

Second Church of Christ, Scientist

2700 N. Pine Grove Avenue, Chicago



Second Church of Christ, Scientist © Eric Allix Rogers

OVERVIEW

Second Church of Christ, Scientist is a fine example of Chicago architect Solon S. Beman's work and is located on the North Side adjacent to historic Lincoln Park. Beman, known most famously for his design of the historic Town of Pullman as well as commercial and religious buildings, designed this church in a Classical Revival-style, reminiscent of an ancient Greek Temple. The building was completed in 1901 as the second church structure and institution dedicated to the Christian Science movement in Chicago.

After serving the Lincoln Park community for more than a century, this remarkable building, designed by one of Chicago's well-noted architects, has been offered for sale by the congregation and a real estate consultant. The church may be in imminent danger of demolition if sold to a developer as the building is not a designated Chicago Landmark. This is due in part to a 1987 Chi-

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Address: 2700 N. Pine Grove Avenue

Architect: Solon S. Beman

Date: 1899-1901

Style: Classical Revival

Neighborhood: Lincoln Park



Second Church of Christ, Scientist © Ward Miller

Chicago ordinance requiring owner permission and consent to designate religious buildings as official protected and recognized Landmarks. Often churches and owners of religious structures do not wish to be encumbered by this designation and honor, which may limit future plans, including possible demolition of their magnificent buildings.

HISTORY

Solon S. Beman (1853-1914), a prolific architect, was born in Brooklyn, New York and worked in the office of New York Architect Richard Upjohn. He was noted for his design of the company town of Pullman, as well as large-scale commercial buildings, railway stations and factories, in a variety of historically influenced styles. Later in his career, religious buildings and several notable libraries became prominent commissions. These were mostly executed in Classical Revival styles and perhaps reflecting the influences and impact on his work from the World's Columbian Exposition, also referred to as the Chicago World's Fair of 1893.

Second Church was designed and heavily influenced by the forms and volumes of an ancient Greek Temple or what may be considered the Classical Revival style. This style of architecture is noted for its pure and strict organized architectural vocabulary and often consists of an impressive columned and pedimented stone façade of the finest proportions, sometimes topped by a large dome. This style harks back to the overall composition of such admired and revered ancient structures as the Erechtheion atop the Acropolis in Athens, Greece.

The Second Church was also modeled after a structure designed by Beman, the award-winning Merchant Tailor's building which was constructed for the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Jackson Park. This was one of two temporary Revival-style buildings designed by Beman for the Fair. The smaller, temporary structure later became a template for several of Beman's religious building designs, especially related to the Christian Science movement in America. Other architects also followed in this style for church buildings, including architect Leon Stanhope and his design of Eleventh Church of Christ, Scientist in Logan Square.

Second Church shares many of the design features associated with the Merchant Tailor's Fair Building, along with several other prominent Beman commissions that followed for other Christian Science churches and the Blackstone Library in Chicago's Kenwood-Hyde Park neighborhood, a Designated Chicago Landmark. These features are most notably the overall massing and volume of the building, the large fluted stone columns with Ionic-order capitals, and forming and signaling in the front entry to this amazing structure. The strict Classical order to its composition and symmetry are a common theme, along with its magnificent large dome topping the building. Its massive but



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well-proportioned volume, overall fine-quality design and execution in Bedford Limestone gives the structure a commanding presence at the corner of Wrightwood and Pine Grove Avenues.

The sanctuary of Second Church is located on the upper floor and is reached by two grand staircases flanking the east and west walls of the building. The sanctuary contains a vast, vaulted column-free auditorium, creating a universal space with restrained ornamentation limited strictly to the stage, podium and the organ screen. This large sanctuary room, which is also free of religious symbolism, seats about 700 people. Its raked auditorium seating fronts the north wall of the church with a stage and a magnificent Austin organ above. The perimeter walls of the sanctuary contain a series of honey-colored art glass windows with the sloped ceiling only interrupted by a magnificent gilded dome and art glass skylight. The lower levels of the building contain offices, classrooms and mechanical spaces.

Beman began his architectural training in 1870, in the office of Richard Upjohn, a well-known architect noted mostly for his religious buildings constructed in the Gothic Revival style. Beman arrived in Chicago in 1879 at the request of industrialist George Pullman to design what was considered to be the first, all-inclusive planned company town. This was to become the Town of Pullman, home of the legendary Pullman Palace Car Company, which manufactured luxury passenger railroad cars and is situated in the Lake Calumet region. The Town of Pullman was annexed to the City of Chicago in 1889. This was an immense commission for Beman consisting of approximately 1,300 buildings constructed between 1880 and 1894. These included houses in various sizes and styles, apartment buildings and flats, factory buildings, a market hall, a hotel, arcade, church, water tower and an administration building, in a variety of styles including Queen Anne, Gothic Revival and Classical Revival.

Solon S. Beman also designed other notable buildings, several which still are extant and designated Chicago Landmarks. These include The Pullman Building (1883; demolished), the Marshall Field Jr. House (1884; Prairie Avenue Landmark District), The Studebaker/Fine Arts Building (1885 and 1898, Landmarked), W.W. Kimball House (1887; Prairie Avenue Landmark District) Chicago's Grand Central Station (1888-1890, demolished), The Griffiths-Burroughs House (1892; Landmarked), First Church of Christian Science, Chicago (1897; Landmarked), The Black-



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stone Library (1904; Landmarked), Fifth Church of Christ Scientist, Chicago (1914; Kenwood Landmark District) and of course the Town of Pullman, parts of which are now a National Monument.

Beman worked with members of the Christian Science Church, including its leaders and Mary Baker Eddy, founder of the Christian Science movement. In the late 1890s he converted to Christian Science and became a close friend of Eddy. With Eddy's encouragement, Beman became the de facto house architect and designed approximately two dozen churches nationwide, including the Mother Church Extension for the denomination's headquarters in Boston. It was said that Mrs. Eddy thought Beman developed the most beautiful buildings for worship of their congregations, and his buildings became a prototype for Christian Science churches across the nation. It is noted that Beman and his son, architect Spencer S. Beman, together designed dozens of Christian Science churches in their combined careers.

The Christian Science movement gained popularity in Chicago as a result of the World's Fair and the World's Parliament of Religions, also known as the World's Congress on Religions in 1893. This conference was held within a partially constructed building, which would later become The Art Institute of Chicago and was originally envisioned to be one of two campuses for the Fair. In the years to follow, the Christian Science movement expanded westward from its Mother Church in Boston and gained substantial growth in both Chicago and across the nation.

THREATS

After serving the Lincoln Park community for more than a century, this remarkable building has been offered for sale by the congregation and a real estate consultant. Despite a proposal in 2017 to consider a reuse of the building as a community cultural center and library, sponsored by a Chicago-based foundation in tandem with the City, the congregation continues to seek a developer for the property. This marvelous structure, much like several other former Christian Science churches, may be in imminent danger of demolition, thereby losing both an amazing legacy building and an opportunity for this structure to continue to serve the community as a destination and a much-needed resource and cultural center.



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RECOMMENDATIONS

Preservation Chicago would like to encourage the church's owners to explore further the cultural and community center proposal in partnership with private foundations, elected officials, the City of Chicago and nearby institutions like Lincoln Park Zoo and the Lincoln Park Conservatory. Such a universal space with auditorium seating could provide a much-needed gathering and meeting space for concerts, lectures and other events.

We encourage this remarkable structure to be considered for designation as a Chicago Landmark. The building would meet the criteria for designation and would fulfill a long-standing conversation in the community with public officials and ownership to consider such a designation and honor. The reuse of the building to a cultural center, combined with a Chicago Public Library branch, would also perhaps be in the spirit of Mrs. Eddy and the larger Christian Science community to reuse the building to benefit mankind.

Chicago 7: Second Church of Christ, Scientist



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