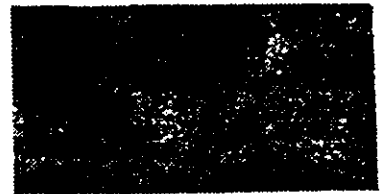


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HISTORIC PROPERTY NAME: Natural History Building
COMMON PROPERTY NAME: Natural History Building

LOCATION: 1301 West Green Street
CITY: Urbana
COUNTY: Champaign
STATE/ZIP: Illinois 61801
UNIVERSITY BLDG. NO.: 32

OWNER'S NAME: University of Illinois
Board of Trustees
LOCATION: 506 South Wright Street
CITY: Urbana
COUNTY: Champaign
STATE/ZIP: Illinois 61801

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION: Office of University Counsel
266 Administration Building
506 South Wright Street
Urbana, IL 61801

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION: Starting at a point at the southwest corner of
the structure the boundary line follows a line
fifteen feet from the edge of the building
walls.

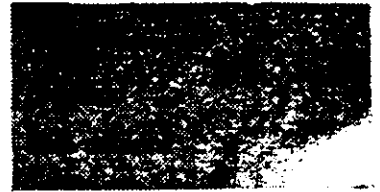
APPROXIMATE ACREAGE: Less than one acre.

DATE OF CONSTRUCTION: 1892
ARCHITECT AND/OR BUILDER: Nathan Clifford Ricker

DESCRIPTION:

The Natural History Building is an American High Victorian Gothic style structure constructed of red brick laid in a running bond with a rough faced coursed ashlar foundation and stone water table. The building is rectangular in plan with two interior lightwells and stands 2 1/2 stories tall. It is capped with a mansard roof clad in slate shingles. The original building was 50 feet by 90 feet. The additions have enlarged it to 90 feet by 180 feet.

The north end of the building was constructed in 1893 and as originally constructed it was rectangular in plan. In 1909, a large "L"-shaped addition was added to the southwest corner giving the building its current west and

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south facades. The lecture hall and museum wing was added in 1910, although it had been planned as a part of the 1909 addition. This is located in the center of the current building, separating the interior lightwells. The last addition to the building was in 1923 at which time the east side was closed. Although the building we see today was constructed over a period of thirty years, it has a consistency of style giving it a unified appearance.

The north elevation, which faces Green Street, is the main facade of the original building and has five bays. The end and center bays project slightly forward. The entrance is in the center bay with a round arched opening, exterior steps, and three paneled doors with lights. An arched transom with three windows above the door openings completes the frontispiece. The basement windows are 1 over 1 double-hung sash with flat lintels of limestone. On the first floor the center bay is smooth faced ashlar. The end bays are also smooth faced ashlar from the water table to just above the window sills. The remainder of the facade is brick and has 4 over 4 double-hung windows with limestone sills and lintels. The second floor windows have segmental arch lintels linked by a stringcourse. Double brick pilasters rise from the stone entrance surround in the center bay, to either side and above the entrance, and at the corners of the projecting bay. A corbel table runs from the pilasters to the corner. Over the entry is a triple window with round top 4 over 4 double-hung sash and continuous arched lintel. The arch spandrels have molded brick with a fan-like embossed pattern. A brick string course with yellow brick and ornamental tile forms a frieze and cornice for the facade. The end and center bays are capped by steep pitched gables. The center bay has three square windows at the third floor level above the entrance with a stone sillcourse and continuous lintel, above which is a frieze and cornice similar to the other bays. The center gable has a pent roof at the bottom, fish scale shingles, a starburst ornament, and a decorative frieze with the words "NATURAL HISTORY" in bright metal cutout letters. The gables in the end bays are of similar materials but have one double-hung window with sidelights and transom in a pointed arch opening. There are flat roofed dormers in the intermediate bays, each with three 2 over 2 double-hung windows.

The west facade of the building has nine bays. The center bay projects while the first, third, seventh, and ninth bays are recessed. The center three bays go a full three stories. The north three bays are a part of the original building and are similar to the north facade, as is the entire basement of this facade. The second bay (counting north to south) has a gable similar to the end bays of the north facade. The first and third bays have flat roof dormers similar to those on the north facade. There is an entry in the center bay with four doors and a round arched transom recessed behind a stone arched opening. The fourth through ninth bays of the first floor have

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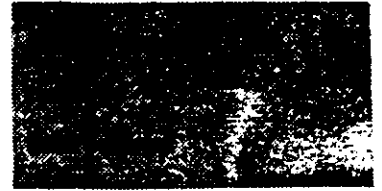
smooth faced ashlar from the water table to the stone sillcourse and 1 over 1 double-hung windows. The windows in the south three bays have flat lintels made of limestone. On the second floor the windows in the fourth and sixth bays are similar to those on the first floor except that they have individual stone sills. Paired cantilevers support a balcony over the entrance which has a stone balustrade. French doors with square transoms and a keyed-in stone surround open onto the balcony. There are 1 over 1 double-hung windows in the south three bays, with stone sills and segmental arch lintels. On the third floor the third and fifth bays have five rectangular windows set in a group with a common sill and combination lintel, transom bar, and string course of stone. There is a gable above the transoms with a stone coping. The center bay has a stone spandrel between the second and third floors and four windows similar to the adjacent bays. All of these windows have transoms and the same lintel/transom bar/string course. A stone lintel and frieze are above the transoms and the bay is topped by a stone gable with a triangular carved panel. The south three bays have a yellow brick frieze and cornice similar to the north three bays. The eighth bay has a hipped roof dormer with balcony, stone balustrade, and three 1 over 1 double-hung windows. The seventh and ninth bays have two hipped roof dormers each. Each dormer has a single 1 over 1 double-hung window.

The south facade has three unequal bays. The end bays are similar to the south three bays of the west facade and project forward. They are topped by gables which have horizontal cornice returns and a triple window in each gable end with double-hung windows and stone segmental arch lintel. There is an entry at each end of the center bay which projects forward and is flush with the end bays. Each entry consists of a stone arch opening with double wood and glass doors, round arched transom, and exterior steps. The entry is at a level between the basement and first floor. The basement and first floor of the center bays are similar to the end bays. There is a balcony with a stone balustrade over the projecting entry. Three casement windows on the stair landing between the first and second floor open on to a stone balcony. The transom bar for these casement windows aligns with the sillcourse for the short 1 over 1 double-hung windows on the rest of the second floor. Recessed brick spandrel panels separate the second and third floors. The third floor windows are similar to the second floor, but with individual stone sills. There are triple casement windows with stone sills between the second and third floors over the entrances. A stone frieze and copper cornice top all three bays. The center bay has hipped roof dormers, each with a 1 over 1 double-hung window.

The east facade has nine bays and is similar to the west facade, but lacks the entrance and balcony in the center bay. There is an entrance to the basement in the eighth bay. A fire escape and greenhouse have been added to the seventh bay.

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SIGNIFICANCE:

In the Natural History Building Nathan Clifford Ricker gave the campus a new building style while continuing his development of techniques in building ventilation and lighting. When it was erected The Illini praised it as "one of the most prominent and noticable ones in the group of University buildings"¹ By the use of repetitive elements and economical construction Ricker was able to give this building nicely crafted details while staying within the usual tight construction budget.

The previous buildings on the University were an eclectic mix dominated by the French Second Empire style of University Hall and Ricker's Chemical Laboratory. In the Natural History Building Ricker introduced the American High Victorian Gothic style to the campus. His use of polychromatic elements in the stone trim and ornamental brick demonstrated that Ricker had a clear understanding of the elements of the style, while the rusticated stone base recalls his earlier Drill Hall and Chemical Laboratory. The steep pitched roof supported by wood trusses allowed the full use of the attic story.

Ricker's floor plan is symmetrical about the building's north-south axis and was described as resembling a double-bladed jack-knife. He integrated engineering systems that were "the most approved methods of natural lighting and ventilation"² being used in construction at the time. The light wells which stretched vertically through the building's wide central corridor, ventilating flues in each room along with steam heat supplied from the main boiler at the University Hall allowed students and faculty to study and learn in comfort.

Although the heavy timber mill construction of the building's structure was not innovative, Ricker raised the system to an art form by turning the exposed beams into a decorative coffered ceiling. Along the same lines, the exquisite millwork in the stairwell recalls Ricker's early training in shop practice, which gave him an appreciation of fine materials and craftsmanship.

The entrances to the building are indicative of the phases that planning has gone through at the University. In 1893, the major campus buildings faced Green Street, and the main entrance of the original Natural History Building followed suit. The later additions to the building open toward the Quadrangle, which was introduced to the campus plan in 1905.

The additions to Ricker's original Natural History Building are very complementary to the style of his building and create an overall consistency of exterior appearance. The 1909 and 1910 additions by State Architect William Carbys Zimmerman gave the growing Natural History Department much

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needed lecture and classroom space, as well as the spectacular museum. This large "L"-shaped addition is attached to the southwest corner of the original building and gives the edifice its present west and south facades. In its design, Zimmerman chose to make the west facade symmetrical about the new center entrance pavilion, with the south end of the facade essentially a duplicate of the original building's west facade. Although Zimmerman was not educated by Ricker, he admired Ricker's design enough to use similar materials in a sympathetic design. The final addition in 1923 by University Architect James M. White connects the east side of the first addition with the southeast corner of the original building, complementing Zimmerman's design for the center pavilion of the west facade and giving the Natural History Building the consistent appearance it has today.

FORM PREPARED BY:

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David J. Garner, Janice A. Stein
Graduate Students in Architecture
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Endnotes

Natural History Building Inventory Sheets

1. The Illini, September 21, 1892, p. 13.
2. Ibid.