

About Us

LANDMARKS ILLINOIS

Landmarks Illinois is the state's leading voice for historic preservation. From the rubble of the 1971 demolition of Adler and Sullivan's masterpiece old Chicago Stock Exchange Building, Landmarks Illinois rose to become a 2500 member statewide organization.

In the more than 30 years since its founding, it has gone on to save countless architectural and historic treasures throughout the state of Illinois. The organization has established a variety of programs that continue to facilitate, educate, and promote historic preservation. Landmarks Illinois' founding mission was to stop the demolition of significant buildings in downtown Chicago.



Chicago Stock Exchange Building c. 1920

Landmarks Illinois' mission today is the same, only broader — the scope and geography now embrace architecturally and historically significant archeological sites, structures, and historic districts in all the cities, towns and rural areas of Illinois. The list of accomplishments is impressive.

SAVE BUILDINGS

After leading the charge but failing to save the old Stock Exchange, the fledgling organization improved its ability to garner popular, political, and media support. Through other more successful advocacy efforts, resources such as the Marquette Building, the Chicago Theater, the Reliance Building, and St. Mary of the Angels Church in Chicago, as well as the Bloomington Courthouse Square, Oakbrook's Mayslake, and the Zimmerman farm archeological site are among those that have been saved for future generations.



Chicago Theatre Interior, Chicago.
Photograph by Barry Rustin

An untested preservation strategy was used to save the Henry Demarest Lloyd house in Winnetka in 1976. After the property was donated to Landmarks Illinois, a conservation easement was placed on it and it was then resold to private owners. With a conservation easement all subsequent owners are bound in perpetuity to preserve and maintain the critical historic features of the property. Landmarks Illinois monitors their performance to ensure long-term preservation. Today Landmarks Illinois holds easements on over 400 properties. That count doesn't include Fort Sheridan where an **easement program** is an integral part of its successful preservation. Fort Sheridan is a former army base whose 96 historic structures are being converted to single family homes, townhouses, and apartments.



Henry Demarest Lloyd House, Winnetka.
Photograph by Thomas Yanul

In neighborhoods with limited economic resources and a prior history of inappropriate alterations to housing stock, a private owner willing to step up to the plate can be hard to find. In such cases, Landmarks Illinois has taken on the role of owner and developer. Pulling together skilled professionals and volunteers, the organization rehabilitated three houses in the Tri-Taylor Historic District as well as two of the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Waller Apartments. The finished residences were resold to moderate-income homeowners.

FACILITATE PRESERVATION

With the complex legislative and financial system that makes up our economy, buildings can be lost because existing regulations and tax implications encourage demolition and new construction rather than preservation. Throughout its history, Landmarks Illinois has been active in sponsoring legislation that removes obstacles and establishes incentives for preservation.

The first 5-year effort led to the establishment of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in 1976. Charged with administering statewide preservation planning, landmark designations, historic resource surveys, and review of the rehabilitation of historic buildings to ensure that they meet preservation standards, the agency has become a vital force for preservation in the state. Landmarks Illinois supports and cooperates with the state without losing sight of the need to push and prod it to even greater action at critical times.



Reliance Building (the Burnham Hotel)
Chicago. Photograph by Hedrich-Blessing



Chana Schoolhouse, Ogle County 1998
Endangered Building Grant Recipient

The panoply of tax incentives for the rehabilitation of historic buildings has grown over the years and Landmarks Illinois has been the initiator and/or ardent supporter of much of the enabling legislation. The statewide property tax freeze for single family homes, later expanded to include up to six unit owner occupied residences, and the Cook County Class L incentive which extends property tax relief to commercial properties were major achievements of Landmarks Illinois. Hundreds of homeowners throughout the state have benefited from the property tax assessment freeze, while early results of the Class L program successes include the Crowne Plaza Hotel (formerly Allerton) and the Wheeler-Kohn Mansion both in Chicago.

Tax benefits may not provide enough dollars to make a preservation project economically feasible. Landmarks Illinois established a revolving **Preservation Fund** in 1976 after the sale of the Lloyd property. Over the years the Fund has awarded low-interest loans for needy projects throughout the state.

In addition to being the catalyst for the already mentioned Tri-Taylor and Waller projects, another loan program was the Neighborhood Initiative. Loans of up to \$10,000 were made available for homes on Chicago boulevards. One of the buildings to benefit was the Ida B. Wells house, residence of the late 19th/early 20th century black reformer.

Unfortunately, even with favorable interest loans, the economics of some projects just don't pencil out. Through small grants to buildings in critical need, Landmarks Illinois' Endangered Building Grants program offered a way to fund some crucial step towards saving an important property for a community. The need for grant money continues to be so important that the organization was successful in the 1999 legislative season in seeing a statewide **Heritage Trust Fund** established. However, the program's funding was eliminated in the last year of the Ryan Administration. Given current budget constraints, this funding is not likely to be reinstated anytime soon.

In 2004 to help fill this void, Landmarks Illinois created the Preservation Heritage Fund, into which the Endangered Building Grant program was folded, to provide greater assistance to preserve important structures and sites throughout Illinois. The Heritage Fund will help provide bricks-and-mortar assistance as well as help fund studies, surveys, and building assessments. The fund will also enable Landmarks Illinois to target long-term preservation initiatives that are linked to economic development, affordable housing, and neighborhood character.

EDUCATE

Citizens of Chicago and Illinois are vastly more aware today than they were in 1971 of the wealth of architectural and historic resources throughout the state, thanks in no small measure to Landmarks Illinois. Beginning with the first publication of the *Loop Inventory* in 1975, through technical publications on historic building materials, and design guidelines for rehabilitation of historic buildings, Landmarks Illinois seeks to educate. Tours such as the Sacred Places Tour delighted participants to the wonders of ecclesiastical architecture. Landmarks Illinois' **Preservation Snapshots**, a monthly lecture series, offers attendees a wealth of architectural and preservation knowledge. For over 20 years the organization-sponsored statewide preservation conference has brought together preservation experts with those seeking preservation advice. Held in historic communities throughout the state, it has increased awareness of important but too frequently overlooked historic resources in the smaller cities and towns of Illinois.

PROMOTE

Sometimes educational efforts need a boost through more aggressive marketing and promotion. The **Ten Most Endangered Historic Places** program, begun by Landmarks Illinois in 1995, draws attention to the most critical preservation problems faced by the state each year.



Central Park Bandshell, Orion, 2004
Richard H. Driehaus Foundation
Preservation Award recipient for
Project of the Year

The public announcement in Springfield and the accompanying media excitement has contributed to saving an array of historic resources that reflect the richness of the state: the Grand Valley of the Kickapoo archeological site, the Skokie North Shore train station, the Wagner farm in Glenview, and the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Glasner house in Glencoe, among many others.

Everyone likes attention for the good things they do and preservationists are no exception. The Preservation Awards Program, begun in 1991, honors projects that promote preservation in a variety of ways – model rehabilitation projects, media coverage, educational efforts, advocacy, community leadership, and the Preservation Project of the Year. Now sponsored by and called the **Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Awards**, recent winners have included the Hard Rock Hotel (formerly Carbide and Carbon building) in Chicago, the Coronado Theatre in Rockford, and Orion's Central Park Bandshell.

THE FUTURE

Landmarks Illinois has grown over the last 30 years into a mature, stable, not-for-profit organization. Although it has never lost sight of its vision, it is no longer the scrappy organization it started out as. Protests, picket lines, and lawsuits are still used as effective tools, but so are diplomacy and compromise. Today government officials, developers, and property owners recognize its expertise and listen to what it says. Landmarks Illinois operates with a broad-based statewide membership, a strong board of community leaders, loyal donors, a professional staff, and a sound endowment fund. Preservation in Illinois has come a long way since 1971 but the job is never over. Landmarks Illinois intends to be around for the next 30 years and for years after that. Its goal is to ensure that the architectural and historic resources of Illinois endure so that future citizens may enjoy the physical presence of their cultural heritage.

by **Victoria Granacki**, former Landmarks Illinois Board Member