

Historic Pulaski Park Field House Roof in Chicago Restored to its Original Beauty



WEDNESDAY January 25, 2006

THE PROJECT

In 1912, Chicago's West Park Commission created Pulaski Park as part of an effort to add more open spaces among the inner-city tenement districts of Chicago's West Side. The park, located in a predominately immigrant neighborhood, was named for Polish war hero Casimer Pulaski who fought for the American cause in the Revolutionary War.

Two years later, in 1914, the commission constructed a three-story field house in the park, to host community activities and services. The 49,100-square-foot structure was built to reflect the historic architecture of Eastern Europe, including design elements such as copper-covered towers, dormers, verandas and green clay tile roofing.

RESTORING CLASSIC BEAUTY

While the field house maintained many of its historic design elements through the years, the original Ludowici clay tile roof was not saved. In 1947, the roof tiles were removed and replaced with asphalt shingles. In the early '90s those shingles were re-covered with laminated asphalt shingles. In 2003, the Chicago Park District decided to replace the entire field house roof, and bring back the tile that was removed more than 50 years earlier. They hired **Knickerbocker Roofing** of Harvey, Illinois to accomplish the project.

The Park District asked that the new roof retain historical value and appearance, including replication of the original roof tile style and color.

Knickerbocker Roofing began the project with research. In the Chicago Park archives, they retrieved old photos and specification drawings of the field house to help them replicate the original tile roofing design. But first, they needed the right tile.



After finding several 90-year-old clay roof tiles in the field house attic, **Knickerbocker Roofing** contacted the original tile manufacturer, Ludowici Roof Tile, and asked them to replicate the tile with one of their modern products. Ludowici matched the style to their current large-size Classic XL tile product, and then custom manufactured the tiles in a shade of green that matches the original color.

INSTALLATION CHALLENGES

Using the original drawings, **Knickerbocker Roofing** integrated the restored tile roofing system with new copper flashings and valleys, as well as the copper ornamentation over the roof's eyebrow vents. The tile roofing was also installed on the various dormers. Most of the project's challenges were not related to the tile directly, but to the work environment. The field house remained open during the project, which required that Knickerbocker effectively use scaffolding and portable fencing to keep themselves and pedestrians safe.

THE FINISHED PRODUCT

The Pulaski Park Field House's new roof closely resembles the original, a testament to the enduring beauty and versatility of today's tile roofing. The restoration project was so remarkable that the Commission on Chicago Landmarks awarded the Park District the 2004 Chicago Landmark Award for Preservation Excellence Tile Roof Restoration. The field house was one of 18 projects honored with a Landmark Award, which recognizes notable improvements to individual Chicago landmarks or buildings in landmark districts.

Project name: Pulaski Park Field House

Project location: Chicago

Project duration: March 19, 2003-Oct. 28, 2003

Roof system type: Clay tile

Roofing contractor: Knickerbocker Roofing and Paving Co. Inc., Harvey, Ill.

Tile manufacturer: Ludowici Roof Tile, New Lexington, Ohio