

# Chicago Bits and Pieces

Architectural Components of a Great City

By

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*Chicago Hidden in Plain Sight Series (CHIPS):*

Volume Five of Five

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The complete *CHIPS (Chicago Hidden in Plain Sight) Series* in Five Volumes:

Volume One: Chicago Street People

Volume Two: Twelfth Century Chicago

Volume Three: Chicago Street Zoo

Volume Four: Chicago Gargoyles, Grotesques, and Dragons

Volume Five: Chicago Bits and Pieces

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## Introduction

There are dozens of books available to the reading public that are filled with pages of sweeping vistas of downtown Chicago highlighting its magnificent skyscrapers, parks, and lakefront. These large picture books display impressive images of Chicago's landmark architecture in the Loop and throughout the city. Not one of these books addresses the small *pieces* of architecture, the details of building façades that make their decades-old walls so engaging. This book does that and more—and most importantly for the very first time.

*Chicago: Bits and Pieces* introduces to the viewer *parts* of buildings as its title suggests. Bits and pieces of building façades were recorded, researched, and revealed in this volume to draw attention to a world of art that was previously “invisible” to most people. Pedestrians running for the train cannot notice the beauty of a limestone carving peering out from some shadowed place, a gift from the past. Lincoln Park passersby with coffee cups and smart phones are too often hopelessly unaware of the green-colored terra cotta forms overhead. These are sad situations with the best remedy in your hands.

*Chicago: Bits and Pieces* addresses architectural embellishments in this city. It is about design, decoration and, abstraction; only non-figurative, geometric, floral, and structural building bits and pieces are featured. Leaves and vines mingle with other recognizable components of our modern society. Planes, trains, and automobiles demand attention with laboratory flasks and beakers, and sailing ships. Musical instruments and cornucopias vie for attention with numerous heavenly bodies—only the types in outer space.

Abstract decoration is celebrated with complex geometries of points, lines, and angles; solids and voids are revealed by shallow black shadows. These are the bits and pieces that are *not* addressed in the other four volumes of the *Chicago Vignettes Series* or anywhere else. Consult those volumes to study carvings of people, weird looking or otherwise, or animals, or dragons; peruse those for heavenly bodies too—the terrestrial types.

There is beauty in architectural bits and pieces. A building façade is made up of many components—many bits and pieces—that were intended to delight the viewer and accomplish nothing more. Others were included by necessity; they are structural and, if magically eliminated, there would be a pile of rubble where a building used to stand. Whether decorative or integral to a building's existence, these bits and pieces serve a purpose and they tell a fundamental story.

Three materials were decided upon for recording and researching: stone, terra cotta, and metal. These materials in their purest forms were extracted from the matrix of earth and reworked by man's hand into new and compelling uses. They call out to us to again be noticed, to be recognized for the work they do and the beauty they unselfishly and unceasingly offer.

The scope of this book is the entire city of Chicago—all 234 square miles of it. Time periods surveyed: long time ago to 2014. Materials recorded: stone, terra cotta, and metal—all of it tough stuff, like this city.