



# City of Chicago



O2022-278

Office of the City Clerk

## Document Tracking Sheet

<b>Meeting Date:</b>	1/26/2022
<b>Sponsor(s):</b>	Misc. Transmittal
<b>Type:</b>	Ordinance
<b>Title:</b>	Historical landmark designation for Seth Warner House at 631 N Central Ave
<b>Committee(s) Assignment:</b>	Committee on Zoning, Landmarks and Building Standards



DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT  
CITY OF CHICAGO

January 20, 2022

The Honorable Anna M. Valencia  
City Clerk  
City of Chicago  
Room 107, City Hall  
121 North LaSalle Street  
Chicago, Illinois 60602

**RE: Ordinance designating the Seth Warner House (631 N. Central Avenue) as a Chicago Landmark**

Dear Clerk Valencia:

We are filing with your office for introduction at the January 26, 2022, City Council meeting as a transmittal to the Mayor and City Council of Chicago the recommendation of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks that the Seth Warner House be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

The material being submitted to you for this proposal includes the:

1. Recommendation of the Commission on Chicago Landmarks; and
2. Proposed Ordinance.

Thank you for your cooperation in this matter.

Sincerely,

Kathleen Dickhut  
Deputy Commissioner  
Bureau of Citywide Systems and Historic Preservation

encls.

cc: The Honorable Emma Mitts, Alderwoman 37<sup>th</sup> Ward ([ward37@cityofchicago.org](mailto:ward37@cityofchicago.org) w/o enclosures)

## ORDINANCE

### Seth Warner House

631 N. Central Avenue

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to the procedures set forth in the Municipal Code of Chicago (the "Municipal Code"), Sections 2-120-620 through -690, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the "Commission") has determined that the Seth Warner House (the "Building"), located at 631 N. Central Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, as more fully described in **Exhibit A**, attached hereto and incorporated herein, satisfies three (3) criteria for landmark designation as set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3), and (4) of the Municipal Code; and

**WHEREAS**, built in 1869, the Building is one of the oldest houses in Chicago and the oldest building in the Austin community, as such it reflects the early history of the city when neighborhoods like Austin were rural communities; and

**WHEREAS**, the Building reflects aspects of Chicago's music culture. From 1924 to 1979, the building housed a series of conservatories of classical music: the Austin Conservatory of Music, the Austin College of Music and the Austin Academy of Fine Arts that together provided musical education to 31,000 students by 270 teachers; and

**WHEREAS**, at 152 years old at time of this ordinance, the Building possesses significant heritage value in terms of its age alone; there are only twelve other Chicago Landmarks built before the Great Fire of 1871; and

**WHEREAS**, the Building was constructed by Seth Porter Warner, one of Chicago's earliest settlers who arrived in the city on the year of Chicago's establishment in 1837; and

**WHEREAS**, Seth Porter Warner was a choral singer and active in Chicago's early music scene when the city was a pioneer settlement. In 1851 he built Warner's Hall, an early music venue; and

**WHEREAS**, Seth Porter Warner was an abolitionist and thus part of a national movement that led to the Civil War and an end to slavery in the United States. His hall frequently hosted speakers and political meetings calling for an end to slavery and supporting the Union cause during the Civil War; and

**WHEREAS**, the Building is an excellent and early example of the Italianate Style of architecture, and it stands as a rare example of the "cube-and-cupola" typology within that style; and

**WHEREAS**, the building displays excellent craftsmanship in traditional hand-crafted materials including load-bearing masonry, cut stone trim, carved-wood exterior details and high-quality interior finishes including black walnut and marble; and

**WHEREAS**, consistent with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code, the Building has a significant historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value, the integrity of which is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express such historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value; and

**WHEREAS**, on December 2, , 2021, the Commission adopted a resolution recommending to the City Council of the City of Chicago (the "City Council") that the Building be designated a Chicago Landmark; now, therefore,

**BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO:**

**SECTION 1.** The above recitals are hereby adopted as the findings of the City Council.

**SECTION 2.** The Building is hereby designated a Chicago Landmark in accordance with Section 2-120-700 of the Municipal Code.

**SECTION 3.** For purposes of Sections 2-120-740 and 2-120-770 of the Municipal Code governing permit review, the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are identified as:

- All elevations, including the rooflines, of the Building

**SECTION 4.** The Commission is hereby directed to create a suitable plaque appropriately identifying the Building as a Chicago Landmark.

**SECTION 5.** If any provision of this ordinance shall be held to be invalid or unenforceable for any reason, the invalidity or unenforceability of such provision shall not affect any of the other provisions of this ordinance.

**SECTION 6.** All ordinances, resolutions, motions or orders in conflict with this ordinance are hereby repealed to the extent of such conflict.

**SECTION 7.** This ordinance shall take effect upon its passage and approval.

## EXHIBIT A

### **Building Address**

631 N. Central Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

### **Permanent Index Numbers**

16-09-107-009-0000

### **Legal Description**

ALL THAT PARCEL OF LAND IN CITY OF CHICAGO, COOK COUNTY, STATE OF ILLINOIS, AS DESCRIBED IN DEED DOC # 27460851, ID # 16-09-107-009-0000, BEING KNOWN AND DESIGNATED AS:

THE NORTH 55 FEET OF THE SOUTH 105.37 FEET OF LOT 18 IN WACHSMUTH'S RESUBDIVISION OF BLOCK 3 OF MERRICK'S SUBDIVISION IN AUSTINVILLE, BEING THE WEST ½ OF THE NW ¼ OF SECTION 9, TOWNSHIP 39 NORTH, RANGE 13, EAST OF THE THIRD PRINCIPAL MERIDIAN, IN COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

**CITY OF CHICAGO  
COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

**December 2, 2021**

**RECOMMENDATION TO THE CITY COUNCIL OF CHICAGO THAT  
CHICAGO LANDMARK DESIGNATION BE ADOPTED FOR THE**

**SETH WARNER HOUSE**

**631 N. Central Avenue**

**Docket No. 2021-09**

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**To the Mayor and Members of the City Council of the City of Chicago:**

Pursuant to Section 2-120-690 of the Municipal Code of the City of Chicago (the "Municipal Code"), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (the "Commission") has determined that the Seth Warner House (the "Building"), is worthy of designation as a Chicago Landmark. On the basis of careful consideration of the history and architecture of the Building, the Commission has found that it satisfies the following three (3) criteria set forth in Section 2-120-620 of the Municipal Code:

1. *Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*
3. *Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*
4. *Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

**I. BACKGROUND**

The formal landmark designation process for the Building began on October 7, 2021, when the Commission approved a preliminary landmark recommendation (the "Preliminary Recommendation") for the Building as a Chicago Landmark. The Commission found that the Building meets three (3) of the seven (7) criteria for designation, as well as the integrity criterion, identified in the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance (Municipal Code, Section 2-120-580 *et seq.*). As part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission preliminarily identified the "significant historical and architectural features" of the Building as:

- All elevations, including the rooflines, of the Building.

Also, as part of the Preliminary Recommendation, the Commission adopted a Designation Report, dated October 7, 2021, the most current iteration of which is dated December 2, 2021, incorporated herein and attached hereto as Exhibit A (the "Designation Report").

At its regular meeting of November 4, 2021, the Commission received a report incorporated herein and attached hereto as Exhibit B (the "Department of Planning and Development Report") from Maurice D. Cox, Commissioner of the Department of Planning and Development, stating that the proposed landmark designation of the Building supports the City's overall planning goals and is consistent with the City's governing policies and plans.

On November 22, 2021, the Commission received written consent to landmark designation of the Building in a form dated November 22, 2021, and signed by James Bowers, the owner of the Building.

## **II. FINDINGS OF THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

**WHEREAS**, pursuant to Section 2-120-690 of the Municipal Code, the Commission has reviewed the entire record of proceedings on the proposed Chicago Landmark designation, including the Designation Report and all of the information on the proposed landmark designation of the Building; and

**WHEREAS**, built in 1869, the Building is one of the oldest houses in Chicago and the oldest building in the Austin community, as such it reflects the early history of the city when neighborhoods like Austin were rural communities; and

**WHEREAS**, the Building reflects aspects of Chicago's music culture. From 1924 to 1979, the building housed a series of conservatories of classical music: the Austin Conservatory of Music, the Austin College of Music and the Austin Academy of Fine Arts that together provided musical education to 31,000 students by 270 teachers; and

**WHEREAS**, at 152 years old at time of this Resolution, the Building possesses significant heritage value in terms of its age alone; there are only twelve other Chicago Landmarks built before the Great Fire of 1871; and

**WHEREAS**, the Building was constructed by Seth Porter Warner, one of Chicago's earliest settlers who arrived in the city on the year of Chicago's establishment in 1837; and

**WHEREAS**, Seth Porter Warner was a choral singer and active in Chicago's early music scene when the city was a pioneer settlement. In 1851 he built Warner's Hall, an early music venue; and

**WHEREAS**, Seth Porter Warner was an abolitionist and thus part of a national movement that led to the Civil War and an end to slavery in the United States. His hall frequently hosted speakers and political meetings calling for an end to slavery and supporting the Union cause during the Civil War; and

**WHEREAS**, the Building is an excellent and early example of the Italianate Style of architecture, and it stands as a rare example of the "cube-and-cupola" typology within that style; and

**WHEREAS**, the building displays excellent craftsmanship in traditional hand-crafted materials including load-bearing masonry, cut stone trim, carved-wood exterior details and high-quality interior finishes including black walnut and marble; and

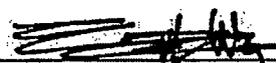
**WHEREAS**, the Building meets three (3) criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3) and (4) of the Municipal Code; and

**WHEREAS**, consistent with Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code, the Building has significant historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value, the integrity of which is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express such historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value; now, therefore,

**THE COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS HEREBY:**

1. Adopts the recitals, findings and statements of fact set forth in the preamble and Sections I and II hereof as the findings of the Commission; and
2. Adopts the Designation Report, as revised, and dated this December 2, 2021; and
3. Finds, based on the Designation Report and the entire record before the Commission, that the Building meets the three (3) criteria for landmark designation set forth in Section 2-120-620 (1), (3) and (4) of the Municipal Code; and
4. Finds that the Building satisfies the "integrity" requirement set forth in Section 2-120-630 of the Municipal Code; and
5. Finds that the significant historical and architectural features of the Building are identified as follows:
  - All elevations, including rooflines, of the Building.
6. Recommends the designation of the Building a Chicago Landmark.

This recommendation was adopted unanimously (7-0)

  
Ernest C. Wong, Chair  
Commission on Chicago Landmarks

Dated December 2, 2021

*Exhibit A*

## LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



# SETH WARNER HOUSE

631 N. CENTRAL AVENUE

Final Landmark Recommendation Adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks,  
on December 2, 2021.



**CITY OF CHICAGO**  
Lori E. Lightfoot, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development  
Maurice Cox, Commissioner

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# **SETH WARNER HOUSE**

**631 N CENTRAL AVENUE**

**BUILT: 1869**

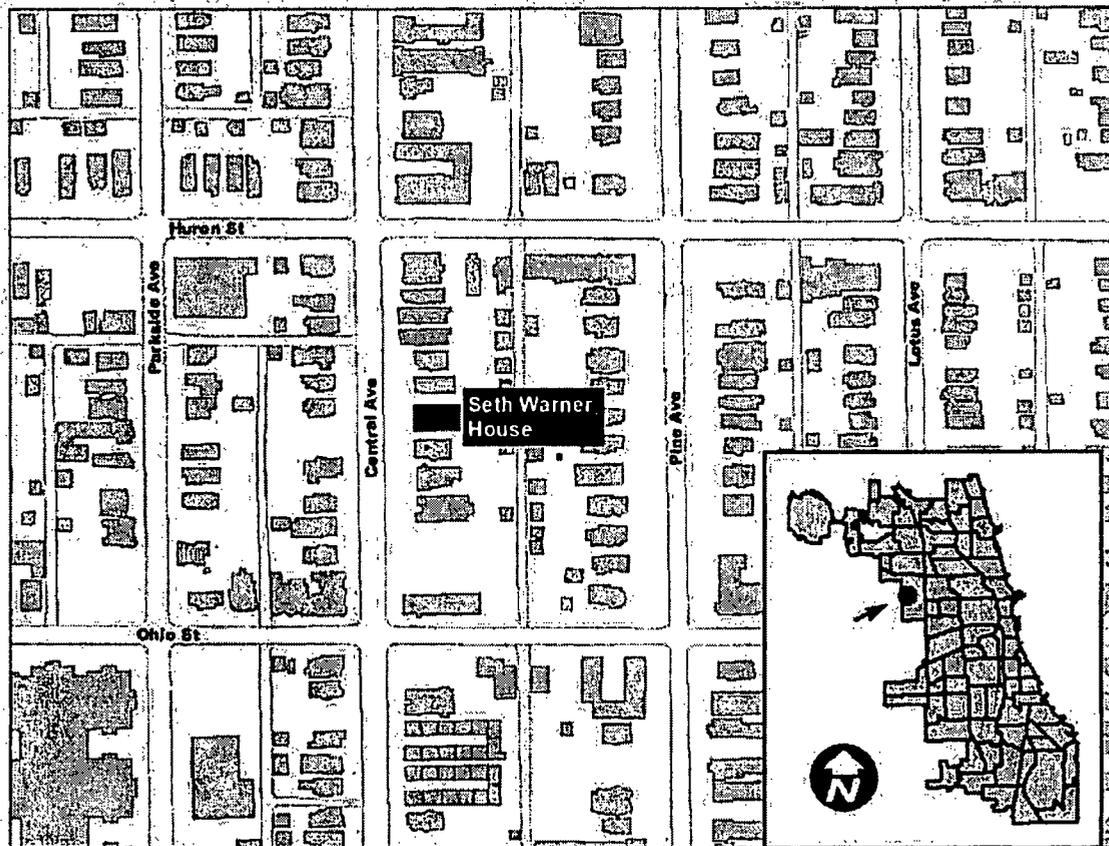
**ARCHITECT: NOT KNOWN**

Built in 1869, the Seth P. Warner House at 631 N. Central Avenue is one the oldest structures in Chicago and the oldest house in the Austin Community Area. The architect of the house is not known, yet it stands as an excellent example of the Italianate Style of architecture and represents the “cube-and-cupola” typology within that style. The house was built as a family home by Seth P. Warner, one of Chicago’s earliest settlers, a successful blacksmith, abolitionist and patron of the arts in Chicago’s days as a pioneer settlement.

When Warner settled in Austin in 1869, the area was largely undeveloped land in Cicero Township, well outside the city’s borders. His house was the centerpiece of a gentleman’s farm occupying 6.8 acres with an orchard, pasture, barn and carriage house. As Austin grew from a rural settlement to railroad suburb and finally to a dense urban neighborhood, the Warner’s farmstead was parceled and infilled with Queen Anne-style houses and later flat buildings. The house remains a rare survivor of Austin’s earliest development.

Seth P. Warner cultivated a lifelong interest in music, and a coincidence of history is that from 1924 to 1979 his house hosted conservatories of classical music serving the West Side. It is estimated that 31,000 students and 270 teachers passed through the music schools at the Warner House.

The Seth Warner House was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. In 1996, it was rated “Red” in the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey*, the highest ranking reserved for sites with citywide, statewide or national significance. Some 300 buildings in Chicago are rated “Red” and only about 25 of these are not designated Chicago Landmarks. As a building dating from before the Chicago Fire, the Seth Warner House is rare. There are only twelve designated Chicago Landmarks that have that distinction. The Warner House is also published in John Drury’s 1940 guide to *Old Chicago Houses* and in the *AIA Guide to Chicago*, published in 2014.



**The Seth Warner House is located in the Austin Community Area on Chicago West Side near the city's western boundary with Oak Park. When the house was built it was the centerpiece of Warner's small farm that occupied the entire block bounded Central, Pine, Huron and Ohio.**

## **SETH PORTER WARNER (1810-1891)**

631 N. Central Avenue (old address 324 Central Avenue) was built by businessman, abolitionist and music lover Seth P. Warner in 1869. Like many of Chicago's early settlers, Warner hailed from New England and came to the city as a young man. He was born in Amherst, Massachusetts and was a grandson of Colonel Seth Warner, an important figure in the Revolutionary War. Little is known of his education or training, but he arrived in Chicago at age 27 in 1837, the same year that the City of Chicago was incorporated.

In the early 1840s Warner established a blacksmith shop on Randolph Street near Clark Street. In 1846 he established a connection with Charles M. Gray, a co-founder with Cyrus McCormick of the McCormick Reaper Works. From that connection Warner received commissions to manufacture the Virginia Reaper, McCormick's invention that revolutionized grain harvesting and that helped establish Chicago's industrial might. Some secondary sources suggest that Seth Warner was not just a supplier to McCormick but also an early executive of the company. This is not confirmed by available primary sources at time of writing.

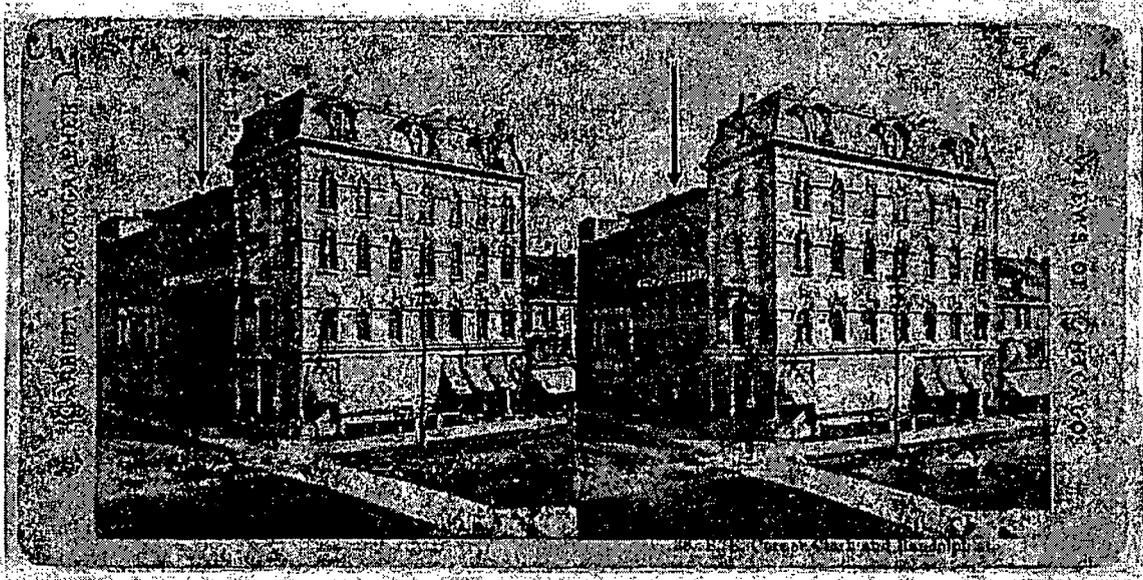
Warner travelled to California in 1849 and returned to Chicago in 1851. The purpose of Warner's episode in California is unknown but these dates correspond to the California Gold Rush.

Warner was musically inclined and served as a director of early choral societies in the city, including the Choral Union, Chicago's first organized singing group. Upon his return to Chicago in 1851, Warner was wealthy enough to build Warner's Hall (no longer extant), near his blacksmith shop at Randolph and Clark Streets which hosted music, lectures and meetings.

Well before the Civil War, Warner was an active supporter of abolition organizations in Chicago, and he used his hall to host meetings and lectures in support of anti-slavery and the Union cause in the years leading up to and during the Civil War. Abolitionist and former enslaved person Frederick Douglass spoke at the hall in 1853 at a state convention of African Americans. The following year, German immigrants who supported the Free Soil Party met at Warner's Hall to protest Senator Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act that created a pathway to extend slavery to America's western territories. This meeting is regarded by some historians as the origins of the Republican Party. In 1863, a meeting was convened at Warner's Hall to encourage African American men to enlist in the Union Army. Also, during war, the Union League club in Chicago convened numerous meetings at the venue.

After the war, Warner relocated to the village of Austin in 1869 where he built his house as the centerpiece of a small farm. In Austin he was regarded as a prominent leader as the community developed. He helped found the Austin Presbyterian Church in 1871. In the 1880s he joined the Calumet Club of Chicago, an organization that restricted membership to those who came to the city before 1840.

Warner sold the house in 1889 when he and his wife moved to live with their daughter who resided at 1124 N. LaSalle Street in Chicago. He died in 1892.



Warner's Hall is indicated by the arrow on this stereograph from around 1868. Seth Warner built the hall as a venue for music, lectures and political meetings. The hall frequently hosted events that supported the abolition of slavery and the Union cause. An 1854 meeting here in protest against the expansion of slavery into the West is regarded by some historians as the foundation of the Republican party. The hall was destroyed in the Great Fire. The Richard J. Daley Center now occupies the site. (John Carbutt (American, 1832 - 1905) S.E. Clark and Randolph St. [Chicago], 1865-1875, Albumen silver print, The J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, Gift of Weston J. and Mary M. Naef)

**COLORADO PEOPLE'S CONVENTION**  
 A State Convention of the Colored people of Illinois is to be held here to-morrow. Warner's Hall has been taken for the purpose, and preparations have been made for a respectable demonstration. Not the less, the most interesting feature of the convention will be the presence of Frederick Douglass—the slave, not the slave holder, Douglass. A telegraphic despatch was received from him yesterday, announcing that he would be here this evening. We doubt not he will receive a warm welcome, not only from his colored brethren, but also, such of our citizens as are not afflicted with color-phobia.

Notice of a speaking engagement at Warner's Hall by the national leader of the abolition movement, Frederick Douglass, in 1853 for the Illinois Colored People's Convention. The Colored Convention Movement was a national movement for Black Civil Rights before the Civil War. (Chicago Tribune, October 5, 1853)

## AUSTIN COMMUNITY AREA

The Seth Warner House is in the Austin Community Area, which is located 7 miles west of the Loop, on Chicago's western border with Oak Park. Many early histories note that the land now known as Austin was a trade center and transit corridor between Lake Michigan and the Des Plaines River for indigenous people including the Potawatomi, Miami, and Illinois nations; and that the Potawatomi established a settlement in the land now known as Austin before the arrival of Europeans. These peoples were compelled to cede their lands here and throughout the larger region through a series of treaties with the U.S. government in the 1830s. By 1835, the indigenous people of the Chicago region were displaced to territories west of the Mississippi River.

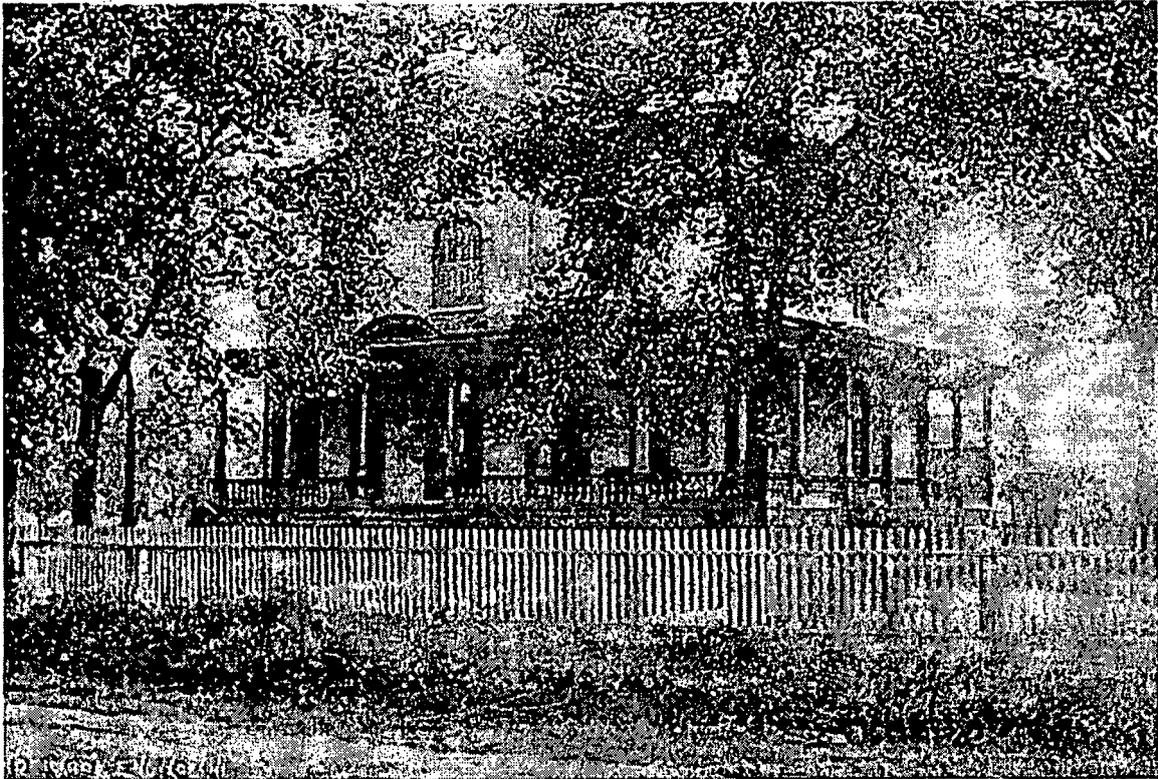
Once the land was cleared of indigenous people, the U.S. government began to sell and grant land to Americans of European descent. In Austin the process began in 1835 when Henry L. DeKoven purchased 280 acres from federal government in 1835 and began homesteading the land. At the time of DeKoven's settlement, the area was known as Sand Ridge in reference to the slight rise in land at what is now Pine Avenue (5500 west). The ridgeline marks the pre-ice age shoreline of Lake Michigan.

Transportation between the settlement at Sand Ridge and Chicago was difficult due to poor drainage. In 1842, the Lake Street County Line Road Company (of which Seth P. Warner was an investor) built a wood-planked toll road on Lake Street, following a route established by native Americans. The Frink, Walker and Company stagecoach line used this road on its route between Galena and Chicago; Sand Ridge was a stop on the route with a tavern and inn known as the Six Mile House.

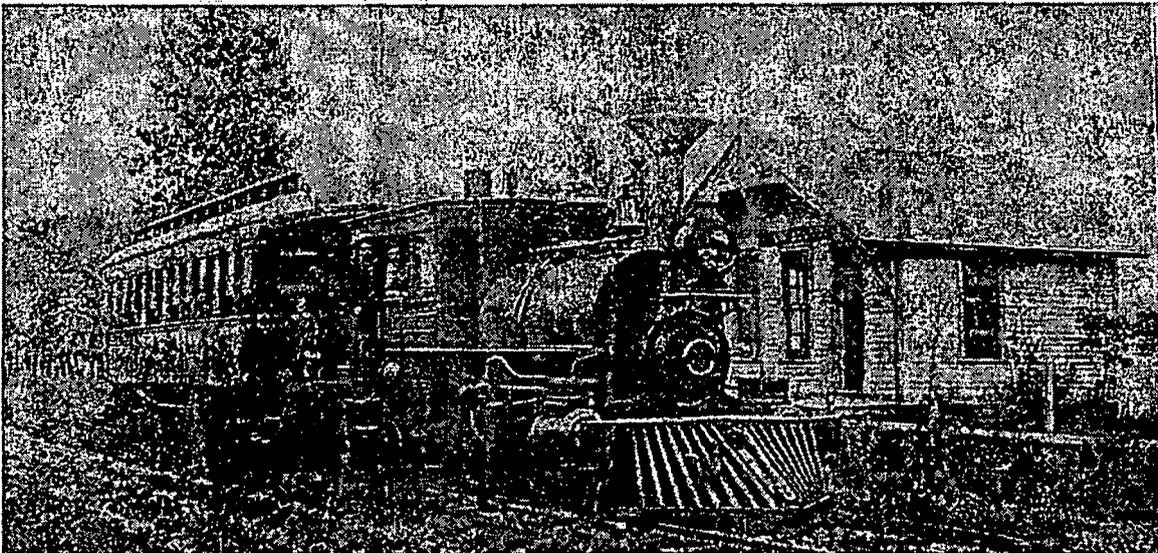
In 1848, the Galena and Chicago Union Railroad, predecessor of the Chicago and North Western Railway, had laid tracks at grade level parallel to the Lake Street Turnpike. In 1866, a railroad depot was built at Central Avenue and the railway established regular service between Chicago and the new subdivision.

From its founding in 1866 until its annexation to Chicago in 1899, Austin was a prosperous suburb. The village was named for Henry W. Austin who, in 1865, acquired the 280-acre tract of land comprising the central portion of the future village from Henry L. DeKoven. In 1866, Austin and C. C. Merrick platted and subdivided lots in the village, called Austinville. Austin and Merrick's subdivision was added on to by other investors until, in 1884, the village included a territory of one square mile bounded by Laramie, Chicago, and Austin avenues and Madison Street.

Like Oak Park, its neighbor to the west, Austin began as a village in Cicero Township. The township was established in 1857, and between 1866 and 1899 its government offices were in Austin on the block bounded by Lake Street and Race Avenue, Central and Parkside avenues, where the current Austin Town Hall and Austin Branch Public Library buildings stand. Within the township, rivalry between the villages of Austin and Oak Park was especially intense and often provoked pitched battles over elections and civic issues. One such instance occurred when permission was sought to extend the Lake Street train line, at street level, from Laramie Avenue to Austin Avenue. The two trustees from Austin on the township board favored the proposal while the two Oak Park trustees opposed it. A representative from Clyde, a village east of Austin, was ill and could not attend the deciding meeting. When the Oak Park trustees left the meeting at 1 A.M., the Austin trustees went to the home of the Clyde representative, roused the



**The Seth Warner House around 1900 when the house was originally the homestead of a gentleman's farm occupying the entire block and surrounded by a small pasture, orchard, barn and carriage house. The wrap-around porch, known as a veranda, was later removed. (Austin Community Collection, Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections)**



**An early 1890s photo of the of the single car commuter railway that served suburban Austin, Oak Park and Forest Park. Though no longer at grade, the line continues to operate as the Union Pacific West Line. (Austinite, August 31, 1893)**



**Austin in 1888 when it was outside the City of Chicago and emerging as a railroad suburb of large single family homes rendered in picturesque Victorian styles of architecture on capacious lots. (*Picturesque Austin*, Austin: W.H. Baker, 1888)**



**Central Avenue, shown here in 1888, was one of the first streets to develop in Austin due to its good drainage compared to other areas of the suburb. The Seth Warner House was the first house on the street. At the time of this photo the street was unpaved and sidewalks were wood plank. (*Picturesque Austin*, Austin: W.H. Baker, 1888)**

man from his sickbed, and brought him to the Town Hall where he cast the deciding vote in favor of the extension. In retaliation, when the issue of annexation came before the Cicero Township electorate, in 1899, Oak Parkers and other township voters gained revenge on Austin by voting Austin into Chicago despite Austin's objections.

Like other outlying suburbs, the population of Austin increased substantially after the Chicago Fire in 1871 as people, fearing a repetition of that tragedy, sought less densely populated areas in which to settle. Most of the earliest homes were built north of or immediately south of Lake Street near the train depot.

Austin retained its suburban atmosphere because of its large number of single-family dwellings and because of such local amenities as Columbus Park. In 1910, Austinites petitioned the Board of the West Parks Commissioners for the establishment of a park at what was then known as Warren's Woods. After the Commissioners' approval, the area bounded by Congress and Harrison streets, and Central and Austin avenues became Columbus Park. The park was laid out between 1916 and 1922 from the designs of noted landscape architect Jens Jensen, who also designed other West Side parks. Columbus Park is one of Jensen's most significant designs.

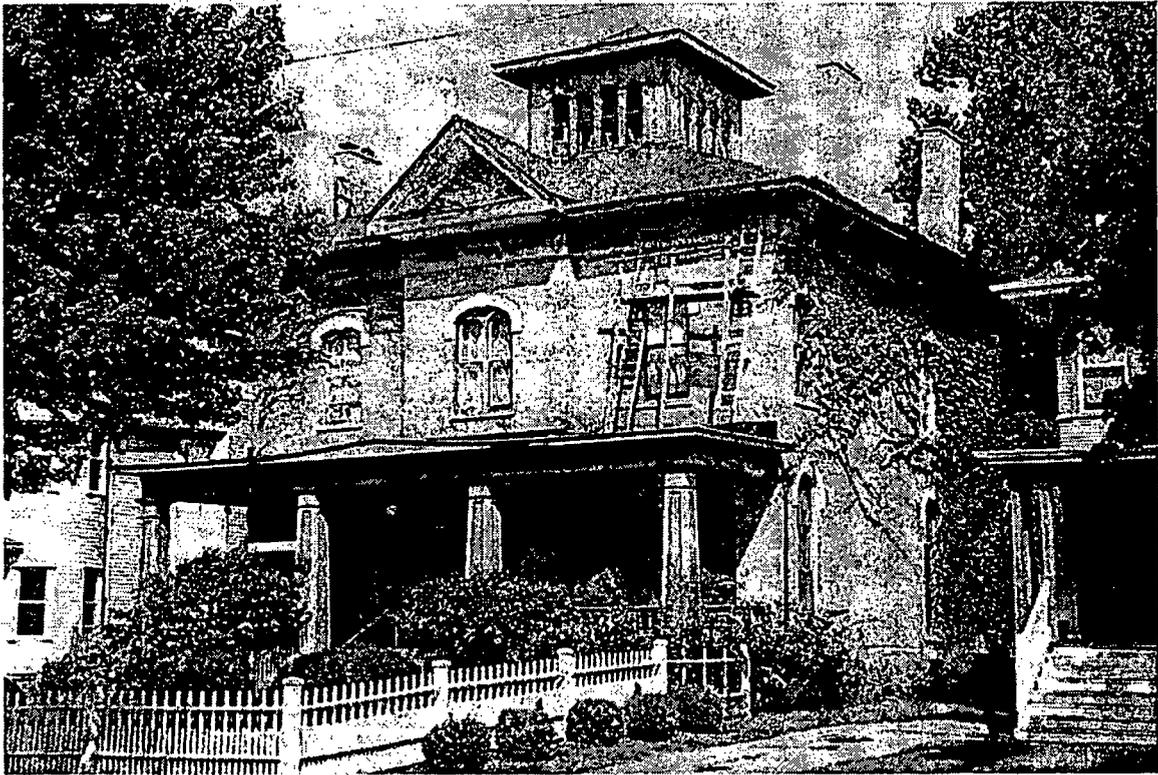
By the 1920s, Austin was one of Chicago's best served neighborhoods for public transit to the Loop for commuters, with the Lake Street "L" and surface lines on Madison and Chicago Avenues. Beginning around 1900 and continuing through the 1930s, rapid residential growth in Austin brought about a change in the built environment of the community as the construction of single-family frame dwellings on large lots gave way to brick two- and three-flats and large apartment buildings. A distinctive design from this period is the Third Unitarian Church (a designated Chicago Landmark) at 301 North Mayfield Avenue, designed by Paul Schweikher and built in 1937. The church marks the end of the major period of Austin's architectural development when numerous distinguished designs were built in this architecturally diverse community.

## **BUILDING DESIGN AND CONSTRUCTION**

In 1866, at age 56, Seth P. Warner bought land for his new house in Austin, which was an undeveloped village, and then well-outside Chicago city limits. The 6.8-acre site occupied the entire block bounded by Huron Street to the north, Pine Street to the east, Ohio Street to the south and Central Avenue to the west. Central Avenue would become the premier street for residential architecture in the village of Austin and it is possible that the Warner House, one of the first high-style houses in the village, established a high bar for Central Avenue. Central Avenue was also the location of the first train depot in the village at Lake Street, now the Central Station of the CTA Green Line "El", two blocks south of the Warner House.

As noted above, the original setting of the house was at the center of a small farm. Later owners of the house sold off the farmland and the house is now surrounded by Queen Anne single family houses and prewar flat and apartment buildings.

Though rear additions have been added to the house, in its original form the house was square in plan measuring 55 feet on each side. The building is 2 stories tall with a raised basement with an overall height of approximately 55 feet, so the overall form of the building is a cube. The two-story box shape is covered with a low-pitched hipped roof and topped by a central rectangular



The Seth Warner House exemplifies the "cube and cupola" formal subtype within the Italianate Style of architecture. The house displays traditional hand-crafted materials including load-bearing masonry, cut stone trim, carved-wood exterior details and high-quality interior finishes including black walnut and marble.

cupola. This formal combination is known as cube-and-cupola, a subtype within the Italianate Style of architecture.

The building rests on a coursed stone foundation. The exterior walls are load-bearing brick laid up in a common bond and measuring 16 inches thick on the first floor and 12 on the second. The outer wythe is a cream-colored brick, common to Milwaukee where it is known as cream city brick. At some point in the past the brick was painted red which the owner is allowing to deteriorate to allow the brick to return to its natural appearance.

The most visible elevation faces west onto Central Avenue. The house is sited behind a 30-foot-deep front yard surrounded by a white picket fence. While the other elevations are flat, the front elevation has a projecting vertical bay at its center that is topped with a low pediment that projects from the hipped roof. This elevation is symmetrical with a central entrance door flanked on either side by a pair of windows on first floor, and on the second floor a central *bifora* window is flanked by one window on each side.

The side elevations facing north, and south are less visible due to neighboring houses. These are flat walls with punched window openings. The rear elevation is not visible from the public way.

A raised one-story wood porch spans the full width of the front elevation. It is carried on square wood columns separated by railings with turned-wood balusters. The entrance to the house is centered on the front elevation and has two paneled doors each fitted with a large pane of glass, and the pair topped with a half-round window.

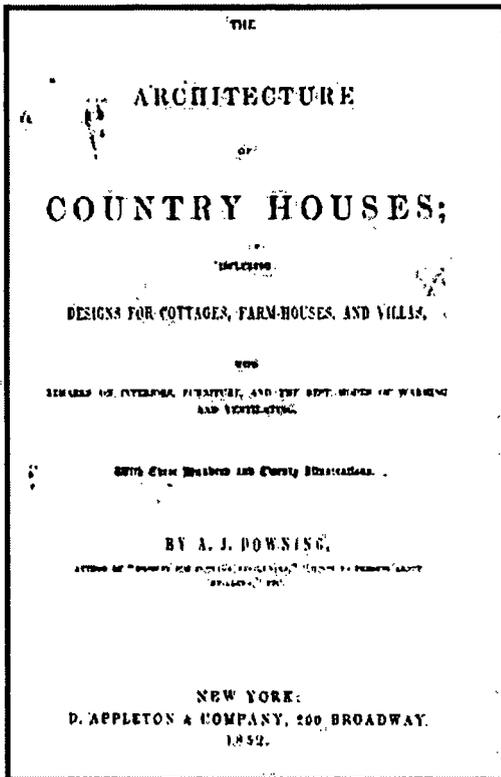
The windows are tall and narrow with double-hung sash with a two-over-two configuration. The sash appear to be original. On the first floor the window occupies the full height of that floor, and the sash can be lifted into a recessed pocket inside the wall. The windows are topped with a combination of segmented and half-round arches built of crisply-cut stone set slightly proud of the wall plane. Sills are also cut stone. This stone trim has also been painted, and the coating is fading, revealing what appears to be sandstone

As is typical of the Italianate Style, the intersection of the exterior walls and the roof is marked by a prominent eave, with scroll-sawn bracket set in pairs on a paneled fascia band all rendered in wood. The hipped roof is clad with asphalt shingles. The prominent cupola rising from the center of the roof has wood siding and four arched windows on each side. Several brick chimneys rising from the roof are evidence of the interior's many fireplaces which served as the heating system at the time of construction.

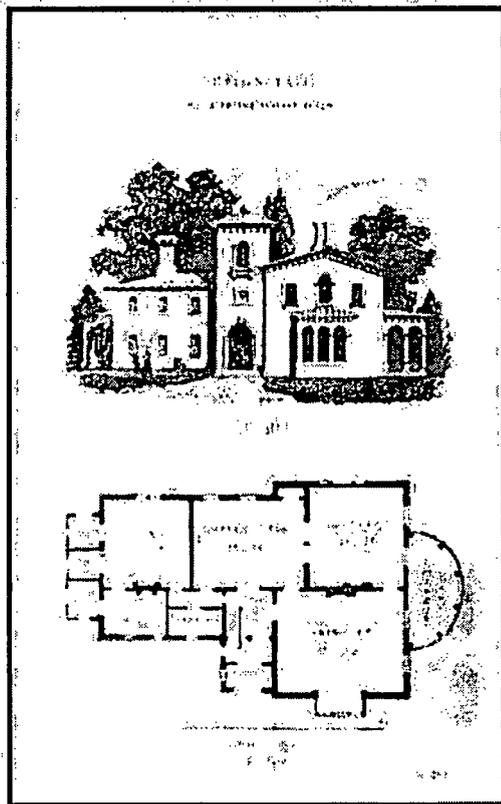
The interior of the house has four rooms on each floor with a central stair hall. The walls are finished in horsehair plaster with run-plaster moldings. Interior doors and all trim are black walnut. Fireplaces in each room feature marble mantelpieces.

## **THE ITALIANATE STYLE**

The Seth Warner House is an excellent example of the Italianate Style which dominated American residential architecture from 1850 to 1880. With Gothic Revival, the Italianate traces its roots to 19<sup>th</sup> century England and the influence of the Picturesque and Romantic movements that reacted against the classical and rational traditions that had dominated the arts in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the United States, the style was promulgated by pattern books published by Andrew



The architect of the Seth Warner House is unknown, but the Italianate Style of the house shows the influence of pattern books published by Andrew Jackson Downing in the 1840s and 1850s, particularly his *Architecture of Country Houses* of 1852. Downing described the Italianate country house thus: "Its broad roofs, ample verandas and arcades, are especially agreeable in our summers of dazzling sunshine . . . It has much to render it a favorite in the Middle and Western sections of our Union."



The illustration from *Architecture of Country Houses* shows the character defining features of the Italianate Style: low-pitched roofs, cupola, tall arched windows with stone lintels and ample porches.

Jackson Downing in the 1840s and 1850s. As its name suggests, the style takes inspiration from Italian architecture, but instead of classical forms the Italianate is modeled on rambling farmhouses in Italy's agricultural regions.

Like the Seth P. Warner House, early use of the Italianate in Chicago was for large, freestanding mansions, such as the Charles Hull House on South Halsted Street, built in 1856 and best known for its later association with Jane Addams.

When applied to residential architecture, the Italianate style's character-defining features are buildings two to three stories tall, relatively flat wall surfaces, low-pitched roofs with bracketed cornices, tall and narrow windows topped by segmental or curved arches that project from the wall. Double doors with arched detailing are characteristic, and in city houses they open off a raised front porch. All these features are found in the Seth P. Warner House.

The Italianate's easy adaptability in terms of materials and detailing made the style nationally popular style by the Civil War. It remained widespread in Chicago into the 1880s. Its features can be found on hundreds of the city's residential and commercial buildings.

## **LATER HISTORY OF THE WARNER HOUSE**

Seth P. Warner sold the house in 1892 when he moved to the Near North Side near the end of his life. The house was then purchased by George Voorhees who converted it to a hotel known as *The Elms* which catered to tourists visiting the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. After the fair until the early-twentieth century, the house passed through three different owners who resided in it.

For much of the twentieth century the Seth Warner House was home to a series of conservatories of music serving residents of the West Side. This chapter in the house's history began in 1924 when it was purchased by George Haskell who established there the Austin Conservatory of Music which taught music, theater and dance with Harold Simonds as director.

In the 1930s, Bessie Ryan took over the institution and changed its name to the Austin College of Music.

In 1934, accomplished violinist Dr. Paul Vernon and his wife Blanch Weber Vernon purchased the house and renamed the institution the Austin Academy of Fine Arts. The Vernons established the academy as a nonprofit organization in 1937.

In 1953 vocalists Perrin B. Root and Ione Walker Root bought the house and took over direction of the academy (Perrin between 1953 and 1963, and Ione between 1963 and 1974). Under the Roots, the academy enrolled 500 students per year under the direction of 35 teachers in voice, instruments, drama, painting and sketching.

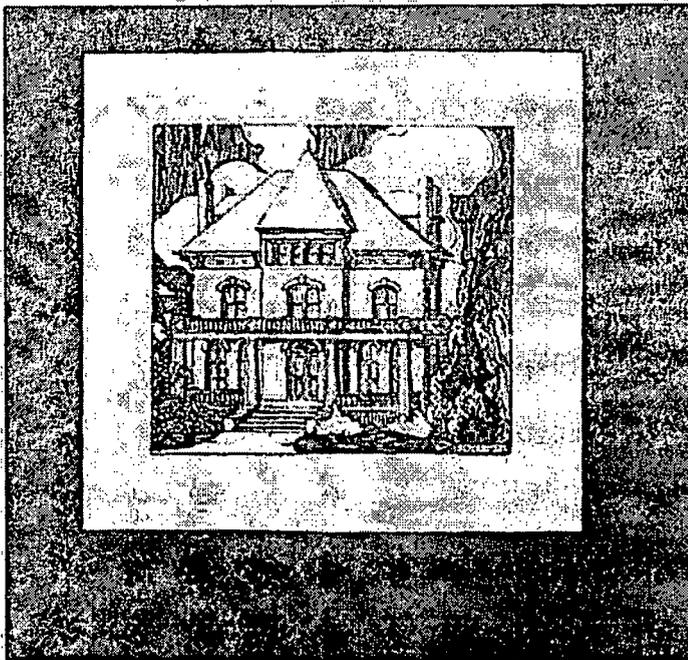
In 1974 Ione Walker sold the property to John H. Hunter (1927-2016), an African American musician and instructor in composition, theory and keyboard. Under Hunter's leadership from 1974 to 1979, the academy was racially integrated and offered teaching to both children and adults. Hunter ran the academy part time while also working as an auditor U.S. Department of Energy.



After Seth Warner sold the house, the new owner converted it to a hotel known as The Elms, which catered to tourists visiting the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. Above is letterhead from the hotel with a picture of the Seth Warner House in its original rural setting. (Courtesy of James Bowers, current owner of the Seth Warner House)



The Seth Warner House in 1953 when it housed the Austin Academy of Fine Arts. By this time significant changes had been made to the roofline, but the date of these changes is not known, and in the 1980s the changes were reversed. (Austin Community Collection, Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections)



For much of the 20th century, the Seth Warner House was home to a series of classical music conservatories. The catalog at left is from 1940. (Austin Community Collection, Chicago Public Library, Harold Washington Library Center, Special Collections)

**AUSTIN ACADEMY**  
**of FINE ARTS**  
 ||||| |||||  ||||| |||||  
 A SCHOOL OF MUSIC AND DANCED ARTS  
 PAUL VERNON, Director  
 631 NORTH CENTRAL AVENUE  
 AUSTIN 2888  
 CHICAGO  
 1939 · 1940

In 1979, the Academy hosted its 46th anniversary recital and the brochure for the program included photographs of some of the school's leaders. (Courtesy of James Bowers, current owner of the Seth Warner House)



**PAUL VERNON**  
*Mus.D.*  
 Founder and Director  
 for twenty years



**PERRIN B. ROOT**  
 Managing Director  
 for ten years



**IONE WALKER ROOT**  
*Mus.B., Mus.M.*  
 Managing Director  
 for eleven years



**JOHN H. HUNTER**  
*Mus.B., Mus.M.*  
 Present Managing Director  
 for five years

Hunter was born in Greenville, South Carolina, where he was raised by a single mother, Teretha Williams. He had to frequently interrupt his middle and high school education to work to support his mother and sister.

While in middle school, Hunter fell in love with classical piano and began lessons. His persistence caught the attention of Frieda McPherson, music supervisor of the Greenville school system. She became a teacher and longtime mentor to Hunter who paid for Hunter's college tuition. Hunter later dedicated the recital studio at the Warner House to Mrs. McPherson.

After graduating from high school in Greenville, Hunter came to Chicago to study at the American Conservatory of Music (closed in 1991). After freshman year there he joined the U.S. Marine Corps to take advantage of GI Bill. After his service, he returned to Chicago to resume his studies at the Cosmopolitan School of Music where he earned his Bachelor of Arts in piano and Master of Arts in music theory in 1959.

After graduation Hunter taught music at Albany State University in Georgia for five years. He then returned to Chicago to work in the civil service as an auditor for the federal government. In the 1970s he began teaching music part time at the Austin Academy of Fine Arts. He purchased the Academy in 1974 and directed its programming for five years. Upon his retirement from the federal government in 1979, he moved back to his hometown of Greenville where he re-established the academy keeping its name. In 1996, Hunter moved back to Chicago to be closer to his daughter, though the academy stayed in Greenville and remained in operation for several years.



**John H. Hunter at right viewing a work of art inside the Seth Warner House, circa 1979. (Courtesy of James Bowers, current owner of the Seth Warner House)**

## **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 an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object within the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for designation," as well as possess sufficient historic design integrity to convey its significance.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Seth Warner House 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, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- Built in 1869, the Seth Warner House is one of the oldest houses in Chicago and the oldest building in the Austin community, as such it reflects the early history of the city when neighborhoods like Austin were rural communities.
- The Seth Warner House reflects aspects of Chicago's music culture. From 1924 to 1979, the building housed a series of conservatories of classical music: the Austin Conservatory of Music, the Austin College of Music and the Austin Academy of Fine Arts that together provided musical education to 31,000 students by 270 teachers.
- At 152 years old, the Seth Warner House possesses significant heritage value in terms of its age alone; there are only twelve other Chicago Landmarks built before the Great Fire of 1871.

### ***Criterion 3: Significant Person***

*Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.*

- The house was built by Seth Porter Warner, one of Chicago's earliest settlers who arrived in the city on the year of Chicago's establishment in 1837.
- Seth Porter Warner was a choral singer and active in Chicago's early music scene when the city was a pioneer settlement. In 1851 he built Warner's Hall, an early music venue.
- Seth Porter Warner was an abolitionist and thus part of a national movement that led to the Civil War and an end to slavery in the United States. His hall frequently hosted speakers and political meetings calling for an end to slavery and supporting the Union cause during the Civil War.

### ***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.*

- The Seth Warner House is an excellent and early example of the Italianate Style of architecture, and it stands as a rare example of the "cube-and-cupola" typology within that style.

- The house displays excellent craftsmanship in traditional hand-crafted materials including load-bearing masonry, cut stone trim, carved-wood exterior details and high-quality interior finishes including black walnut and marble.

### ***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 Seth P. Warner house possesses excellent integrity given its age. Clearly its setting has changed from a small gentleman's farm to an urban neighborhood, but this does not diminish the building's ability to express its historic and architectural value.

The building remains in its original location on Central Avenue, one of early Austin's premier residential streets. There too remains the house's proximity to the Central Avenue CTA Green Line Station which was the location of the community's first rail station.

The design of the house is guided by the Italianate Style of architecture executed in traditional masonry and these aspects of integrity are clearly legible today.

Historic maps and photos of the building over time reveal early alterations and recent restorations that have occurred over the past 152 years. In its original form the porch wrapped around all four elevations of the house. The side and rear elevations of the porch were removed before 1909 (the date of the earliest Sanborn Map of the house) as neighboring lots were sold off and built upon. The front porch that remains also has different support columns than the original. The date of the existing columns is not known, but they were extant in photos from the mid-20th century.

Significant changes also occurred at the roofline. For much of the 20th century the building housed a music and fine art conservatory. Recitals were performed in a large hall with room for an audience of over 100 that was built at the attic level that significantly raised the roof and relocated the cupola. This hall was not original to the building, and it is not known when it was added. In the 1980s, when the building returned to use as a single-family residence, the hall was removed, the roof lowered, and the cupola restored.

A two-story brick addition was added to rear of the house in 1909, again indicated by the Sanborn Map of that year. This was extended by 1950 as shown on the 1950 Sanborn. More recently, a one-story frame addition with wood cladding was added at rear. None of these additions are visible from the public way.

## **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 most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Seth Warner House, the Commission staff recommends that the significant features be preliminarily identified as follows:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the building.

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### **CITY OF CHICAGO**

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#### **Department of Planning and Development**

Maurice D. Cox, Commissioner

Kathleen Dickhut, Deputy Commissioner, Bureau of Citywide Systems and Historic Preservation

#### **Project Staff**

Matt Crawford, research, writing, and layout

*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) phone; web site: [www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks](http://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.*

**COMMISSION ON CHICAGO LANDMARKS**

Ernest C. Wong, Chair  
Gabriel Ignacio Dziekiewicz, Vice Chair  
Maurice D. Cox, Secretary  
Suellen Burns  
Tiara Hughes  
Lynn Osmond  
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Bureau of Citywide Systems and Historic Preservation  
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312.744.3200  
<http://www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks>

*October, 2021, revised and reprinted, December, 2021.*



*Exhibit B*

**DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT**

**CITY OF CHICAGO**

**November 4, 2021**

**Report to the Commission on Chicago Landmarks**

**On the**

**Seth Warner House**

**631 N. Central Avenue,**

The Department of Planning and Development (DPD) finds that the proposed landmark designation of the Seth Warner House supports the City's overall planning goals for the surrounding Community Area and is consistent with the City's governing policies and plans.

The Seth Warner House is in the Austin Community Area, one of ten neighborhoods that are part of the Department's INVEST South/West community improvement initiative. Our goal is to re-activate neighborhood cores that have historically served as focal points for pedestrian activity, shopping, services, transportation, public spaces and quality-of-life amenities for residents. In Austin, the priority corridor is Chicago Avenue, running from Kilpatrick Avenue on the east to Austin Boulevard on the west. The Warner House is located a block away from the corridor.

As part of the INVEST South/West initiative, the Department has focused on another designated Chicago Landmark in the community: the long-vacant Laramie State Bank, a half-mile northeast of the Seth Warner House. Last March DPD announced the winning proposal from the Austin United Alliance. The proposed \$37.5 million project will renovate the landmark structure with commercial uses that include a blues museum, bank branch, café, and business incubator. The adjacent land will be redeveloped with a mixed-income, multi-story rental building that includes a green roof, public plaza, social spaces, and outdoor art.

Our planning work in Austin identifies broad community assets there, including its designated Chicago Landmarks. Designation of the Seth Warner House will add another welcome cultural asset to Austin. The plan also acknowledges Design Excellence Principles that guide the Department's work. Aspects of these principles include strengthening the culture of our communities and committing to cultural longevity. Both principles are manifest in the proposed designation of the Warner House as a Chicago Landmark.

Maurice D. Cox, Commissioner  
Department of Planning and Development