

## **Auditorium Building Self-Guided Tour**

### **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

The Auditorium Building opened in 1889. The technologies of the time were horse drawn cars, railroads, gas lamps, and telegraphs. Telephones, wireless radio, and motion pictures were still in the developmental stage. Electric lights were somewhat exotic due to the challenges of transmitting electricity. The architectural team of Adler and Sullivan stretched the technological limits of the time by creating the Auditorium Building, the tallest, largest and heaviest building of the time, and one of the first with electric lighting, an air conditioning system, and fireproofing throughout the entire structure.

### **THE IDEA**

The Auditorium Building was the idea of Ferdinand Peck. Peck was a Chicago businessman and heir to a family fortune. Among other initiatives, he founded the Illinois Humane Society to protect children from abuse. Peck believed art could and should unite all people, whether they were poor, working class or wealthy. Peck envisioned a multi-use building that would include a theatre of excellent quality in order to bring art, particularly opera, to Chicago and welcome all people. He wanted the building to include a hotel and office space as revenue generators to cover the theatre's inevitable operating losses – tickets were often priced too low to fund a production. Peck organized a syndicate of businessmen to finance the project, and hired the architectural firm of Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan to create it.

### **THE ARCHITECTS, ADLER AND SULLIVAN**

Adler and Sullivan were sought out because of Dankmar Adler's reputation as an expert in acoustical engineering. Adler received training as a draftsman when he was a soldier in the Civil War, and later he developed skills by apprenticing with other architects. Louis Sullivan was also known for his outstanding technical and stylistic achievements. Sullivan entered the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at the age of sixteen, dropped out after one year of study, and started learning on the job as an employee of architecture firms. In 1880 Dankmar Adler hired Louis Sullivan. By 1883, he made Sullivan his full partner in the company. Together they worked on more than 170 buildings, but the Auditorium Building stands out as a brilliant example of their talents and innovations. Adler was 42 and Sullivan was 30 when they began the project in 1886. Frank Lloyd Wright was barely out of his teens when he became their apprentice draftsman. In later years, Wright acknowledged Adler and Sullivan as his great teachers and influencers, particularly taking to heart Sullivan's belief that "form ever follows function."

## **EXTERIOR**

Louis Sullivan designed an exterior with massive stone walls and semi-circular arches, an example of the Romanesque Revival style. Compared to the lavish detailing of the building's interior, the exterior is relatively unadorned.

The bottom three floors of the building are made of rough-faced granite blocks, almost resembling boulders with their irregular surface. Entryways and windows are topped with large arches. On the south side of the building there is a sidewalk arcade which was not in the original structure. In 1952, the widening of Congress Parkway brought the roadway right to the edge of the building. The former bar of the theater had to be destroyed and carved out to create the pedestrian walkway. The bar area was reported to have been absolutely beautiful with intricate woodwork and ornamentation throughout.

The upper portion of the building is made of a lighter color Indiana Limestone cut into smooth *ashlar* [*uniformly cut, assembled in rows*] blocks. There are smaller arched windows on a higher floor, with even smaller arched windows above that. The multi-use building had three main divisions: the 4,200 seat Auditorium Theatre; a 400 room hotel on the Michigan Avenue side; and 136 offices on the Wabash side, including a seventeen story office tower. Adler and Sullivan, as well as Frank Lloyd Wright, had their offices at the top of the tower.

## **FOUNDATION**

The soil beneath the building is soft blue clay to a depth of 100 feet. Adler's challenge was to distribute the weight of the building so it would not sink in the unstable clay. His solution was a foundation that has been described as a wedding cake: Layers of crisscrossed timber float on top of each other and are kept moist, even today, 125 years later, by an aqueduct that flows from Lake Michigan. On top of this, Adler sank supporting pylons so that the foundation would settle gradually as the weight of the building spread on top of it.

The new 32 story Wabash building had to be built inside a walled tub so it would not puncture Adler's foundational system and cause the wooden beams to dry up. Every day, a Roosevelt University engineer checks water levels beneath the Auditorium Building to ensure that system is intact.

## **LOBBY**

Today this area is the main entrance lobby for Roosevelt University. In the nineteenth century, the main entrance to the Auditorium building on Michigan Avenue led into the spacious and lavishly decorated Hotel Lobby. This area was designed to receive the hotel's guests. Between the two main doors there originally stood a small area enclosed by a gilt iron railing. This area was attended by a livery man who furnished the guests of the hotel with carriages. To the south of the doors stood the Union Ticket Office; to the north, stood the news and cigar stand. In front of the main entrance was the hotel registration desk. The desk was made of Mexican onyx and topped with oak. The north half of the desk had oak partition windows. In the center of the partition was an opening where the hotel guests paid their bills.

*Points of Interest:*

- Mosaic floors, oak carvings, terra cotta ornamentation, intricate ceilings. The designs include geometric shapes and the organic imagery that are signatures of Sullivan's style. His designs included thistles, wildflowers, vines, and interlacing patterns that are reminiscent of Celtic art.
- Stained glass display in northwest part of lobby: The piece on the right is from the vaulted ceiling in the former Dining Hall. The piece on the left is from a sky light in the Auditorium Theater.
- A model of the Auditorium Building and the new Wabash Building is in the center of the lobby.

## **STAINED GLASS**

The stained glass pieces throughout the building were designed by Louis Sullivan and created by George Louis Healy and Louis Julian Millet. Healy and Millet met while attending L'École des Beaux-Arts in Paris. After completing their courses in architecture and decoration, they moved to Chicago and began creating frescos, stained glass, glass mosaics and other decorations for some of the city's most architecturally significant buildings.

In 1889, Healy and Millet began work on the series of stained glass windows, following Sullivan's designs. The windows illuminate the Auditorium's interiors with a richly colored, faceted light that enhanced Sullivan's ornate stenciling, plasterwork and carved wood. The varieties of stained glass in the Auditorium Building include opalescent glass, antique glass, and cut jewels, and can be seen in skylights, double-hung windows and decorative lunette windows.

## **GRAND STAIRCASE**

This stairway retains the original cast iron stair treads and **balustrades** [*posts that support a railing*]. As of October 2011, the left side of the staircase has been restored to its original condition. The right side is still under a coat of paint.

The Grand Staircase was the most impressive feature of the hotel portion of the building. The staircase swept into the lobby under a 33-foot wide elliptical arch. To eliminate the need for columns in this wide span, Adler was required to design a **trussed girder** [*supported beam*] to carry the weight above the staircase. The stairs and landings were also illuminated by incandescent bulbs arranged in decorative plaster panels.

The Grand Staircase led to the reception room on the second floor. The staircase turned to the north from the Reception Room and continued to the private rooms of guests on the third floor. A guard was stationed at the foot of the continuing staircase to prevent visitors from exploring the suites above.

*Points of interest:*

- The landing between the second and third floors has a beautiful stained glass ceiling and windows. The stained glass throughout the staircase is now back-lit for display purposes.

- The underside of the staircase has terra cotta detailing.

### **FAINMAN LOUNGE/Loggia**

Located on the second floor, Fainman Lounge serves primarily as a student lounge as well as an entrance to various university administration offices at the north end. The lounge is named for Oscar, Martin and Walter Fainman. The Fainman family have been dynamic members of the Chicago business community for many years, and were early supporters of Roosevelt.

This room was originally used as the Reception Room for the Auditorium Hotel. Visitors and hotel guests could reach this room from the Grand Staircase, which entered on the west side of the room. This room was the same length as the **loggia** [*a long gallery that is open to the air on one side*] seen on the Michigan Avenue façade. The loggia offered a dazzling, unobstructed view of Lake Michigan and Grant Park, then known as Lake Park. Originally the room opened directly to the outside, but early in the building's history, it was enclosed by sash windows and **transoms** [*a window placed high on a wall, usually above a door or other window*] to block the wind and cold in winter, and to allow the lake breeze to cool the building in warmer months.

The room was richly furnished with comfortable chairs and Turkish rugs. It was reported in a newspaper in 1890 that the Reception Room had an "atmosphere of home." A marble and oak fireplace was located at the northwest end of this room. The fireplace was flanked on either side by two stained glass, double-hung windows. Also on the northwest end was a lavish white and burgundy **portiere** [*curtains or tapestry hung across a doorway*] decorated with white silk cord and tassels. One side of the portiere was artfully tied back to reveal the entrance to hotel rooms located in the northeast corner of the building. The south side of the reception room had two oak framed doors which led to the ladies' parlor, now known as the Sullivan Lounge. Congress Lounge, the large room to the south of Fainman Lounge, now displays portraits of Roosevelt University presidents. On the southwest side of the room, there is a portrait and short biography of Edward J. Sparling, founder of Roosevelt University. It was Sparling's decision to acquire and renovate the Auditorium Building.

#### *Points of interest:*

- Mosaic floors in the loggia.
- Ornamentation of walls and ceilings.

**Directions to Library: Take elevators to 10<sup>th</sup> floor.**

### **LIBRARY/Dining Hall**

Roosevelt University's Murray-Green Library was named after two labor leaders. William Green led the American Federation of Labor (AFL) and Philip Murray headed the Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO). These organizations merged in 1955 to form the AFL-CIO.

This grand space was originally the dining hall for the hotel. The wood paneled entrance is part of the original design. The stained glass windows you can see today were once painted over or boarded up: In 1941, the City of Chicago took over the Auditorium Building and Theatre to use as a World War II Servicemen's Center. Between 1942 and 1945, thousands of servicemen were housed in the building, some sleeping on the floors and stairwells. They painted the stained glass black to block out light.

Back when the building operated as a hotel, an elevator at the south end of the room brought guests up from Lobby or hotel rooms. The elevators opened north into a vestibule illuminated by stained glass windows along the staircase. Guests then turned east to the main hall, which was covered by a monumental barrel vaulted ceiling with stained glass skylights. Diners could look out onto Lake Michigan through the lunette windows along the entire length of the east wall. Mahogany was used throughout: in the panels that line the room; in piers and columns that marked the entrance to the two wings; in the fretwork doors on the west side that concealed the kitchen. Behind the doors, a small bridge allowed staff to cross the gap between the dining room and the kitchen.

*Points of interest:*

- The barrel vaulted ceiling. Originally the ceiling was made of stained glass. When Roosevelt University acquired the building, most of the glass was broken or missing.
- Murals on the North and South Side of the Dining Room: The paintings represent hunting and fishing and were painted by the artist Albert Fleury who also painted the murals in the Auditorium Theatre and in Ganz Hall (7<sup>th</sup> floor).
- The Reading Room to the South: The **capital** [*top*] of each column has a unique design.
- The view of Grant Park, Buckingham Fountain, and Lake Michigan.

**Directions to Ganz Hall: Take stairs to 7<sup>th</sup> floor, follow signs.**

**GANZ HALL/ Banquet Hall**

One of the grandest interior spaces, the former Banquet Hall, was in fact one of the last spaces built, added after the construction of the rest of the building was almost complete. To the consternation of Adler, the hotel operator insisted that a large formal banquet hall was needed. Adler came up with another special structural support system. The Banquet Hall was encased in a system of long-span iron **trusses** [*a support structure composed of one or more smaller triangular support units*] which rested on load-bearing masonry walls over the Auditorium Theater below.

A dedicated elevator on Congress Street (now known as Congress Parkway) brought patrons to the seventh floor Banquet Hall. Originally, the paneled antechamber was divided into three sections marked by two cross beams. On the left, three sets of double doors enclosed the men's smoking room. On the right, two fretwork columns marked the entry to the ladies' parlor. Each parlor was equipped with toilet rooms, closets and separate entrances to the main hall.

The Banquet Hall itself was two stories high with a musician's gallery at the north end of the room (the gallery railing was later moved back and now is nearly flat against the north wall). Richly grained tiger

birch columns (which were for decoration, not support) and paneling lined the room. Elaborate plasterwork arches and ceiling beams added to the luxurious feeling and supported 7' cast-iron pendant *electroliers* [a chandelier with electric lights]. Stained glass windows were placed in each of the goldleafed arches as well as in the lunettes at the south end of the room and in the musicians' gallery. Oil paintings by Albert Fleury were soon added below many of the lunettes.

In the late 1950s the room was dedicated in honor of Dr. Rudolph Ganz, president emeritus of the University's Chicago Musical College, now the Chicago College of Performing arts, and is maintained today as a recital hall.

*Points of interest:*

- **Electroliers:** These ornate lights are reproductions modeled on photographs of the originals, as all the originals were damaged or removed.
- **Wooden Columns:** Each of the column capitals has a unique design, except for the two most northern positioned ones. These are plaster reproductions of another capital in the room and were added when the musicians' gallery was eliminated which exposed columns with no capitals.
- **Renovated Wood Paneling:** The paneling on the right hand side of the room as soon as you enter Ganz Hall has been fully restored. Notice the striping in the wood.

**Directions to return to the lobby: Turn left towards Michigan Avenue. Take elevators to 1<sup>st</sup> floor.**

### **RESTORATION AND NEW USES**

The Auditorium Building flourished until the 1930s. The opening of the Chicago Opera in 1929, combined with the Great Depression, led to the Auditorium Building's years of disuse, abuse and decline. One reason the building survived these bleak years is because of the great cost of dismantling such a large structure – it was too expensive to destroy.

The building was acquired by Roosevelt College, now Roosevelt University, in 1947 in exchange for one dollar and payment of back taxes. Students and faculty started cleaning the building themselves so they could hold classes. Over the decades, professional restoration efforts have sought to return these featured rooms, as well as other areas of the building, to a condition that respects the brilliant creations of Adler and Sullivan.

The Auditorium Building was named a National Historic Landmark by the U.S. Department of the Interior in 1975 and a Chicago Landmark by the Chicago City Council in 1976.

**Thank you for visiting the Auditorium Building!**