

Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse

7613 N Paulina Street, Chicago



Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse, 1921, George S. Kingsley, 7613 N. Paulina Street. Photo credit: Eric Allix Rogers

OVERVIEW

The Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse at 7613 N. Paulina Street reflects a time when storage companies took great pride in their buildings, hiring renowned architects to create majestic, sturdy, and stunning contributions to Chicago's built landscape. Designed by George S. Kingsley and completed in 1921, this Rogers Park jewel is one of the city's finest examples of this era, fitted with intricate, monochromatic terra cotta and bringing visual beauty to a typically unexceptional building type.

In 2022, plans were announced to demolish the Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse to build an affordable, transit-oriented residential development, of similar size and height

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Address: **7613 N. Paulina Street**

Architect: **George S. Kingsley**

Date: **1921**

Style: **Spanish Baroque Revival / Eclectic**

Neighborhood: **Rogers Park**



Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse, 1921, George S. Kingsley, 7613 N. Paulina Street. Photo credit: Serhii Chrukky

to the existing building. Preservation Chicago believes that both affordable housing and historic preservation can be achieved in this proposed development.

Historic preservation is highly compatible with affordable housing and we strongly encourage the reuse and incorporation of this beautiful historic structure, particularly its terra cotta cladding, into the new construction. Preservation Chicago supports new affordable housing units and transit-oriented development as important components of healthy communities. Through collaboration between the local community, developers, and preservationists, we are confident that both goals of providing affordable housing and retaining historic architecture can be met, resulting in an even more successful and dynamic project. Additionally, if historic preservation was pursued, the 20% Federal Historic Tax Credit could provide millions of additional development dollars to the project, which could be used to build additional affordable units



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HISTORY

On October 3, 1921, a permit was pulled to build a 6-story brick storage building at 7613 N. Paulina St. for the Werner Brothers Fire-Proof Storage Company for an estimated cost of \$90,000. Architect George S. Kingsley prepared plans for the building while H. Moreland, a prolific and accomplished builder of his time, was listed as the contractor. By 1922, the building had been completed and on September 10, 1922, the Werner Brothers took out an advertisement in the Chicago Tribune announcing the building as “Chicago’s Most Beautiful Warehouse,” with a photo of a grand, two-story office lobby. Werner Brothers referred to the building as Warehouse No. 6.

Werner Brothers commissioned Kingsley to create an ornate façade for their storage warehouse because Kingsley, a “promotion-minded architect,” had by this time developed a reputation for skillfully bringing elegant revival styles to every day storage structures as a form of marketing. He was quoted in 1923 as saying, “Good architecture is good advertising. Twenty or twenty-five thousand dollars is an investment cheaper than billboard rental, more lasting, equally effective, and in better taste. People who store furniture generally live in artistic homes. They will appreciate their furs and pianos being kept in a beautiful building.”

By 1921, Kingsley had already built several of these elaborate structures for Chicago’s many storage companies. In addition to his work on the Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse, Kingsley was responsible for a Neo-Classical



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storage warehouse at 6325 N. Broadway (1920), a Renaissance Revival structure at 6542 N. Clark St. (1920), the Neo-Classical Jackson Van Express and Company Building at 5951 W. Madison St. (1921), and a Prairie School storage center at 3833 N. Sheffield Ave. (1914). However, Kingsley's most iconic design in this vein is the Egyptian Revival Reebe Storage Warehouse at 2325 N. Clark Street (1922) which was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1999. With its exuberant Egyptian-style terra cotta along its ground floor, the Reebe Storage Warehouse is among Lincoln Park's most admired commercial buildings.

Kingsley also designed a number of Orange-rated buildings listed in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey including an American Foursquare house at 1120 W. Albion Ave., a multi-family residential building at 7068-7070 N. Ashland Ave., and two homes at 645 (1914) and 737 W. Hutchinson St. (1911) which are contributing buildings to the West Hutchinson Street Landmark District.

The Landmark Designation Report for the Reebe Storage Warehouse notes that "Kingsley treated his storage warehouses as blank canvases on which he could paint an architectural character," especially given that "the



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simplicity of the [storage warehouse] building type lent itself to ornamentation.” Kingsley’s taste in revival ornament, however, lies within a larger historical context. Per this same Designation Report, “Revival styles were very much in vogue in the early 1920s. Victorian architecture was losing favor, disliked for its fussy details and domestic connotations. In a spirit of controlled adventure, architects were turning to historical styles to refresh their design vocabularies.”

This shift in American architectural taste explains the Spanish Baroque Revival splendor of the Werner Bros. Storage Warehouse. The building’s ground floor windows are framed by white terra cotta archways and, in the center, stands a complex doorframe replete with green terra cotta faces, shields, and urns. Highly-decorative spiraled columns carry the eyes upward from the ground floor to an elaborate cornice and ornamented window surrounds. Viewed from the street, the building’s exuberant facade is surprising for a storage warehouse.

George S. Kingsley specialized in providing dazzling designs to his many storage company clients. Especially when compared to current storage facilities design, it is remarkable to appreciate a time when owners prioritized the appearance of their storage buildings in order to generate widespread customer awareness and support to their economic success.

THREAT

In fall 2022, the developer, Housing for All, unveiled a proposal to build affordable housing and commercial spaces in two phases on N. Paulina St. near the Howard Street Red Line stop. The first phase of the development would include 52 units of affordable housing on the site adjacent to the Werner Brothers Storage Warehouse. The planned second phase would include 52 additional units in a new building that would replace the historic Werner Brothers Storage Building.

Current development plans call for the



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demolition of the historic building due to a claim that the building's ceiling heights are insufficient to meet current standards. Shelly Tucciarelli, development lead for Housing for All, has expressed a willingness to continue to work with the community and to consider alternatives that could preserve some or all of the historic building. Phase 1 of the development is set to begin in late 2023 or early 2024, while Phase 2 is targeted for 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Preservation Chicago has long advocated for affordable housing across Chicago, especially within transit-oriented developments. We have encouraged the development team and Alderwoman Maria Hadden to continue working with the community to find a solution that both retains the historic building intact and allows the current owner to meet its affordable housing development goals.

This site would also be an ideal candidate for a Chicago Landmark designation, and it is believed to have already been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. These designations could generate significant additional sources of funding greater or equal to the cost of the historic structure adaptive reuse. The Reebe Storage Warehouse at 2325 N. Clark Street, also designed by architect George Kingsley, has enjoyed Landmark status for over two decades demonstrates that there is a precedent for protecting fine quality and ornate warehouse buildings.

We look forward to working with Shelly Tucciarelli of Housing for All, Alderwoman Hadden, the Rogers Park/West Ridge Historical Society, and the Rogers Park community to find a solution that retains this remarkable building while creating much needed affordable housing.