy Sternberg recorded on the Home Grown Tomatoes channel at Justin.tv.com. The tree even has its own "Save the Osage-Orange Tree in Kewanee, IL" Facebook page with over 130 fans, including the mayor of Kewanee. Donations to the "Kewanee Osage-Orange Fund" are also accepted through PayPal.

Preservation of a historic tree such as the osage-orange is just short of a miracle. Trees are among the least-understood historic features, often removed because of safety fears or to make way for new construction.

If not for the Internet, would the tree have been saved? Perhaps...but it's doubtful. The speed of electronic communication quickly brought together a qualified and committed community ready to address the city's safety concerns and provide assistance for the tree's long-term preservation. So, how rare is this? Tell us how electronic communication has saved your day.



*In Kewanee an official bank account was established for this endangered Osage-orange (hedge) Maclura tree when Mayor Bruce Tossell joined forces with the Chamber of Commerce and the local bank, motivated by an outpouring of support via the Internet.*

## The Commissioner

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### Editor's Best Bets – Check These Out

+ **The Window Wars:** preservationists must educate + advocate + demonstrate, by Ron Emrich, Preservation New Jersey Executive Director. At <http://preservationnj.wordpress.com/2010/01/10/the-window-wars-preservationists-must-educate-advocate-demonstrate/> Emrich says this: Weatherization is the hot “green” topic these days, and policy makers, including President Obama and many others, are touting the job creation benefits of heavily promoting installation of new energy-saving products such as new windows, and discarding the old. For preservationists, discussion of weatherization – which we definitely want to promote – unfortunately includes having to debunk myths and undo the public’s advertising-fueled false assumptions. While former Oregon gubernatorial candidate and replacement window company executive Ron Saxton participated recently in a White House forum on “green jobs” creation, we have to work ever harder to persuade NPR, the U.S. Department of Energy and even Al Gore that actually the most economically and environmentally responsible way to weatherize a building probably includes retaining the existing windows. Good grief, there’s even an online video game promoting green buildings that starts out by awarding points for ripping out existing windows and replacing them! (Don’t play this game, BTW.)

+ More on “**Cash for Caulkers,**” or rather, “**Vying for Vinyl.**” Oy vey! From NAPC’s Paul Trudeau, a Program Specialist for the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions at the University of Georgia, who was a guest blogger on *The Green Preservationist* blogsite <http://preservegreen.wordpress.com/>. Here you’ll find some excellent prose about why **repair trumps window replacement**.

+ Preservation Magazine’s Editor James Schwartz Debuts on Fox Morning News -- The National Trust for Historic Preservation and James Schwartz, their camera-ready editor-in-chief, educated Fox 5 viewers on the benefits of weatherizing historic homes for winter. From caulking to audits to making the most of historic windows, James’ tips save both energy and money. Check out **online videos** of the pieces that aired recently. **Home Weatherization:** [http://www.myfoxdc.com/dpp/mornings/holly\\_live/holly-morris-home-weatherization-011310](http://www.myfoxdc.com/dpp/mornings/holly_live/holly-morris-home-weatherization-011310).

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### New guide to improving energy use in historic structures released...

A new publication from Clean Air-Cool Planet is designed to help historic district commissions and other local organizations and property owners make historic buildings more energy efficient. *Energy Efficiency, Renewable Energy and Historic Preservation: A Guide for Historic District Commissions* details in 40 pages ways to employ energy efficiency measures and renewable energy without detracting from the historic value of properties, from private residences to community buildings and museums.

“A large proportion of the buildings in the U. S. are considered historic, whether they are officially designated or not,” said Anne Stephenson, Ph.D., who oversaw the preparation of the Guide. “Unfortunately, there is a perception that those properties cannot or should not be made energy efficient.

“That’s an ironic attitude, considering that some of our more efficient and climate-wise building practices were common in colonial times,” Stephenson said. “This guide revisits some of the lessons old buildings can teach us and provides a bridge over the perceived divide between preservationists and those concerned with climate and energy issues.”

More than 15 percent of buildings in the U.S. were built before 1939 – with a much higher percentage in the East – and most buildings constructed before 1850 were not designed to be heated or cooled with fossil fuels.

“We know that more than 20 percent of energy use in this country comes from the residential sector’s heating, cooling, and electricity use,” said Clean Air-Cool Planet CEO and President Adam Markham. “This guide addresses ways to make a significant portion of that housing stock – particularly in the energy-poor northeast – more efficient and affordable.

The Guide and this story are available from the Clean Air-Cool Planet website at [www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/for\\_communities/HDCGuide.pdf](http://www.cleanair-coolplanet.org/for_communities/HDCGuide.pdf).

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## Upcoming Events

### April 10-13

APA National Conference  
New Orleans, LA

### April 28

10 Most Endangered Historic  
Places in Illinois Announcement  
Springfield, IL

### May is Preservation Month

*Old is the New Green*, info @  
[www.preservationnation.org](http://www.preservationnation.org)

### May 2-5

National Main Streets Conference  
Oklahoma City, OK

## SAVE THE DATE

### June 10-12

AIA National Conference  
Miami, FL

### June 18

IHPA Preservation Commission  
Workshop, Lakeside Legacy Center  
Crystal Lake, IL

### July 28-Aug 1

NAPC Conference  
Grand Rapids, MI

### September 22-24

APA Illinois Conference  
Bloomington/Normal, IL

### October 2

2010 RH Driehaus Preservation  
Awards  
Chicago, IL

### October 20-23

Traditional Building Expo and HPC  
Seminars  
Chicago, IL

### October 27-30

National Trust for Historic Preserva-  
tion Conference  
Austin, TX

### November

AIA Illinois Conference  
Dates and Location TBD

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## The Commissioner

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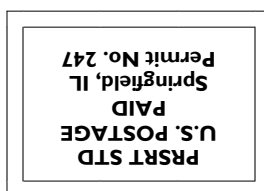
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Michael R. Allen, of the Preservation Research Office; the National Trust for Historic Preservation; and Landmarks Illinois.

*The Commissioner* is a membership benefit.

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