

The Burnham Mansion

The Burnham Mansion is one of the last buildings in town that is associated with the Burnham name. For almost one hundred years the city of Champaign had Burnham City Hospital which was a great hospital; Burnham Hospital was the original Trauma Center in Champaign/ Urbana.

Burnham Hospital was left to the city, so Champaign could have a hospital and it was the first one the area. But the ever wise powers that be decided that it needed to come down and now there is another apartment building with a grocery store standing on that spot. Yes, there is a doorway in a park west of there, but it is not a hospital.

Now the Burnham home is on the chopping block. When it is gone maybe someone will put up a plaque that says on this spot, that is now a parking lot, was where the wonderful Victorian home know as the Burnham Mansion once stood. (I personally love going through old homes ever since I lived in one at 775 W Macon in Decatur) So I will stand and look at the plaque wishing for a time machine that would put the mansion up so I could see in it, and go through it, even virtually. What will your great, great grandchildren think of your actions of taking down a historic beautiful building? They may just wonder about your sanity as I do. There will never be another building like it.

Yes I have heard that it is very rough and deteriorating. I have an idea for that: teach the students how to do home repair by having a shop class. (Everyone needs to know how to maintain a home.) Let the students do the repairs with supervision. No students on the roof.

Perhaps even Parkland could be involved because they have constructions classes. Now what to do with it after it is fixed. How about a museum to show the building off, which could contain information on what not only the Burnham family did for Champaign, but information on Burnham and Root architects. (They were influential in many cities in the Midwest.

Part of it could be a bed and breakfast, with charged admission, to both. Champaign will have nothing left to tie the Burnham family to our town if this building is destroyed except the Burnham athenaeum, which is a private law office . There was a building on University Avenue that was the Champaign county museum that was quite nice and interesting, though only the first and second floors were open to the public, the top floor was supposedly a ballroom. It has since gone back to being a private residence.

Another thing, that can be done to not need to take the Burnham home down, is to limit the students who drive to school to the ones who have after school jobs immediately after school leaving no time to get home on the buses, school or MTD, to their cars, and then go to work. That should definitely limit the amount of parking needed.

What are you going to do here in another 50-70 years when what are you are planning to do now is obsolete? Tear down more of the neighborhood for more room and or take over West Side Park? You have the land north where a state of the art building could be built and the town is growing north. There could be football, track and soccer fields built there. There doesn't seem to be room for that in the middle of town. No matter what you do to the Central High building it will still be an old building for the kids. And like the cars that are fixed up and restored unless they have antique status they are just a nice car of limited value. The central building will be the same, an older building

without the antiques status that the Burnham home has. I have heard that it meets all the criteria for historic status and therefore worth saving.

This is like the song The Big Yellow Taxi by Joni Mitchell with the lines:

“They paved over paradise and put up a parking lot; You don’t know what you had till it’s gone”, and you can never get it back!

Too much “taking down and putting up a parking lot” has occurred. We will have no history left and all these new buildings that do not have the constructions of the older ones will be falling down. This building has stood for over a hundred years and given a chance it can be standing for another hundred years. I know while I think that is wonderful, some of you are cringing in horror.

Remember the words to The Big Yellow Taxie. “They paved over paradise and put up a parking lot; You don’t know what you had till it’s gone”,