

American Book Company Building



Overview:

The stately brick and stone American Book Company building is an integral component in the trio of historic warehouse buildings located at the intersection of Cermak Road and Calumet Avenue. The area is ripe for additional hotel space to compliment the expanding McCormick Place convention center. Without public intervention and protections by the City of Chicago, a recently proposed hotel project, may destroy this unique slice of Chicago's history.

**Address: 320-334 E. Cermak Road
& 2132 S. Calumet Avenue**

Architect: N. Max Dunning

Date: Constructed: July 1912

CHRS Rating: Orange

History:

The handsome brick building at the corner of Cermak Road and Calumet Avenue was constructed in 1912 for the American Book Company. In the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, American was the worlds leading publisher of textbooks. Their textbooks and reading series had a tremendous influence on the youth of the era. American occupied the site for several decades and their longtime neighbor, R. R. Donnelly & Sons was the most recent occupant of the building. It is currently vacant. The structure features Romanesque arched windows at the pedestrian level and vernacular three-bay windows on the upper levels. The bulk of the building is sensitively lightened by horizontal stone bands at the base and upper levels. A recognizable architectural feature is the 2-story tower that extends above the main

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entrance. The tower is highlighted by tapered corners and features several ornamental carvings, including the winged-book logo of the American Book Company. Architect N. Max Dunning was responsible for numerous Chicago buildings in the early decades of the 20th Century. His facilities struck a pleasant balance between the industrial needs of manufacturing facilities and the lighting and human-scale aesthetics appreciated by workers, residents, and visitors. Some of his other notable projects include: American Furniture Mart (Erie and Lake Shore Drive), Chicago Federation of Musicians building (175 W. Washington), Church of Christ Scientist (301 N. Central), Charles Antoine Home (4940 S. Kimbark), and 14th Church of Christ Scientist (4440 N. Paulina).

Threat:

A local development company announced its intention to construct a new hotel complex on a 3.7 acre site which includes the American Book Company building. The proposed project would include up to 1,500 guest rooms, 100,000 square feet of ball-room and meeting space, and accessory shops and restaurants. The facility may also include space for a future casino. The preliminary plans call for twin 21-story towers and make no mention of rehabilitation of the American Book Company building.

A 1998-1999 planned development (PD) zoning ordinance that called for the rehabilitation of the American Book Company building has expired and the site will be subject to re-zoning to accommodate any redevelopment. The potential for demolition is real considering that within the past year, McPier has considered acquiring the site for a similar hotel project. Although this public development entity has the power of eminent domain, it has not yet followed through with this idea.

Recommendation:

Preservation Chicago applauds reinvestment and rehabilitation of the neighborhood surrounding McCormick Place. Such growth does not need to result in the loss of the City's history and culture. We urge the Departments of Planning & Development and Zoning, as well as the alderman to stand firm and seek rehabilitation of the American Book Company building as part of any redevelopment of the site plan. A convention-hotel is a great fit for the neighborhood and will strengthen Chicago's ongoing ability to attract national and international conventions. Chicagoans and visitors alike will appreciate the sense of history that is retained. The restoration of the American building will result in the enlivened trio of historic publishing and printing buildings that surround the northwest side of the convention center.



Photos of American Book Company Building: Peter DeCamp