



CITY OF CHICAGO • OFFICE OF THE MAYOR



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**MAYOR LIGHTFOOT, ALDERMAN DOWELL, AND DCASE INTRODUCE
ORDINANCE TO RENAME CHICAGO'S OLDEST HOUSE IN HONOR OF BISHOP
FORD**

CHICAGO — Mayor Lori E. Lightfoot, along with the Alderman Pat Dowell of the 3rd Ward, and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) introduced to City Council today an ordinance to rename Chicago's oldest house. If approved, the ordinance will change the Chicago landmark's name from the Henry B. Clarke House to the Henry B. and Caroline Clarke/Bishop Louis Henry and Margaret Ford House (to be more commonly referred to as the "**Clarke-Ford House**"). The dedication affirms the profound role of Bishop Louis Henry and Margaret Ford in preserving the house as a significant part of Chicago's history and recognizes the contributions of Caroline Palmer Clarke.

"This renaming provides an important opportunity to provide a more complete history of Chicago's oldest house," said Mayor Lightfoot. "This will allow us to not only acknowledge the house's original owners, but also the significant contributions of Bishop Louis Henry and Margaret Ford in preserving its legacy for future generations to cherish."

"We are grateful to the many individuals — including the Ford family, neighborhood residents, dedicated volunteers — and community organizations who have cared for the Clarke House and advocated for its importance over so many years," said Alderman Dowell.

Additionally, DCASE will hire a curator in the coming months to reimagine the house's public programming, and the Department of Assets, Information, and Services (AIS) will be managing over \$1 million in renovations to the building including exterior repairs and painting and replacing HVAC hardware.

Built in 1836 for Henry B. Clarke, the house shows what life was like for a family in Chicago during the city's formative years before the Civil War. Its fascinating history



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began at a time when Chicago received its city charter and much of the area was still undeveloped prairie. Following the death of her husband, Caroline Palmer Clarke, known as the “Widow Clarke,” developed the surrounding family land during the 1850s, which fostered the neighborhood’s growth and provided financial resources to complete unfinished portions of the house.

From 1941 until 1970, Bishop Louis Henry and Margaret Ford and the St. Paul Church of God in Christ congregation put much energy and repair into preserving the house and advocating for its cultural significance to Chicago. Their efforts paid off in 1970 when the house became one of the earliest buildings to gain local landmark status in Chicago.

Over the years, the house has survived two moves, a fire, and decades of Chicago’s unrelenting growth to become an educational monument to the city’s earliest years. The house is now located at 1827 S. Indiana Avenue in the Chicago Women’s Park in the Prairie Avenue Historic District. The National Society of Colonial Dames in The State of Illinois (NSCDA-IL) has been involved in the Clarke House since 1977, funding programs as well as the collection of period furnishings in the house. Effective September 1, 2022, Clarke House Museum tours are temporarily paused due to construction and a reimagining of its public programming. For more information, visit ClarkeHouseMuseum.org.

Today’s ordinance will next be reviewed by the Committee on Special Events, Cultural Affairs, and Recreation — and is expected to return to City Council for final approval in November. The name change will take effect at that time.

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Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events

The City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs and Special Events (DCASE) supports artists and cultural organizations, invests in the creative economy, and expands access and participation in the arts throughout Chicago’s 77 neighborhoods. As a collaborative cultural presenter, arts funder, and advocate for creative workers, our programs and events serve Chicagoans and visitors of all ages and backgrounds, downtown and in diverse communities across our city — to strengthen and celebrate Chicago. DCASE produces some of the city’s most iconic festivals, markets, events, and exhibitions at the Chicago Cultural Center, Millennium Park, and in communities across the city — serving a local and global audience of 25 million people. The Department offers cultural grants and resources, manages public art, supports TV and film production and other creative industries, and permits special events throughout Chicago. For details,



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