LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



EPWORTH CHURCH 5253 North Kenmore Avenue

Final Landmark Recommendation Adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, on April 13, 2023



CITY OF CHICAGO Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development Maurice Cox, Commissioner

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EPWORTH CHURCH

(FORMERLY EPWORTH METHODIST EPISCOPAL CHURCH, AND EPWORTH UNITED METHODIST CHURCH)

5253 North Kenmore Avenue

CONSTRUCTED: 1891 (CHURCH)

1930 (COMMUNITY HOUSE ADDITION & RENOVATION)

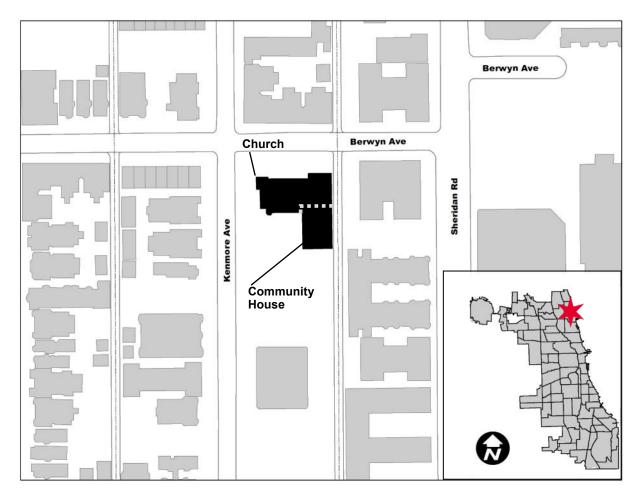
ARCHITECTS: FREDERICK B. TOWNSEND (CHURCH)

THIELBAR AND FUGARD (ADDITION & RENOVATION)

Epworth Church consists of a church building completed in 1891 and a community house addition completed in 1930 by a Methodist congregation. The building is located in Edgewater on Chicago's North Side, a neighborhood that initially developed as a suburb outside the city limits of Chicago. Edgewater's suburban growth was led by developer John Lewis Cochran who donated land for the fledgling Epworth Methodist Episcopal congregation to build the church. Architect Frederick B. Townsend, an early member of the congregation, donated his design services. Thus, the church building reflects the initial suburban development of Edgewater. Architecturally the church is, if not unique, a rare example of fieldstone architecture in Chicago that uses uncoursed granite boulders in its wall construction. This method of construction requires a high degree of design and craftsmanship in traditional masonry.

As the population of Edgewater and the congregation at Epworth grew in the early decades of the 20th century, the congregation added an addition to the church known as the community house. It was designed by the noteworthy Chicago architectural firm of Thielbar and Fugard and its facade combines granite fieldstone like the church, as well as cast stone, a new material in the 1930s. The picturesque design of both the church and community house display influences of Gothic Revival and Romanesque styles of architecture.

Epworth was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 2008 and it is published in the *AIA Guide to Chicago*. The congregation no longer worships at Epworth and at time of writing the property is for sale.



Epworth Church consists of a church building from 1891 to the north and an attached wing known as the community house from 1930. The building is located at Berwyn and Kenmore Avenues in the Edgewater Community Area on Chicago's North Side.

BUILDING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION

Epworth is a work of architecture in two parts, the first consisting of the 1891 church building and second being the attached community house addition of 1930 that together form an L-shaped site plan. Both parts of the building combine elements of the Gothic and Romanesque Revival styles, and both feature distinctive uncoursed fieldstone wall construction. The different age and program of each of these parts of the church merits separate architectural descriptions

Church Building Design and Construction

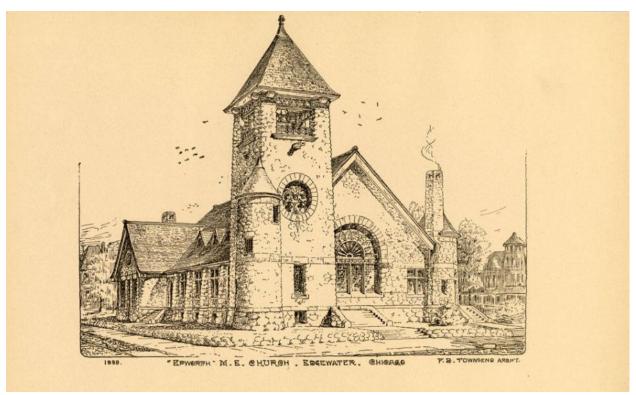
The Epworth church building is located in the Edgewater Community Area which borders Lake Michigan on the Chicago's North Side. The name Edgewater was created by residential developer John Lewis Cochran (1857-1923) who in 1886 platted a 200-acre subdivision between Lake Michigan, Broadway, Bryn Mawr and Foster Avenues. At the time this area was in Lake View Township and outside the borders of Chicago. Cochran envisioned Edgewater as a fashionable lakefront suburb of large residences with easy access to downtown via commuter rail.

The land on which the church stands was donated by Cochran to the fledgling congregation, and when the Church was completed, the nearest house was two blocks away. In 1889 Edgewater became a Chicago neighborhood as part of the larger annexation of Lake View Township. Despite becoming part of the sprawling city early on, Cochran's subdivision was intended to be suburban in character, with large single-family houses set on large lawns and with wide setbacks. When Epworth was dedicated in 1891 (two years after annexation), contemporaries still regarded it as a picturesque suburban-style church.

As a congregation, Epworth traces its origins to August 1888 when three persons began meeting in the home of Mr. and Mrs. L. T. M. Slocum at 5047 N. Kenmore, and then at a school near Broadway and Argyle Street (both buildings are no longer extant). The granite fieldstone walls of the church came from Slocum's summer home and farm in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin.

Fundraising for the construction of the church began in 1889 through advocacy of the Slocums and Rev. G. K. Flack. In September of that year the *Chicago Tribune* reported that architect Frederick B. Townsend, who was also a member of the congregation, was preparing designs for the church *pro bono*. The cornerstone was laid in June 1890 and the following year the church was dedicated in a standing-room-only service.

The Epworth church building is T-shaped in plan with the 135-foot-long sanctuary oriented west-to-east and a 75-foot-long crossing of the T-shape situated at the east end that contains rooms behind the worship space. The structure consists of a stone foundation, load-bearing stone walls 16 inches thick and a wood-truss roof. Windows are deeply set within the wall to emphasize the massiveness of the structure. Most windows are wood sash with leaded art glass. There are some steel-sash windows that likely date to the 1930 renovation. The roof is a cross gable with dormers on the north and south slopes. Though now surfaced with asphalt shingles, the roof was originally slated.



Frederick B. Townsends pen-and-ink rendering of Epworth was published in *Inland Architect* in 1889 (Source: Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Archival Image Collection). In reporting on the dedication of the church in 1891, *The Inter Ocean* newspaper described the church as a "unique, artistic and beautiful temple of worship" and stylistically "of the early English type with a dash of the Roman."



The facade of the church showing the distinctive uncoursed fieldstone walls built of natural granite boulders. The gable front is framed by projecting, asymmetrical towers. The arched entrance doors open up into an enclosed vestibule, or narthex, added in a 1930 renovation.

The primary elevation is a front-facing gable on Kenmore Avenue. The side elevations face north onto Berwyn Avenue and south towards a landscaped yard in front of the 1930 addition. The east elevation faces an alley.

A distinctive feature of the church is its uncoursed fieldstone walls, described by a contemporary newspaper as a "picturesque structure of bowlder (archaic spelling) stone." As noted above, the granite boulders came from the property of L.T.M. Slocum in Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. They were shipped to Chicago in barges via Lake Michigan and unloaded at a temporary pier at Berwyn Avenue (at the time of construction, the shore of Lake Michigan was around 600 feet from the building site, much closer than today). The stones are in their natural size and shape, and exhibit a range of colors from brown, gray, tan and pink. The wall construction demonstrates exceptional skill in traditional masonry and exhibits a remarkably picturesque quality. In addition to the granite fieldstone, dressed Joliet limestone is used for the water table, belt course and windowsills.

The west and primary elevation contains the primary entrance to the church, though the current entrance dates to the 1930 renovation to the church. In the original design, the primary entrance was at the base of the square tower. In the 1930 work, a one-story narthex, or enclosed vestibule, was added to the front elevation. A staircase leads up to two round-arched entrances with chevron moldings and Romanesque columns. The entrance doors are oak. The front of the narthex is cast stone tinted to mimic Joliet limestone. Above the entrance two gargoyles frame a tablet reading "Epworth Methodist Church."

Above the narthex, the gable is pierced with a half-round stained-glass window with fanlight tracery resembling a sunburst. The age, artistry and design quality of the window makes it attributable to Healy & Millet, a prominent stained glass and decorative arts firm based in Chicago. This window is largely obscured from view on the exterior by the narthex addition. While the interior was not accessible to the author, photos of the interior show that this window is a significant feature of the sanctuary. The design combines geometric and floral forms with a wide palette of glass colors and textures.

The gabled front elevation is framed on either side by towers. The largest of these is square in plan and rises to a height of 65 feet at the northwest corner of the church. The first stage of this tower lies below a Joliet limestone belt course and contains lancet windows with leaded-art glass casements. The second stage contains oculus windows on three elevations which are currently boarded. These openings originally contained quatrefoil tracery executed in carved wood with art glass; it is unknown if these survive beneath the board-up. The third and top stage of the tower contains an open belfry with wrought-iron filigree railing and quatrefoil frieze. The square tower is topped with a pyramidal roof with a copper finial. A partial-height round turret engages the outside corner of the square tower. A conical roof tops the turret.

A second tower stands at the southwest corner of the church. It is octagonal in plan with a polygonal roof. In the original design of the church a second entrance door was located in this tower. This was infilled during the 1930 renovation that reconfigured the entrance sequence described above. A stone chimney is set between this tower and roof of the church.



Detail of the 65-foot-tall square tower with the round turret bracing its corner. The oculus windows are boarded up, but the circa 1960 photo below shows that these openings contained quatrefoil tracery.



Circa 1960 photo of congregants entering the church. Source: Bruce Greene, Epworth historian and archivist, from a group of photos with Rev. Leland N. Lotz who served 1958 -1963.



The side elevations of the church building feature buttresses dividing the wall into equal bays each with a pair of casement and transom windows,



The right gable in this photo is the cross gable forming the T-shape at the east end of the church. The left gable is the rear of the church facing the alley and faced in stone

The side elevation of the church facing south (toward the lawn in front of the addition) is relatively low at 16 feet from grade to the eave. Below grade a concrete wall creates a well that admits light into basement windows which are steel sash with clear glazing, likely from the 1930 renovation. The elevation has four bays divided by engaged buttress with battered walls. Each bay contains a pair of casement windows each topped with a transom window. The windowsills and horizontal mullion below the transom are Joliet limestone. The window head is trimmed with wood with bullseye rosettes. The wood-frame casements are glazed with leaded art glass set in a geometric pattern. Additional illumination to the interior of the church is provided by pedimented dormer windows piercing the roof..

The side elevation of the church facing north, toward Berwyn Avenue, is nearly identical to the south elevation with the exception of a cross gable at the east end (this feature was subsumed in the 1930 addition to the south). The wall of the cross gable is divided into two bays by a recess in the wall. Engaged columns frame large window opening in each bay at the first floor. Each opening contains three casement windows, each with transoms, glazed with art glass found elsewhere. Steel sash windows at the second-floor likely date to the 1930 renovation.

The east elevation of the church faces an alley, and while today it is the least visible it is rendered in fieldstone like the primary elevations likely reflecting that this elevation was once more visible in the yet-undeveloped setting in which the church was first built. The steel-sash windows at this elevation appear to date to the 1930 renovations, as does the pedimented dormer clad with shingle.

Like many late-19th century buildings in Chicago, the design of the Epworth church exhibits multiple stylistic influences. Indeed, in reporting on the dedication of the church in 1891, *The Inter Ocean* newspaper described the church as a "unique, artistic and beautiful temple of worship" and stylistically "of the early English type with a dash of the Roman," while not academic, the early journalist's description was accurate. The design shows the influence of two architectural styles popular in the late-19th century and derived from the picturesque aesthetic movement: the Gothic Revival and Richardsonian Romanesque. Character defining features of the former include the gable front flanked by a tower, deep buttresses, window tracery and quatrefoil decorative motifs. Richardsonian Romanesque features of the building are the textured wall surface created by fieldstone, the round-arched entrances with their chevron and knotwork motifs, the half-round window above the entrance, and the deeply recessed window openings which emphasize the wall thickness.

The author did not access the interior of the church, however available photos show a pleasant sanctuary with exposed wood trusses. In addition to the narthex mentioned above, the 1930 renovations of the church included redecoration of the sanctuary, new Sunday school rooms in the basement and the installation of a new organ donated by organist William Barnes. At time of writing this report, some furniture, fixtures and equipment in the church and addition have been removed.

Community House Design and Construction

By World War I Edgewater was completely built out and more apartment and residential hotels were replacing first generation single-family suburban-style houses. The increased density in the neighborhood added to the congregation at Epworth which peaked at 1,200 members in 1929. That year, under the leadership of Rev. C. Claud Travis, planning began for a substantial addition to the church known as the community house as well as renovations to the exterior and interior of the church. The Chicago architectural firm of Thielbar & Fugard were commissioned for the project and ground was broken in May 1930.

The community house extends from the south elevation of the church forming an L-shape footprint. The program for the addition included a social hall with tile floors and beamed ceiling, kitchen, club rooms, gymnasium/auditorium and a chapel dedicated to Robert Cree, a member of the congregation killed in action in World War I.

Currently a large lawn lies in front of the community house, yet from the early twentieth century a wood frame residence occupied this site and partly obscured the front elevation of the 1930 community house. The house was destroyed by fire in 2005.

The community house is rectangular in plan extending 95 feet south from the church and 60 feet wide. It is three-stories tall with a concrete floor structure and wood-frame roof with a gambrel shape. The primary façade faces west toward a lawn and Kenmore Avenue. It is divided into four bays, one for the entrance and three for windows, each divided by projecting piers that lend the building a vertical quality.

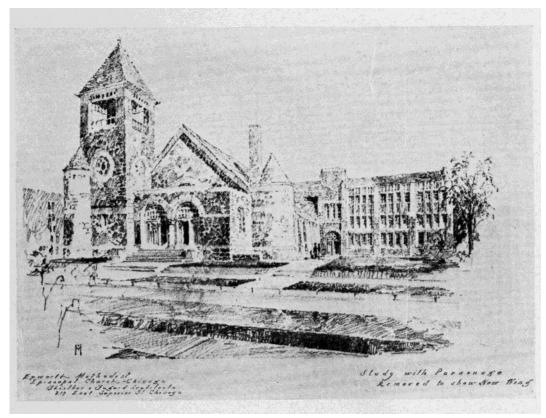
The front façade of the community house is designed to complement the architecture of the church. The walls are granite fieldstone, like the church, and cast tone, pigmented to match the color of the Joliet limestone trim used at the church. The design includes Gothic Revival and Richardsonian Romanesque stylistic influences as does the church.

The entrance bay is framed by projecting piers that extend the full height of the building and are topped with cast-stone towers framing a crenellated parapet. The double-leaf entrance door is recessed within a cast-stone Gothic-style archivolt. Like the 1930 narthex of the church, gargoyles and a tablet above the doors identify the building as the "community house."

The window bays are divided by projecting piers that extend the first two floors. At the third floor the granite fieldstone walls are flat and the stones here are faced flat. The windows are steel sash with clear glazing.

A prominent feature of the front façade design is the cast-stone walls in each window bay. At the first floor, the cast stone forms heavy mullions. At the second floor, each window opening is framed by cast-stone columns topped with an arcaded corbel table of Romanesque design.

The secondary south elevation of the community house is minimally visible and of plain face brick. The east façade facing the alley is similarly treated but with window openings fitted with steel sash.



Thielbar and Fugard's 1930 pen-and-ink study of the community house addition shows a more vertical composition compared to the church. A frame house used as a parsonage that stood in front of the addition was not drawn to show the new wing. Source: Bruce Greene, Epworth historian and archivist, from a Dedication Program for the community house, Epworth Methodist Episcopal Church, February 22, 1931.



The front façade of the community house includes an entrance bay topped with Gothic Revival towers and a Romanesque arcaded corbel band above the second floor windows.



The Epworth choir standing in front of the church, circa 1918. Dated by the presence of William H. Barnes (served 1910 - 1924) and Rev. Dr. E. Dailey Smith (served 1917 - 1920). Source: Bruce Greene, Epworth historian and archivist.



The congregation at Epworth formed a theatre group shown here in 1921. Dated by Wm. Barnes, and Rev. Dr. Harlow V. Holt (served 1920 - 1925). Source: Bruce Greene, Epworth historian and archivist.

ARCHITECT FREDERICK B. TOWNSEND

One of the earliest parishioners of the congregation at Epworth was architect Frederick B. Townsend who designed the church building free of charge.

Townsend was born in 1853, in Somerville, Massachusetts. He studied architecture at Harvard University, but was unable to complete his degree due to the death of his father. He began working as draftsman in Washington, D.C. before coming to Chicago in 1877 at age 24. In Chicago, he began working in the in the office of the architect L. B. Dixon and was made a partner in the firm in 1881. The partnership was dissolved after three years, and each founded an independent practice.

Designs by Townsend in Chicago include the Jan Kralovec House (1952 S. Avers Avenue, 1892) in the Five Houses on Avers Avenue District, a designated Chicago Landmark. Czech immigrant Jan Kralovec developed the five houses on Avers, and while not documented, all of the houses in the district are attributed to Townsend given that he designed the developer's own home there. The two-year time span between the building of the five houses and their similar architecture further supports the attribution to Townsend. His design of the Kralovec House is Romanesque Revival executed in course-faced limestone.

Another residential commission by Townsend is the William C. Groetzinger House (526 W. Deming, 1895), a contributing building in the Arlington-Deming Chicago Landmark District. The red sandstone mansion combines Gothic Revival and Romanesque details.

In 1882, Townsend completed the reconstruction of the Unity Church (later Scottish Rite Cathedral, 929 N. Dearborn) in Washington Square District, presently occupied by the Harvest Bible Chapel. The building, which had been badly damaged in the Great Fire of 1871 and never completely renovated, received two new towers and an interior reconstruction from plans by Townsend.

ARCHITECTS THIELBAR & FUGARD, 1930

The architectural firm of Thielbar & Fugard, founded in 1925, designed the community house addition and renovations at Epworth in 1930. Frederick J. Thielbar (1886-1941), a native of Peoria, Illinois, attended the University of Illinois before going to work for the noted Chicago firm of Holabird & Roche. There, Thielbar served as a superintendent of construction and later as a partner. His most significant work while with Holabird & Roche was the Chicago Temple Building, located at Clark and Washington Streets and constructed in 1923 for the First Methodist Episcopal Church. Thielbar was a member of the Board of Directors of the Methodist Church in Chicago and secured the commission for the building which houses both church sanctuaries and rental offices. Thielbar was both principal designer and construction supervisor for this work.

John Reed Fugard (1886-1968) was born in Newton, Iowa, and also attended the University of Illinois, receiving a B.S. in architecture in 1910. His early practice was with George A. Knapp in the firm of Fugard & Knapp, and the pair designed several noteworthy luxury apartment and hotel buildings in Chicago during the 1910s and early 1920s, including three of the eight buildings that comprise the East Lake Shore Drive Chicago Landmark District. Fugard & Knapp also designed the Moody Memorial Church on N. Clark St. (1924) and the South Water Market complex on Chicago's Near West Side (1925). They also collaborated with New York architects Murgatroyd and Ogden in the construction of the Allerton Hotel, 701 N. Michigan Ave., built in 1924 and a designated Chicago Landmark.

Significant buildings designed by Thielbar & Fugard in partnership include the Trustee's System Service Building (182 W. Lake St., 1930), the McGraw-Hill Building (520 N. Michigan Ave., 1928-1929), both designated Chicago Landmarks. The firm also collaborated in 1926 with architects Giaver & Dinkelberg on the design of the Jewelers Building at 35 E. Wacker Dr., also a designated a Chicago Landmark.

LATER HISTORY OF EPWORTH CHURCH

After the completion of the community house addition, Epworth appears to have sustained a robust congregation for much of the 20th century. In 1935, the Methodist denomination merged the Sheridan Road Methodist Episcopal Church of Uptown into Epworth, substantially increasing its congregation. The Methodist leaders stated that the closure of the Sheridan Road church was driven by the rise of the automobile that eliminated the need to have a church within walking distance of every family.

During the 1960s the congregation at Epworth began to decline. The surrounding neighborhood demographic also began to change with the arrival of immigrants from Cuba and Puerto Rico. In response, Epworth initiated new programs including bilingual worship, citizenship and English classes, child daycare, and employment services. In the 1980s Epworth established a shelter to respond to serve homeless men.

In May 2022, the Methodist Conference closed Epworth and the remaining congregation continues to worship at another church in Edgewater. At time of writing the property is for sale.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Section 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a recommendation of Landmark designation for a building, structure, object, or district if the Commission determines that it meets two or more of the stated "Criteria for Designation," as well as possesses a significant degree of historic design integrity. The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in

determining whether to recommend that the Epworth Church be designated as a Chicago Landmark:

Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State, or National Heritage

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

- Epworth Church exemplifies the important role that religious institutions played in the development and sustenance of Chicago's neighborhoods.
- Epworth is a picturesque, suburban-scaled church that reflects Edgewater's first phase of growth as a suburban residential development with close proximity to the lakeshore and convenient transit service to downtown.
- Epworth is a manifestation of a community working toward a common goal: the land on which the church building sits was granted to the congregation by John L. Cochran, the developer of Edgewater, the design of the building was donated by architect and congregation member Frederick P. Townsend, and funds for the construction were raised from the community.

Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture

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

- Epworth Church is, if not unique, a rare example of fieldstone architecture in Chicago that employs uncoursed granite boulders in its wall construction. This method of construction requires a high degree of design and craftsmanship in traditional masonry construction.
- The design of the church building and community house at Epworth combines influences of both the Gothic and Romanesque Revival styles of architecture, picturesque styles of architecture that were popular in the late-19th and early-20th centuries.

Criterion 5: Important Architect

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

- The church building at Epworth was designed by architect Frederick B. Townsend, who specialized in residential construction in late-19th century Chicago. Notable examples of his work include the William C. Groetzinger House of 1895, a contributing building in the Arlington-Deming Chicago Landmark District, and the Jan Kralovec House in the Five Houses on Avers Avenue Chicago Landmark District.
- The community house addition and 1930 renovations at Epworth are the work of Thielbar & Fugard, a significant architectural firm in the history of the City of Chicago, designing the Trustee's System Service Building (182 W. Lake St., 1930), the McGraw-Hill Building

(520 N. Michigan Ave., 1928-1929), and as associated architects for the Jewelers Building (35 E. Wacker Dr., 1925-1927), all designated Chicago Landmarks.

• John Fugard also is significant as the designer, through his earlier firm of Fugard & Knapp, of several luxury apartment buildings on Chicago's East Lake Shore Drive – a Chicago Landmark district and was associated with the design of the Allerton Hotel (701 N. Michigan Ave., 1922), also a designated Chicago Landmark.

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 City of Chicago.

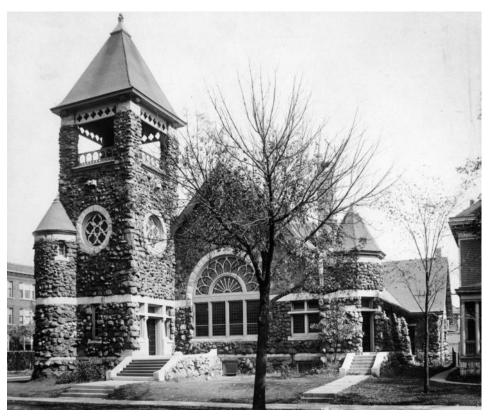
• With its uncoursed granite fieldstone walls and picturesque towers, Epworth Church possesses a familiar and unique visual presence in the Edgewater neighborhood

INTEGRITY CRITERION

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, architecture or aesthetic value.

The circa 1920 photo and the current image at the facing page show that Epworth Church possesses remarkable integrity to convey its aesthetic and architectural value. The 1930 community house addition to the building is sympathetic to the church and a change to the building that has, with the passage of time, achieved its own historic significance. The building remains in its original location in Edgewater. Throughout its history the setting around the building has been residential, albeit it is more densely populated today than its original suburban setting.

The design of the building is preserved, as are most of its materials. Changes to the exterior include replacement of the original slate roof with asphalt shingle, the boarding up of the oculus windows in the tower and deterioration of a concrete entrance stair at the north side elevation. These changes are typical of a building of this vintage and do not diminish its ability to convey its value.



Epworth circa 1920, prior to 1930 community house and narthex addditions. Source: Ryerson and Burnham Libraries, Archival Image Collection.



Epworth 2022, showing the addition of the narthex and a partial view of the community house addition which are historically significant changes.

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 the most important to preserve the historic and architectural character of the proposed Landmark. Based on its evaluation of the Epworth Church, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as:

• All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the Building including the church building and community house addition.

For the purposes of Section 2-120-740 of the Municipal Code governing the review of permit applications, the following additional guidelines shall also apply:

• The Commission's review of proposed work should ensure that the significant historic and architectural features of the Building are preserved while allowing reasonable change and flexibility to meet continuing and new needs, whether related to the continued current uses of the Building or in accommodating future uses. In particular, the Commission may approve modifications to existing windows and doors to meet code-required light and vent requirements.

The foregoing is not intended to limit the Commission's discretion to approve other changes.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

CITY OF CHICAGO

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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 that individual building, sites, objects, or entire districts be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law. The Commission is staffed by the Chicago Department of Planning and Development, First Deputy Commissioner's Office, City Hall, 121 North LaSalle Street, Room 905, Chicago, IL 60602; (312-744-3200); www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks

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

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Gabriel Ignacio Dziekiewicz, Vice Chair
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