Preservation Chicago Unveils the 2015 Chicago 7 Most Threatened...

Pioneer Arcade & New Apollo Theater

1535-1541 North Pulaski Road

OVERVIEW:
Along with its neighbor the New Apollo Theater, the visually-striking Pioneer Arcade is one of the last remaining anchor commercial buildings that comprise the business and entertainment center at North Avenue and Pulaski Road (formerly Crawford Avenue). The Pioneer Arcade is also Chicago's largest surviving 1920s-era commercial recreation center, or "rec," and was a popular West Side venue for bowling and billiards for over 80 years.

One of many commercial bowling alleys constructed in Chicago's 1920s building boom, the Pioneer Arcade more closely resembled some of Chicago's early movie palaces with its palatial scale and its ornate Spanish Colonial Revival style terra cotta ornament. Even after a decade of vacancy, the Pioneer Arcade is still a much-loved neighborhood landmark whose rehabilitation would serve as key component in the ongoing revitalization of West Humboldt Park's commercial district.

The New Apollo Theater is an example of a fine quality neighborhood theater building constructed prior to the beginnings of the lavish Vaudeville movie palaces that became popular in the late teens and 1920s throughout the country. The building has experienced a variety of uses, including a restaurant.

Pioneer Arcade & New Apollo Theater

Address:
1535-1541 North Pulaski Road

Neighborhood: West Humboldt Park

Architect: Jens J. Jensen, William A. Bennett

Date: 1925, 1914

Photo credits:
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Chicago 7: Pioneer Arcade & New Apollo Theater

HISTORY:
The Pioneer Arcade was completed in 1925 by Greek-born entrepreneur Constantinos "Gust" Regas (1894-1986) at a cost of $350,000. The building was designed by Danish-born architect Jens J. Jensen (1891-1969), who also designed 300 West Adams, a designated Chicago Landmark and the Guyon Hotel, a Chicago 7 Most Threatened site in 2014. Responding to a growing public enthusiasm for indoor sports entertainment, Regas' Pioneer Arcade was among Chicago's largest bowling and billiards halls and was declared "one of the city's finest" by the Chicago Daily Tribune. The building housed a main entrance lobby with a wide central staircase, a 1st floor pool hall with room for thirty-five billiards tables, and twenty 2nd floor bowling lanes with an adjoining lounge and a mezzanine level gallery (now missing) that could comfortably seat six-hundred spectators. The Pioneer Arcade (later Pioneer Bowl) was a West Side indoor sports destination for over 80 years, home to local industrial leagues and host to thousands of neighborhood and citywide bowling and billiards tournaments.

The building's Pulaski Road facade is one of Chicago's best examples of 1920s Spanish Colonial Revival style architecture. With design elements architect Jens J. Jensen borrowed from Spanish and Spanish Colonial architecture including an elaborate center pediment, ornate window surrounds, and balustered balconies, the Pioneer Arcade's exuberant terra cotta work rivals that of some of Chicago's 1920s movie palaces.

The New Apollo Theater was designed by William A. Bennett in 1914 constructed on the site of the "Old Olympic Theater" by three Greek owners, Peter Nasiopulos, John Ahamnos and A.K. Kalodimos for a new commercial district forming around the intersection of North Avenue and Pulaski Road (originally known as North 40th Avenue and later as Crawford Avenue, before becoming Pulaski Road in 1952). The theater building, constructed of a deep red brick and terra cotta supplied by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Company came into some financial issues with the steel supplier, Wendnagel & Company which resulted in delays for completing the two steel balconies. The balconies were finished and the theater opened with a seating capacity of 1,136.

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THREAT:
The last owner of **the Pioneer Arcade** closed the bowling alley in the mid-2000s. The building's current owner, Hispanic Housing Development Corporation (HHDC), planned to incorporate the rehabbed historic Pioneer Arcade into a larger mixed-use development adjoining the site. A downturn in the economy over the past few years reduced the scale of the overall development plans to include only the new apartment structure extending to the corner of North Avenue and Pulaski. The Pioneer Arcade building is currently vacant and being considered for a possible sale.

The Pioneer Arcade was determined eligible for individual listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 2010 and meets as many as four criteria for individual local landmark designation (#1, #4, #7, and the integrity criterion). With increasing investment in the West Humboldt Park community, a rehabilitation of the Pioneer Arcade would be an attractive project for redevelopment using national and local historic rehabilitation tax incentives.

The New Apollo Theater and the Pioneer Arcade are two fine examples of neighborhood commercial structures that are currently vacant or underutilized. Both structures, located directly across the street from one another have suffered from deferred maintenance over time. Preservation Chicago is hopeful that listing these two structures as one of our Most Endangered may bring about an awareness of these two fine quality buildings and bring about a preservation solution, as part of any development plans for the structures.