

<http://www.chicagotribune.com/features/custom/landmarks/chi-0305150048may15,1,2405299.story>

A SQUANDERED HERITAGE

Healing process

It's unclear whether Cook County Hospital can or should be saved.

But what is certain is that there hasn't been a full airing of the question.

By Blair Kamin and Patrick T. Reardon
Tribune staff reporters

May 15, 2003

As Cook County Board President John Stroger forges ahead with his controversial plan to demolish Cook County Hospital, it is worth remembering a similar battle fought more than 30 years ago -- and decided after the late Eleanor "Sis" Daley put her foot down.

The year was 1972. The building in the cross hairs was the Chicago Public Library on Michigan Avenue, beloved for its Beaux-Arts exterior and Tiffany-designed stained-glass dome. Developers wanted to tear down the old library and erect a modern office tower. Richard J. Daley, then Chicago's mayor, was about to let them have their way.

His wife said no.

"I don't think that would be nice," she told a Tribune reporter about the plan to destroy the building she had used as a child. "That's a beautiful site where it is. I'm for restoring and keeping all these beautiful buildings in Chicago."

Soon after, a special mayoral committee voted unanimously against demolition.

Today, the former library, renamed the Chicago Cultural Center, is one of downtown's most vibrant structures, teeming with people attending lectures, exhibitions, performances and other activities. But two miles to the west, Stroger is readying to tear down Cook County Hospital, and no person in power, no "Sis" Daley, has materialized to shout "Wait a minute!"

The old hospital -- a sumptuous classical monument that symbolizes compassionate care for the poor and that embedded itself in the public consciousness as the basis for the hugely popular television series "ER" -- is about to be destroyed with virtually no public debate. And at a cost to taxpayers of as much as \$30 million.

Advertisement

StriVectin-SD[®]
(Clinical)[™]
Intensive Concentrate For Existing Stretch Marks
Celine Chénouard

Ultra Concentrated Stretch Mark Formula

- Clinically Proven to Dramatically Reduce the Appearance of Existing Stretch Mark Length, Depth, Texture, and Discoloration
- Makes Improvement of Tone and Texture Through Selenium Glycosaminoglycan and Collagen Synthesis
- Significant, Measurable Results in 10% of Subjects Treated
- NET WT. 6 oz. (171.4 g)

AVAILABLE AT:
Marshall Field's

* Botox is a registered trademark of Allergan, Inc. © 2004 Klein-Becker usa. All rights reserved.

It's unclear whether Cook County can or should be saved.

What is certain, however, is that there hasn't been a full airing of the question of demolition versus preservation.

Time is short. The county hopes to have the building down by the end of this year, is expected to ask the County Board to authorize a demolition contract in July. And county officials are turning a deaf ear to those who want to breathe new life into the now-vacant structure, including real estate developers.

As Michael LaMont, the county's director of capital planning and policy, said Tuesday: "From an artistic point of view, yes, it looks artistic. But it's not the solid great structure [preservationists] are making it out to be. . . . It is not in good shape."

Yet it also can be argued that that comment represents a self-fulfilling prophecy, one based on an outdated consultant's study as well as outdated attitudes about the vital role historic buildings play in the life of a city.

If such an approach had prevailed 31 years ago, the old Public Library would be long gone and downtown would be the poorer for its loss.

The stand that "Sis" Daley took in 1972 came at the dawn of a new age, when Chicagoans and Americans -- jolted into awareness a decade earlier by the destruction of such landmarks as Pennsylvania Station in New York City and the Garrick Theater in Chicago -- realized for the first time that they needed to fight to preserve the nation's architectural treasures.

Now a new crisis looms.

Chicagoans are discovering that the unofficial neighborhood landmarks that once lent character to their communities -- churches, social clubs, corner commercial buildings, graystones and three-flats -- are being razed by the hundreds.

As a Tribune investigation has documented, more than 700 buildings identified by the city as potential landmarks already have come down.

And Cook County Hospital, which stands on the Near West Side, not far from scores of vacant lots once filled by potential landmarks, is the next big target.

In response to the Tribune's accounts about the destruction of hundreds of potential landmarks, some city officials have questioned the worthiness of many of the demolished buildings. But the architectural quality of Cook County Hospital can't be dismissed as easily.

Source of strength

Completed in 1914 and designed by Cook County Architect Paul Gerhardt, the two-block-long building is a West Side cousin of the Chicago City Hall that predated it by three years. The monumental presence and ornate decoration of its Harrison Street facade, which features pairs of three-story, fluted Ionic columns, as well as faces of lions, cherubs and humans, powerfully communicates the idea that the building represented a source of strength and succor to the poor and ailing.

That idea is touchingly reinforced by a 1920s Art Deco monument to the French medical researcher Louis Pasteur in the public park across the street from the hospital. Inscribed in its stone walls is this quote from Pasteur: "One doesn't ask of one who suffers: What is your country and what is your religion? One merely says, You suffer. That is enough for me. You belong to me and I shall help you."

Though Cook County Hospital had a reputation among many Chicagoans and suburbanites as something out of a Dickens novel, a bedlam-filled warren where patients were dumped in old-fashioned wards rather than private rooms, it also had an illustrious history. The hospital was not only recognized nationally for its innovative burn treatment unit, but also it broke ground in the diagnosis of sickle cell anemia and had one of the best emergency rooms in the country.

All that would seem to qualify the shuttered institution for city landmark status. But city officials are sitting on the sidelines.

Pete Scales, spokesman for the Department of Planning and Development, said: "It's their property, and in deference to the County Board, we're not reviewing it at this time." The county has not yet applied for a demolition permit, he added.

County officials have said there is no need for further discussion about tearing down the hospital because a study found that the structure could not be saved. But the study is out of date because it was conducted 15 years ago, preservationists argue -- well before gentrification swept over the Near West Side and led to an astonishing rise in land values. In addition, they assert, the study never looked at any possible use of the building except as a hospital or medical facility.

Developers are "champing at the bit" to convert the hospital to a new use, said David Bahlman, president of the Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois, a statewide advocacy group.

One of them is Preferred Real Estate Investments Inc., a Philadelphia company that is converting a former, coal-fired power plant in Chester, Pa., into offices. The reuse of the plant, a massive 1918 neo-classical structure, is pumping new life into Chester, a small, economically depressed city about 20 miles southwest of Philadelphia. The company wants to perform the same kind of transformation at Cook County Hospital.

The controversy over the hospital's future is "unbelievably similar" to the arguments over the fate of the power plant, said Ira Saligman, acquisitions manager for Preferred Real Estate Investments. "Half the people wanted to tear it down. The historic folks said you shouldn't. . . . We flew in the face of a lot of adversity on this."

Two weeks ago, Saligman wrote to the County Board with a reuse proposal that, he claims, would save taxpayers \$15 million, half the projected cost of the environmental cleanup and demolition of the hospital.

He has gotten no response.

"Once the building is torn down, they will never build another building like this again," he said.

There are other plans percolating for the hospital's future.

LPCI last month released a detailed plan, prepared by Chicago architect Joe Antunovich, that calls for turning the old hospital into 320 loft apartments and a health center for the entire medical district at a cost of \$84 million.

City officials even have suggested the old hospital as one of several possible sites for a new Chicago casino.

The implications of the plan to raze Cook County Hospital extend far beyond the granite, terra cotta and brick walls of the 89-year-old institution at the corner of Harrison and Wood Streets. The case is a test of Chicago's resolve to protect its neighborhood treasures.

Indeed, a decision to save Cook County Hospital could represent the same sort of decisive turn that occurred in 1972 when "Sis" Daley entered an already-brewing controversy and championed the old Public Library.

Downtown preservation

Along with the widespread revulsion to the demolition of Louis Sullivan's Chicago Stock Exchange Building in the same year, the reclamation of the Public Library set the stage for a downtown preservation movement that of late has been able to save everything from the old Reliance Building to the clifflike wall of buildings along Michigan Avenue.

Stroger says the hospital must be torn down to meet the open-space requirements of the Illinois Medical District's 1997 master plan. In addition, the County Board promised city officials that it would tear down the old hospital following completion of the new John Stroger Hospital, which opened late last year.

Yet tearing down the hospital would take away a structure that forms a grand gateway into the motley collection of hospitals and medical facilities that make up the 560-acre Illinois Medical District.

And new open space on the site of the old hospital likely would doom Pasteur Park across the street, which the district wants to redevelop.

Moreover, the new open space itself might not last because it would sit right next to the new hospital, its parking garage and a nearby clinic. "Despite the best intentions of the city, we believe this new park will quickly become subject to redevelopment pressures for the expansion of both facilities," LPCI says in its report on Cook County Hospital's future.

The report shows how the preservation movement has changed since the early days of picketing and protests. Now it is mandatory to do more than scream "Heritage!" every time a building is threatened. Preservationists feel obligated to present marketable solutions, and LPCI's Cook County Hospital report exemplifies that new strategy.

However, Tom Livingston, the medical district's executive director, points out that the plan is woefully short of parking, providing only 150 spaces for the 320 apartments. And a County Board member, who asked not to be identified, characterized the plan as "D.O.A."

Is it structurally sound?

Any alternative proposal for the hospital inevitably will face the question of whether the building is structurally sound and whether the cost of fixing it would be prohibitive. Stroger says the 1988 study found problems with the hospital's structural, mechanical, ventilation and electrical systems.

But most of those systems would be replaced or significantly upgraded in any major rehabilitation, according to Preservation Chicago, a city advocacy group. "I can't imagine any structural problems with it," said LPCI's Bahlman, who toured the hospital last year before it closed. "There weren't any yellow tapes in front of doors saying `Danger, don't enter.'"

The key issue is cost. The county has to remove the asbestos in Cook County Hospital whether the building is torn down or reused.

The questions are: Should the county spend up to \$30 million to clean up the building and tear it down? Or should it clean the building and turn it over to a developer for a nominal price?

In addition to saving millions of dollars in demolition costs, redeveloping the hospital would put the property back on the tax rolls in a major way and could accelerate the area's economic development.

"I think there has to be a discussion before we enter into the contract," said first-term Cook County Commissioner Larry Suffredin, one of a new group of board members. "The older board members feel that that's already occurred. For the newer board members -- we have a right to find that out, to be part of a hearing before we vote on a demolition contract."

Stroger says there is no market for the building. But the county has never tried to sell it.

Nor has it solicited proposals from developers who would adapt the old hospital to new uses. Discussions of the building's future have been held quietly, often behind the scenes, as is commonplace with major projects in Chicago.

But the hospital's fate is not yet sealed. The city still has to issue a demolition permit for the building, and the County Board still has to allot money for demolition.

A possible forum for debating County's future could come in July when the board is expected to take up the question of whether to authorize the money for demolition.

That leaves time for a citizen outcry, such as the one that recently saved the onion-domed Medinah Temple (now a Bloomingdale's store) and, decades ago, the old Chicago Public Library.

The library wouldn't have been saved if it weren't for debate -- at least within the Richard J. Daley household.

Copyright © 2005, [Chicago Tribune](#)