THE CHICAGO AUDITORIUM THEATRE
1886-1966

Thesis for the Degree of M. A.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

James W. Wright

1966

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ABSTRACT

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by James W. Wright

The Chicago Auditorium Theatre has been called "the greatest room for music in the world--bar none."[1] The superlatives used to describe it in the last decade of the nineteenth century when it was new seemed unlimited. Public spirit concerning the Auditorium was always good. Today, though, this building once containing a fine theatre, an office block, and a hotel to rival many in the world, has almost passed into oblivion. The hotel and office portions have been remodeled into facilities for a large university, and the theatre lies empty. Designed by Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan the building was renowned for its massive plainness on the exterior and its exquisitely delicate and beautiful interior. The theatre, with its fine acoustics, was one of the best known in the country. To Chicago and to the rest of the United States the Auditorium remains today a fine example, not only of the work of Adler and Sullivan, two of the world's truly great architects, but also of the reflection of a public spirit encompassing Chicago in the eighteen eighties and nineties.

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been written about this great theatre, and there is no written account covering its entire history. Consequently, the purpose of this thesis is to present as complete a history as possible of the Chicago Auditorium Theatre.

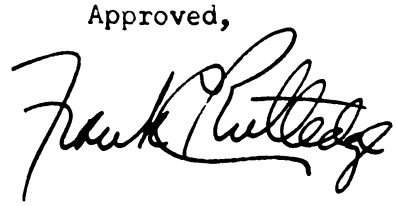
Materials on the Auditorium Theatre are not particularly abundant. A few books contain chapters on the building but little else. However, two private libraries in Chicago, the Newberry Library and the Burnham Library of Architecture of the Chicago Art Institute, contain fine collections including scrapbooks of press clippings, programs, etc., collected during the years the Auditorium was in operation. In addition, the Chicago Public Library contains microfilm files of a number of Chicago newspapers which are invaluable in researching a topic such as this. These three sources are necessary for the research from 1886 to 1945. Material for the years from 1946 to 1966 can be obtained from the Auditorium Theatre Council, a non-profit group organized to restore the theatre, and from newspaper files in the Chicago Public Library. The research techniques employed were simple but effective. They involved spending a great deal of time in the above mentioned libraries searching through their various collections and personal interviews with persons involved in the restoration.

The major finding of this study, if one can be pinpointed, would be that this theatre which was designed to be self-sustaining, and for the people of Chicago, could not long sustain itself. Before too many years it was forced to shut its doors, first for only a few years, but later for good. At present the Auditorium Theatre Council is attempting to restore the theatre to its original state. This

restoration attempt has been in existence for six years--almost twice as long as the original construction--and has yet to raise the amount of money necessary to complete the job. There is little question that this restoration will be completed, and when it is the theatre will be closer to the original than any remodeling since its opening. The only question remaining is when the restoration will be completed.

This thesis, The Chicago Auditorium Theatre, 1886 - 1966, deals exclusively with the history of the Auditorium, and makes no attempt to look at the building in any other aspect.

Approved,



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[1]Frank Lloyd Wright. Recollections: The Auditorium Building and Its Architects, Taliesin Spring Green, Wisconsin (1940), p. 2.

THE CHICAGO AUDITORIUM THEATRE

1886 - 1966

By

James W. Wright

A THESIS

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

Department of Speech

1966

PREFACE

Slightly over a year ago, this writer became aware, through various means, of the existence of a theatre which, though it had been dark for almost a quarter of a century, had been reputed to be one of the finest halls in the United States. This theatre was the Chicago Auditorium. Realizing the possibilities for a subject for a major paper, the subject was researched at which time it was discovered that little had been written about it. Because of its seeming importance, but lack of publicity, it became this thesis topic.

This thesis is a study of the Auditorium Theatre from a historical point of view. No attempt has been made to discuss any other aspect of the theatre. Although there were unlimited opportunities to discover such things as the social overtones of the history of the Auditorium Theatre, no effort has been made in these directions since the author feels that the study presented here is necessary groundwork for any further research and writing on other aspects of the theatre's construction or operation.

Two private libraries--the Newberry Library of Chicago and the Daniel Burnham Library of Architecture of the Art Institute of Chicago--were extremely helpful through their collections of scrapbooks and manuscripts of the history of the Auditorium Theatre, and this writer would like to thank the staffs of these libraries for

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In addition, there are a number of people who deserve special acknowledgment. First of these is Mr. Robert Ahrens, Vice President for Development at Roosevelt University, Chicago, who found time to talk to this writer when he was just beginning his research, and during the course of this conversation suggested many people to see and places to go for background information. Second is Mr. Karl Hartnack of the Chicago architectural firm of Harry Weese and Associates who took time from his very busy schedule to conduct the writer on a personal tour of the Auditorium, and during that tour gave information of an architectural and structural nature which, since this information has never been put down on paper, would have been otherwise unattainable in this thesis research. Finally, this writer would like to thank Mr. Frank C. Rutledge of the Department of Speech, Michigan State University, whose help in research, technique, and writing style was invaluable in the preparation of this thesis. Many other people were of great help, but they are too numerous to mention here.

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THE CHICAGO AUDITORIUM THEATRE

During the late 1800's the opera was a favorite pastime for many people, rich and poor alike. Since most cities in the United States could not support a resident opera company, it was the usual practice for them to present an opera season, engaging one of the many touring repertory opera companies--mostly European--to sing, in the respective cities, one or more weeks of opera. The Eastern cities had opera and this made them cultured, or so Chicago thought; so naturally a city like Chicago, "The gateway to the West," of necessity had to have opera, not only to fulfill the popular pastime of the citizens, but more importantly it would elevate Chicago to a cultural level similar to that of many of the great Eastern cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia.

Chicago had been growing rapidly in every other respect so it was only natural to expect some growth culturally. From 1880 to 1891 Chicago's population more than doubled, growing from 503,298 to 1,099,850. The size of the city had increased five times over--from 35.79 square miles to 180.2. Chicago's wealth had grown from $117,133,726 to $219,354,368 during those ten years while the amount of building went from $8,207,000 to $47,400,000.[1] Chicago could well

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[1]Thomas E. Tallmadge, Architecture in Old Chicago, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1941), p. 133.

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The need for opera and a place to hold it is one of the raison d'etre of the Chicago Auditorium. It was the success of the opera festival of 1885 that spawned the idea for a great hall such as the Auditorium in the mind of Ferdinand W. Peck. Ferd Peck is described as "one of the wealthiest, among the most popular, and, perhaps the most liberal of all the numerous patrons of art in Chicago."[2] This man was the driving force behind the Chicago Auditorium. Peck had headed the 1885 Opera Festival held in the old lake front Exposition Building redecorated especially for this event, as it had been for the three preceding years. To Peck it seemed rather ludicrous to continue to remodel an old, ill-suited hall year after year when what was really needed was a new, modern facility designed essentially for music. At the close of the operatic season he promised the City of Chicago that a great hall would be built to be used for mass meetings and political conventions, and would provide the masses with the finest facilities for music and first-class speakers at a price everyone could afford.[3] What Peck envisioned was a great permanent opera house to serve "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."[4] To him, and many others at that time, and even now, Chicago seemed to be an ideal

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[2]"The Great Auditorium," The Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1888, p. 7.

[3]The Graphic (Chicago), December 14, 1889, [cited in] "Scrapbook of Press Clippings of the Chicago Auditorium," III, p. 63.

[4]Hugh Morrison. Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture. (New York: Peter Smith, 1952), pp. 85-86.

place to hold national political conventions because of its central locality and fine transportation. Consequently, on May 29, 1886, in a speech before the Chicago Commercial Club, Ferd Peck proposed the building of the new hall. Since the Commercial Club was made up of the more affluent men in Chicago, it was only natural for Peck to turn to them for support. In a portion of the speech Peck effectively argued the acceptance of the proposal by saying:

> We have had seven National political conventions in this city; we have built temporary auditoriums for six of them, two of them complete buildings. Three times we have built within the Exposition Building seating capacity for this purpose at a cost ranging from $17,000 to $30,000 in each instance, four times for large musical festivals, three of which cost about $20,000 each and one over $50,000. * * * Now, gentlemen, shall we let this exceptional opportunity go by, and wait, perhaps twenty or more years for as favorable a basis and conditions for the accomplishment of this important purpose, and permit our sister cities, which are behind us in every other important respect, to reach out for the great conventions and musical festivals which the education and entertainment of our people demand as well as our business interests? or shall we now avail ourselves of the proposition presented to us to do so much for our city of Chicago?[5]

Needless to say the Commercial Club members availed themselves of the opportunity and accepted Peck's proposal. The idea, however, does not seem to have been an immediate success, at least as far as the newspapers were concerned. The only mention of the Commercial Club meeting was a Chicago Daily Tribune note mentioning that the chief topics of discussion were "The Causes of Recent Labor Troubles and the Possible Remedies" and the regulation of "liquer" traffic.

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[5]"Early History and Press Clippings: Chicago Auditorium Association," Chicago; 1887-1889. [Gift to the Burnham Library of Architecture of the Art Institute of Chicago, by the Auditorium Association., 1942.]

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The paper also mentioned that Peck was one of the speakers.[6]

Though the newspapers seemingly took little notice of Peck's idea, some Chicagoans did, since on December 4, 1889, the first subscribers' meeting was held. The Association was incorporated on December 8, and the first directors' meeting was held on the 11th of that month.[7] Ferd Peck was elected president of the Association, with Edson Keith as 1st vice-president; N. K. Fairbanks, 2nd vice-president; Charles L. Hutchinson, treasurer; and A. F. Towne, secretary. The directorate was composed of N. B. Ream, Wm. E. Hale, Charles Counselman, Eugene S. Pike, Henry Field, Martin Ryerson, A. A. Sprague, and the officers of the Association.[8]

The project started small but grew rapidly. Beginning as a theatre costing about $800,000.[9] the project soon leapt far beyond that figure, but when considering the prominence of the backers it is not surprising. In fact, the cost got so high that the theatre alone would no longer suffice; something else had to be added to support the theatre venture. Thus, the project was enlarged to include a hotel and office building forming a shell around the theatre.[10]

Until an architect for the project was chosen, most of this planning was fairly meaningless. On December 22, 1886, the Chicago-

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[6]Chicago Tribune, May 30, 1886, p. 16.

[7]List of Association members in the Appendix.

[8]Chicago Tribune, January 30, 1887, p. 17.

[9]The Daily News (Chicago), December 9, 1889, [cited in] "Scrapbook," I, p. 37.

[10]Morrison, p. 86.

based firm of Adler and Sullivan was named to design a building suitable to the backers' wishes.

When considering today that Louis Sullivan was reputed to be the real genius in the firm, it is interesting to note that the commission was entirely Dankmar Adler's.[11] The supporters of the project, in fact, weren't even sure that they wanted to have Sullivan in on the project at all. Sullivan himself says that he was not the chosen architect. In his Autobiography of an Idea Sullivan says: "Adler was Peck's man. As to Louis he was rather dubious, but gradually came around--conceding a superior aesthetic judgement--which was something in the nature of a miracle. Besides, Louis was young, only thirty when the task began, his partner forty-two. . ."[12] Adler was an experienced architect whose work was known, while Sullivan was relatively untried. Therefore, it is only natural that Adler should get the commission. Thomas Tallmadge in his book Architecture in Old Chicago says:

> I like to think of the building as more the creation of the senior partner Adler. Sullivan came into his own later as leader and prophet with the Transportation Building at the World's Fair. At the Auditorium he stands on the threshold and seems to be trying to divine the sign in the sky.
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> . . . . . .
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> So when the Auditorium came into the office of Adler and Sullivan in the summer of 1886 it most certainly was Adler's job particularly, as he was chosen without competition, with every architect in town after the commission."[13]

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[11]Frank Lloyd Wright, Recollections: The Auditorium Building and Its Architects, Taliesin, Spring Green, Wisconsin. July 10, 1940.

[12]Louis Henry Sullivan, The Autobiography of an Idea, (Chicago, 1924, Chap. 15, p. 13. [Manuscript in the Burnham Library of Architecture of the Art Institute of Chicago.]

[13]Tallmadge, pp. 157, 161.

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Adler never did develop the feeling for design which Sullivan possessed naturally, but by the same token, at this time at least, Sullivan had nowhere near the grasp of building technique necessary to attempt a job of this magnitude.[14]

To say that the Auditorium commission was important to the firm is an understatement. It was not only the largest commission that Adler and Sullivan had had up to this time, but was also the largest commission that any firm had ever held.[15] [Figure 1]

During the course of this project Adler was acknowledged by those working under him as the "chief". He constantly hovered over the project, both on the drawing board and at the construction site. Many of the sub-contractors tried to take short-cuts, but unless these had been previously O.K.'D by Adler, as Frank Lloyd Wright said:

> . . . perhaps [they would be] condemned to tear out what they had done and do it over again as he [Adler] had told them to do it in the first place; most of the profit gone out of the job because they had tried, and failed, to fool the 'old man'. These would be the 'green' ones. Those who knew him feared and respected him mightily. He was master of their craft and they knew it.[16]

But now an interesting point arises. How much of the building can be attributed to Adler and how much to Sullivan? In essence the over-all plan of the building was Adler's. Most of the decorative work, inside and out, was done by Sullivan. Although the pencil sketches and the essential conception for the interior ornamental work were mainly Sullivan's, most of the ornamental work was detailed

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[14]Wright, p. 1.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

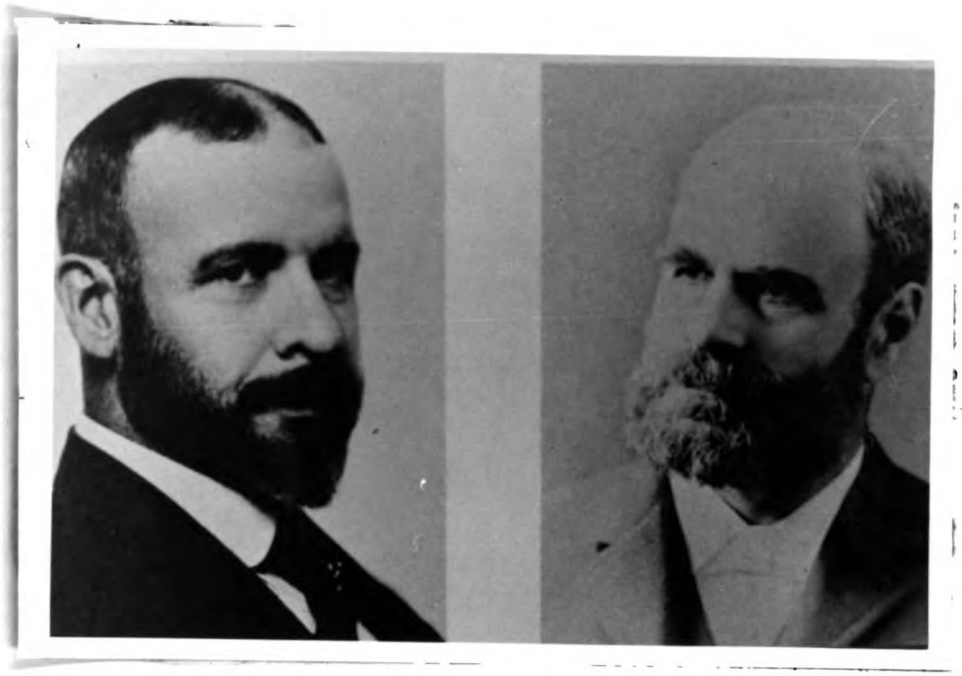

Fig. 1.--Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan, architects for the Chicago Auditorium.

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by an eighteen year old, twenty-five dollar a week draughtsman for Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright.[17] The main portion of the interior design furnished by Adler was the acoustics of the Theatre, but that we shall come to presently. In other words, this building, the first by which Sullivan became known outside Chicago, was a combination of the best efforts of two great architects. One, Adler, had the genius to plan a magnificent building with "harmonious and masterful distribution of the masses," and the other, Sullivan, provided the finished decoration and detail which made the Auditorium, especially the interior, the imposing edifice that it is. Both men were building for the future yet with a very great practicability. It was truly the spirit of the West.[18]

Adler and Sullivan set to work on the preliminary plans, but when they presented them to the board of directors for approval, the directors felt some changes were necessary. In fact, they made it quite clear that changes were inevitable, and that these changes were likely to be made until such time as the roof was firmly fixed in place.[19] And changes there were. Through the entire four years of the planning and construction of the building, and though both architects were physically exhausted, when the task was completed they had succeeded in creating as Adler put it:

> . . . an Opera-House larger and finer than the Metropolitan, a hall for great choral and orchestral concerts, a mammoth ball-room, a convention hall, an auditorium for mass meetings, etc., etc., all under the same roof and within the same walls. . . self-sustaining and not, like the Metropolitan Opera House, a perpetual financial burden . . . . Auditorium . . .

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[17]Morrison, p. 85.

[18]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 11, 1889, p. 9.

[19]Chicago Tribune, January 30, 1887, p. 17.

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> business building and hotel . . . together . . . form the Auditorium Building.[20]

But we are getting ahead. On January 11, 1887, only a month to the day after the first directors meeting, all the land for the entire project had been acquired. Getting the land was not an easy task, since various pieces of the property were owned by six separate owners. Since only two of these owners were disposed to this venture to begin with, the task was made just that much more difficult. Fortunately, one of these owners held three-fourths of the land, leaving five to deal with for the remaining quarter. These five, says E. S. Hand in his booklet entitled Auditorium, ". . . varied only in the degree of sordid selfishness and in eagerness to compass their personal gains at the expense of a great public enterprise."[21] However, with a little diplomatic tact the backers of the project managed to secure the land without any undue sacrifices. Peck signed ninety-nine year leases on the property, a minor fact at the time, but one which was to prove of great importance in the long run. The site they acquired was an area of about 63,500 square feet (about one and a half acres). The land comprised the south half of a block with Michigan Avenue on the east, Congress Street on the south, Wabash Avenue to the west, and Van Buren Street to the north. Best of all, however, was that the site overlooked Lake Michigan—a good spot for a hotel.[22]

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[20]Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., (ed.) Louis Sullivan and the Architecture of Free Enterprise. (Chicago: The Art Institute, 1956), p. 24.

[21]E. S. Hand, Auditorium, (Chicago: Exhibit Publishing Co., 1890), p. 20.

[22]Morrison, p. 89.

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The magnitude of the project, as previously mentioned, was not static, but grew constantly. The area to be covered grew from 46,000 square feet to about 62,000 square feet, while the cubic capacity of the building went from 4,750,000 cubic feet as it was first projected, to 9,950,000 cubic feet when it was completed and as it now stands. The original cost of the project was estimated to be about $800,000, although Hand says the amount deemed ample for every possible requirement was $1,500,000. However, by the time the building was completed the amount had risen to the astronomical sum, at least for those days, of $3,500,000.[23] When the Chicago Auditorium Association was founded, stock was issued in the amount of $2,000,000 and an additional $900,000 in bonds were issued. The entire amount was raised from among the eventual three hundred stockholders of the Association.[24]

The plans for the Auditorium were drawn and redrawn. Additions kept being made to all parts of the building. A multitude of technical improvements for the theatre were incorporated. ". . . the building grew in height, and a banquet hall was added to the hotel." In all, a total of $60,000 was spent by Adler and Sullivan on preliminary studies alone.[25]

Fund raising appears not to have gone as well as might have been expected. Hand says that Mr. Peck's brothers ". . . at a critical period in the initiatory stages of the enterprise, even went so far as to offer their personal bond for two millions of dollars in support of the position taken by their public-spirited brother. This

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[23]Hand, p. 21.

[24]Morrison, p. 86.

[25]Ibid, p. 86.

heroic act of devotion and confidence proved, however, to be the turning point in the history of the Auditorium. After this, all organized opposition died away and the growth of the Auditorium began."[26] It is doubtful that this $2,000,000 backing was ever used, however, since the only Peck on the stockholder list is the Estate of P. F. W. Peck, and this particular stockholder is never mentioned again. Therefore, it seems unlikely that this holding was a $2,000,000 one. Also, it was only a personal bond.

"Speed" may be the word which best describes the construction concept of the Auditorium. Excavation was begun on January 24, 1887, a scant month and a half after the venture was incorporated. (The date of the start of excavation is also recorded as January 28, 1887.[27] However, an article in The Chicago Sunday Tribune of January 30, 1887, records the event like this:

> The contract for the excavation was let ten days ago, Monday the first shovelful of earth was removed.

Since January 30, 1887, was a Sunday, then the previous Monday would have been the 24th. Hence the excavation date was January 24.) This error can probably be attributed to the fact that ground was frozen and, since buildings were still on the premises and the workmen were working behind these buildings, their presence was not noted. January 29, being a very pleasant day, work was begun in earnest. At eight o'clock in the morning two hundred men and thirty teams of horses began their excavation by tearing down the remaining buildings.

Though this venture seemed to be an important event in the

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[26]Hand, p. 21.

[27]Morrison, p. 89.

history of Chicago, there was actually very little reporting of its progress in the local newspapers. The Chicago Daily Tribune, for instance, makes no mention of the Auditorium until the coverage of the Republican National Convention of 1888. However, when Ferd Peck was asked for some information just after excavation began, he declined to answer many questions on the grounds ". . . that the public should see the tangible results rather than a construction of the building in the newspaper ."[28] This appears to be a shrewd move by Mr. Peck. [Figure 2] By releasing just enough information to keep the public aware, he could goad them into coming to watch the progress first hand, and, therefore, to take a closer interest in the project.

Work on the excavation was just as hurried as was the financing before it. Some of the crews even worked at night by floodlight. An average of eight hundred workmen worked night and day on the project, yet in the almost three years of the building of the Auditorium, there were only two fatalities, a record envied by many of our modern construction jobs. The excavation itself required the removal of some 30,000 cubic yards of loam and sand, and by June 1, 1887, the site was ready for the laying of the foundation. Soil conditions were fairly poor at the Auditorium site. The first eight to ten feet of soil was sand, and below that for a similar depth was clay which became increasingly softer becoming mud to a level of about fifty feet. Below that was bedrock.[29] Construction methods were different when the Auditorium was built than they are now. At that time neither caissons nor skeletal construction had been invented. The former,

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[28]The Chicago Tribune, (January 30, 1887), p. 17.

[29]Hand, p. 22.

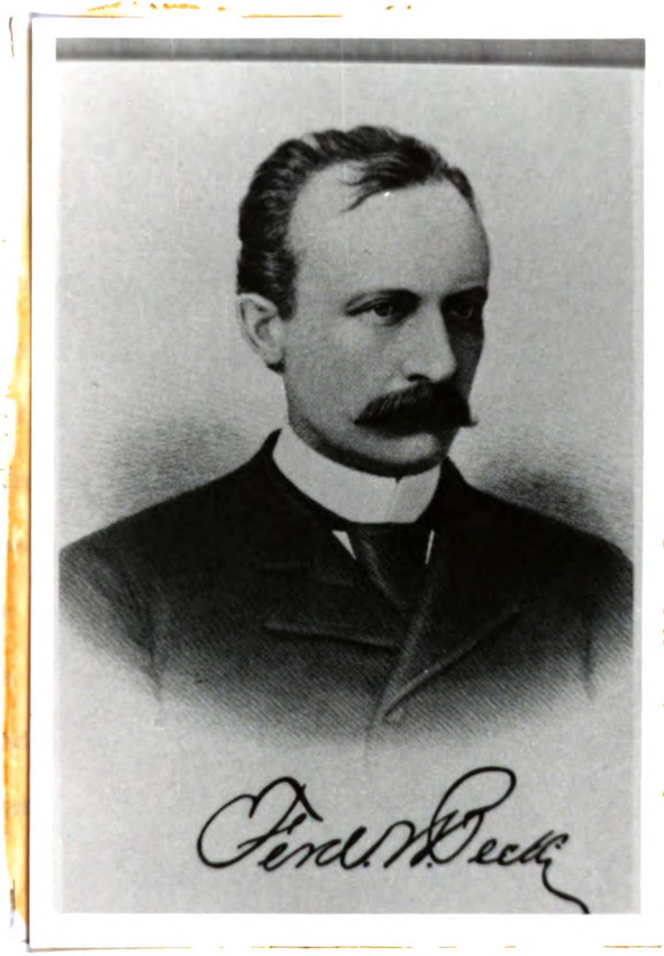

Fig. 2.--Ferdinand W. Peck
"Father of the Auditorium"

a method of sinking cement columns to the bedrock, would have provided more support, and the latter would have greatly lightened the building.[30] Instead, planking was laid over the entire foundation surface. One million feet of pine lumber, laid below the water line where it wouldn't decay, was used as flooring. Upon this a four foot layer of concrete was poured. Steel rails were used in this base, four miles of them in the foundation of the tower alone. Because the building could not depend on the bedrock for support it was naturally assumed that portions of the construction would sink. (Evidence of this assumption and its ultimate truth is still apparent in the Auditorium. The arches in the main lobby are built in uneven arcs seemingly corresponding to the sinking of the floor. No cracks in the masonry of these arches is apparent, thus indicating that the building had settled before the arches were built and their unevenness was compensation for the settling. Karl Hartnack, architect with the firm of Harry Weese and Associates, pointed out to this writer that the arches become more symmetrical the higher one goes in the building. This, he says, stems from the fact that the building had done the major part of its settling before the upper stories were put in place. He further added that there has evidently been little more settling since the building's completion. If there had been, he says, cracks would be evident in such places as these arches.)[31] Since some portions of the building were heavier than others, Adler found it necessary to work out a unique system whereby he determined the total weight of each

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[30]Tallmadge, p. 162.

[31]Personal interview with Karl Hartnack, architect with the firm of Harry Weese and Associates, Chicago, April 7, 1966.

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portion of the building, including the estimated audience weight in the theatre, and, by using pig iron, counter-weighted the foundation accordingly.[32]

Two sections of the building required special foundation work. First of these was the tower, already mentioned, which required a great deal of extra support because of its tremendous weight. The other section was the stage. The Association wanted the most advanced stage built to date—anywhere. It was to include, in addition to the usual stage paraphernalia, traps, bridges, a fire curtain, and cyclorama, all of which were to be operated mechanically. In addition there had to be ventilating equipment, a sewage ejector, and various other forms of machinery necessary in the operation of the building, all of which was to be placed in a pit beneath the stage. Because the pit had to be sufficiently deep to allow for the vertical movement of the hydraulically operated traps, it was, of necessity, eighteen feet deep—five to seven feet (the distance varies with different sources) below the water level of Lake Michigan which stood less than two blocks away. Since no effort was made to provide for the discharge of surface water into the sewers, it was necessary to make a waterproof flooring. No matter how much the downward pressure of the machinery exerted on the pit floor, the upward pressure on the floor from beneath was even greater. Therefore, the floor had to be strong enough to withstand a pressure of ten pounds per square inch over its entire surface, and yet be waterproof. Adler finally hit on a method. First of all, the area to be taken up by the pit was excavated to the proper depth and

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[32]A complete description of Adler's method may be found in Hugh Morrison's Louis Sullivan: Prophet of Modern Architecture.

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constant pumping was initiated to keep the area free from water. The first portion of the floor was a layer of Portland cement six inches thick. On top of this layer of concrete was laid a sheet of asphalt one and one-half inches thick. The asphalt was in turn covered by two layers of asphalt paper, which was covered with another one and one-half inch layer of asphalt. Now the floor was waterproof, but not yet strong enough to withstand the pressure of the water from below. Consequently, another layer of Portland cement, this one with railroad bars imbedded in it, was laid on top of the asphalt. The total weight of the flooring now proved more than sufficient to counter-balance the head of water beneath it.[33] The foundation was completed in just four months, and construction began on June 1, 1887.

The final plans had been adopted in April, 1887, and by October the building was in readiness for the laying of the cornerstone. Because of the importance of the building, the owners decided that they needed a notable figure to lay the cornerstone. Since he was going to be in Chicago already, they decided to ask Grover Cleveland, then President of the United States, to officiate, and on October 6, 1887, the event took place. A great parade was held and the streets about the building were jammed with spectators, including pickets from various labor unions. It seems that in the interest of haste of completion, the owners of the Auditorium rejected work done solely by the labor unions and hired whomever could complete the job quickly and at the least expense. Consequently, the unions petitioned the President ". . . not to lay the cornerstone of a Building whose owners

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[33]Hand, p. 23.

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will not recognize labor unions. . ."[34] Obviously the petition wasn't too effective since Cleveland appeared anyhow.

If coping with the labor unions had been the only problem which confronted the construction, then the task would have been relatively simple, since at that time the strength of the unions was slight, at least by our current standards. But there were other problems. One of these was that on December 8, 1887, the Republican National Committee decided to hold its 1888 National Convention in Chicago, and the Auditorium was a possible site, or at least one of the influencing factors in bringing the convention to Chicago. On the surface this appears to be more a stroke of luck than a problem, but when considering that at that time not a single block of the granite for the outer walls was in place, and the bare brick walls of the inner structure were only about half way up, then it was a problem. From that time on construction work fairly flew. Over one hundred different contractors were engaged in the work, and at times over one thousand men were employed in some aspect of the construction. Whenever possible extra men were put on the job. Contractors neglected some orders and abandoned others altogether in order to have the building ready for the June convention. Not till late in March was the roof of the theatre in place, and the iron work was not in place until April 1. From then on all attention was focused on completing the theatre. The outer walls were built just high enough to support the inner structure and then were abandoned for the time being. By early June, however, there was no longer any doubt that the hall could be finished

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[34]"Early History and Press Clippings: Chicago Auditorium Association," no page number.

by June 18; and masons and laborers began again to swarm about the outer walls.[35] This obstacle of time had been cleared.

There was a second problem which was evident almost from the time construction was begun. The first two stories, or the sub-structure of the building, were to be faced with dark grey granite to be obtained from the Mesaba Heights quarries of the Minnesota Granite Company. By January 1, 1888, it was obvious that this company could not furnish the largest stones necessary. However, giving their all, as had most of the other contractors on the Auditorium, they went bankrupt trying to produce the stones. Having failed, they turned over their quarries and cutting plant to the Auditorium Association, but this didn't solve the problem of getting the granite. Since a good deal of the stone had already been cut the problem was compounded. Granite, like many other kinds of stone, varies from vein to vein as to color and texture. The problem remained, then, of where to find a granite of a matching color and texture which could be cut into large enough stones. After a diligent search, the Hallowell Granite Company, with quarries in Maine, was found to have a vein that harmonized with the color and texture of the Mesaba quarries. (Even after a lapse of some eighty years, the color and texture of the stone is still plainly visible on the exterior of the Auditorium.) The granite problem was solved and the 60,000 cubic feet of stone used—a quarter of a million tons—was mined, 10,000 cubic feet from Maine and 50,000 from Minnesota.[36]

The work on the theatre portion of the Auditorium was nearly

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[35]Chicago Tribune, June 18, 1888, p. 7.

[36]Hand, p. 24.

completed by the early part of June, 1888. On Thursday, the 7th, the lights were turned on for the first time. Seven hundred fifty of the twenty-seven hundred incandescent lamps in the theatre were set ablaze. Because the skylight would not be completed in time for the convention, and the ceiling was not completely finished, draperies were hung from the ceiling and the lights were on whenever the building was in use, day or night.[37] It appeared that the only portion of the theatre not to be finished for the convention was to be the upper galleries, and a picture from the June 10, 1888, edition of the Chicago Daily Inter Ocean shows the galleries closed off. However, a sentence on page nine in the article accompanying the picture states that ". . . with the addition of the upper gallery and the improvised galleries in the organ chamber, the hall will contain 8,130 seats."[38] So apparently the entire theatre was to be put to use.

On Monday, June 18, the day preceeding the opening of the convention, the completed hall, or as much as it was to be completed for the time being, was turned over to the Veteran Union League for a concert of war songs. The concert was performed by a chorus of five hundred voices and an orchestra composed of fifty-five wind instruments. Following the concert, the hall was opened to the public in its full grandeur so that thousands of people would be afforded their only opportunity of viewing the hall where the Republican Presidential candidate was to be nominated.[39]

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[37]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), June 9, 1888, p. 3.

[38]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), June 10, 1888, p. 9.

[39]The Sunday Inter Ocean (Chicago), June 10, 1888, p. 6.

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On June 19, the convention opened. [Figure 3] Strangely enough, little is said about the Auditorium theatre in the convention news articles. Instead, a great deal of space is given over to describing in "society page" fashion, the appearance of the audience. Opera chairs--7,603 of them--were set up throughout the hall. In addition there was standing room for 1,400 people, so that over 9,000 persons could be accomodated during each session.[40] The seating plans were similar to those of our present conventions with the delegates and press being closest to the rostrum. Further back were the alternate delegates, and beyond them, the spectators. When the convention had broken up, Benjamin Harrison had been selected as the Republican candidate for President.

Though the building had been in use for the duration of the convention, it was by no means completed. Only one portion--the theatre--could be used and it was not completely finished. The hotel and office building portions were not very far along at all. However, the work continued at its break-neck pace and on October 2, 1889, only fourteen months later, the copestone ceremonies took place. On that date the copestone (the topmost stone in the tower) was set in place with full Masonic ceremonies presided over by the Illinois Masons. This event, like every other in the past history of the Auditorium, was filled with bands, speeches, and dignitaries. On October 3, 1889, the following appeared in the Chicago Herald:

> What is this Auditorium, an incident in the construction of which is signalized by imposing parades, solemn ceremonies and eloquent orations? The grandest building ever erected by private capital. The Auditorium stands without a peer in a city whose proud palaces of

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[40] The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), June 7, 1888, p. 9.

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[40]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), June 7, 1888, p. 9.

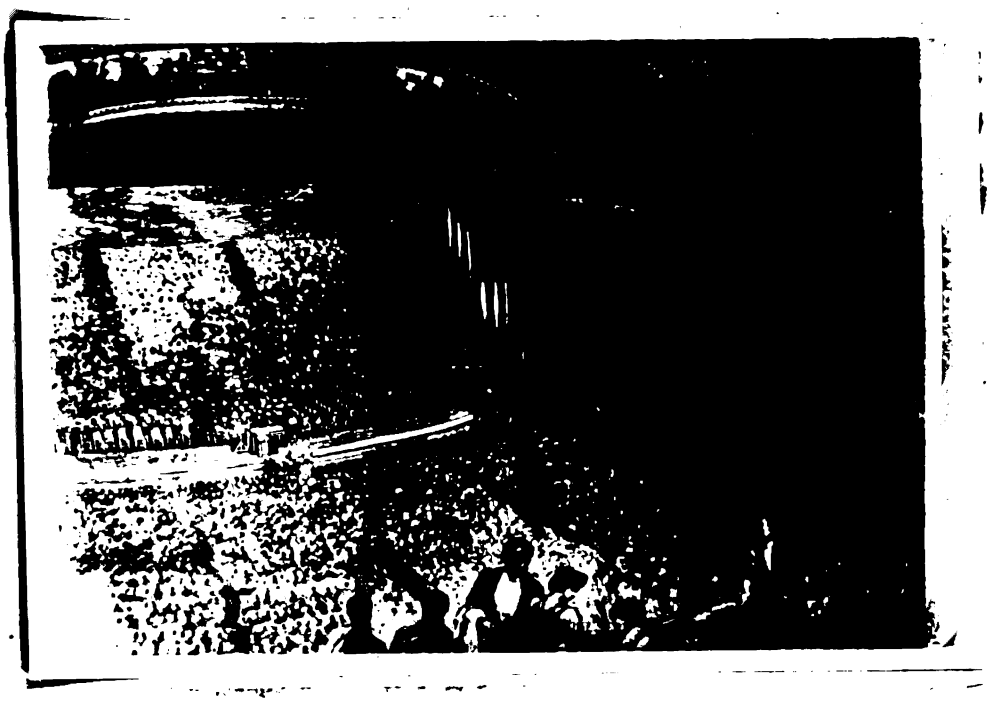

Fig. 3.—Artist's depiction of the 1888 Republican National Convention.

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> trade are the wonder of the world. From the coping of the sky-piercing tower down to the massive foundations the Auditorium is a gigantic illustration of the enterprise and public spirit of the business men of Chicago.[41]

With the conclusion of this ceremony the Auditorium was, for all practical purposes, finished. All that remained to be done was detail work, cleaning, and other such finishing touches. On December 9, 1889, less than three years after ground was broken for the project, the Auditorium Building was dedicated. When Louis Sullivan discussed the Auditorium in his autobiography, he related that:

> . . .the entire structure comprising Theatre, Hotel, Office Building and Tower he Ferd Peck named the Auditorium Building—nobody knows just why. Anyway it sounded better than 'Grand Opera House'.[42]

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[41]Chicago Herald, October 3, 1889, [cited in] I, p. 4.

[42]Sullivan, Chap. 15, p. 12.

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[41]Chicago Herald, October 3, 1889, [cited in] I, p. 4.

[42]Sullivan, Chap. 15, p. 12.

CHAPTER II

STATISTICS

The cost of the Auditorium, originally set at somewhere between $750,000 and $800,000 (the sources vary in their estimates), grew, as has been mentioned, until by January of 1887 it reached a sum of $1,500,000. At that time, however, it was conceded that the figure could conceivably grow much greater, and, indeed, this original estimate proved to be much too low. The final figure was presented by Ferd Peck in a report to the stockholders upon the opening of the building in December, 1889. The total cost, including construction and equipment, reached a final figure, with carrying charges totaling nearly $200,000, of $2,900,000. As Peck pointed out, however, it was fortunate that the structure had been started at the time it was, since by the time of completion the cost would have been at least an additional $500,000, the cost of iron alone having gone up nearly $100,000 during the three years taken for the construction. Peck was also careful to mention that the earning power of the building had nearly doubled during the same period.[1]

Hugh Morrison quotes a figure of $3,145,291 as the final cost of the project, which is a sum of about thirty-six cents per cubic foot for the 8,737,000 cubic feet contained in the building. The amazing

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[1]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 11, 1889, p. 9.

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fact about this figure is that the cost was almost six times the cost per cubic foot of any previous assignment by the architects, resulting in a quality of workmanship and materials unrivaled in that age. The Auditorium thus became the most luxurious building between New York and San Francisco.[2] The Chicago Tribune of December 10, 1889, compared the new Auditorium with other architectural landmarks:

> Compared with the solidarity of this wonderful development of Chicago enterprise the useless pyramids shrink into insignificance and the Eiffel tower is but a toy. The cost of the great structure has been over $2,700,000 and the ground upon which it stands is worth $1,000,000. It has been built in three years, while the Grand Opera House in Paris, with half its seating capacity, cost $9,000,000 and occupied thirteen years in construction.[3]

Peck, in his report to the stockholders, made this point even stronger by claiming that the Paris Opera was also much inferior to the Auditorium both in beauty and in practical features. In all fairness to the Paris Opera, however, all of the other great opera houses of Europe were also inferior to the Auditorium, at least according to Peck, including those in Vienna, Frankfort, Dresden, Berlin, and Milan, if for no other reason than that they were smaller in capacity than the Auditorium, and a great deal of their seating was taken up by exclusive boxes since they were obviously meant to have been designed more for the few than for the masses, while just the opposite was true of the Auditorium.

> Most of the great theatres of Europe have grand approaches and splendid vestibules, embellished with costly frescoes and statuary which governments have paid for; but the interiors are a disappointment, and lacking in

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[2]The Auditorium Building, (a pamphlet produced by the Auditorium Theatre Council), p. 8.

[3]The Chicago Tribune, December 10, 1889, p.3.

> practical details as compared with the Chicago Auditorium. They are all smaller in capacity, exclusive boxes occupying much of the space. They are built rather for the few than for the masses—the titled and the wealthy rather than for the people—lacking the broad democratic policy of providing for all which prevails in the arrangement of the Auditorium thereby lessening the gulf between the classes.[4]

Briefly mentioned in the first chapter was the stipulation placed on the architects as to the simplicity of the exterior. The basic style chosen by Sullivan was Romanesque—almost devoid of all decoration. The reason for the choice of this style seems to have been primarily the influence on Sullivan of H. H. Richardson, the reigning Chicago architect. (Many people feel that the greatest blunder in the entire structure is the lack of plastic decoration on the facade.) Probably the biggest single reason for the choice of this particular architectural style, however, was the wishes of the backers who more than likely had an eye on the financial aspect of the building. As has been previously mentioned, the Auditorium was the most expensive structure of its kind yet constructed. Consequently, a simplified exterior was a good means of cutting the financial corners.

There was, however, another reason, other than cost, for Sullivan's choice of the Romanesque style. Paul Mueller, Adler and Sullivan's chief engineer on the Auditorium project, suggested that the use of the style may have been the result of pride on Sullivan's part. Mueller said that most of the plans for the building were completed, including a highly ornamental facade, when Sullivan was told of a remark about him made by John Root, another of Chicago's well known architects. The remark went something to the effect that

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[4]Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 11, 1889, p. 9.

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"Louis couldn't build an honest wall without covering it with ornament."[5] This statement, of course, made Sullivan furious and in an attempt to disprove Root, he discarded the nearly completed designs and created instead the fantastically simple yet massive lines with no excessive ornamentation which characterize the completed structure. The second preliminary design [Figure 5] which Morrison has reproduced in Louis Sullivan seems to bear out at least some creditability for Mueller's theory.

Adler was not particularly happy with the exterior, and made the following comment about it:

> It is to be regretted that the severe simplicity of treatment rendered necessary by the financial policy of the earlier days of the enterprise, the deep impression made by Richardson's Marshall Field Building [Figure 7] upon the Directors of the Auditorium Association, and a reaction from a course of indulgence in the creation of highly decorative effects on the part of its architects, should have happened to coincide as to time and object, and thereby deprive the exterior of the building of those graces of plastic surface decoration which are so characteristic of its internal treatment.[6]

It is unfortunate that Sullivan chose the Romanesque style, devoid of ornament, for the exterior of his building, because except for the massiveness and the tower surmounting the ten story structure, it is not a particularly impressive building. It hardly seems fitting that this starkly plain facade should serve, for whatever the reason, as the shell for the delicately majestic interior which Sullivan so painstakingly created. Thomas E. Tallmadge says in his book, Architecture in Old Chicago, that

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[5]Thomas E. Tallmadge, Architecture in Old Chicago, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1941), p. 159.

[6]Morrison, p. 89.

Fig. 4.--First Preliminary Design for the Chicago Auditorium.

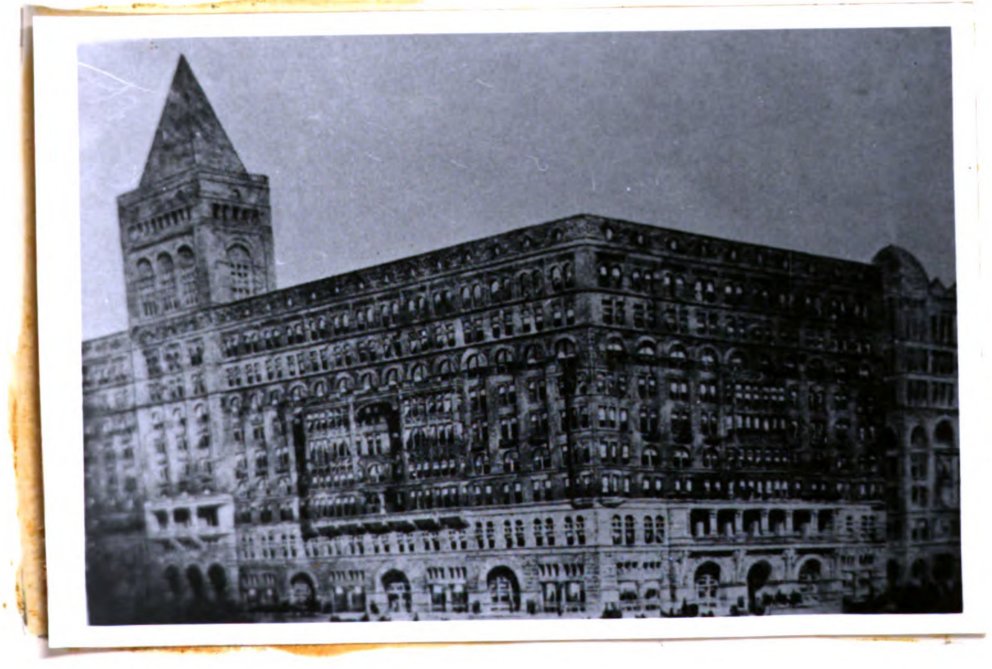

Fig. 5.--Second Preliminary Design for the Chicago Auditorium.

Fig. 6.--The Chicago Auditorium, Final Design.

Fig. 7.--H. H. Richardson's Marshall Field Building. This is the architectural style that Sullivan attempted to follow on the Auditorium.

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". . .there is no suggestion in the form of this building of its primary function in the housing of a vast auditorium. In fact, its great tower seems to preclude the possibility of a huge hall lying beyond."[7]

One opinion in favor of the style Sullivan chose was put forth by Carl W. Condit in his book The Chicago School of Architecture. He says that it is fortunate for the field of architecture that Sullivan did abandon his love of elaborate exterior ornament and instead "concentrated on the architectonic effect of mass, texture, and the proportioning and scaling of large and simple elements." Condit does not say, however, why he feels this way.[8]

"Massiveness" is probably the one word which captures best the outer appearance of the building. It was to have a 362 foot frontage on Congress Street, 187 feet on Michigan Avenue, 160 feet on Wabash Avenue, for a total of 709 feet, equal to almost one city block. The building proper was to be ten stories, with an additional seven stories in the tower. [Figure 8 is a cross-section of the Auditorium.] It was expected to be the largest building erected by private capital in the United States and probably in the world up to that time. The sub-structure (lower floors) were of dark gray granite, rough-hammered finish and set off by polished granite columns. The super-structure was entirely of buff Indiana limestone, smooth-hammered finish.[9] To give an idea of the massiveness of the structure, the second story consisted of a granite facing sixteen inches thick backed by twenty inches of brick. There were 17,000,000 bricks used in the construction

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[7]Tallmadge, p. 157.

[8]Carl W. Condit, The Chicago School of Architecture, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (1964), p. 70.

[9]The Sunday Inter Ocean, June 10, 1888, p. 9.

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and 6,000 tons of iron and steel. The building was estimated to weigh 86,000 tons and the tower added another 15,000 tons. In addition there are 1,500 windows and 2,000 doors using a portion of the 60,000 feet of polished plate glass found in the building.[10]

Probably the most salient feature of the exterior of the Auditorium was the tower which surmounted it. It rose 270 feet above the main entrance on Congress Street. In addition to much of the mechanical equipment for the Auditorium, the nine stories of the tower also contained some office space. It was in the tower that Adler and Sullivan had their offices for twenty years. The top floor, plus a small one story extension on the tower, which housed equipment, was occupied by the United States Signal Service Department. The tower occupied an area 70 feet by 41 feet up to the eighteenth floor and the extra story constructed of terra-cotta and iron, nine by eighteen feet, extended thirty feet into the air. As an article in the Chicago Tribune put it, the tower would be large enough to provide room for twenty-five sets to dance a quadrille on the top.[11] During the early 1890's the Auditorium tower was considered one of the best places from which to obtain a breathtaking view of Chicago. One could stand on the over-hanging balcony on the nineteenth floor, or the braver few could ascend to the smaller twentieth floor and see the entire city of Chicago spread out before them in three directions, and Lake Michigan in the fourth. It was said that on clear days one could see into Indiana from the tower.[12] At the time it was built,

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[10]Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago) December 11, 1889, p. 9.

[11]The Chicago Tribune, January 30, 1887, p. 17.

[12]The Chicago Tribune, December 8, 1889, p. 30.

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Inside the simple outer shell, the building was even more spectacular. In Peck's report to the stockholders he said:

> The arts represented in your building by mosaic work, marbles, onyx, bronze work, and plaster casts, together with ceiling and mural decorations, are not equated in amount in any other building on the continent, and are of a quality that will constantly attract art lovers and connoisseurs to the Auditorium and hotel.[13]

Where the outside of the Auditorium was Romanesque in style, the interior was no such thing. Tallmadge, in Architecture in Old Chicago, says "Where the Romanesque was material, this [the interior] is ethereal; where the old was common and brutal forms, this is a fairy-land . . ."[14] Fifty thousand square feet of Italian mosaic floors containing 50,000,000 pieces of marble put together by hand in France and Italy were used in the building.

The entire structure was fireproof, one of the first buildings to be constructed with this precaution, and it was to pay in the future. All of the structural parts were noncombustible and nonyielding to severe heat. This was accomplished through the use of a porous hollow clay tile known commonly as "fire-proofing tile," but technically as "terra cotta lumber." This material was not ". . . affected by age, acids of gases, or changes in temperature, and not liable to shrinkage or expansion. Its weight [was] one-third that of brick; its qualities for nonconducting sound, cold and heat, and resisting rats, mice and other vermin have no superior or equal."[15] Other interesting statistics showed that the com-

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[13]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 9.

[14]Tallmadge, p. 158.

[15]Hand, p. 28.

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pleted Auditorium building contained twenty-five miles of gas and water pipe, electric wire and cable stretching over 230 miles, 12,000 electric light bulbs, dynamos, electric and hydraulic motors, pumping engines, and a total of thirteen elevators.[16]

The office building portion of the three-part building was contained on the Wabash Avenue, or west side of the building. There were, in all, one hundred thirty-six large offices and shops. This portion of the building was an immediate success which is apparent from the fact that each unit was rented, mostly by artists and students, almost as fast as it was completed. The Chicago Conservatory of Music occupied a major portion of the office space, mostly on the upper floors.[17]

The hotel, which occupied the third of the building fronting on Michigan Avenue, was reputed by many to be on a par with many of the very finest European hotels. It showed great ingenuity of design since there was an average depth to this portion of only forty-five feet. In it was included a large, ornate lobby, men's smoking-room, a parlor, restaurant and banquet hall with necessary kitchens and service rooms, and four hundred large guest rooms. The public rooms were extremely ornate with mosaic floors, and a grand staircase rich with onyx paneling and intricate wrought-iron railings leading to the second floor main lobby.[18] [An example of the work of this staircase is found in Figure 9.] This portion, opened in January, 1890, was leased to the Auditorium Hotel Company, a group separate from the Auditorium Association, for a period of ten years. The lessee, who was responsible for

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[16]Joseph and Caroline Kirkland, The Story of Chicago, Vol. II, Chicago: Dibble Publishing Co., (1894), p. 364.

[17]The Chicago Tribune, December 10, 1889, p. 3.

[18]Morrison, pp. 96-97

Fig. 9.—The Main Staircase of the Auditorium shows Sullivan's touch with delicate ornamentation.

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furnishing the hotel, paid a fixed rental plus a percentage of the gross receipts. It was to be conducted on both the European and the American plans. One of the best known features of the hotel was the banquet hall which served as host to a number of famous persons at feasts held there. The room was an extremely beautiful one built of steel and carried on the trusses spanning one hundred twenty feet over the orchestra of the theatre.[19]

Before turning to the Auditorium Theatre, the third portion of the building and the only one that remains intact serving its original purpose, there is one other portion which bears mention. This is the Recital Hall on the seventh floor on the Wabash Avenue side. It was a small hall, in comparison to the main theatre, seating about five hundred persons, and was to be used for both concerts and lectures. [Recital Hall ground-plan--[Figure 10] The Recital Hall was dedicated on October 12, 1889, with a concert celebrating the twentieth anniversary of the Illinois Humane Society. The critics pronounced this tiny hall a "gem".

In most instances a grand hotel or a building containing thirty-six offices would have been reason enough for having built that building, and both of them together under one roof, as in the Auditorium, would have been more than reason enough to sanction its construction, but the "raison d'etre" of the Auditorium Building was the theatre. It was the physical and spiritual heart of the building. Just as the plain exterior of the building formed a shell about the magnificant interior, so also did the hotel rooms and the business offices form a shell around the theatre, for at no place did it penetrate to the

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[19]The Chicago Tribune, December 8, 1889, p. 30.

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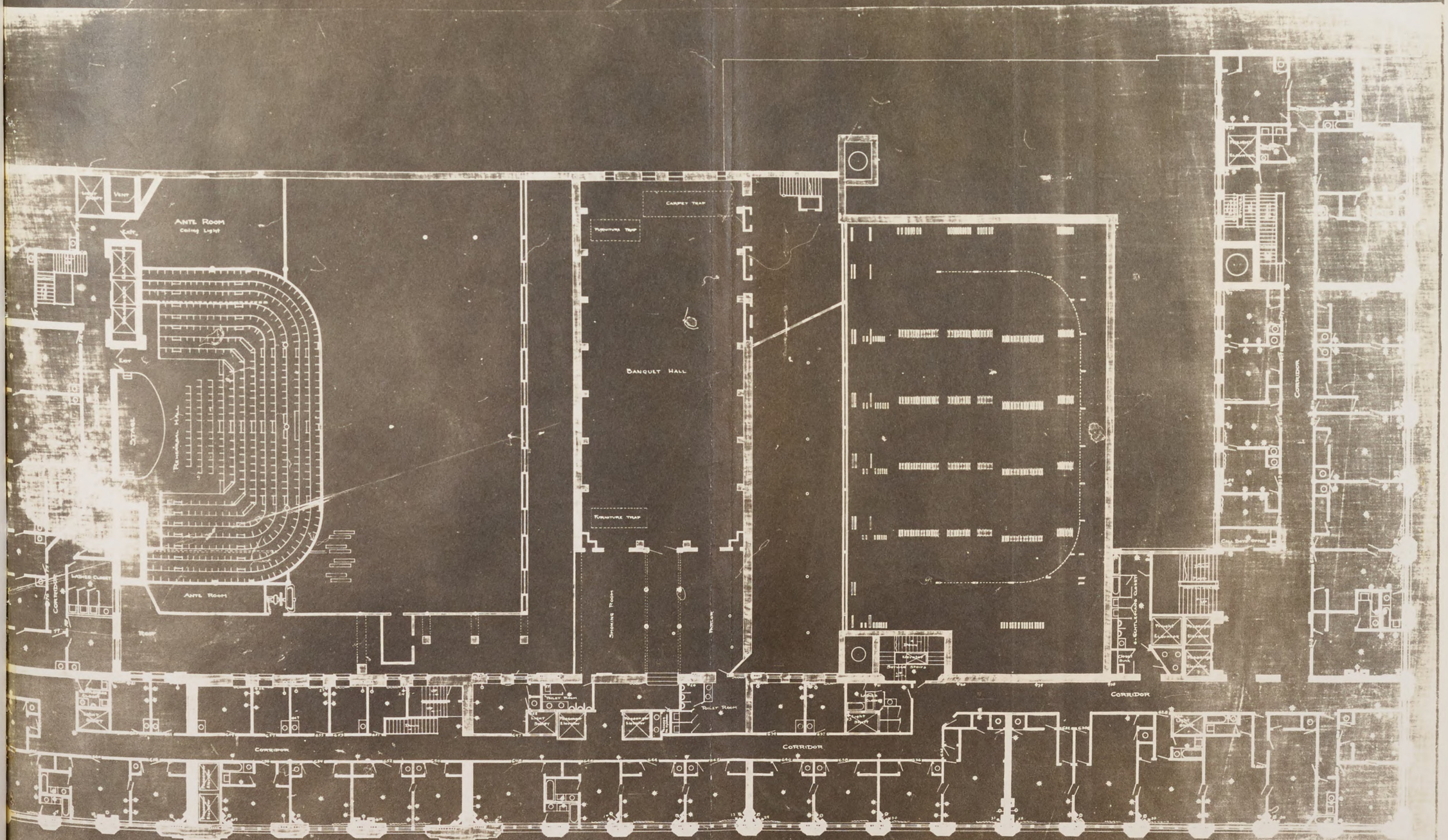

CHICAGO AUDITORIUM BUILDING

PLAN OF THE SEVENTH STORY

SCALE 1/8" = 1'0"

RECITAL HALL FL. PLAN
7TH STORY

outside walls. This shell formed a rectangle 118 feet by 246 feet within which was found the theatre. Including the various vestibules, foyers, and cloak-rooms the theatre occupied over half of the total area and about a third of the total volume of the building, and seated 4,237 persons.[20] The Auditorium Theatre was, at the time of its construction, the largest permanent theatre, excluding open-air theatres, ever erected.[21]

> The seating capacity of the Auditorium for ordinary occasions is to be 5,000, but 8,000 people can be comfortably accomodated when a national political convention is held there. It will be arranged after the most modern way, and have besides a main floor seating 3,000, two expensive balconies with chairs for 2,000. About the proscenium openings there will be fifty-one elegantly fashioned boxes.[22]

Various sources claimed that the Auditorium could accomodate up to 11,000 people if the need arose.[23] This figure seems somewhat unrealistic, and the largest crowd seems to have been the 9,000 people (including standing room) who attended the 1888 Republican National Convention.

Adler and Sullivan were not in the least hampered by a lack of space in which to put their theatre. Rather they were instructed to design a perfect hall, with money and time being no obstacle. The main architectural design concept of the theatre seems to have been to destroy the effect of a great open space. There is a great open space to be sure, but one never has the feeling of emptiness. One of Adler and Sullivan's greatest achievements was the plan devised for controlling the flow of the audience. Even taking into account

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[20]The La Scala Opera House in Milan, Italy, seats only 3,000.

[21]Morrison, p. 99.

[22]The Chicago Tribune, January 30, 1887, p. 17.

[23]The Chicago Daily News, December 9, 1889, p. 2.

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the vast size of the room, there were ample entrances and exits. In fact an audience of eight thousand could enter or leave the building in a matter of five minutes. In addition to the usual number of entrances there were also vomitoria-like tunnels which ran from the lower vestibule to the front seats in the house. In fact, if a spectator used the closest entrance to his seat, then no matter where his seat was, when he entered the theatre proper, he would be no more than fifteen feet from it. In this way the architects successfully eliminated the usual noise created by latecomers.[24]

The arrangement of the seating seemed to be designed to accomodate the largest number of people possible while still retaining some intimacy. The parquet, or main floor, measured 112 feet from the footlights to the last row of seats, and seated 1,442 persons. [Ground-plan--Figure 11] This area was actually divided into three individual levels. The orchestra or lowest of these could be entered from the side corridors running underneath the boxes. These same seats and the section immediately behind them were entered from the vomitoria entrances from the main lobby, or grand foyer. The rear seats in the parquet circle were reached from the foyer on the floor above the main lobby. The first, or main balcony contained some 1,632 seats. [Ground-plan--Figure 12] It had a rise of forty feet, determined by acoustics rather than sightlines, but that will be covered later. Immediately above the main balcony were two galleries, both reached from the sixth floor, either from the elevators in the office portion or by climbing many flights of stairs from the main lobby. The first gallery seated 526 and the second, which was carried on iron columns and trusses a little

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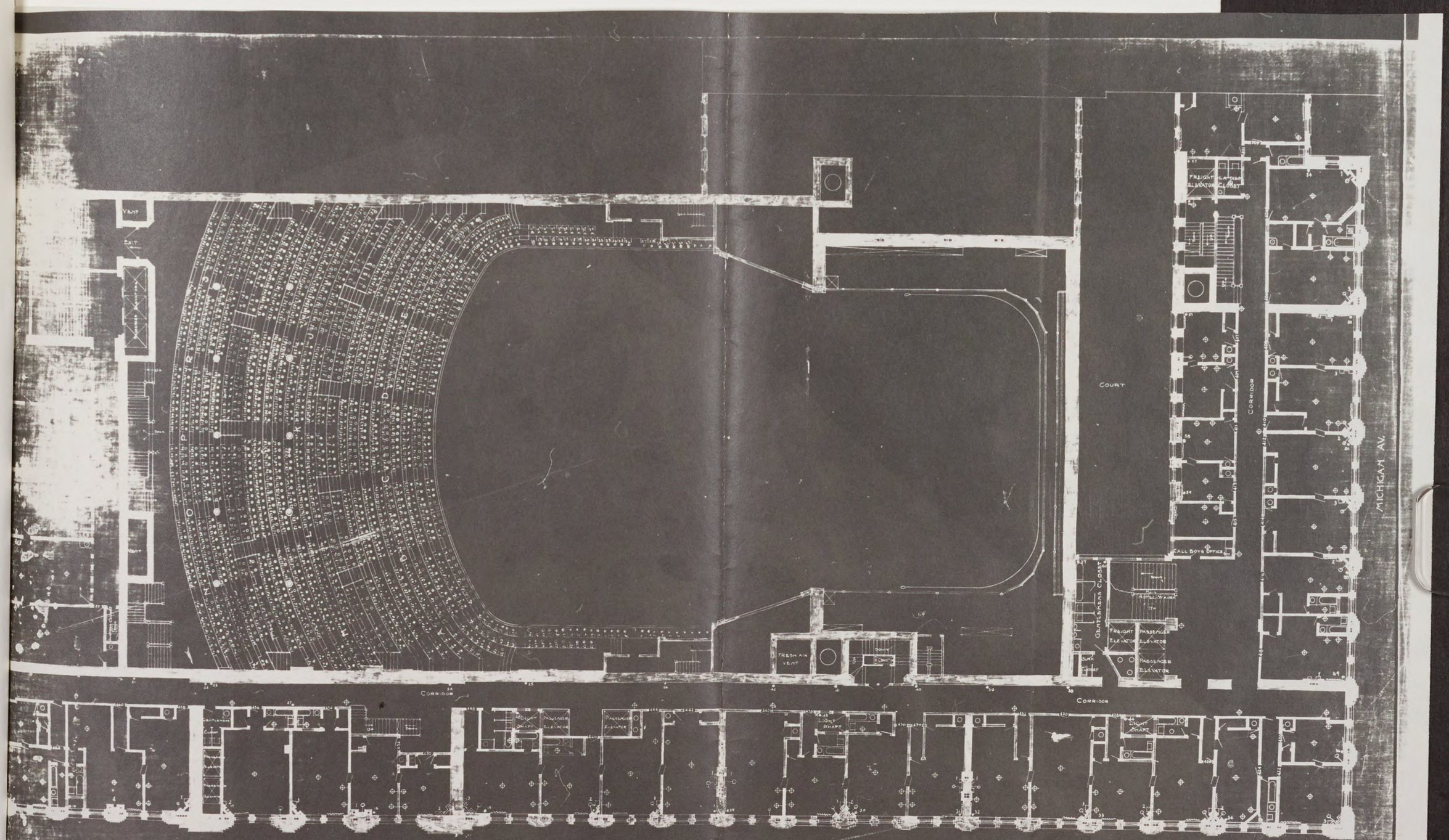
[24]The Chicago Tribune, June 9, 1888, p. 1.

above and



CHICAGO AUDITORIUM BUILDING.

PLAN OF THE FIFTH STORY

MAIN BALCONY FL PLAN
5TH STORY

above and in front of the other so as not to interfere with its sightlines, had seats for 437 persons. [Ground-plan--Figure 13] This second gallery, reached by horizontal bridges and tunnels from the sixth floor was popularly known as the "family circle".[25] These were the inexpensive seats. Even from the galleries the sightlines were perfect, though the back row of the top gallery was seven stories up and almost a block away from the stage. The seats in these upper sections were not particularly comfortable by modern standards, but since they were so inexpensive, they were as comfortable as could be expected. The architects of the Auditorium were realists and knew that the theatre would not always be full. This problem was also echoed by some of the artists who were to perform in the house. They complained about the possibility of playing to half empty houses; and, consequently Augustin Daly suggested to Sullivan that some method be devised whereby the galleries could be closed off when not in use so that the theatre would maintain all of its intimacy. Sullivan's plan was to construct a curved, hinged ceiling piece which could swing down and close off the galleries. [Figure 14] When the galleries were to be used, these pieces swung up out of the way so that they acted like, and actually appeared to be, portions of the ceiling. Though each of these units weighed nearly twenty tons, they were so perfectly counter-balanced that one man on each of six windlasses could raise or lower them easily in a matter of minutes. By closing the two galleries, and by drawing a curtain from pillar to pillar across the rear third of the balcony, the seating capacity of the theatre could be reduced to

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[25]Morrison, pp. 100-101.

Fig. 14.—The main balcony with the family circle and second balcony closed off. Also evident are a portion of the skylight and some of the boxes with the original pillars interrupting the sightlines.

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2,574.[26] Very soon, however, it became evident that shutting off these areas constituted no real gain in intimacy, but it did tend to detract somewhat from the overall design of the hall (though they were designed to maintain the symmetrical design) so it is doubtful if these ceiling pieces were used very much, if,indeed, at all.

That the theatre was built for the masses instead of the privileged few was borne out partly by the fact that there were only forty boxes containing 200 seats, or about one-twentieth of the total seating. These boxes are arranged along each side of the room, [Figure 14] a radical departure from the typical opera-house arrangement of a horseshoe formation for the boxes. There were twenty boxes on each side arranged in two tiers, the eight boxes in the lower tier forming a decorative arcade for the twelve in the upper tier. The boxes themselves were of cast-iron with the fronts slightly bowed out.[27] An ornamental iron treiliswork separated the boxes from the foyer from which they were entered. The only bad sightlines in the house, unfortunately, were from the lower tier of boxes. Instead of being cantilevered, the upper tier of boxes was supported by cast iron pillars from the lower boxes. This, therefore, left the people in the lower boxes having to look at the stage through this maze of pillars.[28]

The foyers and vestibules were as beautifully decorated as the rest of the theatre. The main vestibule was 117 feet long and 59 feet wide. It had a very handsome groined ceiling with arches rising from massive square pillars, the capitals of which were rich in gold plaster

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[26]Yvonne Bonsall Shafer, "The Auditorium Theatre," Educational Theatre Journal, XVII, (March, 1965), pp. 40, 42.

[27]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 9.

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decoration. The walls of the foyers, vestibules, stairways, and the walls back of the boxes were covered with some extremely intricate gold stencil work designed by Sullivan. [Figures 15--17] One of the outstanding features of the grand foyer were the two inglenooks flanking the central staircase. Featured in these inglenooks were delicately carved oaken benches with leather tufted seats, and against the center walls were massive red Numidian marble fireplaces fed with gas-log flames. The side walls, back of the benches, were adorned with vari-colored dados of marble mosaic.[29]

The decoration in the theatre was especially beautiful. Like the main rooms of the hotel, it was done predominantly in gold and old ivory colors. The quality of the gold leaf used was exceptionally fine being twenty-three carats. In all a total of 26,500 pounds of white lead and 46,875 square feet of gold leaf were used in the decoration, or more than enough to cover one acre.[30, 31] The boxes were done in the same ivory and gold with the exception of the upper boxes which had plush draperies of a slightly darker ivory color, and the chairs were upholstered in yellow satin. The chairs in the main part of the house were done in old yellows. All of these colors went well with the raspberry red Wilton carpeting. Built during an age when decorative plaster was widely used, the Auditorium was no exception, and decorative plaster work was used throughout. Much of the decoration designed by Sullivan was extremely intricate but never tiring.

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[29]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 9.

[30]Ibid, p. 10

[31]A pamphlet, The Auditorium Building put out by the Auditorium Theatre Council gives detailed descriptions of how this decoration was painstakingly applied.

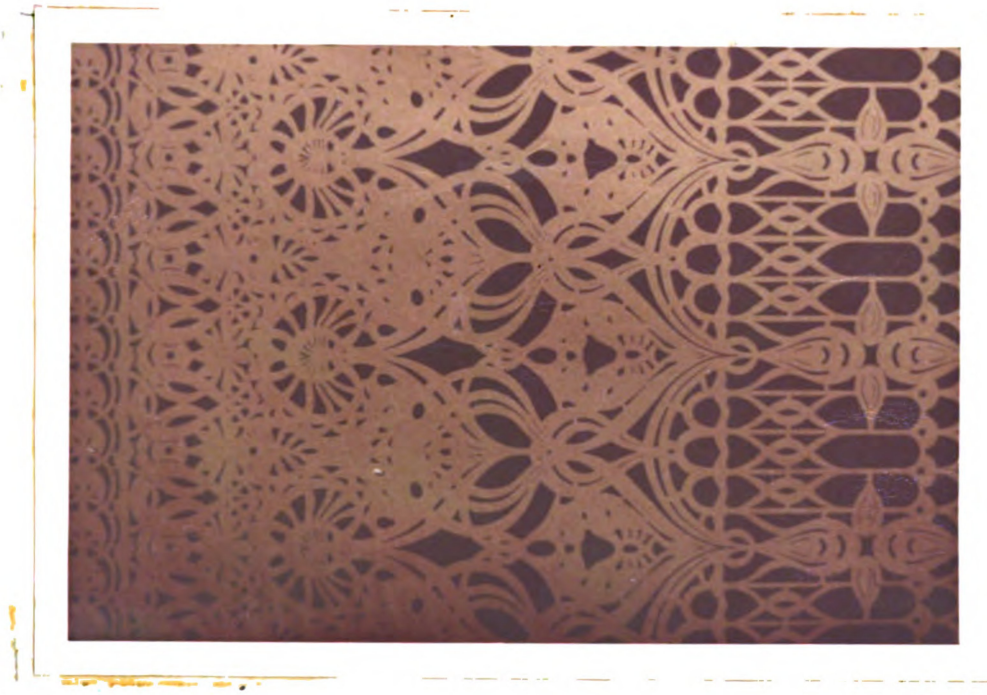

Fig. 15.--Original Sullivan stencil.

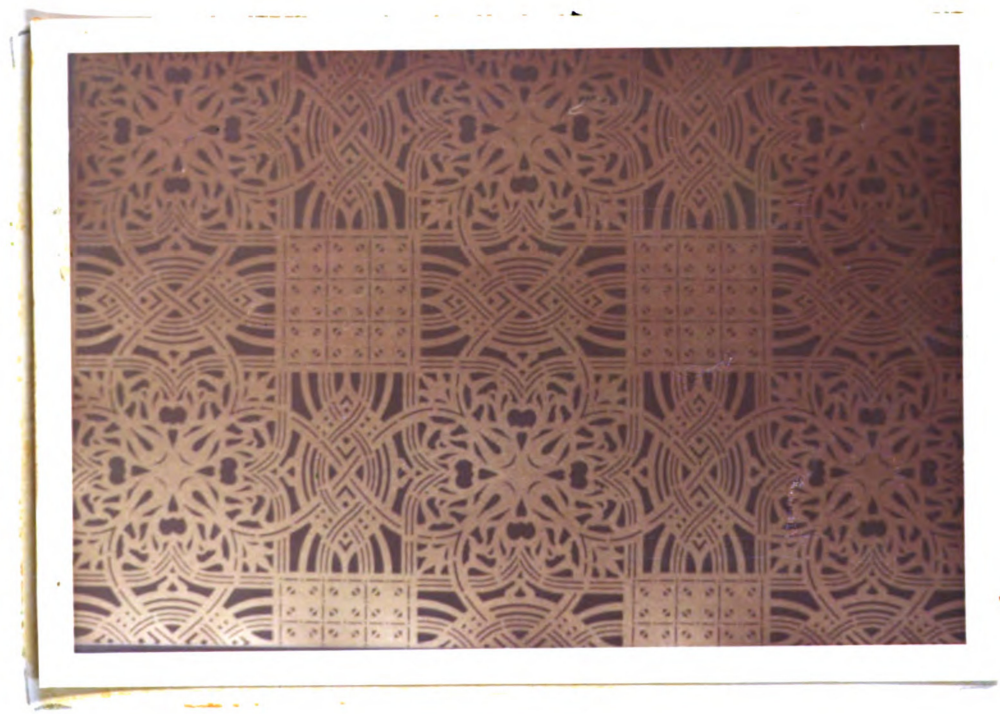

Fig. 16.--Original Sullivan stencil.

Fig. 17.--Original Sullivan stencil. Uncovered in the main staircase of the theatre. (Seen over a scaffolding during restoration work).

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For instance, the capital of every column in the foyer was made up of a design consisting of acanthus and lotus leaves intermingled with the twining vines of some Southern plants. Even the four great arches spanning the 118 feet of the main portion of the theatre were covered with ornamental plaster work. Here the light bulbs used for illumination, 5,000 of them arranged in five-bulb "star" patterns, formed an integral part of the design. The light that they cast on the gold ceiling seemed to make the Auditorium appear lighted by a golden glow rather than direct lighting. But these trusses pushing upward and outward toward an immense skylight filled with stained glass, 2000 square feet of it, and located above the main balcony, were not solely for support. Adler ingeniously doubled their use as heating and air-conditioning ducts. The theatre was warmed by a large mass of fresh air which was washed, then warmed, then dried in the winter, and cooled in the summer.[32] The air escaped from these trusses through little metallic, decorative pieces resembling beehives which studded the arches. The system operated with a high degree of efficiency, at low cost and with great ease.

A very integral part of the theatre decoration were three murals, one over the proscenium done by Charles Halloway, and two on the side walls at a point where the balcony began done by Fleury. The two side murals, each twenty-five feet wide, were inspired by quotations from Louis Sullivan's unpublished poem "Inspiration." The mural on the left of a late fall or winter scene was based on the line "A great life has passed into the tomb and there awaits the requiem of winter's snows". This mural was acclaimed by the critics as a truly fine work. Its

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[32]Hand, p. 33.

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companion piece, a spring scene of the rebirth of life, based on the line "O soft melodious springtime, firstborn of life and love," was not on the same par.[33] Although the mural was a green meadow scene, it came nowhere near capturing the feeling of spring breaking forth in defiance of the cold and snow of winter. In fact, as E. S. Hand says, it seemed to more closely approximate a damp meadow suggesting pneumonia and mustard plasters.[34] Both of these murals, however, blended in perfect harmony with the rest of the decor. The third mural, (actually a frieze) by Halloway, arched gracefully over the entire width of the proscenium opening. In this mural forty-five life-sized figures were presented, representing the power of music from the quotation "The utterance of life is a song, the symphony of Nature." [Figure 18] The biggest complaint about this work was that most of the female figures were in various states of undress. Hand says that the French may think this was all right, but to Americans it was repugnant. The lack of taste was unfortunate, he says, because the work showed snatches of brilliance. An interesting note about this frieze came from L. Grant Duncan in a letter to the editor in the Chicago Daily News in December, 1932.

> He Halloway made his models pose for him on the scaffolding of the unfinished theatre. It was early fall and the building was unheated and the models were very lightly draped. At about the middle of the painting, they struck for heat or more draperies. Comfort considerations won over artistic desires.
>
> New audiences in the theatre, who will be able to distinguish all the details of the murals, will quickly discover that the right-hand half of the scene above the pro-

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[33]Morrison, p. 104.

[34]Hand, p. 130.

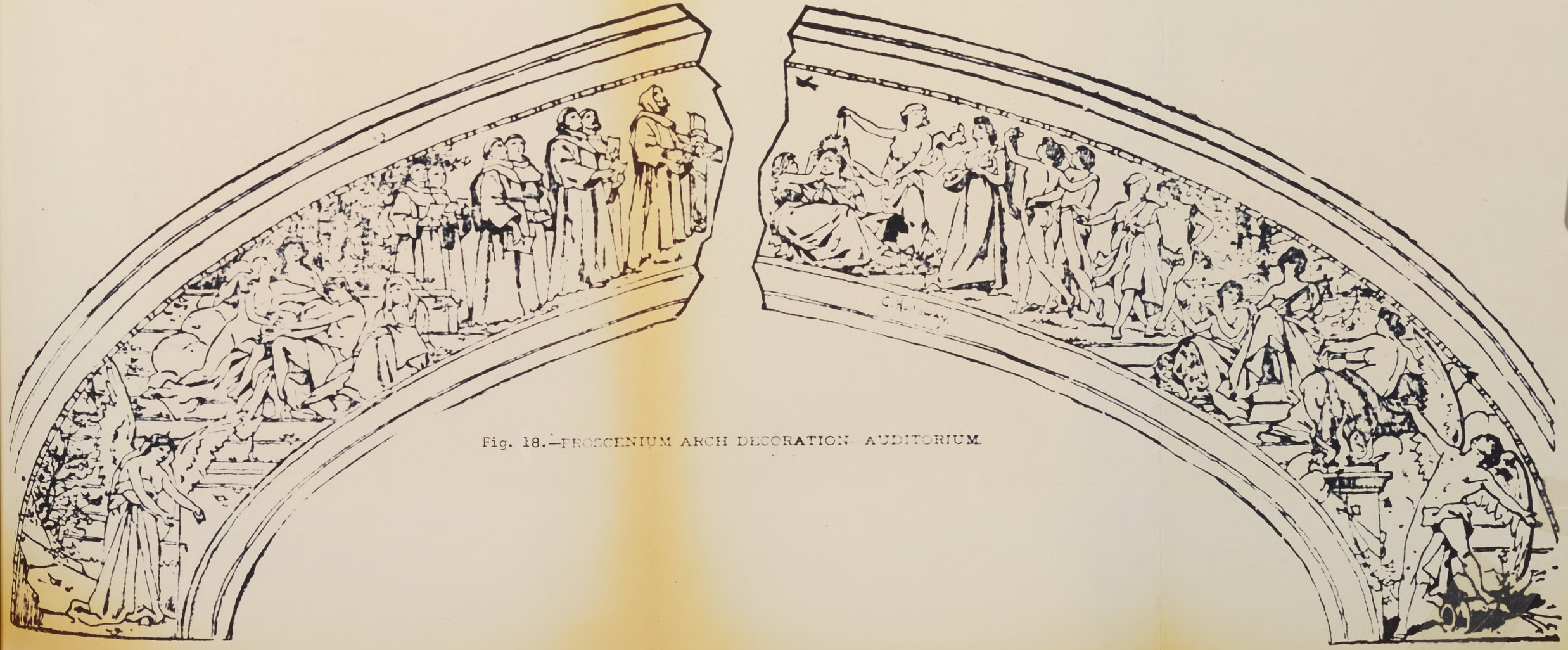
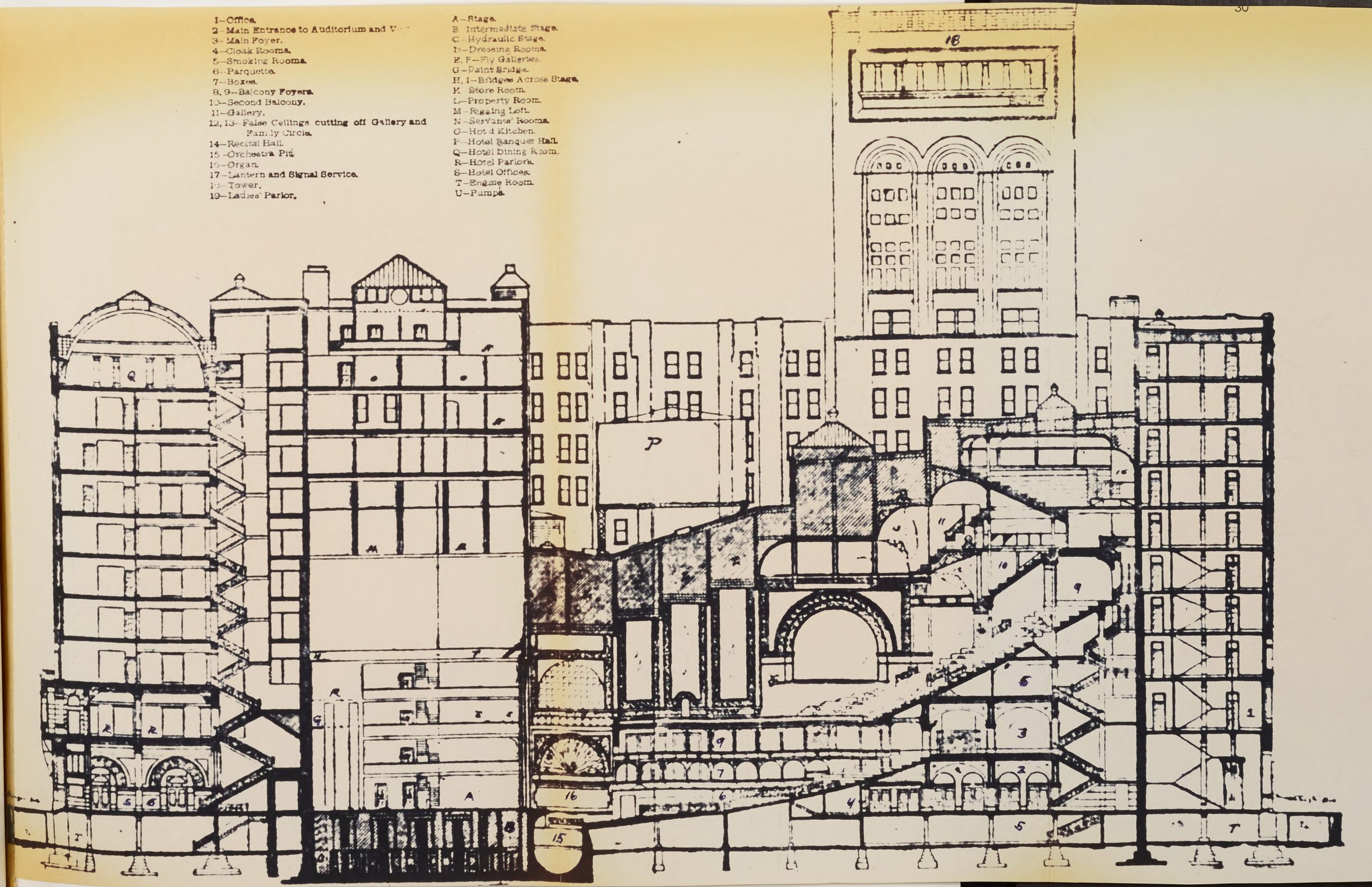


Fig. 18.—PROSCENIUM ARCH DECORATION—AUDITORIUM

1—Office.
2—Main Entrance to Auditorium and V...
3—Main Foyer.
4—Cloak Rooms.
5—Smoking Rooms.
6—Parquette.
7—Boxes.
8, 9—Balcony Foyers.
10—Second Balcony.
11—Gallery.
12, 13—False Ceilings cutting off Gallery and Family Circle.
14—Recital Hall.
15—Orchestra Pit.
16—Organ.
17—Lantern and Signal Service.
18—Tower.
19—Ladies' Parlor.

A—Stage.
B—Intermediate Stage.
C—Hydraulic Stage.
D—Dressing Rooms.
E, F—Fly Galleries.
G—Paint Bridge.
H, I—Bridges Across Stage.
K—Store Room.
L—Property Room.
M—Reeling Loft.
N—Servants' Rooms.
O—Hotel Kitchen.
P—Hotel Banquet Hall.
Q—Hotel Dining Room.
R—Hotel Parlors.
S—Hotel Offices.
T—Engine Room.
U—Pumps.



CROSS SECTION OF
THE AUDITORIUM THEATRE

> scenium arch shows the models in far more comfortable attire than they wore before they struck.[35]

The major purpose of the murals, besides as decoration, was to present the close harmony of music and nature.

On the side walls close to the proscenium the major decorative pieces are huge gold, fan-shaped treilises, above which are, on one side, the gold relief portraits of Wagner and Haydn, and on the opposite side likenesses of Demosthenes and Shakespeare. [Figure 19] The left treilis also served to hide the main portion of the magnificent organ of the theatre. Though the organ did not have as many stops as some others, it far surpassed most in purity and volume of tone. It also contained all of the latest improvements and novelties both electrical and pneumatic. It was a Roosevelt organ costing, with all its parts, $45,000.[36] The keyboard was in front of the proscenium and faced the orchestra director in case it should ever be needed with an orchestra (which it was on the dedication night). In addition to the main organ behind the treilis, there was an echo-organ placed in the attic over the parquet which was used for soft and entrancing sounds such as was necessary in the "Angelic chorus" closing Faust. This echo-organ produced a sound which seemed to envelop the listener and, indeed, probably produced a magnificent effect. The chimes were placed in the flies and were especially useful in church scenes such as in

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[35] Letter from L. Grant Duncan, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Chicago Daily News, December 1, 1932, cited in "Scrapbook", XXIV, p. 8.

[36] A complete description of the great organ, its parts, and its operation can be found in E. S. Hand's Auditorium, Chicago: Exhibit Publishing Co., (1890), pp. 122-127. A complete list of parts with diagrams is found in Early History and Press Clippings: Chicago Auditorium Association, Chicago: 1887-1889, in the Burnham Library of Architecture of the Art Institute of Chicago.

Fig. 19.--Treillis flanking the proscenium. The left treillis hide the main workings of the Auditorium organ.

Lohengrin. These special organs showed good planning on the part of the designers, since both of those operas were scheduled for the first season.[38]

Two more decorative features which, though actually a part of the stage are more rightly discussed as a part of the audience space, are the reducing curtain and the act curtain. The proscenium opening was actually 76' x 44', but for practical use a reducing curtain was flown in which cut this size to 47' x 36'. This curtain, in itself, was a magnificent spectacle. It was iron covered with decorative plaster and weighed 26,000 pounds. Like most of the rest of the decor of the theatre, it was done in gold, and emblazoned on it in large gold letters were the names of many of the leading composers both classical and modern, at least in 1890. [Figures 20 and 21] From top left to top right were the names of Gluck, Gounod, Verdi, Mozart, Rossini, Schumann, Haydn, Berlioz, Beethovan, and Bach.[39] The act curtain was probably the single most beautiful piece of work in the hall. Measuring 37' x 49' and weighing six hundred pounds, this canary yellow curtain believed to be the largest curtain in the world when it was made, received an ovation on opening night when the fire curtain was raised revealing it. Made entirely by the J. A. Colby Company of Chicago, the foundation of the curtain was formed by two hundred yards of solid gold silk canvas especially manufactured and woven in this country and worth over $12. a yard. Twenty pounds, or more than 40,000 yards of embroidery silks were used. The applique work was done with one hundred and seventy-five yards of heavy silk

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[38]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 10.

[39]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12.

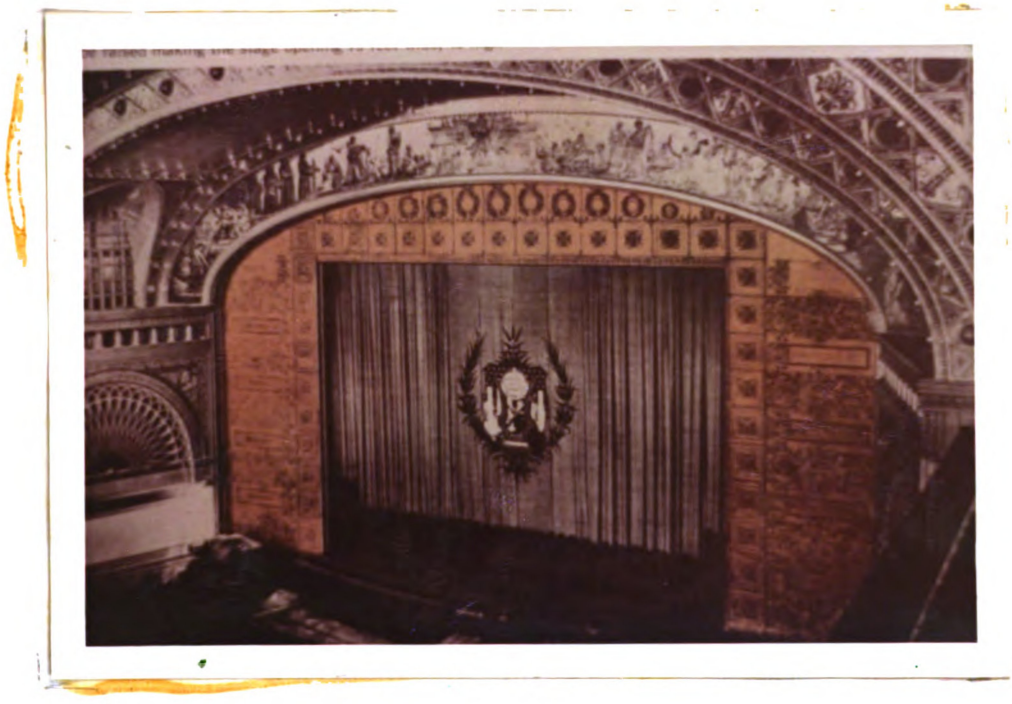

Fig. 20.--Reducing Curtain.

Fig. 21--Reducing Curtain close-up.

plush woven to order and dyed in Europe. The finishing touches were accomplished with thirty yards of cloth of gold, ten pounds of gold bullion, five pounds of silver, and about three hundred large brilliants. The drop curtain was smooth in the center and hung in folds as it moved outward. The curtain was enhanced by a centerpiece representing the American coat-of-arms. Figure 20 In essence this consisted of a golden lyre superimposed on a shield among stars. Superimposed in turn on the coat-of-arms were a crossed flagolet and a violincello supporting a musical score on which were the opening notes of Yankee Doodle. This entire design was enclosed in a laurel wreath.[40] It is no wonder that this splendid piece of work received an ovation.

The Auditorium Theatre was truly a magnificent work of art, but its most magnificent feature was not even visible to the naked eye. This was the acoustics. Acoustics were Adler's specialty and he made the most of them in the Auditorium. Carl Condit, although describing the Central Music Hall, another Adler creation, tells in essence the extent to which Adler went to achieve his fine Auditorium acoustics, and why they work.

> The acoustical properties of the theatre[Central Music Hall] were nationally famous and served to give Adler the reputation of the leading acoustical 'engineer' of his time. This reputation justly became world-wide with the completion of the Auditorium. The acoustical excellence of the Music Hall theatre resulted from three characteristics: (1) the upward curve of the orchestra floor away from the stage; (2) the transverse projections below the ceiling (the furring around the trusses over the theatre); and (3) the lateral curve of the ceiling vault. Adler's mastery of acoustical design appears to have been the product of a direct empirical approach to the problem. In 1885 he made a careful study of the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City as preparation for

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[40]Hand, pp. 120, 121.

the design of the Auditorium.[41]

The method Adler used for acoustics in the Central Music Hall was essentially the same as that in the Auditorium. When planning the seating, the uninterrupted sightlines were of almost secondary importance, they seem almost to have been an end result of Adler's attempt to make the house acoustically perfect. To achieve his end Adler based his floor design on Scott Russell's "isocoustic curve". Consequently the rise in the floor was designed to achieve better acoustical properties rather than better sightlines. The seventeen foot rise over the one hundred twelve foot length of the main floor, and the forty foot rise of the main balcony to a point in the last row, 266 feet from the stage, was more than enough for good sightlines. The ceiling with its series of flat arches getting progressively larger as they lead away from the proscenium to a point perpendicular to the front of the main balcony, was also planned acoustically. Floor and ceiling together caused the outward movement of the sound waves to reach every part of the floor without creating an echo.[42]

The acoustics of the Auditorium Theatre were indeed amazing. The Chicago Tribune in an article on January 5, 1890, mentions that even in the rear of the main balcony, the farthest point from the stage (266 feet) " . . . the faintest pianissimo tone, even the swish of a dress, is distinctly audible."[43] Only a few months ago this writer sat in the very back row of the top gallery and was able to hear, with little strain, conversation going on on the stage. Of course, in this instance the Auditorium was empty and the effect would undoubtedly be

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[41]Condit, pp. 32-33.

[42]Morrison, pp. 99-100

[43]Chicago Tribune, January 5, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 90.

different with an audience absorbing some of the sound. Not everyone was completely entranced with the Auditorium's acoustics. Frank Lloyd Wright tells of Theodore Thomas, director of the Chicago Symphony, and his dismay upon first playing in Chicago's then new Orchestra Hall and finding that the intimate quality which had been present in the Auditorium was so severely lacking in Orchestra Hall.[44] However, Dr. Leo Beranek of Bolt, Beranek, and Newman, Inc., a firm which conducts acoustical surveys, tells quite a different story. In his book, Music, Acoustics, and Architecture he has this note from Charles Edward Russell:

> From the beginning Theodore Thomas had known that the Auditorium was not the place for orchestral concerts. It was so big that to fill it with sound he was obliged to employ a stress that obliterated the finer points he wished the public to seize and assimilate. The stage was so ill adapted to an orchestra's use that he regarded it as hopeless. . . Nothing would prevent what was to his ears a deadly mishmash of sound where his passion was for clarity and sweet reasonableness.[45]

Thomas did agree that for a hall of its immense capacity the Auditorium did have excellent acoustics, but they were not ideal for a symphony orchestra since it was necessary to fill the entire space.[46] However, he was also quoted many times as saying,

> . . . that in no other hall in which an orchestra of his has ever played has every instrument come out so completely and perfectly in the tonal mass as in the Auditorium.[47]

From these contradictory statements it is rather difficult to decide just what Thomas thought of the Auditorium's acoustics. We do know

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[44]Wright, p. 3.

[45]Leo L. Beranek, Music, Acoustics, and Architecture, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc. (1962), p. 119.

[46]Ibid., p. 120.

[47]Chicago Sunday, Tribune, December 11, 1904, Part IV, p. 1.

however, that because of the exceedingly high fly space, a great deal of the orchestra sound never reached the audience but was lost instead in the fly gallery. Although Bolt, Beranek, and Newman have run acoustical surveys on many Chicago halls, they have never run one on the Auditorium; and consequently, there seems to be no scientific comparison between the Auditorium and other musical halls in Chicago.[48]

Just as the hall is technically and artistically one of the finest in the world, so also is the stage of this theatre one of the greatest ever built. Unlike many theatres in the United States where the stage is secondary to the beauty and comfort of the house, the Auditorium placed almost primary emphasis on the stage. It was larger and better equipped than almost any other stage in the world. It was full of all the latest technical stage improvements, plus a few that were introduced on it.

As has been previously mentioned, the stage had a normal proscenium opening 47' x 36', but for large choral concerts, conventions, or events which required the full use of the stage, the reducing curtain, hydraulically run, could be flown out leaving an opening 76' x 44'. Behind the proscenium the stage was 62-1/2 feet deep, and with the added width of the 6-1/2 foot apron, the overall depth from footlights to rear wall is 69 feet. The actual width of the stage, from side wall to side wall, is 110 feet, but there is a clear width of 98 feet allowing for a great deal of wing space, the total available stage room being 6,862 square feet. The clear height of the stage from floor to rigging loft was about 90 feet. Thomas E. Tallmadge claims that he belonged to a tennis

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[48]Dr. Leo L. Beranek, Personal Letter to James W. Wright, January 19, 1966.

club which, between opera seasons, would set up a full double tennis court on the stage.[49] More practical demonstrations of the size are realized from the children's production of "Cinderella" in 1890 which involved two thousand children with six hundred fifty of them on stage at one time;[50] from Adler's description of large choral concerts when the proscenium was opened to its fullest and ". . . The chorus seats [rose] tier upon tier seventy-five feet wide, seventy feet deep, closed in on the sides with suitable decorations and covered with a series of sounding boards suspended from the rigging loft";[51] and the 1888 convention when seats for one thousand spectators were placed on the stage. But an even better example was that on this stage, with the largest proscenium arch in the country, the Madison Square Theatre of New York, in its entirety, could be placed. The Auditorium stage was exceeded in size only by the La Scala Opera House in Milan, Italy.

To build the greatest stage possible Dankmar Adler travelled to Europe to study the finest stages there. Although he modeled his stage after that at Buda Pesth, his stage had the advantage of mechanical, electrical, and hydraulic improvements in stage equipment made since the construction of the Buda Pesth theatre. In fact, there were only three stages in the world to rival the Auditorium and these were the ones at Buda Pesth, Prague, and the old German University at Haile. The majority of the technical improvements were innovated and patented by the Asphaleis Company of Vienna, or the firm of Kautsky and Sons. Fritz Kautsky, head of that firm, even spent some time in Chicago

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[49]Tallmadge, p. 164.

[50]The Morning News (Chicago), June 7, 1890 [cited in] "Scrapbook", II, p. 56.

[51]Kaufmann, p. 28.

supervising construction of the stage. When finished, the Auditorium caused a revolution in scenic apparatus and equipment for stages in America.[52] Milward Adams, the manager of the Auditorium, was led to remark, "This stage will mark the beginning of a new era in theatrical productions in this country".[53]

A section of the stage floor 46' x 36' was trapped so that it could be raised or depressed in four sections, a total of eighteen feet. These four traps, 9' x 46', could be operated either independently or together. Contained in each of these four traps were smaller bridges, 26' x 4', each of which also contained still smaller bridges, 4' x 6'. Located just back of the main curtain were two 2-1/2' x 2-1/2' star traps, which had a vertical travelling distance of nine feet. Between the star traps and the main traps of the stage was a bridge 4' x 46' with a travelling distance of 13 feet. All of these traps or bridges could be operated separately, and those contained in the main trapped section could operate either individually or together.[54] The traps were run by water powered hydraulic rams supplied with water stored in tanks in the tower. [Figure 22 shows a ground-plan of the trap system]

Eighty-nine feet above the stage was the gridiron capable of sustaining an overall weight of 159,000 pounds. Used for rigging on the stage were twelve miles of steel cable and about 6,600 feet of 1-1/4" hemp used in the counter-weight system. (Everything on the stage was run either hydraulically or on the counter-weight system.) The drops were operated from the stage floor rather than from the fly-gallery as

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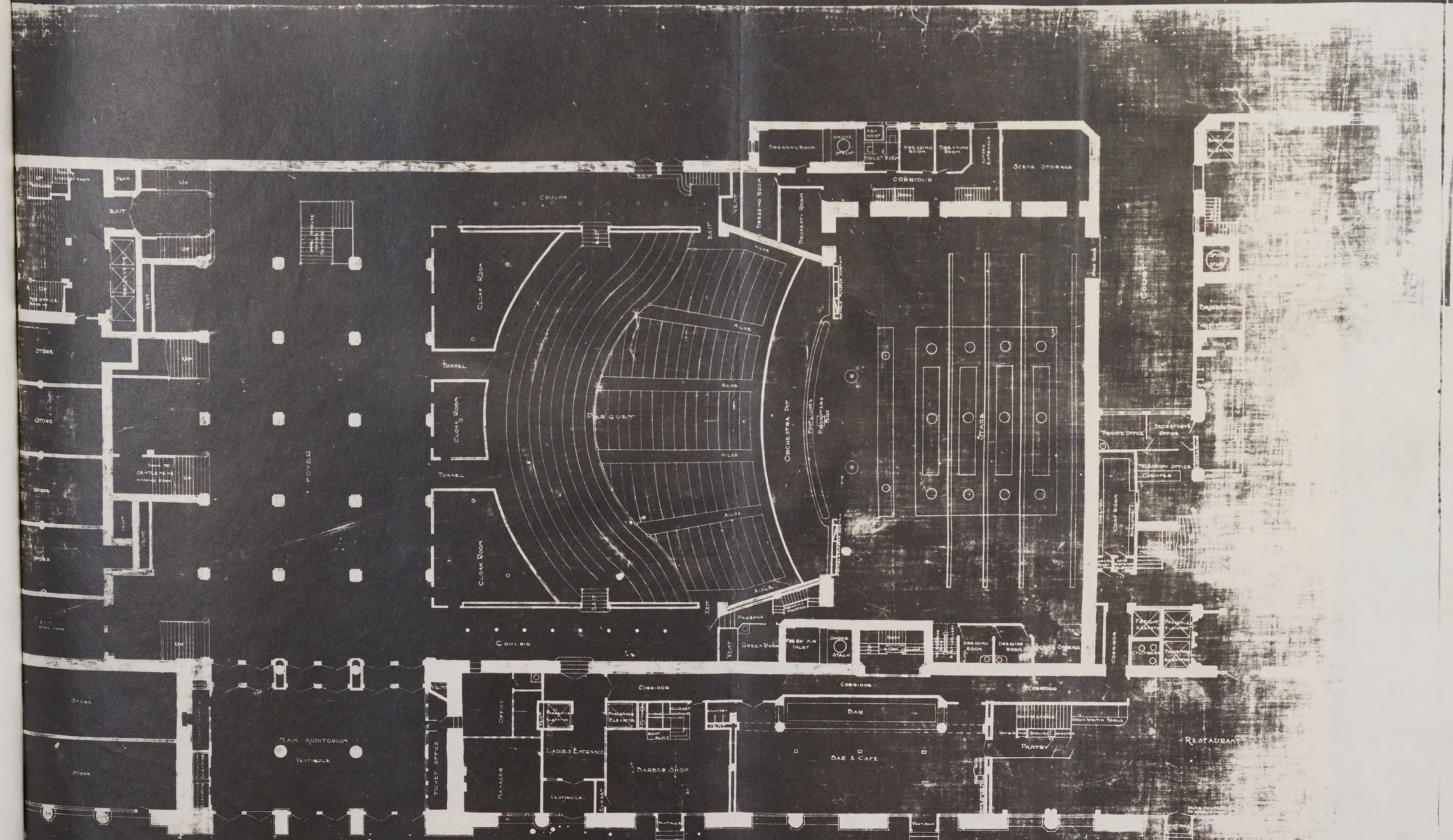
[52]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12.

[53]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 10.

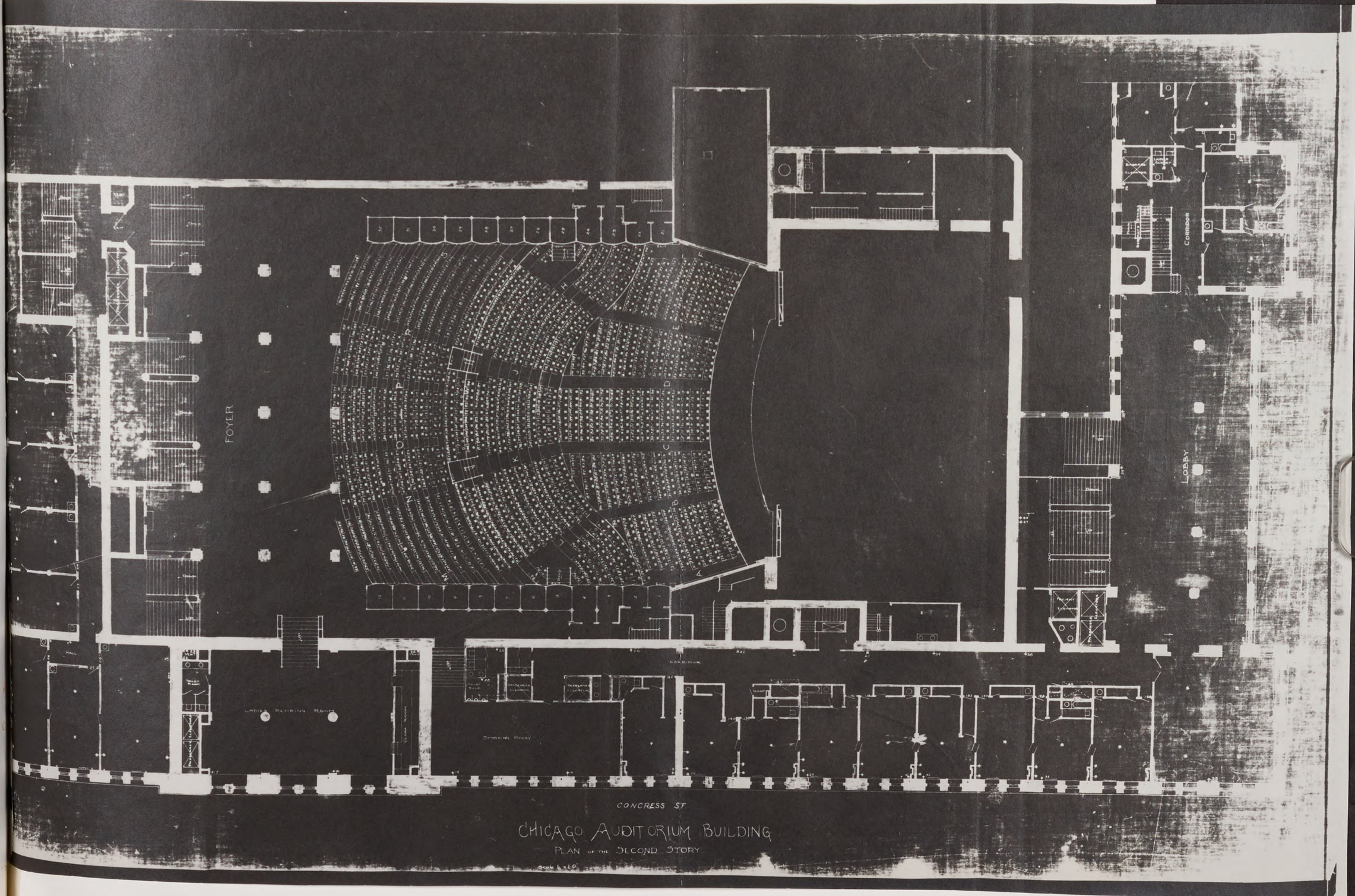
[54]Hand, p. 134.



CONGRESS ST.

CHICAGO AUDITORIUM BUILDING
PLAN OF THE FIRST STORY

STAGE FLOOR PLAN
1st STORY



CHICAGO AUDITORIUM BUILDING

PLAN OF THE SECOND STORY

PARQUET FLOOR PLAN
2ND STORY

was the practice in most theatres of that time. In this way the operation was much more convenient and thus more accurate since the operator could see the stage. Supported by this gridiron were the 26,000 pound reducing curtain, an iron fire-curtain weighing 9,000 pounds, a small scene bridge of 7,200 pounds, a two section steel paint frame of 12,000 pounds, and sixty sets of lines or the battens for them, weighing, without drops, 38,000 pounds.

The Auditorium was remarkably well prepared, scenically, for the opera seasons that were planned. In stock there was an assortment of one hundred twenty-five drops, each 36' x 45'. In short, there was complete equipment enough to do thirty different operas. In addition, there were some three hundred set pieces, largest of which was the 24' x 36' Egyptian tomb for "Aida", a thirty-eight foot high tower for "Otello", and the set trees, tallest of which were thirty-three feet in height.[55]

Probably the greatest innovation on the Auditorium stage, and the only one in America at that time, was the "horizon" as it was called then, or "panorama" as it is known today. This piece of equipment, fifty feet high and containing some three hundred yards of canvas, was developed to be used in lieu of a cyclorama, and to create weather effects for the rear of the stage. It consisted of two large cylinders placed on either side of the stage, attached to which was the canvas, moved by a steel link belt in a track running from one cylinder, across the back of the stage, to the other cylinder, the entire process forming a pattern somewhat like a "U". The purpose of the horizon was to

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[55]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 10.

[56]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12.

create the illusion of illimitable space for a set. Painted on it were four kinds of weather so that by moving the horizon across the stage a change could be effected going from fair weather to a dark and threatening sky, and finally to the heavy clouds of a storm. All of the horizon was transparent so that lighting effects such as the sun, moon, stars, or lightning could be accomplished from behind it and appear as a part of the sky. Light and beautiful as this unit may have appeared, it weighed 5,800 pounds, counter-weighted, yet it could be flown hydraulically out of sight into the fly space.[56]

Under Mr. Ernest Albert, the scenic artist, and with the aid of all the latest technical devices found on the stage, a different type of setting was used in the Auditorium than was common in other theatres in the United States. There were no floor grooves on the stage and all sets consisted of the horizon and thirty-five to forty foot side pieces which could be flown. These side pieces, called "walls" by Fritz Kautsky to avoid the term "wings", were arranged similar to the wing and border sets. They were suspended from the grid and then propped up from behind with stage braces. Obviously a great deal of care was taken in preparing the scenery for the Auditorium as can be seen by the following newspaper account:

> The artistic finish of all these pieces makes them worth looking at on their own account. Ordinary stage decorations are coarse when looked at closely, but in this case each piece is a picture in itself, so perfect that one might hang it in his parlor alongside of a good oil painting.[57]

Six of the battens above the stage held the borderlights which provided most of the illumination for this area of the theatre. Each

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[56]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12.

[57]Ibid.

of the border lights had a full complement of colored lamps, 165 lights in each, in green, red, and white. Added to this for illumination were 150 lamps in the footlights. All of these lights were run by electricity which, as Milward Adams says, made calcium light a thing of the past. Electrical lighting gave the Auditorium the opportunity to use many special forms of lighting effects. Nora Marks, in a Chicago Tribune article of 1889 tells of her surprise when, at the touch of a button, a beam of sunlight suddenly blazed through a stained-glass window so true that even the divisions between the panes stood out.[58] Lightning was produced by a stagehand who stood at the side of the stage holding two wires with carbons attached. At the proper time he merely had to bring the carbons close enough to create an arc similar to a lightning bolt.

Although not a lighting effect, one of the fine sound effects which could be achieved at the Auditorium Theatre was that of thunder. The device used for this was calculated to create real terror in the hearts of the audience. In fact, the results were so terrifying that often they frightened even the actors and actresses. Thunder was made by rolling sixteen to twenty-four, depending on the amount of terror required, cannon balls, down a chute made of boiler-iron which extended from high up on one side of the stage around across the back to the other side of the stage. The cannon balls started with an initial drop of eight feet into the boiler-iron trough in which they rolled down an incline of sixty feet where there was a drop of five feet in the chute. From there they continued down the chute, made a shorter drop, rolled some more, and ended their journey by falling noiselessly

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[58]Nora Marks, The Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1889, p. 3.

into a padded box, having suitably terrified everyone within hearing distance.[59]

The stage and its accompanying equipment was not inexpensive. Most sources list the cost of the stage and equipment, including iron fire-curtain, at $175,000. One source even claims that the iron work on the stage, alone, cost $110,000. and that the total figure for all of the furnishings amounted to upwards of $300,000.[60]

Even the performers weren't neglected when the Auditorium was planned. For the actors there were thirty dressing rooms which, all together, accomodated some three hundred people. Six large dressing rooms were located on the stage floor and were furnished in antique oak and bronze. The remaining rooms were found on the various levels above the stage. The average size of these rooms was 12' x 16'. All of them were connected to the prompter's box by means of an electrical bell system. All of the dressing rooms were painted, neatly furnished, and carpeted. Wash basins were built into all dressing rooms and washrooms connected each set of four. Interestingly, all of the dressing rooms were furnished with electricity but there was also gaslight for makeup purposes. On stage left, back of the proscenium there was a very handsomely furnished reception room connected to the foyer back of the boxes. Here the actors could receive callers and yet the stage would be kept free of visitors. At the rear of the stage was a large covered area for the actors arriving in carriages.[61]

The musicians were not forgotten either. Built especially for

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[59]The Chicago Tribune, March 30, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", II, p. 4.

[60]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12.

[61]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 10.

them back of the orchestra pit, on the intermediate stage level, was a room 16' x 50', the same size as the orchestra pit, accomodating one hundred people. In this room, fitted out with full washroom facilities, the orchestra members could retire when they were not performing. Even the stage manager and electrician had their own little rooms placed conveniently on the stage level.[62]

Properties for the Auditorium were obviously quite realistic. One writer says that they were not sham, but rather the real item. She went on to say that the glassware was of the finest quality, as was the furniture and other material.[63] It is unlikely, however, that many of the properties were real since Fawcett Robinson, the prop man, was considered somewhat of a genius with papier-mache. The prop room and workroom were located above the orchestra pit and here Robinson and his brother, both of whom had once been property artists for Henry Irving, worked with a force of artists creating papier-mache furniture which from a distance of five feet not only appeared to be the genuine article, but also appeared to be made of antique oak.[64]

The manager of the Auditorium Theatre was a young man named Milward Adams. He had worked for this same management at the old music festivals held in the Exposition Hall. He had proven himself capable of handling large affairs with never any problems, and was a logical choice to take over the management of this endeavor.[65]

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[62]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12

[63]The Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1889, p. 3.

[64]The Chicago Tribune, December 7, 1889, p. 12.

[65]The Daily Inter Ocean, December 11, 1889, p. 9.

> It gives Chicago once more the home of art and music which it lost in the fire of 1871, only on a larger grander and nobler scale. It gives her the largest, most elegant, and most admirably equipped opera-house and public hall in the world, with an organ which stands unrivalled in its resources, and a stage provided with every device known to the dramatic art. It has been a colossal undertaking, but Chicago skill, courage, and faith, and enterprise have carried it through to success and the great structure is already world-famous.[66]

It had been built by Chicagoans and was a fitting tribute to their public spirit and drive.

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[66]The Chicago Tribune, December 8, 1889, p. 12.

CHAPTER III

"GRAND OPENING YEAR"

In the Auditorium nothing was ever done in a small way. Even the dedication was a mammoth affair. The last time Chicago had seen crowds similar in size to those at the opening of the Auditorium was at the Chicago Fire in 1871. With the amount of time, money, and effort put into the construction of the building it was obvious that the Association would not allow it to be forgotten. Consequently, the theatre portion of the Auditorium was dedicated on a grand scale on December 9, 1889. Plans for the dedication were begun far in advance. In a report to the stockholders November 23, 1888, Ferd Peck announced that the President of the United States would more than likely be present for the ceremonies.[1] By December 1, 1889, the plans were nearly completed but the noteworthy officials who had been expected to attend had by then become doubtful attenders. The program was to have somewhat of an international flair with a number of lesser Canadian officials in attendance. In honor of these guests, special boxes were to be placed on stage, by the proscenium opening, and were to be decorated for the occasion with Canadian and American flags. It was hoped that the Canadian Prime Minister could attend, but this was uncertain. The United States, on the other hand, was to be represented by its Vice President, Levi P. Morton.

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[1]Early History and Press Clippings

In the same article as the above, the program for the dedication was announced, and it proved to be as marvelous as the building in which it was to be held.

> 'Triumphal Fantasie,' by Theodore Dubois composed for the occasion for the grand organ and orchestra, Clarence Eddy, organist,
>
> Address by Mayor Cregier, [Mayor of Chicago],
>
> 'Auditorium Festival Ode,' by Frederick Grant Gleason, a symphonic cantata composed for the occasion and sung by a chorus of 400 voices, under the direction of William L. Tomlins; text by Miss Harriet Monroe,
>
> Address by John S. Runnells,
>
> 'Home, Sweet Home,' Sung by Mme. Adelina Patti.
>
> -Intermission-
>
> 'America' by the Apollo Club,
>
> 'Concert Fantasie,' by F. Dela Tombelle, composed expressly for the Auditorium organ; Clarence Eddy, organist,
>
> 'The Heavens Are Telling,' Haydn, by the Apollo Club,
>
> Dedication address by Gov. Joseph W. Fifer [Governor of Illinois],
>
> 'Hallelujah' chorus from 'The Messiah,' Handel, Apollo Club.[2]

The hit of the program, from the time of its announcement was the choice of Adelina Patti, the prima donna of the opera, to sing "Home, Sweet Home."

Seven days before the dedication an announcement was made which greatly enhanced the aura of the ceremonies. The Auditorium Association revealed that President Harrison, nominated in this same hall

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[2]The Chicago Tribune, December 1, 1889, p. 27.

before it was completed a year earlier, was going to return to the Auditorium for the dedication of the completed building.[3]

The Washington Hatchet of Washington, D.C., announced that an audience of 5,000 persons, and an outside assemblage of 10,000 gathered to dedicate ". . . the largest and grandest operatic structure in the world—the Chicago Auditorium."[4] The event appeared differently in the Chicago papers. By 7:30 a.m. there was a gathering of some 225 men and women waiting outside the building hoping to get standing room tickets for the dedication. By 7:30 that evening, a mere twelve hours later, these same 225 had become the veterans in a veritable army estimated at 7,000, and by 8:00 p.m. this number had risen to about twice that number so that Congress Street, from Wabash to Michigan was jammed. The crowds were so vast, said the Chicago Tribune, that the doors of the residences on the south side of Congress Street fairly sagged with the pressure of the crowd, and the plate glass in the Auditorium windows needed all of its thickness to withstand the impact.[5] By nine o'clock the streets were free of people but were still filled with the hundreds of empty carriages awaiting the end of the program. Inside the house was an audience of about 7,000, those in the boxes having paid as much as $2,000 for that privilege. The program proceeded according to the announced plan with the exception that remarks by Ferd Peck and President Harrison were inserted early in the evening. There was some small complaint on the order of the speakers, since the important

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[3]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 2, 1889, p. 1.

[4]The Hatchet (Washington, D.C.), June 30, 1889, [cited in] "Chicago Auditorium Dedication Volume", [Press notices and replies to invitations to the dedication, accumulated by Ferd. W. Peck], Gift to the Newberry Library by F. W. Peck, Jr., October 30, 1941.

[5]The Chicago Tribune, December 10, 1889, p. 2.

ones had gone first and the less important speakers last, but this complaint was rather minor and soon disappeared. The evening was one of general merriment, the high point of which was, of course, Patti's rendition of "Home, Sweet Home" for which she received such a tremendous ovation that she had to reciprocate by doing an encore of Eckert's "Swiss Echo Song".

Across the country newspapers were exceptionally kind to the new auditorium by heaping superlatives on it. They compared Chicago to other great cities. The Deadwood, South Dakota Pioneer claimed, ". . . its [the Auditorium] erection does honor to the enterprise of Chicago, while again making the contrast between that city and New York in everything that involves public spirit."[6] The Philadelphia Inquirer reported,

> The great Auditorium Building in Chicago, which was dedicated yesterday, is more than a mere landmark; it is an event. It marks the progress of the age and the development of wealth, intellect, and culture in the newer section of the country. Philadelphia, New York, Boston, Baltimore, and Washington were all old when Chicago was begun; yet Chicago has outstripped them all in cost of a building devoted to the liberal arts, and if expectations shall be realized, has produced a structure worthy to rank with any in the cultivated cities of Europe. There will be the usual Western self-laudation over the achievement no doubt; but there need be no jealousy of it in the East. Rather should we rejoice that our common country has grown so great and rich as to afford so fine a building, so significant a testimonial to intellectual attainments, a thousand miles from the seaboard.[7]

They pointed out the public spirit and enterprise behind this venture. They expressed the opinion that the investment would probably return

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[6]The Pioneer (Deadwood, South Dakota), December 14, 1889, [cited in] "Chicago Auditorium".

[7]The Chicago Tribune, December 12, 1889, p. 4.

no profit to the investors. According to the Chicago Tribune everyone in Chicago, high born or low, those attending the inaugural and those who couldn't even attend the inaugural opera season, should be gratified just to be a part of a community in which such an endeavor as the Auditorium could have taken place.[8]

But most important of all, the Auditorium, according to the newspapers, was a building for the future. The Daily Inter Ocean said: "It is not a temporary affair; it was builded to the ages, and it will endure with the Nation, and only fall into ruin when the great principles upon which this government is based have been overwhelmed by the folly and degeneracy of men".[9] The Chicago Tribune put it differently:

> Some traveler from New Zealand may, indeed, sit on a broken arch of London bridge and sketch the ruins of St. Paul's but the traveler who will first sketch the ruins of the Auditorium must come from one of the planets.[10]

From the impressive dedication night ceremonies the Auditorium management went on to produce an opening season unrivaled by most other theatres. The preparations for this opening opera season began long before the actual date, December 10, 1889. Since the main impetus for the building of the Auditorium had been the Opera Festival of 1885, and since one of the main purposes of the hall was to provide a home for the opera in Chicago, it was only natural that the first season in the new Auditorium should be one of opera—the very finest Italian opera available. The Auditorium was presenting a four week season of opera which would be of interest the world over for two reasons.

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[8]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 10, 1889, p. 4.

[9]Ibid.

[10]The Chicago Tribune, September 15, 1889, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 1.

First, this was an attempt, an important attempt, to revive Italian opera on a large scale, and secondly, because the company employed had some of the most talented operatic voices in the world. Selected to present the season was the Abbey and Grau Company, who had under contract to them such stars as Adelina Patti, the acknowledged prima donna of the opera, and Signor Francesco Tamagno, the leading operatic tenor at that time.[11] The repertoire of the company consisted of Romeo and Juliette, Otello, Lakme, William Tell, La Traviata, Les Huguenots, Lucia di Lammermoor, Lohengrin, Faust, Il Trovatore, Semiramide, Mefistofele, Aida, Martha, and La Sonnambula.

With a company of the caliber of that gathered by Henry E. Abbey and Maurice Grau, and with the season they had planned, it was no wonder that good seats, in fact all seats, were at a premium for the season. Prices for the seats, as they were listed in the program, were not as expensive as one might believe, however:

Main Floor	$ 3.50
Main Balcony, Front	3.00
Main Balcony, Rear	2.50
Second Balcony	2.00
Family Circle	1.50
Boxes, Seating Six	30.00
Season Tickets	54.00
Season Boxes	450.00[12]

The price list found in the newspaper advertisements differed somewhat from the list in the programs, although for no apparent reason.

> Boxes (seating five) for the season of twenty-one performances, $500.
> Seats for the season, $20, $30, $40, $50, and $60.
> Single seats $1, $2, $2.50, $3, $3,50.[13]

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[11]The Chicago Tribune, December 8, 1889, p. 12.

[12]"Auditorium Scrapbook Collection", 8 v., Newberry Library, Chicago. II.

[13]The Chicago Tribune, November 17, 1889, p. 9.

The method used to distribute the best seats was one not altogether popular with the public. On November 22, 1889, an auction was held at the Central Music Hall to dispose of as many seats as possible. This auction was strictly a society affair. On the evening that it was held State Street, in front of the Central Music Hall, was filled with carriages, many of them with English drivers (a sure sign of affluence by the owner). The air was filled with seemingly knowledgeable talk of Verdi, Beethovan, Berlioz, Sullivan, and others. Even the auctioneer, Franklin H. Head appeared in evening dress.[14] It was necessary, however, for the Auditorium management to devise some 'condition(s) of sale' by which the auction should be conducted. Under these conditions each successful bidder could select not less than two seats nor more than six. The seats, however, had to be all in one row so that no person could select all aisle seats. In addition, no more than two boxes should be sold to any bidder. The bid price, incidentally, was over and above the price of the seat; and, consequently, the bidder paid the normal price of the seats plus the amount he bid for the choice of them. The tickets were delivered to the purchaser immediately upon the acceptance of his bid by the auctioneer.[15]

The sale of thirty-six boxes netted a sum of $19,900. This sum added to the normal prices of the boxes—approximately $500 apiece—brought the total for the boxes auctioned off to about $37,900. As the Tribune stated, however, the society of Chicago must (society felt) be isolated elegantly when they went to the opera, but they had

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[14]The Chicago Tribune, November 23, 1889, p. 1.

[15]The Chicago Daily News, November 22, 1889, p. 2.

to pay for the privilege. The first choice of boxes went to George M. Pullman who paid $1600 for that choice. From then on the price went lower, though very slowly, as is the case with most auctions. Ferd Peck was the successful bidder for choice number twelve and paid $800 for his success. Even some of the single seats were auctioned off at a fairly high price. Their price began at $5 but went up rapidly until Charles Counselman took the opening bid for $50. (Again, this price did not include the regular price of the seats.) The single seat bidding price stayed at $50 until nearly all of the seats in the parquet circle had been sold.[16]

As mentioned previously, this auctioning of the seats was not the most popular action ever taken by the Auditorium management. To the public it didn't seem right that a business venture such as this should employ the tactics of charities. For charity this auction, which seemed an attempt to make as much money as possible, would have been acceptable, but not for a business venture. Also, the Auditorium was to have been built for the people, yet here was society paying exorbitant prices for the good seats in the house, seemingly cutting out the less wealthy. The auction, some of the newspapers claimed, proved that this monument to the people was, in reality, a millionaire's paradise. There were, however, a number of very good reasons for holding the auction. In the first place one of the conditions of the contract with the Abbey and Grau Company imposed by Mr. Abbey was that an auction type of seat sale be conducted. Milward Adams, though, was quick to point out that the

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[16]The Chicago Tribune, November 23, 1889, p. 1.

Auditorium management was by no means opposed to this method. In this instance, with the demand for tickets being so great, the auction method seemed to be the fairest. Another reason for the choice of sale was based on the feelings of the management that if seats were sold on the usual "first come, first served" basis, then the speculators would be bound to buy up many of the tickets and in the long run the public would be forced to pay the same prices as were paid at the auction. The management reasoned that the excess cash would do better in the box office than with the speculators.[17] There need not have been so much concern over the tickets, however, since out of nearly 4,500 seats available in the Auditorium, only about 430 of them were sold at the auction, and the majority of the best seats in the main floor and first balcony, as well as the entire second balcony and family circle remained unsold. As Mr. Adams had implied earlier, the Auditorium was still to be run on an equal basis for all people.[18]

The remaining seats for the first four week season of opera were put on a week by week sales basis, with the seats for the first week's operas going on sale on Tuesday, December 3. There were plenty of seats remaining to be placed on sale. The sale opened at nine o'clock in the morning at the Congress Street box office, but approximately ten hours before that time the nucleus of the crowd had begun to gather in the vestibule. Before dawn the crowd had formed into four separate lines leading to the two box office windows. Shortly after dawn the lines reached from the vestibule down Congress Street to Wabash Avenue

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[17]The Chicago Tribune, December 12, 1889, p. 1.

[18]The Chicago Tribune, [letter to the editor], December 4, 1889, p. 7.

and down Wabash to Van Buren , a block away.[19] The Auditorium management's charge that speculators would buy up as many seats as opportunity permitted seemed to have been borne out by the events of the single seat sale. Many of the speculators hired boys to stand in line as early as the Friday before the box office opened. The boys camped in the vestibule much as people today camp at box offices in order to be first in line to get tickets for a world series baseball game. As each boy bought his choice seats, he would hand them over to the broker and get back in line. According to one old theatre-goer, never in the history of Chicago had there been such a tremendous interest in securing tickets for anything.[20] The following article appeared in the December 4, 1889, Chicago Tribune and was entitled "Her Tussle for Tickets". It is a report of a hypothetical case overheard in a restaurant at 4 p.m. on the day tickets went on sale. It is supposedly the account of one woman's struggle to get tickets:

> Well, I'm so tired I don't know anything! Been standing up at the Auditorium since 8 o'clock this morning! My daughter, she said: 'Ma, what are you going so early for?' But I knew what I was about: haven't lived in Chicago all these years for nothing. I waited there since 8 o'clock and have just got my seats; got 'em, though, and they must be a whole block away from the stage! Way up next to the roof! The man said it was the family balcony or something, and I just had to take 'em or go without. Couldn't go without because they said I mustn't come home without some kind of seats, anyhow. Here they are. Paid a dollar apiece for 'em.[21] As early as I was I could get to the sill of the door, and I never got any further till half past 1. Another woman offered me $3 for my place, and I saw lots of places sold for $3. There were five

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[19]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 4, 1889, p. 6.

[20]The Chicago Daily News, November 25, 1889, p. 1.

[21]There are a number of errors in this article, but they are all very minor. Since it is only a hypothetical case, the writer probably felt free to take whatever liberties he pleased to make the article as interesting as possible.

> lines and eight policemen. I heard one man say after he got his tickets he 'would be dashed if he would go hear Patti or anyone else sing if there was going to be such a crowd', and he sold a good seat for just what he paid for it, but in trying to crowd out caught the fever again--pressed into him, I suppose--and turned around, joined the line, and ended by being mighty glad to get a seat against the roof. There were lots of speculators in the crowd offering seats for $7 a pair. Shame, ain't it, to have seats bought up that way? Ever so many fainted away, and there was some screaming all of the time--gettingtrampled on I suppose. Lot's of 'em had been there since 4 this morning.[22]

Regardless of whether the Auditorium management employed an auction or a single seat sale in order to dispose of tickets, there were bound to be some people who would be opposed to the method. One newspaperman was quick to point out that Peck's motto had been that the Auditorium didn't have to pay, and yet many of the opera boxes went for about $1,000. Worse yet was that in a house seating nearly 5,000 where nearly all could enter cheaply, people were still forced to stand in line for an entire day and pay as much as $5 for a seat.[23] It is unfortunate that the writer did not understand, or chose to ignore the economics of the Auditorium, or of any business venture for that matter. It is true that the investors in this building didn't hope to make a fortune from their investments, but neither did they wish to keep pouring more money into the project or watch the building go bankrupt simply because the people wanted to get in cheaply no matter the loss. After all, weren't the society patrons a part of the crowd and entitled to get more comfort and better seats for their extra money? In a rough estimate, if all of the seats in the house (assuming that they were

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[22]The Chicago Tribune, December 4, 1889, p. 7.

[23]John McGovern, The Elite News (Chicago), December 14, 1889, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 60.

all sold) brought an equal amount of two dollars, the evening's production would probably lose money, or at best just barely break even.

Opening night of the first season, December 10, 1889, was truly magnificent. The hall was jammed to hear Mme. Patti and the Abbey and Grau Company sing Gounod's Romeo and Juliette. Even the streets outside the building were jammed with people who had come for no other reason than to gape at the very fortunate first-nighters. Inside, the hall seemed to be filled with nothing but society. Wherever one looked he could see one of Chicago's fashionable set. Some of the elite were even found standing. The following day, when Mme. Patti was asked what she had observed from the stage on opening night she said:

> 'Chicago may be proud of her great opera house . . . It is wonderful. That is the word. It is wonderful. I never faced a more beautiful sight than the view from the stage. The magnificent audience, the sparkling lights, the sweeping curves of white and gold—Oh it was beautiful, beautiful'.[24]

Some of the critics, however, were not overly enthusiastic about the opening performance. The critic for the Tribune claimed that the performance was good, but nothing special. He felt that while Patti was still a good singer she lacked much of the sparkle which audiences had known at the height of her career. She was past her prime and her voice was beginning to show it.[25] The major criticism about the performance was not against Patti, however, but rather against the choice of Romeo and Juliette as the opening opera. According to many critics this opera is not one of the best. Patti,

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[24]The Chicago Tribune, December 12, 1889, p. 1.

[25]The Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1889, p. 1.

herself, claimed that the choice was a mistake. She personally had wanted to do Il Trovatore or another of the old favorite operas--at least something that ended with a flourish. But the Auditorium and Abbey and Grau wished it differently, and therefore Romeo and Juliette was the choice. Patti also claimed that this opera was not as fully prepared as some of the others in the repertoire. Also, since the company was quite unaccustomed to the size of the stage and the terrific size of the set pieces they consequently had trouble adjusting to them.[26] The consensus was, however, that regardless of the choice of the opera, or Patti's voice, the opening night was a success. The work of the other principals, the superb chorus, the naturalness, solidity, and splendor of the scenery more than made up for whatever was lacking in the rest of the production.

A number of interviews were held with Mme. Patti on the day following the opening to find out what she, the first star to perform in the magnificent new building, actually felt about it. She admitted to having had one big fear. She had heard that it was possible to hear, from the last gallery, normal conversation going on on the stage. This, of course, was wonderful, but her fear was that the voice would be lost on the stage, the voice could be absorbed. The worst thing in the world would be for the singer not to be able to hear herself.[27] But her fears were dispelled. She remarked to one of the reporters:

> 'Wasn't it grand last night? I never saw anything like it, never. And the hall is perfect. Tell the people

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[26]The Chicago Tribune, December 12,1889, p. 1.

[27]The Chicago Tribune, December 8, 1889, p. 1.

> of Chicago that they have the most perfect hall in the world'.[28]

She was asked if it was more difficult or required any extra effort to make herself heard in such a vast hall, to which she replied that not the least extra effort was necessary. In fact, just the opposite was true. She felt that this hall could separate the good singers from the bad ones. The acoustics were so good that every note, high or low, would be perfectly audible. Because of this, she said, there could be no worse hall for a poor singer. Any fault that a singer might have, be it a gasp for breath, a mispronounciation, or whatever, would be immediately and distinctly audible to the audience. For the perfect singer there could be no better hall. She was asked to compare the Auditorium with other famous halls, particularly the Metropolitan Opera House in New York, to which she replied that there was no comparison; it is like comparing night and day. The Met, she said, was a beautiful place in which to appear, but one may as well sing in a ballroom. And, as to other halls in the world, there was simply nothing which could compare with the Auditorium.[29]

The Auditorium had had its first real test with a first-rate opera and a full house and had passed with flying colors. One purely mechanical detail of the opening night did not fare so well and was to plague the Auditorium for some time to come. The writer included this problem, not only for interest's sake, but also because it showed one of the many minor problems that could arise when a house of this size

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[28]Marks.

[29]The Chicago Tribune, December 12, 1889, p. 1.

was constructed. Quite naturally, with 4,500 persons attending the performance there would need to be a good number of carriages to convey them to and from the Auditorium. There would undoubtedly be a crush of carriages all converging on the entrance right about the time the curtain was to go up, but this was to be expected and there was very little that those in charge of the Auditorium could do to avoid it. However, since everyone would be leaving the theatre at one time at the conclusion of the performance, there would be an even bigger crowd and the street would be jammed for hours unless some system were devised for the orderly loading and dispersal of the carriages. Between eight hundred and eleven hundred carriages filled the streets after the opening night's performance, and in anticipation of this a unique system for loading had been worked out in advance. As each carriage arrived to unload at the beginning of the evening the driver and the occupants were given coupons with identical numbers. At the end of the performance the holders of carriage checks were asked to remain in their seats until their number was called. Then a large placard reading "Carriages now ready from 1 to 100" was displayed on the stage. The patrons holding odd numbered coupons were asked to load on Congress Street and those with even numbers had their carriages drawn up on Wabash Avenue. When the first hundred carriages were loaded, the next one hundred numbers were called, and so forth until all the carriages were loaded. The first-nighters paid absolutely no attention to the system and it turned into a fiasco. The problem was that the men would escort the women to the sidewalk, hand the check to the attendant, and then go off to search for their carriage themselves. Consequently, when the carriages were drawn

up to load, the women had no idea what the number of their particular carriage was, and because of the press of carriages trying to load, the drivers would have to drive away empty. The result was that many women were left standing on the sidewalk shivering in the December night, many tempers were lost, and at 12:30 a.m. the street was still filled with carriages waiting patiently—many impatiently—to load.[30] Although there was never any follow-up article on the carriage problem, it must somehow have been solved.

The remainder of the first week consisted of Wednesday night's production of William Tell with Sig. Francesce Tamagno in the title role; Thursday night had Faust with Mme. Emma Albani as Marguerite; Friday night again featured Tamagno, this time as Manrico in Il Trovatore; and the week concluded with Lucia di Lammermoor and Adelina Patti as Lucia.

The first season was an artistic success, but was not without its troubles. One complaint was that, with the exception of the first week, there were no performances on Wednesday and Saturday evenings. This, according to the complainer was highly illogical since Saturday was the one night when most people could really afford to take the time to spend an evening out. This was back in the days when the average person worked a six-day week rather than the four or five day week that is now usual. Consequently, with Sunday being a day of rest, one could afford to spend Saturday night at the opera, and yet there was no performance.[31] There was, however, a much bigger

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[30]The Daily Inter Ocean (Chicago), December 11, 1889, p. 1.

[31]The Indicator (Chicago), January 4, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 89.

hurdle. This took place on December 31. On that night the schedule called for Otello starring Tamagno. Unfortunately, Tamagno, like a good many other members of the company, was sick in bed with the flu. The Auditorium Association was up in arms as to what to do, where to find a replacement. They asked Patti to substitute that evening, but since she wasn't scheduled, she asked such a high price that they couldn't afford her. Finally, on the verge of cancelling that evening's performance, Mme. Albani stepped in and did Les Huguenots. Otello was rescheduled later in the week but had to be cancelled again.[32]

One of the more humorous complaints facing the Auditorium Association during the first opera season was brought out in a letter to the editor appearing December 21, 1889, in the Chicago Eagle:

> To the Editor,
> Do you know that I do not believe that Patti is in America? You may be startled at this, but I have heard the lady now singing at the Auditorium, and she sings no more like the Patti of old than any other woman would. Besides, this Patti has red hair.
> The real Patti had black hair, and was beautiful to look upon.
> Who ever heard of a pronounced brunette dyeing her hair red?
> I am not the only one who thinks that Patti is not at the Auditorium.
> How is it?
>
> G.E.B.[33]

G.E.B. may not have been the only one who thought Patti was not at the Auditorium, but he was the only one who bothered to make his opinion known. Quite naturally, the Association took this complaint

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[32]The Chicago Tribune, January 1, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 85.

The Chicago Eagle, December 21, 1889, [cited in] "Auditorium Dedication Volume."

with a grain of salt, and probably had a good laugh over it. Besides, not only was there a change in Patti's voice, which has already been explained, but there was a change in her hair also. The real Patti had auburn hair—she used to dye it black.[34]

Expenses for the Abbey and Grau Company were fairly high with a weekly average of $37,000. However, the company reportedly received between seventy-five and eighty per cent of the gross while the Auditorium got the remaining twenty to twenty-five per cent. Adelina Patti, being the acknowledged drawing card of the season, received the greatest salary. Her basic salary was $3,500 for every night that she sang plus ten per cent of the receipts each time they exceeded $5000 per evening during her stay in the Auditorium. On the evening of the dedication on which she sang "Home, Sweet Home" and encores, Patti received $4500. Supposedly, she gave the extra $1,000 from her dedication night earnings to a charity.[35]

It was estimated that about 100,000 people heard the opera in the four weeks of the season, with 6,000 people attending the final matinee. The average for each performance was $10,588.81, with the final matinee starring Mme. Patti drawing the greatest, financially. This performance showed total admissions of $14,229, and, in fact, each of Patti's performances averaged something over $13,000. At the final performance, not only was every seat in the house sold, but also no less than 1,400 standing room tickets were sold, making the

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[34]William Armstrong, The Romantic World of Music, London: George Allen & Unwin, Ltd. (1923), p. 6.
The Daily Graphic (London, England), January 27, 1890, [cited in] "Auditorium Dedication Volume".

[35]The Chicago Tribune, December 12, 1889, p. 1.

crowd nearly 6,000. The gross for the four week season, broken down into weekly totals was:

First week (six performances)	$ 60,087
Second week (five performances)	53,807
Third week (five performances)	52,735
Fourth week (six performances)	66,323
Total (twenty-two performances)	$232,952[36]

Estimating roughly, out of this total gross, the Abbey and Grau Company received approximately $186,360 for a profit of almost $38,360. The Auditorium Association received a gross profit of about $46,500, not a bad four weeks work.

Both artistically and financially the first opera season was accounted a great success.

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[36]The Chicago Tribune, January 5, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 91.

CHAPTER IV

THE IN-BETWEEN YEARS: 1890-1922

The years between 1890 and 1922 at the Auditorium were not really too much different than they would have been at any other theatre. Newspaper coverage, which had never been really abundant, dropped off even further, though the theatre was seemingly never lacking for events or spectators. In the eyes of the papers the Auditorium should receive no more publicity than the other theatres. Even advertisements for events held in the Auditorium were small in comparison to those of the other Chicago theatres. Often the only mention of the current attraction there was a small two or three line announcement tucked off at the bottom of a page. This lack of publicity and advertising simply meant that things were running smoothly in the great hall, crowds continued to show up regardless of the lack of advertising, and newspapers found nothing new to write about the building so they wrote nothing at all.

During the early 1890's, while the building was still new, and the superlatives had not yet completely run out, there was a great deal more written about it than in later years. Consequently, these formative years will be discussed in more detail than the latter. Mention is made only of the more important events taking place after about 1905 (mainly because little, if anything, is written or remembered about the unimportant things up until about 1922).

Ferd Peck, as has often been stated previously, was careful to make it known that his theatre was constructed on an equal rights basis

and, except for the seating arrangement,[1] everyone in the theatre was to be treated equally. In his own words he commented that,

> . . . the Auditorium [was] 'the temple where the rich and the poor and all classes can meet together upon common ground and be elevated and enlightened by the power of music now typified over this arch [the proscenium arch mural]. It has been built out of the rich man's largess and the poor man's mite for the benefit of all'.[2]

Special programs in the form of concerts, lectures, and the like were planned especially for the workingmen, in an attempt to give labor and capital a joint interest in the venture. The first of these programs was heralded by the announcement, only a few days after the opening of the Auditorium, that the Apollo Club, a well-known choral organization in Chicago, was going to do two Christmas concerts featuring Handel's "Messiah", in the Auditorium in late December, 1889. The reason for two identical concerts was simple enough; in that way there could be one concert for the society folks and another for the workingmen. In order not to let just anyone in the city take advantage of the "wage-earner's concerts", as they were popularly known, the stockholders of the Auditorium were careful to define as a wage-earner or workingman, anyone who made less than $15 per week. Anyone making more than that was not allowed to attend the concert. Also, the tickets were distributed by the individual employers to their employees.

The idea of a second concert for the workingman was a fine and noble gesture by all concerned, but it seemed rather a slap at the wage-earner by the more affluent who would prefer presenting a second concert rather than have the "lower class" associate with them. How-

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[1] In Peck's theatre wealth was a minor matter, it was just that those who paid more for their seats sat closer to the stage, and those who paid less sat further away. That society got to sit up close was a privilege of their affluence.

[2] The Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1889, p. 4.

ever, since this was the only way many people would get to hear the "Messiah" or see the inside of the Auditorium, and since these poorer classes were financially unable to compete for tickets, the plan did have some merit. One problem did develop very early though. A few of the stockholders expressed a fear that these wage-earners, not being as "clean" as the people who normally attended programs in the new building, might have a tendency to get the rich plush hangings and carpeting dirty. To guard against this, they suggested covering these fineries with canvas. They were, in essence, willing to take the hard-earned money of the common laborers, yet deny them seeing half of the show--the Auditorium itself. Ferd Peck, the workingman's friend, again came to his rescue. He vetoed the demands of the stockholders (actually a minority) and declared that he had no intention of hiding the tiniest piece of plush in the building.[3] When the crowd of wage-earners arrived, freshly scrubbed, they proved to be better behaved and more attentive to the program than were the usual crowds.

Two announcements appeared in the first year's programs which further backed up Peck's thesis that this could be a people's theatre. First of these was a schedule of trains to all parts of Chicago and the suburbs which was useful to people attending the theatre. The richer people would more than likely have brought their carriages to the theatre, but those less well to do would be forced to seek a cheaper means of transportation and for those living far away this meant trains, so for them the train schedules were a great help. The second notice to appear indicated that the management felt that the patrons weren't getting the

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[3]The Daily Mail, (Chicago), December 30, 1889, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 82.

most out of their visits to the Auditorium. Consequently, the following note appeared in the program:

> Special Notice - The management desire that each entertainment at the Auditorium should be made a social occasion, for which ample facilities have been provided, ant the audience, especially the ladies, are requested to leave their seats during the intermission.[4]

Peck and the stockholders could be proud of the strides being taken to enhance the public's opinion of their theatre. Every possible detail was taken into account to make sure that all people could enjoy the comfort and entertainment found in the Auditorium.

The Auditorium Theatre was not run on the same basis as most other theatres and opera houses. In most other houses, one opera company or a single show would perform for an extended period of time. The Auditorium, however, operated on the principle that many evenings should be kept free so that one night concerts, benefits, dances, and other such short term engagements could be booked into the hall. One of the first of these single evenings for the Auditorium was the charity ball held January 10, 1890. For this occasion, and in fact for every ball held there, a wooden flooring was placed over the orchestra pit and almost the entire parquet circle, from the footlights to the rear tunnels. At the rear of the stage a balcony had been built to accomodate the orchestra, and the Second Regiment Band of Chicago was stationed at the other end of the hall in the promenade. The sponsors of the dance felt that the hall was beautiful enough that too much decoration would have been superfluous. Consequently, the decorations consisted only of a few flowers and the beauty of the natural decoration within the building.

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4 Grand Opera Program, December 19, 1889, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 94.

The electric lights in the Auditorium were more effective than many, many flowers.[5] The guests at the ball were able to greet their friends or watch the dancers from the theatre boxes or from the front of the balcony.

Another of the touring companies to visit the Auditorium Theatre in the first year, besides the Abbey and Grau Opera Company, was the Duff Comic Opera Company who specialized in the works of Gilbert and Sullivan. The company performed for two weeks doing two of the duo's better known operettas. Opening and continuing for the remainder of the first week was H.M.S. Pinafore, and the second week was the run of The Mikado. There were three thousand persons in the opening night audience, but with the fantastic scenic effects achieved on the stage for this production it was a shame that the house was not standing room only.

> The scenery was the feature of the opera. Eight ships instead of one lay in the harbor. The horizon line was scarcely perceptible in the deep perspective. The ships rolled on the swell of the sea with a realism that made some persons seasick.[6] It was difficult to believe that the ships were not riding at anchor in the harbor. A small pleasure boat occasionally skimmed across the undulating sea and the lighthouse and the buildings of Portsmouth appeared in the distance. When Sir Joseph approached the Pinafore in his gig the vessels lying at anchor saluted him with broadsides that shook the gilt-covered arches.[7]

Pinafore was just one more indication of the tremendous effects which

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[5]The Chicago Tribune, January 10, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 94.

[6]The rocking motion was achieved by an uneven movement of the pistons controlling the large bridges. One of the persons made seasick was the teenage boy whose job it was to sit on the edge of one of the traps and pull the small launches across the stage.

[7]The Daily News (Chicago), February 11, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 123.

could be accomplished on a stage as advanced as that in the Auditorium. But, no matter how great the scenic effect of Pinafore, the second week's offering of The Mikado was even more spectacular. When the curtain rose on the first act, the newspapers reported, a momentary hush fell over the house, and then, as one, the members of the audience ". . . burst forth with prolonged applause . . ." The stage picture was absolutely breathtaking and seemed to be a gigantic enlargement of a rice paper painting done by one of the Mikado's own court artists.[8] In short, it seemed from reading the newspaper articles on the Auditorium, that, scenically, each production was an attempt to out-lavish the one before it.

Opera was by far the favorite of audiences at the Auditorium and to prove it, in March, 1890, the Abbey and Grau Company, with Patti and Tamagno, returned for a six performance stand. This season was almost as well accepted as the first. By April, the Auditorium management, sensing that Chicagoans had had their fill of Italian opera with the two engagements by the Abbey and Grau Company, and feeling that many excellent operas in other languages were being passed over, presented as a change of pace, the Metropolitan Opera Company of New York for eighteen performances of German opera, under the baton of Walter Damrosch. The operas presented during the Met's visit were well-done, and supposedly well-received by the audiences, but they were not as heavily attended as the Italian opera seasons had been.[9 & 10] There

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[8]The Globe (Chicago), February 21, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", I, p. 127.

[9]The Daily Mail (Chicago), March 29, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", II, p. 3.

[10]Interestingly enough, during the last week of the season the

had been in the short span of five months three separate seasons of German and Italian opera.

The summer of 1890 was highlighted by the June appearance of the Vienna Orchestra under the direction of Edouard Strauss.

The 1890-1891 year, the second regular season at the Auditorium, was inaugurated on September 8, with a return engagement by the Duff Company. They opened that night with Gilbert and Sullivan's Iolanthe. In the remainder of the first week the company performed H.M.S. Pinafore and Trial by Jury. Back by popular demand during the three week season were revivals of Patience, The Mikado, and Pirates of Penzance.[11]

The high hopes for a wonderful season were shortlived. On September 19, 1890, Milward Adams made a rather startling announcement. According to Mr. Adams, the Auditorium and the music-lovers of Chicago were both due for a very dull season. He announced that there would be no grand opera whatever in Chicago during the second year. He observed that there was simply no grand opera in the country which meant, obviously, that as a result there could be none engaged for Chicago. When Adams was asked about re-engaging the Metropolitan Opera, he pointed out that the New York Company sang German opera and from the reaction to the previous spring's offerings, the citizenry of Chicago was not interested enough to warrant a return engagement. Therefore,

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seat prices changed for no apparent reason. For the final week the price of boxes was reduced from $20 to $15, yet the price of general admission tickets went up from 50¢ to $1. (The Globe (Chicago), April 20, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", II, p. 17. and The Chicago Tribune, May 7, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", II, p. 38.

[11]The Saturday Evening Herald (Chicago), September 6, 1890, [cited] "Scrapbook", II, p. 69.

there would according to present plans be no opera. Mr. Adams reported, however, that almost all of the dates for 1890-1891 were filled even without the drawing power of a grand opera season.[12]

The Boston Theatre Company production of the play Soudan in March, 1891, provided yet another example of the wonderful scenic effects possible on the Auditorium stage. In the Trafalgar Square scene of that play there needed to be an exceedingly large crowd of victorious soldiers returning from battle. Since it was inconceivable to put such a large crowd on the stage, a large group of extras made of papier-mache, with intelligent faces and wearing ordinary hats were used instead. As the scene was set, the stage carpenters would bring the "dummies" up from the basement. These were fastened together in long double rows and placed on stage in a semi-circle about the Nelson monument. Then, with a crowd of live, moving people milling about the "dummies", the papier-mache soldiers seemed to all of the audience to be really a living part of the scene. Their silence and fixed position was hardly noticed. According to Mr. McCarty, the stage manager for the Boston Theatre Company, the "dummies" were better than real actors for at least two reasons. First of all, the dummies didn't cost the 50¢ a night that it cost to hire extras, and secondly, the dummies didn't get into fights.[13]

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[12]The Morning News (Chicago), September 20, 1890, [cited in] "Scrapbook", II, p. 69

[13]An interesting means of advertising was used for this play. Obviously the public was familiar with the play and knew of famous scenes in it. This can be seen in the advertisements which announced:

"The Great Battle Scene at 10,
Trafalgar Square at 10:10"

Ibid., March 4, 1891, III, p. 21.

The people of Chicago seemed to have been unwilling to have a single season pass without grand opera. In May, 1891, contrary to Milward Adams' statement, there was an opera company at the Auditorium. A special company was formed to present three operas in English--an innovation for the Auditorium. The company was actually an augmented version of the Duff Comic Opera Company, doing Carmen, Mignon, and La Boheme. The season was apparently very well received, indicating that the people of Chicago really did want to see and hear opera.[14]

The third season, 1891-1892, started off at quite a rapid pace. Beginning on September 14 with Alexander Salvini, followed immediately by the Theodore Thomas Orchestra of New York, the remainder of the first half of the season was taken up with five weeks of Italian opera sung by the Abbey and Grau Company.[15]

The appearance of the Thomas Orchestra was especially important since this was its first appearance under its new name, the "Chicago Orchestra". Here was an important turning point in the history of Chicago music. This Midwestern metropolis could now compete with New York, Boston, or many cities in Europe with the acquisition of the Thomas Orchestra. Supposedly there was no finer orchestra at the time, and the programs from the group were to be unequaled. Now they were Chicago's own. Beginning on October 17, 1891, the orchestra was to present twenty concerts, each preceded by a public rehearsal. Admission was to be charged for both the rehearsals and the regular concerts. The price for the rehearsals ranged from 25¢ to $1., and the

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[14]The Chicago Evening Post, May 2, 1891, [cited in] "Scrapbook", III, p. 56.

[15]Ibid., August 27, 1891, p. 76.

evening concerts weren't too much more expensive with the price ranging from 25¢ to $1.50. The programs, especially the rehearsals, were very well received.[16]

On January 2, 1892, the Elite News announced that on the following Saturday the second annual indoor baseball game was to be played in the Auditorium between the Ashlands and the Careltons of the Midwinter League. Of course, the game was not the usual baseball game that we know. The newspapers described the ball to be used as " . . . a large ball, like a four-ounce boxing glove with the thumb cut off and the wrist plugged up".[17] If the game bore so little resemblance to the real game of baseball, the crowds bore even less resemblance to those normally found at baseball games. All of the people came to the game dressed in evening dress. From 8:15 to 9:15 p.m. the Second Regiment Band--they seem to have spent most of their time performing for Chicago society--played a concert, and after the game, played again, this time to provide music for those who wished to spend the remainder of the evening dancing.[18]

In 1892, the year before the magnificent world's fair in Chicago, the Auditorium Hotel management decided to take advantage of the anticipated crowds flocking to Chicago for the fair, and built the Auditorium Annex. The Annex was a hotel-only facility built on Michigan Avenue across Congress Street from the Auditorium. The two buildings

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[16]Ibid., October 9, 1881, p. 91.

[17]The Times (Chicago), January 10, 1892, [cited in] "Scrapbook", IV, p. 55.

[18]The Chicago Tribune, January 6, 1892, [cited in] "Scrapbook", IV, p. 48.

were an attempt to be just what their names implied, a hotel and its annex. Many of the facilities of the annex were drawn from the Auditorium, including heat and light, a move that was to prove very unwise in the long run. The annex also provided a valuable addition to the hotel not only because it provided more guest rooms, but also because it provided many of the service areas, storage rooms, and the like which were cramped in the Auditorium. The two buildings were connected by a very ornate mosaic tunnel running beneath Congress Street.[19]

The Auditorium Theatre, in conjunction with the theme of the 1893 World's Fair, a theme of magnificence in Chicago and America, produced a special entertainment which ran for the entire summer of 1893. The beauty and splendor of the Auditorium's production, "America", was matched only by the beauty and splendor of the event for which it was being held. The production was staged by Abbey, Schoeffel, and Grau, the Grand Opera Impresarios. It consisted of a prologue and thirty-six tableaux, dealing with the rise and progress of America from the landing of Columbus on the shores of San Salvadore to the 1893 fair. The production comprised impressive scenery, music, ballet, and mime. Although there was to be some dialogue it was intended to be subordinate to the other aspects of the show. All of the exquisitely painted scenery was executed in Paris by a corps of well-known artists, all of whom were connected with the Grand Opera House there.[20]

By about 1893 the Auditorium had settled down to a normal pattern of operation. No longer did the newspapers make a big fuss over

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[19]"Early History and Press Clippings"

[20]"Auditorium Scrapbook Collection", I.

it. It would rather appear from the newspaper advertisements from about 1893 on, that the theatre was in almost constant use. The management had no difficulty filling up their schedule with a variety of events. Many of the great individual artists in the world made fairly frequent visits to the Auditorium. One such was Ignace Paderewski, the great Polish piano virtuoso. The building was the home of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for many years. John Philip Sousa, the famous bandleader, made frequent, almost yearly, visits to the Auditorium both with the United States Marine Corp Band and with his own bandsmen. The Apollo Musical Society and other private groups used the hall often. But music was not the only criteria for getting on the schedule. Lectures, from beauty tips and grace to the qualities of liquid air, took place on the stage. Conventions of all sorts; receptions, including Presidential receptions; and mammoth, beautiful Charity Balls took place in the Auditorium Hotel and Theatre. The Sunday School Association of Greater Chicago held its annual meeting in the Theatre. Northwestern University and Hyde Park High School were two among many institutions to hold their commencement exercises on the stage of the great hall. In short, the hall had been built for the people and the schedule of events for it showed that, indeed, the programs presented in the Auditorium were of such a great variety that they were sure to satisfy the entire citizenry of Chicago. The Auditorium had not been built to amass a great fortune for the stockholders, and judging from the diversity of programs, many of them with appeal to only selected spectators, the Auditorium could not hope to amass great fortunes. But to keep the lovers of Grand Opera in Chicago happy, there was opera at the Auditorium every year,

usually at least two companies, one in the fall and one in the spring.[21]

Sometime about March, 1896, the first change in the decorations of the Auditorium Theatre took place. A note in the programs around that date informed the audience that:

> The draperies on the walls and in the boxes [were] only temporary, and were put up for the Opera Season as an experiment, in compliance with many requests for a change in the color of the decorations. Should this change be acceptable to the box patrons of the Auditorium it will be made permanent. If you approve of this scheme of color on the walls and hangings, or if you have any suggestion to make for something different, please address Milward Adams, Manager, the Auditorium.[22]

This was the first of a number of redecorations to be done on the Auditorium and it seems that none of them did anything to improve the appearance. They added, usually, only another coat of paint. Interestingly enough in the preceding note, people's theatre notwithstanding, the decision about redecorating and the colors to be used was left almost entirely up to the members of fashionable society, the box-holders.

In 1903 an event took place in Chicago which created many problems for the theatres in the city, the Auditorium included. It was on December 30 of that year that a tragic fire took place at the Iroquois Theatre with the loss of 602 lives. Since the Iroquois had been constructed only a short time prior to the fire,[23] and since the death toll had been so exceedingly high, the city of Chicago was

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[21]"Auditorium Scrapbook Collection"

[22]Ibid., I.

[23]The Chicago Tribune, December 31, 1903, p. 1.

moved to form a theatre fire-safety inspection commission,[24] the activities of which were to cause much grief for the theatre owners in the city. On January 2, 1904, the mayor of Chicago ruled that every theatre in Chicago would have to be closed immediately. Each and everyone of them would have to be inspected by the commission, and then make any repairs or changes which the commission deemed necessary to the safety of the patrons before being allowed to reopen. Consequently it became Milward Adams' sad task on that evening to inform the spectators that there would be no performance of the Thomas Orchestra.

By January 6 the Auditorium was still closed, and it was anticipated that it would remain so for at least another thirty days. Consequently, spokesmen for the Chicago Orchestra requested special permission to hold concerts in the building. Since the main concern of the commission was with the stage area, the orchestra even offered to perform in the pit with the fire-curtain lowered, thus cutting off the stage from the house. According to the orchestra spokesmen, if the theatre was closed for the thirty day minimum which was rumored, the expenses incurred by them would be so exorbitant that it would mean disbanding the orchestra. Their request, however, was denied. On January 14, after an inspection tour of the Auditorium by the commission, they allowed it to reopen for concerts by the orchestra providing that they did perform in front of the fire-curtain.[25] By January 20 the commission had outlined the changes necessary for the reopening of the building. Only two were required. These were

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[24]Ibid., January 1, 1904, p. 1.

[25]The Chicago Sunday Tribune, January 3, 1904, p. 1.

the enlarging of the air vents over the stage and the installation of a sprinkler system, the total cost being only about $15,000. By following the fire laws existing at the time the Auditorium was constructed, including the installation of a steel fire-curtain instead of the usual asbestos kind, the management saved themselves countless hours and great expense by anticipating the changes in the new laws. When the outlined alterations were completed and an inspection had been made, the theatre would be allowed to reopen. On January 26, however, the Chicago City Council ruled that the Auditorium could reopen without installing the sprinklers. Therefore, as soon as the vents on stage could be enlarged the theatre could be opened. On February 2 the first theatrical performance was held, and the Auditorium became the first of Chicago's theatres to resume operations. The performance was a benefit to aid the actors put out of work by the closing of the theatres. Many of the best acts in Chicago appeared before a rather small but very appreciative audience, and a total of $2,100 was raised. This performance, too, was played in front of the steel curtain, it being raised only once to allow the bringing forward of a piano.[26] Very shortly after this, the necessary repairs were made and the theatre was back operating normally, the first one in Chicago.

The year 1904 seems to have been one of changes at the Auditorium. In January Heinreich Conrad, manager of the New York Metropolitan Opera Company announced plans to do Richard Wagner's newest opera, Parsifal, during the fall engagement of the Met. The Auditorium, Conrad admitted, had the best stage in the country, but even so, it

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[26]The Chicago Tribune, January 20, 1904, p. 2.

would need some alterations before the opera could be staged. It would require two months alone to fire-proof all of the scenery. In addition, the stage required the installation of special pivots and pulleys for the movement of the mammoth sixty-five foot high columns. Conrad figured the expense of these changes at around $5,000. This, he said, was quite inexpensive, however, when it was considered that he spent $135,000 to rebuild the Met for this same opera.[27]

Another change taking place in the later part of the year played a great part in the demise of the Auditorium Theatre, although no one at the time foresaw it, or said anything about it. On June 9, 1904, a picture appeared in the Chicago Tribune of the proposed new Orchestra Hall to be ready for occupancy by the Chicago Orchestra on November 1 of that year. Up to this time there had been no mention that the orchestra had any plans whatsoever of moving out of the Auditorium. Since no article accompanied the picture, the only information obtainable about the move was from the caption under the picture, and this provided nothing but the announcement of the intended move.[28] However, on October 30 the same newspaper announced that the first four pairs of concerts of the Chicago Orchestra--public concerts and their accompanying public rehearsals--would be held in the Auditorium since the new hall would not be ready until sometime around December 1. The orchestra finally did move, and on December 10, 1904, the following paragraph appeared in the Chicago Daily Tribune:

> The Chicago orchestra gave its last afternoon concert in the Auditorium yesterday. It was the fifteenth

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[27]Ibid., p. 6.

[28]The Chicago Tribune, June 9, 1904, p. 2.

> anniversary of the dedication of the great hall, and it seemed a noteworthy coincidence that the farewell of the splendid organization which owes its origin to the Auditorium should fall on that date. Tonight the final concert will be given, and Mr. Thomas and his men will move next week to their new home in Orchestra Hall.[29]

The reasons for the move into Orchestra Hall weren't really apparent until December 11. Then the Orchestra Association made the reasons clear. Because of the great open space above the stage which tended to absorb a great deal of the orchestra sound, it was necessary for the orchestra to forsake quality to achieve volume. The new Orchestra Hall, on the other hand, was designed especially for orchestral music, with a stage resembling a bandshell, where the quality of the orchestra could stand out. In addition, the orchestra over the years in the Auditorium had established a financial deficit. For these reasons the Orchestra Association wanted a hall of its own where a permanency would help to wipe out the deficit. Thomas also wanted a hall built to his own specifications and which would be devoted exclusively to his orchestra. Everyone in Chicago seemed to have been happy to see the new hall, and the orchestra move was made seemingly with the blessing of the Auditorium management. At least no adverse criticism was reported.[30]

For many years after the opening of the Auditorium Theatre it had been under the management of Milward Adams, whose job it was to secure at least one Grand Opera season each year, and often two. However, in 1910 the Chicago Civic Opera Company was formed[31] and

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[29]The Chicago Tribune, December 10, 1904, p. 8.

[30]The Chicago Sunday Tribune, December 11, 1904, p. 1, part IV.

[31]Morrison, p. 100.

this eliminated the need of spending time and effort securing a first rate company to appear in the hall. Chicago could now boast not only a first rate orchestra, but a first rate opera company in addition. No longer would there be a need to bring in outsiders, although other opera companies did perform at the Auditorium during the ensuing years. It was the true home of the Chicago Civic Opera.

In 1911 a structural change was made in the seating of the house. At this time new building laws required the construction of a fire-proof partition between the parquet seats and the main foyer where there had previously been no separation at all. Consequently, the last eight rows of the parquet were removed and in their place were constructed a double row of boxes, forming a horseshoe similar to the normal seating arrangement for opera houses. [Figure 23] These were obviously put up with little or no concern for using the same decorative plaster and iron-work which was found in the other boxes. In comparison to the original boxes, these new ones were actually quite plain. The parquet seating capacity was reduced by 412 seats, but the amount of seating in the boxes was greatly increased--110 seats.[32] Mr. Karl Hartnack, architect with the Chicago firm of Harry Weese and Associates, the architects on the Auditorium reconstruction, suggested that another reason for the addition of the nearly thirty boxes was a need for a number of higher paying seats. To get more money for the seats, it was obvious that a better seat than already existed would have to be installed, and the only thing better than the original parquet seats were boxes which would appeal to the society elite. Whatever the reason for the new boxes, however,

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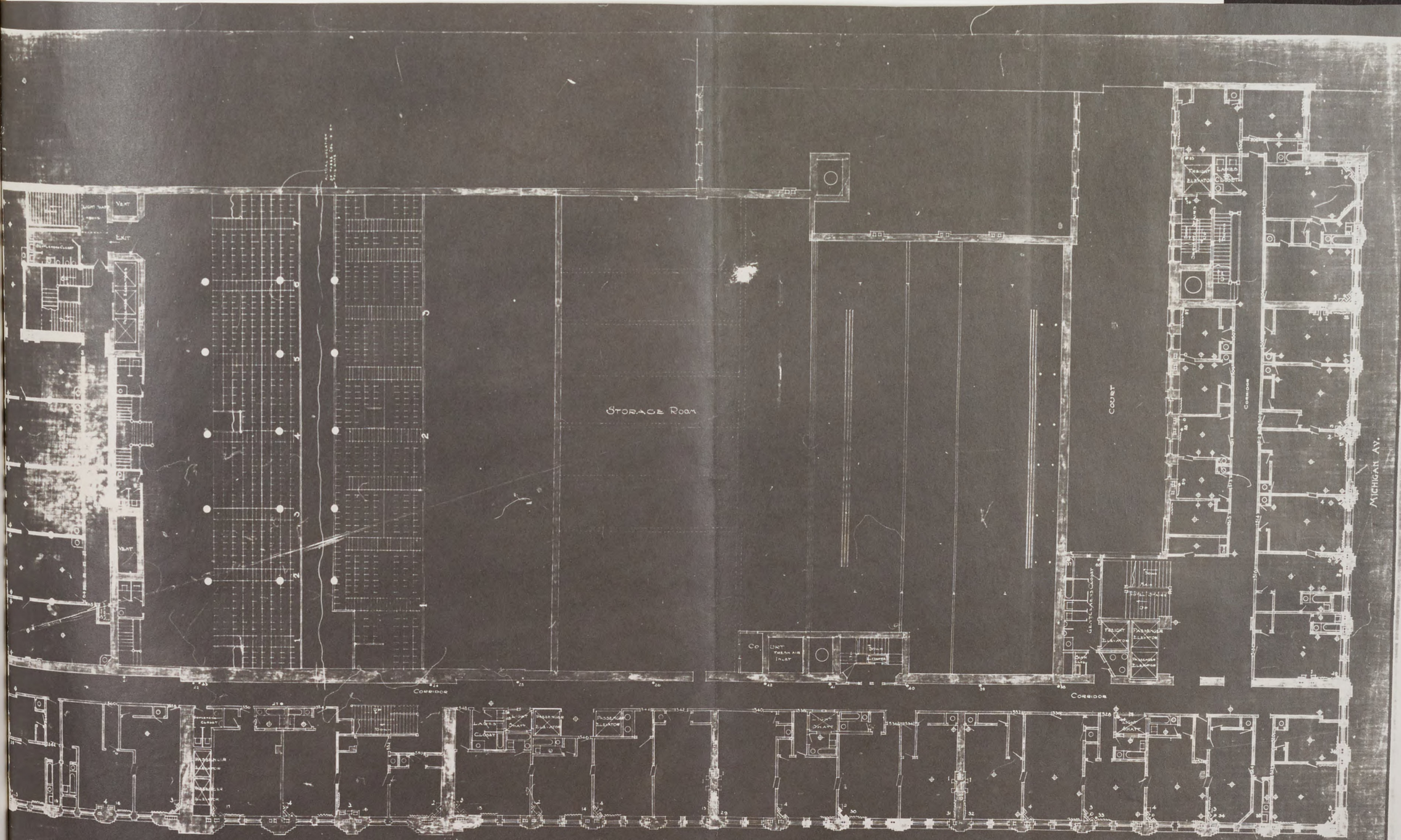
[32] Ibid.



CHICAGO AUDITORIUM BUILDING

PLAN of the SIXTH STORY

GALLERY FLOOR PLAN
6TH STORY

Fig. 23.--Boxes installed in the theatre at the rear of the parquet--1911.

whether because of the new building laws or because of a need for better paying seats, they did nothing to improve the beauty of the hall. In fact, the original beauty of the hall was impaired.

For the next ten years or so, the Auditorium ran along smoothly. Unfortunately, the volumes from the various scrapbook collections covering these years are missing. However, the schedule for the theatre was seldom free and the quality of production remained high. Newspapers wrote little of the events there. We do know that the Chicago Orchestra under Thomas, and later Frederick Stock, played numerous performances in the hall, and in 1916 that the Progressive Party National Convention took place in the Auditorium. Evidently nothing of exceptional importance happened until the early 1920's. Then, however, all was to change.

CHAPTER V

THE TROUBLED YEARS

From the time of its opening in 1889, securing performers had never been a problem at the Auditorium. Nights when the Auditorium was empty were seemingly seldom. At some point during these years, however, though no source mentioned it, the Auditorium ran into financial difficulties. This trouble came to light suddenly and with no forewarning on February 15, 1923. On that date Circuit Court proceedings were begun in Chicago by attorneys for the Auditorium Association against the estates of Willing and Studebaker and fifty-two other holders of the title to the land on which the Auditorium stood. The Association proposed razing the present Auditorium and in its place build a building which would be as tall as present or future ordinances would allow. This new edifice, planned to cost between $10,000,000 and $15,000,000 was to be the skyscraping height of twenty-two stories and would include a huge hotel and a theatre.[1]

The Association attorneys presented some extremely impressive arguments for their proposal. They maintained that the entire building, including the theatre, hotel, shops, and offices, had never been a paying venture. In fact, the first, last, and only dividend on the capital stock of the corporation was paid thirty years previously, in

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[1]The Chicago Tribune, February 16, 1923, p. 1.

1893, and amounted to only a 1-1/2 per cent realization by the stockholders. Taxes, according to the records attached to the petition filed by the attorneys, had been $3,555 in 1888, but by 1922 they had risen to $145,289 (or about $4,160 per year increase). In addition, in the three years from 1918 to and including 1921, $734,000 was lost to the stockholders. There was still more to the petition, however. "Present inability to pay the interest on the bonded indebtedness out of the earnings of the building endanger[ed] the capital and assets of the company through possible foreclosure".[2] The attorneys also asserted that because the building had settled (in some places as much as twenty-two inches) it was very likely that the city would require the razing or at least a complete alteration. It was their opinion that within the not too distant future the building, because of depreciation would become unsafe and unsanitary.[3] Thus, the Association wished to force the title holders of the land to allow them to remove the Auditorium and replace it with a more permanent, self-sustaining building.

The Attorneys did not have long to wait for an answer to the charges set forth in their petition. The following day, February 17, 1923, Ferd Peck, the "Father" of the Auditorium, made clear his feelings on the razing attempt.

> I say it has paid, and enormously, thousands of percent in thirty-four years to the stockholders and to a large part of our people. The prestige that has come to Chicago because of this building and the opera house it contains has not only added value to real estate and other interests, but has promoted entertainment

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[2]Ibid.

[3]Ibid.

> for the people.
>
> In its creation it was never intended to prove profitable to its shareholders from a monetary standpoint. I promised every shareholder that joined me in subscribing the two millions of stock that he would never receive a dollar back in dividends, but would indirectly receive enormous profits which in my judgment would amount to more than any money dividend from any building in New York or Chicago.
>
> The $734,000 which it is claimed has been lost to the stockholders is merely the amount of the depreciation which every building must suffer.[4]

Peck was right. He had never promised a profit return and, in fact, had warned that there probably would not be one. The indirect benefits that Peck had promised to the stockholders were in essence, an increase in trade from people visiting the Auditorium. The Auditorium had been a major selling point when discussing Chicago as a convention city, and these conventions alone accounted for some increase in trade. But most important of all, the mere fact that the Auditorium was constructed at all, gave Chicago and its citizenry something to take some measure of pride in. As one critic put it, for almost two generations the terms "opera" and "Auditorium" were synonymous in Chicago.[5]

Peck admitted that the subject of the need for a new opera theatre, one designed especially for opera, popped up now and then in public discussions. If these plans were to materialize, he said, it would make no real difference to the Auditorium. There was no reason why Chicago couldn't use another opera theatre. But there were a good many productions, public gatherings, etc., which could be held nowhere else but in the Auditorium because of its size. There was

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[4]The Chicago Tribune, February 17, 1923, p. 5.

[5]Morrison, p. 99.

also no other stage in the city so grandly equipped.[6]

With the exception of the two articles cited and a note in the Chicago Journal of Commerce, November 18, 1932, which pointed out that the basis of the defense lay in the fact that the original leases, good for ninety-nine years, prohibited tearing down the building, this writer could find no other mention of the first action by the courts deciding the fate of the Auditorium. A 1925 report on the Chicago Civic Opera reported that the opera had amassed a $400,000 deficit during the 1924-1925 season. The benefactors, therefore, would have to pay at least eighty per cent of their guarantees. The deficit seemed rather large until compared with the previous year's deficit of $325,000 and the 1922-1923 season when there had been a loss of $350,000.[7]

On February 2, 1925, a hearing was begun delving into the structural soundness of the Auditorium.[8] Witnesses for the plaintiff, the Auditorium Association, were extremely adamant in their charges that the building was unsafe. One witness claimed that many of the beams in the building were carrying a great deal more stress than that for which they had been designed. However, under later questioning this particular witness did admit that he had, in fact, never made any extensive tests of the stress and could find no meaningful faults, or

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[6]The Chicago Tribune, February 17, 1923, p. 5.

[7]The Chicago Tribune, January 24, 1925, p. 13.

[8]This author assumes that this action was another step in the long series of court cases between the Auditorium Association and the titleholders of the land, although no newspaper articles could be found to back this premise. The information, however, comes from a microfilm of the testimony in that hearing, found in the Architecture Library of the Chicago Art Institute.

cracks, in the structure. Another witness for the plaintiff reported having seen nearly 100,000 square feet of unprotected, unfireproofed lumber in the building, a great deal of it in and under the theatre itself. As far as he was concerned the building was unsafe. Although it had settled already up to almost two and a half feet in some places he did not consider this critical unless some excavation was done in the immediate vicinity. If a building of any great size was built on Wabash, Congress, or Michigan Avenue directly across from the Auditorium, the entire Auditorium Building was very liable to come crashing down into the streets. Still another of the plaintiff witnesses testified that he had found a column of water which had risen inside a column of the building. From his calculations he estimated that the water probably rose several stories inside the column. While the presence of the water could have been meaningless, it could also be rather dangerous. If the water were to rust the pipe, the column could be very greatly weakened structurally, or if the water were to freeze and crack the column, the same effect would take place. The witnesses for the plaintiff, all architects and structural engineers were unanimous in their pronouncements that the entire building was generally unsafe for public occupancy.

Witnesses for the defendants, the title holders, were quite naturally just the opposite in their viewpoints. These men, also leading architects and structural engineers, felt that while the building was not exactly one hundred per cent safe, it could easily be made so. The settlement of the building, they claimed, had been anticipated and in fact alterations had been made during construction to correct for this settling. The main floor lobby [Figure 24] shows

Fig. 24.--Main Lobby of the theatre

no signs of any further settling, although the arches are not perfectly round, since they were planned taking the previous settlement into account. In regard to the claim that excavation in the immediate vicinity would lead to permanent damage to the building, they replied that while there was some danger, it, too, could be minimized if the slightest bit of care was taken during the excavation.[9]

Evidently the defense arguments were either more sound or more convincing since a short time after this hearing the case was dismissed, not on the grounds that the building was or was not structurally sound, but on the grounds that the Auditorium was considered, when it was built, as a civic project whereas the proposed structure was planned as a purely financial venture.[10]

On January 29, 1927, the Civic Opera made another rather startling announcement affecting the Auditorium. The Opera company announced plans for a new building specifically designed for them. The losses from the opera seasons in the Auditorium were continually growing and the financial statement for 1926 stated that the opera planned a new building which would insure the permanency of the opera as a civic institution.[11] The reasoning behind this move was based on the fact that the current lease on the Auditorium ended in September, 1927. Of course, the lease could be renewed for a few years, but the opera management was convinced that within the not too distant future the entire Auditorium block would be razed

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[9]Structural Soundness of the Auditorium, Testimony in Chicago Circuit Court, (Chicago, Illinois, February 2, 1925), plates 4, 10, 18, 31.

[10]Jonathan Pugh (ed.), "Restoring the Auditorium", Talmanac, [customer magazine of Talman Federal Savings and Loan Association, Chicago], (November, 1964), p. 15.

[11]The Chicago Tribune, May 23, 1927, p. 19.

ultimately necessitating the move. So, rather than being forced into a hurriedly built hall, they wanted to be prepared. The house they had planned was to cost $15,000,000 to $16,000,000 and was to have a stage equipped in the most modern fashion. The new opera house was to have a third less boxes[12] and fifty per cent more seating on the main floor than the Auditorium. There was to be a smaller theatre to go with the opera theatre, both of them to be a portion of a huge office complex which was expected to offset any deficit created by the opera. The opera management suggested that the public would be asked to share in the expense of constructing the building. Half of the amount was to be raised by the sale of bonds while the rest was to come from the sale of preferred stock. To push the sale of the stock, the management pointed out that not only would this be a good investment, but it also would be a matter of civic pride to invest in this new theatre. More important, however, was that the bonds were to start paying back within three to five years after the opening of the house. Of greater interest to the public was the announcement that there was a slight possibility of having free opera in the new hall.[13]

Later in the year (1927) the United States Court of Appeals in Chicago sent the Auditorium case, now in its fourth year, back to the court of Federal Judge James H. Wilkerson. The Association was so supremely confident that they had won the case that they made some

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[12]The Talmanac is not specific whether this figure is based on the original number of boxes in the Auditorium or the remodeled number.

[13]The Chicago Tribune, January 29, 1927, p. 1.

alterations in their original plan. Since plans had already been announced for the new opera house, the theatre which had been planned in the new Auditorium Building was deleted. However, there was still to be a skyscraper hotel, or office building.[14]

In August, 1927, a group of five Chicago businessmen purchased the controlling interest in the Auditorium, but the deal was well shrouded in mystery—there was no publicity other than a short announcement of the action. When the newspapers tried to talk to the men, they were unavailable for comment either by refusing to comment or by being conveniently out of town on business. One of the five, a lawyer, appeared in neither the legal directory or the Chicago telephone directory. Following the announcement, however, talk of the syndicate died down. Two months later, though, the United States Supreme Court ruled in favor of the land owners on the failure of the lessees to pay the ground rent.[15] The battle for the Auditorium, a battle which had been raging in the courts for nearly five years, was now at an end, and the Auditorium Building was safe, at least for a few more years. Though these had been five particularly long and hard years, the Auditorium had, throughout, maintained a busy schedule with a full program of opera, individual artists such as Paderewski, orchestras like the Chicago Symphony conducted by Richard Strauss in concerts of his own compositions, and many other special productions such as Max Reinhardt's The Miracle.[16] In this

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[14]Talmanac, p. 16.

[15]Journal of Commerce, (Chicago), November 18, 1932, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXIV, p. 4.

[16]Talmanac

particular production the major portion of the theatre—stage, proscenium openings, and the areas adjacent to these—were transformed into a church complete with stained-glass windows. The set even included the replacement of many of the seats in the parquet with pews, in order to carry the illusion even further.

On January 26, 1929, the Chicago Civic Opera gave its last performance in the Auditorium. Fittingly enough, the opera chosen to end an era was the same one that had started it. On that date the opera closed out an artistically, though not financially, successful existence at the Auditorium with a performance of Gounod's Romeo and Juliet starring Edith Mason as Juliet. Many people wondered why the opera forsook the Auditorium to move to the Civic Opera House, a much inferior hall.[17] There are two answers: first, since the opera obviously needed a second source of income to carry its losses, an office building the size of the Civic Opera House certainly served the purpose; and secondly, (though this is mostly conjecture) the design of the building is very much like that of a throne, and a good many people felt that Samuel Insull had it built as a personal throne. The two theatres were huddled into what room remained under the seat. The new house was long and narrow and the sightlines on the main floor were bad. The sound, as one writer said, was somewhat akin to that produced in a padded-cell. The microphones clustered on the proscenium served a very definite purpose, and only grand opera failed to find a need to use them. But then, the hall was designed specifically for grand opera.[18] At the

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[17] Ibid., p. 20.

[18] Ibid.

time the Civic Opera House was constructed it was ideally located for its principal patrons--close to the major railroad stations. However, the hall is now hopelessly isolated from the cultural center of Chicago (if Chicago can be said to have a cultural center).

Late in 1929, $834,000 worth of bonds for the Auditorium that had been issued back in 1889 fell due, and when the syndicate could not pay, the entire property went back to the four separate interests owning the land.[19] Soon after this the Auditorium closed for the first time for financial reasons. On September 8, 1930, plans were announced to build two miniature golf courses in the theatre. Tentative plans called for an elaborate set-up. A course of six holes was to be placed in the lobby and a second full eighteen hole lay-out was to go on the main floor.

> In the orchestra pit, where the ninth hole of the miniature golf course would be sunk in synthetic turf, Campanini and Polacco once waved their batons. On the stage occupied by the hot dog stand Mary Garden sang her Carmen, Muzco her Aida, Marshall his Pagliacci, Challapin responded to an encore with the "Volga Boat Song." Duse was last seen [there] before she died.[20]

On the stage was planned a stucco replica of a country clubhouse complete with a veranda, artificial trees, a privet hedge. Here the players could purchase hot dogs, soda pop, or lemonade. Though the papers had not been signed, R. Floyd Clinch, president of the Chicago Auditorium Association, which had been named receiver of the building, felt that the miniature golf craze might provide some of the much needed income to redeem the bonds. It was strange that the

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19 Chicago Tribune, May 30, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook", XXVI, p. 586.

20 Talmanac, p. 16.

hall once known as the "world's largest theatre" and in 1893 as "the wonder building of the fair", should be turned into such a horrible fate as a miniature golf course.

> The Messrs. Gluck, Handel, Beethoven, et al, can say, 'Art is dead; long live midget golf.'[21]

There is, however, no record confirming that this fate ever befell the Auditorium.

In September, 1932, plans were made to reopen the Auditorium. At that time the architectural firm of Holabird and Root, one of the leading firms in Chicago was chosen to begin an eight week, $100,000 rejuvenation job on the theatre. The remodeled hall was to be used for large shows, concerts, and the like, although grand opera was not expected to perform there. George Kingsbury, the new manager of the house, admitted that although no bookings had definitely been made, there had been a considerable number of requests and applications.[22] As the time for the reopening of the Auditorium drew closer, a number of suggestions were made that the management should try to celebrate the 43rd anniversary of the Auditorium opening with real style by attempting to ring up the curtain again on December 9, forty-three years to the day after the curtain had been rung up for the first time.

Although the actual birthday was missed, it was only by a few days; and, on December 14, 1932, the Auditorium reopened, having been dark for three years. Much of the same splendor was again evident

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[21] Ibid.

[22] Chicago Times, September 20, 1932, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXIV, p. 1.

in the theatre that Chicagoans once knew. On that evening Frederick Stock directed an augmented version of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra--200 players--, and several distinguished soloists, including Elsa Alsen, John Charles Thomas, and Josef Hofmann. Claudia Cassidy, writing for the Chicago Journal of Commerce, reported that "The program. . . generously repaid the enthusiasm of the capacity audience."[23] The audience was rewarded in another way--more light was provided on the stage with the installation of the new $25,000 lightboard. This was probably the biggest single expense in the renovated house--the total cost being $125,000. The new board, a Major Pre-select, resistance system was the last word in modern lighting. The lighting system throughout the house was rewired and a complete new set of footlights was installed.[24]

Even better news to lovers of the Auditorium was the announcement in the Chicago Times that there would, indeed, be grand opera at the Auditorium once again. A new company, The Chicago City Grand Opera Company was organized by Attico Bernabini, the former chorus-master of the Chicago Civic Opera, and John Pane-Gasser, tenor. They announced plans to open a ten week opera season in the Auditorium on December 26, with Il Trovatore as the first production.[25]

The 1932-1933 reopening season lacked nothing of the glamour that had been present in the original opening season of 1889-1890.

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[23]Chicago Journal of Commerce, December 15, 1932, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXIV, p. 14.

[24]Chicago Tribune, December 11, 1932, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXIV, p. 11.

[25]Chicago Times, December 4, 1932, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXIV, p. 8.

The season included a number of one and two nights of opera featuring such great artists as Lawrence Tibbets and Lily Pons. The famous Polish pianist, Ignace Jan Paderewski, made another of his almost yearly appearances in the Auditorium. Other guests were violinist Nathan Milstein, singer John Charles Thomas, and pianist-composer George Gershwin. There were road shows such as Showboat with Helen Morgan, and Of Thee I Sing. And there were such other well-known groups as the Don Cossack Chorus, the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, and the Minneapolis Symphony under the baton of Eugene Ormandy. The real highlight of the 1932-1933 season, however, began with the announcement by Fortune Gallo, opera impresario, that beginning on Labor Day, 1933, the world famous San Carlo Opera Company would open a four week season at the Auditorium Theatre. As if the mere presence of opera in the Auditorium was not enough, the price was even more rewarding. The season, offering twenty operas, had an admission price ranging from $1.00 down to 25¢.[26]

The brilliance of the following season was only slightly less than the previous one. The "piece de resistance" of the 1934 season, however, was Max Reinhardt's production of A Midsummer Night's Dream. Most Chicagoans could remember the Reinhardt production of The Miracle seven years earlier, and they eagerly anticipated his newest offering. What made it even more enticing was that it was billed as being even greater than The Miracle. The "Dream" cast numbered over 300 and was augmented by a vocal chorus, a ballet of eighty dancers, and a symphony orchestra. The production

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[26]New York American, August 4, 1933, [cited in] "Scrapbook,"

[27]Ibid.

ran for two weeks.[28]

Newspaper coverage on the Auditorium was still fairly poor, so little can be realized about the next few years. The hall continued to maintain a fairly full schedule with the usual opera companies—the San Carlo Opera appeared a number of times—road shows, individual stars and the like. During the thirties the Auditorium management also began to show movies as a part of their bill of fare. In the latter 1930's people at the Auditorium seemed to have begun to have serious doubts about the merits of the acoustics. Two shows, Leave It To Me and The Women (1938), employed special sound amplification systems for their productions.

In May, 1941, the then current smash hit, Olsen and Johnson's Hellzapoppin, began its run at the Auditorium. For this show no one was in the least concerned about acoustics since, as the Chicago Tribune critic stated, "Hellzapoppin' is a show you can hear two miles away."[29] But that show was more important for another, less wonderful, reason. Though few people suspected it, this was to be the last show to appear in the Auditorium for a long, long time. The Chicago Times on May 29, 1941, made this announcement:

> The old Auditorium theatre . . . will close its doors for the last time on June 30 . . .
>
> At the same time, the Auditorium hotel, with its 330 rooms, and the related 10-story office building, with its 17-story tower, will be abandoned.
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> 'Taxes assessed against the property in the past 12 years, exclusive of penalties, have been $722,000 greater than the net operating income,' he [John Goodridge, President of the Auditorium Building Corp.] said. 'Penalties

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[28]Chicago American, November 10, 1934, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 216.

[29]Chicago Tribune, May 4, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 581.

accumulated are an additional $411,000 load.'[30]

Mr. Goodridge was quite put out by the failure of the Auditorium, and rightly so. Nowhere else but in Chicago could a thing like this have happened. According to him the Auditorium was one of the greatest theatres in the world, and in other countries this building would have been kept alive, if it had to be done by municipal, state, or national subsidy. Instead, the Auditorium was forced to struggle, sometimes against almost insurmountable odds, to keep the building operating against the confiscatory tax laws. The Auditorium, however, could no longer struggle and had to close. Every bit of net revenue since 1930 had been applied toward the taxes. The owners received no income, yet each year the tax bills were at least twice the net operating income, and often they were four or five times this amount.[31]

The crowning blow in closing the Auditorium, however, probably came when the Auditorium Annex, across Congress Street, was sold. Under normal circumstances this would have made little difference, but sometime after 1893, a heating, lighting, and hydraulic power system had been installed in the Annex. This was a logical step since both buildings had drawn their power from the Auditorium system, so, naturally when the new system was installed both buildings continued to draw power from one system. However, when the new owners took over, they redesigned the power system to serve only the Annex. The Auditorium management was forced to install their own

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[30]Chicago Times, May 29, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 586.

[31]Chicago Daily News, May 29, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 586.

power supply at a cost of $150,000 for the unit. Unfortunately, this extra cost added to the tax problem left no alternative except closing.[32]

Once again it was a Peck who spoke out for preservation of the building. This time, however, it was Ferd Peck, Jr., son of the originator of the Auditorium. There was a noticeable difference in their arguments, though. Where Ferd Peck, Sr., had argued the statistics and figures about the building, the younger Peck argued from an emotional standpoint.

> I know the buildings are no longer profitable, that taxes have piled up, but it seems a shame that the theatre can't be moved into Grant Park and rebuilt.[33]

There were other suggestions which offered more practical solutions. One such was the Warterfield Plan devised by J. Saule Warterfield, President of the Chicago Building Congress. He suggested that the four owners of the Auditorium property deed it to the city and county in payment of the $1,150,000 of back taxes. These owners--made up of three estates and an insurance company--would receive in return revenue bonds which would be issued by a foundation created especially for the purpose of operating the property. In this way the Auditorium Theatre could be preserved as a civic theatre.[34]

On June 14, 1941, the Chicago Herald American announced that the June 30 closing date for the Auditorium had been temporarily

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[32]Chicago Times, May 29, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 586.

[33]Chicago Tribune, June 1, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 587.

[34]Ibid., June 5, 1941, p. 588.

suspended. It seemed that when the famous building was in a very real danger of closing a number of people were suddenly ready and willing to come to the rescue. Shortly after the closing was announced, a group of civic leaders called what they termed a "rescue meeting". A committee was appointed to work out a means of retaining the building. Their plan was to keep the building functioning by operating it as a non-profit musical organization, to be known as "The Chicago Music Foundation". Under further portions of the plan the tax burden would be reduced so that the back and current bills could be met. This would be done by basing the tax levy on the income rather than the theoretical value of the building. If both of these plans were followed the committee felt that the building could be kept open.[35] More importantly, however, John S. Clark, Cook County Assessor, promised to re-assess the property at $600,000, a big drop from the original $2,000,000 assessment. Under this new rate, and with a non-profit charter, the Auditorium would be responsible for paying $20,000 a year instead of the original $72,000. Another break came when Clark reported that this would be retroactive to past years so that the tax bills could be paid.[36]

None of these plans were effective, however, and in the summer of 1941, the doors of the Auditorium were shuttered. Soon after, the majority of the contents of the Auditorium Building were

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[35] Chicago Herald American, June 14, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 590.

[36] Chicago Daily News, June 16, 1941, [cited in] "Scrapbook," XXVI, p. 590.

sold at auction.[37] As far as the Auditorium as a public building was concerned, it was finished. From 1942-1945, however, the Chicago U.S.O. used the building for a servicemen's center. The Auditorium theatre was turned into a bowling alley, [Figure 25] and what foyer and stairway walls had not been painted over in previous remodeling jobs, were whitewashed and covered with signs for the servicemen. It seemed almost criminal to adulterate the Auditorium this way, but we should be thankful that it was not razed.

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[37]The Auditorium Building

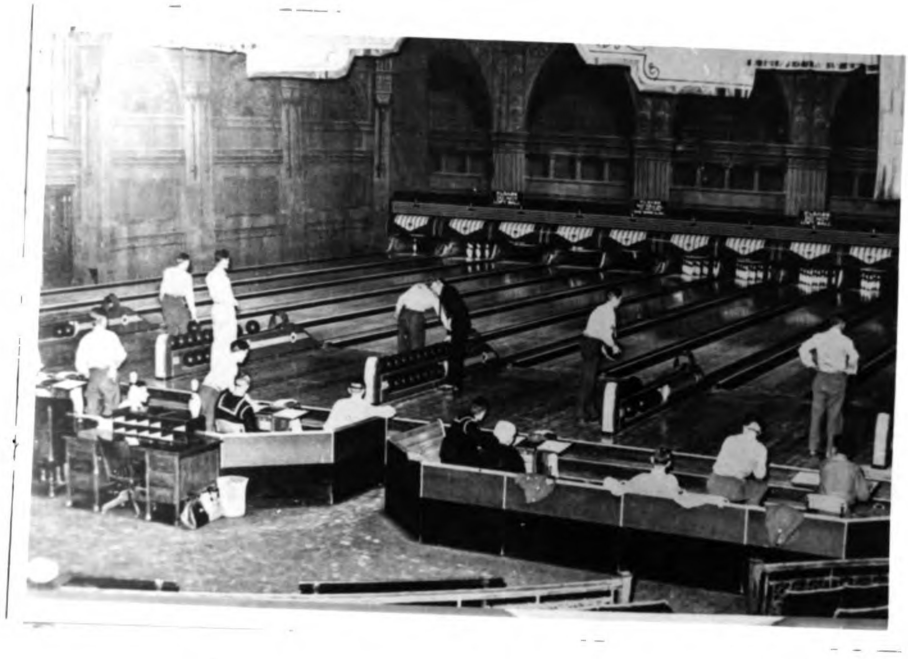

Fig. 25.--The bowling alley placed on the stage during its use by the U.S.O. from 1941-1945.

CHAPTER VI

THE RESTORATION YEARS

At the end of World War II the U.S.O. moved out of the Auditorium Building and it was empty once more, this time for a very long time. In 1946, the one year old Roosevelt University, looking for a home, found the empty Auditorium suitable for its needs. They cleared up the tax bills and successfully rescued the building from demolition. They took over the lobbies, rooms, and offices, and altered them to be appropriate for the university needs. The unfortunate problem was that, because of the theatre, the university was unable to use half of the total area and a third of the volume of the building. The theatre lay dormant in the midst of the building. Even if they had been able to raise enough money to restore the theatre, it was far too large for their use, and far too expensive for them to operate on their own. So, though the major portion of the building was once again in profitable use, the theatre remained empty.

In 1956, Crombie Taylor, now Professor and Associate Dean, School of Architecture at the University of Southern California, but then in Chicago, led a group on an inspection tour of the theatre. The only light was from the flashlights carried by the group. Karl Hartnack told this writer of Mr. Taylor's expedition. The dust was choking--a lot can accumulate in ten years. The

eerie part of the venture, though, was that all that could be seen was that captured in the flashlight beam while unseen, but often heard, and all too often felt, were the chunks of plaster falling from the ceiling. Later, when enough lights could be turned on to see the rest of the theatre, it didn't look much better. Most of the paint was peeling or flaking off. A great deal of the plaster--decorative and plain--was falling. The skylight which had been so exquisitely beautiful during the heyday of the theatre was now sagging dangerously under the weight of the lead panes. In short, the condition of the theatre was quite disheartening. Several structural changes were discovered which had been made at some time during the theatre's operating history. One change for the better had been the removal of the pillars supporting the upper tier of boxes on both sides of the house. [Figure 26] By cantilevering the upper boxes, the sightlines in the lower ones were greatly improved. Also, the width of the orchestra pit had been narrowed enough to permit the installation of two more rows of parquet seats.[1]

In 1958 people began to wonder seriously about restoring the Auditorium Theatre. Insull's Civic Opera House had become a white elephant. The Lyric Opera season was very short and few other tenants could be attracted to the theatre. In June of that year the owners decided to turn the Opera House into a wide-screen movie house. When this happened there began to be talk that maybe the Lyric Opera might have to look for new quarters; and, since legal problems were still holding up progress on the Arie Crown

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[1]Hartnack.

Fig. 26.--The restored boxes with the supporting pillars removed.

Theatre in McCormack Place, there were no stages available unless the Auditorium could be restored. There were 4,536 suggestions offered in an attempt to relieve the cultural emergency and in response Mayor Daley organized one of his inevitable but always futile committees to solve the problem. However, the Opera House remained open to opera and the problem was by-passed. Many of the suggestions received during the crisis had been for restoring the Auditorium Theatre. Herman Kogan, writer for the Chicago American, received a number of offers of contributions although he hadn't asked for them, and Norman Ross, asking how many of his radio listeners would be willing to give $1 toward the restoration of the Auditorium, received 5,000 responses in two weeks.[2] Many Chicagoans still remembered the Auditorium Theatre. It is no wonder that they remembered it. After all, almost every major artist had appeared there at one time or another. John McCormack said of the theatre: "I would rather sing here than in any other hall in the world."[3] Madame Amelita Galli-Curci, the great operatic soprano, made her American debut with the Chicago Opera Company in 1917. In a sense she was discovered in Chicago, and her loyalty always remained there. Various opera seasons saw Chaliapin, Caruso, Melba, Geraldine Farrar, Mary Garden, Tettrazini, and Edith Mason. Actresses Ellen Terry and Sarah Bernhardt and actor George M. Cohen were among those appearing at the theatre, as were Teddy Roosevelt and evangelist Dwight L. Moody. The variety of attractions at the

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[2]Herman Kogan, Panorama - The Chicago Daily News, February 29, 1964.

[3]The Auditorium Theatre, (a pamphlet produced by the Auditorium Theatre Council).

Auditorium was amazing. In a single ten day period, for instance, the theatre hosted a circus complete with elephants, Grand Opera, the United States Marine Corps Band, a ball for Prince Henry of Prussia, Northwestern University's commencement exercises, the annual Chicago Flower Show, John Philip Sousa and his band, the Apollo Musical Club, and various other recitals and concerts.[4]

There were other large theatres and halls in Chicago but none could compare with the Auditorium.

> There is the Civic Opera house on Wacker Drive, which replaced the Auditorium--if a second-rate hall can ever be said to replace a classic of design and acoustic balance.
>
> Also there is Arie Crown theatre in McCormack Place, which hasn't replaced anything, for the simple reason that it is too big and misshapen to serve any esthetic function beyond sales conventions. Even the addition of a new fiberglass acoustic shell for orchestral concerts has not been more than a welcome stop-gap measure. The design of Arie Crown is basically wrong, just as the design of Philharmonic hall in Lincoln Center is basically wrong. Whereas the latter is a tunnel, a fact which no amount of suspended ceiling panels will ever change, our lake front theatre is too wide, an almost manical miscalculation by its planners. Without microphones, there cannot be equal dispersion of sound throughout the hall. With microphones, however, one might as well stay home and listen to a high caliber stereo rig.[5]

On February 18, 1960, the Board of Trustees of Roosevelt University voted 18 to 7 to authorize a fund raising drive for $3,000,000 to restore the Auditorium. Four of the seven who voted against the drive did so because they felt this drive would severely limit a University fund campaign. (These four finally resigned from the board). In addition, the University Vice President for

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[4]Ibid.

[5]Roger Dettmer, Chicago American, March 8, 1964.

Development and the Dean of Faculties, both of whom opposed the drive, were discharged. At the time student opinion was opposed to the drive--it later was reversed--and the faculty was divided.[6] To conduct the fund drive and the theatre, the Roosevelt Board authorized the formation of the Auditorium Theatre Council, a modern counterpart of the original Chicago Auditorium Association. In essence, the Council was empowered to raise the $3,000,000 necessary, to plan and begin the restoration, to restore the theatre, and, finally, to supervise the management of the theatre once it was completed.[7]

The Auditorium Theatre Council was made up of civic-minded volunteers who gave their time, effort, and financial support in an attempt to restore the Auditorium Theatre to use. The executive committee was made up of people who had demonstrated special talents in fields such as architecture, the arts, education, law, finance, etc. Chosen to head the Council was Mrs. John V. Spachner, a volunteer who had just finished raising $1,000,000 to restore Ganz Hall, the old Auditorium banquet hall, for use by the Chicago Conservatory of Music. Harold W. Norman, a prominent Chicago lawyer, was selected as Mrs. Spachner's co-chairman. Honorary Chairman was the Honorable Richard J. Daley, Mayor of Chicago. The main purpose of this non-profit organization was " . . . to restore the Auditorium, not out of nostalgia, not merely because it is a great piece of architecture, but because it is the perfect

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[6]Lois Marie Fink, "Roosevelt University," College Art Journal, XIX, (Fall 1959-Summer 1960), p. 370.

[7]Talmanac, p. 21.

medium to enhance the cultural life of Chicago and the Mid-west."[8]

Another of the major purposes of the Council was:

> . . . to offer to the youth of [the] community, educational and cultural programs that [could] enhance their capacities for aesthetic growth, and develop their intellectual and social maturity.[9]

In March, 1960, Roosevelt University requested a tax ruling from the Internal Revenue Service concerning their status as a tax exempt institution if they went ahead with plans for the Auditorium fund drive. In May of that year they received a reply. The new ruling, which showed the school to be still tax exempt under a ruling of October, 1945, gave perhaps the best description of the Council and the purpose and uses of the Restoration fund.

> Information submitted shows that by a resolution of your Board of Trustees the Auditorium Theatre Council, formerly the Auditorium Restoration and Development Committee, was authorized and directed to raise funds on your behalf for the restoration of the Auditorium Theatre and for the supervision and administration of its restoration. Contributions are to be deposited in a special fund to be known as the Auditorium Restoration Fund, segregated and separated from your other funds and to be used for no other purpose than the restoration of the Theatre and the operation of the fund drive. An Executive Committee of the Council composed of not more than 25 persons is to be formed. After the restoration of the Theatre, any funds remaining in the Auditorium Restoration Fund will be transferred to an Auditorium Theatre Operating Fund to be used only for the maintainance and operation of the Theatre. Any surplus in this account, after the establishment of a reserve adequate to safeguard the maintainance and operation of the Theatre, will be transferred to your unrestricted funds and used for educational purposes.[10]

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[9] Ibid.

[10] Letter to Roosevelt University from John W. S. Littleton, Director, Tax Rulings Division, Office of the Commissioner of Internal Revenue, U. S. Treasury Department, Washington, D. C., May 11, 1960.

The Internal Revenue Service ruled that the contributions would not affect the University status as a tax exempt institution. In addition, since all contributions to the fund would technically be considered contributions to the University and therefore tax exempt, these contributions would be tax deductible for the contributor. The Council was now ready to move forward.

Plans for the restored theatre, elaborate as they may have been, were quite slow in taking effect. From the time the Council was formed in 1960, little if any work was begun until the middle of 1964. Events taking place during those years explain the delay. The first big delay was caused by the announcement that Chicago's new convention hall, McCormack Place, was to contain a 5,000-seat theatre. All but the most ardent supporters of the Auditorium lost interest in it until the completed Arie Crown Theatre could be tested. After the tests, however, the Arie Crown Theatre acoustics were found to be, in a word, "bad." If it had not been clear before, it now became fairly evident to almost everyone concerned that there was no finer acoustical hall in Chicago than the shuttered Auditorium. An even more bitter problem arose from within to plague the Auditorium Council. Shortly after being formed, the Council hired a nationally known architectural firm to research and made suggestions concerning the best way to restore the theatre. In November, 1962, with their expenses already topping $50,000 of the Council's money, the firm announced that after careful examination of the condition of the theatre their original estimate of $3,000,000 would have to be raised to nearly $4,250,000, and it was quite feasible, they added, that even that sum might not be sufficient. What

really impressed many of the members of the Council, however, were the photographs which the architects had carefully collected in order to prove that the building was in imminent danger of collapse. They even advised that no one but themselves be allowed in the theatre or on the stage lest they be killed by falling plaster. Needless to say, a great many people became uneasy. Since the rise in the cost of the restoration was more than the total amount raised by the drive in nearly two years, the entire project was in financial jeopardy, and became even more so when many of the original supporters backed out, realizing that this project was quite a financial risk..

The Council still retained the money that had already been raised and with it made some minor repairs. Then they went out to find, if not better, then at least other technical assistance. At this time the Council got in touch with Harry Weese, a noted Chicago architect whose firm specialized in the restoration of old buildings.[11] As a volunteer, Mr. Weese accepted the chairmanship of the Building Committee and through his recommendations the Council sought the advice and counsel of such people as George C. Izenour from Yale, a noted theatre designer-engineer; Fred N. Severud, a structural engineer with the New York firm of Severud, Elstad, Krueger and Associates; Sumner Sollitt, a Chicago construction engineer; and the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill.[12] All of these men concurred with Mr. Weese's opinion that as a whole the theatre was structurally sound. Where the original architects had

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[11]Talmanac, pp. 23-24.

[12]"Auditorium Theatre Fact Sheet," (Updated, February, 1965).

been in favor of replacing the theatre--that is, rebuilding it within the already existing shell--Harry Weese was of the firm belief that all that was really necessary was a restoration--restoring what was already in existence.[13] With these findings, the estimated cost of the restoration was reduced to a figure in the neighborhood of $2,750,000.[14]

By February, 1964, the project of restoring the Chicago Auditorium Theatre was well underway. During that month the first building permits were issued and work, other than fund raising, was begun in earnest. Through the efforts of Mrs. Spachner and her Council, in the three years since the fund drive began, a total of $762,000 of the $2,750,000 necessary had been raised. Optimists believed that the building could be ready for use in the fall of 1965.[15]

It was only by some miracle that the entire structure had not been removed in order to put up some building of less lasting importance. Even more of a miracle was that the original blueprints plus reams of documentation were found which indicated the theatre's true original appearance.[16]

A pamphlet produced by the Council announced the magnificent plans they had for the theatre restoration:

> Air-conditioning, modern heating, lighting and ventilating equipment, and complete fireproofing, will be built into the theatre.
> Additional cross-aisles, luxuriously-upholstered, self-rise seats, and many more lounges will be installed. Existing murals will be carefully restored and ornamental plaster work will be renewed.

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[13] Talmanac, pp. 25-26.

[14] Richard Christiansen, Chicago Daily News, August 7, 1965.

[15] Kogan. [16] Dettmer.

> ... . there will be a new floor over its the stage 110 foot width and 70 foot depth. Its 26 hydraulic-lift sections will be restored. There will be new stage lighting and controls.
>
> A new, concealed projection booth is planned. There will be new stairways, fire doors, additional rest rooms, powder rooms and checkrooms.[17]

One of the major suggestions had been to replace the stage floor with a six inch slab of cement. This idea was quickly squelched by the cries of such musicians as Leopold Stokowski. One of his chief reasons was that part of the success of the acoustics was attributed to the wooden floor of the stage which acted like a sounding board of a piano or the wooden case of a fine violin.[18] To replace this with cement would ruin one of the very reasons for the Auditorium's remaining in existence, the acoustics.

The Council also had big plans for the back stage space:

> The use of less bulky contemporary scenery and modern stage lighting, and adoption of the trucking-warehousing system, will facilitate scenery handling and extend still further the production possibilities. More than 35,000 square feet of space in the theatre basement and backstage areas will be utilized to provide more than adequate room for scenery, properties, for larger workshops, sewing and pressing rooms.
>
> Nearly a score of stars' dressing rooms are planned. Casts of more than 150 can be accomodated in these and in chorus dressing rooms. Backstage, two high-speed elevators will serve the performers.[19]

Plans were also formulated for the productions to be held in the theatre. All of the scheduling and the details of running the theatre were to be managed by a professional staff who would be serving under the guidance of a professional manager.[20]

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[17]The Auditorium Theatre. [18]Hartnack.

[19]The Auditorium Theatre.

[20]"Auditorium Theatre Fact Sheet" February, 1965.

Although it was estimated that the restored Auditorium would draw nearly one million people and twenty million more dollars annually into downtown Chicago,[21] the question still remained, who would use the Auditorium once it was renovated? The Lyric Opera had already stated categorically that it would remain in the Civic Opera House and would not transfer operations to the Auditorium. After all the owners of the Opera House were providing warehouse space for the sets and costumes, and were providing free office space for the managers of the opera.[22] The same problem was found when discussing the return of the Chicago Symphony to the remodeled Auditorium. They, like the opera, had a home of their own in Orchestra Hall. True, it was not as acoustically fine as the Auditorium, but for an orchestra it was all right, and it was their own.[23] However, the hope has been expressed that the Chicago Symphony will play occasional concerts in the Auditorium as they had done for years after Orchestra Hall was built. If these concerts in the Auditorium were not as artistically successful, they would be at least financially more successful since the box office revenue of the orchestra in the Auditorium could be fifty to seventy-five percent greater than the corresponding revenue in Orchestra Hall.[24] But for these two Chicago groups which would not under present plans be appearing in the renovated theatre, there were many internationally and nationally known stars who had stated they wished, in fact, intended to perform in the restored theatre. Among these stars were conductor Leopold Stokowski; pianists Artur Rubenstein

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[21] Ibid. [22] Dettmer.

[23] The acoustics of Orchestra Hall are being improved during a $2,000,000 remodeling job now in progress. (Hartnack).

[24] Dettmer.

and Van Cliburn; violinist, Nathan Milstein; and singers, Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker.[25] The question still remained, however, would there be enough attractions to fill the Auditorium and keep it in operation? The answer was simple, if somewhat optimistic. Maybe there wouldn't be enough to fill it every single night all year long, but until the restoration is completed this will be unpredictable. The philosophy was to get it ready and then see; performers were bound to come. The most important aspect of the Auditorium restoration was that it would provide a tremendous facility for everything from shows, ballets, musical concerts, festivals, lectures, educational programs, to conventions. It would be a place to showcase local talent, a place to stimulate the arts.[26] Roosevelt University would have use of the building for assembly needs as would other educational institutions in line with the policy set up by the Council. No matter what, the restored theatre would be a civic center. It would be a place where programs, commercial or otherwise, would be presented. All segments of the Chicago Community would have the use of the available facilities. The purpose of the programs would be to entertain, educate, and inspire.[27] The Auditorium would have the advantage over other theatres in Chicago of not having to depend on the box office to stay in business, and thus would be able to provide a much wider variety of productions. The Council has emphasized repeatedly that the revenues received from rental of the theatre will be used to help insure maintenance of the building. In addition, since the theatre

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[25]Fact Sheet, 1965. [26]Kogan.

[27]The Auditorium Theatre.

would be let on a guaranteed rental basis, the theatre would be self-supporting and once the project has achieved the basic aim--that is renovation and establishment of a program--the Auditorium would need no further outside financial assistance.[28] Also, because of the tremendous physical attributes of the house, the Auditorium would attract many great artists and national touring companies who currently do not appear in Chicago.

The Auditorium has another advantage over its two rivals--the Civic Opera House and the Arie Crown Theatre--that is its central location. It is located at the focal point of a vast network of expressways, superhighways, and toll roads. During the day there are parking facilities for the cars of a capacity audience within a half block of the theatre, and night parking for four thousand cars within a block of the building. In addition, bus and subway lines also run within a half block of the main entrance.[29] No other major theatre in Chicago can boast this accessibility.

On April 23, 1964, music filled the Auditorium for the first time in almost a quarter of a century.[30] The theatre was opened for the Dick Schory musicians for their first in a series of stereophonic recording sessions in the Auditorium. When the session was finished Mr. Schory said, "I've recorded in many halls, but I have never before heard one like this. The sound is literally as clear as a bell."[31]

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[28]Ibid. [29]Ibid.

[30]Technically this statement is not true, since in 1961, Van Cliburn played a special fund-raising and publicity concert. The theatre was dimly lit and extremely dusty, and the audience was small, but the acoustics were perfect. Since that time Van Cliburn has been one of the major backers of the restoration project. Talmanac, p. 30.

[31]Ruth Moore, The Chicago Sun-Times, April 28, 1964, p. 14.

The records he made there bear out his statement.

May 11, 1964, marked the beginning of the actual restoration repair work. The first job was to remove all of the defective plaster in the building. The main cause of the falling plaster was water seepage in the ceiling. However, the three broken downspouts which had caused the leakage were repaired and the roof, twenty-five feet above the ceiling of the Auditorium, was waterproofed and provided with a new drainage system, thus eliminating any further problems of this kind. When the amount of water damage was assessed, however, it was discovered that only three areas covering a total of only about 400 square feet of the ceiling had suffered any appreciable damage during the theatre's fifty years of use, and two and one half or more decades of neglect. What was even more amazing, however, was that while it had originally been thought that most of the gold decoration was gone, it turned out that it was instead buried under years of dust, and only warm water was necessary to restore it to its original splendor. The stenciling in the main staircase [Figure 17] was restored in this manner. First, camel's hair brushes were used to remove most of the dust. Then the area was washed carefully with warm water, and in most cases the decoration returned to its original state. In some instances, where the plaster beneath the gold leaf was damaged, it was painstakingly removed, in order to be replaced. As it turned out, only about fifteen percent of the ornamental plaster had to be removed.[32] Here a problem arose. In the first place, working with decorative plaster is a dying art, and it was rather difficult to find men trained in the

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[32]Claudia Cassidy, The Chicago Tribune, April 15, 1965.

field. Of almost equal importance, however, was the fact that it was necessary to remove each piece of plaster, truck it off to the plasterer's shop, recast it—a separate cast was needed for each individual casting—and return it to the Auditorium to be put back into place. Since the going price for a cast was $25 or $50, the entire restoration budget would likely be spent just on the decorative plaster work.[33] Of necessity, therefore, the plasterers soon discovered an inexpensive method of doing the castings without leaving the building. The system was relatively simple and quite inexpensive. The good piece of plaster from which the mold was to be made was removed and coated with a half dozen coats of liquid latex. This was allowed to harden and was then set in a wooden box of plaster which in turn hardened around the latex mold. From these molds recastings could be made every ten minutes if necessary.[34] As each new piece of plaster was finished, it was overlaid with gold leaf and put back into place.[35] [Figure 27] An even more difficult task was that of uncovering Sullivan's stencil work buried under coats of dust, paint, and whitewash. Although the following is a description of the method used in restoring the recital hall stenciling, it is also that used in the Auditorium:

> Blocks of plaster were removed, x-rayed, and examined by a paleontologist but no trace of the gold design was revealed. Trying another approach, Crombie Taylor carefully sandpapered for hours and hours through layers and layers of paint. Gradually the hidden design emerged. More blocks of plaster were sanded until the whole of each design was uncovered [Figure 28]. From the drawings of these original designs stencils were cut and used for redecorating the restored room. The pattern had eluded the x-ray because of the process of application. Gold had been

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[33] M. W. Newman, The Chicago Daily News, August 7, 1965.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Moore.

Fig. 27.--An example of the recast plaster pieces used in the restoration.

Fig. 28.--Stenciling uncovered on the wall behind the boxes. This is the only portion in the theatre proper to be uncovered.

> applied over the entire area and the design was then painted over that. Thus the x-ray could not register the differences between the metal and the plaster because the entire surface was metallic.[36]

In many instances the stencil in the Auditorium could be brought back to its original splendor just by washing away the many years of dust and grime, [Figure 29] but in other cases the stenciling was in too bad condition to be restored and had to be painted out. It was estimated that the cost of restoring the decoration would be in the neighborhood of $150,000, and would take some four months to complete, but that when it was finished, the Auditorium would more closely resemble the theatre which opened in 1889 than did the remodeled and redecorated versions other generations of Chicago theatre-goers had known.[37]

Fund raising for the theatre went on at its normal pace and by September of 1964 Chicagoans had contributed the sum of $855,000 of the necessary $2,700,000.[38]

The restoration work schedule showed February, 1965, as the target date to have the walls reinforced, the roof repaired, the skylight removed, and the stage vents, which the new city code required, installed. In addition, they hoped to have the fire curtain back in operation. (When the curtain was restored, the hydraulic system worked perfectly, and the fire curtain moved soundlessly). Also to be completed, was a modernization of most of the mechanics of the building including the plumbing, heating, air-conditioning, electrical work, and the lighting and communication systems. The dressing

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[36]Fink, p. 365.

[37]Cassidy.

[38]Chicago Daily News, September 3, 1964.

Fig. 29.--Restored arch in the Recital Hall showing Sullivan's artistic skills.

rooms, orchestra pit, and service areas were also to be included in the modernization. Much of the seating was to be reconditioned or replaced, as were the carpets and stage draperies. In short, a great deal of the Auditorium was to be restored.[39]

By April, 1965, Harry Weese, Chairman of the Building Committee, announced that the boxes which had been added across the rear of the main floor had been removed, leaving a clean sweep from the orchestra pit to the beautiful arches of the main lobby. The 110 box seats which were thus removed were replaced by about 500 parquet seats, bringing this section back to its original 1,400 seats. When the boxes were removed a new band of gold Sullivan stencils was revealed in almost perfect condition.[40]

In the same article as the announcement by Mr. Weese was an announcement by Mrs. Spachner that the fund raising campaign had exceeded the million dollar mark with a $20,000 gift by Mrs. Ferdinand Peck, daughter-in-law of the founder of the Auditorium. A much more important announcement, though, was the decision by Mr. Weese and Sumner Sollitt, the building contractor, that the building was so sound that $1,750,000 would be sufficient to complete the restoration. The information contained in these announcements meant that the fund drive was now well over the half way mark with only about $750,000 left to be raised.[41] If these funds could be made available quickly, said Mrs. Spachner, it was entirely possible that the Auditorium could be expected to reopen by December, 1965,

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[39]"Fact Sheet", 1965.

[40]Moore, April 15, 1965, p. 32.

[41]Cassidy.

or April, 1966, at the latest.[42] Already there had been spent or committed for construction $1,000,000, leaving only $500,000 needed to finish the basic work.[43] By May, 1965, the Council announced that there were already about one hundred and eighty unsolicited, potential renters for the restored theatre. Everything from the Metropolitan Opera touring company to the Zion Passion Play to nearly fifty conventions were hoping to make use of the building.[44]

The fund raising campaign has been somewhat of a sore point ever since its beginning in 1960. It seemed incredible that in more than five years in Chicago, a city with a population in excess of three and one-half million, the Council has been unable to raise $1,750,000. One of the big problems, of course, has been that the Auditorium has been closed to the public for almost twenty-five years. Consequently, Chicagoans hear many stories of the beauty and fabled acoustics of the Auditorium, but an entire generation has grown up without the opportunity of hearing a concert in the building in person.[45] It is often quite difficult to talk people into parting with money for a project they know little about. Most of the money already raised, however, has been from the pockets of individuals. Private groups and large corporations have been hard to interest. There have been at least two gifts of $50,000 and several in the vicinity of $30,000, but most have been much smaller.[46] As incentive to would-be donors, the Council has decided that:

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[42]Moore, April 15, 1965, p. 32.

[43]Norman Ross, The Daily News (Chicago), May 26, 1964, p. 22.

[44]Ibid.

[45]Robert Marsh, The Chicago Sun-Times, May 6, 1964. [46]Newman.

> Contributors of $100 or more may have their names or those of loved ones permanently inscribed in 'The Book of the Auditorium' for future generations to see.[47]

Karl Hartnack told the writer of one offer of $1,000,000 which was refused because the potential donor would give the money only if the Auditorium were renamed after him. The Council felt that this man, who had done little in or for Chicago, would be buying his way into the city.

Many critics have claimed that the campaign is not being run on a "professional" basis. To this Mrs. Spachner answers, "I'm the one who has to do most of the money-raising. I'd welcome help."[48] It is true, she does get very little help. City Hall in Chicago, as an example, one of the biggest benefactors of a restored Auditorium, has given the restoration program its blessing, but has not found it in its heart to give a single dollar.[49]

One of the big critics of the fund raising campaign, yet one with many constructive suggestions, has been Peter P. Jacobi.[50] In an article on the Auditorium, Mr. Jacobi had this to say about the fund drive:

> Cultural do-good committees sometimes are more motivated than directed, and this has been part of the Auditorium story. Those on the Auditorium Theatre Council are highly motivated individuals, idealists with a fine goal in mind. They've worked diligently, but their enthusiasm has been largely untransferable and untranslatable into

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[47]"Why the Restoration of the Auditorium Should Concern You," Chicago: Auditorium Theatre Council.

[48]Ibid. [49]Ibid.

[50]Mr. Jacobi is the Assistant Dean of Journalism at Northwestern University; News assignment editor and theatre-music reporter for the National Broadcasting Company, Central Division, Chicago; Chicago theatre critic for the Christian Science Monitor; music correspondent for the New York Times; and opera commentator for radio station WFMQ, Chicago.

needed funds because no specific program has been outlined to detail what might be done with the Auditorium once it is reopened.

To preserve an architectural monument may appeal to some people, but not to enough. The public must know what the Auditorium can do and see action toward program fulfillment.

. . . . . .

It is not enough to splinter further the meager fare that now goes into the Arie Crown and the Civic Opera House. The first of these theatres has major deficiencies to be sure, and the Civic has its faults. But for money to be spent on a third equally large theatre, the Auditorium ladies and gentlemen must come up with a sufficient plan. Occasional performances, mixed with conventions and sales meetings, would not be worth the investment, even the investment to date of somewhere near $800,000. It would not be worthy of the place.

A program added to an architectural masterpiece--now that's a different story and would attract the fund-raiser. To scaffolding and fund-raising the Auditorium Theatre Council right now should add an artistic director and planner, someone with the courage and sagacity of a Tyrone Guthrie to work on content within the Auditorium walls.

Chicago needs this marvel of a theatre; it will be to our continued and everlasting shame if we fail to undo the negligence of several decades, if we once again allow this towering home for the arts to decay or lie fallow. But the money would more likely be made available and the support more likely at hand if--between now and a potential December opening--a full program of professional artistic activity could be realized.

. . . . . .

A suggested procedure toward a December opening would 1) have the Auditorium Council name an artistic director; 2) have that director begin to set up a program, and 3) get Chicagoans emphatically committed to providing additional funds.[51]

Jacobi is the one critic to give some helpful suggestions, yet there is no indication that these suggestions have been heeded; and now, almost a year later, the Auditorium remains closed, with only about $400,000 having been raised during that year.[52]

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[51]Peter P. Jacobi, "The Awakening Auditorium," Chicago Magazine, Spring, 1965, p. 38.

[52]This figure is fairly impressive, however, when considering that it took nearly five years to raise the first $1,000,000.

On October 24, 1965, the Auditorium Theatre was opened to celebrate a memorial service for the late Adlai E. Stevenson. [Figure 30] The fact that the restoration work was not completed made little difference since what work remained was essentially on the dressing rooms, electrical equipment, and machinery. Since the permanent seats in the parquet had not yet been replaced, temporary folding chairs were used.[53] There was a full house of 4,200 persons for a program including United Nations Delegate Arthur W. Goldberg, who gave a "reminiscences" speech; actor Fredric March and his wife actress Florence Eldridge who read Stevenson quotations; Gwendolyn Brooks who read her new poem "Adlai Stevenson of Illinois"; and a videotape of Stevenson's last interview by the B.B.C.[54] Since the majority of the program was speeches, the acoustics could not be adequately tested. Unfortunately, Grace Bumbry, an operatic contralto whose voice would have been a perfect test for the acoustics, was ill and couldn't sing. The remaining musical group on the program, the Paulist Choir, came through very well.[55]

On October 27, 1965, Mrs. Spachner reported that only $600,000 was necessary to complete the restoration work.[56] The theatre, however, did not achieve the hoped for December, 1965, reopening, and on the 22nd of that month the Council announced that they hoped for a single fund raising performance in the spring of

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[53]Variety, October 5, 1965.

[54]William Kling, Chicago Tribune, October 25, 1965, p. 1

[55]Donal J. Henahan, Chicago Daily News, October 25, 1965, p. 29

[56]Letter from Mrs. John V. Spachner, (Chairman, Auditorium Theatre Council), The Chicago Tribune, October 27, 1965.

Fig. 25.--Photograph of the restored house for the Stevenson Memorial Program, October 24, 1965.

1966, and then after further remodeling, a September, 1966, opening. In order to open by February 1, 1966, however, at least $300,000 still had to be raised and an additional $164,000 would be needed to realize a full September reopening.[57]

When this writer visited the Auditorium in early April, 1966, the only things remaining to be completed were the dressing room areas, some air-conditioning work in the lobby, the replacement of some decorative plaster in the lobby, and general clean-up work. Mr. Hartnack gave some rather disheartening news during this visit. Commonwealth Edison Company of Chicago, who supply the electric power to the building, reported that they could no longer supply the D.C. current necessary to operate the light board on stage. However, someone, somewhere, found a rectifier to change the incoming A.C. current to D.C. to operate the board, so it is still very usable; and, since almost the entire theatre operates on D.C., this rectifier has saved the Council a great deal of money. However, two other portions of the stage area were not so fortunate. The reducing curtain and the magnificent trap system are not at present to be restored, since during the operating years of the Auditorium, someone had damaged the hydraulic system providing their power to such an extent that major repairs are necessary to put it back into operating condition. It is hoped, though, that at some time in the future these areas can be repaired.[58] One story that Mr. Hartnack told was quite interesting. The light bulbs in the hall were replaced, and when they were turned on, the paint job looked awful. Finally it was discovered

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[57]The Chicago Tribune, December 22, 1965.

[58]Hartnack.

that the paint only looked good under the original carbon filament lamps. Fortunately there is still one company in the United States that makes this type of lamp. When asked what would happen if this lone supplier went out of business, Mr. Hartnack replied that as long as the Auditorium remained in operation, the supplier would never go bankrupt. (The theatre and lobbies use more than 5,000 of these carbon filament lamps.)

At the time of this writer's visit, no spring concert had yet been held and only $1,435,000 had been raised out of the needed $1,794,000.[59] There are no signs at present indicating that the predicted spring concert will be held, or that the rest of the money will be forthcoming in the near future.

The restoration has gone too far now to be halted. Consequently, it seems only a matter of time before the remaining funds can be raised and the Auditorium can be put back in operation. The latest figures show that $352,000 still is needed to meet the goal, and, according to Mrs. Spachner, the entire amount must be in hand before an opening date can be announced. If the needed cash is acquired quickly, the theatre could open within about three months.[60] A great many Chicagoans are looking forward to that day, whenever it may be.

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[59]"Auditorium Theatre Fact Sheet" (Updated, 1966).

[60]The Chicago Sunday Tribune, May 1, 1966, p. 25.

CONCLUSION

Taking a final overview of the Auditorium Theatre it can be seen that this structure has had a long, though sporadic, and at times glorious existence. The key word in the construction was "speed". From the time the original idea was presented by Ferd Peck in May, 1886, it was only a matter of some three and a half years until the building was completed and opened to the public. A quick glance at the important dates during this time bears out this statement:

Subscribers' Meeting	December 4, 1886
Incorporated	December 8, 1886
First Directors' Meeting	December 11, 1886
Adler and Sullivan appointed Architects	December 22, 1886
Land secured	January 11, 1887
Excavation begun	January 24, 1887
Borings begun	February 24, 1887
completed	April 28, 1887
Construction begun	June 1, 1887
Cornerstone laid	October 6, 1887
Republican National Convention	June 19, 1888
Copestone laying	October 2, 1889
Dedication	December 9, 1889

The major credit for the success of the Auditorium, however, was laid to the tremendous public spirit displayed by Chicagoans at that time. This spirit was evidently more prevalent in Chicago than in other large cities at the time.[1]

The reason for the financial failure of the Auditorium is only

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[1] Deadwood Pioneer (Deadwood, South Dakota), December 14, 1889, [cited in] "Auditorium Dedication Volume."

speculation. Probably the Theatre was just too large an enterprise to be self-supporting, and even the added income of the Hotel and Office Building was not enough to offset the losses. Once the tax payments and such fell behind, it was more than likely impossible to make them up while still paying the succeeding year's bills. Regardless, even when the Auditorium closed in 1929 and then again in 1941, that great Chicago public spirit was still in evidence. The clamor was great enough to warrant the reopening of the theatre. In 1941 the closing was not strictly the fault of the people. They devised many ingenious methods to keep it in operation, but all of them were impractical for one reason or another.

It is interesting to note that the demise of the Auditorium seems to correspond directly to the demise of theatre in general throughout the United States. This, then, could be one of the major problems with the restoration of the theatre; it is being attempted at a time when theatre attendance in the United States is on a downswing.[2] It is difficult, consequently, to get money for a project for which there may not be very much interest in the majority of Chicagoans; it is difficult to say definitely. However, it is very obvious that the Council is having a great deal of difficulty raising the funds for the restoration. Whether this difficulty is caused by lack of interest on the part of donors as the Council claims, or whether it is caused more by the not altogether effective money raising techniques employed by the Council as other critics claim, we may never know for sure; there are strong arguments on both sides.[2]

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[2]Walter Kerr, How Not to Write a Play (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1965), pp. 2-3.

The research covered in this thesis is by no means all that can be written about the Auditorium. In fact, there should be some questions raised from the facts compiled here which will lead other researchers to delve deeper into certain aspects of the theatre's history. Possible questions are: (1) what events took place during the early 1900's to cause the first attempt to raze the Auditorium in 1923, or (2) what were the principal failures in the final restoration attempt, or (3) what were the social factors evident in Chicago which would have initiated the idea for the construction of the Auditorium? As far as this thesis is concerned, however, it has covered to some degree the entire history of the Chicago Auditorium Theatre from its inception to the present.

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APPENDIX

Inscriptions over the fireplaces in the inglenooks of the main lobby of the Auditorium Theatre:

> I wish that this great building may continue to be to all your population that which it should be: opening its doors, from night to night, calling your people away from cares of business to those enjoyments and entertainments which develop the souls of men and inspire those whose lives are heavy with daily toil; and in this magnificent and enchanted presence lift them for a time out of dull things into those higher things where men shall live.
>
> Benj. Harrison
>
> President of the United States
> December 9, 1889

> I have stood in every great hall and sat in all the famous theatres and opera houses in the world; but in its unrivaled acoustics both for oratory and music and its unequaled capacity to comfortably accomodate vast audiences, and in the harmony and taste of its ornamentation, this Auditorium of Chicago is without a rival or a peer.
>
> Chauncey Depew
>
> President of the New York Central Railroad
> June 5, 1890

List of stockholders of the Chicago Auditorium Association

February 1, 1889:

George E. Adams
J. McGregor Adams
J. Q. Adams
Adler & Sullivan
S. W. Allerton
John Angus
A. J. Averell
Ed. E. Ayer
A. C. Bartlett
Perkins Bass
George F. Bissell
John C. Black
T. B. Blackstone
James U. Borden
H. Botsford
George P. Braun
Edward L. Brewster
John Buehler
W. H. Burke, Paris, France
W. H. Burnet
A. Byram
R. R. Cable
John B. Carson
Carson, Pirie, Scott & Co.
Eugene Cary
George W. Champlin
C. C. Cheney, Trustee
Chicago City Railway Co.
Jonathan Clark
A. L. Coe
W. H. Colvin
Austin Corbin, New York
Charles Councelman
Alfred Cowles
R. T. Crane
Henry Crawford
D. F. Crilly
Andrew Cummings
C. R. Cummings
Dauchy & Co.
Wirt Dexter
J. W. Doane
John C. Dore
John B. Drake
E. S. Dreyer & Co.
J. H. Dunham
Miss M. V. Dunham
George L. Dunlap
J. H. Dwight
William L. Elkins
N. K. Fairbank
P. Farrell
C. B. Farwell
Henry Field
Marshall Field
Frederick Fischer
A. J. Fisher
L. G. Fisher
L. E. Fitts
L. C. Paine Freer
William A. Fuller
Charles W. Fullerton
L. J. Gage
H. H. Getty
William A. Giles
George A. Gindele
J. J. Glessner
James B. Goodman
Daniel Goodwin
F. S. Gorton
A. W. Green
M. T. Greene
John B. Grommes
George W. Hale
William E. Hale
P. C. Hanford
George F. Harding
Carter H. Harrison
Mrs. E. D. Hawes
Albert Hayden
F. H. Head
C. M. Henderson
William G. Hibbard
Higgins & Furber
D. K. Hill
Thomas E. Hill
F. E. Hinckley
W. B. Howard
Charles L. Hutchinson
A. L. Ide & Son, Springfield, Ill.
Illinois Terra Cotta Lumber Co.
E. H. Irwin
John D. Jennings
E. H. Johnson, New York
N. S. Jones
Edson Keith
O. R. Keith
William D. Kerfoot

stockholders (cont.)

George F. Kimball
S. D. Kimbark
Charles D. Kimball
William Kirkwood
Knisely & Miller
H. H. Kohlsaat
George H. Laflin
Robert Law
Edward F. Lawrence
T. J. Lefens
E. J. Lehmann
L. Z. Leiter
John T. Lester
Adolph Loeb
B. Loewenthal
Frank G. Logan
John Mason Loomis
Franklin MacVeagh & Co.
McAvoy Brewing Co.
Estate of C. H. McCormick
Andrew McNally
Charles A. Mair
Mandel Bros.
J. Medill
N. C. Miller, New York
John J. Mitchell
W. H. Mitchell
John Mohr & Son
A. A. Munger
John Newell
George G. Newbury
Samuel M. Nickerson
William Penn Nixon
J. W. Oakley
Orr & Lockett
E. F. Osborne & Co.
J. E. Otis
William R. Page
Leroy Payne
Annah B. Peck
Clarence I. Peck
Ferd W. Peck
Mary K. Peck
Walter L. Peck
Eugene S. Pike
H. H. Porter
Potts & Esch
Ernst Prussing
N. B. Ream
David Reed
Alex H. Revell
Henry C. Rew
Frank Roosevelt, New York
Paul Rothbarth
H. A. Rust
Estate of J. O. Rutter
Estate of Martin Ryerson
Martin A. Ryerson
H. E. Sargent
J. Young Scammon, Trustee
Schlesinger & Mayer
Henry Schuttler
Joseph Sears
Conrad Seipp
William C. Seipp
Selz, Schwab & Co.
G. B. Shaw
John G. Shortall
Lazarus Silverman
E. T. Singer
H. M. Singer
The Snead & Co. Iron Works
William Sooy Smith
Sprague, Warner & Co.
M. C. Stearns
T. D. Stimson
O. J. Stough
Robert Strahorn
J. H. Swan
H. C. Taylor
The Tobey Furniture
Louisa Ullrich
James Van Inwagen
Wirt D. Walker
John R. Walsh
Louis Wampold
Robert Warren
P. B. Weare
M. D. Wells & Co.
A. W. Wheeler
P. A. B. Widener
John Wilkinson
Williams & Thompson
C. L. Willoughby
F. H. Winston
Henry R. Worthington
Charles T. Yerkes
Otto Young
Young & Farrel[1]

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[1]The Auditorium Theatre.

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY OF CHICAGO

RICHARD J. DALEY
MAYOR

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the restoration of the world famous Chicago Auditorium has officially commenced; and

WHEREAS, the Auditorium will be restored to the original architectural beauty and useability of its opening in 1889; and

WHEREAS, the United States is presently in the middle of a great renaissance in music, dance and the theater, restoring the Auditorium will give Chicago a cultural facility of the first magnitude:

NOW, THEREFORE, I, Richard J. Daley, Mayor of the City of Chicago, do hereby proclaim the month of April, 1964, to be AUDITORIUM RESTORATION MONTH IN CHICAGO and urge that all members of the community give full support to this worthy and important project.

Dated this 31st day of March, A. D., 1964.

Mayor

Figure 32

Advisory Committee

Figure 32.

FOR THE RESTORATION

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Boris Blai
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Director, The Metropolitan Museum of Art

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Eero Saarinen and Associates

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Opportunities for Tributes and Dedications

You have a rare opportunity to establish a lasting tribute or dedication through the restoration of the world famous Chicago Auditorium.

A living person or family name, a company or institution, may be honored within the theater by dedicating any one of its distinguished components as a mark of remembrance. Or, a loved one no longer with us can be memorialized in a meaningful and enduring manner.

Your name or the name you select for a tribute or dedication will be permanently recorded in the lobby of the Auditorium with an individual plaque.

A plaque will also be attached to the dedication item selected.

Gift Schedule

SEATS

According to location... $1,500. / 1,250. / 1,000.

STAIRWAYS..10,000 to 15,000.

BOXES.....10,000 to 35,000.

DRESSING ROOMS @ 5,000.

MUSICIANS' ROOM. 20,000.

MAIN LOBBY ..... 350,000.

STAGE ..... 250,000.

COSTUME ROOM ... 30,000.

MOSAICS ..... 5,000.

PROSCENIUM ..... 200,000.

ORCHESTRA PIT .....$150,000.

STAGE LIGHT CONTROLS 50,000.

THEATER LIGHTING .... 75,000.

PROJECTION BOOTH .... 25,000.

MAIN ENTRANCE VESTIBULE ..... 100,000.

WABASH AVENUE ENTRANCE ..... 75,000.

FOYERS .....25,000 to 50,000.

BOX OFFICE EQUIPMENT 12,500.

MAIN HALLWAYS (each). 25,000.

PROPERTIES ..... 150,000.

STAGE ELEVATORS ..... 175,000.

AIR CONDITIONING ..... 150,000.

BALLET REHEARSAL HALL .....$ 40,000.

CEILING RESTORATION. 85,000.

STAGE FLOOR ..... 25,000.

FIREPLACES ..... 15,000.

LOUNGES ..... 75,000.

SHOP EQUIPMENT. 4,000 to 50,000.

MARBLE STAIRS ..... 10,000.

PIANO ..... 7,500.

ORGAN ..... 150,000.

Address your inquiries to:
The Auditorium Theater Council
Mrs. John V. Spachner, Chairman
310 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago 3, Illinois WA 2-2110

Figure 33

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY OF CHICAGO

RICHARD J. DALEY
MAYOR

Fellow Chicagoans:

A theatre, acclaimed as the greatest hall for the performing arts in the world, lies dark in our city.

For more than half a century, the Auditorium Theatre echoed with the sounds and glowed with the brilliance of the world's leading singers, musicians, actors, statesmen, orators, and evangelists. Chaliapin, Caruso, Melba, Mary Garden, Helen Terry, Sara Bernhardt, George M. Cohan, Theodore Roosevelt, and Dwight L. Moody are some of the names emblazoned on the Auditorium Theatre programs.

This theatre's exceptional versatility and diversified service to the community lent vitality and excitement to Chicago. But when the depression came, its lights dimmed and its stage was empty. The hundreds of thousands of Chicagoans who each year had found enjoyment and beauty in the Auditorium came no more.

But now there are new sounds in the Auditorium - the sounds of construction. Men are at work restoring what is recognized as one of the great architectural accomplishments of the twentieth century.

To duplicate this hall today would cost $20,000,000, but for only $3,000,000 the sons and grandsons of the foresighted Chicagoans who built the Auditorium can recreate an incomparable cultural center, and reclaim its tradition and magnificence.

Here is a project of consequence to everyone, to those who want the meaning and beauty of great architectural achievement to survive and endure and to those who wish to see and hear the performing arts in an incomparable setting.

As a great heritage entrusted to all Chicagoans by their forefathers, the Auditorium Theatre represents an obligation and an opportunity. I know the citizens of this great city will respond to the opportunity and shoulder the obligation. I urge you to support the Auditorium Theatre Council in this worthy effort.

Sincerely,

Richard J. Daley

Mayor

Figure 34