

THE FIRST BUILDING OF THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS

On July 3, 1862, as a part of the celebration of the Centennial of the Land Grant Act of 1862, a bronze tablet was dedicated on the Campus of the University of Illinois. It was on the south-east corner of University Avenue at Wright Street, and notes that immediately south and east where the baseball diamond is situated was the site of the original building of the University of Illinois.

The University registered the first students in the newly chartered Illinois Industrial University on March 2, 1868. The University property consisted of a considerable amount of land, but only one building, a five story structure erected as the "Urbana-Champaign Institute" over a period of about seven years from 1860 to 1867. This structure, started as a real estate promotion scheme with private funds, was purchased by the county, and used as an integral part of the offer made by Champaign County in its attempt to secure the location of the new university to be chartered under the terms of the Land Grant Act of 1862.

While the story of the legislative actions involved in selecting a site for the new Agricultural and Mechanical University in 1867 is long, complicated, and at times amusing and amazing, there can be little doubt that the existence of a building in Champaign County had a great deal to do with the award of the location to Champaign County.

THE ORIGIN OF THE URBANA AND CHAMPAIGN INSTITUTE

On or about January 20, 1859, there appeared in Urbana and Champaign, a certain Jonathan C. Stoughton of Aurora and Freeport. A minister and real estate promoter, the Rev. Stoughton met with a group of citizens to propose the erection of a seminary of learning. His proposition was based on what he described as strictly business. If he could purchase about 200 acres of land between the two towns *at a reasonable price*, he would set aside ten acres for a seminary, erect a building at a cost of \$60-80,000, donate the building to the community, and make his costs and profits from the sale of lots subdivided from the rest of the land. There were some added elements of a "company" whose stockholders were to get preferred treatment in the choice of lots but the stock subscriptions were to secure an advance fund of some \$40,000 to begin the work on the seminary immediately.

Dr. Charles A. Hunt of Urbana became Chairman of a Committee which was actively interested in the project. But Dr. Hunt had bigger ideas than just a "seminary". He had followed the difficulties of the proposed "Land Grant Act" in Washington, and while it seemed to be having its troubles, felt sure that agricultural universities were coming. He had the vision that the "seminary" might become the "agricultural college". Dr. Hunt even went so far as to send a resolution proposing this to the Illinois Legislature in 1861.

PROGRESS OF THE INSTITUTE

During the summer and autumn of 1860 preparations went forward looking toward the start of the new seminary building. But the Civil War started in 1861; the progress on the seminary was discouraging, in fact was delayed almost entirely until the summer of 1862. Collections, sales, and building were moving very slowly, and the promoters were discouraged.

However, the local citizens were more active. On February 21, 1861, the Illinois Legislature granted a Charter incorporating the "Champaign-Urbana Institute" for the purpose of "establishing and maintaining a seminary of learning comprehending an agricultural or other departments as the public may demand". Then in rapid order came the passage of the Land Grant Act on July 2, 1862, the acceptance of the Act by Illinois on February 14, 1863, and on December 12, 1864, a meeting of the Rev. Stoughton with the citizens including the incorporators of the seminary, when he offered to sell all of his interests to the county which could then use them in their effort to secure the new University. A week later, on December 19, 1864, The Champaign County Board of Supervisors voted to buy out the Rev. Stoughton. For practical purposes, the County took over, and the building on which some \$75,000 had been spent, plus ten acres of land around it became the property of the county and ready to become a part of the Champaign County offer to the state for the location of the new institution.

FROM 1864 TO 1867

After the acquisition of the building by the County, it became a major element in the effort to secure the location of the University in Champaign County, being included in the offers to the State in 1865, and again in 1867, when the location was made. Following the action of the Legislature placing the University

in Champaign County, it was reported at the second meeting of the Board of Trustees on May 7, 8, 9, 1867, that "the County of Champaign had conveyed to the Board of Trustees of the Illinois Industrial University by good and unincumbered titles, the Building and Grounds known as the Urbana and Champaign Institute. . . ." Thus, the project which started with Rev. Stoughton as a seminary became the first, original, and only building of the Illinois Industrial University when it opened in 1868.

THE OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION OF THE INSTITUTE

A joint committee of the Legislature visited Champaign County in January of 1865 to investigate the community as a site for the proposed new University of Illinois. In its report to the Legislature it described the building:

"The Urbana and Champaign Institute is a substantial brick building, with stone foundation, standing on a beautiful elevation of ground, about one-half mile from the Illinois Central railroad at Champaign City, and about an equal distance from Urbana, the County seat of Champaign County. The whole structure is beautiful in its architectural proportions, and very imposing in appearance.

"The main building is 125 feet front, by 40 feet in depth, and five stories high. From the center a wing projects, 44 by 70 feet, four stories high. The front wall has a projection eight feet by forty, with pilasters and towers ornamenting the corners. The stories are from 10-14 feet in height. The inside of the building is unfinished, and may be somewhat modified from the original plan if desired as to size and number of rooms.

"The original plan contemplated some 85 or 90 dormitories or students' rooms, 10 by 15 each with suitable rooms for the principal and professors, large and commodious recitation, painting, and society room, ample dining room and chapel with basement, kitchen, and cellar, halls, and storage rooms, amounting in all with accommodations for from four to six hundred students. Accommodations for a much larger number of day students could easily be provided by reducing the number of dormitories. The walls are without crack or blemish, and the whole structure is very substantially built. The building is under the contract to be wholly finished, complete and entire at the expense of the county in the early part of the coming summer".

THE BUILDING WAS THE UNIVERSITY

During the first five years of its operation from 1868 to 1873, the Urbana and Champaign Institute Building was the University of Illinois. It contained all the class rooms, the offices, the meeting rooms, and also served as a dormitory building. Tuition was \$15 a semester, and student rooms rented for \$4.00 per semester. The student had to furnish his own coal or wood for heating his room. (Note the numerous chimneys). By 1871, it was apparent that the one building was inadequate, and University Hall was started, being completed and opened in 1873. A small Drill Hall and Mechanical building was also finished in 1872. With the opening of University Hall, the use of the old original building began to decline. It was not well built, and in 1880 when it had been nearly abandoned because of serious depreciation, it was damaged seriously in a windstorm. It was torn down in 1881, and its rubble dumped in the foundation for what is now the baseball diamond. It didn't even live to see the "Illinois Industrial University" become the University of Illinois in 1885.

THE URBANA-CHAMPAIGN INSTITUTE

The Urbana-Champaign Institute Building is the 21st in our Illinois series. The picture we used appeared in the (Champaign) Gazette in its issue of Thursday, November 30, 1868. In the newspaper, it gave every appearance of having been printed from a wood block carrying the signature "Bond-Chandler". We have had no success in identifying the maker but the article accompanying the picture in the newspaper described it as a "magnificent structure" and urged the citizens to "give the University your hearty and active support. . . . It remains now to make it a power for good in our midst by hearty attempts to fill its halls with our best and most promising young men".

Our copies were printed by hand from wood cuts on tulip wood blocks. In the campaign to secure the location of the University in Champaign County, the Institute building was derisively termed "The Elephant", but we believe you will agree that in its way and for its time, it had a certain charm. We have wanted to include it in the series and have saved it intentionally for 1966 just before the beginning of the Centennial Year of the University of Illinois in 1967-68.

FRED AND BETTY TURNER

Christmas, 1966
Urbana