

Chicago Saves Its Past

New Law for Preserving Landmarks

P. 30 New bank for Q Huxtable

By ADA LOUISE HUXTABLE

After three years of battle marked by the crash of falling monuments and the clamor of international protest, Chicago finally has a law to protect its architectural past.

The new legislation is the result of the biggest, noisiest, most dedicated and desperate campaign waged in any American city on behalf of the great old buildings that are being knocked down like tenpins for massive urban renewal and private rebuilding projects.

Chicago's successful effort to put brakes on the destruction of its landmarks was signed into law on Aug. 6 by Gov. Otto Kerner of Illinois.

The law gives the city the power to designate "areas, places, buildings, structures, works of art and other objects having special historical, community or esthetic interest or value."

The law states that "the preservation and continued utilization of such property is declared to be a public use essential to the public interest."

The city can regulate construction, alteration, demolition and use, and control the appearance and use of private property adjacent to landmarks to protect their character.

It can also acquire buildings or property by eminent domain under certain circumstances, issue bonds and receive gifts of money or property for preservation.

Mayor Supported Drive

To protect property owners, compensation is stipulated for owners who suffer losses in the normal revenue-producing power of their holdings due to legal controls.

The law was backed by Mayor Richard J. Daley and the Chicago Heritage Committee, a small, but vigorous con-

servation group whose activities for threatened Chicago landmarks have combined the best offensive and political techniques of Hurricane Jackson and Machiavelli.

Headed by a Chicago school teacher, Thomas Stauffer, the committee began as one man with a purpose and a typewriter, and ended properly incorporated, after bringing the plight of the city's historical buildings to the world's attention.

Scholars already knew the buildings well. Chicago in the eighteen-eighties and nineties was the birthplace of the skyscraper, that peculiarly American architectural contribution that flowered later so spectacularly on the skyline of New York.

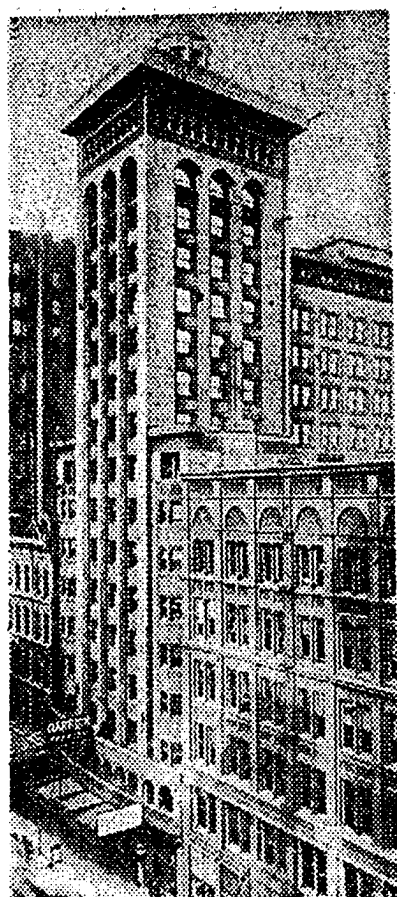
The Chicago School, as it is known in text books, included the master of early skyscraper design, Louis Sullivan. The city is also rich in the early work of Sullivan's pupil, Frank Lloyd Wright.

Nobody except the scholars paid much attention to this cultural and esthetic heritage until a commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks was established in 1957.

Work proceeded quietly and efficiently on the listing and recommending of landmarks until 1960, when a storm broke over the news that Louis Sullivan's Garrick Theater was to be demolished for a parking garage. An on-again, off-again preservation fight followed that had all the characteristics of a turn-of-the-century Chicago melodrama.

Wrecking permits were issued to the owners and held up by the city in the best tradition of The Villain vs. Little Nell.

The press, radio and television joined the fray. Indigna-



The New York Times

DID NOT FALL IN VAIN: The Garrick Theater building in Chicago. The long fight over demolition of the landmark led to enactment of a law to protect other notable structures.

tion was registered by a British M.P., a journalist in Rome, university students in Florence and the noted architect Le Corbusier.

Mayor Daley charged to the rescue, calling public meetings to study methods of salvation. The owners filed suit to force the city to issue the wrecking permit.

A Superior Court judge refused it; the Planning and Zoning Committee toured the building and called for immediate razing.

Adverse Court Decision

The owners appealed to the Illinois Appellate Court, which finally ordered that the permit be issued. With a bow to the city's good intentions, the court decided that the owners would suffer economic hardship.

The building's beautiful ornament was dismantled and given to institutions, and the wreck-er's ball swung. But Chicago didn't satisfy itself with hearts and flowers. The result of the Garrick tragedy was the move for preservation legislation, leading to the present law.

It is ironic that the Garrick Theater faced the side of Chicago's new civic center, and it would have made an ideal cultural and historic addition. But the Public Buildings Commission was unable to acquire the Garrick for this purpose. Under the new law, acquisition is easier.

One question outstanding is where financially hardpressed municipalities will find money for owner compensation, and how willingly they can offer tax relief on landmarks, while desperately seeking new sources of taxation.

During the uproar, other historic structures were destroyed. But the prospects are better now.

Chicago—and the nation—has been alerted to the value of its monuments. Connoisseurship of early Chicago skyscrapers, like that of early Romanesque churches, has become a serious sport.

And across the country, many city dwellers are taking another look at their past.