Bush Temple of Music
100 W. Chicago Ave./800 N. Clark St.

Preliminary Landmark recommendation approved by
the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, June 7, 2000

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Alicia Mazur Berg, Commissioner
Above: The Bush Temple of Music is located in the Near North Side community area of Chicago, southwest of historic Washington Square.

Cover: A 1905 photograph of the building.

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor, 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 recommended to the City Council should be regarded as final.
firms employing 18,000 skilled workers.

Music instruction, in public schools and private music conservatories and through private tutoring, increased during this period to accommodate the demand. By 1880, seven out of ten pupils in American public schools were being taught to read music. During the same decade, half a million people were learning to play the piano. Especially for young women, piano instruction was an important part of one's education, an element of refinement and culture important to American ideas about culture.

Piano Manufacturing in Chicago

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The first piano in Chicago is said to have been brought to the frontier town by 1834 by the pioneer Jean B. Beaubien, and the piano was destined for parlors throughout the United States. In their intended use, Chicago piano companies were similar to the great mail-order companies—Sears, Roebuck & Co. and Montgomery Ward—that also were headquartered in the city. Unlike their Eastern rivals such as Steinway and Chickering, Chicago piano companies such as Kimball, Steger, and Bush and Gerts—the company that built the Bush Temple of Music—built pianos for middle-class town and farm families without much money but with a strong desire for music and culture.

The Bush and Gerts Company

The Bush and Gerts Piano Company was founded in 1885 by William H. Bush, his son William L. Bush, and John Gerts in order to take advantage of this burgeoning demand for pianos. The elder Bush was a pioneer Chicagoan, prominent in the lumber trade. His son worked at an early age for several piano companies, including the Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, firm of George Helmkamp. No piano manufacturers, however, existed in Chicago until 1851 when G. A. Helmkamp began producing a variety of musical instruments, including pianos.

The 1880s and 1890s were decades of great growth for Chicago as a major manufacturing and distribution center for all kinds of products, including pianos. The city's natural advantages as a manufacturing center—its central location to both raw materials and buyers and the network of railroads that radiated from the city—worked for piano manufacturers as well as other industries. By 1900 Chicago was the second largest center of piano manufacturing in the United States after New York, with 21 piano factories producing 16 percent of all American-made pianos. By the early 1920s, Chicago was the leading piano manufacturing center in the number of pianos made, nearly 125,000 a year.

Chicago manufacturers produced thousands of pianos destined for parlors throughout the United States. In their intended use, small-town and rural audience, Chicago piano companies were similar to the Cambridgeport, Massachusetts, firm of George Helmkamp.
Woods and Co. and the W. W. Kimball firm of Chicago. Gerts, a native German, learned piano manufacture in Hamburg before emigrating to Chicago in 1870. During the 1870s and early 1880s, Gerts worked for several piano manufacturers before opening his own small-scale piano factory. The new partnership with the Bushes brought capital that allowed Gerts to expand production. The elder Bush also owned a building at the northwest corner of Chicago Avenue and Clark Street (the future site of the Bush Temple of Music) which the Bush and Gerts Piano Company used for offices and a showroom.

The new company prospered during the 1890s, moving production into a larger factory building at the corner of Weed and Dayton Streets. By 1900, Bush and Gerts had established itself as one of Chicago’s top piano manufacturers, producing an average of 2,000 pianos a year. Its pianos, selling for $250 to $300 apiece, were sold to middle-income buyers throughout the Midwest.

**BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND DESCRIPTION**

During these first years of growth, the Bush and Gerts Piano Company maintained two showrooms, one in the midst of South Wabash’s burgeoning “Music Row” where most other Chicago music companies maintained showrooms and offices, and one at the company’s headquarters at Chicago and Clark. By 1901 the company decided to build a larger, more lavish headquarters. The elder Bush, who was company president, decided to construct a building that would combine sales and office space for the company with concert facilities and studios for piano and other music teachers. It was a common practice for piano companies in Chicago and other cities such as New York to encourage the public interest in music—and piano playing—through the construction of such facilities. Other similar buildings by Chicago piano companies include those by Kimball and by Lyon & Healy, both located at the intersection of Wabash Avenue and Jackson Boulevard.

The new Bush Temple of Music, however, would be the most visually elaborate of those in Chicago. Although Bush died in 1901, before the construction of the planned building, the company carried out the project. Upon its completion in 1902, the French Renaissance Revival-style building featured a 10,000-square foot piano showroom, a 1,000-seat theater, three recital halls, artist and music studios, a photography gallery, lodge room, banquet hall, restaurant, shops, and offices.

Described in the Inland Architect and News Record as “a striking architectural feature of the North Division of Chicago,” the picturesque, six-story building dominates its corner lot, stretching for 100 feet along Clark Street and 150 feet along Chicago Avenue. It is clad in grey pressed brick with white terra-cotta trim. Its walls are decorated with classical pilasters and cornices, accented
with ornament with musical motifs such as harps. Its dramatic roofline has high-pitched hipped roofs once ornamented with cast-iron finials and terra-cotta-trimmed dormers. One news account aptly described the building as “a touch of Paris in Chicago.”

**The French Renaissance Revival Style**

The Bush Temple of Music was designed in the French Renaissance Revival style, an unusual choice for a Chicago commercial building, but indicative of the elder Bush’s desire to create a building that would serve as a visually splendid advertisement for the company’s pianos. Sometimes called “Chateauesque,” the style is derived from sixteenth-century French buildings, especially the lavish châteaux which were country palaces built for French kings and nobility. It typically is characterized by masonry construction and high-pitched hipped roofs with a variety of vertical elements, including dormers, spires and chimneys. As in the original style, ornamentation combines both Gothic elements such as high-pitched roofs with Renaissance pilasters and ornate capitals.

The French Renaissance Revival was first popularized in the United States by Richard Morris Hunt, the first American architect to be trained at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. Built between 1879 and 1881, Hunt’s elaborate house for William Kissam Vanderbilt on New York’s fashionable Fifth Avenue established the style as one of culture and refinement, suitable for the social aspirations of America’s newly established wealthy families.

It is very unusual, however, for the style to be used for a commercial building, even one with aspirations towards culture such as the Bush Temple of Music. In Chicago other surviving examples of the style are mansions such as the Kimball House, located at 1801 S. Prairie Ave. and built for a business rival of Bush and Gerts, and a limestone-clad house at 3806 S. Michigan Ave. built for Chicago contractor John Griffiths. The architect of the Bush Temple of Music, J. E. O. Pridmore, may have used the style, with its connotations of wealth and social status not to mention its visual connection with France and the country’s reputation as a center of turn-of-the-century culture, to provide extra cachet for the new building.

**Architect J. E. O. Pridmore**

Born in England, John Edmund Oldaker Pridmore (1867-1940) came to the United States in 1880 and soon settled in Chicago. He developed a reputation for beautifully crafted buildings designed in the variety of historic styles favored by Chicagoans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. He was a resident of the Edgewater neighborhood and several of his finest buildings grace this neighborhood. A member of the Church of the
Atonement (5749 N. Kenmore Ave.), Pridmore rebuilt the church and added a parish house in the 1910s and early 1920s. His Manor House Apartments (1021-29 W. Bryn Mawr Ave.; built in 1908) and Beaconsfield-Hollywood Apartments (1055-65 W. Hollywood Ave.; built in 1913) are excellent examples of English Tudor design. Pridmore designed several other churches of note, including the People's Church (941 W. Lawrence Ave.; built in 1925), which housed the ministry of famed preacher Preston Bradley, and the Episcopal Chapel of St. John at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. It was as a consummate designer of theaters, however, that Pridmore shone. An expert on theater planning, he published several articles on theater design and acoustics. He designed several theaters for stage productions, including the Cort Theater (126-32 N. Dearborn St.; built in 1909; demolished) and the College Theater of DePaul University (northeast corner, Sheffield and Webster; built in 1907; demolished). Movie theaters of note included the Sheridan (4038-48 N. Sheridan Rd.; 1927; demolished), with its blue-and-white Classical-style pediment, and the Nortown (6320-32 N. Western Ave.; built in 1931; altered) with its “atmospheric-design” auditorium with decoration resembling a picturesque sea village, complete with murals of sailing ships seen through arcades.

The Bush Temple Conservatory and Later Building History

Besides its chief purpose as the headquarters of the Bush and Gerts Piano Company, the Bush Temple of Music also was a prominent cultural venue for the first decades of the twentieth century. Its Classical-style auditorium was dedicated on April 17, 1902, with a concert by famed singer Madame Shumann-Heink.

The building also housed a cultural institution of note, the Bush Temple Conservatory of Music and Dramatic Art. Organized by William L. Bush, who by then was president of Bush and Gerts following his father’s death, and operated by Kenneth M. Bradley, the Conservatory was one of the city’s premier music and drama schools for approximately 30 years. It offered classes in voice and a variety of musical instruments, including piano, organ, and violin, as well as training in drama and foreign languages.

Other building tenants of note during the building’s first 20 years included the Bush Temple Theatre and Rev. George F. Hall, a charismatic Chicago minister who held services in the Bush Temple auditorium every Sunday for many years.

By 1912, however, the Bush and Gerts Piano Company had moved their general offices and showroom to their factory at Weed and Dayton Streets. In 1918, faced with a decline in interest
in music instruction fueled by the new media of motion pictures and records, the Bush Temple Conservatory moved to smaller quarters on nearby Dearborn Street. A growing demand for office space on the Near North Side led new owners to remodel the building as an office building in 1922. The remodeling was done by the architectural firm of Shankland and Pingrey, and the building was renamed the Chicago-Clark Building.

More recently, the Bush Temple of Music was rated “orange” in the Chicago Historic Resources Survey, the citywide survey of historically and architecturally significant buildings undertaken by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks and the Department of Planning and Development. It also was included in the AIA Guide to Chicago, published in 1994, and pictured in Chicago at the Turn of the Century in Photographs, a compilation of vintage architectural photographs published by the Chicago Historical Society in 1984.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sections 2-120-620 and 690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation on landmark designation for a building, structure, or district if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated “criteria for landmark designation,” as well as possesses historic design integrity.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to make a final recommendation that the Bush Temple of Music 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 history of the heritage of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois or the United States.

- The Bush Temple of Music was built as the headquarters and showroom of the Bush and Gerts Piano Company, one of the city’s largest and most important piano companies, at a time when Chicago was the second largest piano manufacturing center in the country.
- The Bush Temple of Music exemplifies the importance of piano manufacturing and ownership during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when pianos became readily available to the American middle class and were important symbols of culture and social status.
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 Bush Temple of Music is a rare surviving large-scale example of French Renaissance Revival-style architecture in Chicago. At the time of its completion, one news account referred to the building as "a touch of Paris in Chicago," while Harper's Weekly singled it out as one of the city's most notable buildings.

- The French Renaissance Revival was mainly used for mansions of the wealthy elite. Its use for the Bush Temple of Music, a combination commercial-theater building, is highly unusual in the context of both Chicago and the United States.

- The Bush Temple of Music is an elaborate example of the combination office-showroom-auditorium buildings built by piano companies in Chicago and other cities. Its unusual use of the French Renaissance Revival style was meant to enhance the reputation of the company and its pianos through the style's associations with French history and culture.

Criterion 5: Important Architect
Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer or builder whose individual work is significant in the history of development of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Bush Temple of Music's unusual design and distinctive details are a testament to the skill of its architect, J. E. O. Pridmore, in designing a structure that included a wide variety of uses, ranging from a theater and piano showroom to offices and retail space. Pridmore was praised at the time for creating "a structure at once picturesque and striking with the dignity and beauty that will be appreciated in contrast to the ungainly outlines of so many of our modern business buildings."

- Pridmore was a significant architect specializing in the historic revival styles favored by Chicagoans during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His buildings were beautifully crafted, utilizing a variety of materials, including stone, terra cotta, and brick.
• Pridmore was an important Chicago architect specializing in theater architecture. Most of his buildings containing theaters or music auditoriums have been demolished. The Bush Temple of Music, although without its auditorium, remains the most prominent of these buildings.

**Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature**

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

- Located on the prominent corner of Clark Street and Chicago Avenue, the dramatic roofline, massive form, and French-inspired elegance of the Bush Temple of Music has been a visual landmark of the Near North Side of Chicago for a century.

**Integrity Criterion**

Its integrity is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value.

"Integrity" as it pertains to the criteria for landmark designation is the ability of a property to convey its historic significance. The Bush Temple of Music, although altered, retains enough of its original 1901 appearance to convey its historic community, architectural and aesthetic interest.

Although the theater spaces were removed during a 1922 remodeling, the exterior of the Bush Temple of Music still retains its original design integrity. The primary alterations in 1922 were:

- conversion of the interior theater spaces and artists studios to office space;
- removal of a small balcony over the building's Chicago Avenue entrance;
- reconfiguration of a few of the second- and third-story windows above the former entrances to the theater and offices, using brick and stone similar in color and texture with original materials; and
- roof infill between the gables on the fifth story, utilizing terra cotta similar in color and texture with the original.

Subsequent changes and alterations to the building include:

- removal of the slate roof, clock tower, and decorative roof metalwork, terra-cotta finials, and dormer pediments; and
- alterations to some of the ground-level storefronts.

Despite these physical changes, the Bush Temple retains the majority of its original building fabric and appearance; it would be recognized by turn-of-the-century Chicagoans as the building built in 1901. It remains a distinctive physical presence at its original historic location, the northwest corner of Clark Street and Chicago Avenue. Although some redevelopment of the neighborhood has occurred during the past 40 years, the Bush Temple itself retains its historic setting, fully occupying its historic footprint and relating to neighboring historic buildings such as the Cosmopolitan Bank building across Clark Street.

Its historic design is recognizable and its overall scale and massing is intact. Its high-pitched multiple-hipped roof remains a distinctive part of the building’s physical character and is visible from some distance down Chicago Avenue and Clark Street. The building’s historic pattern of fenestration is largely intact. It retains its historic building materials, including distinctive brick and terra cotta with their textures and colors. Although some ornamental metal and terra-cotta rooftop detailing has been removed, most of the building’s exterior ornament remains, including pilasters, capitals, and dormers. Harp-and-palm-frond capitals ornament storefront pilasters. More elaborate swag-festooned capitals decorate pilasters ornamenting the building’s second and third floors. Dormers are topped by triangular pediments, while taller, centrally placed dormers are detailed with shell motifs.

Through these aspects of its physical character, the Bush Temple of Music conveys to an onlooker the important characteristics that make up its architectural and historic significance. It is recognizable as a large-scale and unusual example of the French Renaissance Revival style. It remains a commercial building that hugs the street corner, with storefronts that define its ground floor. Its size, distinctive roofline, and ornament physically express the historic architectural character that have made it an important visual “landmark” to its surrounding neighborhood and to the City of Chicago for the last century.

**SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES**

Whenever a building 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 Bush Temple of Music, the
Music, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be identified as:

• all exterior elevations and rooflines of the building, with the alley and rear building elevations being treated as “secondary elevations” for purposes of permit review.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO
Richard M. Daley, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Alicia Mazur Berg, Commissioner
Brian Goeken, Deputy Commissioner for Landmarks

Project Staff
Terry Tatum, research and writing
Jeanne Lamb in, research
Beth d'Agostino, layout

Special thanks to Susan Perry, Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago, and Harold Wolff for their assistance with research.

Illustrations
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Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago: inside back cover (top).

Above: The picturesque appearance of the Bush Temple of Music as depicted in a 1901 rendering.
Left: The building retains its terra-cotta ornament, including this harp-and-palm frond pilaster capital.