

LOVELY TEMPLE OF 1893 FAIR IS BEING RESTORED

Japanese Buildings Saved from Wreckers.

BY JAMES O'DONNELL BENNETT.

"Better tear them down," said some officials of the south park board as they contemplated a shabby, tenantless group of buildings that was one of the treasures of the World's Fair of 1893.

"Better tear them down. They have ceased to be an asset, and patching and watchman's pay have run into a lot of money in forty years."

"Wish they'd burn up some night," said others.

"Wait a minute! Wait a minute!" exclaimed George T. Donoghue, superintendent of the south parks. "Sentimentally and artistically this Japanese group is irreplaceable. Let's see what can be done to save it."

The result was postponement of orders to bring on the wrecking crew. Negotiations with the Public Works administration followed. That body agreed to finance restoration of the architectural treasure to the amount of at least \$22,000, the government providing all the labor and the south park board sharing half the cost of the material.

Inspiration for the Artisans.

Consequently a piece of work beautiful in spirit and beautiful in execution is progressing on the serene Wooded island in Jackson park. Sixty American artisans are bending lovingly to the restoration of oriental craftsmanship that excites their admiration and that is teaching them valuable lessons about the enduring qualities of work that is done on honor—"work done for the work's sake," as Emanuel Buchsbaum, one of the architects, put it.

What barely escaped the wrecking crew, and what long has struck the heedless passerby as only a pretty and looking group of shacks, will by the first of June be one of the loveliest show places in all Chicagoland—or in the United States, for the matter of that.

Nor will it be only a show place. It will be an art and gala center. "What a setting," said Supt. Donoghue, "this will be for some such fête as an outdoor presentation of 'Madam Butterfly'—or 'The Mikado,' if you like. On the lagoons surrounding the Wooded island we plan to duplicate in midsummer the annual midsummer festival in which the Japanese send by night symbolic candles floating down the streams of their countryside.

Practical Phases of the Plan.

"But we have our practical plans, too. Without commercializing the place we wish to make the beautiful old structures in some measure self-sustaining so that never again can they fall into disrepair or be at the mercy of vandals. That may be effected by using them as tea houses under a strictly regulated concession."

This restoration is one of the most exhilarating jobs of the day. All the workmen engaged on it are rejoicing in it. The Japanese built so well that many of their choicest effects in richly carved redwood, metal, and lacquer have survived forty years of exposure to weather and vandalism. "Vandals," said Mr. Donoghue, "did more than 75 per cent of the damage. Our severe winters and leakage caused by the long lack of thorough repair account for the rest."

The three buildings, including their connecting passageways, measure 200 feet from end to end and are forty feet wide. The principal structural material is redwood and the Japanese selected it with such care that there is no knot in any piece of wood throughout the buildings.

All the timbers are mortised and

Japanese Buildings of 1893 Fair Being Restored



The picturesque Japanese buildings of the World's Fair of 1893, which have stood on Wooded island in Jackson park for forty-one years, are being restored by the south park board with the aid of public works administration funds.

(TRIBUNE Photo.)

disintegrating, and have replaced them with 150 piers of reinforced concrete. Architects who are following the project agree that, considering the sound state of the original timbers and the added strength given the fabric as a whole by the restoration, there is no reason why these structures should not be one of Chicago's adornments 300 years hence.

One change from the original material is being made. The Japanese fitted the window frames with rice paper. The Americans, for climatic reasons, are fitting them with glass.

Where Dean Kelley Comes In.

Nearly all the ceiling panels, which were charming designs painted on rice paper, were destroyed by leakage. Enough of the nearly one hundred are in such a state that it will be possible to reproduce the designs. When that work begins the south park authorities and the PWA hope to enlist the aid of Dean Charles F. Kelley and his students in the Art Institute's great school of design. Already the institute's Ryerson library, a treasure house of prints and data concerning hundreds of architectural masterpieces, has given the restorers valuable assistance by providing them with photographs and photostats of the buildings as they appeared in the golden days of the old Fair.

The restoration is going forward under the general direction of Mr. Donoghue. Mr. Buchsbaum is the building architect and Robert Moore, a pupil of the illustrious Jans Jensen, the landscape architect. Alfred Caldwell is working out Mr. Moore's designs.

Gardens Where Cascades Will Sing.

Those designs give the project its supreme touch of beauty. They will carry an extensive scheme of Japanese gardens, embellished with cascades and bridges, from the buildings to the shore line of the lagoon east of them. In the far distance a massive arched bridge of red stone closes the picture. On the north the buildings are sentinelled by a grove of 500 Japanese cherry trees, the gift of citizens of Japan. Having been acclimated for a year in Seattle, they have been set out here and are doing well.

The craftsmen engaged on the restoration—and they make an honor roll—include carpenters, metal workers, painters and cement finishers. All are Americans. Expenditure runs 80 per cent for labor and 20 per cent for material, which is precisely the alloc-

tenoned with a nicety that delights American workmen accustomed to more slapdash methods of construction. When the buildings were recently thrown open to the artisans all the latticed doors moved smoothly in their grooves after forty years, and the cry went up from onlookers, "Now, isn't that honest workmanship!"

"Yes," said Mr. Wakai [pronounced Wakie], a visiting Japanese architect who through the good offices of the Japanese consul gave the restorers valuable advice, "yes, it was work done on the principle of 'cost of labor no object.'"

And other Japanese travelers viewing the structures on the Wooded Island said, "We don't build this well in Japan now. You have a treasure from the hands of the old honor craftsmen."

Lacquer Time Has Not Harmed.

The precious lacquer work has come undimmed and unchecked through four decades and still glistens like black glass.

The copper sheathing of the roofs and much of the exterior ornamentation in copper have suffered severely. They were made from plates too thin for our climate. Storms tore away some of them. Vandals tore away others. Enough of them remain to give the American craftsmen abundant models from which to reconstruct the ornamentation.

This phase of the work especially interests the men and it is delightful to behold the care and ingenuity which they bestow upon the cutting, bending, and hammering of new copper in their fashioning of pieces that duplicate the old hand wrought Japanese ornaments which blew away or were stolen. From fragments of wood and from the bits of metal which overlaid the wood our countrymen are performing achievements in restoration that would deserve the praise of the Japanese artisans of forty years ago. The new work will last much longer, for the Americans are using sheet copper twice as thick as the old plates.

The Japanese really built only for the period of a world's fair, although as it turns out they did far better than that. The restorers are going them still better. They have removed the original brick piers which sustained the structures and which were

tion that the PWA wishes to maintain.

The buildings are duplicates of the famous Houden temple, sometimes called the phoenix palace, at Niji, near Tokio. They symbolize the sacred bird of Japan and hence are full of religious significance. They were first fabricated and erected in Japan under the direction and at the cost of the government. They were taken down and the joining of the various pieces was carefully marked before they were shipped to Chicago in 1891. With them came 75 Japanese workmen, who reerected the structures on the Wooded Island. The job was an early instance of what we now call prefabrication.