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Restoration of the Humboldt Park Stables and Receptory

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HUMBOLDT PARK STABLES AND RECEPTORY

3015 W. Division St.

Chicago, IL

Construction completion: 1895

Architects: Frommann & Jebsen

Initial restoration: 1992

Exterior shell restoration completion: 1998

The Humboldt Park Stables and Receptory is located at 3015 W. Division Street at the southwest end of Humboldt Park on Chicago's northwest side. Humboldt Park is comprised of 206 acres of open picturesque parkland and is one of six large-scale parks developed by the city to provide places of natural beauty and relaxation citizens. These large-scale parks offer Chicagoans the opportunity to escape the urban atmosphere of the city and partake in relatively passive recreations such as strolling and horseback riding (Tatum 2007, 7). The stables and receptory building was constructed in 1895 to house horses, wagons and landscaping tools. It also acted as the office of the park superintendent which at the time of completion was the noted landscape architect Jens Jensen (Tatum 2007, 9). The building is a rare surviving example of a late 19th century park structure built in a very unusual style that combines the Queen Ann architecture with the styles of a German country house.

One of the original large scale parks on the northwest side, Humboldt Park was set aside as one of five large scale "pastoral" parks in 1869. The park's original purpose was to encourage real estate development and to provide recreational areas (Tatum 2007, 3).

The stables and receptory were built for a two fold purpose. In the stable or west half of the building, "visitors would use the facility to park their carriages, arrange to have their horses tended to, or rent canoes while enjoying the park's landscapes, gardens and

lagoons. The stable had stalls for sixteen horses and a hay and feed loft on the second floor” (Tatum 2007, 9). The east section of the building was referred to as the receptory, which housed the Superintendent’s office (Jens Jensen), restrooms, tool-rooms, carpentry shop and storerooms.

In blueprint drawings obtained from the Chicago Park District dated May of 1991, the initial restoration plans only called for exterior repairs to be done to the structure (Humboldt 1991, A-3). The stable and receptory had been reroofed in 1971 with asphalt shingles and windows had been boarded up according to drawings at the Chicago Park District archives. Michael Fuss, at the Capital Construction Group of Chicago Parks, said that the stable had only been used for storage of machinery as of the late 1960s and replacement of the original terra cotta tiles were quite cost prohibitive, so an asphalt roof was installed as an alternative. The 1991 roof blueprints note the following, “Remove all existing asphalt shingles. Remove all existing galvanized metal roofing. Remove all existing roofing felt. Remove all existing flashing materials...Replace existing roof decking that is not consistent with the original structure, particularly at roof projections and eaves. Install new roofing materials as per details” (Humboldt 1991, A-3). The details of the plan call for three different types of Ludowici tiles to be incorporated in the new roof, all flashing was to be converted to copper and a series of dormers were to be reframed so that they were “plumb and level.” Other exterior elevation drawings noted that brickwork was to be repointed and any rotten window or door jambs were to be replaced (Humboldt 1991, A-3).

It is not known how far the restoration work proceeded before disaster struck the construction site in 1992. A fire broke out in the receptory on the east side of the building and spread quickly to the second story of the building. Before fire fighters were able to bring the blaze under control forty percent of the building lay in smoldering ashes.

Almost the entire east elevation of the building was destroyed sparing only Jen Jensen's office turret and main masonry chimney. The fire had completely destroyed the second story on the east façade and burned down to the solid masonry wall on the first floor. All the structural heavy timbering collapsed on the east façade leaving only pieces in the far northeast and southeast corners of the building. The fire has since been ruled arson, but it is still unclear as to who set the blaze. Speculation has it that the fire was set by gangs of the neighborhood or a homeless person that was upset by the construction taking place to the structure. The building remained open to the elements for at least six months causing further water damage to the portions of the building unaffected by the fire.

Early in 1993 McClier Architecture and Engineering was contracted to do a full restoration to the stable and receptory, repairing all fire damage and restoring all exterior portions of the building to their 1895 condition. Construction drawings dated June of 1993, call for all heavy timbering to be replaced in the burned sections of the building and the application of Dutchmen patches to sections of the timbering that were suffering from rot. The plans call out for all Dutchmen repairs to be made from salvaged timbers from the original structure or the use of heavy timber that matches as closely the original (Humboldt 1993, A3.1). Gunny Harboe, the lead project manager on the restoration said,

“we did a series of Dutchmen repairs, but, for the smaller sections where we couldn’t do Dutchmen, we did epoxy patches” (Harboe 2009).

The original red pressed brick masonry walls survived the fire intact but sections of it still needed to be replaced either due to deterioration from the elements or the heat from the fire breaking them apart. The patches that were applied to the existing building blend in almost seamlessly to the originals. Michael Fuss commented, “we did pretty well on finding a good match to those bricks. Sometimes you are able to match them to the originals and sometimes not”(Fuss 2009). None of the original bricks were available in the Humboldt Park renovation, but, fortunately, close matches were found. “There are some really good old brick yards out there that we can pick from, and we have had a pretty good track record of matching our brickwork to the originals” (Fuss 2009).

On the northeast and southeast corners of the building are two round turrets that project from the façade. The turrets have limestone window surrounds with wood sashes, and, at the bottom of the turrets, a rusticated stone foundations rises one foot above grade. The limestone was hand carved on site during the construction of the building and thankfully survived the fire and the test of time (Fuss 2009). Several sections of the limestone had chipped or broken off. Where a repair was needed, the construction drawings call for a composite limestone patch (Humboldt 1993, A3.1-A3.2). The rusticated foundation didn’t fare as well as the limestone, and large areas of the foundation had to be rebuilt and patched where necessary. “As we began construction we found out that the rusticated foundation was actually backed by stacked brick. It was just a veneer,” Gunny

Harboe commented. “Several sections of the foundation, especially on the east façade, needed to be rebuilt and waterproofed because the basement under that portion of the building leaked quite badly” (Harboe 2009). The rusticated foundation in some areas only needed repointing, but in other areas it needed to be rebuilt completely. Because it was just a veneer, the work was not that invasive from a structural standpoint, and the drawings called for the reuse of all boulders from their original positions. The new work matched the existing stonework as closely as possible.

One feature characteristic that gives the Humboldt Park Stables and Receptory their German country manor charm is the roofline with its many dormers and spires that project upward breaking up the horizontal lines of the second story. In the Chicago Landmarks report on Humboldt Park Stables and Receptory, the report notes that the significant contributing architectural features include all rooflines of the building (Tatum 2007, 17). The roofline is dotted with its six towers, twenty six dormers, and covered in terra cotta tiles of eight different types. Restoration of these tiles was key to the character of the building. The drawings call for varying types of Ludiwici tiles to be used throughout the roof as well as a special glazed tile to be used on the two turrets. In addition to the tiles on the roof, copper finials were to be reconstructed, and two horse heads supporting a wagon wheel were to be rebuilt and erected on the east elevation (Humboldt 1993, A2.3, A3.1). In all, the exterior restorations were completed in 1998 and are almost indistinguishable from the original 1895 photographs of the structure just after completion. The Chicago Parks District has been maintaining the exterior of the

structure since completion of the 1998 restoration, and the interior restoration is still ongoing.

In 2002 the Institute of Puerto Rican Arts and Culture (IPRAC) approached the Chicago Parks District to occupy the stable and receptory building as a new headquarters for its organization. IPRAC and the Parks District came to an agreement that IPRAC would hire a contracting firm to finish off the interior restoration contingent upon approval from the Parks District. Macondo Corporation was chosen as the contractor to finish off the interior build out and construction started May of 2007. Photographs provided by Michael Fuss taken in 2007, show the interior of the structure with all wall board and mechanicals in place. Shortly after taking the photographs he was informed that IPRAC ran out of funding for the project, and construction came to a standstill sometime in late 2007 or early 2008 (Fuss 2009). According to the Macondo Corporation website, “the developer will convert the interior into exhibit space, theater and performance space, classrooms for studio arts and workshops, cafe, museum store and central courtyard for events” (Almada). The future timeline for completion of the interior is somewhat uncertain at this point as there have been no press releases or announcements from IPRAC or Macondo. The Chicago Parks District was also unaware of any progress on getting the project restarted in the near future.

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