

History of Thomas Franks Family and Home

The Franks House was probably constructed around 1872 with later additions up to around 1895. Bowman's Map of 1858 shows the block bounded by Maple, Randolph, Vine and Neal streets as unplatted with C.F. Columbia's name written across it. This block was a special assessor's subdivision that was developed much later than the rest of Columbia's holdings in the area to the west and north; perhaps he was speculating on the construction of an east-west railroad. In fact, three railroads would eventually build tracks and stations immediately north of Maple Street: the Wabash Railroad; the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad; and the Havana Line of the Illinois Central Railroad. By 1871 the block had been platted into lots and Columbia sold lots 4, 5, and 6 to James M. Ralph on March 31 for \$1,500. (1) Ralph, in turn, made a quick profit by first selling lots 5 and 6 to Thomas Franks for \$600 per lot twelve months later and then lot 4 for another \$600 on July 3, 1873. (2)

Thomas B. Franks was born in Westbury, near Bristol, England, on February 8, 1844 and was apprenticed in the landscaping trade. He left England for Canada at age 21 and landed in Quebec in 1865. From there he immigrated to the United States to work on Chicago's new Lincoln Park. According to his obituary in the *Champaign Daily Gazette*,

When Lincoln Park in Chicago was being laid out Mr. Franks went to Chicago and was employed on the park work for several months. While employed there he was recommended to the trustees of the University of Illinois for head gardener and he accepted the position and was listed as a member of the faculty. Mr. Franks came to Urbana at the end of the first term of school and remained there for three years before moving to Champaign to engage in the greenhouse business. (3)

J. S. Lothrop's Champaign County Directory of 1870-1 lists Franks as the University Gardener and Florist living south of University Avenue in the University Gardens. (4) His house was on the site of Engineering Hall and was later moved south to the University farm. (5) His obituary details some of his work for the University that included laying out the grounds of Illinois Field and also supervising the planting of the present [1916] forest. Students had to work two hours each day under him and among those workers were Prof. I.O. Baker, Prof. N.C. Ricker, and Dr. T.J. Burrill. (6)

His position with the University is further substantiated in *The Movement for Industrial Education and the Establishment of the University, 1840-1870* which states Professor of Agriculture Willard F. Bliss took over the development of the University's agricultural properties in March, 1869 and under him was, "an Englishman, Thomas Franks, appointed by the board with the title of gardener to the university." (7) About the time he joined the staff of the new university, Franks married Anna M. English, of Lancaster, Wentworth County, Canada. (8) According to her 1901 will, Mrs. Franks inherited money from her father, which she invested in Champaign property. (9) It is conceivable that it was her inheritance that allowed the Franks to buy the Randolph Street property and to build the large greenhouse complex within three years of arriving in Champaign.

Franks purchased the property between Maple and Vine streets on the east side of Randolph Street in 1872 and established Champaign County's first greenhouse. (10) By August he was advertising bulbs and flowering plants at his greenhouse (11) and he was soon listing both his business and residence on the 1873 Champaign County Map, "THOMAS FRANKS, Landscape Gardener and Florist a full assortment of bedding plants, flowering shrubs and evergreens kept constantly on hand - residence and green houses,

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FOUR BLOCKS NORTH of BARRETTS HALL, on Neil St. Champaign, Illinois.” Thus his home and business were clearly in place on Randolph Street by 1873, and in 1879 his son George was added to the family. The home and business were continually modernized. City water in a ¾” galvanized line was run to the home in 1886; (12) and quite likely possibly wired for electricity from the power lines of the main trolley line, which ran down Neil Street just one block to the east. (13). The original 5 rooms of the home were piped for gas lighting when they were built. The piping is still in the walls and ceiling. Physical changes were also made to the residence. This appears in all of the original rooms. (13) Physical changes were also made to the residence. The 1892 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map (see attached map) shows the greenhouse complex with a single long greenhouse near the east edge of the property, on the north end of which was the heating plant (steam heat with coal fuel) with a 35-foot brick chimney and two heaters. Attached to the heating plant was a one-story frame building, in two sections, that abutted Maple Street and extended to the west; to the south of this building and adjacent to the west side of the heating plant was a long building with an attached greenhouse that ran east-west. This section in turn was connected to a glass roofed "L"-shaped segment that had three greenhouses adjoining on the south; altogether, the greenhouses created a "U"-shape. In the "L" was the office in that in turn was connected to the residence.

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On the front page of the *Champaign Daily Gazette* of May 15, 1891 appears the following article (spelling and punctuation remain as originally published) –

Probably no man in Champaign has had a harder row to hoe, and howed it more successfully than Thomas Franks, the florist, and certainly there is no man in the city who can show a better example of what hard

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work and untiring energy will do toward helping a man in his struggle in life. When the University of Illinois was located in this city, Thomas Franks came with it as florist and gardener. He arranged all the shrubbery at the campus, where the original building stood. He stayed in the employ of the state for three years and at the end of that time, backed up by his energetic disposition he resigned and embarked in the florist's business. Nineteen years ago Mareschal Neil roses, at 10 cents apiece, were not a thing which the people thought that they needed, but Mr. Franks has, to a great extend, differently educated them by this time judging form the hundreds of dollars worth of flowers he sells every month.

A reporter for the Gazette called on him yesterday evening, with a view to giving his business such a write up as it deserves. He was found in his always pleasant mood, and was not ashamed to tell of by-gone days and what a struggle he had to build up a paying business. About 19 years ago he bought the lots where he now is, his first green-house being a small affair, 12 by 25 feet; but at the time he found even this too large for the exceedingly small trade which he got. He was compelled he said, to seek outside employment in order to live. When he had finished his story he said, with an air of pride, "now follow me and I will show you what has grown out of that 12 by 25 house". He led the way into a little glass house which he termed his tropical house. "Here", said he, "is where I keep all my valuable tropical plants. Among the collection I have certain varieties which are seldom found in green house outside of the big cities."

On entering the place the reporter's eye struck a pair of Sago palms, which he thought he would like to buy, but Mr. Franks said they were not for sale. He had been offered \$150 for the pair. Mr. Franks said he had had them 12 years and then they were old plants. He keeps them for decorating purposes and sells the leaves at \$1 a piece. He has certainly made hundreds of dollars out of them in the time mentioned. Here were also seen many members of the Orchid family, a rare plant, which is seldom seen outside of large cities, and certain varieties of these have been known to sell for many hundreds of dollars. Then there was an India rubber tree, fan palms, plants from the South Sea Islands, the screw pine and all such odd varieties, and the surrounds, combined with the owner's interesting lectures, would make one imagine that he had been transported from Champaign to the tropical regions.

From this interesting place he went to the green house proper, covering a space 20 by 75 feet. This house is filled with a general stock and the visitor can walk down the passage ways and see plants from the East and West Indies, China, Japan, Egypt, all parts of Europe and in fact from all over the world. One of the most interesting plants in this house is a Mareschal Neil rose bush, which measures three inches at the butt and is 15 years old. During its stay here it has furnished thousands of fragrant roses for the wedding, the funeral and the sick room alike. Tropical fruits in blossom, green and ripe are also to be seen here. In this house there are many steam pipes and during the coldest days in winter the temperature is kept at 75 degrees. The system of ventilation is also splendidly arranged.

The next house contains carnations and many hundreds of other varieties. The curiosity of this house is the Passion flower, from South America. They are a rare plant. This is heated the same as the first house and had the same ventilation appliance.

The next house is that in which he keeps his finer grades, such as the La France and American Beauties, which retail for 75 cents apiece; also the Catharine, Mermet and Bride's, the former being a beautiful light pink flower, while the latter is a pure white. On one side of this house is the home of succulent plants from the cactus family in numerous varieties.

The last house visited was the new rose house, which is 20 by 75 feet. It is occupied exclusively by roses of which there are over 700 bushes, whose yield is great, the rose selling at ten cents apiece, but still with this great number he cannot supply the demand.

Another interesting place is the prophofating house, where he starts all his plants, they being just twigs and leaves set out in pure sands, and after they root they are transferred to pots. The heater room, from which this vast area of glass garden is warmed has a Haxton heater of two boilers which force the steam through

thousands of feet of pipe to all parts of the place, and during the winter 120 tons of coal are used by the heater. The trip is now completed, after a visit the seven green houses 20 by 75 feet and passing under 7,000 feet of glass. This is one of the largest concerns of the kind in Illinois, and neither Danville nor any of the other cities surrounding Champaign, have nothing which will compare with it. As an evidence of this fact Mr. Franks has control of the trade for a radius of 50 miles around Champaign and gets many orders from larger cities. The grounds surrounding the houses are a perfect Garden of Eden, and not a dead blade of grass can be seen. Mrs. Franks is also a great worker in the business and she greatly has helped to make it the concern it now is. Thousands of dollars have been expended by the owner and things looked pretty discouraging sometimes, but he is now reaping his harvest, and has made for Champaign a green house which is equaled by few. There is no business in Champaign that can be spoken of more flattering than that of Mr. Franks.

Just a year later the May 23, 1892, the *Champaign Daily Gazette* states on page one, "Thomas Franks, the florist, has completed, and is now moving into another new greenhouse, exclusively for roses. This new house is 95 feet long . . . With it, Mr. Franks now has nine houses and one of the largest establishments of its kind in Central Illinois." The article goes on to suggest the reason that Franks would later abandon the north Randolph Street area, "He has added new houses from year to year, being compelled to do so by the remarkable growth of his business, until now he has only enough space left to add one more small house. He is at a loss to know what to do when this space is covered. " A month earlier in the April 28, 1892, the *Champaign Daily Gazette* appeared the following Urbana announcement, "Thomas Franks, the Champaign florist, opened his branch green house on the lot west of Clark & Saffels marble works, today. " This is the north Goodwin site. By 1910 the City Directory would list Franks and Son retail on University Ave in Champaign and the wholesale operation on Goodwin in Urbana; however both Thomas Franks and his son George are still listed as living at the residence at 704 N. Randolph in the same directory.

In 1892 the house had a slightly smaller and different footprint than the current building with a one and one-half story section near Randolph Street, whose ridge ran north-south. A porch extended across the south end and covered a small one-story wing on the southeast corner, attached to which was a long one-story section that connected on its east end to the corner of the office. Between these two southern one-story areas and a smaller slightly "L"-shaped one-story section on the north, near Maple Street, was a large wing that connected with the office and the west end of the house. The "L"-shaped section had an inset porch facing east and on the west it also connected to the main north-south one and one-half story section.

By 1897, the entire greenhouse and residential complex had been enlarged (see attached map). A long greenhouse was added along the south side of the original complex, thus enclosing the "U" and creating an open square; an additional greenhouse was placed inside the square along the side of the easternmost original greenhouse. The residence was expanded with the addition of a wing that projected west from the main north-south section and the north "L"-shaped one-story section with inset porch was remodeled into a one and one-half story section without the inset porch, but with a small porch in the southeast corner next to the office. Moreover, the long one-story section that connected the front porch and the office is now depicted as glass roofed.

By 1892 the Franks had purchased additional land on East University just west of the Boneyard Creek (204 E. University) for another greenhouse and florist operation; the Randolph Street complex was

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abandoned by 1901. (14) The 1902 Sanborn Map confirms this as it shows only the house remaining. All the greenhouses, the office section and the southeast corner of the residence were removed. Anna Franks died in November 1901, and in her will she left all her property to her siblings in Canada with a small bequest to her son George. A later codicil had revoked her bequest of the use of the E. University property to her husband Thomas. Although the records are incomplete, it appears that the will was contested on the grounds of her mental instability, and her son George seems to have inherited most of the property. (15) However, the lots that contained most of the greenhouses were not sold until May 1920 and November 1923. (16)

Records show that Thomas Franks constructed the single family home at 108 W. Vine on property that he owned in 1900-1901. (17) However, Thomas and George continued to live in the Randolph Street house and ran the E. University greenhouse; in 1909 they opened a "big supply plant on North Goodwin Avenue, Urbana."(18) Thomas married a widow, Jennie Murphy, a childhood acquaintance he encountered
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on a trip to England in 1902; she died in 1908. (19) George married Janet Styles in St. Louis in 1913 and they moved to 111 West Vine. Apparently, Thomas moved in with the young couple as the *City Directory* of that year shows all three living together in the Vine Street house.

Thomas Franks was one of the earliest Champaign Park Commissioners. He was a commissioner at the time the concrete walks and fountain were placed in West Side Park and spent considerable time supervising the work. (20) Thomas Franks' credentials clearly recommended him for the Park Commission. His actual length of service has been lost with the rest of the City records from this time; however, it can be documented that he was serving on the Commission at least as early as 1892 and that he was the Chairman of the Board of Park Commissioners in 1898. (21) In 1892 an article appeared that suggests that if Franks was not the Chairman of the Commission in this year he was still very influential. It in part reads, "People of the East Side are getting more interested as to the welfare of their park, recently given by J.R. Scott ... Some days ago Thomas Franks was taken out to the new park, and he made a small diagram showing how the work of setting out the trees should be begun. (22) From this it might be inferred that Franks should rightfully be credited with the original layout and design of Scott Park.

Planning for the sidewalks in West Side Park was occurring in the early part of 1898. (23) Work started on the sidewalks in the fall of 1898 with awarding of the contract to P.E. Taintor of Springfield. (24) The work continued into 1899 and perhaps longer. As reported in April 1899 "The excavation has just been finished for the curve from the intersection of State and West Park streets to...Prairie street and University avenue ... this is the only one of these curves that will now be put in (25) The work on the fountain was not underway until 1899, "The excavation has progressed so far for the fountain in the park, that the laying of the stone in the foundation can begin next (soon)."(26) In 1900 the concrete curbing was still being installed. (27) Additionally two later articles from 1900 discuss the fountain, the first stating that in July, 75 to 100 gold fish were installed in the fountain. The second states that in November of that year, "the fishes, thirty in number, were taken out carefully and transferred to water in Thomas Frank's greenhouse to spend the cold months. "(28)

From this evidence it is clear that Thomas Franks' was influential on the Champaign Park Commission as early as 1892 and was still actively involved in 1900. Since the official city records are lost

and the Champaign Park District's records do not start until 1914, the full extent of Thomas Franks' commitment to Champaign and its open places will never be known. At least part of this time, he was the chair of the commission. During Thomas Franks' tenure, planning and work began on Scott Park as well as the design and development that has made West Side Park a focal point for the community for nearly 100 years. These two parks, especially West Side, are testimony to the enduring service of Thomas Franks to the City of Champaign.

Besides his service on the Park Commission, Thomas Franks was also a member of the Elks and a life-long member of the Episcopal Church, although he served for 15 years as the choir director of the First Presbyterian Church in Champaign. (29) He became a naturalized United States citizen in 1890. (30) Once established in the United States, he sponsored both of his sisters, Mrs. Sarah Ann Franks Frost and Elizabeth Franks Strode, to this county and both settled within a few blocks of 704 N. Randolph. Mrs. Strode came with her husband, George Strode, a local businessman for many years. (31) Thomas Franks died on October 18, 1916 at the home of his sister, Sarah Frost; his funeral was held at his son's home at 111 Vine Street.

While developing his greenhouse business, Thomas Franks also launched, in 1890, what became a major annual event, The Chrysanthemum Show. The first show was held in November of 1890. (32) The next year he was advertising "Frank's Chrysanthemum Show at the Walker Opera House" (formerly located on the northwest corner of Neil and Park streets). (33) By 1892 the *Champaign Daily Gazette* was reporting, "The opera house was transformed into a flower garden and it was a decided change to walk from a muddy street into the midst of a chrysanthemum show. The flowers made a pretty picture under the rays of the gas and electric lights ... In the center was a pyramid of tropical plants, among them being palms, rubber, orange and banana trees. Near each corner of the floor space were great groups of blooming chrysanthemums, and it was in these that the ladies found most delight ... Each year these shows grow more popular with the people." (34)

By the fourth year of the show, 1893, the paper reports, "There were ladies from Paxton, Kankakee, Homer, Monticello, Farmer City, Mansfield, Tuscola, Arcola, Rantoul and Tolono....." And that over 800 people attended the event. Later it states that Thomas Franks, "promises something even nicer next year, but it is not easy to see how he can bring it about. What he has now done seems to be quite up to the capacity of a town of this size. But the Twin Cities are never satisfied till they have done things up on a genuinely metropolitan scale." (35) Then a year later, the paper reports, "Several hundred people visited the Walker yesterday evening, sipped chocolate, listened to the music made by the Ladies Mandolin and Guitar Club and feasted their eyes on the finest collection of chrysanthemums Franks has yet made ... It was beyond question one of the nicest shows ever made by Franks, or any other florist in ... Illinois," (36) A year later there is an announcement about the upcoming show. (37) After 1895 no information has been found about the shows.

His son George worked with his father in the greenhouse business, joining the family business around 1908. He took over the business after his father's death, but gave it up in 1931. (38) By then George Franks had been a city alderman for six years (1911-1917) and was involved in the new commission government. George held the job of commissioner of public safety for ten years and in 1927 he was elected mayor. He ran on a platform that was against a two million dollar beautification improvement of the Boneyard; it was under his administration, however, that the railroad viaducts were constructed. (39) After four years as mayor (1927-1931), he started an insurance business and was head of the Franks-Tyler insurance agency at 110 1/2 N. Neil Street. George Franks died in 1959. (40)

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When the Franks moved to 111 West Vine Street, the Randolph Street house was left vacant according to the *City Directory* of 1912. By 1914 the Franks had leased the home to William and Sally Leer; William worked for the City. After Thomas Franks' death, George sold the property to Josephine Glouser in 1918, who lived there at least through 1922.⁽⁴¹⁾ The record is not clear as to what happened between 1918 and 1924 because George sold the property again in 1924 to Benjamin Snooks for \$3,500; Snooks was a carpenter. ⁽⁴²⁾ In 1925 the Snooks took in a boarder named C. D. Kelley. Mr. Snooks died at 704 N. Randolph in 1926 and his widow sold the home to G.R. Parker in June, 1926. ⁽⁴³⁾

Parker was a bachelor and never lived at 704 N. Randolph. The *City Directory* for 1927 shows the house as being vacant. In August 1927, Parker sold the property to George and Lella Taylor.⁽⁴⁴⁾ Mr. Taylor was also a carpenter. On June 11, 1928, the Taylors obtained a mortgage from the Urbana Home Loan Association on the south 70 feet of lot 6 in the amount of \$5,000. This suggests that Mr. Taylor was building the brick bungalow that is now 702 North Randolph. ⁽⁴⁵⁾ In 1928 the *City Directory* lists the Taylors living at 704 Randolph along with boarder Daisy Lustz, a maid at the Beardsley Hotel. In 1929, the *City Directory* lists 704 as vacant and the Taylors are living at 702 N. Randolph.

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The public record shows that the Taylors sold the remaining north half of lot 6 containing the Franks home to John and Clara McTaggart on December 31, 1927.⁽⁴⁶⁾ Over the years Mr. McTaggart is listed in the *City Directories* as working at the University of Illinois (dairy department) and then as a farmer. Along with John and Clara, the directories show both Edwin C. and Francis McTaggart living there in 1920 and 1931; Francis worked at the soda fountain at the Peoples Pharmacy. In 1938, Charles B. McTaggart, the display manager at W. Lewis and Co., is listed along with John and Clara; Laurence J. McTaggart, a student, and his wife Helen are also living there. In addition, all through the 1930s the McTaggarts had boarders living at the house. John McTaggart died in April, 1950. ⁽⁴⁷⁾

Widow Clara McTaggart sold 704 N. Randolph on July 1, 1953 to Hobart and Mary Peer, who never lived at the house. ⁽⁴⁸⁾ The *City Directories* show that it was rented by the Peers as a single family home to various married couples until 1960. The 1961 *City Directory* lists four different tenants and this is consistent with the recent use of the property as the house is currently divided into four apartments. In 1970 the Peers sold the house to D.M. Withers. ⁽⁴⁹⁾ Withers sold the property on Contract for Deed to Allan and Julie Jenkins. They stopped paying on the contract and Withers foreclosed obtaining a clear title to the property. For a period of time the great granddaughter of Thomas Franks negotiated to obtain the property but ultimately decided against the effort. Withers died. The executors of the estate contacted Michael Markstahler about purchasing the property. Markstahler purchased the property in the fall of 2001. He is currently remodeling the property into two townhouses using the original stairs and the later added 'maid's' stairs for the two townhouses.

Architecture

The Thomas B. Franks House is a one and one-half story, frame dwelling with intersecting asphalt shingled gable roofs. Stylistically, it is a Queen Anne-influenced T-plan building with a large rear wing. It rises from a painted (red) brick foundation with a wood watertable and drip cap; the clear poplar clapboard walls are defined by corner boards. The one-over-one and four-over-four double- hung windows have simple wood surrounds with drip caps; however, most are currently boarded. Decorative shingles in unusual arrow and round patterns are located in the gables which have molded rake boards that end in ornamental scroll-sawn stops set over scroll-sawn eave brackets; the overhanging eaves are open. The house is sited high on a rise; the widening of Randolph Street removed a major portion of the west and

north lawns which were replaced with a concrete sidewalk and tall concrete retaining wall with integral concrete steps. The front lawn has a gravel driveway and parking area with a neighboring house (702 N. Randolph) set between the Franks House and Vine Street. Unimproved Maple Street and the historic Wabash Railroad tracks are to the north of the house, while vacant land and other neighborhood homes are to the east and southeast respectively.

The main or south elevation of the Franks Residence is dominated by a one-story shed roof porch. The circa 1920s-style porch has tapered wood posts set on high brick pedestals, a concrete floor, and a solid concrete parge balustrade. This balustrade may not have been original. The entrance faces south and is placed to the east along the face of the porch. It has modern concrete steps. Above the porch is a single upper story window that interrupts the line of the frieze, thus placing the lower half of the window in the clapboard wall area and the upper sash in the gable. Attached to the frieze and flanking the windows' surround are very unusual and decorative scroll-sawn half-round stops that extend down the length of two clapboards. The gable has the decorative shingles, rake boards, stops, and brackets described above.

To the east of the porch is a recessed large poured concrete porch. Behind this is a story and a half with two windows to the east; set above and to the north of the shed roof is an upper story portion that has a central wall gable with paired windows and the same decorative details as the other gables. A small upper story window is set in the west corner. Two doors are in this face. One is a main entry to what is the new parlor and the east door opens into the new kitchen.

The west or Randolph Street elevation has a T-plan with a slightly lower gable roof projecting pavilion off-set to the north. The pavilion has paired windows centered on the first story and a through-the-frieze window similar to the south elevation set above. Details of the gable also correspond to those of the main facade's gables except that only the arrow shingle pattern is used. Single windows face south and west in the south corner created by the projecting pavilion and the main block; the north corner has only a window facing north. Blind clapboard walls are above these windows and terminate in overhanging open eaves.

Continuing around the house, the north elevation is "L"-shaped with two almost equal-sized sections. The west half has a wall gable at the west end with two windows on the first story and the same upper window and gable details as the other two elevations. A single window is to the east on the first story and there is a small rectangular sash set to the immediate east of the wall gable and directly below the eave. The east half of the elevation projects to the north and also has a wall gable at its west end. This gable has similar decorative shingles as the other gables, but with paired windows. On the first story is one large single-light window.

A single large gable elevation faces east, the first story of which has a single central window with a slightly lower single window at the south edge of the building. Above is a center four-over-four window with another single window to the south. This gable is plain without the shingles, frieze, rake boards, and decorative elements seen on the other elevations; it has only a single center two-light rectangular sash. A covered brick bulkhead is off-center to the north and there is a single basement sash near the north corner.

The residence is covered by a complex roof comprised of intersecting gables at various heights. The main ridge runs north/south with a slightly lower gable pavilion off-center (to the north) on the west side. Although the roof is now covered in asphalt shingles, the original wood shingle roof is still in place.

The east gable section of the house is slightly taller than the main ridge and has a small gablet with just the vestige of shingle sheathing facing west; there is a parged ridge chimney.

The T-Plan and Queen Anne Architectural Style Influence

T-Plan: Even though the Franks House has quite fine Queen Anne details, it is a vernacular T-plan building type. The term vernacular denotes buildings that do not have the characteristics or elements of any specific architectural style, although they may exhibit stylistic elements with a few details or in their massing; this is denoted by the use of the term "influence." Usually vernacular buildings are designed by craftsmen who follow their own building traditions or were influenced by local climate and/or the availability of certain building materials. This is in contrast to architects or builders who followed contemporary architectural fashions and who built in the prevailing style.

Building type is defined by the structure's function, floor plan, configuration (shape), number of stories (height), chimney location, roof shape and window and door placement (50) The T-plan building type is closely related to the L-plan and Gabled Ell type. It is usually one-and-one-half or two stories, with various orientations toward the street, and has a gable roof. Unlike the Gabled Ell, the ridgelines of the roof do not have to be at the same height. Porches are often located in one or both of the reentrant angles. (51)

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The Franks House seems to have been constructed almost organically and combined the functions of residence, office, and greenhouse complex. It has also been altered over the course of the years with the addition of a bungalow-influenced front porch, c. 1920, and the removal of the large greenhouse complex in 1901. However, it displays many of the aspects of a T-Plan building type, especially as viewed from Randolph Street.

Facing Randolph Street is a prominent wing that projects west from the main north-south body of the house, giving the building its prominent T-shape. It is one and one-half stories high with unequal ridgelines. Its porch, however, is not in the reentrant angle, but stretches across the south elevation. Many decorative Queen Anne details have been added to this vernacular building type resulting in a quite elegant example of a Queen Anne-influenced T-plan dwelling.

Queen Anne: From about 1880 to 1900, the Queen Anne architectural style was the dominant style of domestic building in the United States, and with lesser influence, through the first decade of the twentieth century. English architects, led by Richard Norman Shaw (1831-1912), named and popularized the style. It actually has little to do with Queen Anne or the formal architectural styles that were popular during her reign, but rather is more closely related to late Medieval buildings and a range of sources including Classical, Tudor, and Flemish architecture. Introduced to the United States at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, the style was seen as being a tremendously free and eclectic hybrid of forms. (52) Early American examples in half-timbered and decorative masonry are closer to Shaw's work than later frame buildings with spindlework or classical detailing; these are indigenous interpretations with ornate spindlework examples dominant during the 1880s and more classically detailed buildings widespread in the 1890s. Most spindlework examples have turned porch supports or balustrades and frieze details suspended from the porch ceiling. Such detailing is also found, however, in gables and under the wall overhangs left by cutaway bay windows. (53)

The 1874 half-timbered Watts-Sherman house in Newport, Rhode Island, is usually noted as the first American example of the style. Other high-style examples followed, and by the 1880s the style was being spread and popularized throughout the country by pattern books and the first architectural magazine, *The American Architect and Building News*. Expanding industrialization and railroad networks helped increase the market by making pre-cut architectural details conveniently available. (54)

The Queen Anne style emphasized human scale and domestic comfort. Variety was its hallmark with asymmetrical massing a principle feature. Residential examples are almost always irregular in shape with an assortment of textures and contrasts. Variety was achieved through the use of materials such as clapboards, shingle siding, brick, terra cotta, stone or a combination of two or more of these materials. Bay and oriel windows, overhangs, and roof gables as well as towers or turrets engendered asymmetrical massing that was furthered by full-width or wrap-around porches. Flat wall surfaces were taboo. Roofs were steeply pitched and irregular with combinations of hip and gables, often sheathed in slate or multi-colored and patterned shingles, with roof cresting or finials and prominent chimneys. Windows were often decorative with stain, leaded or etched glass being common, but huge, machine-made panels of clear glass in one-over-one double-hung windows were widely popular. (55)

The Franks House has many Queen Anne characteristics such as its asymmetrical shape, steeply pitched gable roofs with a variety of ridge heights, and variety of textures: brick, clapboards and shingles. It is in the detailing of the gables, however, that most of the stylistic elements are found. The gables on the Franks House are very decorative with wood shingles in unusual arrow and round patterns and molded rake boards that end in ornamental scroll-sawn stops set over scroll-sawn eave brackets. Attached to the frieze and flanking windows that interrupt the frieze are very unique and decorative scroll-sawn half-round stops that extend down the length of two clapboards. This particular detail has not been observed on any other house in the community. Since the windows are currently boarded, it is hard to determine the exact style and type of windows that are in place; however, neighborhood memory recalls large one-over-one double-hung windows and at least two multicolored leaded windows on the north elevation. Both of these window types are typical elements of the Queen Anne style. The porch on the house appears to date from the 1920s, but is in the same configuration as that shown on the 1890s Sanborn Maps. Unfortunately, any decorative spindlework detailing that might have been on the porch has been removed, to be replaced with a porch more in keeping with the bungalow house next door. It would be interesting to speculate if the porch remodeling was done in conjunction with the construction of that building.

Construction History

The original house was a story and a half north south orientation with a one room east west on the east forming the "T". The home was constructed with a full basement. The two-story section was two room down and one large common room up. The upper room was accessed by the stairs, which are still in existence. To the east was a one-story kitchen. This makes the original home four rooms. Original construction was wood balloon frame with the clapboards applied directly to the exterior and the 1" sub-sheeting boards installed on the interior of the framing. Over these boards were first installed a heavy paper and then wallpaper. Most likely the north room, which was directly off of the kitchen and has a butler's pantry under the stairs was the original dining room. This would mean that the south room would have been the parlor. The two windows on the south appear to be original. There is not evidence of an original door to the exterior on this south face. This suggests that the original entry door was on the west or the north. However with the obliteration of the original north wall and a portion of the original west wall in a subsequent remodeling we cannot know.

Later an addition was added to the east of the kitchen. At this time a second sleeping area was added over the original kitchen and the east addition, which was the new kitchen. At this time it is likely that the old kitchen was converted to a dining room. It is likely that at this time the original fireplace in the old kitchen was walled up. Perhaps at this time also the original large second floor room was divided into two rooms.

Later an addition was added to the north of the east wing. When this was added the roof was raised and extended out over this new north addition. This addition added two stain glass windows a formal dining room and stairs leading directly from the new dining room to the new east sleeping rooms. This suggests that a live in maid was now in residence.

Perhaps at this same time or a bit later additions were added to the original four rooms on the west. A two-story bump out was added on the west and the north wall of the original two-story portion of the home was removed and an addition of approximately 8' was added. It is likely that at this same time the Victorian double fireplace was also added in center of the original two-story section of the home. This is probably the time that the walls in the two lower rooms in this section were lathed and plastered.

This was the last expansion of the home with the exception of the big south porch. This is when the Queen Anne shingle patterns were added, as this is when all of these gables were built. A south facing second story dormer in the east 'T' section must have been added also at this time.

At some time a covered hallway was added parallel to and adjacent to the east of the original stairs. It is clear that this hallway's purpose is to provide a direct outside access to the original kitchen. This was mostly likely done when this old kitchen became a dining room. This hallway kept traffic out of what must have become the more formal rooms on the west and allowed direct access to the upper floor from the kitchen and dining room area.

The final addition was the big porch on the south. This is also when the basement got a direct access under roof. Prior to this time the basement had only an outside cellar door access. This was likely in the same location as the existing stairs to the basement. The low headroom at the bottom of these stairs suggest a shorter access at one time. The door leading out of the south face of the original kitchen would have provided easy access to food goods stored in the basement and accessed by an outside cellar door adjacent.

The east wall of the main stairs was the original outside wall. With the addition of the hallway for access to the dining room the wall moved to the east side of this hallway. With the addition of the porch the outside wall moved again to its present location.

Summary

The Franks House is fairly unique within its neighborhood, commonly called the "Sesquicentennial Neighborhood" for its history as the oldest residential area within the City of Champaign, not only because it was the home of an early business entrepreneur and civic-minded individual, but also because of the integrity of its architecture. The vernacular "T"-plan building type is rare

within the boundaries of the neighborhood (Neil, Lynn, Church, and the railroad tracks) and is infrequently seen on the neighborhood's outskirts. A tour of the neighborhood finds only six other T-plan examples, but the integrity of all of these examples except one has been compromised. 510 W. Columbia is a single story house with wide artificial siding and porch changes; 508 W. Columbia is covered in asbestos shingle siding and has had modern porch alterations; 408 W. Columbia is a gable front T-plan that also has artificial siding. Two houses on W. Vine Street are T-plans, 404 and 410, but both are covered in artificial siding. The only other good example of a T-plan building type within the neighborhood is 603 W. Columbia, a two-story clapboard house with a Colonial Revival-influenced porch that appears to be younger than the Franks House, C. 1885; however, no research has been undertaken to document this structure. In startling contrast to these T-plan houses, the Franks House still retains its 1870/1890s integrity with the residential floor plan intact, original poplar clapboards and decorative shingles exposed, and beneath the boards, the original wood windows/frames in place. Even the alterations that have occurred to the house are historic changes having taken place in 1901 (removal of greenhouses) and c. 1920 (porch change).

Aside from being a good example of a T-plan building type that has been unaltered since the 1920s, the Franks House exhibits characteristics of the Queen Anne architectural style that should not be ignored. Currently these features are obscured from the casual viewer because of the use of a monochrome blue paint scheme, but close examination reveals a variety of textures: clapboards and shingles, both arrow and round ended patterns, and brick that is used on the exposed foundation. Ornamental rake boards end in scroll-sawn stops and there are decorative scroll-sawn brackets below the eaves. One detail that appears unique to the Franks House are the half-round stops that flank the upper story windows and interrupt the frieze; these stops continue down the length of two clapboards. In addition, the steeply pitched gable roof and large one-over-one windows are Queen Anne elements. Except for the absence of a scroll-sawn porch (which was probably replaced with the current c. 1920s style porch), this house would have been classified as a Queen Anne building instead of a T-plan and one with a high degree of architectural integrity.

Although the Franks House is not an example of an architecturally high-style house, like those along University Avenue or around West Side Park, it is a good example of a vernacular building type with very unusual and well-executed Queen Anne details. Within its setting, the Sesquicentennial Neighborhood, the house is both architecturally and visually important as a rare example of a building that has not been altered since the 1920s and that sits along a very busy street, clearly visible to both vehicular and pedestrian traffic. Added to this architectural importance, however, is its clear association with Thomas Franks, an early entrepreneur in Champaign who established the first commercial greenhouse and florist operation in Champaign County. For over twenty-five years, that operation was conducted at the Randolph Street site, and was later expanded to two other sites in Champaign and Urbana. The business itself lasted until 1931. Mr. Franks also had connections with the early years of the University of Illinois and was responsible for the design of Illini Field and the development of the forestry lands. His community service is still admired by those who use West Side and Scott Parks, as Franks was also responsible for laying out both parks and the siting of the Prayer for Rain statue during his service as a park commissioner. The house at 704 N. Randolph Street was also the birthplace of a mayor of Champaign, George Franks, who was partially responsible for the construction of the railroad viaducts through Champaign in the 1920s, a civic improvement that we still enjoy. The house's connections with these two Champaign citizens, one of whom was a pioneering businessman and the other a civic-minded mayor, makes it deserving of landmark status.

Endnotes

1. Deed Book 21, page 356.
2. Deed Book 33, page 26 and Deed Book 38, page 424.
- Ohio Historic
3. "Thomas Franks, Old Resident, Expired Today," *Champaign Daily Gazette*, 18 October 1916.
4. *J.S. Lothrop's Champaign County Directory of 1870-1*, (Chicago: J.S. Lothrop, compiler & publisher, 1871); Maxiprint reprint, 1975, 324.
5. "Franks Funeral to be held on Friday," *Champaign Daily News*, 18 October 1916.
6. "Thomas Franks," *Daily Gazette*.
7. S. Burt E. Powell, *Semi-Centennial History of the University of Illinois, Volume I.- The Movement for Industrial Education and the Establishment of the University 1840-1870*, (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1918), 321.
8. The couple was married on July 9, 1869. Anna or Annie English was born on May 2, 1850. "Mrs. Thomas Franks Dead," *Champaign Daily News*, 9 November 1901.
9. "Will of Annie M. Franks," *Champaign Daily News*, November 1901, in the "Franks Family File" of the Champaign County Historical Archives collection. Annie Franks owned the property at 606, 703 and 715 N. Randolph and 108, 109 and 111 West Vine, and 204 E. University, all in Champaign.
10. "Thomas Franks," *Daily Gazette*.
11. *The Champaign County Gazette*, 14 August 1872.
12. Records of the Northern Illinois Water Company, 201 Devonshire Drive, Champaign.
13. "Urbana and Champaign Railway, Gas and Electric Company," in J.R. Steward, editor, *A Standard History of Champaign County Illinois* (Chicago: Lewis Publishing Company, 1918), 349. For information on early electricians see the biographies of S.D. Greshams, Clarence A. Loyde, and George Alexander Way in J.O. Cunningham, editor, *Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Champaign County*, Vol. It (Chicago: Musell Publishing Co., 1905). For a depiction of where the street car lines were located see the "Outline Street Map of Champaign Illinois," copyright by Geo. A. Ogle and Co., 1913.
14. "Thomas Franks", *Daily Gazette*
15. Champaign County Probate Court Records, #2668 and #2672
16. Deed Book 179, page 143 and Deed Book 190, page 624.
17. *Daily Gazette*, 28 December 1900, page 2.
18. "Thomas Franks," *Daily Gazette*.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. *Daily Gazette*, 4 June 1892, page 1; 26 May 1898, page 4.
22. *Daily Gazette*, 4 June 1892.
23. *Daily Gazette*, 19 August 1898, page 5,
24. *Daily Gazette*, 16 September 1898, page 4.
25. *Daily Gazette*, 22 April 1899, page 1,
26. *Daily Gazette*, 14 April 1899, page 5.
27. *Daily Gazette*, 8 September 1900, page 2.
28. *Daily Gazette*, 16 July 1900, page 4; 12 November 1900, page I
29. Ibid.
30. Naturalization File, Folder F in the collection of the Champaign County Historical Archives.

31. *Daily Gazette*, 13 December 1900, page 1; 25 November 1936, page 6.

32. *Daily Gazette*, 11 November 1890, page 1.

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33. *Daily Gazette*, 9 November 1891, page 8.

34. *Daily Gazette*, 18 November 1892, page 1,

35. *Daily Gazette*, 10 November 1893, page I

36. *Daily Gazette*, 21 November 1894, page I

37. *Daily Gazeue*, 23 October 1895, page 5.

38. "Franks Says 20 Years in Public Life a 'Great Education for Any Man'", undated newspaper article in "Franks Family File" of the collection of the Champaign County Historical Archives.

39. "Former Mayor Franks, 79, Dies," 3 April 1959, unmarked newspaper article.

40. Ibid.

41. Deed Book 170, page 614 dated 7/1/1918; (Trustees Deed to John Beers, Book 244, page 247 dated 7/1/1918; mortgage dated 7/1/1918, Deed Book 212, page 233; Quick Claim Deed back to Franks, Deed Book 180, page 224); 1922 *City Directory*. In addition to Mrs. Giouser, D.H. and Daisy Merritt resided there in 1919. Mr. Merritt delivered for Lillard and Getman. In 1921 Walter and Bendela Haines are at 704. In 1922 along with Mrs. Glouser, Alga and Eva Buckner, John Swartz, Mrs. Anna Hall, and R.K. Kaunse lived in the house. Mr. Buckner was a grinder for Cushman's and Mrs. Hall was a nurse.

42. Deed Book 193, page 567 and 1924 *City Directory*.

43. Deed Book 201, page 281 and *City Directories* for 1925 and 1926.

44. Deed Book 207, page 300.

45. Deed Book 298, page 295.

46. Deed Book 188, page 520.

47. "Set M'Taggart Rites Tuesday; Arcola Burial," *The News-Gazette*, 3 April 1950.

48. Deed Book 482, page 78.

49. Deed Book 929, page 476 (actually there were a series of quick sales in 1970 within a few months of each other: Peers sold to Richards who sold to Meyers who sold to Withers).

50. Gordon, 121

51. Ibid.

52. Rachel Carley, *77ze Visual Dictionary of American Domestic Architecture*, (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1997), 154.

53. Ibid, 264.

54. Ibid.

55. Gordon, 91; Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984) 263; Carley, 154; and James C. Massey and Shirley Maxwell, *House Styles in America*, (New York: Penguin Studio, 1996), 134.

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