

Century & Consumers Buildings

202 & 220 S. State Street, Chicago



The Century and Consumers Buildings, 202 S. State Street & 220 S. State Street. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

Overview

Preservation Chicago has long been concerned about the deferred maintenance, vacancy and deteriorating condition of the Century and Consumers Buildings, fronting State Street, Adams Street and Quincy Court, in the heart of the Chicago Loop and Central Business District. These two early 20th-century skyscraper structures were included as a Chicago 7 Most Endangered in 2011 and in 2013. And now for a third time in 2022, both have again been selected due to a significant threat of demolition.

Preservation Chicago has learned that a \$52 million expenditure has been earmarked in the Federal Infrastructure Appropriations Bill, currently before Congress, specifically for the demolition of the Century and Consumers Buildings. It appears that the decades-long advocacy efforts to save these significant buildings is reaching a critical stage.

The Century Building

Address: **202 S. State Street**
Architects: **Holabird and Roche**
Date: **1915**

The Consumers Building

Address: **220 S. State Street**
Architects: **Jenney, Mundie & Jensen**
Date: **1913**

Neighborhood: **Loop**
Style: **Early Chicago School Skyscrapers**



The Century and Consumers Buildings, 202 S. State Street & 220 S. State Street. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

These two remarkable buildings, the 16-story Century Building by Holabird & Roche (1915) and the 22-story Consumers Building by Jenney, Mundie & Jensen (1913), were once principally occupied by small businesses, attorney offices and showrooms. Due to the close proximity of the courthouse and courtrooms, the Federal Government and the General Services Administration (GSA), exercised its power of eminent domain in 2005-2007, to take control of these State Street buildings based on increased security concerns following the events of September 11, 2001. Since that acquisition by the GSA, the buildings have been stable but slowly deteriorating due to deferred maintenance and prolonged vacancy.

Multiple adaptive reuse plans for the Century and Consumers Buildings have been proposed and later blocked due to the proximity to the Chicago Federal Center. The Dirksen Federal Courthouse, part of the larger Federal Center complex, fronting Dearborn Street on the west, is located across a rear courtyard and alley from these historic buildings. The Quincy Court entry to the Dirksen Building was originally envisioned as a principal pedestrian entrance to the courthouse structure from State Street by architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe.

Originally both the Century and Consumers Buildings, along with parcels to the south extending to Jackson Boulevard along State Street, were all to be occupied by Federal Government offices as part of an expansion of their Loop campus. That proposal would have included the Century and Consumers Buildings, along with two smaller buildings located at 212 and 214 S. State Street. 214 S. State was known as The Consumers Annex and location of Roberto's storefront. It was remodeled by Jenney Mundie & Jensen in the 1920s. Originally it was designed by architect, C.M. Palmer in 1883, for Gunther's Confectionary store, and later Martin Jewelers and Roberto's Men's Store with a remodeled Art Deco storefront by Isadore E. Alexander, c.1949. Also included in those Federal Center expansion plans were the Art Moderne Benson & Rixon Store Building by Alfred Alschuler in 1937 at 230 S. State

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The Century Building, 1915, Holabird and Roche, 202 S. State Street. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

and the modernist Bond's Clothing Store by Friedman, Alschuler & Sincere, with Morris Lapidus, in 1949 at 240 S. State, also known as 10 W. Jackson Boulevard. A small two-story building included on this block is the heavily-remodeled and truncated E.L. Brand Building by Adler & Sullivan from 1883 at 12-18 W. Jackson Boulevard.

These seven properties on the block-long parcel fronting State Street, one of Chicago's most famous and notable thoroughfares, were acquired by the GSA to be used exclusively for Federal Government offices. They were long-considered to be part of a larger revisioning and vast expansion of the Federal Center complex. At one time, the GSA proposed a new large office building, which was to be sheathed in glass to bridge and connect the Century and Consumers Buildings. This proposal would have further increased the larger and more desired floor plates and square footages for Federal offices. That proposal was welcomed by many in the architectural community, as it engaged and bridged the two historic skyscrapers in a sensitive manner, reinvested in the restoration, and repurposed these two seminal buildings. The plans also engaged The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Restoration, which is a series of established guidelines, principles and best practices for the reuse of historic buildings and part of a Federal program.

In the past decade, it was determined that the expansion of the offices into all of these buildings was unnecessary with federal funding largely diminished for this larger and broader vision. Only the Benson-Rixon Building, with its broad horizontal banding and curvilinear corner, along with the former Bond's Store, were to be converted into governmental offices. The remaining buildings along State Street, between Adams and Quincy Court, were to be planned to be reused at some point in the future. Discussions held at the Federal Center in about 2009-2010, which included Preservation Chicago and our other partner organizations, also considered demolition of one or both of the tall Chicago School buildings as a possibility. The conversation around demolition of these early skyscrapers was

considered unbelievable and incomprehensible at the time by members of the architecture and preservation community, and this response was shared with GSA officials.

Security concerns and a reduction in required office space in the Loop appeared to have halted the GSA's initial plans for renovation and reuse. Then in 2017 after an extensive advocacy effort by Preservation Chicago, the City of Chicago issued a Request For Proposals for the adaptive reuse of the Century and Consumers Buildings. Preservation Chicago was delighted by the City of Chicago's selection of CA Ventures in partnership with Cedar Street Companies. Their \$141 million renovation proposal planned for a preservation-sensitive adaptive reuse of the four building cluster, with the two terra cotta office towers as residential apartments and the two adjacent low-rise buildings as State Street retail with a tower above. Despite a strong developer team submitting a solid adaptive reuse for a residential plan, it was halted by a federal judge citing security concerns due to the proximity of the rooftop deck and rear windows to the courthouse.



Consumers Building, 1913, Jenney, Mundie & Jensen, 220 S. State Street. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

Widely considered to be an impossible challenge to solve, Preservation Chicago redoubled its efforts to identify an adaptive reuse that could accommodate the rigorous courthouse security requirements. Eventually, we arrived at a highly unusual solution, a collaborative national archive center to be known as the “Chicago Collaborative Archive Center.”

At first, the notion of repurposing two tall, slender Chicago School skyscrapers into an archive center seemed unique and perhaps even improbable. In fact, this creative solution has many strengths and is very achievable. Recognizing the growing urgency to repurpose these buildings, Preservation Chicago has been working diligently over the past two years to build a strong coalition of critical stakeholders. There is now strong interest, support and enthusiasm for this adaptive reuse project. This coalition of partners has already engaged architects and engineers long before news broke of the \$52 million demolition congressional earmark in February 2022.

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History

Originally, these tall and elegant skyscraper buildings were part of a thriving and vibrant State Street Retail District. The 16-story Century Building at 202 S. State Street was designed by Holabird and Roche in 1915. The 22-story Consumers Building at 220 S. State Street and 1 W. Quincy Court was designed by Jenny, Mundie & Jensen in 1913.

The Century Building is historically unique for two important reasons. First, the distinct vertical expression of the building's exterior elevations demonstrate the transition from the Chicago School buildings of the late 19th century to the early decades of the 20th century. Emphasis of verticality is achieved with strong vertical bands and understated recessed spandrels. Second, the overall design of the façade ornament is a rare example of Neo-Manueline (inspired by the historic Portuguese style) influenced architecture in the Midwest. The proliferation of complex ornament around the building fenestration and openings, such as windows and doors, along with the uppermost floors of the building, features shields, knights in armor, along with botanical and other motifs, and contributes to the diversity of the architectural environment within the Chicago Loop.



The Century and Consumers Buildings, 202 S. State Street & 220 S. State Street. Photo Credit: Kaufmann & Fabry Co., State Street, 200-298 S. Folder 1177, Sheet 18, CPC_04_D_1177_018, Chicago - Photographic Images of Change, University of Illinois at Chicago. Library. Special Collections Department

This building is listed as a contributing structure to the Loop Retail Historic District on the National Register of Historic Places. It has been determined by a General Services Administration study that it may be eligible for an individual National Register listing according to a March 2006 Cultural Resources Survey. It also received an orange-rating in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey, published in 1996. An orange-rated building “possesses some architectural feature or historical association that made them potentially significant in the context of the surrounding community.” It would be a strong candidate for Chicago Landmark designation.

The history of The Century Building began when Buck & Rayner, a pioneering Chicago drug store firm later absorbed by Liggett Drug stores, commissioned the noted Chicago architectural firm Holabird & Roche in 1913 to design a modern commercial skyscraper building.



The Century Building, 1915, Holabird and Roche, 202 S. State Street. Photo Credit: Chicago Architectural Photographing Company, State Street, 200-298 S. Folder 1177, Sheet 21, CPC_04_D_1177_021, Chicago - Photographic Images of Change, University of Illinois at Chicago. Library. Special Collections Department

Completed in 1915, the Twentieth Century Building, as it was originally called, is an excellent example of a tall shops building. Its upper floors were occupied by a wide variety of tenants through the years including tailors, furriers, beauty shops, clothes shops, lawyers, brokers, and dentists, reinforcing the vibrancy of the commercial district within the Loop. The Twentieth Century Building's name was changed to the Century Building in 1917 after the newly named Century Trust and Savings Bank signed a 20-year lease for space in the building. In 1949, Home Federal Savings and Loan Association purchased the Century Building, resulting in alterations to the storefronts and lobby space. In about 1958, Home Federal Savings & Loan Bank acquired the Republic Building (1905-1961), by architects Holabird & Roche, also a building of great architectural merit and located directly across the street, on the southeast corner of State and Adams Street. The Republic Building was then demolished by Home Federal and replaced with a nondescript bank building, which opened in 1962, as the bank's new headquarters.

The iconic Consumers Building represents the last period of the large-scale Chicago School commissions, (also known as the Chicago Commercial Style), along with its neighbor, the Century Building. Typical of this commercial style, the 22-story building is constructed with a steel frame and clad in white architectural terra cotta made locally in Chicago, with a vertically-oriented, streamlined design highlighted by decorative ornament. The steel structure is supported with 38 caissons that took 200 men two months to drive into the ground. One week after the building permit was granted, a new Chicago building code limited the height of buildings to 200 feet. The Consumers Building is 291 feet tall.

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The Consumers Building, 1913, Jenney, Mundie & Jensen, 220 S. State Street, c. 1960. Photo credit: Chicago Architectural Photographing Company, State Street, 200-298 S. Folder 1177, Sheet 4, CPC_04_D_1177_004, Chicago - Photographic Images of Change, University of Illinois at Chicago. Library. Special Collections Department

Windows are present on all four sides of the building so that natural sunlight reaches all parts of the floor plates, which was an important feature in the early years of electricity and ventilation. An interior lightwell, which was typical of many large commercial buildings of the era, was eliminated from the design, as windows wrap all sides of the building. Floors 2, 3 and 4 feature the three-part Chicago windows, with a central fixed panel and two operable

double hung windows on each side. The remaining floors contain more typical paired double-hung windows, extending to the top of the building. The primary street facades on both State Street and Quincy Court are recognized for their vertical expression and their tripartite design, which consist of a defined base, shaft or middle section and capital or cornice.

The Consumers Building is separated into these defined sections at the 1st, 4th, 17th, and 20th stories by simple horizontal bands of terra cotta and topped with an ornamental fascia and cornice. The terra cotta spandrels are detailed with simple geometric shapes. In contrast, many of the public and semi-public interior spaces of the Consumers Building are highly ornamented and detailed. The revolving door and entrance to the building fronting State Street favors the far north side of the ground floor elevation and is asymmetrical, surrounded by bronze and granite surfaces.

Upon entering the building, the lobby is composed of Italian marble-clad walls and ceiling, all authentic to the original architect's vision and design. Bronze fixtures, finishes, and surfaces, including elaborate bronze elevator doors, are original features within the lobby. Several alterations have been made to the ground-floor facade of the building. The bronze canopy over the State Street entrance was removed along with the storefronts. These early storefronts were replaced with modern storefronts over time. The original roof that included a frieze band and cornice with lights, located at the very top of the building, was also modified.

Plans for the Consumers Building began when Jacob L. Kesner, part of Kesner Realty Trust, initially purchased two buildings on the site along with a ground-lease under the structures. Both buildings were then demolished in order for the skyscraper to be constructed. The State and Quincy corner site was ideal for retail and store frontage, as there was good light, and ventilation. Kesner went on



The Century Building, 1915, Holabird and Roche, 202 S. State Street. Photo Credit: Chicago Architectural Photographing Company, State Street, 200-298 S. Folder 1177, Sheet 21, CPC_04_D_1177_021, Chicago - Photographic Images of Change, University of Illinois at Chicago. Library. Special Collections Department



The Consumers Building, 1913, Jenney, Mundie & Jensen, 220 S. State Street. Photo credit: Ward Miller / Preservation Chicago

to purchase the adjacent building at 214 S. State Street to ensure that no other skyscraper would be built there and to forever protect his tall building's light and ventilation. That building was later remodeled by Jenney, Mundie & Jensen and called the Consumers Building Annex.

The Consumers Building secured three important tenants, the first was A. Weis & Co. for the Winter Garden, a formal restaurant located in the basement of 220 S. State, with much of the lavish interior ornament signifying a very desirable restaurant entity. The second was the Hilton Company, a men's clothing store from New York City, which was placed in the corner store location at street level. A month later, the name of the building was changed to the Consumers Building, which noted the occupancy of the Consumers Company on the 20th and 21st floors. At this time, a 60-foot electric circular "Consumers" sign was installed on the roof of the building. This sign was later removed at an unknown date. Throughout the years, the building's tenants have also included film companies, clothing dealers, and the Remington Typewriter Company.

One of the smaller buildings located between the two early Chicago skyscrapers mentioned prior, dates from 1886-1887 and designed by architect Charles M. Palmer for Gunther's Confectionary store, located at 214 S. State Street. It was reduced in height and revisioned as the Consumers Building Annex, to protect against intrusions on the adjacent Consumers Building and the many windows on the building's north elevation. The 214 S. State Street building was later remodeled once again in about 1949 and has an important historic curvilinear storefront and entry which should also be preserved. The streamlined, high-style Art Deco/Art Moderne storefront by Isadore E. Alexander, with its black Vitrolite, colored terrazzo, silver banding, and exuberant circular glass window display, is highly intact and a rare survivor celebrating State Street's rich history. Preservation Chicago hopes that particular care and sensitivity will be taken to protect and restore this significant element.



Marble-clad Consumers Building elevator lobby and grand staircase with bronze fixtures. c.2017. Credit: John O'Dwyer / JSO Valuation Group

Threat

The irreparable damage that demolition of these historic buildings will have on South State Street cannot be overstated. Their facades provide an important anchor for the existing street walls along both State Street, Adams Street, and the Chicago Federal Center, which Ludwig Mies van der Rohe felt it important to frame his buildings. If demolished, not only will Chicago lose two important early Chicago School skyscrapers by two of its most important architecture firms, it will also create a huge void and open site which will adversely impact and vacate the energy from one of downtown Chicago's most vibrant thoroughfares and intersections. Chicago does not need another vacant lot or windswept plaza, nor does it need the shame of losing more of its early historic skyscrapers. Every effort should be made to repurpose these buildings, so they contribute to the vibrancy of State Street and the tax rolls.

Moreover, there are also concerns regarding the impact that demolition of 202 S. State St. would have on neighboring buildings that compose the historic Berghoff Restaurant at 17 W. Adams Street. A recent structural survey has concluded that the Berghoff Restaurant – Chicago's oldest extant restaurant, comprising two historic 1870s buildings – could potentially lose the significant structural stability that they currently receive from the frame of the Century Building.

There is much more at stake here than just the terra cotta skyscrapers. Chicago's 'Early Chicago Skyscrapers' are currently under consideration for a UNESCO World Heritage Site. If the Century and Consumers Buildings were to be demolished, it would jeopardize eligibility for this extraordinary designation and international recognition. Additionally, a successful Chicago's 'Early Chicago Skyscrapers' UNESCO World Heritage Site would generate thousands of annual heritage visitors and millions of additional heritage tourism dollars to the economy.

Recommendations

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Roberto's storefront / originally Gunther's Confectionary, 214 S. State. Remodeled in 1949 by Isadore E. Alexander in a streamlined, high-style Art Moderne style. A highly intact and rare survivor celebrating State Street's rich history. Photo Credit: Google Maps

Every effort should be made in partnership with the GSA and Federal Government to preserve, protect, and reuse the Century and Consumers Buildings. Since the buildings are already owned by the federal government, they could be rehabilitated for government use, or a creative solution like a collaborative and shared archives institution, as proposed by the Chicago Collaborative Archives Center.

Preservation Chicago hopes that the Consumers Building's elevations on State and Quincy Streets will be restored to include the building's original rooflines, frieze band, fascia, cornice and terra cotta, along with the storefronts and grand marble-lined lobby and arcade.

Preservation Chicago is currently engaged with a consortium of stakeholders for a collaborative Chicago Archives Center. To date, we have a group of religious archive collections which have joined together to explore the Century and Consumers Buildings as a national collaborative archives center, which could prove beneficial to many religious orders around the nation. Such an idea could also provide a center for religious studies and research, centrally located and under one roof, in an area of Chicago noted for its concentration of universities and university students.

With this collaborative archives project, many of the rear elevation windows on the Consumers Building, closest to the Federal Courthouse, could be blocked for the archives stacks which are sensitive to sunlight exposure. Other windows at the west end of the Quincy Court elevation, could potentially be blocked from the interior side, which would not impact the building's southern elevation. The easternmost windows on Quincy, as well as those fronting State Street, could remain open but inoperable with special glass. The areas at the front of the building could be used as a research center for each archive, which could potentially be located on individual floors of the building and locked off with security as needed. Of course, security would be of great importance and entry to the building would be by appointment only and via a security desk in the lobby of each building. This is an exciting opportunity and concept and could even house municipal, state and federal archives, as well. One suburban university has even proposed the idea of a new presence in the Loop for their library and archive departments.

In an era of ever-shrinking tax dollars, now is not the time to use \$52 million of public taxpayer monies to destroy historic buildings for vacant lots. If properly repurposed for government use, or as a Chicago Archives Center, these two buildings could serve the people of Chicago for another 100 years or more.



The Century Building, 202 S. State Street. Photo credit: Chicago Architectural Photographing Company, State Street, 200-298 S. Folder 1177, Sheet 13, CPC_04_D_1177_013, Chicago - Photographic Images of Change, University of Illinois at Chicago. Library. Special Collections Department