

= Pui Tak Center =

The Pui Tak Center (Chinese : 培德堂 ; pinyin : Péidé Zhāng ; Jyutping : pui4 dak1 zung1 sam1 ; Cantonese Yale : Pùihd?k J?ngs?m ; literally : " cultivating virtue center ") , formerly known as the On Leong Merchants Association Building , is a building located in Chicago 's Chinatown . Designed by architects Christian S. Michaelsen and Sigurd A. Rognstad , the building was built for the On Leong Merchants Association and opened in 1928 . The Association used it as an immigrant assistance center , and the building was informally referred to as Chinatown 's " city hall " . In 1988 , the FBI and Chicago Police raided the building as part of a racketeering investigation . The US federal government seized the building that same year .

The building was purchased by the Chinese Christian Union Church (CCUC) for \$ 1 @. @ 4 million and renamed the Pui Tak Center in 1993 . That same year , the On Leong Merchants Association Building was designated a Chicago landmark by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks . The CCUC spent \$ 1 million raised from community donations to renovate and update the building 's neglected interior . The newly named Pai Tak Center now hosts various religious , community , and educational programs , such as English @-@ as @-@ a @-@ Second @-@ Language courses (ESL) .

In 2007 , the Pui Tak Center won a \$ 100 @, @ 000 grant from the Partners in Preservation , a program sponsored by American Express and the National Trust for Historic Preservation . In preparation for the restoration work , the structural and architectural engineering firm Wiss , Janney , Elstner Associates completed an evaluation of the building 's eastern and southern facades , focusing on its terra cotta portions . Restoration work began in spring 2009 and is scheduled for completion in early 2010 . Fully restoring the building 's exterior terra cotta pieces and clay roof tiles is the first step in a long @-@ range \$ 2 million repair plan .

= = History = =

In 1912 , Chinese businesses began relocating from the Loop to Chicago 's South Side . Starting this trend , the On Leong Chinese Merchants Association appealed to deed @-@ holder and former Illinois State 's Attorney Jacob J. Kern to hire architect H. J. Swanson to design a building large enough to house 15 stores , 30 apartments and office space on the 200 block of West 22nd Street (now Cermak Road) . Built in 1912 for \$ 200 @, @ 000 , the building 's design was typical of the period ; however , it featured white tile trim adorned with Chinese dragons and a third floor balcony . The Association relocated to the building 's third floor by 1914 .

In the 1920s , Chinese community leaders secured approximately 50 ten @-@ year leases on properties in the newly developing Chinatown . Jim Moy , director of the Association , then decided that a Chinese @-@ style building should be constructed as a strong visual announcement of the Chinese community 's new presence in the area . With no Chinese @-@ born architects in Chicago at the time , Chicago @-@ born Norse architects Christian S. Michaelsen and Sigurd A. Rognstad were asked to design the On Leong Merchants Association Building in the spring of 1926 . Moy decided to employ the pair again after Michaelsen and Rognstad 's firm built Moy 's Peacock Inn in Uptown in 1920 .

After studying texts on Chinese architecture , Michaelsen and Rognstad 's final design was an example of Orientalism , a Western architect 's interpretation of Chinese architectural forms . A good substitute for the liu li glazed ceramic found in traditional Chinese architecture , Rognstad designed exterior Teco sculptural accents , a type of terra cotta produced by Crystal Lake , Illinois 's American Terra Cotta Company . When the building plans were announced in the Chicago Tribune on July 4 , 1926 , the building was called , " One of the most expensive and elaborate buildings ever erected in America by the Chinese " . Construction began in 1926 and was completed a year later for the cost of \$ 1 million .

When the building opened in 1928 , the On Leong Merchants Association used it as an immigrant assistance center that housed various meeting halls , a school , a shrine , and the Association 's offices . It was often informally referred to as Chinatown 's " city hall " . In 1941 , the On Leong

Association offered Reverend John T.S. Mao space in the building to open St. Therese Chinese Catholic School , a Catholic grade school . By the 1950s , the school had become overcrowded , but it remained in the building until construction of a new , devoted school building was completed in 1961 .

= = = Seizure and sale = = =

In the mid @-@ 1960s , prosecutors began claiming the building was a national headquarters for a multimillion @-@ dollar racketeering operation . On April 20 , 1988 , the FBI and Chicago police Internal Affairs Division investigators raided the On Leong Merchants Association Building , confiscated gambling paraphernalia from a casino hidden on the building 's second floor and seized \$ 350 @,@ 000 from a vault . Assistant U.S. Attorney John J. Scully asserted that the Association had collected \$ 6 million in illegal gambling profits between 1966 and 1988 . The building was seized by the US federal government two months later under federal racketeering statutes . Other than several first @-@ floor shops , the building sat empty for almost five years . Rooms on the upper floors fell into disrepair , with paint peeling and faded ornamentation in pieces on the floor .

After a unanimous voice vote by a City Council committee , the Commission on Chicago Landmarks designated the On Leong Merchants Association Building as a Chicago Landmark on December 1 , 1993 , the only such landmark in Chinatown . It has been described as Chicago ? s " most significant symbol of the cultural heritage of the Chinese " . That same year , the Chinese Christian Union Church (CCUC) bought the building from the government for \$ 1 @.@ 4 million . The CCUC now uses the newly named Pui Tak Center to host religious , community , and educational programs such as family literacy classes , music programs , computer courses , and youth activities , with English @-@ as @-@ a @-@ Second @-@ Language courses (ESL) being the Center 's largest program . Recent Chinese immigrants can also visit the Center for assistance with everyday needs . Serving approximately 2 @,@ 500 new immigrants annually , the Center 's annual \$ 1 @.@ 5 million operating budget is partially funded by state and local government grants and private donations .

= = Renovation and restoration = =

After purchasing the building in 1993 , the Chinese Christian Union Church spent \$ 1 million raised from community donations to make extensive alterations to the building 's interior , which suffered from peeling paint , falling plaster , and poor lighting . The On Leong Merchants Association 's former vault was converted into a closet , and the building 's heating and water systems underwent major renovations and replacement . Renovations were completed in 1995 , and the CCUC opened the building in November .

In November 2007 , the Pui Tak Center won a \$ 100 @,@ 000 grant from the Partners in Preservation , a program sponsored by American Express and the National Trust for Historic Preservation . Spreading the word via e @-@ mail , Facebook , and church sermons , the building led the five @-@ week @-@ long online contest from the start and ultimately received 14 % of the vote . It received more votes than any of the other 24 historic Chicago sites participating in the contest , including the Robie House , the Chicago Cultural Center , and Unity Temple .

In preparation for the restoration work , the structural and architectural engineering firm Wiss , Janney , Elstner Associates completed an evaluation of the building 's eastern and southern facades , focusing on its terra cotta portions . By using ultrasonic testing , engineers were able to evaluate the state of the terra cotta without further damaging the pieces . Severely cracked or damaged pieces were partially removed and a report was written from these findings . This report provided recommendations for the masonry facade and terra cotta repair work . Restoration work began in spring 2009 and is scheduled for completion in early 2010 . All of the damaged terra cotta elements have been replaced on the south tower and parapet , and scaffolding has been erected on building 's eastern facade in preparation for further restoration work . Fully restoring the building 's exterior terra cotta pieces and clay roof tiles is the first step in a long @-@ range \$ 2 million repair plan .

