



Office of the City Clerk

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Legislation Text

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OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

CITY OF CHICAGO

LORI E. LIGHTFOOT

MAYOR

TO THE HONORABLE, THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CHICAGO

Ladies and Gentlemen:

At the request of the Commissioner of Cultural Affairs and Special Events, I transmit herewith an ordinance authorizing the renaming of the Henry B. Clarke House as the Clarke-Ford House.

Your favorable consideration of this ordinance will be appreciated.

Very truly yours

Mayor

ORDINANCE

WHEREAS, the members of the City Council of Chicago wish to recognize, honor and commemorate Bishop Louis Henry Ford's leadership and vision in preserving Chicago's oldest home, known now as the Clarke House Museum, and more commonly known as the Henry B. Clarke House; and

WHEREAS, the historical significance of the Henry B. Clarke House has been acknowledged by the Architect's Project of the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the Historic American Buildings Survey in 1935, its designation as a Chicago Landmark in 1970, its certification on the National Register of Historic Places in 1971 and the receipt by the City of Chicago of federal funds in 1977 issued through the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, which funds were used to restore the structure and relocate the Henry B. Clarke House to its present location at 1827 South Indiana Avenue; and

WHEREAS, the history of the Henry B. Clarke House in many ways parallels the history of the City of

Chicago, having survived, grown and changed throughout the 186 years since the house was built near what is now the intersection of the 16th Street and Michigan Avenue; and

WHEREAS, the house was built in 1836 for Henry B. Clarke, a merchant and former City Clerk of the City of Chicago, and his wife, Caroline Palmer Clarke. The house exemplified the Greek Revival style common throughout the East Coast and Midwest during that time. The land on which the house was built included a historic cottonwood tree that purportedly marked the site of the Battle of Fort Dearborn. Henry Clarke died during a cholera epidemic in 1849, and Caroline Palmer Clarke completed the renovations to the house and lived there until her death in 1860. It was during this time that the house was known as the "Widow Clarke's House."

WHEREAS, The Clarke children sold the house to John Chrimes in 1872. Mr. Chrimes relocated the house to what became 4526 South Wabash Street, reportedly to avoid a possible second Chicago fire; and

WHEREAS, the house was sold to Bishop Louis Henry and Margaret Ford and St. Paul Church of God in Christ ("SPCOGIC") in 1941 by Lydia and Laura Walters, the granddaughters of John Chrimes, whose family had occupied the house for three generations. SPCOGIC used the house to serve its growing congregation. The Church's care for the home was evident, as the City's application for National Historic Preservation Act funding (signed by Marshall Suloway, then the City's Commissioner of Public Works) acknowledged that much repair had been performed upon the house by the congregation of SPCOGIC; and

WHEREAS, Bishop Ford articulated his respect and vision for the Henry B. Clarke House during the 126th anniversary celebration of the house in 1962, stating: "Chicago has often been referred to as the city which doesn't have a place for landmarks. We will continue to fight off demands to tear down this building because we feel it deserves a place in Chicago on an equal footing with the Water Tower," and "I hope the citizens of Chicago will help us relocate the building to its original site at 16th Street and Michigan Avenue, complete with a park and museum"; and

WHEREAS, despite what Commissioner Suloway deemed as the "reverent care" by Bishop Ford and the SPCOGIC, the church could not afford a complete restoration of both the house, landscaping and fencing that Commissioner Suloway believed the house deserved. Mayor Richard J. Daley attended the 1969 birthday celebration for the house and joined Bishop Ford in

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recognizing the house's significance, as well as Bishop Ford's interest in restoring the house and its surroundings; and

WHEREAS, when interviewed by the Chicago Tribune about the 1969 celebration, Bishop Ford made it clear that both to himself and the SPCOGIC, the house epitomized the vitality and resilience of Black Chicago: "Who'd believe, up on the north shore and such places, that here, in the heart of the ghetto, grass is growing all around, and flowers. So many people think the Black community is supposed to destroy everything...Destroy everything? Here we have preserved the oldest house. This is our message;" and

WHEREAS, in October 1970, the Clarke House became one of the earliest buildings to gain local landmark status in Chicago. The City's Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks was assigned to study how the house could be moved, restored, and preserved. This work culminated in the City's grant funding under the National Historic Preservation Act. In 1977, the Clarke House was relocated to 1827 South Indiana Avenue, and in 1982 was opened to the public as the Clarke House Museum with furnishings provided by The National Society of the Colonial Dames of America in the State of Illinois; and

WHEREAS, these times demand that we recognize the whole cloth of Chicago's history, that this cloth is comprised of many threads, and that these threads are inextricably woven through and bound to each other. The history of the Clarke House is one swatch of that cloth, weaving together the threads of the histories of the people of this area, all coming together to produce and preserve the enduring legacy of the Clarke House. It is incumbent upon us now to be inclusive by recognizing and commemorating the whole of the histories that bind us as a community and provide the foundation for our future; now, therefore,

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

SECTION 1. The City of Chicago landmark known as the Henry B. Clarke House shall be renamed as the Henry B. and Caroline Clarke/Bishop Louis Henry and Margaret Ford House, which may be commonly referred to as the Clarke-Ford House.

SECTION 2. The Commissioner of Cultural Affairs and Special Events is authorized to perform, or cause to be performed, all such acts, including without limitation the placement of signage with the new name of the landmark, and to execute and deliver any and all agreements, documents, instruments or certificates as the Commissioner deems necessary, advisable, or appropriate, to effectuate this ordinance. All acts which are in conformity with the intent and purposes of this ordinance, whether heretofore or hereafter taken or done, shall be ratified, confirmed, authorized, and approved hereby in all respects.

SECTION 3. This ordinance shall be in full force and effect 30 days after its passage and approval.