

March 2, 2022

Commission on Chicago Landmarks
c/o Chairman Ernest Wong
City of Chicago
Chicago City Hall
121 N. LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60602

Re: Monumental Baptist Church, 729 East Oakwood Boulevard

Dear Chairman Wong and Members of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks,

Preservation Chicago would like to voice their enthusiastic support for the preliminary landmark recommendation and eventual landmark designation of Patton, Fisher & Miller's Monumental Baptist Church. Located at 729 East Oakwood Boulevard in the Bronzeville community, this house of worship was built in 1899 and completed in 1900 as Memorial Baptist Church. The spectacular architecture of Monumental Baptist Church and its association with the accomplished firm of Patton, Fisher & Miller make this site a perfect choice for Chicago's next officially designated Landmark.

The church is a robust example of Romanesque Revivalism, one of the finest and most immense in the city. Its central feature, a colossal lantern tower that rises above the church's central auditorium almost as its own separate entity, was popularized by Henry Hobson Richardson and is an architectural rarity in Chicago. The church's citadel-like appearance is created through stout corner towers, a wide central gable, and heavy archways above its doors and windows. That the church was completed in a little more than half a year, an unbelievable feat by any measure, further illustrates the incredible architectural accomplishment that is this soon-to-be Landmark.

It should be noted that there is a quite a convincing precedent for the landmarking of Monumental Baptist Church, as two buildings by at least two of its attributed architects have already been designated official Chicago landmarks: IIT's Main Building and Machinery Hall, designed by Patton & Fisher. However, the principal architects of Patton, Fisher & Miller left their architectural fingerprints across the United States, not just in Bronzeville. Most notably, Patton & Miller were the architects behind over 100 Carnegie Libraries built across the country during the first part of the 20th century, stretching from Illinois to Texas. Additionally, dozens of buildings designed by the trio (including the aforementioned Carnegie Libraries) are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, bolstering Patton, Fisher & Miller's place in the pantheon of American architectural history. Apropos of its name, however, Monumental Baptist Church is one of the most monumental designs brought to life by the three architects and is certainly one of the most singular churches in the entirety of the city.

We are thrilled to see Monumental Baptist Church be considered for preliminary landmark status. Continuing to honor architecturally, historically, and culturally significant sites in Bronzeville as well as Chicago's entire South and West Sides demonstrates a necessary commitment to telling underrepresented stories in our city's disinvested communities. The anticipated landmarking of Monumental Baptist Church shows the city is taking this responsibility seriously and we at Preservation Chicago are more than happy to offer our voice in support of this worthwhile endeavor. Thank you to all involved, including the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and the Department of Planning and Development, for your hard work in getting this landmark recommendation to this stage.

Sincerely,

Max Chavez

Director of Research & Special Projects

Preservation Chicago