



Jacob Riis Public School

Address: 1111 South Throop Street

Date: 1914-1915.

Architect: Arthur F. Hussander

Style: Classical Revival

**CHRS
Rating:** None

Threat:

The stately Jacob Riis Public School has survived years of declining attendance and neighborhood change, culminating with its closure by the school board in 2002.

The building survived when much of its surroundings

were demolished to make way for the Jane Addams public housing in the late 1930s, and it has survived as those buildings in turn have largely succumbed to the wrecking ball in 2004. The building waits to be reborn, with much the same strength and resilience as the Little Italy neighborhood that surrounds it.

Ironically however, after so many chapters in its rich history, and in spite of the structure's remarkably solid state, LR Development has announced that they will be demolishing the school. As a part of the massive Roosevelt Square development, which is replacing the Jane Addams Homes that once surrounded the school, the building will be demolished to make way for green space. Despite a lengthy planning process involving dozens of city acres, LR claims there is no room within its plans to create green space elsewhere.

The Roosevelt Square development, projected to contain several thousand dwelling units, makes no provision for new schools. However, even in the event that Jacob Riis School is deemed unsuitable for school use, the building could have a new life under any number of adaptive reuse scenarios.

Literally surrounded on three sides by land cleared from the demolition of the Addams Homes, to demolish the Riis School is to squander one of the last historic buildings in the redevelopment area. On the other hand, reusing the building would add vitality and variety to the redevelopment, and would create a small historic focal point: The one Addams Home building being retained (the proposed site of a public housing museum) lies directly to the north of the School building.

History and Architecture:

History: The Jacob Riis School is named for Jacob August Riis, a noted social reformer, photographer, and author in New York City. Through his photographs and writing, Riis helped expose to the masses the conditions of the poor in America, coining the phrase "how the other half lives." Riis died in 1914, the same year that the Chicago school was commenced.

Coupled with the Jane Addams homes surrounding it (currently under demolition), the complex is a fitting tribute to the social reform movement in the United States. Jane Addams one of early Chicago's leading social reformers, and the founder of Hull House, which remains standing in the immediate area.

Architecture: Arthur F. Hussander is noted for his powerful, Classical Revival school buildings. No exception to the rule, The Riis School is composed of a monolithic block relieved only by slight projections in plan and rises in elevation. Despite its classical ornament, the façade of the school is organized into strong pier-defined bays with giant double-hung windows, much in the Chicago tradition of candid structural expression. Chicago's City Hall (1911, Holabird and Roche) employs this same device, with traditional ornamentation applied to Chicago classic construction techniques.

Hussander's other works include Kelvyn Park High School, Hyde Park High School, and the Pullman Branch library. Over the course of his multi-year engagement with the Chicago Public Schools, he designed no less than two-dozen school structures.