OVERVIEW:
Completed in 1923, the Woodruff Arcade, at the north edge of the Edgewater neighborhood, is one of the last arcade buildings remaining in Chicago. Development pressure from its proximity to Loyola University’s Rogers Park campus has resulted in the current demolition threat to Woodruff Arcade and its proposed replacement with a new residential building. The Edgewater Historical Society, Preservation Chicago, and other local neighborhood groups are advocating for its preservation and protection through Chicago Landmark status. The online petition to save the historic Woodruff Arcade has collected approximately 800 signatures to date.

HISTORY:
Shopping arcades are a rare building type, both in Chicago and across the country. The predecessors to the modern shopping mall, these enclosed structures featured retail spaces arranged around a central court. Popularized first in Europe, many were built in American cities, beginning in the 19th century. One of the nation’s earliest and most significant arcades is the Westminster Arcade in Providence, Rhode Island, which opened in 1828. After a considerable effort by the Providence preservation community, it was successfully and sensitively reused, and now includes a mix of retail, restaurants and affordable housing. Other notable arcades exist in cities such as Cleveland, Nashville, Ann Arbor, and Watertown in upstate New York.

Woodruff Arcade Building
Address: 6361 N. Broadway
Architect: Herbert H. Green
Date: 1923
Neighborhood: Edgewater
Style: Chicago School / Chicago Commercial Style

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The Woodruff Arcade was completed in January 1923 for W.J. Woodruff and designed by architect Herbert H. Green. While it appears as a 1920s business block on the outside, the unsuspecting visitor who ventures inside discovers a delightful interior space with a beautiful sky-lit, two-story central court with face brick piers and terrazzo floors. The Arcade originally housed a bank, grocery stores, and other retail establishments. Prior to the displacement of Woodruff’s tenants late last year, it primarily contained small retailers, professional offices, and medical and dental offices.
Chicago 7: Woodruff Arcade Building

One of the most notable Chicago examples of the arcade building type was the Pullman Arcade, designed by Solon S. Beman in 1882 and demolished in 1926. Much of the Pullman community is now a National Monument but this architecturally significant arcade has been lost. Nearly all of Chicago’s arcades have been demolished, except for the Woodruff Arcade.

THREAT:
The Woodruff Arcade building faces an imminent threat of demolition. It stands near Loyola University’s Rogers Park campus and development pressures related to the university have continued over time. This development pressure has caused the demolition of other significant buildings at this historic gateway over time, including the much beloved Granada Theater, one of Chicago’s grandest movie palaces before its tragic demolition.

Already sold to a developer, a seven story building is currently proposed for the site. Ironically, this proposed development is being marketed as “The Arcade.” The proposal does not include saving any part of the existing structure, and its fourteen businesses have already been forced to move.

48th Ward Alderman Harry Osterman does not oppose the proposal and suggests that the development is too far along for the City to consider a Chicago Landmark Designation for the building. As the developer is planning to work within the existing zoning limits (as-of-right), there is no requirement for public meetings or Aldermanic approval. Like so many historic buildings under threat, the discrepancy between the existing historic structure and the site’s more permissive zoning results in an economic incentive to destroy historic resources.

Preservation Chicago and preservation partners have reached out to Alderman Osterman to encourage the developer to save the facade and the arcade, and to encourage development above or behind these existing features. To date, the only concession from the developer has been the offer of a commemorative plaque.
RECOMMENDATIONS:
Preservation Chicago strongly advocates for the preservation of the Woodruff Arcade. The rarity of this building type in Chicago makes this structure a strong candidate for protection, and perhaps Chicago Landmark Designation. Preservation Chicago believes that this is an important gateway building to Rogers Park to the north, Edgewater to the south, and the Devon Street commercial corridor to the west.

The Woodruff Arcade is an important community feature and it could be an asset for the Rogers Park and Edgewater communities for years to come. It should be preserved, restored, and reused.