St. Anthony’s Hospital, 2875 W. 19th Street

Overview:
St. Anthony’s Hospital, an orange-rated structure in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey (CHRS) overlooks Douglas Park and is currently facing an uncertain future. Threatened by its sheer success in serving a diverse community, a new replacement hospital campus is being planned a mile to the south at 31st and Kedzie. The existing hospital, which is located on a narrow site, is to be either redeveloped or demolished. Discussions have even included razing the buildings for additional green space to be added to Douglas Park, even though the building complex is also a buffer to the freight railroads, the CTA’s “L” and industrial uses behind the existing hospital.

History:
The St. Anthony Hospital building is located along Chicago’s renowned Boulevard System or “emerald necklace” on 19th Street where Sacramento Boulevard transitions into Marshall Boulevard. The building was designed by noted Chicago architect Henry Schlacks in 1898 with a faithful addition to the original building, also by Schlacks, doubling its original size in 1910. Both structures, along with several modest additions of later eras form a beautiful terminus to the park, further defining its southwest border, while also being a gateway building at the park’s entry point and the Boulevard System.

Henry Schlacks was born in Chicago in 1867 and attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. During his early career he worked in the firm of Adler & Sullivan, one of the most influential architecture firms in the country and the firm responsible for many of the some of the city’s most prominent structures including the
Auditorium Building and theater, the Schiller (later Garrick) Building and Theater and The Chicago Stock Exchange Building. The Adler and Sullivan firm also fostered the career of perhaps the world’s most recognized architect, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Schlacks later formed his own practice and is very well noted for his proliferation of religious church buildings, as he was considered one of Chicago’s finest architects of ecclesiastical buildings. Among the most notable structures include St. Paul’s Church and St. Adalbert Church in Pilsen and St. Ita, St. Ignatius and St. Mary of the Lake on Chicago’s North Side, St. Anthony in Bridgeport, St. Boniface (Chicago Seven for 2009) in East Village, St. Gelasious in Woodlawn, St. John of God (recently dismantled and to be reassembled elsewhere) and St. Martin De Tours. These structures were among the landmarks of the communities in which they served and represented a wide diversity of ethnicities, from German, Polish, Croatian, Czech, Italian and Irish to name several such groups.

Significance:

Many of these buildings are among the City’s finest religious structures and it was said that he was the favored architect of Cardinal Mundelein during a time of growth of Chicago’s Roman Catholic community, known as the Golden Age of ecclesial architecture. Among other accomplishments, he also helped to establish the Department of Architecture at the University of Notre Dame.

Threat:

As hospitals throughout the county expand and modernize, the facilities that are vacated for these new structures are, more often than not, demolished. Recent fights by Preservation Chicago and other preservation stakeholders to preserve significant hospital buildings have had mixed success.

Efforts to save the former Cook County Hospital have, so far been successful. The campaign to save Prentice Hospital is currently stalemated and it has again been named a Chicago 7 for 2012 and only one of 8 buildings co-designed by Walter Gropius at the former Michael Reese site remains standing. Soon, St. Anthony’s will be replaced with a new campus a mile to the south at 31st and Kedzie. The fate of the existing hospital is currently unknown, but discussions have included both razing the building for additional green space to be added to Douglas Park or preserving the building for redevelopment. The building is in good condition and its floor plan layout lends itself well for residential or commercial adaptive reuse.