

Treasure

By Neil Steinberg
Staff Writer

The former Sheridan Theatre, among the grandest theaters ever built in Chicago, is in its death throes.

What glories the theater building, at 4036 N. Sheridan, has managed to retain over the decades—elegant, Greek-style geometrical plasterwork, stained glass skylights 10 feet across, a stupendous, classical, bas-relief pediment—are being stripped away, to be sold as garden ornaments and embellishments in elegant private homes.

"These things should not be torn down; the city should find some way to save them," said Stuart Grannen, whose company, Architectural Artifacts, is rushing to salvage valuable flourishes from the building before it tumbles to the wrecking ball.

Over the last two weeks, hundreds of feet of brass railing have been removed—replaced by plywood sheets to prevent a careless worker from stepping off a balcony into thin air. There's a "very good possibility" some of the railings will end up in a house in Barrington, Grannen said, with others bound for a 19th century barn being turned into a guesthouse in Wisconsin.

Also gone are five circular skylights, hidden for years by grime. "But I knew they were there," said Grannen, who thoroughly researched the theater, built in 1927 and



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The Sheridan Theatre, one of Chicago's grandest, as it looked shortly after it was built in 1927.

dripping with neo-Greek splendor.

Grannen estimated he's paying \$50,000 to salvage the items, both in labor costs and fees, and might see two to four times that, if he is lucky.

Much depends on the giant terra-cotta pediment, 80 feet wide and 20 feet tall, an azure and ivory carnival of lions and chariots and winged gods and goddesses that tops the front of the building. Grannen hopes somebody will want it

Hunters

to make a wall. The slow, laborious removal of the frieze, by first pulling out the brickwork behind, might be for naught if part of the frieze smashes to the ground.

As the theater awaits its fate—wrecking starts within days—the interior is a forbidding, dark hulk. Chandeliers that once held gaudy chandeliers in the three-story lobby now sway eerily in the breeze coming from ragged holes where windows have been ripped out. The silence is shattered by power saws and compressors.

Traces of those who made use of the space after it was a grand theater are to be found; a giant menorah still is attached to the ceiling, where it was added to dignify the auditorium when it was turned into a sanctuary for Anshe Emes Synagogue. A large, lighted marquee out front still announces "Palacio," a reminder of its days as a Hispanic movie house. And its most recent inhabitants have left their marks, too: spray-painted tributes to "Kim" and "Monica" and "Tina," as well as several local youth groups.

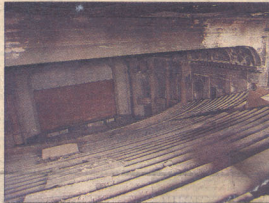
Perhaps it is ironic that Grannen—whose company stripped the Woods, the United Artists, the Granada, and other grand old theaters, now vanished—views his work as a sort of conservation.

"We have nothing to do with the demolition—these theaters should be saved," he said. "We're the only ones saving even a piece of it. If not for us, it would all be destroyed."



AL FODOROSKI/SUN-TIMES

Crews hope to salvage the facade, with its winged gods and chariots. RIGHT: Jeff Smith (from left), Stuart Grannen and Jerry Brookman gently remove a statue's head from atop the facade.



LEFT: What once was the grand lobby, with its ornate ceiling dangling above the staircase. FAR LEFT: The theater's masonry interior, with its seats removed. The building hasn't been used as a theater for about 20 years.