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# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

## 1 NAME

HISTORIC

Robert S. Abbott House

AND/OR COMMON

Robert S. Abbott House

## 2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

4742 Martin Luther King Drive

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Five

STATE

Illinois

VICINITY OF

CODE  
17

COUNTY  
Cook

CODE  
031

## 3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER: Apartment Bldg.

## 4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Ms. Rosetta Robinson

STREET & NUMBER

7300 S. Calumet

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois 60619

VICINITY OF

## 5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Deeds (Doc. #9322814, Book 2291, Page 314)

STREET & NUMBER

Cook County Courthouse

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois

## 6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

None Known

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Robert S. Abbott House is an architectural reminder of a by-gone era of sumptuous living on Chicago's South Side. Located on King Drive, formerly known as South Parkway and Grand Boulevard, it lies in the heart of the city's black belt. A community known for its stately mansions and grand lifestyle, the area no longer ranks as the mecca of black opulence. Today, the Abbott House is but a shell of its former elegance and has been converted into a rooming house.

Its style is reminiscent of England's Queen Anne architecture with traces of Neo-Classicism, which was prevalent in this country around the turn of the century. Built originally as a duplex unit consisting of two similar townhouses, the Abbott House is but one-half of the duplex, although its treatment and side yard amenities indicate that it was the dominant of the two units.

Its exposure is to the east, south and west, with the north wall shared in common with the adjoining unit. The eastern facade faces the boulevard, and thusly, this facade was treated rather formally with ample, delicately balanced window fenestrations. The first floor windows are spanned by a flat limestone arch or architrave, which articulates the window openings, as well as accentuates the horizontal aspects of the facade. Between the windows are stunted engaged Ionic columns of limestone, with decorative spiral volute capitals of the Greek-Aegean order. The second and third floor windows repeat the horizontal motif with the added exception of a half wheel (rose) window adorning the top.

The south facade's primary feature is a decorative portico. The landing is defined by a simple limestone railing, punctuated by masonry piers atop which rest two unfluted, free-standing Doric columns. These six columns (three pair) support the limestone entablature without frieze. Atop the entablature is another stone rail delineating a second floor porch.

The roof lines depict a rather severe gable roof with a raised stone parapet. Penetrating the roof at various points are handsomely grouped masonry chimneys and dormers, reminiscent of the Queen Anne period.

To the rear of the building is a former coach house, built in the same style as the main building. It too has the high Dutch gable roof with raised parapets. A rather poorly executed rear porch has been added to the west elevation of the house, detracting from its once grand appearance.

On the interior, the treatment exhibited to the facade is carried through with ornately carved oak pilasters and exposed beams which frame the principal rooms. The main staircase is also done in a similar manner, displaying a grandeur of a by-gone era.

(continued)

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		<b>Afro-American History</b>
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES Robert S. Abbott (1870-1940) BUILDER/ARCHITECT Not Known  
Residency (1926-1940)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

In the opening decades of this century, Robert Sengstacke Abbott created and led the Chicago Defender to a position of national importance in the lives of black people, North and South. Under Abbott the Defender was a beacon of hope for tens-of-thousands of blacks pushed beyond endurance by the virulent racism of the Deep South. According to the great sociologist, E. Franklin Frazier, "The Defender more than any other Negro newspaper was responsible for stimulating the northward migration of Negroes by picturing the advantages of the North as opposed to southern oppression."<sup>1</sup> In articles and editorials, Abbott encouraged southern blacks to seek a haven in the northern cities, particularly Chicago.

For the first time in the history of the black press, the masses came to feel that the Defender indeed was their newspaper, printed with them in mind. The headlines of the Defender were designed to attract the eyes, touch the hearts and move the pocketbooks of the black masses.

BIOGRAPHY

Robert Sengstacke Abbott was born in 1870 on St. Simon Island, off the coast of Georgia. He was educated at Beach Institute in Savannah, Claflin University in South Carolina, and Hampton Institute in Virginia where he learned the printer's trade. In 1896 he migrated to Chicago where he studied law at Kent School of Law but was unable to earn a living as a lawyer. Abbott conceived of the idea of a newspaper while working in a printing house in the City of Chicago. The first page handbill-size copies of the Defender were peddled from door-to-door by its optimistic founder in 1905. Virtually every barbershop, beauty parlor, drugstore, church and poolroom became an outlet for this brash newspaper. From these lowly origins, the Defender expanded to become a household name in black America. Robert S. Abbott soon moved in very high financial and business circles in Chicago. The Defender became a business showplace. Abbott himself was soon quite well-to-do within two decades.

Unlike the circumspectly prime North Star edited by Frederick Douglass, or the New York Age edited by T. Thomas Fortune, the Defender under Abbott deliberately published the shocking, the scandalous and the unflattering. This approach, said a leading student of the history of black Chicago, "was destined to revolutionize Negro journalism."<sup>2</sup>

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Ayers Directory of Publications - 1974. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1974.

Chicago Defender, May 5, 1975, vol. LXXI, No. 1.

Drake, St. Clair and Horace Cayton, Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern (continued)

**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than ten acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	4,6,2	6,5,0	4,4	8,8	2,0,0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		
C							D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(SEE CONTINUATION SHEET)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez-Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

June 30, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, N.W., Suite 103

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

**12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION**

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL \_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_ LOCAL \_\_\_

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

Robert S. Abbott

CONTINUATION SHEET

House

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The Abbott House in its original condition, exhibited a sensitive masonry treatment, unlike that found in today's construction. Although the brickwork is in need of tuckpointing and cleaning, it still radiates a carefully delineated composition representative of its era. The house with its massing of volumes, its symmetry, handsome brickwork, dormers, and its Dutch gable roof is representative of Queen Anne architecture in Chicago. Its departure to Greek Neo-Classicism elements is typical of the vernacular residential architecture of its day.

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Robert S. Abbott

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When the migration of southern blacks peaked, the Defender turned its attention to the social and political status of blacks in the North. Abbott tashed out against racism and discrimination in Chicago. The Defender reported outrages against blacks in other parts of the country. Abbott was committed to making the public life of the nation color-blind. He once wrote, "I want to think and do think I am a citizen of the United States and the flag that covers the head of the white man is the flag that covers and protects the head of the Negro."<sup>3</sup> From time-to-time the Defender reported on manifestations of racism abroad, including a widely-read series involving the travels of Abbott himself. The main thrust of the Defender, however, was on the home front. This newspaper was the twentieth century pioneer in the publication of articles dealing with black personal deportment and conduct, but it also occasionally issued calls for cultural uplift and social refinement. However, the overall mission of the Defender was, and still is, the defense of the race against racism. Then, as now, the pages of the Defender tended "to set the tone and provide the rhetoric of public discussion of issues."<sup>4</sup>

As a business entrepreneur, Abbott became the most successful black publisher of his era. From a one-man kitchen table operation in 1905, the Defender evolved into a three-story building with its own printing press, a production staff of three-score employees and a circulation of over a quarter million copies weekly by 1929. The readership of the Defender was primarily beyond the city of Chicago, with the local black population taking up only about 40,000 of the newspapers sold. Accordingly, the Defender had both a local and a national focus.

At the beginning of the Depression, Abbott "was drawing \$2,000 as a weekly salary," plus regular bonuses. He had nearly a half million dollars in cash. He lived in a palatial home at 4742 South Parkway Avenue (now Martin Luther King Drive), an extant edifice which he purchased for the then huge sum of \$24,000 on June 28, 1926. While undergoing marital difficulties in 1934, Mr. Abbott sold this residence to the Robert S. Abbott Publishing Company on the 24th day of January of that year. Thus, this building became a part of the legal structure of the Defender itself, remaining in the general estate until 1944.

Perhaps more durable than the old Abbott residence is the Defender itself which currently has a Chicago circulation of 31,384 but is the senior partner in a chain of newspapers that includes the Michigan Chronicle (circulation 47,843), the New Pittsburg Courier (circulation 35,376), and the New National Courier with Georgia, Florida, Ohio and Michigan (Detroit) editions, and the Tri-State Defender. Known as the Sengstacke Newspapers, the elongated branches of the old Chicago Defender boast a full-time staff of over 200 persons.

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Robert S. Abbott

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Robert S. Abbott died February 29, 1940, but not until after having groomed his nephew, the current captain of this team of newspapers, John H. Sengstacke, for the leading role. In the words of Gunner Myrdal, author of the monumental work An American Dilemma, Abbott was:

The greatest single force in Negro journalism, and indeed the founder of the modern Negro press. The publisher's newspaper contemporaries as well have acknowledged his significant role in the development of Negro newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

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PAGE FOUR (reference notes)

1. E. Franklin Frazier, The Negro in the United States (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1957), p. 510.
2. Allan H. Spear, Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 401.
3. Roi Ottley, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott, Founder of the Chicago Defender Newspaper (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1955), p. 207.
4. James Q. Wilson, Negro Politics, The Search of Leadership (Chicago: The Free Press, 1960), p. 121.
5. Chicago Defender, May 5, 1975, vol. LXXI, No. 1., p. 56.



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City, Vol. II. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970 edition.

Frazier, E. Franklin, The Negro in the United States. New York: Macmillan Co., 1957.

Ottley, Roi, The Lonely Warrior: The Life and Times of Robert S. Abbott, Founder of the Chicago Defender Newspaper. Chicago: Henry Regnery Co., 1955.

Sengstack Newspapers, Communicators to Black America. Chicago, Illinois.

Spear, Allan H., Black Chicago: The Making of a Negro Ghetto, 1890-1920. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967.

Wilson, James Q., Negro Politics: The Search for Leadership. Chicago: The Free Press, 1960.

INTERVIEW

Dr. Russell Adams, Howard University with John H. Sengstacke, on March 25, 1976 in the Defender offices at 2400 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60616.

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Robert S. Abbott

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House

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The Robert S. Abbott House, 4742 South Martin Luther King Drive, bears the following legal description: South Forty-five (45) Feet of Lot Ten (10) and the North Ten (10) Feet of Lot Eleven (11) in the subdivisions of the East 315 Feet of the North East Quarter of the North East Quarter of the North West Quarter of Section Ten (10), Township Thirty-Eight (38) North, Range Fourteen (14), East of the principal Meridian.

and

Lot Seven (7) and Lot Eight (8) in Block Two (2) in the Subdivision of the South Half (S1/2) of the South West Quarter (SW1/4) of the North East Quarter (NE1/4) of the North East (NE) of Section Ten (10), Township Thirty-Eight (38) North, Range Fourteen (14) East of the principal Meridian, both in Cook County, State of Illinois.

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Robert S. Abbott

CONTINUATION SHEET House

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PAGE Two (Reasearchers)

Dr. Russell Adams  
Department of Afro-American Studies  
Howard University  
Washington, D.C.