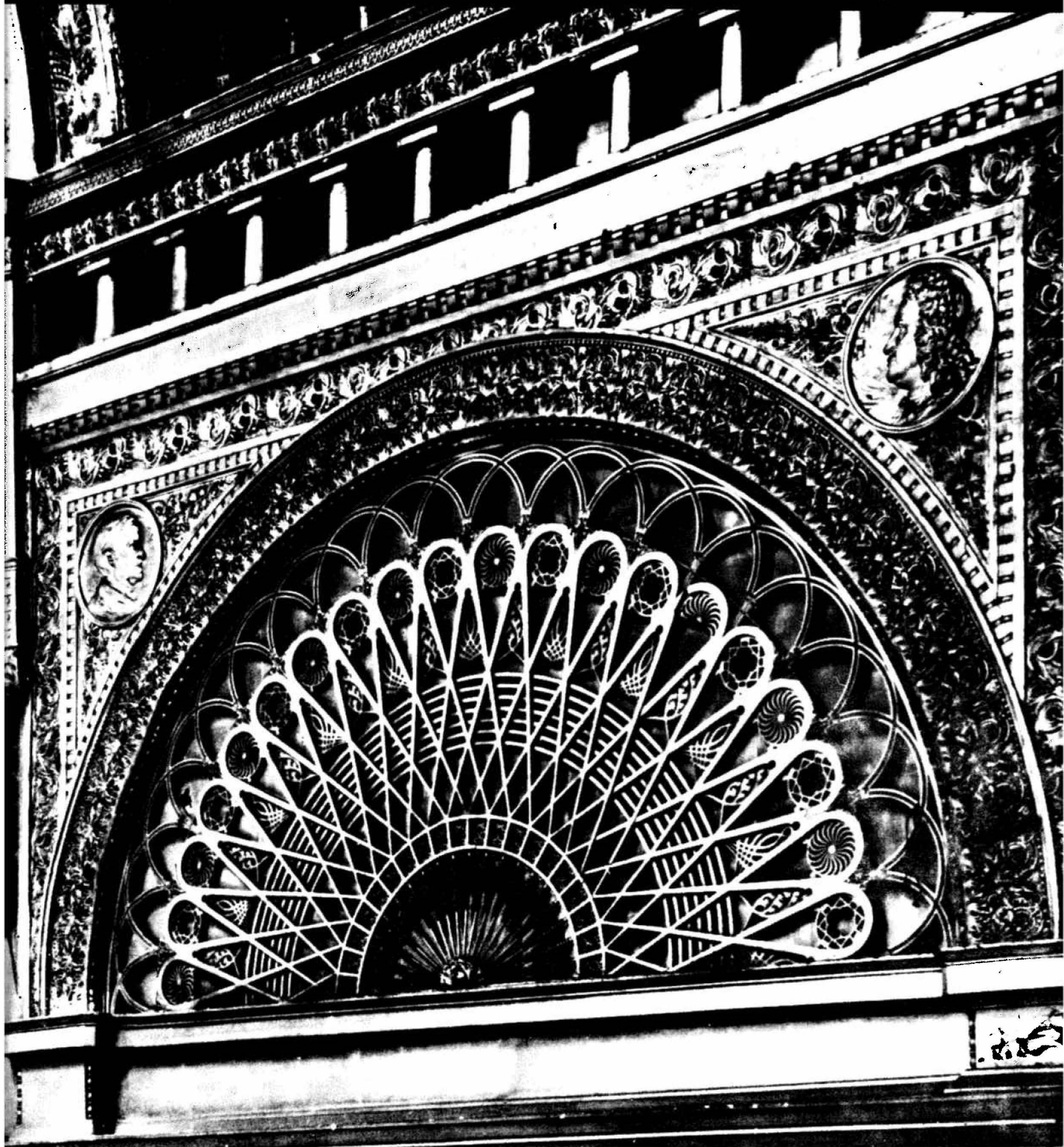


AUDITORIUM BUILDING

a summary of information

June 1972



This *Summary of Information* is a synopsis of various research materials related to THE AUDITORIUM BUILDING, prepared for the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks by its staff.

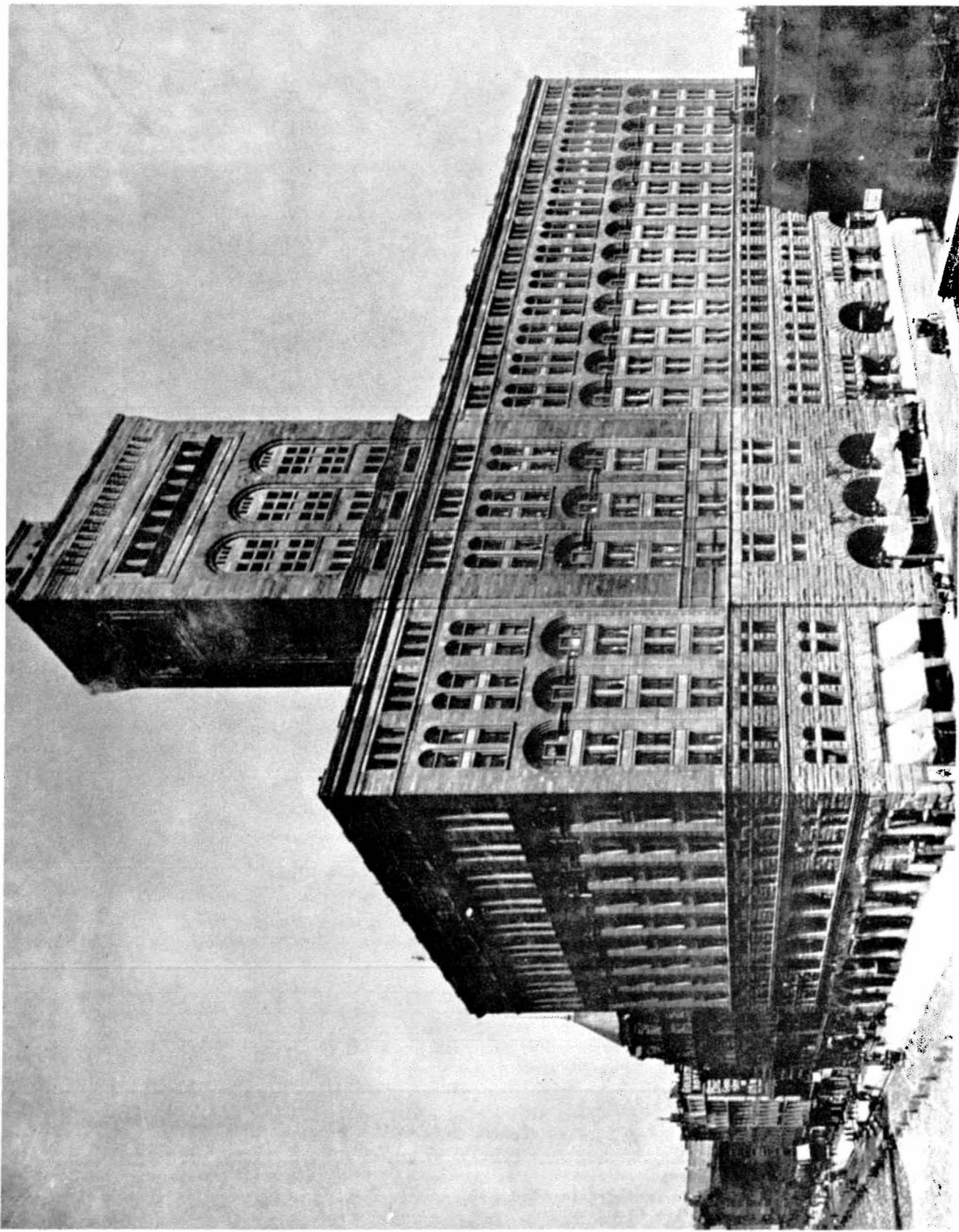
cover design:

Gilded arch decorating proscenium wing of the Theatre.

opposite:

This early photo offers a rare view of the Congress facade and great tower. The building has undergone few exterior alterations and still looks very much the same today.

(Photo by Chicago Architectural Photographic Company)



THE AUDITORIUM BUILDING

Michigan Avenue and Congress Parkway
Chicago, Illinois

Date of Completion: 1889

Architects: Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan

Landmark Site: Part of Original Lot 5 and Original Lots 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 in Block 9 in Fractional Section 15, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

Adler and Sullivan

Responsible for an overwhelming number of architectural innovations in style and engineering, Dankmar Adler and Louis Henri Sullivan proved a force to be reckoned with throughout their career.

Sullivan's senior by twelve years, Adler was born in Germany in 1844. He came to the United States with his father ten years later, and received his elementary and high school education in Detroit. Showing an aptitude and interest in architectural drawing, his father apprenticed him in the office of John Schaefer, and a short time later he entered the office of E. Willard Smith.

In 1861 the Adlers moved to Chicago where Dankmar found work as draftsman with Augustus Bauer. But the Civil War cut his stay here short and he enlisted for active duty in July 1862. As an artillery man Adler fought in some of the toughest campaigns before being detailed as a military engineer. His last nine months of service found him in the Topographical Engineer's Office of the Military Division of Tennessee where he gained invaluable experience for his future career. Adler enjoyed telling others that his service with the Union Army was in fact his education. In truth, all his vast knowledge was either self-taught or picked-up from professional associates.

1865 brought the end of the war and Adler's return to Chicago. Over the next 14 years he worked briefly for Bauer, for O. S. Kinney, in partnership with Kinney's son, and in partnership with Edward Burling before establishing independent practice in 1879.

Frank Lloyd Wright recalls "The Big Chief" this way:

A personality, short-built and heavy, like an old Byzantine church. . .one to inspire others with confidence in his power at once. I felt comforted. He walked with deliberate, heavy-legged, flat-footed steps. . .Then while his deep bass voice rumbled, he went about with his hands stuck under his coat-tails, looking at drawings, a word of greeting occasionally. He would sit and make suggestions in a fatherly sort of way. He got to me. Looked at me pleasantly from his deep-set eyes under the bushy brows. "Hello! Sullivan's new man?" He sat down on the stool I had vacated to stand up to him. As he put one leg over the other I noticed his enormous mannish feet. They spread flat like the foundations for

some heavy building. "Sullivan needs help, Wright. It's difficult to find anyone to catch on to what he wants. I hope you will succeed!" He got up abruptly almost as soon as he had sat down and, as though suddenly remembering something, he went heavily out among the draughting tables like a barge making its way between river craft. . . Dankmar Adler had been an Army engineer. He commanded the confidence of contractor and client alike. His handling of both was masterful. . . He was a good planner, a good critic. . .

Sullivan on the other hand was decidedly different, as Wright was not hesitant to say:

About 10:30 the door opened. Mr. Sullivan walked slowly in with a haughty air, a handkerchief to his nose. Paying no attention to anyone. No "good morning." No words of greeting as he went from desk to desk. Saw me waiting for him. Came forward at once with a pleasant "Ah! Wright, there you are," and the office had my name. And evidently, in Sullivan's unusually pleasant address, also my 'number'. "Here," lifting a board by my table, "Take this drawing of mine, a duffer I fired Saturday spoiled it. Redraw it and ink it in." And they all knew what I was there for. He wandered about some more in a haughty sort of way. . . The Master's very walk at this time bore dangerous resemblance to a strut. . . The deep quiet of his temper had great charm for me. The rich humor that was lurking in the deeps within him and that sat in his eyes whatever his mouth might be saying, however earnest the moment might be, was rich and rare in human quality.

Born in Boston in 1856, Sullivan even as a child was a sensitive complex of powerful emotions. His early years were divided between school and long summers on his grandparents' farm. Here he developed his deep respect for nature, its rhythm and meaning. In 1872 he entered the architectural school at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology but his restless, inquisitive personality found it mechanical and empty. So after only one year he left with every intention of studying in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Instead, he went to Philadelphia to try his hand at the real world of architecture. He entered the office of Frank Furness partly, as Carl Condit says, "because of the superior quality of his buildings and partly because he had heartily damned MIT."

But the panic of 1873 was bad for business and Sullivan was forced to leave after just a year at the drafting board. Since his parents had moved to Chicago four years prior, Louis decided it was time for a visit. Appalled at the chaos and ruins left in the wake of the Great Fire, he was also deeply impressed by the sheer effort of will that he sensed putting the city back on its feet. Excited by the prospect of reconstruction, he took a job as draftsman with Major William LeBaron Jenney.

Here he met some of the young men who would later become collaborators in the development of the famous "Chicago School" of architecture. Yet all the while his conscience kept nagging him to go on to Paris and the Ecole. He left in 1874.

After two years Sullivan felt the Ecole could offer him no more than he had received from MIT. He returned to Chicago and took a job with Johnston and Edelman, remaining there until 1879 when he teamed up with Adler.

The Era and Work of Adler and Sullivan

As disastrous as the Chicago Fire seemed at the time, it later proved to be somewhat of a blessing in disguise.

Chicago had grown rapidly before 1872. Population multiplied wildly. The city took pride in being not only the transportation center of the United States, but the financial and industrial capital of the Midwest.

Then, except for a few scattered and hardly buildings, the great fire completely leveled the city. Yet the men responsible for Chicago's phenomenal development were

determined to move ahead on an even greater scale.

And that meant rebuilding had to begin and go fast.

Reconstruction was measured in miles and not number of buildings. Activity progressed steadily for nearly 18 months until the panic of 1873-74 was felt throughout the nation. While the depression retarded rebuilding considerably, progress continued in Chicago.

By the time economic conditions improved 10 years later, the elevator had been invented. Fire-proofing techniques had been perfected. And Chicago architects were ready to answer the needs of a sophisticated business community which, in response to soaring real estate values, demanded a new form of commercial construction.

As historian Carl Condit explains it, the Chicago architects

faced the challenge with rare boldness and imagination. They met all the utilitarian requirements of the big office building by introducing a bewildering number of innovations in structure and mechanical facilities. . .

They developed structural devices and methods of construction that constantly increased the speed and efficiency of the building process. . .

They designed buildings to be erected in unbroken ranks. . . story on story, block after block. . . The architects nevertheless avoided the deadening monotony of profile and detail. . .

John Root. Daniel Burnham. William LeBaron Jenney. Martin Roche. William Holabird. Adler and Sullivan. All participated in the architectural revolution that began in Chicago, extending roughly from 1880 to 1893.

These young designers and engineers produced for the first time the floating and caisson foundation, the Chicago window. They broke with the tradition of masonry construction and substituted the use of the steel skeleton system.

The steel frame allowed them to build higher, and when they did they realized the need for a whole new system of design and ornamentation which would express the structural innovations and character of their new, tall buildings.

Taken together these developments became known as the Chicago School of Architecture, a style which incorporated totally unique structural principles. One which turned its back on all references to classical design.

The partnership of Adler and Sullivan was one of the most productive in architectural history. Together they executed the Rothschild Store, 1887. The Wirt Dexter Building, 1887. The Auditorium, 1889. The Schiller Building, 1892. The Stock Exchange Building, 1894. In St. Louis they did the Wainwright Building, 1890. And in Buffalo the Guaranty Building, 1894.

Sullivan designed the Transportation Building for the Columbian Exposition. And after the dissolution of the partnership in 1895 he designed Chicago's famous Carson, Pirie, Scott Store in 1899, 1904.

Too often Adler is not given nearly the credit he deserves as a brilliant and progressive engineer. Sullivan, on the other hand, is justly celebrated as the Father of Modern Architecture. Yet studies of their independent work before and after the partnership show that Sullivan unquestionably produced most of his greatest buildings while with Adler. And Adler in turn reached his highest accomplishments with Sullivan.

But Adler and Sullivan, along with the other Chicago designers, built more than buildings.

They built a reputation. For themselves as great architects. For Chicago as the birthplace of the skyscraper and modern architecture.

Birth of the Auditorium

In 1879 Dankmar Adler designed the Central Music Hall. The building was widely accepted as having the best acoustics in the city, so that in the spring of 1885 when Chicago decided to sponsor an Opera Festival, Adler was the man chosen to handle the job.

A temporary opera hall was constructed in the Old Exposition Building along the lake in Grant Park. Again the acoustics went unmatched and the Festival proved an overwhelming success, playing to more than 6,000 people. This prompted Ferdinand W. Peck, responsible for organizing the Festival, to conceive of a permanent opera house for Chicago.

As Hugh Morrison, Sullivan's biographer, puts it, Peck envisioned the building as:

...a civic center for the highest development of the opera, the symphony, the dance, and musical festivals, as well as for glittering society balls and political conventions. As the idea grew, it became apparent that these functions would require a building on such a scale and of such great cost that it could not be expected to maintain itself financially. Commodore Peck hit upon the idea of adding to the 'cultural' part of the building a 'commercial' part which should afford the necessary revenue for the maintenance of the whole. Thus the concept was enlarged to include a hotel and business offices, arranged as a shell around the theatres, all to be controlled by a single organization. The idea, already well-formulated, was presented in an address to the Commercial Club on May 29, 1886. Other supporters were found, and the Chicago Auditorium Association was organized; stock was issued to the amount of \$2,000,000 and bonds to \$900,000; eventually there were about three hundred stockholders.

Every architect in the city naturally sought the commission. But Peck was convinced to turn it over to Adler and Sullivan, based on the extraordinary work they had just completed for the Festival.

The Auditorium cost a total of \$3,145,291. And because the scale of the building was constantly changing, construction took three years and encompassed unbelievable problems in engineering and design.

The commission first came into the office in the spring of 1886. Adler was 42, Sullivan 30. Morrison describes the preliminary work:

...As the months went on the project grew: the Board of Directors of the Auditorium Association amplified its ideas; all kinds of technical improvements in theatre mechanism were incorporated; the building grew in height; a banquet hall was added to the hotel; the estimated cost jumped to well over \$3,000,000. Even after the foundations were built the plans changed, and the architects were working on uncertainties because conditions changed so rapidly. The plans were drawn and redrawn; over \$60,000 was spent by Adler and Sullivan on preliminary studies.

Even before the Auditorium was completed it housed the Republican National Convention of 1888. Benjamin Harrison and Levi Morton were nominated for the nation's two highest offices. As an indication of the importance held for this building throughout the country, Harrison and Morton after their election returned for the dedication December 10, 1889. And for the first time in history the United States saw both the president and vice-president away from the Capitol at the same time while Congress was still in session.

The Auditorium Building

Sullivan's initial conceptions were much more ornate than the final design, including elaborate terra-cotta facade ornamentation, a gable roof, dormers, corner pinnacles and oriels.

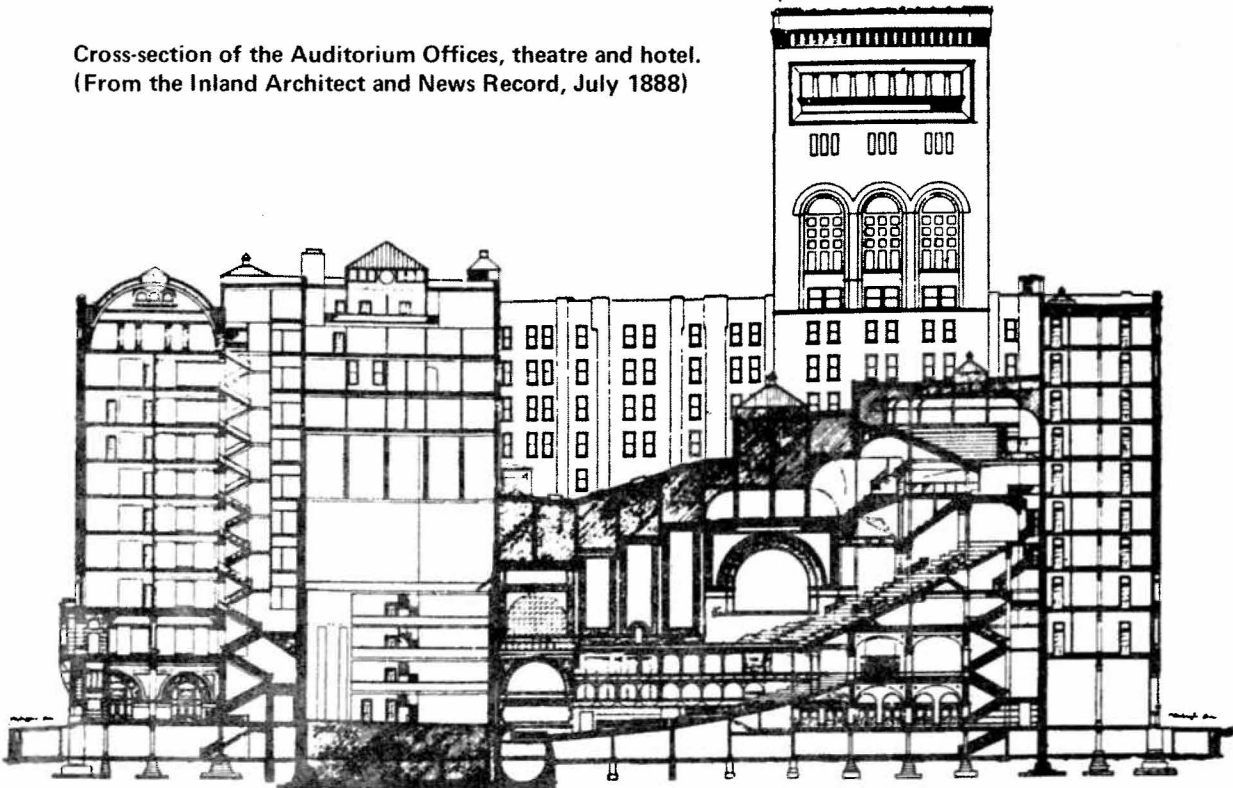
The final scheme was deeply influenced by Richardson's Marshall Field Wholesale Store, begun late in 1885. As Condit explains:

... Both Sullivan and Peck had a profound admiration for the earlier building; in addition, the board of the Opera Association saw many possible economies in the adoption of its simplicity. Fortunately for architecture everywhere, Sullivan abandoned his propensity for elaborate exterior ornament and concentrated on the architectonic effect of mass, texture, and the proportioning and scaling of large and simple elements.

Adler did not personally agree completely with the new design. He felt it deprived "the exterior of the building of those graces of plastic surface decoration which are so characteristic of its internal treatment". What Adler could not have known at the time, but which historians would recognize later, was that the Auditorium was the turning point in Sullivan's career, when he channeled his energy toward the development of an appropriate form to express the nature of tall commercial buildings and consequently pioneered the concept of modern architecture as we know it today.

The Auditorium Building covers 63,500 square feet of ground, bounded by Wabash, Michigan and Congress. The office section faces west, the hotel east. The theatre itself is situated deep inside the building, at no point penetrating to the street. This arrangement not only afforded the office and hotel space with all the available and valuable window frontage, but wrapping the other functions around the theatre also insured its isolation from disturbing street noise.

Cross-section of the Auditorium Offices, theatre and hotel.
(From the Inland Architect and News Record, July 1888)



A masonry building, the exterior walls and partitions dividing the theatre from the rest of the structure are all load-bearing members. However, the interior floor, vault and roof loads are carried on a complex system of cast- and wrought-iron framing. In the Auditorium, Adler is said to have "exhausted all the forms of iron construction that his age had developed". Along with John Root's Monadnock Building and Richardson's Marshall Field Store, the Auditorium signalled the end of masonry construction and was one of the last great monuments to that centuries-old technique. Sullivan himself stated that "Louis' heart went into this structure. . .It was the culmination of Louis' masonry 'period'."

Ten stories high, the Auditorium is faced with huge blocks of rusticated granite for the first three stories, a smooth limestone sheathing above that. Since the theatre is sealed within the structure, the facade treatment reflects the more simplistic nature of the hotel and office blocks.

Three massive arches mark the hotel entrance along Michigan. Three smaller arches serve the same purpose for the theatre along Congress. The ground level arcade that now runs the length of Congress Parkway was cut through in 1952, when the street was widened as part of Congress (now Eisenhower) Expressway.

Although windows are paired from the second to the ninth floors, Sullivan avoided monotony by treating them differently. At the second floor each window is capped by a separate, small arch. At the third story, the windows are rectangular. From the fourth to seventh floors they fall under large, semicircular arches which span the entire bay width. Through the eighth and ninth floors each upper window nestles under its own simple arch. And at the tenth floor the windows are grouped in threes, are again rectangular and are recessed and handled in a colonnade fashion.

The window treatment and pronounced piers have a tendency to emphasize the vertical. So Sullivan introduced a series of projecting courses (at the second, third, fourth, and tenth floors) to reassert the horizontal dimensions of the building. The main elevations are finished off with a parapet. Carl Condit eloquently praises the exterior design:

The elevations form a beautiful illustration of Sullivan's unique feeling for harmony, scale and proportion. The subdued texture of the masonry and the alternating accents of pier and opening have the quality of a musical composition: there are four basic, repetitive rhythms, each representing a slight variation on the other, but all are positively integrated into a harmonious whole.

The tower on the Congress side rises seven stories above the building proper. It was constructed primarily to house hydraulic machinery for the stage of the theatre, and to provide additional high-rent office space. Near the top Sullivan introduced a recessed balcony sensitively masked with a colonnade. Here in the tower, the highest point in Chicago when built, Adler and Sullivan had their own office behind the colonnade for 20 years.

Originally, the 41 X 70 foot tower was surmounted by a two-story lantern house which contained instruments of the U. S. Signal Service. A stairway led to the station roof which was used as a sightseeing platform or observatory.

To support this massive building Adler designed foundations capable of carrying 4,000 pounds of pressure per square foot. Anticipating settlement, which eventually measured 18 inches, Adler fit all pipe connections with special lead insertions to provide flexibility and inhibit the tendency to snap. But the biggest foundation problem involved the tower, which weighs 15,000 tons. Hugh Morrison describes the predicament:

This called for a special foundation and a special mode of construction. The actual area of the tower was 2,870 square feet, but its foundation was much larger, spreading. . .over 6,700 square feet. It might be described as a kind of platform composed of a five-foot thickness of concrete reinforced by two layers

of heavy timbers, three layers of criss-crossed steel rails, and three layers of iron I-beams. . .

But still the necessary settlement had to be allowed for, and this introduced one of the most baffling problems, and one of the most ingenious solutions in the entire structure of the Auditorium. . . Under normal conditions, the settlement of the foundations would have progressed uniformly as the building continued to rise and the load was increased. But the foundation under the tower was designed to support between six and seven thousand tons more than the adjacent wall foundations. Therefore if the tower were built up along with the adjacent wall the weight would be insufficient to compress its foundations, the adjacent walls would settle more than the tower walls, and cracks in the masonry would ensue. The problem was to load the tower foundations concurrently with the wall foundations in proportion to their ultimate loads so that the settlement would be even throughout. . .

The only solution was an artificial loading of the tower. This Adler did by means of adding pig-iron and brick in vast quantities to the lower stories and basement, increasing the artificial load gradually as the height of the walls and tower approached the tenth story, but always maintaining a constant mathematical equation between the relative weight of the adjacent wall to its foundation-capacity. Thus the settlement proceeded absolutely uniformly. After reaching the tenth story the full settlement of all the foundations had been reached. Above this, as the tower rose above the adjacent wall, the problem was merely to translate artificial load into real load, and this was done by gradually removing the pig-iron and bricks as the tower grew to its full height and weight. When the tower reached the top, ninety-five feet higher than the adjacent walls, all the artificial load was gone, but the total weight was just the same as it had been at the tenth-story level.

Inventive as Adler's solution was, the entire process was outmoded when caisson foundations were invented for the Stock Exchange Building in 1893. Adler himself introduced them.

The tower foundations weren't the least of Adler's worries. Below the theatre was a tremendous amount of necessary mechanical stage equipment. It was to be housed in a basement 18 feet below the stage and 7 feet below the water level of Lake Michigan. Somehow he had to make the space water-tight.

Waterproofing concrete had been accomplished before, but not waterproofing against pressure. As Condit explains it, "Adler met the problem in his characteristic way, which was direct, ingenious, and highly empirical." He designed a laminated floor built up of alternate layers of concrete, asphalt, and asphalt-saturated felt, counterweighted with additional concrete and rails to offset the upward pressure of ground-water beneath the basement. The result: a completely waterproof room extending seven feet below the level of the lake.

What used to be the Auditorium Hotel ran the full length of Michigan and then west along part of Congress. Only 45 feet deep, this narrow section nevertheless contained 400 guest rooms plus elaborate public and service facilities. The original plans called for lobbies, main offices, a men's smoking room, a ladies' parlour, a restaurant, kitchen, and servant and service rooms.

But after the foundations had already been laid, the Board of Directors expanded the program to include a dining room, a banquet hall and consequently enlarged kitchen and service areas. Again Adler was pressed to the limits of his ability. With no room to build out, the new facilities could only be secured over the ceilings of the auditorium and stage. An incredible system of trusses was constructed to carry the rooms. Bridges often linked them together.

Morrison's description of the hotel interior is perhaps one of the best:

The three entrance arches on Michigan Avenue open into a spacious lobby with a marble mosaic floor, and a six-foot dado of Mexican onyx. A row of piers supports the ceiling, divided into panels by beams and stencilled with geometric patterns. The decoration of the archivolts and soffits of the arches, the frieze at the top of the wall, and the corbels and pier capitals is all of gilded plaster relief made from Sullivan's designs. This work, together with the richly colored ceiling and the fine marbles, has the sumptuous effect deemed proper for hotel lobbies in the eighties, without the vulgarity of other fashionable hostelrys of that era.

The decoration of the long bar in the restaurant is noteworthy: the forms executed in carved wood and moulded plaster are entirely new architectural ornament, revealing Sullivan's rebellion against traditional forms and proportions, and his extraordinary fertility in the invention of a new vocabulary. On the second floor, above the lobby, is the main parlor of the hotel, reached by a grand staircase rich in onyx panelling and gilded plaster relief, and with fine wrought-iron stair-rails. The mosaic floors of the landings were especially designed by Sullivan, and show an amazing power in the proper use of the material, originality of motive, delicacy of treatment and wealth of color. . .The larger part of the ten-story building is taken up by guest rooms. The Auditorium Hotel was considered the last word in luxury and had large rooms and many fine suites.

. . .the finest public room in the hotel was the great dining hall on the tenth floor, running the whole length of the Michigan Avenue front, and with a magnificent view from the large windows overlooking the lake-front park. The main room was covered by a curved vault, the curve beginning at the floor level. Five arched trusses divided the ceiling into bays, and each arch was decorated by soffit panels of ornamental plaster reliefs centering on electric lights. There were also electric flood-lights over the skylights, so that the room was extremely effective at night. The ceiling was originally decorated by a rich stencilled pattern, now painted over. At the ends were two smaller dining-rooms separated from the main room by columns carrying a very rich frieze. The segmental arches above the frieze were adorned by mural paintings. In the conception of the whole and in detail this was not only entirely novel, but one of the most beautiful rooms which Sullivan designed. The kitchens for this dining-room were located in a structurally independent building, four stories high, carried by trusses over the theatre stage, and reached from the dining-room by bridges.

Finally, the hotel possessed a special banquet hall located directly over the auditorium of the theatre, and carried by two huge iron trusses. Entirely different from the main dining-room, the banquet hall was no less original in conception or refined in detail. In it another novel decorative use of electric lighting demonstrates Sullivan's resource in utilizing every practical necessity as an integral element in the architectural whole. .

The office block on Wabash contained 136 offices. It also served as an auxiliary entrance to the theatre. The sixth story corridor connected by bridges to the two upper galleries. The seventh floor corridor led to a small recital hall which sat above the upper galleries.

But the whole reason behind the Auditorium Building was the auditorium itself. The largest permanent theatre constructed up to that time, it had the capacity to seat 4,237. And including foyers, sitting rooms, stage and stage facilities it occupies more than half the total area, one third the total volume of the structure.

The parquet or main floor, stretching 112 feet from the stage footlights to the back row, accommodates approximately 1,400 people. The seats are arranged in a series of wide, sweeping curves with the floor gradually rising a total of 17 feet from front to back. Both

the floor and seating arrangement were determined by acoustic principles, not sight-lines, and were more than was necessary for clear vision.

Forty boxes were arranged in two tiers on each side of the parquet. The lower tier of eight formed an arcade of semicircular arches while the upper tier of twelve was entirely open. The fronts were of cast iron curved slightly out, decorated in ivory and gold, the prevailing color scheme of the house. The plush draperies of the upper boxes were ivory slightly darker than the box fronts. The chairs were upholstered in yellow satin.

The main balcony is even larger than the parquet. Its 1,600 seats are arranged elliptically, suspended at a height of 40 feet. Again, both the seating pattern and height of the balcony were based on the same acoustic principles applied to the parquet.

Two galleries sit above the balcony. Both are entered from the same level since the second gallery is not over but rather in front of the first. Together they seat just under 1,000.

The proscenium arch rises in an elliptical curve bordered above and at the sides by painted murals on a gold background. All three paintings are inscribed with and illustrate passages from Sullivan's essay "Inspiration."

The proscenium wings spread out from the curtain at an angle and are decorated with graceful fan-like trellises and golden plaster relief. An organ grille rests to the left. The organ was considered the most complete instrument in the world at the time. The grille opposite the organ was used to admit fresh air cooled by roof sprays, and this made the Auditorium the first air-conditioned theatre.

The reducing curtain was richly ornamented with gold-encrusted reliefs and the names of great composers. The drop curtain was silk embroidered with gold.

The stage apron projects 6 feet in front of the curtain. The prompter's box sat in the middle, and the orchestra pit is below that.

The intricate ceiling form was molded entirely after acoustic principles. Composed of four expanding elliptical arches, each becomes progressively wider and higher until the outermost spans the full width of the theatre. The ceiling between the arches is smooth and acts as a sound reflector. The spacing of these sections is carefully calculated so that sound waves from the stage are reflected down to every part of the main floor and to the balcony.

If the arches had been perfectly semicircular the sound waves would have been focused in only one spot at the center of the floor. Adler's use of flat elliptical arches prevented this focusing. The smooth ceiling panels in turn provided vertical breaks which threw the reflected waves to the back, diffusing them throughout the theatre.

The arch heights are further calculated to dispel echoes, the lowest arch being only 45 feet above the floor. Reverberation was still another problem to be solved. To counteract it in a theatre as large as the Auditorium either the total volume of the space must be reduced or sound-absorbing surfaces must be introduced. Adler used the great arches to significantly reduce the volume and lessen the reverberation time. With no previous research to guide him, no consultant to assist him, Adler produced a theatre possessing near-perfect acoustics.

The arches offer absolutely no structural support. The ceiling is carried on huge iron trusses 118 feet long. The arches are merely light frameworks hung from these trusses, and serve as acoustical elements and ventilating ducts. The gilded bee-hive projections along the face of the arches are actually air outlets.

The arches render both architectural and decorative function. Morrison writes:

Sullivan made them the dominant theme of the interior and the repeated curves

have a grand sweep over the hall. They are decorated by plaster reliefs, chevron mouldings dividing the faces into hexagons enclosing the grilled bosses, and smaller triangles enclosing other foliage designs. The whole surface is covered by gold leaf and studded with electric lights, gleaming like dull, mellow gold. Even the borders of the arched panels are enriched by relief bands and an inner lace-like pattern delicately stencilled in gold. Rarely has there been such a wedding of large and majestic simplicity with refined and subtle detail. The effect is superb.

Adler developed an extremely sophisticated device for reducing the capacity of the theatre. He designed the ceilings over the galleries as hinged panels which could be lowered to close off those areas. When raised they seemed to disappear completely. When dropped they served as part of a new ceiling line. In all he was able to reduce the theatre from 4,237 seats to only 2,574.

The auditorium stage remains one of the largest in the country, measuring approximately 70 feet deep, 100 feet wide, and 95 feet high. It has a huge reducing curtain weighing 10½ tons. Dressing rooms were provided on both sides of the stage, on four stories above and two below.

The mechanical equipment installed was the most advanced of its time. As Condit explains:

Adler went to Europe to study the best facilities on the Continent, but he introduced radical changes into European techniques to suit American practice. An important innovation was the construction of the stage in sections that could be lifted by hydraulic machinery (up or down over a range of 18 feet. It could also produce wave-like or rocking motions obliquely as well as vertically). In this way the stage could be banked for choral concerts and the like. Lowered flat, overlaid with hardwood, and opened to its fullest extent, it became a ballroom capable of accommodating eight thousand people. There is a great amount of mechanical and hydraulic equipment above and below the stage, which is still one of the largest and best equipped in the country. With few exceptions, there is nothing like it in theatres devoted to opera and drama.

Adler incorporated yet another stage innovation: a moving panorama which ran in a track around the stage, painted to reflect the sky of every season and weather condition. It allowed for instantaneous mood changes and eliminated the need for numerous set pieces.

The entire stage area was designed for maximum efficiency and flexibility. Only 25 stagehands were required for production of even the most elaborate operas. As Adler said a few years after the building was finished: “. . .all changes and transformations are made quickly and smoothly and there has never yet been a case when the actors have waited for the stage.”

Now over 80 years old, when the Auditorium Building went up in 1889 it encompassed the largest single building enterprise in Chicago. Its hotel was the most luxurious, its theatre without peer. Condit states that: “On the Auditorium, the later success of Adler and Sullivan was built, and in good measure, the later fame of the Chicago school and of the city itself.”

Morrison reflects:

As an engineering achievement it was outstanding, being the heaviest structure yet carried on floating foundations, and embodying extremely ingenious solutions to many other complex problems of planning, construction, and mechanical equipment. Its historical importance as a turning-point in Sullivan's style and as a great institution in the civic life of Chicago, not to speak of its architectural excellence, make it a building which should be preserved to future generations as one of the great monuments of American architecture.

Of all the Adler and Sullivan buildings erected in Chicago only two major commissions remain. The Carson, Pirie, Scott Store and The Auditorium.

Over the Years

The Auditorium Building operated continuously and successfully until 1929. In that year Samuel Insull built the Civic Opera House on Wacker Drive, and in doing so moved the Chicago Opera Company out of the Auditorium. Following the loss of the theatre's major tenant, the depression of the 1930s virtually closed down the hotel. Bankruptcy was declared in 1940. The theatre locked its doors. And the movable contents of the building were sold at auction.

Parts of the hotel and the orchestra floor of the theatre were used as a U. S. O. center between 1942-45. In 1946 Roosevelt University bought the building and began adapting it to their educational needs.

In 1956 a campaign began to raise \$75,000 for restoration of the seventh floor banquet hall as a recital hall. The money secured, the hall was dedicated and opened the next year.

About the same time Roosevelt's Board of Trustees passed a resolution indicating interest in the preservation and ultimate restoration of the building. In 1960 the Auditorium Theatre Council was formed, charged with the responsibility of financing and supervising restoration of the theatre and overseeing its operation.

As the money came in, so did Harry Weese and Associates' offer to handle the architectural side of the endeavor.

The firm found the building in fine structural condition. Repair was preferred to replacement whenever possible. Although some of Sullivan's original ornament was lost because funds were not then available to preserve it, tracings and molds were made so that when the money was finally forthcoming the decoration could be duplicated.

Tremendous time, effort, and good will went into the restoration project. The theatre reopened amid gala celebrations in 1967. Roosevelt University deserves much credit for undertaking the enormous project, as does Mr. Weese's office for a sensitive restoration, and above all the Auditorium Theatre Council under the chairmanship of Mrs. John Spachner for raising the funds and seeing the project through.

Recognized by the previous Commission on Chicago Architectural Landmarks, the Auditorium is also listed on the *National Register of Historic Places*.

Today the building is back in full use, its magnificent theatre hosting everything from ballet to rock concerts. And once again Chicagoans are beginning to appreciate this irreplaceable part of our heritage, just as the rest of the world has from the day it went up.

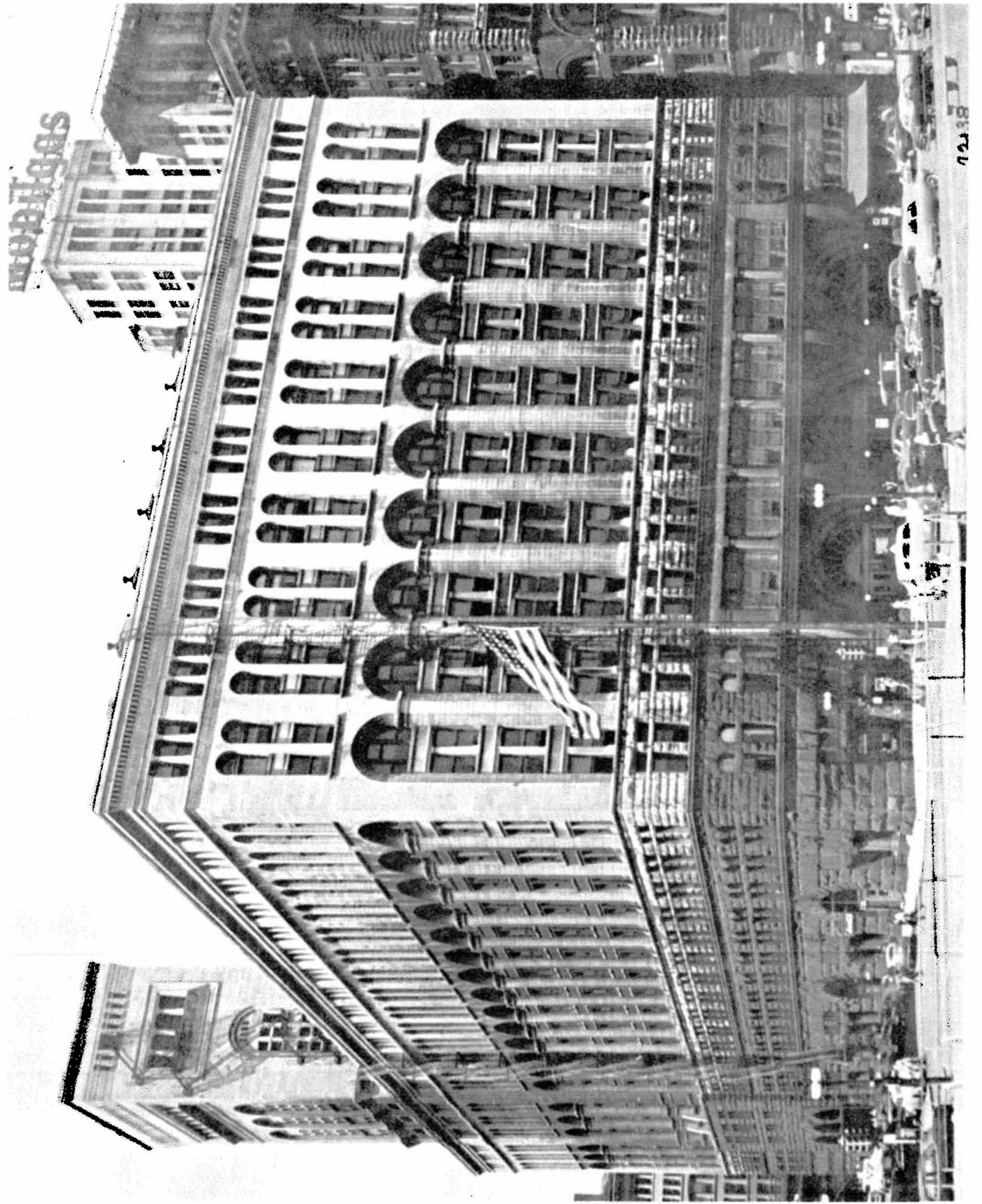
Selected Bibliography

- Adler, Dankmar. "The Chicago Auditorium", *Architectural Record*, Vol. I, April-June, 1892.
- Adler, Dankmar. "Foundations of the Auditorium Building, Chicago", *The Inland Architect and NewsLetter*, Vol. XI, No. 3, March, 1888.
- Adler, Dankmar. "Theater Building for American Cities", *Inland Architect*, November, 1967.
- "The Auditorium Building - Its Component Parts - The Interior Decoration", *The American Architect and Building News*, December 28, 1889.
- "Auditorium Building", Roosevelt University announces plans for the restoration of Adler and Sullivan's Auditorium Building.
- "Architecture of Chicago and Vicinity", Society of Architectural Historians, August Tour, 1965.
- Condit, Carl. *The Chicago School of Architecture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965.
- Drury, John. *Old Chicago Houses*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Giedion, Sigfried. *Space, Time and Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1963.
- Hasbrouck, Wilbert. "Chicago Auditorium Theater", *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. IV, No. 3, Third Quarter, 1967.
- Hayes, Dorsha B. *Chicago, Crossroads of American Enterprise*. New York: Julian Messner Inc., 1944.
- Historic American Buildings Survey. Historic and structural information.
U.S. Department of the Interior
National Park Service
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
801 19th Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20006
- Hunt, Ridgely, "Resurrection of a Masterpiece", *Chicago Tribune Magazine*, October 29, 1967.
- Koeper, Frederick. *Illinois Architecture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968.
- Kogan, Herman and Lloyd Wendt. *Chicago: A Pictorial History*. New York: Bonanza Books, 1958.
- Morrison, Hugh. *Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1935.
- "Notes and Clippings", *The American Architect and Building News*, November 9, 1889.
- Pierce, Bessie Louise. *A History of Chicago, 1871-1893*. Vol. III, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957.

- Randall, John D. *A Guide to Significant Chicago Architecture of 1872 to 1922*. Glencoe, Illinois: P. O. Box 345, 1958.
- Randall, Frank. *History of the Development of Building Construction in Chicago*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1949.
- "Restoring the Auditorium", *Talmanac*, November, 1964. Talman Federal Savings and Loan Association Magazine.
- Saarinen, Aline B. "Pioneer of Modern Architecture", *New York Times Magazine*, October 28, 1956.
- Scharres, Harry. "Eighty year old theater reopens", *Heating, Piping and Air Conditioning*, November, 1967.
- Siegel, Arthur. *Chicago's Famous Buildings*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 1965.
- Tallmadge, Thomas E. *Architecture in Old Chicago*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941.
- Wright, Frank Lloyd. *Genius and the Mobocracy*. New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949.

opposite:

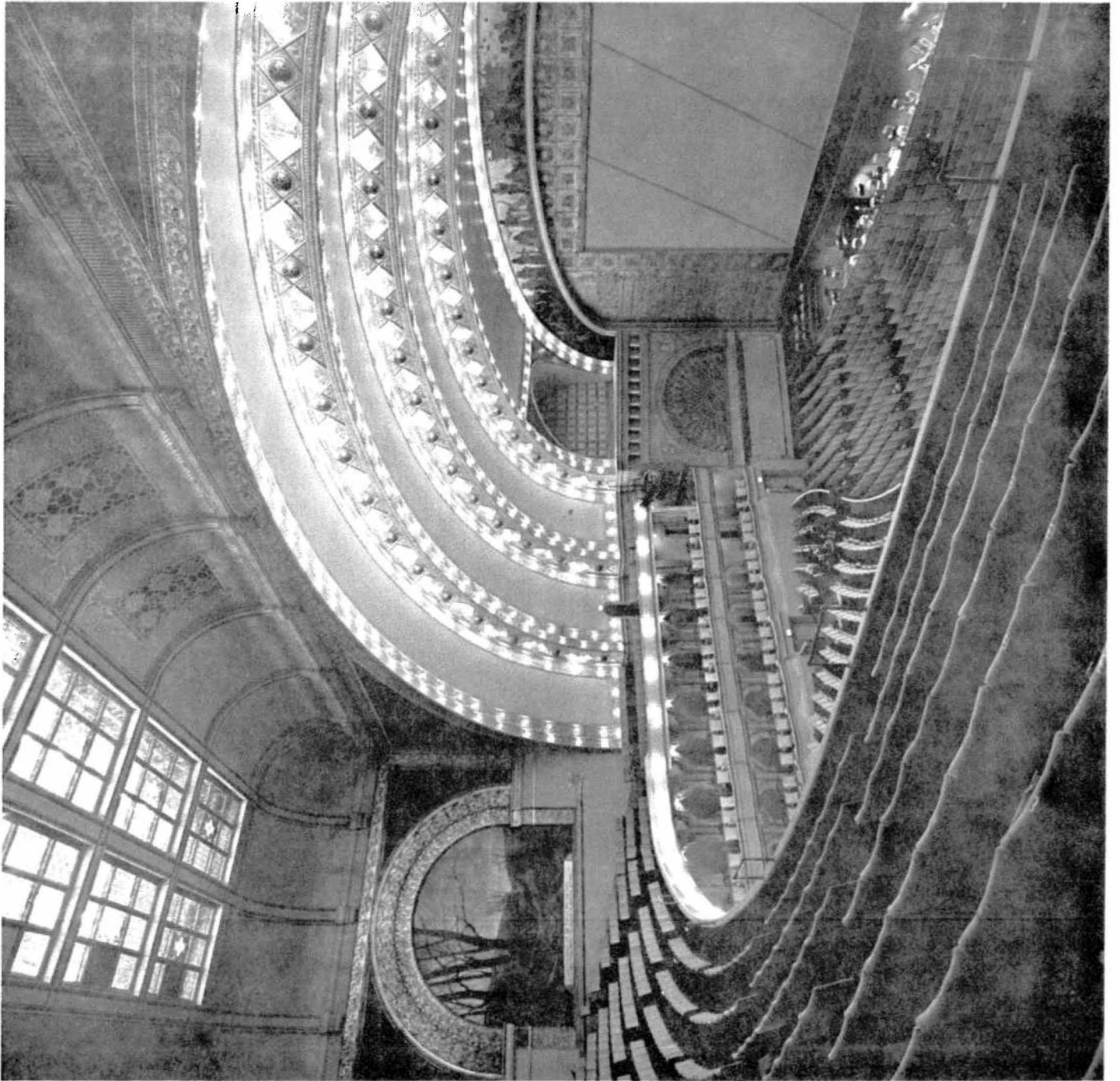
The Auditorium Building as it looked prior to the widening of Congress in 1952. The second floor balcony on Michigan has already been glassed-in, but the base along Congress is still intact and without the arcade.



opposite:

Interior of the Theatre. Notice the rich ornamentation and the way Sullivan echoed the great ceiling arches throughout the space.

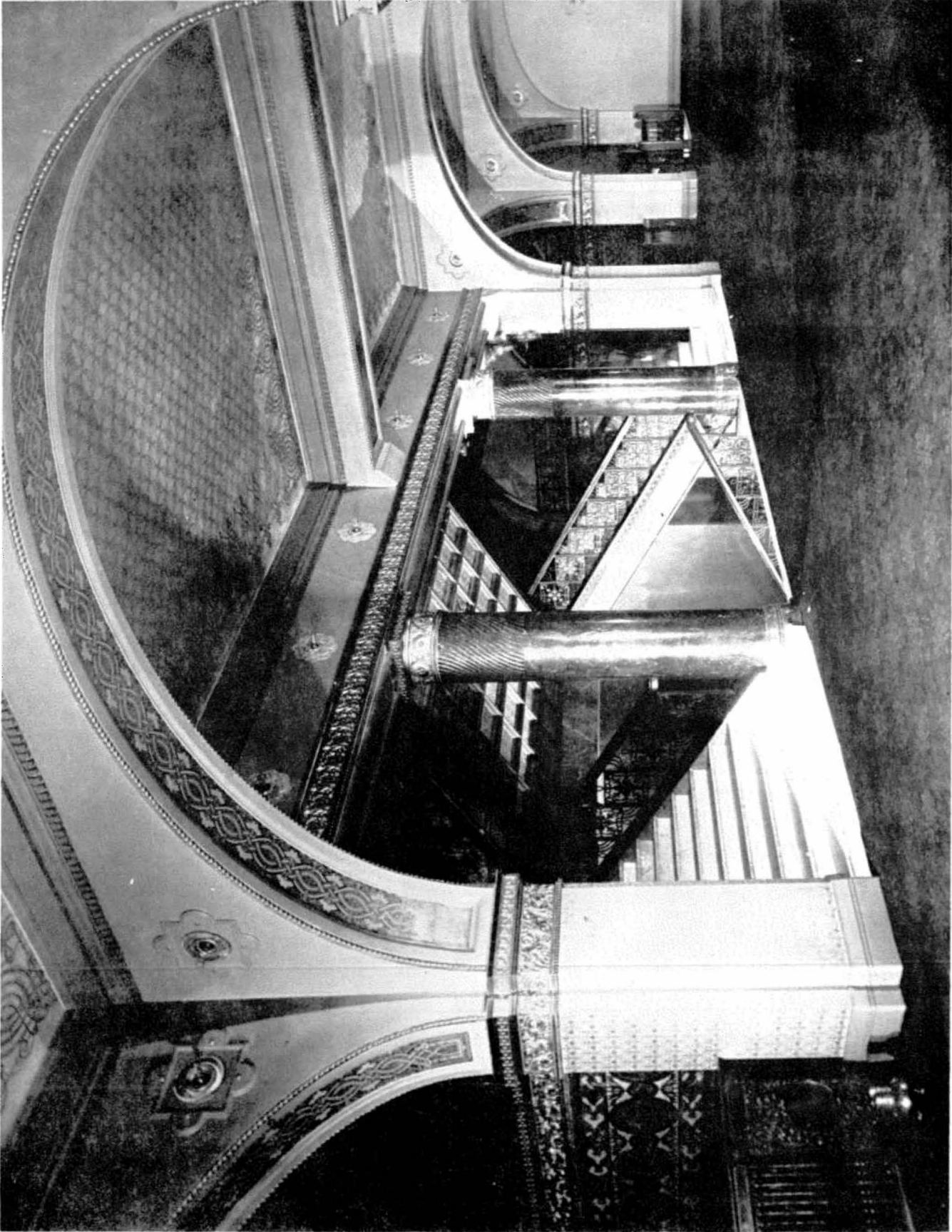
(Photo by Richard Nickel)



opposite:

Upper foyer of the Theatre. 1890 photograph. Except for the ornamental stencils this area has been fully restored. Stencil patterns have been copied and plans exist to duplicate the work when funds are available.

(Photo courtesy of the Auditorium Theatre Council)



opposite:

Detail of column capital showing Sullivan's unique foliate ornamentation. Capital stands in the Rudolph Ganz Recital Hall, formerly the Hotel banquet hall and ballroom.





CITY OF CHICAGO
RICHARD J. DALEY, Mayor

**COMMISSION ON CHICAGO HISTORICAL
AND ARCHITECTURAL LANDMARKS**

SAMUEL A. LICHTMANN, Chairman
BARNET HODES, Vice-Chairman
IRA J. BACH, Secretary
JOSEPH BENSON
JEROME BUTLER
CHARLES CUNNINGHAM
LEWIS W. HILL
CLEMENT M. SILVESTRO

Room 800 - 320 North Clark Street, Chicago, Illinois 60610, Telephone 744-3200