



Tax Destruction
Sweeps Chicago

By Joseph Ator

ON THE sultry afternoon of last May 19 a motorist, driving across the Chicago stockyards over the 43d street viaduct, flipped a cigaret into one of the wooden, straw-strewed cattle pens below.

There followed a conflagration in which one heroic watchman lost his life, which 2,200 firemen, using five-sixths of the city's apparatus, fought until the next day to subdue and which destroyed a dozen famous stockyards structures and fifty minor buildings. The fire was the most widespread since the great conflagration of 1871, with property damage now placed by underwriters in the neighborhood of \$4,500,000.

But as an agent of destruction that careless motorist who tossed away his cigaret was a piker compared with that group of public employes—quite efficient employes, in the main—who in the county building prepare and send out Cook county's 1,100,000 annual real estate tax bills.

Theirs is a smokeless, unspectacular destruction, but it numbers each year hundreds of buildings as its toll against the few score which burned at the stockyards. This devastating effect of taxes tearing down a city—because the owners of buildings find it cheaper to wreck them than to operate and

GENERAL TAX BILL—DUE NOW

DATE _____ 1934

1ST INSTALLMENT

OFFICE NUMBER _____

NAME
AND
ADDRESS
FOR
WHOM
PAID

Tax Payer,
Chicago, Ill.

VOL.

429/158

TOWN

SPECIAL ASSESSMENTS
ITEM ARE PAYABLE TO CITY AND
VILLAGE COLLECTORS
UNTIL JUNE AND AT THIS
OFFICE AFTER AUGUST 1

PENALTY ADDED AFTER

LEGAL DESCRIPTION

pay taxes on them—is evidenced by the pockmarks of scores of parking lots which have replaced office and warehouse structures in the loop and surrounding business districts.

It appears again in apartment houses throughout the city, owners of which, unable to operate at a profit, have boarded them up or abandoned them to vandals. The slow fire of tax destruction strikes indiscriminately. In the list of casualties appear the home of a merchant prince of earlier Chicago, where President Grover Cleveland was entertained, and, far-

ther down, what was once America's most elegant and notorious bawdy house.

It is rapidly operating to complete the work of the great fire of '71 in stripping Chicago of its historic landmarks. A century-old tavern where fur traders roistered and Indians begged whisky has given way to a parking lot, as has a great wholesale building which in its day was one of the city's most famous business structures. A cottage where Abraham Lincoln often slept when he came to Chicago to try law cases has

Skyscrapers and
Landmarks Fall

been pulled down, and a great brewery, which even the return of beer could not rescue from its tax burden.

Since 1931 Chicago has torn down more than twice as many buildings as it has built. Records of the city building department show that during 1932 and 1933 the buildings torn down, including those condemned by the city as unsafe, totaled 1,948. During the same two years permits to erect new buildings totaled only 928.

Furthermore, only a few of the new structures went up on the land cleared by wrecking. During 1929, the last year of the building boom, 6,146 permits were issued for the erection of buildings with a total cost of \$202,286,800. That year only 1,017 buildings were wrecked, less than in 1933, when the city saw only \$3,683,960 in new building construction.

Each year, in making up the real estate assessment roll, the staff of Assessor J. L. Jacobs makes a survey of all buildings wrecked or destroyed during the previous year. Those records for 1930, 1931, and 1932 are available (the 1933 assessment is not finished). They show that after excluding as worthless from a taxation standpoint all structures ordered wrecked by

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