THE ALLEGHENY COUNTY JAIL WITH COURT HOUSE BEHIND

This photograph was published one year after the dedication of the Jail and shows it as originally built to the design of H. H. Richardson with three cell blocks and exterior jail yard wall.
PART I A CULTURAL REVELATION

At the core of America's mighty City of Steel stands a colossus of granite. Its great mass at once expresses and conceals the tense containment of pulsating noise, the foul body odor, and the dangerous unrest of wasted manpower confined within a brutal filigree of iron bars. But few, who scurry past to perform their various labors, are aware of the continual drama within this throbbing citadel, where are restrained up to six hundred souls daily. And yet for these seven decades, men from the world over have come to admire its sun-shaped forms, its sky-filling silhouettes, and its unending variety of compositions.

The building is, of course, H. H. Richardson's great Allegheny County Jail, whose polygonal bulk is tenuously connected by the Bridge of Sighs to his equally great County Court House, which tops the mounting geometry with its 325 foot high tower. And this composition can but gain strength from the several feeble buildings that presently hem it in. For it was of these County Buildings that Richardson said, toward the very end of his life, "If they honor me for the pigmy things I have already done, what will they say when they see Pittsburgh finished."

Though Richardson died at the premature age of 47, his Pittsburgh Buildings surely represent a culmination of his design. He had known for some years that his end was imminent and devoted the greatest portion of his waning energy to seeing the completion

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* An address delivered at a meeting of the Society on April 16, 1956. Mr. Huff, an architect, helped found the Pittsburgh Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians, to combat further destruction of architectural monuments and masterpieces.—Ed.

1 The 360 foot high Frick Building, facing the front facade of the Court House, must be recognized as a handsome example of skyscraper pioneer, Daniel H. Burnham. It was finished in March, 1902 and puts to disadvantage the Court House and its tower which had afforded a favorite vantage for viewing Pittsburgh.

2 Born September 29, 1838, in Louisiana; died April 27, 1886, of Bright's disease.
of these buildings about which he cared the most. "Let me but have time to finish Pittsburgh," he often exclaimed, "and I should be content without another day."

Thus it is of little wonder that in these buildings we find the embodiment of those basic principles which were to be Richardson's greatest contributions to the development of an American architecture. Both buildings have aged well; but through 70 years of test, we find, of these two masterpieces, the Jail to be the more significant and possibly the greatest of all his work. So it would be well at this time to investigate those elements that have made this one of America's most important buildings of the past century and to reevaluate those qualities, possessed by the Jail, that are the apex of Richardson's steady strivings.

Economy of Means

Historically, the County Buildings represent the dying gasp of an ancient mode of construction. It is doubtful that anything of its kind shall ever again be built by our civilization. To the very year, 1884, when the plans of the Jail and Court House were begun, Jenny was raising skyward the first steel skyscraper in Chicago, while Richardson was piling stone upon stone in a manner that dates to the prehistoric. He was not a faddist; he had used some of the newer materials, but with little consequence to their potentialities; rather he was master of his favorite materials, wood, brick, stone—and void. In this case, his colossal granite blocks help create the vigorous, virile quality the Jail possesses. And Richardson's sophisticated reticulation of mortar and stone, his invention and refinement of detail, his plastic joining of elements, and his relationships of mass to void afford lessons long to be remembered—whatever be the materials we use. For while his constructions were seldom niggardly in cost (nor should they have been for their monumental nature) his approach was, nevertheless, highly ethical in that his purpose was always revealed through an economy of means.

*The Albany Capitol and the Marshall Field Wholesale Store also occupied Richardson's ebbing days. The latter was considered by himself and succeeding generations as the peak of his career, sharing this position with the Pittsburgh Buildings. The Field Store has been demolished, thus increasing the importance of preserving the Pittsburgh Buildings.
Sociological Implications

Historically, Richardson added his particular idiom to the already long list of Revivals. He gave us back the Romanesque (which actually had been used but with not very significant effects before Richardson made it the commonplace); for this, he may very well deserve criticism in abetting eclecticism. But with his Romanesque Revival, he sought to achieve certain ends. Some of these ends hold more of a historical context. Such was his attempt to resurrect the craftsman, for he envisioned the artisan (i.e., individual expression) completely doomed in the face of the mass production methods of the Industrial Revolution—especially relevant to Pittsburgh. And so, he turned to a medieval form which in its time had been so successful a resultant of the melding of crafts and talents of a closely integrated society. But this is a romantic fantasy enjoyed by many 19th century minds and remains little more than a curiosity for us today. Nevertheless, we must admit that Richardson did achieve the highest quality of craftsmanship in his buildings—else the effort of his studied masonry would have been for naught.

Form

The reason for his choosing the Romanesque over the Gothic, which also allowed a craftsman approach and which had enjoyed revival thirty or more years earlier, is another matter. It was more than an arbitrary caprice to create his personal Revival, while so many were already at hand; nor was this to be a mere vehicle by which to display his virtuoso with a different collection of historical curios. For within the Romanesque framework, he was enabled to express the two aspects which are regarded today as his greatest contributions—massing and space. His geometric forms imply the containment of great volumes; and the massing of these volumes was so abstract, so monumental, so plastic that his buildings became in themselves almost pure sculpture. In this aspect, the Jail stands supreme amongst all his works. For in the Jail, Richardson accomplished his ends by using not one bit of ornament, so as not to distract the eye from the form which he shaped with respect only for the quality of the material itself. A noted critic in 1891 glossed over this aspect with the observation quoted here:

The Pittsburgh buildings derive their individuality in great part from
the conditions of the problem, a pile in intractable granite built in a smoky town in which the deposits of soot threaten to nullify all delicacy of detail and to incumber all projecting members. It would be highly unreasonable to reproduce, in a more facile material and in a cleaner air, the treatment imposed by these conditions. All that can properly be conveyed from the building and made available elsewhere is precisely the general composition

Thus he came close to the truth and at the same time missed the point of it; for he was unable to foresee how Richardson was to become a precursor to the experiments of succeeding generations, working with pure form unencumbered by stylized adornment. Nor is any ornament required with so powerful a composition. The dynamic forces of the spokes, radiating from the hub, is rigidly held by the tight skin of the great wall stretched around its perimeter—without which wall the composition would lose control and fly apart.

Space

But Richardson's prime contributions were in the realm of interior space—that quality which has in the past been the noblest contribution to architecture by Western Man. Space cannot be adequately photographed or rendered; it cannot be seen or felt in a plan; it, of all the elements that comprise architecture, is the one that must be experienced to be comprehended. Richardson gave us new dimensions and new sensations in the ways he moulded his great, brooding, uninterrupted spaces. Here again the Jail ranks at the top of his creations—in this case, along with Trinity Church of Boston. Here is a noble space of magnificent proportions and of unending variations of perspective. At the core of the building is the octagon, a vast space rising to a height of 91 feet and surrounded by slender granite columns, which sit upon heavier squat piers and which terminate in graceful arches supporting the great octagonal dome. From this central space shoot off the four great naves with their elegantly proportioned windows that rise to almost the full height of the uninterrupted walls and create a strong contrast to the massive masonry. The light shafts filling this space are beautiful and rich—and a little mysterious. Piranese could hardly have done better! It has been seriously proposed to remove the cell blocks and to dedicate this building as a place of prayer and meditation—so sublime is its space.

*The original concept planned for the 40 foot (diameter) octagon to be used as a chapel; functionally, of course, it provided a focal point which required a minimal number of guards and afforded ease of control.*
Cultural Heritage

In the Jail, Richardson presents us with a document of an age. The end of the 19th Century contains many achievements of which we may be proud and some actions—to be sure—of which we must be ashamed. But this era of vigorous growth and violent struggle is a part of our history which cannot be erased. This is not a pretty building any more than the history is a pretty history; the realities of the Jail cannot be denied any more than can be those of the history. But both Jail and history possess a greatness seldom attained by any society.

One does not associate with this building lurid intrigues of any great importance to compare with those of the Tower of London or the Bastille. The historic interest it possesses is not by virtue of prisoners it may once have held, but by its manifest evocation of a dynamic virility that was inherent in this age of an expanding nation. This strong 19th century masculinity is in great contrast to the delicate feminity of 18th century architecture as found in the French Rococo and the English Georgian. The Jail possesses great power—an almost brutal power—but also control, dignity, and even elegance. And its companion piece and complement, the Court House, possesses the same heavy austerity of the age, but with greater refinement—its feminine counterpart of the Victorian Era. And one may even detect here a turgid pretension of assurance and security in newly amassed wealth and deduce, from the buildings' possibly overstated forcefulness, an underlying sense of insecurity haunting the 19th century self-made man who witnessed the unrest and violence of such events as the Railroad Riot and burning of Union Station in 1877 and the Homestead Strike in 1892.

But more than a document of the hopes and fears of an age, this building is a testament to the faith of man. We have a work which adds to the already noble adventure of Western Man's exploration of space, volume, and form. Richardson has enriched our lives with his invention. When we think of the vast majority of buildings built today with materials, such as steel and concrete, of infinitely greater capabilities and when we witness the ineffectual results, surely we must realize the great values such buildings as Richardson's Jail and Court House yet hold for us; and surely we must recognize the lessons we might learn if we were but to use our eyes.
PART II THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

On Sunday morning of May 7, 1882, the handsome Greek Revival Court House by John Chislett was destroyed by fire. Along with it went Allegheny County's fourth jail, which was attached to the rear of the third jail, which, in turn, was attached to the rear of this second Court House. A masterpiece in itself, the Doric porticoed edifice had, none the less, become inefficient in its accommodation of courts and records under the rapid growth of Allegheny County, and this had led to the expediency of extending the Court House space into the third jail. Thus the unfortunate fire served mainly to hasten the day for its replacement with a building of more adequate facilities, and the County was, at this time, spared the agonizing question concerning demolition of an outmoded masterpiece.

The three County Commissioners R. E. Mercer, George Y. McKee, and Daniel McWilliams "forecasting from the immense increase in the business of the county for the last two or three decades what it would in all probability become, they saw that it would be wasted money, by the time another decade or two had rolled by, to put up an ordinary building." "The wealth of Allegheny county demanded such an architectural edifice as should do honor to its prominence politically and commercially in the Nation, while duty to the taxpayers called for such expenditures as would avoid an increase of the tax millage or heavy bonded indebtedness." Opinions as to its proposed cost varied between $½ million and $5 million. "Rich and poor, high and low, interviewed the Commissioners upon the subject and proffered their advice. The opportunity there was in the construction of the new Court House and Jail for corrupt contracts, or at least extortionate cost, brought the schemers, who live by much political plunder, thickly around. It was well for the county that its business was in the hands of a body of Commissioners whose high personal character, integrity and business ability were all their subsequent actions proved them to be." "For while the edifice will long remain a monument to the genius of the architect, the facts of its construction should, in this age of so much bargain

* Born in England, 1800; died 1869.

* All quotations in Part II come from Thurston's Allegheny County's Hundred Years except as otherwise noted.
and sale and official corruption true or charged, be a monument to
the Commissioners under whom it was planned and built, without
the taxpayers having been burdened with a heavy debt or a whisper
of corruption in its contracts, although the sum expended has been
so great and the opportunities for what, in the political slang of the
day is called 'jobs,' many." Finally, the Commissioners hit upon
an estimate in the realm of $3,000,000 for a suitable building.

"That they might have formulated in their own minds the
building they should erect," the Commissioners visited the principal
cities east and west to study the best modern public buildings. They
consulted all county officials as to their needs and from this drew
up a program. A circular, requesting estimated fees for plans,
was mailed to a number of the principal architects of the day. The
replies varied from $500 to $30,000. "It was then decided to select
five of the architects replying to the circular, one of whom should
be a resident of Allegheny county, two residents in the Eastern
States and two in the Western. Mr. Post, of New York; Mr. Ord,
of Philadelphia; Mr. Boynton, of Chicago; Mr. Meyer, of Detroit,
and Mr. Peebles, of Pittsburgh, were selected. About this time an
active interest sprang up among a number of the best citizens in
favor of Mr. Richardson, of Boston, from whom no reply had been
received to the circular sent him. Mr. Post, of New York, having
deprecated the condition of the Commissioners that but $2,500 would
be paid to each architect for his plan, and that the plan should be
the property of the Commissioners, and to be furnished by January
1st, 1884, Mr. Richardson was substituted in his place." At the
time of submission only four plans were presented, since Mr. Peebles
was unable to complete his.

"The plans were placed on exhibition in the Welsh church on
Ross street on January 1st, 1884, and the makers were present to
explain them. Great interest was taken in the exhibition by all
classes of citizens, many of whom, after several examinations of the
drawings, visited the Commissioners and spoke in favor of the plans
they preferred." "Fully four fifths gave a preference to the plan
of Mr. Richardson, the Commissioners being themselves unanimous
in the same opinion." On January 31st, 1884, the Commissioners
"employed Mr. Richardson, instructing him that the building when
fully equipped, completed and furnished must not cost more than
$2,500,000, and the cost of the building itself must not exceed
$2,250,000. Previous to this, the Board of Prison Inspectors of Allegheny County, deciding that the old Court House lot was not large enough for both Court House and a Jail such as the health as well as safety of criminals required, passed a resolution requesting the Commissioners to purchase the property on the east side of Ross street as a Jail lot." The Commissioners had an act of the legislature passed in 1883 to prevent extortion by the sellers of the property in question. After much negotiation this land was purchased from 15 or 16 owners at a cost of $170,000.

Richardson completed his plans about July 1st, 1884, with submission of bids set for August 16th, 1884. The bid of Norcross Brothers of Worcester, Massachusetts, for $2,243,024 was accepted; and the contract was signed on September 10th, 1884. "The contract required that the jail should be finished by May 10, 1886, and the court house in three and a half years. The jail was ready for occupancy at the time specified, but the dampness of the walls not having dried out, it was decided not to bring the prisoners from Claremont until September 1, 1886. The court house building would have been finished at the time contracted for, but in the fall of 1887 the commissioners (on previous advice of the architect) requested the contractors, on account of the frosty weather, not to finish work on the tower until the spring of 1888. This was done, and the cap-stone was placed in position on March 10, 1888, thus finishing the main work upon the structure, although there was a small force of men still working on the interior until September 10, 1888." "During the course of the construction of the Court House and Jail the Commissioners found the necessity of making twenty-six alterations. While some of them increased the original contract, others decreased it, but the aggregate increase was but $14,000." The contract for furnishing and equipping the Court House was also awarded to Norcross Brothers for $103,760. To pay for all this, the Commissioners levied extra millage from 1884 through 1888 and increased the bonded indebtedness only $800,000, as against the $1,200,000 they had estimated.

And so, for a sum of $2,268,453.52, including $12,700 for electric lighting, or a total sum of $2,443,899.06 with painting and fur-

* From here came the pinkish Worcester granite with which the County Buildings are faced.

* *Pittsburgh and Allegheny Illustrated Review; see Bibliography.
nishings, the people of Allegheny received the following: 157,222 cubic feet of foundation stone; 96,774 pounds of iron pipe; 11,680 pounds of brass; 14,322,140 brick; 1,187,136 pounds of rolled iron beams; 87,346 feet of granite ashler; 81,299 hollow brick; 260,651 feet of granite; 1,308,317 pounds of cast iron; 2,580,909 pounds of wrought iron; 617,119 feet of roof tile; 1,145,120 brick in floors, arched; 3,008 square feet of copper gutters; 24,500 enameled brick; 16,500 squares of terra-cotta partitions; 56,861 yards of plastering; 28,197 feet of plate glass; 8,795 feet of marble wainscoting; 38,464 feet of floor tile; 80 doors; 306 windows—plus two architectural masterpieces. And by far, the greater part of the bargain was recorded in 1889 by the *Pittsburgh and Allegheny Illustrated Review*, which then observed: “The jail now in use has certainly no superior either in architecture or in interior arrangements among any of the county jails in the country, and is fully worth the price paid for it, amounting to about $400,000.”

“The history of its building is thus given so fully that it shows a business ability not usually displayed by public officers, and an effort not only to guard the public money from the inroad of corrupt schemers, but at the same time a broad, generous expenditure, give the County of Allegheny a public building commensurate with its wealth commercially, its manufacturing fame, its historical dignity and political importance.”

Most fitting then it were that at the top of the grand staircase of the Court House the County should have inscribed this tribute to the man who was so able in fulfilling its purpose:

IN MEMORY OF

HENRY HOBSON RICHARDSON

1838 ARCHITECT 1886

GENIUS AND TRAINING MADE HIM MASTER IN HIS PROFESSION

ALTHOUGH HE DIED IN THE PRIME OF LIFE

HE LEFT TO HIS COUNTRY MANY MONUMENTS OF ART

FOREMOST AMONG THEM THIS TEMPLE OF JUSTICE
PART III ATTACKS AND COUNTERATTACKS

On October 6 and 7, 1954, the Pittsburgh newspapers reported that Conrad Hilton was considering the Jail property as a possible hotel site. The County officials leapt at the opportunity to voice their opinion that the Jail was a deterrent to progress and of no aesthetic value, nor did they leave any doubt that they would deliver the Jail with swiftest alacrity to the hands of the man with the right price. Though a small group of Pittsburghers as quickly rallied to the cause of preserving the Jail (along with a vision toward an Industrial Museum), the newspapers generally made light of the “Friends of the Ross Street Prison” in treating their efforts as eccentric delusions of the lunatic fringe to save some “grisly old structure.” The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette presumed to pose as an arbiter of American culture, while disregarding the authority of the architectural historians, when it editorialized on at least two occasions:

The Architecture of the Allegheny County jail would be more appropriate to the old section of Nuremberg than to a modern American city like Pittsburgh. This gloomy stone pile has long contributed to the medieval appearance of the upper area of the Triangle, which is at odds with the general urban redevelopment program.

Thus County Commissioner John Kane’s hint that someone is interested in replacing the jail with a modern structure, perhaps a hotel, is welcome. Such a move would contribute to the redevelopment of the long neglected commercial area east of Grant Street. We hope it will be done.

...Removal of the jail from its present site impresses us as a good idea because the building is singularly unattractive, because a jail, being tax-exempt property, should be on relatively inexpensive outlying land, and because this development would offer the dual opportunity to improve the street pattern and put the improved property on the city’s tax books.

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9 Dubbed so by Pittsburgh Press, November 7, 1954. On January 13, 1955 the nucleus of the “Friends” helped to found the Pittsburgh Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians in order to combat more effectively the demolition of the Jail and other monuments of cultural value in the Western Pennsylvania area.

10 The group urging preservation of the Jail has received the support of the departments of architecture at Pennsylvania State University and Carnegie Institute of Technology; of the department of history of art at University of Pittsburgh, Harvard University, and Yale University; of the Society of Architectural Historians, national chapter, and the College Art Association; and of such men as Walter Hovey, Harold E. Dickson, John Knox Shear, Josef Albers, Carroll L. V. Meeks, Vincent J. Scully, Jr., Philip Johnson of the Museum of Modern Art, the late George Howe, the late Edgar Kaufmann, Edgar Kaufmann, Jr., and the dean of architectural historians, Henry-Russell Hitchcock. The group also received the editorial support of the Pittsburgh Sun-Telegraph in November, 1954.
However, this is not the first time the Richardson buildings have been endangered by ignorance, misunderstanding, and lack of official support. The succeeding Commissioners, other County officials, and local sachems of culture, since those enthusiastic days that saw the building of the Richardson Court House group under Messrs. Mercer, McKee, and McWilliams, seem to have been less than enlightened. These buildings came under fire as early as 1904, at which time the County, feeling the need of more space, was considering the proposal of F. J. Osterling to jack up the roof of the Court House in order to add another story. "The architecture will not be affected in the least on account of the additions to the building proper," architect Osterling declared. A prominent periodical of the day, The American Architect and Building News, thought otherwise and took an initiative against this proposal. Its words in defence of the Richardson buildings, though primarily concerned with the Court House in this instance, could scarcely be more apropos today, respecting the Jail:

The architect and intelligent people of Pittsburgh, Pa., are most unexpectedly called upon to "save" the Allegheny County Court-house, the building which H. H. Richardson fondly regarded as his most successful piece of design. The attempt to save must, to be successful, proceed along other lines of argument and appeal than those which were successfully followed in saving the "Bulfinch Front" of the Massachusetts State-house a few years ago, and the United States Capitol last winter. In this case, the building has neither historical nor sentimental association connected with it which cry for preservation; the only profanation is that offered to a work of architecture of whose real value there may be, even amongst architects, honest difference of opinion, and in the case of such conflicting testimony the less instructed public is likely to think that neither opinion is of much real value, and that its own, reached by an intuitive perception of what practical needs require, is a far better guide under the circumstances. The question is likely to be decided on its practical merits, and the architects and others who are preparing for the defence of Richardson's masterpiece will do well, while making an adequate, but brief, presentation of the architectural merits of the question, to place their hope and their reliance on making not only their skirmish line but also their main attack consist of practical arguments, based on dollars and cents.

The American Architect observed that the court rooms were in service only a small portion of the working year, due to the "lordly" judges' propensities to do as little as possible and to take long vacations; this put especial strain on services and space when in use because of the large backlog of work. Therefore, the simple solution

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11Coincidentally, the U. S. Capitol is once again threatened at the same time as are the Richardson's Pittsburgh Buildings.
of a more efficient readjustment of schedules along with a studied rearrangement of the interior was proffered by the periodical which reflected, "Here, it seems to us, should be the main point of attack, for the best scheme of defence is often to take the offensive." And realizing that Mr. Osterling spoke from a threatening position of authority, the *American Architect* further warned that "as there are very many who will believe he knows what he is talking about, because they themselves have not trained imaginations, it will be bootless for those who oppose him to talk learnedly about proportions, and even a reference to the change that is always produced when an inch is added to the length of a man's nose will be ineffective." Though we cannot be sure that this appeal was instrumental in the achievement of its purpose, the words, none the less, hit the mark; and in fact the Osterling proposal was never carried out.

But in 1924 a very great danger to the Jail developed and lasted at least six years. It threatened either to remove the Jail altogether or to emasculate it so thoroughly that the value of the remains would be slight indeed.

As reported in the *Post-Gazette* in 1927, "The County Planning Commission recommended the removal of the jail October 3, 1924, and on March 6, 1925, approved a plan presented to place the jail on the upper floors of the county building proposed to be built at Diamond and Ross Streets for which $1,000,000 was authorized in the people's bond issue of April, 1924." And the *Gazette Times* had previously revealed in March, 1925, that the Commissioners planned a skyscraper jail, a 17 story combination office and prison building to be erected at Diamond and Ross Streets and Fourth Avenue, while the existing Jail site, bounded by Fifth, Sixth, Ross, and Diamond, was to be developed into a "spacious traffic square around which all vehicles could rotate and its interior could be developed as a suitable park, which would prove a great convenience and comfort."

Another *Gazette Times* news item was headlined in 1926, "Virtually Assure Removal of Jail from Present Site." "For more than a year the project of removing the present jail was steered through a stormy course against the opposition of citizens and organizations who objected to even partial destruction of the architectural 'masterpiece' consisting of the court house and jail, connected by the 'bridge of sighs' over Grant Street. What had become
of the project was the subject of many inquiries, nothing having been heard of it for months.”

The principal “opposition” came from the Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Institute of Architects which had not taken a position against “even partial destruction” but which had formulated in October, 1925, recommendations, “proposing to reduce the structure to its original extent and exterior condition and to remodel the interior to serve as a hall of records, with a view to conserving it to future generations.” The AIA proposal, which possibly grew out of an earlier suggestion by County Architect Stanley L. Roush, called for the removal of the parts of the building that were added in 1905 with the claim by the AIA that its “conception of the proposed hall was taken from existing drawings of the original jail and a floor plan found in records of Richardson’s works.”

Whether by inference or actual misinformation, the great wall has, as a result of this proposal, been identified with those additions of 1905; and the facts have since become so confused that many Pittsburghers today support the belief that the original Jail of Richardson had never possessed a wall at all. The responsibility for this erroneous belief can be traced to the ambiguously worded AIA Recommendation 2, part (b):

To restore the Jail building to Richardson’s original design will necessitate the removal of the forbidding looking walls of the jail yard, the diagonal north-east wing, parts of the north wing and east wing, and, perhaps, some other minor portions.

To accomplish the reduction of the building to its original proportions required, to be sure, the “removal of the forbidding looking walls” for the simple reason that, when the building was expanded, the original Richardson walls had to be moved outward and enlarged. But this is not to say that these walls were not of the exact design and intent of Richardson or that their construction was not executed in precisely the same manner as the Jail yard walls erected in 1885-86. Nothing could be further from the truth; it can be readily refuted by the viewing of a few photographs, dating to the time of its erection, or with but a cursory examination of Richardson’s original plans—half of which set is in the possession of the Allegheny County Works Department and the other half of which is preserved at Harvard University. To those of perception even this evidence would be unnecessary, for a single glance at the wall
itself reveals at once the Master's design. Furthermore, it may confidently be asserted that those sections which are additions have happily been executed with remarkable sympathy for Richardson's original concept and detail. It seems most probable that these additions were the design of aforementioned architect Osterling; and, if this be so, history has smiled upon the Richardson buildings, wherein the Court House was spared the outrage of the proposed upper story additions while the Jail was expanded in a most intelligent manner. To be sure, additions change, but they do not always destroy—they sometimes add. In this case, the extension of two cell blocks was most logical; and the addition of the fourth, on the 45 degree, most successfully carried through the daring dynamics of Richardson's original scheme.

The AIA plan was publicized widely by the City papers, Charette magazine, and by the Pittsburgh periodical, Progress, which in its May 1930 issue enlarged upon these recommendations of dubious merit. It was the opinion of Progress that the "Forbidding Aspect Should Be Eliminated."

The high and ominous enclosing walls, and the huge and gloomy bulk of the various wings, are characteristics which may be said to be particularly depressing. There is no doubt that these characteristics are psychological obstacles to a normal use of the private properties on the north side of Fifth Avenue and thereby retard their economic success. The same might be said of the private structures on the opposite side of Sixth Avenue. But these characteristics, even if undesirable, can not be said to have any economic effect upon the Court House, the City-County Building, or the new County Office Building. It may, therefore, be said that for the relief of the private properties just mentioned, it is desirable to demolish at least the Jail walls, the north end of the Ross Street wing, all of the large diagonal wing and part of the east wing.

The popular AIA recommendations were espoused by a large number of civic groups and were discussed at a special meeting of the Chamber of Commerce in January, 1928, where even Pittsburgh architect Edward J. Weber apparently submitted to the plan in an

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12 It seems most probable that Mr. Osterling executed the 1905 additions, as reported by mouth. He did much work for the County, including the 1904 recommendation to raise the Court House roof and the County Morgue of 1908 in the Richardsonian manner. But verifying documentation has been surprisingly difficult to obtain, due largely to uncooperative County officials who profess to fear that the misuse of such information may lead to a jail break but who more likely realize that the less informed the defenders of the jail be, the more impotent will be their attack. Ironically, they seem unaware that they possess only the half set of original Richardson plans and that Harvard freely supplies scholars with copies of the other half.
attempt to save at least "half the hog," though earlier he had made an eloquent and enlightened appeal for the building in toto. He recognized the Jail, the Court House, and the connecting Bridge of Sighs as an inseparable group and pleaded against the desecration of any one of the units of the Court House complex; "Turn the whole into a public museum," he begged. A great portion of this article, printed in the Pittsburgh Sunday Post of March 29, 1925, I am impelled to recall here due to its penetrating insight into the quality of this great building, including a deep understanding of the Jail's most powerful external feature—the controversial wall.

The jail, itself, in a remote way, brings back the aroma of Lerida, the Cathedral of Lerida in Spain. The entire group is Richardson's greatest piece of work; far finer than Trinity church in Boston, and more interesting than the now destroyed Chamber of Commerce of Cincinnati.

Some will object that the jail is mostly wall. To be sure, part of it is a plain wall, but what a wall! A beautiful wall, beautiful to the extreme. Those walls suggest strength, and those frowning towers are so calm and magnificent in their austerity. Examine the graduation of the stone courses. From great width at the bottom to narrow courses at the top where less strength is required.

Observe the artistic proportion of each stone; with what nicety the lengths are varied in proportion, of from one by two to one by seven; then, the refinement of the curve of the ovolo moulding forming the water table. How beautifully battered the wall is! See how cleverly the plain east wall is broken and handsomely silhouetted by the gable—with its twin pinnacles—of one of the prison wings.

If there is no beauty in the side elevations of the towers of "Notre Dame de Paris," then I'll grant there is none in the Allegheny county prison. If there is no beauty in the Palazzo Strozzi, then the prison is without the quality of great architecture. If the Pitti Palace is monstrous, then I'll admit so, too, is the prison.

Truly, kind reader, ours is the most beautiful prison building in the world today and this fact is incontrovertible.

Here is a smoke stack. What a utilitarian thing is a smoke stack! Yet, it is in this case not an eyesore, as nearly all smoke stacks are. The artist has made of it a thing of delight.

Too much praise it is not possible to bestow on the prison portion of the court house group, truly a most interesting work of art, for which one will have to travel far to see the equal of in any type of building.

However, these voices faded; the plans of both the AIA and the Commissioners were laid aside. The new County Office Building was built during 1930 without its skyscraper prison, but the steel was so designed that it might at some future date see such a project through to realization. And the fate of the Jail passed to a state of limbo, till 1954, when the old controversy was sparked anew.
By now, many words of the wisdom and the folly of the past have been repeated; new people have taken up the cause of the old Jail. In the name of "progress" the present attack against the Jail has been fashioned around economic and traffic considerations, similar to those of the 20's, and confused by the clamor of unqualified critics who cry "gloomy stone pile" and "Chinese wall."  

As indicated by the Post-Gazette editorials, many wish the Jail site developed commercially; there is the desire to return this land to the tax books. Yet, it is inconceivable that a city which possesses the potential wealth of Pittsburgh cannot allow space to this singular masterpiece. Of course, it has frequently been noted that the great monuments of Europe have most often been spared by the dubious fortune of bankruptcy. But, if the increasing hordes of Americans continue to flock to Europe each summer on the affection of inspecting its art treasures, the Europeans will themselves presently be in a position to afford the replacement of these burdensome monuments and land-consuming ruins with spanking modern commercial ventures in reflection of the American propensity to dispose of its unproductive landmarks. Poor, indeed, we are—culturally, as well as economically—if we can no longer afford this building in our midst. 

Traffic engineers claim there is a traffic problem here. This building, they say, creates a bottleneck. Yet the streets here are no narrower than in the rest of the city (though one sidewalk, I admit, is lacking); therefore, it would be naive to believe the city's traffic ills would be solved by widening Diamond (now Forbes), Fifth Avenue, or Sixth Avenue at this point. And a commercial development could only add to congestion here; by its very nature it would be a traffic generator. No! good city planners are, in fact, trained to find solutions that will not only make use of physical endowments, but also put to advantage the cultural heritage. Shall Pittsburgh scrape away its hills and fill in its valleys for lack of imagination in traffic engineering? Led by enlightened planners with the cooperation of Federal, State, and private civic groups, our

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11 In a meeting on November 16, 1954, the Pittsburgh Chapter of the AIA refused their support to the preservation of the Jail for fear of going on the record as standing in the way of "Pittsburgh's progress." But in 1956 the Architectural Record, in honor of the AIA centennial celebration, composed a panel of fifty architects and scholars to select America's fifty "most significant buildings" of the past one hundred years. The "Allegheny County Buildings" tied for seventeenth place, and only this and one other building represented the achievements in the field of governmental buildings.
sister city, Philadelphia, not only has cleared a mall before Independence Hall; but in this same area it is rehabilitating the crumbling masterpieces of William Strickland, an early 18th century master. For the Philadelphians, being privileged to possess these treasures, have realized the responsibilities they bear the Nation as custodians of an American culture. But in Pittsburgh, we honor alone our Block House—and this only after the long hard fight by a small but aroused and determined citizenry which was aware of what we possessed.

But possibly the most difficult challenge, if not the most annoying of circumstances, is the absurd necessity to defend a building which belongs to a period of architecture that is presently suffering unjustified abuse. Our age seems bent on discrediting the Victorian Era much in the same manner the Renaissance discredited the great achievements of the later medieval period and bestowed the derogatory title of "Gothic" (inferring barbarism) upon that era. It required centuries to right this wrong and to restore those great works to the proper place of respect in Man's cultural history—but only after many of the monuments had been lost or defaced. Is the "Pittsburgh Renaissance" any the wiser for it?

Sociological and penological developments of the past century have made the Jail obsolete, and understandably the Commissioners and Board of Prison Inspectors are ever ready to rid themselves of it. The greatest deterrent thus far seems to have been the sheer bulk which assures an expensive undertaking to any entrepreneur who plans to tear it apart. Mr. Hilton has since found his hotel site, and the Jail is again returned to that limbo between promises of preservation and threats of demolition. And apparently the County Commissioners have innocently provided a shrewd businessman with a convenient ruse. But the next time we may not be so fortunate; for we may awaken one morning to discover that the Commissioners, wishing to avoid another public storm, have quietly exercised their invested powers (neglecting moral obligation) and sold irrevocably the Jail to a more serious bidder. The real threat to the Jail has not been Mr. Hilton; the danger still exists and will continue to exist as long as persons in authority find no place in their program for the preservation of this outstanding monument.14

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14 To bring this history up to date, the Pittsburgh Press reported on November 24, 1957, that the Federal Government had "granted the County a $60,000 loan
Well it is to repeat still other words of architect Weber:

It is strange, people have a certain regard for masterpieces of sculpture and painting, yet, when it comes to masterpieces of architecture, simply because good buildings are useful as well as beautiful, they seem to think that they can be cut and dissected, severed here and patched up there, tossed around willy-nilly to the tune of anyone in power.

This must not be; it is imperative that the court house group remains whole and undefiled. It belongs not to the city or county only, it belongs to the entire United States of North America. Yea, it belongs to the world, for it is one of the world's masterpieces.

to pay for drawing up plans for adding several new floors" to the County Office Building. "Modern detention facilities may be provided in the plans, thus making it possible to eliminate the Ross Street jail." The Press printed a contumelious editorial, as a follow-up (November 26), calling for demolition of the jail. Even more recently, it has been reported that the County Commissioners are considering the possibility of converting the Jail into an office building; at the same time, they have not ruled out the suggestions that it be used as an Industrial Museum.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

One could scarcely find the history of the construction of a building better documented than that of the Richardson Allegheny County Buildings, owing in part to the esteem the officials held for the buildings that they had commissioned and in part to the timely concurrence of Allegheny County's centennial celebration with the dedication of the new County Buildings in 1888. Van Rensselaer, Marianna Griswold (Mrs. Schuyler v. R.); *Henry Hobson Richardson and His Works*; Boston, 1888.


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I have briefly perused and recorded the incomplete set of Richardson's original Jail drawings in the Allegheny County Works Department, Design; and I have more fully studied the remainder of the set—the originals of which are preserved at Harvard University's Houghten Library and copies of which are owned by the Pittsburgh Chapter, Society of Architectural Historians; University of Pittsburgh.

I further recommend James D. Van Trump's recent article for the Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians; Vol. XVI, No. 3; October, 1957, entitled "The Romanesque Revival in Pittsburgh" and wish to call especial note to the passages concerning the Jail, e.g., "Of the two Pittsburgh buildings, the Jail seems now to be in the greater aesthetic favor..."