

# Michael Reese Modern



Kaplan Pavilion Photo: David Schalliol

## Overview:

The Michael Reese Hospital and Medical Center campus located along Chicago's lakefront on the Near South Side offers a compelling vision of post-World War II optimism in the power of rational design to improve the quality of our lives. Today, as the medical center's 130-year history comes to an end, the Michael Reese campus is slated to become the site of the Olympic Village for the 2016 Olympic Games.

## Michael Reese Modern

*31st and King Drive*

**Architects: Ezra Gordon and Jack Levin, Loeb, Schlossman and Bennett and A. Epstein and Sons**

**Dates: 1951 – 1962**

## Threat:

Currently, only the orange-rated 1905 main building has been recognized as worthy of preservation, leaving the future of the rest of the campus in doubt. Preservation Chicago sees in the Michael Reese campus a wealth of pioneering humanistic modern architecture ready to be reclaimed and repurposed as part of the planned Olympic Village and future residential community. We urge the City of Chicago and the 2016 Committee to carefully consider the preservation and reuse of this fine group of mid-century buildings.

## Chicago 7: Michael Reese Modern Continued

### History:

After the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 destroyed the city's only Jewish hospital, Michael Reese, a wealthy real estate developer, provided funds in his will to build a new Jewish hospital for the city. The main building of the new Michael Reese Hospital, designed by the firm of Richard E. Schmidt with designer Hugh Garden, was completed in 1905 and is rated Orange in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey. Schmidt and Garden's work also includes the Schoenhofen Brewery Powerhouse (1902) and the Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House (1907), both Chicago landmarks.

In the 1950s, Michael Reese embarked on an ambitious expansion plan as part of a massive South Side urban renewal project. The Chicago firm of Loeb, Schlossman and Bennett served as the hospital's primary architects, while others, including Ezra Gordon and Jack Levin and A. Epstein and Sons, designed individual buildings. Walter Gropius, the former director of the Bauhaus then at Harvard, participated in the project as a planning consultant. The resulting campus is an excellent example of progressive thinking in post-World War II planning and architecture.

The first new building to be completed was the Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Institute Building, now known as the Singer Pavilion (Loeb, Schlossman and Bennett, 1951). The design of the Institute Building established the tone and style for a campus focused on human experience—the experience of patients, staff and visitors—rather than the foreboding sterility of more typical institutional settings. Situated in a landscaped, park-like setting, the Institute Building creates a sense of openness and accessibility through generous windows with slatted sunshades for south-facing patient rooms. The scale of the building is more residential, less institutional. Other significant Loeb, Schlossman and Bennett buildings on the Michael Reese campus, including the Baumgarten Pavilion, the Kaplan Pavilion and Surgical Wing and the Dreyfus Research Labs building, share the same sensibility and attention to detail, pattern, light, materials and human scale shown in the Institute Building.



Dreyfus Research Labs Building Photo: David Schalliol



Simon Wexler Pavillion Photo: Lee Bey



## Chicago 7: Michael Reese Modern Continued

The Simon Wexler Psychiatric Research and Clinic Pavilion (Ezra Gordon and Jack Levin, 1962) is an equally innovative and sensitive design. The small scale of this closed circular-plan building addresses issues of patient comfort and privacy, while the thoughtful use of natural light successfully enriches the experience of interior spaces. Situated at the south end of the Michael Reese campus is the Research Foundation building, also known as the Blood Bank (A. Epstein and Sons, 1955). The Foundation's more abstract, sculptural style is perhaps closer to the

work of Walter Gropius than Richard Bennett, but it harmonizes wonderfully with the rest of the campus and is a fine tribute to Gropius' involvement in the planning of the campus.



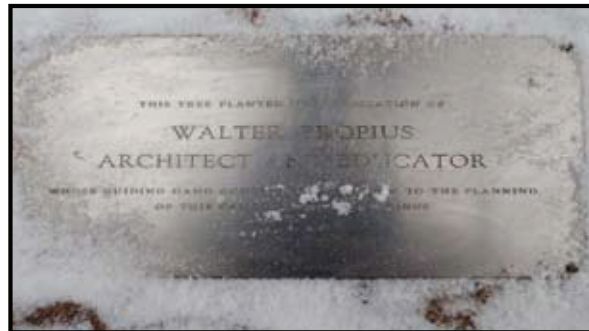
Blood Bank Building Photo: David Schalliol

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### Recommendation:

Healthcare facilities rarely survive to old age. Their lives are short. They quickly become obsolete and succumb to the ever-changing needs of new technologies and practices. They are remodeled, retrofitted, expanded and eventually replaced. But this campus of human-scaled, sensitively-designed mid-century architecture deserves a second life. These buildings were conceived as residential in character and intended to be welcoming and joyfully full of life. Their conversion to residential and other collateral uses as part of the Olympic Village seems like the natural answer to their future. Preservation Chicago

urges that the best buildings on the Michael Reese campus be preserved and reused as part of the Olympic Village project. Conscientious reuse of existing buildings on the site would be one more way in which Chicago can present itself to the world as the "green" capital. There is perhaps nothing more environmentally sensible than adaptive reuse of existing structures. Showing off the rich architectural and cultural heritage of Michael Reese to Olympic athletes and the world can be both practical and economical.



Plaque dedicated to Walter Gropius Photo: David Schalliol