

December 2, 2021

Commission on Chicago Landmarks

c/o Chairman Ernest Wong

City of Chicago

Chicago City Hall

121 N. LaSalle Street

Chicago, Illinois 60603

Re: Final Landmark Recommendation for the Seth Warner House, 631 N. Central Avenue, Chicago

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

We at Preservation Chicago, fully support the "Final Landmark Recommendation" and the Chicago Landmark Designation of the Seth Warner House, located at 631 N. Central Avenue in Chicago.

The Seth Warner House is a remarkable structure, almost embodying the early years and growth of city of Chicago, along with the communities of the West Side and the Austin neighborhood. This history extends to Warner's own residency in Chicago, as one of its earliest settlers at the time of the city's incorporation in 1837.

Warner established a blacksmith shop in the 1840s, and by 1846 become involved with Cyrus McCormick and his partners in the manufacturing of products for the McCormick Reaper Works, which was later known as International Harvester Company. This is a link to one of Chicago's early industries and the grain markets, which along with other agriculture entities established the city as an important center for commodities. Warner's financial successes, led to the establishment and construction of Warner's Hall, a four-story building, with a music and assembly hall, which once stood near the southeast corner of Randolph and Clark Streets, on a portion of the current site of the Richard J. Daley Center and Plaza.

Warner's strong stance on abolition, was reflected in the many progressive events held at Warner's Hall, in the 1850s and 1860s, leading up to the Civil War. Programs at Warner Hall, which have almost been entirely forgotten from our collective memories until the research for this Landmark Designation Report, included a visit and presentation by Frederick Douglass, as the honored guest speaker in 1853. This is a remarkable history, which should be celebrated.

Warner's Hall was lost in the Great Chicago Fire, 150 years ago, like many of the buildings in the central area of Chicago. We at Preservation Chicago are of the opinion that northwest corner of the Daley Center and Plaza fronting Randolph Street, which was the original location of Warner's Hall, hosting

many abolition meetings, should also be considered as an important Landmarks site, looking to the future.

The Seth Warner House is also viewed as a long-time local Austin landmark, by generations of community members, as the building served almost continuously as a home to several music and cultural institutions. These included The Austin Conservatory of Music, The Austin College of Music and The Austin Academy of Fine Arts. The three institutions were noted as having provided music lessons to 31,000 students, with an estimated 270 instructors, between 1924 to 1979. So, for many years this was a much-celebrated community building, with tremendous public access and a fine institution, outreaching to so many.

These histories associated with Seth Porter Warner, together with his home, which he occupied for twenty years, and recognized as the oldest building in the Austin Community, and among the oldest houses in the city, dating to 1869, should be honored and Landmarked for its significance.

The building is also noted as being “red-rated,” and recognized to be of the highest importance in the CHRS-Chicago Historic Resources Survey. Many of the almost 200 red-rated structures in the City of Chicago are already Designated Chicago Landmarks, noting their tremendous significance, with many recognized nationally and internationally.

We at Preservation Chicago are grateful to both offer and support this Chicago Landmark Designation and we are so very honored to have worked with the current long-time owner, Mr. James Bowers for several years towards this remarkable recognition and designation.

We also want to note that in the year of the 150th anniversary of the Chicago Fire, this designation of the 152 year old, Seth Warner House, also recognizes and celebrates Chicago’s amazing history and its rebirth, following a most terrible and tragic disaster.

Sincerely,

Ward Miller

Ward Miller, Executive Director

Preservation Chicago