



PROJECT PROFILE

On Leong Merchants Building

Partial Facade Restoration | Chicago, IL



CLIENT

Chinese Christian Union Church

BACKGROUND

The On Leong Merchants Building, now known as the Pui Tak Center Building, was constructed in 1926 and is a three-story historic Chicago landmark building located in Chicago's Chinatown district. The building was designed by architects Michaelsen and Rognstad in an Oriental style and includes meeting halls, a school, a shrine, and offices. The building facades are constructed primarily of brick masonry, with ornamental colored terra cotta used extensively throughout the south and east elevations.

In 2008, the On Leong Building was awarded a grant from American Express to perform a partial facade restoration. In preparation, the client engaged WJE to perform a facade assessment of the structure in order to develop a prioritized restoration plan and budget estimate for the repair of the terra cotta portion of the building. Because the structure is a Landmark building and was awarded the Saving America's Treasure grant, all of the facade restoration work must follow the recommendations of the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.



SOLUTION

WJE architects and engineers visually assessed the exterior condition of the south and east elevations of the building from the ground level, the main roof level, and close-up from an aerial lift. The exterior assessment included the terra cotta and brick cladding as well as a cursory survey of the wood windows, steel storefront windows, and wood soffit. Several openings were created at severely distressed facade conditions in order to determine the as-built conditions.

The terra cotta and brick masonry facades were found to be in fair to poor condition. At isolated locations, significant deterioration in both the terra cotta and the brick masonry was observed. The terra cotta cladding above the third floor window head of the southwest tower was temporarily stabilized during the close-up survey because of its severely distressed condition.

WJE prioritized repairs for exterior masonry facade elements and provided a report with drawings and specifications that outlined a restoration plan. The team then oversaw the competitive bidding of the work and provided on-site documentation and observation of the terra cotta repair and replacement, brick masonry replacement, steel restoration, and limited facade cleaning. WJE's work was awarded the 2010 Chicago Landmark Award for Preservation Excellence—Exterior Restoration.