

# LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



## Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building

4100 South Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive

Preliminary Landmark recommendation approved by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, December 7, 2006



**CITY OF CHICAGO**  
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development  
Lori T. Healey, Commissioner

*The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.*

*The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.*

*This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within the designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.*

**Cover, clockwise from upper left:** The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building, 4100 S. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, completed in 1890 in the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style. **Upper right:** Capital detail on a roof support column from the second floor gallery interior. **Bottom right:** A. Philip Randolph, Founder of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, America's largest African-American labor union. The Brotherhood held rallies and met regularly at the church. **Bottom left:** The building's semi-circular sanctuary interior.

# **METROPOLITAN APOSTOLIC COMMUNITY CHURCH**

**(ORIGINALLY THE 41ST STREET PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH,  
LATER THE METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH)  
4100 S. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. DRIVE**

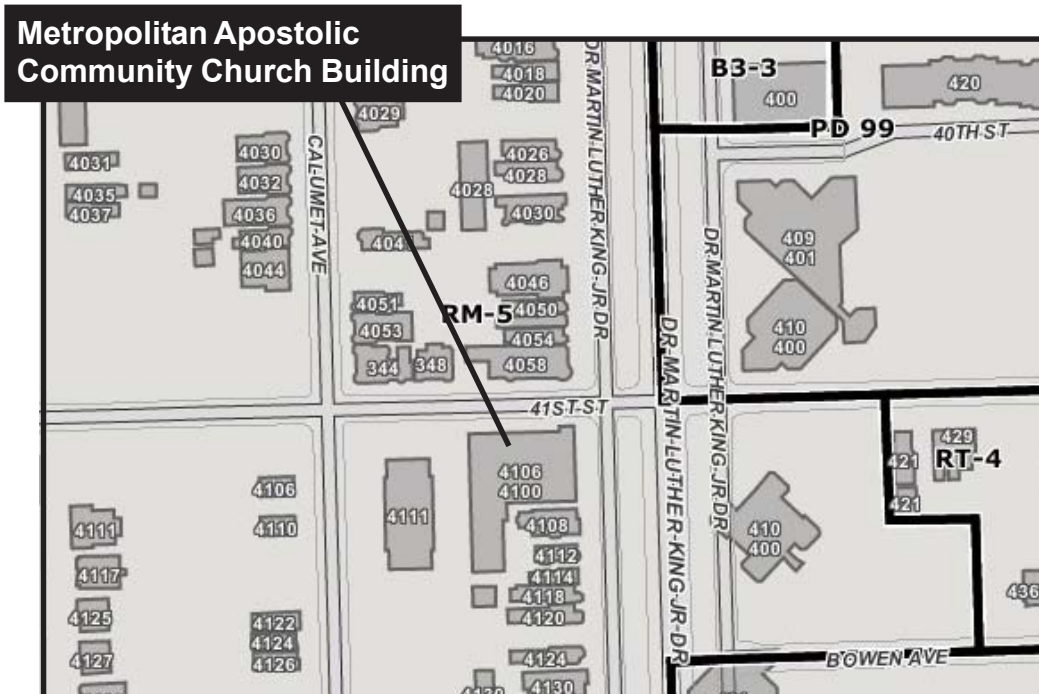
**BUILT: 1888-1890; 1913 (ADDITION)  
ARCHITECTS: JOHN T. LONG; CHARLES S. FROST (ADDITION)**

In Chicago's neighborhoods, religious buildings often are some of the most outstanding visual and historical landmarks due to their visual prominence, the quality of their architectural design and materials, or their association with the history of their communities. The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building in the South Side neighborhood of Grand Boulevard, part of "Bronzeville," is no exception. Located at the corner of 41st Street and Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive (formerly Grand Boulevard), it was originally built in 1890 for the 41st Street Presbyterian Church and is an outstanding example of Romanesque Revival church architecture.

The building is the work of Chicago architect John Turner Long, known for his churches and school buildings in Evanston and many South Side neighborhoods. He is also credited with designing such Chicago Landmarks as the Yale Apartments on S. Yale Ave., and the 111th St. Train Station in the Beverly/Morgan Park Railroad Station District. After a merger with the First Presbyterian Church in 1912, and a subsequent name change, the congregation hired prominent Chicago architect Charles Sumner Frost in 1913 to make



Top: The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church as it appeared in the 1940s. Originally called the 41st Street Presbyterian Church, it is an 1890 building clad in variegated or “raindrop” sandstone from a quarry near Marquette, Michigan, and built in the Romanesque Revival architectural style. Bottom: It is located in the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago’s South Side.



some alterations, including a side addition to the existing classrooms, to reflect the union of the two congregations.

The Peoples Community Church of Christ and Metropolitan Community Center, later called the Metropolitan Community Church, was founded in 1920 by Rev. William Decatur Cook, the former pastor of Chicago's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. Cook, with over 500 followers, purchased the building in 1927 after the Presbytery sold the church to move to their new home in the Woodlawn neighborhood. The newly-formed church followed the principles of the fledgling Community Church Movement. Founded in 1915, the movement promoted the formation of ecumenical or "independent" churches that governed themselves democratically, with a dedication towards community service rather than religious denomination.

From the beginning, the Metropolitan Community Church kept to its credo: *Non-Sectarian, Broadly Humanitarian, Serving All The People*. The church's membership rolls contained many of Chicago's prominent black leaders, including journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett; *Chicago Defender* founder, Robert S. Abbott; and Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks. The church also served as the organizational home to a number of African-American labor unions and social clubs, as well as the venue for many civil rights activities. Most notably, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded by A. Philip Randolph, met regularly at the church. On a national stage, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt used the Metropolitan's pulpit to speak out against the racial segregation of military troops during World War II.

In 2003, the building was purchased by Rev. Leon Finney, Jr. and the congregation of the Christ Apostolic Church. Out of deference to Metropolitan's illustrious contribution to the African-American community, the church changed its name to the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church.

## **BUILDING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

Chicago's South Side neighborhood of Grand Boulevard was originally a part of suburban Hyde Park Township. It was mainly prairie with a few scattered houses and two Indian trails which eventually became Cottage Grove and Vincennes avenues, and is bordered by 39th and 51st streets on the north and south, Cottage Grove Avenue to the east, and the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad tracks to the west. The area experienced small growth spurts in the 1860s and 1870s after the Civil War and Chicago Fire of 1871, and was settled primarily by middle-class families of English, Scotch and Irish descent. These residents built modest wood-frame cottages lining Grand Boulevard (later South Parkway, and now Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive).

In 1869, the South Park Commission planned Chicago's boulevard system, including Grand Boulevard, where the design called for narrow service roads next to building lots

on both sides of the street and a wide thoroughfare down the center. The roads were separated by landscaped, tree-lined parkways. The five-year beautification of Grand Boulevard began in 1874, as many of the city's elite began drifting southward from the neighborhoods to the north, centered on Prairie and South Michigan avenues.

The Commission's efforts, along with the introduction of cable cars along Cottage Grove Avenue in 1882, made the area very appealing for high-quality residential development. Many of the wood-frame cottages along Grand Boulevard were torn down in favor of masonry mansions and single-family homes. The result of the beautification was so successful that it served as the impetus for the fashionable "Sunday promenade" by the carriage-riding public en route to Washington Park at 51st Street. The area's popularity continued after the village of Hyde Park was annexed by the City of Chicago in 1889.

The origins of the 41st Street Presbyterian Church (the original occupant of the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building) date to 1869, when the congregation began as a Sunday school in the home of Mrs. Lewis W. Stone at 4316 S. Michigan Ave. Coinciding with Mrs. Stone's Sunday school, the Presbyterian League of Chicago operated a small mission at the corner of 41st St. and Prairie Ave., funded by the First Presbyterian Church located at Indiana Ave. and 21st St. Five years later, the Presbytery of Chicago rewarded their efforts by building a small wooden church for congregation near the mission. Aptly named the 41st Street Presbyterian Church, their first services were held on May 23, 1875, but by the mid-1880s, the growing congregation was in need of a much larger building.

In September 1888, the trustees of the 41st Street church chose Chicago architect John Turner Long to design its new church. Although little is known about him, Long had been employed as a draftsman in the offices of both William W. Boyington and Adler & Sullivan in the early 1880s. After a brief period of designing buildings in Kansas for the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railroad, Long returned to the Chicago area, where he completed the largest body of work in his career. He is credited with numerous school and church buildings in Evanston and in many South Side neighborhoods. They include the Hemenway Methodist Episcopal Church in Evanston, and such Chicago Landmarks as the Yale Apartments (1892) on S. Yale Ave., the Horace Horton Mansion (1890) in the Longwood Drive District, and the 111th St. Train Station (1891) in the Beverly/Morgan Park Railroad District.

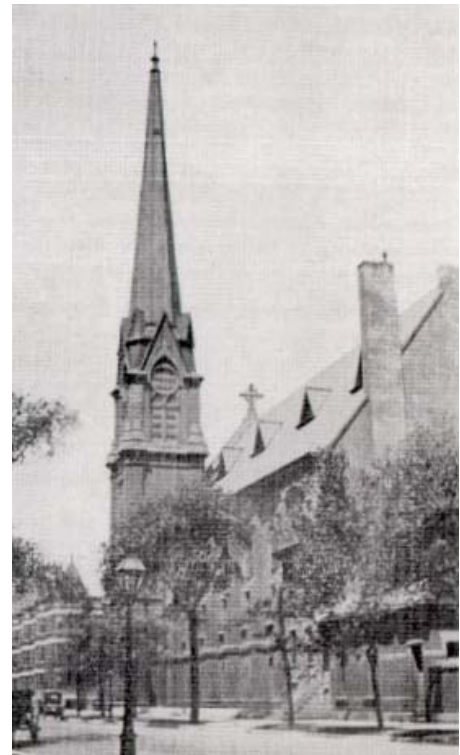
The congregation purchased a 100 x 135-foot parcel on the southwest corner of Grand Boulevard and 41st Street, earmarking \$100,000 for its completion. The *Chicago Tribune* described the proposed design as a Romanesque-style brownstone church with a slate roof and a short bell tower at the corner. The church was also to have a two-story, 40 x 100-foot building at the rear of the church to be used for Sunday-school classrooms, a parlor, kitchen, and pastor's study. In addition, the *Tribune* detailed a 90 x 95-foot sanctuary auditorium and gallery space capable of seating 1,400, outfitted with hardwood ornament and stained glass windows, making it one of the "handsomest churches on the interior in Chicago." By all accounts, John Long did not deviate from his original plan.



**Top:** Chicago's South Park Commission planned the city's boulevard system in the 1870s, including Grand Boulevard. In this 1893 photo, stately masonry residences in the Romanesque Revival architectural style line the boulevard.

**Right:** The First Presbyterian Church, located on Indiana and 21st Street (demolished). Forced out by encroaching business development, its congregation moved in 1912 to the 41st Street Presbyterian Church, and subsequently changed its name to First Presbyterian Church.

**Bottom:** The Church of the Epiphany, built in 1885 by Burling & Whitehouse, is the only remaining church in Chicago clad in variegated sandstone from the same Michigan quarry. The church is part of the Jackson Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.



The cornerstone for the new 41st Street Presbyterian Church was laid in October 1889, and the building was dedicated on Sunday, December 21, 1890.

As early as 1897, the congregation of the First Presbyterian Church realized that the area adjacent to their location at Indiana Ave. and 21st Street was being developed for businesses, rather than residential purposes. In addition, the racial and religious character of the area was changing from predominantly white and Protestant to African-Americans and German Jews. Without a reliable source of income from the neighborhood, the parish struggled to operate independently.

In 1912, after thoroughly accounting for their assets with the Presbytery of Chicago, First Presbyterian Church was allowed to consolidate its congregation with that of the 41st Street Presbyterian Church, transferring all orders of business to the Grand Boulevard location. Subsequently, the name of the building was changed to First Presbyterian Church.

The following year, the congregation hired Chicago architect Charles Sumner Frost to make some interior alterations, as well as extend the building at the rear of the church to house more classrooms and a gymnasium. Frost replaced five narrow arched clerestory windows with three wide pointed gothic arches on the south façade to accommodate the stained glass windows removed from the former First Presbyterian Church. Frost was also asked to relocate the organ, which required raising the choir area behind the altar and moving the pulpit forward into the center of the church.

First Presbyterian's congregation remained in the church for another fifteen years before making the decision to move to the Woodlawn neighborhood. The Peoples Community Church in Christ, later called the Metropolitan Community Church, purchased the building in 1927, where it remained until 2002. It was then purchased in 2003 by the congregation of Christ Apostolic Church, and out of deference to Metropolitan's illustrious 75-year history with the building as part of the African-American community, the church changed its name to the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church.

The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building is a Romanesque Revival-style church, distinguished by its austere exterior with deeply-recessed, round-arch window and door openings, rough-cut masonry façade, and minimal ornamentation including squat engaged or clustered columns. It is built of "raindrop," or variegated, sandstone on the north and east facades, and common brick on its south and west façades. Quarried in the Lake Superior region near Marquette, Michigan, this sandstone was very popular in the 19th century for its strength and its unique purplish-brown color that resembles wet stone. Used primarily for large public buildings, it was almost quarried to exhaustion during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The only other existing church in Chicago made from this material is the Church of the Epiphany, a Romanesque Revival-style structure built in 1885 by architects Burling & Whitehouse, located within the Jackson Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.





A current view and window detail of the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building (the clerestory windows were removed from the building in 2002). The Romanesque Revival architectural style in Chicago was greatly influenced by the work of architect Henry Hobson Richardson. With its strong massing, round arches and simple ornament, the style was used in dozens of public building types from the mid-1880s through the 1890s. Bottom left: A *Chicago Tribune* article announcing the proposed building in September, 1888. It is located in the Bronzeville neighborhood on Chicago's South Side.

AMONG THE ARCHITECTS AND BUILDERS.  
 The Forty-first Street Presbyterian trustees selected Architect John T. Long's plan for a handsome \$100,000 brownstone church, to be erected on the corner of Forty-first street and Grand boulevard. The foundation will be laid this fall on a space of ground 100x135, and the remainder of the building will be finished next spring as soon as the weather will permit. The main auditorium will be 90x125, and have a seating capacity of 900. A handsome gallery of hardwood finish will ornament the sides and seat 500. The rear of the church, 40x100, will be divided into two stories. The first story will be devoted to Sunday-school purposes, consisting of a large Sunday-school, infant and Bible class rooms; the second story to parlor, study, kitchen, and janitor's quarters. A short tower, with space for a bell, will overlook the corner of Forty-first street and Grand boulevard. Blinded-glass windows will be among the ornamental features, and no expense will be spared to make it one of the handsomest churches on the interior in Chicago. The exterior will be constructed of plain cut brownstone.





**Some architectural elements on the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building typical of the Richardsonian Romanesque architectural style including; round arches, heavy massing and minimal ornamentation.**





**Top: The facade of the attached Sunday-school building facing 41st Street. Bottom: Copper dormer vents provide a visually-pleasing contrast to the church building's dark coloring.**



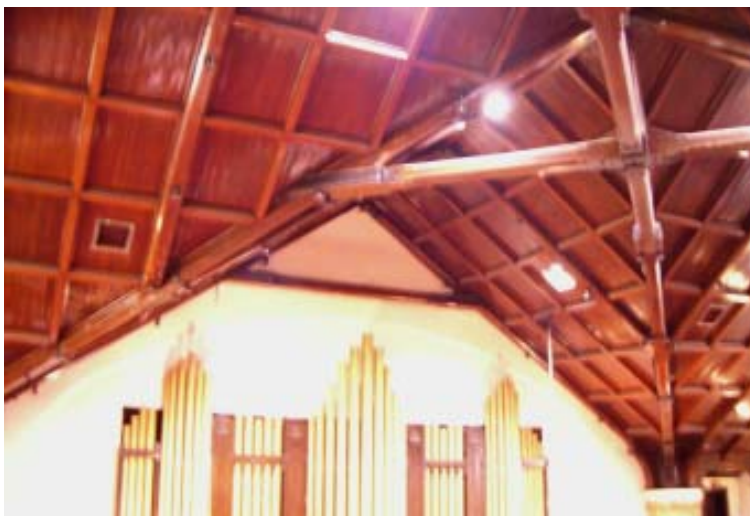


**Top: View from the gallery looking towards the pulpit and choir loft. The most imposing feature in the main sanctuary of the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building is its grand cross-gable roof with its open trusswork and coffering.**

**Middle: Scrollwork detail on the roof trusswork. The roof is made from red oak and chiefly supported by large concrete columns.**



**Bottom: Detail of the church's intersecting cross-gables, rafters and coffering.**



The sanctuary building has a Greek cross plan, whereby all of its arms are equal in length. It stands approximately three stories tall, and faces east onto Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive. It also has a high-pitched roof with multiple dormer vents made of copper, of which its green patina provides a visually-pleasing contrast to the stone. On its northeast corner, the building has a square bell tower with a pyramidal roof and is accented with arches and narrow slits on all visible sides. On the southeast end of the building, the entrance is only two stories high, with slits that mimic the bell tower, and has a flat roof. This entrance visually conceals the common brick façade from the public right-of-way.

The building has three entrances off of King Drive and three additional entrances on the 41st Street side, one of which is a separate entrance into the long narrow classroom building, which is adjacent to the alley to the west. All are surrounded by a stone arch and have double doors with semi-circular fixed transom windows made of stained glass. The main entrance is distinguished by pairs of small cylindrical columns flanking the doors, while the other entrances are flanked by square engaged columns. All of the columns are smoothly carved from sandstone and have squat capitals with a foliate design. The building also contains scrolled banding subtly-carved just above the second floor and gables, and triangular-shaped foliate designs located at points where the roof and walls meet.

The fenestration is evenly-spaced on both the east and north façades. There are five tall, narrow arch-shaped clerestory window openings on the east façade. The openings on the north façade are equally tall and narrow, but shaped like a horseshoe arch. On the south façade, there are three wide openings shaped like a pointed arch with stained glass in a square-paned pattern. At street level, the windows are arch-shaped and are comprised of three panes with a semi-circular stained glass panel overhead. The east clerestory windows, as well as a number of the semi-circular panels, were removed in 2002.

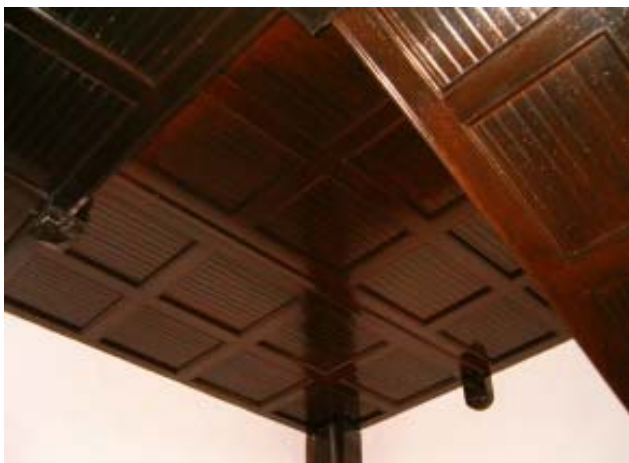
The entrance to the attached two-story classroom building faces north and is made from the same brownstone as the sanctuary building. The west façade is made of common brick and has arched windows on the first floor and double-hung windows on the second floor. Its lintels and sills are made from sandstone. The 1913 addition constructed by Charles Frost is attached to the south end of the original classroom building. It is made from common brick and has smaller, unadorned windows.

The sanctuary's almost square-shaped room has an open floor plan that slopes toward a large raised semi-circular pulpit area which contains the altar and seating. The pulpit is surrounded by a low carved communion rail and a step for kneeling. Its auditorium-style seating radiates out from the pulpit. Behind the pulpit area, there is a raised platform for the choir and an elaborately-carved red oak screen that conceals the organ. On the west wall are some of the large brass organ pipes. It is reported that the pipes, which were part of an organ installation in 1922, number over 2,000.

The most imposing feature is an intersecting cross-gable roof articulated by rafters and coffering. It is made from red oak and stained a deep brown color. The trusses are



Interior details of the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building. Clockwise from top left: View from the sanctuary's first floor looking south towards the church's semi-circular gallery; Gilt detail on the column capitals that support the upstairs gallery; Foliated gilt detailing on the massive concrete columns that support the roof; Coffered woodwork under the stairs leading to the gallery; Stained glass window detail on the first floor of the sanctuary.



connected by large metal brackets, and are decorated with large wooden scrolls which rest on four massive two-story columns. These load-bearing columns are located near the corners of the sanctuary on the first floor and punch up through the gallery floor. They are made from poured concrete, with gilding at the base and capital, which has a foliate design.

Just inside the entrance there are two sets of stairs to the north and south which lead to the gallery. The area under the stairs uses the same material as the organ screen, and the both the walls and ceilings are paneled. The stair railings have finely-turned spindles. The gallery is semi-circular in shape with multiple steps down. The underside slopes downward and is supported by evenly-spaced columns with capitals of a stylized foliate design, and it is edged with a carved wooden rail with turned spindles, similar to the stair railing.

## **THE ROMANESQUE REVIVAL AND CHURCH ARCHITECTURE**

The forms of the Romanesque Revival architectural style, used for the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building, derives from the 11th- and 12th-century architecture of Western Europe, primarily from France, Spain and Germany. Based on Roman and Byzantine elements, Romanesque Revival architecture is characterized by its massive articulated wall structure, round arches and powerful vaults.

The revival of the Romanesque, or “Norman” architectural style began in England and Germany, but especially with the latter. Begun in the 1830s, it was virtually concurrent with the Gothic Revival style, of which England was particularly fond. In Protestant church architecture, the use of Roman and Byzantine elements was used for political as well as practical and aesthetic reasons. Historically, Romanesque architecture was linked with the Early Christian, or “primitive” church, while Gothic architectural style was tied to the Catholics and High-Church Anglicans churches. One fine European example of the Romanesque Revival architectural style is found with Karl Friedrich Schinkel’s Church of the Nazarene in Berlin. Begun in 1831, its strong massing, round arches and simple ornament made it less ostentatious than its Gothic Revival-style counterpart.

The first-recorded religious structure in the Romanesque Revival style was the Church of the Pilgrims, a Congregational church in Brooklyn Heights, NY, completed in 1846 by English-born architect Richard Upjohn. Known primarily for his Gothic Revival-style Episcopalian churches, Upjohn was reluctant to offer this particular style to Protestant denominations. Other architects that produced churches in the Romanesque Revival style include John Notman and James Renwick, although the style enjoyed a resurgence in the 1880s due to the work of the acclaimed Boston architect **Henry Hobson Richardson** (1838-1886). Richardson’s Trinity Church, completed in 1877, was a Romanesque Revival masterpiece and caused many congregations to seek duplicates of his design.



Left: Henry Hobson Richardson's Romanesque style made a significant impact on architecture in Chicago and throughout the nation. He is most noted for his design of Trinity Church in Boston (1872-77).

Clockwise from right: The best known examples of Richardsonian Romanesque architecture in Chicago include such Chicago and National Landmarks as: the John J. Glessner House (1886-87); the former Chicago Historical Society (1890-95) by Henry Ives Cobb; and the Auditorium Building (1886-90) by Adler & Sullivan.





### *Richardsonian Romanesque in Chicago*

H. H. Richardson's Romanesque style made a significant impact on architecture in Chicago and throughout the nation. From roughly 1885 to 1900, in Chicago alone hundreds of public and private buildings were built in this style. Only three Chicago structures were actually built by Richardson: the Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1885-87, demolished), the Franklin MacVeagh House (1885-86, demolished), and the John J. Glessner House (1886-87), a Chicago Landmark and a National Historic Landmark. Their greatly contrasting scales and uses in turn gave local architects highly visible models.

In Chicago, the examples of the Richardsonian Romanesque style include dozens of public building types, such as schools, cultural institutions and monuments, as well as religious buildings. Among the best known are: the Auditorium Building (1886-90); the former Chicago Historical Society Building (1890-95); and the Armour Institute Main Building (1891-93), all Chicago Landmarks; and the base of the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial in Lincoln Park (1886-91).

Examples of religious buildings in the style include such Chicago Landmarks as the Kenwood United Church of Christ (1887) in the North Kenwood District, the Greenstone Church (1882) in the Pullman District and most notably, the Church of the Epiphany (1885) in the Jackson Boulevard District. The Church of the Epiphany, designed by architects Burling & Whitehouse, is built from the same Lake Superior variegated sandstone as the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building.

## **ORIGINS OF CHICAGO'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY (1850-1920)**

Although the origins of Chicago's African-American heritage began in 1779, when Jean Baptiste Point DuSable, the city's first non-native settler, built a cabin along the Chicago River, there was no significant African-American settlement in the Chicago area until the 1840s. The city's industrial growth, followed by the onset of the Civil War created hundreds of jobs that employed African-Americans, many of which were fleeing oppression from the South. From 1850 to 1870 alone, the African-American population in Chicago grew from 320 to almost 3,700.

Settlement was concentrated in small pockets in various parts of the city, with the largest being on the Near South Side. By 1870, the boundaries of the South Side community were established in a long narrow strip, often known as the "Black Belt." Bordered on the west by rail yards and industrial properties and on the east by affluent white neighborhoods, the belt extended from Van Buren Street (in the Loop) to 39th Street, a distance of nearly five miles.

Chicago's business and social establishment was largely indifferent to the African-American community. Consequently, what gradually evolved in the Black Belt was a complete and independent commercial, social, and political base. As the community grew, it began to satisfy its own demand for goods and services. By 1885, it had

diversified to such an extent that a complete directory of African-American businesses, *The Colored Men's Professional and Business Directory of Chicago*, was published.

The community's political strength was shown in the election of John Jones to the Cook County Board of Commissioners in 1874. Jones, a tailor of mixed free-black and white parentage, was supported by both African-Americans and whites and was the first African-American to hold elected office in Illinois. The site of the John and Mary Jones home in the South Loop is a Chicago Landmark.

By 1900, with a population of over 30,000, the burgeoning South Side community began to take on the characteristics of a small "city-within-a-city." A major factor in the growth of this "Black Metropolis" was due to its increasing access to financial resources due to the prosperity of the African-American community. As a result, the unwillingness of the white financial community to support African-American enterprises became much less of an obstacle. With greater financial resources, the commercial and business interests of the African-American community continued to diversify into a wide range of professional, commercial and manufacturing interests.

Much of the reason for the access to financial resources was due to the phenomenal increase in the community's population. The "Great Migration," as it is often referred, was a period between 1910 and 1920 when approximately a half million African-Americans left the South and journeyed to cities in the North and West seeking employment and individual freedom. It was the largest internal movement of a people in such a concentrated period of time in the history of the United States.

In this period of migration, Chicago became the destination for African-Americans from all walks of life, largely due to the national distribution of the *Chicago Defender*, one of the city's black newspapers. Founded in 1905 by Robert S. Abbott, a black Georgian who came to Chicago in 1899, the *Defender* was widely distributed throughout the South by Pullman railroad porters, who were usually African-American and stationed in Chicago. These men touted Chicago as a place of opportunity, and soon the African-American population grew from just over 40,000 to nearly 110,000, all residing in an area that by 1920 was bounded on the north by 22nd, on the east by Cottage Grove, on the south by 55th, and on the west by Wentworth.

The First World War also stepped up migration of blacks from the South to Chicago because there was a need for them as industrial workers in the growing stockyards, steel mills, and foundries of the city. They crowded into the Black Belt, which expanded gradually into neighboring areas. This strain on housing added to other tensions that erupted in race riots in Chicago during the summer of 1919. In the aftermath, the Black Belt became almost exclusively populated by African-Americans, and the surrounding areas exclusively by whites. Today, this area includes the Calumet-Giles-Prairie District, designated a Chicago Landmark in 1988, and more recently, the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District, and designated a Chicago Landmark in 1994.



Between 1910 and 1920, the Great Migration brought thousands of African-Americans to Chicago seeking employment and individual freedom.

Right: Reverend William Decatur Cook, the former pastor of Bethel A.M.E. Church, founded the Metropolitan Community Church in 1920. Bottom left: Originally called the Peoples United Church in Christ, the congregation held its first religious services in Unity Hall, part of the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville Chicago Landmark District. Bottom right: The congregation also held services at the Metropolitan Community Center, a social service agency run by the church at 3118 S. Giles (demolished). The congregation purchased the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building in 1927.





The membership rolls of the Metropolitan Community Church contained many of Chicago's prominent African-American leaders such as (clockwise from top left): *Chicago Defender* founder, Robert Sengstacke Abbott; Journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett; U.S. Congressman Oscar DePriest and Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks.



## METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH

The Metropolitan Community Church was established in 1920 by the Rev. William Decatur Cook, the popular former pastor of Chicago's Bethel African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church. Politics in the African-American community were fierce as ambitious members of this rapidly-growing area (due to the sudden influx of Southerners via the Great Migration) competed against one another to represent the interests of the community. In Chicago, many ministers took to politicking from the pulpit, and the A.M.E. Church administration was ambivalent towards this influx of new arrivals, resulting in them seeking spiritual guidance elsewhere. Cook criticized his colleagues for their departure from their pastoral duties, and they lobbied to the A.M.E. Bishop that Cook be removed from his post at Bethel. During the 1920 A.M.E. convention in Des Moines, Iowa, representatives from Bethel presented a petition to the Bishop to keep Rev. Cook after they had heard he would be transferred to a rural parish. The Bishop told the representatives that Cook could stay, but after the convention gave him his reassignment in defiance of the congregation. The turmoil caused by this believed betrayal caused a schism within the congregation at Bethel, such that Rev. Cook left the A.M.E. Church.

Coinciding with these events, the fledgling Community Church Movement was forming congregations in the Midwest. Historically, "community churches" were in existence since the early 19th century, primarily in rural areas that couldn't afford to financially sustain individual denominations. In David R. Piper's *Community Churches: The Community Church Movement* (1928), he references that the Movement began on the East Coast in 1915, but makes no mention of its African-American counterpart, founded that same year. The People's Independent Church of Christ was founded in 1915 by Rev. N. P. Greggs and a group of 47 parishioners who withdrew from First A.M.E. Church of Los Angeles. It is currently one of the largest African-American churches in Los Angeles.

The Movement gradually gained acceptance in Chicago and the Midwest, based largely on the success of the Los Angeles church, and because the competitiveness between denominations had reached an impasse. The Community Church Movement was based on the principles of democracy and service as applied to religious organization; formed with the belief that all Christians could work together via community service, and govern with greater efficiency, once creedal requirements and religious hierarchies were set aside.

Membership in a community church was non-sectarian and all-inclusive, often crossing class and racial lines, yet members were not required to relinquish the denominations under which they were raised. So progressive was the Community Church Movement, that its denominational contemporaries dismissed it as a "cult." In the case of the congregational split at Bethel A.M.E. Church, the formation of a community church was ideal. So on September 28, 1920, Rev. Cook, along with over 500 parishioners, organized the Peoples Community Church in Christ and Metropolitan Community Center.

Not yet knowing what to call his new church, Cook and his parishioners held their first services in Unity Hall at 3140 S. Indiana Ave. The building was the headquarters of the

Peoples Movement Club, a political organization headed by Oscar S. De Priest, the first African-American elected to Chicago City Council and the first northern African-American to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives (Unity Hall (1887) is the part of the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District, which was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1998). Shortly afterwards, the congregation called itself the Peoples Community Church in Christ, most likely influenced by the Los Angeles model. The congregation also operated a social service agency called the Metropolitan Community Center at 3118 S. Giles (demolished).

Although church records are limited, it is known that the congregation eventually moved their religious services from Unity Hall into the Metropolitan Community Center. The congregation also held services at Wendell Phillips High School (1904), designated a Chicago Landmark in 2003. They eventually raised enough funds to purchase the former First Presbyterian Church Building at 41st and King Drive in 1927, consolidating both their religious services and social service agency into one building. They officially changed their name to the Metropolitan Community Church where they remained for almost 75 years.

Through the years, the Metropolitan Community Church Building, with its seating capacity of 1,400, was host to hundreds of events that were at the forefront in Chicago's African-American community. On the music scene, the building hosted large annual music festivals, almost all under the auspices of the *Chicago Defender* and its mascot "Bud Billiken." These festivals were such a success that they often drew nationally- and internationally-renowned African-American artists such as jazz pianists Earl "Fatha" Hines and Nat "King" Cole; gospel singer Mahalia Jackson, accompanied by composer Thomas A. Dorsey; and opera singer Marian Anderson.

Shortly before his death in 1930, William Decatur Cook appointed his successor, Rev. Joseph W. Evans. Evans was the former pastor of the Metropolitan Community Church of Detroit, although trained in the A.M.E. Church tradition. His deep concern with social and economic problems in the community earned him the title of "Chicago's most outspoken liberal." Pastor of the Chicago's Metropolitan Community Church until 1956, his views were shared by many of his parishioners and were instrumental in the use of the building for the activities of many African-American labor unions, social clubs and civil rights organizations.

In 1928, A. Philip Randolph used the edifice to organize the Chicago Division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Although the union was founded in New York, the Chicago Division was the largest in the nation. The Chicago membership in 1937 was 1,500 before being affiliated with the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) that same year.

During World War II, African-Americans were discriminated against in all branches of the armed forces. Segregation was permitted, and the frustration felt caused race riots many military bases, especially in the South. In response, A. Philip Randolph organized



Top left: Rev. James W. Evans was appointed by Rev. Cook as his successor shortly before his death in 1930. Evans' progressive views concerning the community's social and economic problems earned him the title of "Chicago's most outspoken liberal."

Bottom right: A. Philip Randolph, founder and organizer of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, the largest African-American labor union. The Chicago Division of the BSCP held this 1928 strike rally, and met regularly at the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building. Randolph continued to use the church building for his labor union and civil rights activities over the next three decades.



**Public Mass Meeting**  
 — HELD BY —  
**Chicago Division**  
**Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters**  
 Sunday Afternoon, April 22,  
 3 P. M.  
 AT  
**Metropolitan Community**  
**... Church ...**  
 4100 SOUTH PARKWAY  
**A. PHILIP RANDOLPH**  
 General Organizer,  
 will discuss every phase of the Strike Situation, and also the "So called offer to Settle with the Pullman Porters," so prominently played up by the *Pittsburg Courier*.  
 The success of the Brotherhood is of vital interest to all Negro workers. Learn more about it at this meeting.  
**Everybody Welcome** **Admission Free**  
**CHICAGO DIV. HEADQUARTERS**  
 224 EAST PERSHING ROAD  
 M. P. WEBSTER, Organizer GEO. W. CLARK, Sec.-Treas.

**Plan Big, 'Americans Too,' Chicago Conclave**

NEW YORK — Miss E. Pauline Myers, executive director of the March on Washington Movement, left New York on June 1 to direct arrangements for the big "We Are Americans, Too," conference to be held in Chicago, June 30-July 4, at the Metropolitan Community church in Chicago.

A. Philip Randolph, director of the movement, declared this week that a large delegation of Eastern-ers, representing a complete cross-section of American life, is expected to attend the Chicago conclave.

The conference will debate basic questions involving strategy and the status of the Negro during the war and postwar period.

One of the main speakers at the Chicago sessions will be J. Finley Wilson, grand exalted ruler of the Elks and officials say the fraternal leader will be welcomed by hundreds of fellow lodge members, officials and friends.

**HEAR**  
**A. Philip Randolph**  
 International President, Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters  
 Vice President, AFL-CIO  
 Speak on the Subject  
**CIVIL RIGHTS PLANKS**  
 Adopted At Recent Democratic And Republican Conventions And Their Meaning To The Negro People Of America  
**AT METROPOLITAN COMMUNITY CHURCH**  
 4100 South Parkway, Chicago, Illinois  
**SUNDAY, AUGUST 21, 1960**  
 2:30 P.M., Daylight Saving Time  
 Auspices Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters AFL-CIO - CLC

**FIRST LADY  
FLAYS RACE  
SEGREGATION**

Tells Stand On Air Corps  
Jim Crow In Interview  
With Defender



**Top:** First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt with activist and President of Bethune-Cookman College, Mary McLeod Bethune. In 1943, the First Lady visited the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building, and voiced her opposition to segregation in the armed forces during World War II.




**Left:** Founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), W. E. B. DuBois. DuBois used the church building as a venue for lectures on political and civil rights issues.

**Bottom:** Civil rights activist Roy Wilkins, shown here with Chicago Mayor Richard J. Daley. Wilkins lectured on civil rights issues in 1964 on behalf of the NAACP. Wilkins was Executive Director from 1955 to 1977.

**Wilkins Calls  
Both Hoover  
and King Right**

BY WILLIAM KLING

Roy Wilkins, executive director of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said last night that "there is right on both sides" in the feud between the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., civil rights leader, and J. Edgar Hoover, director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.



Wilkins





a planning rally at the Metropolitan to March on Washington and to bring national attention to such indignities. In 1943, First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt visited the church and also spoke out against the military's segregationist policies.

The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building was often the venue for a variety of speakers, performances and guests, such as Mary McLeod Bethune, W.E.B. DuBois, Chicago Cubs baseball player Ernie Banks and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. More recently, the late *Chicago Sun-Times* and *Defender* columnist Vernon Jarret was witness to, and reported on, many of the events that occurred there in the church.

## **CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION**

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect. 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation of landmark designation for a building, structure, object, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for landmark designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of its historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

### ***Criterion 1: Critical Part of the City's History***

*Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois or the United States.*

- The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building exemplifies the important role that churches and other religious institutions played in the history and development of Chicago's neighborhoods in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.
- From the time of its purchase in 1927, the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building has served as a home to many African-American labor unions, social clubs and civil rights organizations and related events; most notably, the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, founded by A. Philip Randolph, met regularly at the church.
- For much of its history, the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building housed the Metropolitan Community Church, formerly called the Peoples Community Church in Christ and Metropolitan Community Center, which was the first African-American church associated with the innovative Community Church Movement in the City of Chicago.

### ***Criterion 3: Significant Person***

*Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- Throughout its history, the membership rolls of the Metropolitan Community Church contained many of Chicago's prominent African-American leaders, including journalist and activist Ida B. Wells-Barnett; *Chicago Defender* founder Robert S. Abbott; and Illinois Poet Laureate Gwendolyn Brooks. The church building was also where elaborate funerals were held for Ida B. Wells-Barnett, Robert S. Abbott and Oscar S. DePriest, the first African-American in Chicago City Council and first northern African-American after Reconstruction to be elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.
- The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building was the venue for a variety of speakers, performances and guests. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, outspoken in her socially-controversial views on civil rights, spoke at the Metropolitan against racial segregation in the military during World War II, invited by educator and activist Mary McLeod Bethune. Other guests included: African-American musicians Marian Anderson, Nat King Cole, Thomas A. Dorsey, Earl 'Fatha' Hines and Mahalia Jackson; civil rights leaders W.E.B. DuBois; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Rev. Martin Luther King, Sr. and Roy Wilkins; two of the four "Scottsboro Boys," Olen Montgomery and Roy Wright; Baseball Hall of Famer Ernie Banks, Judge Edith S. Sampson, and African-American historian Carter G. Woodson.
- A. Philip Randolph founded and organized the Chicago Division of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. He held a rally for striking porters at the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building in 1928 and continued to hold BSCP meetings there. In addition, his persistence made the Brotherhood the largest African-American union in the nation, and the first to be recognized by the American Federation of Labor/Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). Randolph also used the Metropolitan as a staging area for many civil rights rallies during World War II and the civil rights movement in the 1960s.

### ***Criterion 4: Important Architecture***

*Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

- The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building is an outstanding example of Romanesque Revival-style architecture, influenced greatly by the work of acclaimed architect Henry Hobson Richardson, and an architectural style of great significance in the history of Chicago and the United States.



**Defend**  
CHILDREN'S

PAGE EIGHTEEN

### King Cole Trio To Play For Our Easter Festival

**K**ING COLE and his nationally famous trio, stars of the radio, stage and screen, will be the featured attraction at the Chicago Defender Bud Billiken Club's 17th annual Easter Music Festival at Metropolitan Community Church, 4100 South Parkway, Sunday, April 6, at 3 p.m.

King Cole, the keyboard king, who began his musical career in Chicago as a member of the Bud Billiken Club, will appear at the Easter Festival through the courtesy of Harry W. Gray, president of Local 208, American Federation of Musicians, and Kenneth Blewitt, managing director of the Radio Theatre whose Cole and his duo will open a week's engagement beginning Friday, April 4.

The King Cole Trio consists of Cole at the piano; Oscar Moore, guitarist, and singin' bass, Harry James. They will render such numbers as "Faster People," "Rockin' Myself In G String" and the "In The Good Old Fashioned Way."

Programs other than that at Metropolitan are to be held at Shiloh Baptist Church, 430 Vincennes ave., under the direction of Mrs. Max Butler, South Shore Baptist Church, 623 Chestnut ave., Elston Homes, director, Greater Union Baptist Church, John Thorne-

as director; Southwestern Baptist, 220 Dearborn, Rev. Paul Queen, director.

A new addition to the list of Billiken Festivals in appreciation of the church, "The Billiken Club," is to be staged at the Marzetta Hall, Park Center, 308 Indiana ave., under the personal supervision of Edna Marzetta Hall. In this special music relating to the subjects of Jesus Christ will be staged.

Four live concert, matinee and Easter eggs now to be donated by the club's "sponsors" by public spirited citizens and businessmen. All programs will begin at 2 o'clock and last for two hours.

**STROLLING WITH THE BILLIKENS**  
by DAVID W. KELLUM  
A BUD BILLIKEN STORY

**WE ARE NOW IN THE MIDDLE of Holy Week . . . First comes Palm Sunday, then Good Friday and finally EASTER, the day Billikens hold the coronation of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. In Chicago, as well as the rest of the nation, children are eagerly anticipating the arrival at Easter when the legendary rabbit brings bountifully colored dyed eggs . . . then there's the Easter Festival!**

### DR. W. E. B. DU BOIS WILL BE FORUM SPEAKER FRIDAY

Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, will speak before the Chicago forum at 7:15 p. m. Friday in Metropolitan Community church, 4100 South Parkway. His subject will be "Should the Negro or any Other Minority Group Return to the Republican Party in 1948?"

Dr. DuBois will be introduced by Dr. Charles Gilkey, dean of Rockefeller Memorial chapel, and will receive tribute in observance of his 79th birthday from professors of Northwestern university and the University of Chicago.

Sponsoring the forum are Dr. Metz T. P. Lechard, director; Robert R. Taylor, Earl B. Dickerson, Dr. Edwin R. Embree, Horace Clayton, Dr. Midlan O. Housefield, and Dr. Robert R. Wanver.

The *Chicago Defender*, the city's most widely-distributed African-American newspaper, frequently reported on the many African-American notables which visited the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building.

### Marian Anderson Is Honored At Metropolitan

Music lovers at the regular monthly songfest held by J. Wesley Jones, director of the famous Metropolitan Community church choir were given a rare treat Sunday night when Miss Marian Anderson appeared as special guest. Amid deafening applause she was introduced by Mr. Jones, who hailed her as "America's songbird."

Earlier in the day Miss Anderson thrilled thousands at a recital held at the Auditorium theatre under the auspices of Northwestern university.

The musical at Metropolitan was one of the outstanding events of the month. The University of Chicago choir rendered musical numbers which were pleasing and won high commendation from the huge throng.

Miss Anderson also attended the basketball game between the Alpha Phi Alpha team and Fisk university at the Eighth Regiment Armory, Sunday night. She was guest of Mr. and Mrs. Alexander L. Jackson.

### CHICAGOANS HEAR DR. WOODSON

Nearly 2,000 turned out Sunday evening to hear Dr. Carter G. Woodson in a Negro History Week address at Metropolitan Community church. He told the audience that American history for the most part is propaganda. Stated is Morris H. Lewis, president of the Men's club of the church which sponsored Dr. Woodson's appearance.—Daily News photo.



- The Church Building possesses an excellent Romanesque Revival-style exterior, exemplified by its masonry façade made rough-cut variegated Lake Superior sandstone, round-arch windows and doors, and its minimal ornamentation of engaged and clustered columns. Its building is rare as one of only two remaining churches in Chicago built from this material.
- The Church Building possesses fine interior detailing and fittings, including its wooden intersecting cross-gable roof articulated by rafters and coffering, its massive two-story columns which support the roof, semi-circular platform stage with wooden communion rail, wood-paneled staircase, gallery and railing; stained glass windows, carved choir screen and pipe organ.

### ***Integrity Criteria***

*The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.*

The Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building possesses excellent exterior physical integrity, displayed through its siting, scale and overall design, its historic relationship to the surrounding area. It retains its historic overall exterior form and almost all exterior materials and detailing. Any changes that were made to the original 1890 structure are minor and inconsequential

Changes to the building's exterior include the replacement of the original slate roof with asphalt shingles, the replacement of the original wooden doors, and the removal of a number of stained glass windows. In 1900, Philo Adams Otis' history on the First Presbyterian Church credits the Louis Tiffany Co. with creating three memorial windows between 1891 and 1895. These windows were incorporated into the 1913 renovations to the south facade by Charles S. Frost. The windows were transferred to Second Presbyterian Church at Michigan Ave. and Cullerton St. when the congregation vacated the building in 1927. A three-story cinderblock-enclosed passenger elevator and metal fire doors were added in 1998, but they are primarily hidden from public view. The elevator is attached to a portion of the building which is not being considered for designation.

The sanctuary interior still retains its significant historic features and character, much of it dating from 1913 or earlier. In 1946, repairs were made to a ceiling truss, but it is virtually undetectable.

## **SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the

historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based on its evaluation of the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the original 1890 church and Sunday school building; and
- The interior main sanctuary.

The 1913 Sunday school and gymnasium addition and adjacent parsonage buildings are not included in this designation.

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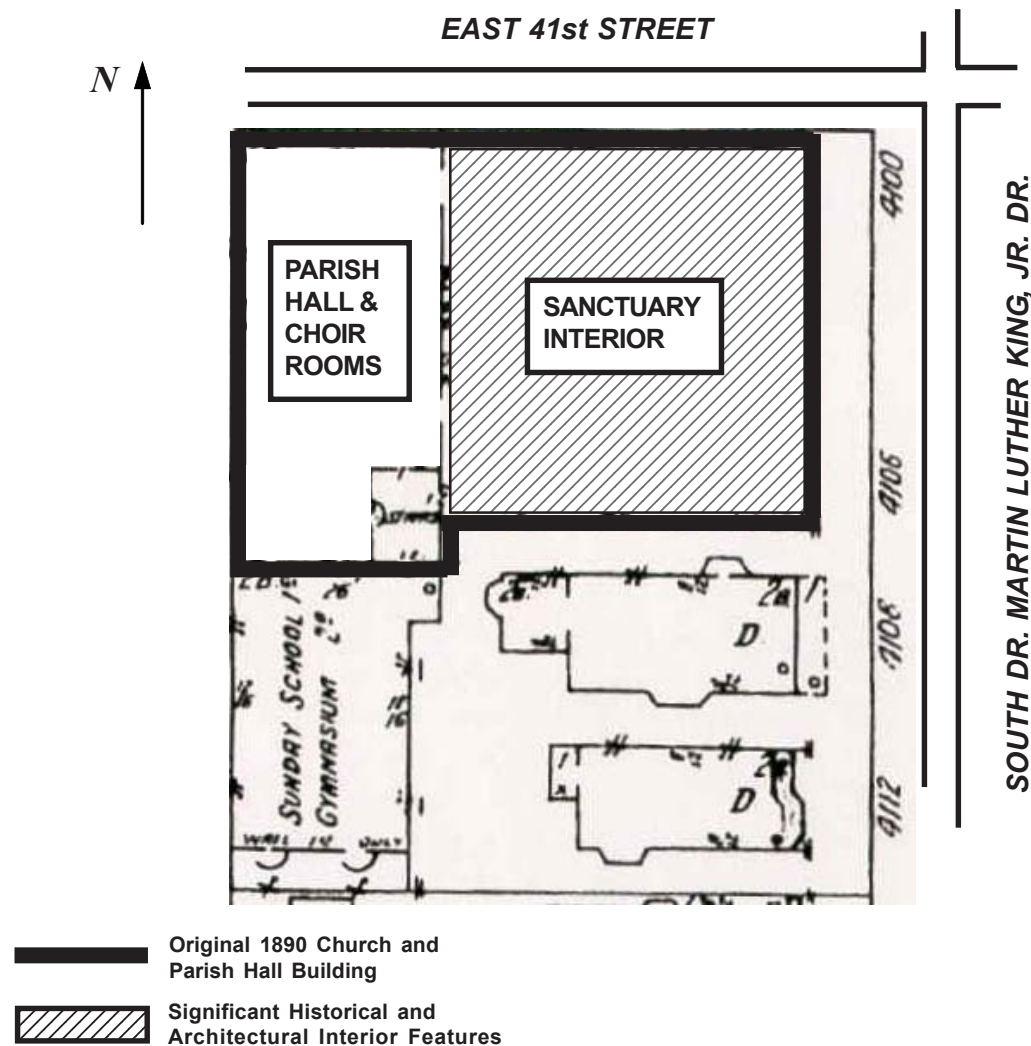
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The Sanborn Fire Insurance map from 1925 shows the Metropolitan Apostolic Community Church Building and two parsonage buildings. The outlined area is the original 1890 church building designed by architect John T. Long. The Sunday school and gymnasium addition was built in 1913 by Charles S. Frost.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

### **CITY OF CHICAGO**

**Richard M. Daley, Mayor**

#### **Department of Planning and Development**

Lori T. Healey, Commissioner

Brian Goeken, Deputy Commissioner for Landmarks

#### **Project Staff**

Susan Perry, research, writing, photography, and layout

Terry Tatum, writing and editing

Brian Goeken, editing

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#### **Illustrations**

Linda Slaughter, private collection: Cover top left, p. 2 top

From Otis, *The First Presbyterian Church, 1833-1913*: p. 5 mid.

From Mahoney, *Douglas/Grand Boulevard: A Chicago Neighborhood*: pp. 5 top, 17 bot. left, bot. rt., 18 top rt., bot. rt.

From Lane, *Chicago Churches and Synagogues*: 5 bot.

Commission on Chicago Landmarks/Department of Planning and Development: cover bot. left, pp. 2 bot., 7 top, bot. rt., 8, 9, 10 bot., 12 top left, top rt., bot. left, 14 bot. left, bot. rt.

*Chicago Tribune* newspaper: p. 7 bot. left

From Dorochoff, *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: Metropolitan Community Church*: cover top rt., pp. 10 top, mid., 12 mid., bot. rt.

Library of Congress: cover bot. rt., pp. 14 top, mid. rt., 17 top left, 21 bot. left, 22 mid.

Talbert, Horace. *The Sons of Allen*: p. 17 top rt.

*Who's Who in Colored America*: pp. 18 top left, bot. left

*Metropolitan Community Church 36th Anniversary Book*: p. 21 top left

Chicago History Museum: p. 21 top rt.

*Chicago Defender* newspaper: pp. 21 mid., bot. rt., 22 top left, bot. left, 25

Florida State Library and Archives (website): p. 22 top rt.

Susan Perry, private collection: p. 22 bot. rt.

The Sanborn Company: p. 28.

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The Commission is staffed by the  
Chicago Department of Planning and Development, Landmarks Division  
33 N. LaSalle Street, Suite 1600, Chicago, IL 60602

312-744-3200; 744-2958 (TTY)  
<http://www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks>

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