

**Architecture**

# A Bad End, And a Good Idea

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

**A**S predicted, the fight is on for bits and pieces of Chicago's Old Stock Exchange. Now that Adler and Sullivan's non-landmark landmark (it was never designated by the city in spite of the repeated official urging of its Landmarks Commission) is in the process of coming down, fragments of the building that wasn't worth keeping are going to the highest bidder.

The wrecker has a nice thing going. According to standard demolition procedure, anything he can sell for salvage is part of his deal. Two flights of the interior stairs have gone to a leading museum for \$5,000 a flight. I suppose you could figure it as so much per riser for the Sullivan iron ornament.

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The Chicago Art Institute is taking enough of the elements of the trading room to be able to re-erect it. The effort has been somewhat hampered, however, by the asking price of \$40,000 just for the stained glass. The University of Chicago at the Chicago Circle campus has spoken for the west wall cornice and 13th floor arcade, and that is very much hampered by the fact that the school has no funds at all.

Out of the battle for the dismembered corpse has come one very interesting request. New York's Metropolitan Museum has asked for the entrance arch and five to seven of the surrounding bays. The proposal is to re-construct these elements as one of the new park entrances to the museum that are part of the Metropolitan's master plan.

Usually building fragments applied to other buildings or set up in galleries are a bad joke. The farce we go through of destroying a city's living substance and then stashing dead tokens in alien settings is the kind of false conscience balm that can only be called stupid, willful

or otherwise. But when a building is being wrecked, arguments about *in situ* preservation become pointless. Then one is forced to deal with its parts as artifacts rather than suffer total esthetic loss.

In the light of this sad truth, the Metropolitan's scheme is outstandingly good. It has meaning because it proposes to re-erect the entrance of the building, complete with its enclosing bays, to be used as an entrance again, at least duplicating its original architectural and spatial functions. Entering the museum through a Sullivan portal is not the same as entering a Sullivan building, but it does give scale and purpose to the fragment, and make it understandable as architecture.

Used this way, the Sullivan portal would become part of the rear court of the American wing. As the north enclosing arm of the court it would make a new entrance through the old Vaux building, directly opposite the present American wing entrance.

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That American wing entrance, which currently can be seen only by peering around the building and through a fence, is the re-erected 1822 Assay Office facade by Martin Thompson, dismantled and moved from Wall Street and put up here at the time the Assay Office was demolished. It is a very fine, and presently invisible, thing.

This would mean that the Assay Office and Stock Exchange fronts, facing each other, would make the American wing court a significant and handsome museum of American architecture. The long, plain wall joining them would be ideal for some of the cast-iron fronts that New York has been disassembling and holding for "the future." Again, cast-iron should be saved in the city's fabric,

where it belongs, not filed away. But the result would be an optimum installation of an art form that resists museum display.

When, as proposed in the museum's master plan, this court becomes a park entrance, its impact would be dramatic. The Metropolitan is prepared to pay the costs of dismantling, moving and re-erection, and that is no small consideration. Moreover, the facade would be installed without delay.

The only element that the developers of the Stock Exchange site have agreed to save from the wrecking is the entrance arch. They have promised to pay for its unspecified re-erection, somewhere in Chicago. So far, the city has proposed putting the arch in a park, something preservationists view as not unlike presenting a nose without a face. There is talk of using it as part of a future

Art Institute addition, a good many years away.

The Metropolitan wants it even willing to take the bays without the arch, although the arch is the central element. The bays could make an exterior arcade. That, too, has more intrinsic merit than anything that has been proposed. The museum's scheme would not only save more of the building, adding the bays to the arch, but also offers a specific and superior plan. Nothing else has been suggested of this scope and immediacy — and permanent value.

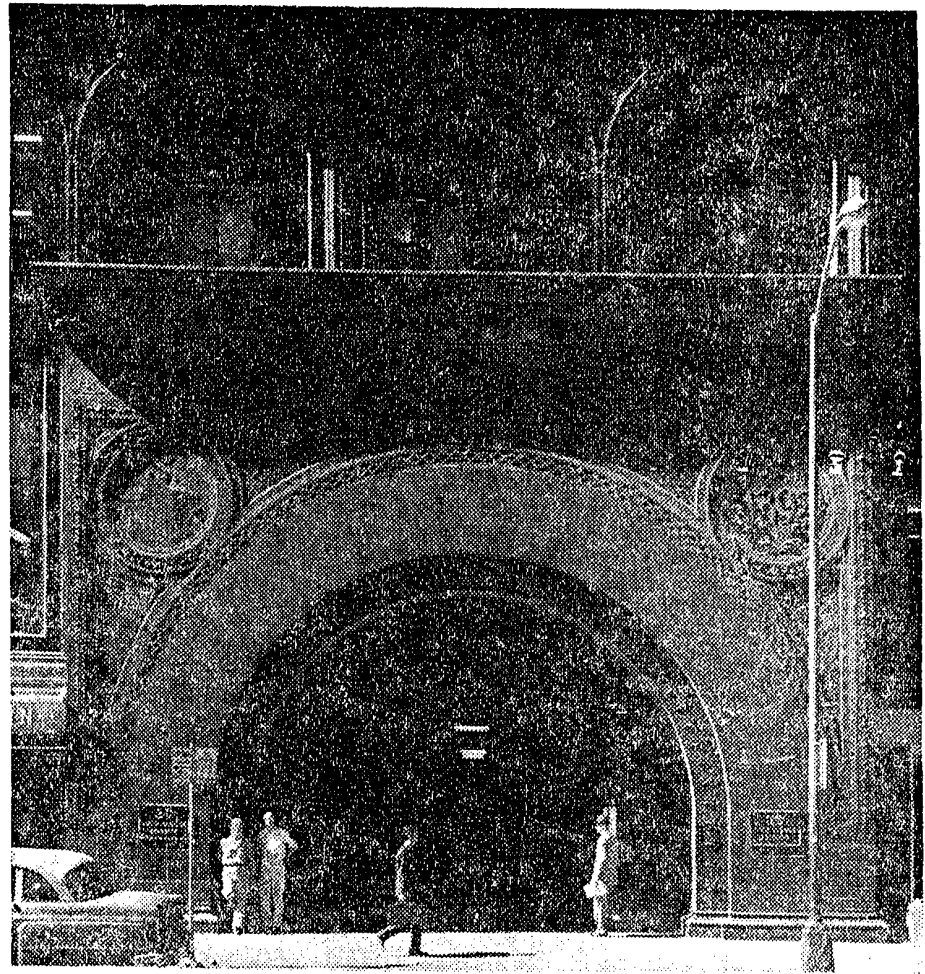
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There is a hitch, of course. Having permitted the destruction of the building, Chicago is now reluctant to let the arch go. Word has it that Mayor Daley wants to keep the arch in Chicago and that New York doesn't stand a chance. Under the circum-

stances, Chicago should at least come up with an equivalently good plan.

This unwillingness to see the arch go was not, of course, matched by an equal unwillingness to see the building go. It could be a matter of civic, or hurt pride, to keep the arch now—critics have been pretty rough on the city for its landmarks policies—or perhaps it is intended as a monument to landmark destruction. How appropriate that would be! It would indeed make an ironic memorial to Chicago's inability to come to grips with the legislative and zoning steps that must be taken to save anything of the celebrated Chicago School.

It is all about to go down like tenpins, following the Stock Exchange, unless creative solutions are actively sought. Relics don't mean much when a heritage has been lost.



Richard Nickel

Entrance arch and bays of the Chicago Stock Exchange, now under demolition  
The dispute is over how much to save, and where to put the body