



Illinois Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary

Address: 135 South Sangamon Street
Date: 1931
Architect: C. Herrick Hammond and Edgar Martin
Style: Art Deco with Mayan Detailing
CHRS Rating: Orange

Threat:

The 2nd Ward needs a new park, and has been promised one by Alderman Madeline Haithcock. The residents are eager for it, and understandably so. However,

Preservation Chicago strongly objects to what the City planners have decided to sacrifice in order to create this new park: A unique building that is both architecturally and historically significant. The building is located at the Northeast corner of Sangamon and Adams, and is the Orange-rated Illinois Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary.

The proposed city park is located in a section of the city that contains many suitable sites for such an improvement. Non-contributing buildings and surface parking lots abound in the area, which has suffered numerous demolitions of historic buildings over the years.

Furthermore, if this site is truly the only option for a new park, the existing building can be retained for the benefit of all parties involved. The Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary occupies roughly 1/3 of its half-block site on West Adams Street, with the remaining 2/3 in use for parking and green space. Preservation Chicago believes that the presence of this historic building on the site presents a unique opportunity. Restored to its original dignified presence, it could be used to carry on yet another great Chicago tradition, the one in which architecturally strong, graceful field houses were built to provide a public service amidst the expansive beauty of our city parks.

Reused for public purposes, the building would serve as another community anchor, while permitting the park to move forward on the remaining vacant land. Preservation Chicago has offered to finance a reuse study to show how to turn the building into a field house, but despite numerous requests to UIC, we have yet to get copies of the blueprints. Another parcel to the north contains an insignificant building, which could be added to the plan, further increasing green space.

The park project has been delayed while the complicated transfer from the State-owned school to the city has been completed. The move required an act of state legislature. Currently lacking funds for a park, the project is stalled, but is still imminent. We ask those involved to consider the potential of this important, irreplaceable structure. Adaptive reuse can save the Illinois Charitable Eye & Ear Infirmary, to the benefit of all parties involved.

Architecture:

Architecture: Built in 1929, the architects of the Eye and Ear Infirmary were Charles Herrick Hammond and Edgar Martin. Hammond was a partner in the famous firm of Perkins, Chatton, and Hammond, working with the noted Prairie School designer Dwight Perkins. Martin was the third partner in the equally-famous, pioneering Prairie School firm of Schmidt, Garden, and Martin. He left the firm and became State Supervising Architect for several years, during which time he worked on the Eye and Ear Infirmary. The Eye and Ear Infirmary building represents a unique commission that features the talents of both of these two Prairie-school giants.

The building is executed in a highly unusual Mayan style, perhaps the only of its kind in Chicago. The basic form of the building can be described as Art Deco, with low relief ornament, upward thrust, pronounced piers that diminish in prominence as the building rises, and subtle detailing. However, the details themselves are of a Mayan sensibility, likely inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's California work in the 1920s. Fascinating lintels rise above flat windows, while reentrant corners and Mayan-inspired banding trace roofline parapets.

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The entry pavilion to the Eye and Ear Infirmary is wonderfully enriched with Mayan architectural detailing.

Illinois Charitable Eye and Ear Infirmary (*Continued from previous page*)

Architecture: (continued) The entry pavilion is of special interest. Flanking the arched doorway on both sides are the architects' version of Wright's Hollyhocks, featured on the eponymous Hollyhock House in Los Angeles (1920). Also, directly above the door itself are small Mondrian-like elements, in a pattern nearly identical to that used on Wright's Textile Block Charles Ennis House, also in LA (1924). Such elements bring to Chicago a unique and celebrated type of architectural detailing rarely seen outside its original context. However, it should be noted that this is unquestionably a highly original work, and bears little overall resemblance to Wright's California houses.

History: The Infirmary's history, as an institution, is a long one. Founded by Edward Lorenzo Holmes in 1858, the Infirmary was the first institution to bring the specialty of Ophthalmology to prominence in Illinois. Its many talented doctors have provided charitable medical service to the indigent citizens of Illinois, through the Civil War, the Great Depression, and World Wars.

A fixture of the Near West Side since 1874, the Institution helped the development of the area by establishing itself on this block almost immediately after the Great Chicago Fire. Due to its great success and service to the public, in 1943 the Infirmary was joined with the University of Illinois College of Medicine. Despite the merger, the Infirmary remained on the Near West side until a 1965, when a new building in the Illinois Medical District was built to bring its operations closer to the UIC core hospitals. Now, as part of UIC, it is a key part of one of the most respected medical, teaching and research institutions in the world. The building you see here is the only historical structure standing today that reflects this public Institution's remarkable story and service to Chicago.



A Preservation Chicago graphic shows the present building and full site acquired by the State of Illinois. Computerized imaging has converted the current parking lot into park space, with the existing building visible in the upper-left corner. The easternmost façade is also simulated, as today this is the back of the building.

Another, state-owned and architecturally non-contributing building is seen at the top of the graphic, which could be used for further park expansion, nearly doubling the size of the site.