

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

11 WEST 53 STREET, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

TELEPHONE: CIRCLE 5-8900

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ARCHITECTURE WORTH SAVING, an exhibition of important buildings in various parts of the country recently destroyed, doomed or delivered, will be on view at the Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, from October 8 through December 15. The purpose of the show is to demonstrate the rapidity with which America is losing much of its architectural heritage and to suggest what to save and how to save it.

This is one of four exhibitions marking the re-opening of the Museum after a four-month period devoted to extensive renovation and remodeling of all gallery and office floors. The show was organized by the Museum in collaboration with the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the Architectural Forum. A dozen buildings ranging from a southern plantation house to turn-of-the century office structures by pioneer modern architects are shown in enlarged photographs accompanied by explanatory text.

"The preservation of America's 18th century architecture now enjoys public sympathy and support," Arthur Drexler, Director of the Museum's Department of Architecture and Design, says. "But many great buildings of the 19th and early 20th centuries--too recent to seem romantic or significant--have not yet aroused public interest and are being ruthlessly destroyed. The Museum of Modern Art, which has always championed the cause of a creative modern architecture, is concerned with this problem because unless the habit of preservation prevails there can be no architecture at all, and today's great new buildings will soon disappear in their turn."

Three buildings, recently destroyed because they no longer serve their original function, have been selected as examples of the hundreds lost in the past few decades. They are: Belle Grove, considered one of the great plantation houses of Louisiana, destroyed by vandals in 1952; Frank Lloyd Wright's Larkin Office building in Buffalo, torn down in 1950 and replaced by a truck parking lot, and the St. Louis iron front buildings, dismantled by the hundreds in 1939 to make way for a memorial.

Five buildings and a park are shown to illustrate architecture which appears to be doomed to destruction unless action is taken soon. H.H. Richardson's masterpiece the Allegheny County Jail in Pittsburgh, completed in 1886 after the death of the pioneer architect, is slated for demolition unless a new use such as a museum can be found for the "noble interior and stone walled courts."

The Auditorium of the Chicago Civic Center, built by Adler and Sullivan in 1889, stands empty and crumbling because its owners, Roosevelt University, cannot obtain funds to repair it despite its basic soundness, good location and excellent acoustics.

Grand Central and the Pennsylvania Railroad stations in New York City have been

more

153

selected as examples of buildings threatened by a different kind of destruction. The beautifully proportioned space of Grand Central Terminal's great room is described in the exhibition as disappearing under the onslaught of monster luminous photographs, animated billboards and revolving automobiles, while Pennsylvania Station's new ticket counter is said to be totally unrelated to the scale and character of the original room.

Doomed by remodeling is the Capitol building in Washington, D.C. Relocation of the East Facade will destroy the forecourt and interrupt the dramatic cascade of row upon row of columns from dome to portico.

Washington Square, a center of Greenwich Village in New York City since the 1830's, faces still another kind of threat in the name of "progress" as proposals to increase automobile traffic will destroy its character as a neighborhood center.

Buildings in the show illustrating possibilities of deliverance from imminent destruction are: the Robie House by Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago, bought by Webb and Knapp to be used as their Chicago office with the assurance that the building will be saved; Louis Sullivan's Security Bank and Trust Company building in Owatona, Minnesota, intelligently remodeled by a sympathetic architect, Harwell Harris, who preserved the original character of the building while at the same time making it efficient for modern banking needs; and the Old Patent Office in Washington, D.C., to be given to the Smithsonian Institution for use as an art gallery.

The exhibition was installed by Wilder Green, Assistant Director of the Department of Architecture and Design.

As a guide to local groups and interested individuals, the Museum points out that one of the exhibition's sponsors, the National Trust for Historic Preservation, a private organization chartered by Congress, is now operating a national clearing house and information center on preservation matters. Local preservation committees of the American Association of Architects are also prepared to advise on whether or not a building is worth preserving.

An illustrated article from the June 1958 issue of Architectural Forum, the other sponsor, has been reprinted to serve as the catalog for the exhibition.

Fully illustrated catalog and photographs are available from Elizabeth Shaw, Publicity Director, Museum of Modern Art, 11 West 53 Street, New York, N. Y.