NPS Form 10-900

OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

SG2914

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National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name South Side Community Art Center

other names/site number Seaverns mansion

Name of Multiple Property Listing

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

street & number 3831 South Michigan Avenue ☐ not for publication

city or town Chicago ☐ vicinity

state Illinois county Cook zip code 60653

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this **_x_** nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property **_x_** meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance: **_x_ national ___ statewide ___ local**

Applicable National Register Criteria: **_x_ A ___ B ___ C ___ D**

7-23-18

Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Illinois Dept. of Natural Resources - SHPO
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

X entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:)

Barbara Wyatt 9-13-18

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, ,Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- [X] private
- [ ] public – Local
- [ ] public – State
- [ ] public – Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

- [X] building(s)
- [ ] district
- [ ] site
- [ ] structure
- [ ] object

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
2	0	buildings
		site
		structure
		object
		Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and culture – Community Art Center
Domestic – mansion

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Recreation and culture – Community Art Center

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Classical Revival

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: stone
walls: brick
roof: asphalt
other: limestone detailing

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity).

Summary Paragraph

The South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC) is located at 3831 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. The building was designed in 1892 by architect L. Gustav Hallberg as the residence of George A. Seaverns Jr., his wife, Clara Seaverns, and their two sons. The home was originally built among many wealthy neighbors and was well suited in this context. By the mid-1920s the home and its coach house had become multiple rented apartments, and the neighborhood began to decline. In 1940 the home was purchased by the South Side Community Art Center, an organization created under the auspices of the Federal Works Progress Administration's Federal Art Project Community Art Center program. The 1940 art center renovation has been credited to two prominent figures in the New Bauhaus school: Hin Bredendieck and Nathan Lerner. Although the exterior maintained its original features and residential character, the primary interior spaces were transformed to a more progressive architectural aesthetic. The main building is in good condition with various areas in need of differing levels of repair. The coach house is in generally poor condition with some areas having been better protected or maintained.

Narrative Description

General

The South Side Community Art Center (SSCAC) is a 3½ story Classical Revival brick masonry structure with limestone trim and decorative features. The building has a hipped roof with a single dormer at the south projecting bay. The size, massing, siting, and design of the building are indicative of its original 1892 residential use, as well as the affluent influences of the neighborhood at the turn-of-the-20th century. The interior embodies elements of the building's original residential construction; as well as a 1940 renovation, which incorporated a distinct New Bauhaus design in several main rooms that were intended to serve the art center function. There is a two-story coachhouse at the rear of the property which is constructed of masonry similar to the main house. The SSCAC is sited on the east side of a wide, urban boulevard along the 3800 block of South Michigan Avenue. There are several historic and contemporary single and multi- family homes on this block; but nearly half of the lots are vacant land. At the time that the building was renovated for the art center, the surrounding neighborhood was likely much more densely populated, since much of the mansion-lined street had been converted to multi-family tenement houses by the time of the Depression. Although several structures on adjacent blocks have been removed since 1950 (based upon Sanborn maps from 1912 and 1950), the overall character of the surrounding neighborhood remains residential as it was during the period of significance.

Site

The SSCAC is sited on a wide lot, approximately 50 feet x 140 feet. The northeast corner of the site is slightly chamfered due to a jog in the adjacent rear alley. The main building is generally rectangular and is located toward the north of the site providing a larger yard to the south. The coach house is located at the eastern edge of the site, and its rectangular plan is also truncated by the jog in the property line at the northeast corner.

The orientation of the buildings on the site creates a lawn area along the south of the main building which continues to the rear of the lot between the house and the coach house. This yard area is minimally planted with grass and a few sparse trees and shrubs which are likely volunteers that have grown more permanent over time. There is a simple five-foot high wrought iron fence along the west (front) side of the site that is installed upon a

concrete curb, a deteriorated paved path leads from the street to the coach house through the center of the lawn, and a few permanent art installations have been placed near the west side of the site. The spatial arrangement of the two buildings on the site remains the same as during the period of significance; no parking lots or other structures have been added to the site.

Exterior

The west (front), north, and south elevations of the main building are constructed with red/brown face brick with a limestone base. The east (rear) elevation is constructed of common brick. The limestone base at the north, west, and south includes basement level window openings which are primarily single-lite, wood-framed, hopper windows. Three windows at the base of the south rounded bay are taller openings that extend below grade into shallow light-wells. These three windows are wood framed, double-hung units. All basement window openings include exterior decorative iron grilles.

The exterior front elevation is articulated by a pedimented limestone entrance canopy with fluted ionic columns, and a rounded projecting bay at the south half of the first and second floors. Limestone detailing includes the base (basement level), the window heads and sills (continuous at the third floor, individual at the first and second), and the base and capital of pilaster window mullions. The window mullions are designed to incorporate engaged ionic pilasters at the projecting bay, and partially engaged columns at the third floor, and the second-floor window opening above the entrance. The windows themselves are original wood units. With the exception of the second-floor window over the entrance (which is comprised of a pair of 6-lite casement sashes flanked by narrow fixed sashes), all of the windows on this elevation are double hung with single-lite sashes. The front entrance is set within a brick arch and is comprised of a pair of full-lite wood doors, half-lite glazed sidelights, and a glazed arched transom. The doors do not appear to be original, but are not out of character with the design of the building.

The south elevation is articulated by two projecting bays. One rounded, two-story bay at the rear (east) which is similar in size and orientation to the bay at the west elevation; and one three-sided, three-story bay at the center of the elevation which extends above the roof line. The windows at this elevation are wood double-hung, and six of the third-floor windows have arched upper sashes. The limestone head and sill detailing from the third floor of the west elevation continues around to the south elevation until it meets the center bay. Additional ornamentation at this elevation includes round ‘porthole’ brick recesses above the third floor of the center bay, and decorative brickwork at the cornice line of the east rounded bay.

The north elevation is simpler than the west and south in that it does not include any projecting bays, but the fenestration at this elevation is more varied. Openings include square doublehung windows of varying sizes, a pair of hopper windows at the basement stairwell (this opening also has a decorative iron grille, similar to the basement windows), a group of three arched-top double hung at the main stairwell, and a single hopper window with three divided lights toward the rear of the elevation. A few of the windows on this elevation are boarded up at either the exterior or interior.

The west elevation is constructed of common brick. The face brick and limestone detailing of the primary elevations extends to the west elevation approximately one foot at each of the corners. There are two windows at this elevation; both two-over-two doublehung sashes located at the rear stairwell. There is a small single-story addition at the north corner of this elevation. Although not original, this addition mimics the finish brick and limestone details of north elevation and the masonry is carefully toothed-in to the original building facade. The addition is constructed of common brick at the south and east, and has a flat roof. The addition has two doors at

the south elevation: one leading the first floor and one leading to the basement; the first-floor entrance has a small wood stair leading to it.

The main building has a hipped roof with a single dormer at the south projecting bay. The roof is currently comprised of reddish-brown asphalt shingles. There is no observable evidence of what the original roof material was. The roof eave is a modest projecting cornice which conceals an inlaid gutter. Beneath the gutter there was originally a decorative metal cornice which appears to have been continuous around all four elevations, interrupted only by the south projecting bay. This cornice has been removed and the area is covered by an unadorned sheet metal cap. The south bay also has its own cornice at a slightly higher elevation. It appears that the original pressed metal cornice is still extant at this location. The building has three prominent brick chimneys with decorative flue caps.

The coach house is a two-story structure constructed of common brick at the north, south, and east (rear) elevations; and the same red/brown finish brick of the main building at the west elevation. The design of coach house is simpler than the main building, but includes limestone trim and brick corbelling. Its design is residential in character. The second-floor windows are single-lite doublehung sashes, the first floor windows are smaller casement sashes with exterior iron grilles. There is a single man-door on the west elevation, and a large carriage-door on the east elevation. There is a crude, non-original, wood framed lean-to structure attached to the south elevation. The coach house has a flat roof with three chimneys. With the exception of the lean-to structure, the coach house generally maintains its original appearance. It retains a high degree of integrity although its condition is deteriorating.

Interior

The interior of the main building contains features attributable to both the original construction as well as the 1940 art center renovation. Since 1940 there have been additional alterations to the interior. In general, the configuration of rooms is consistent with the original residential use but many rooms were renovated with new finishes and features to support the art center use and employ a different aesthetic.

There are two rooms in particular: the entry foyer and the first-floor gallery – as well as the main stairs from the first to second floor, and from the second to third floor – which were transformed by the New Bauhaus design. One of the most notable New Bauhaus features of these spaces include wide, vertical, wood planks at the walls of the entry foyer and the first-floor gallery. These planks are continuous around the walls of both rooms, covering even the doors and two of the window openings with hinged panels that can be opened or closed. When closed, the majority of the room reflects this uninterrupted visual appearance. The panels were originally unfinished and had a very light appearance with the natural knots and imperfections of the wood being visible. The panels were later stained a darker color but still have a very rustic appearance.

There is an inactive fireplace at the center of the east wall of the gallery which is original to the residential use, and retained in the art center renovation. The current fireplace retains the original hearth, firebox, and trim panels, and the renovation added a simple wood hearth and trim as a transition to the wood wall panels. The original materials include a running bond pattern of black marble tiles at the hearth, a white basket-weave pattern at the fire box, and green marble trim panels with a decorative Acanthus-leaf pattern at the junction with the firebox.

The other finishes in these rooms have been altered since the 1940s renovation. The ceilings are currently lay-in acoustic tile ceilings whereas the art center renovation maintained a plaster ceiling at the foyer and a unique tile

ceiling at the gallery which included a distinctive lighting cove. The wood floor of the gallery has been painted, and the foyer now has a checkered pattern of 12x12 tiles. Additionally, the radiator cover in the foyer has been changed from a linear slatted design to a vertical slatted design.

Leading from the entrance foyer to the second floor is a stair, believed to be in its original location, that was renovated for the art center conversion with a monolithic plaster rail with a continuous wood cap.

The remainder of the first-floor rooms include a small entrance vestibule, a secondary exhibit space, and a few storage/work rooms. These spaces contain features which are likely original to the residential use including plaster ceilings and walls, and wood doors and trim. The entry vestibule contains its original terrazzo flooring, but the other floors on this level have been covered with vinyl tiles. All wood doors and trim have been painted.

The second floor contains a series of rooms off a center corridor which is generally consistent with a residential layout, although the original configuration cannot be confirmed. There are two toilet rooms on this floor which appear to have undergone recent renovations and therefore it is not known if they were originally part of the art center renovation. The rooms on this floor have features which are likely original to the residential use, including plaster walls and ceilings, wood floors, paneled wood doors, and wood trim. The front room on this floor (currently used as a gallery space) includes a stair that leads to the third floor. This stair appears to have been introduced as a part of the art center renovation, although its design is not as dramatic as the lower stair. The side of the stair is clad in wide wood planks, similar to the first-floor gallery, although these have been painted; and there is a simple wood railing.

The third floor includes a large exhibit/lecture space, originally believed to be the ballroom, as well as two storage rooms and a toilet room. The guard rail around the stair opening is plaster with a wood cap, similar to the rail of the first-floor stair. The configuration of this space appears to be consistent with the original use, with minor interventions for the new use including simplification of the window trim, addition of drapery coves, and the incorporation of wood panels along the east wall. Consistent throughout this floor are wood floors, plaster walls/ceilings, paneled wood doors, and wood trim.

At the center rear of the main building is a secondary stair that is continuous from the basement to the third floor. This stair appears to be original to the residential use and includes wood wainscoting at the walls.

The basement contains a series of rooms currently used as storage. There is one toilet room and one mechanical room. There is a concrete floor and stone foundation walls, although some spaces have raised wood floors and plaster walls. The basement spaces are in very poor condition and likely have undergone numerous modifications.

The coach house is divided into many smaller spaces. The first level seems to have served more utility/workshop purposes in recent years; spaces which were likely originally used for carriage and horses. This level has several spaces finished with wood walls and wood ceilings; some areas have a built-up wood floor, but others are concrete. The second floor has been divided into boarding rooms or small apartments. This floor is finished with wood flooring, plaster walls/ceilings, wood doors, and simple wood trim. The interior spaces are in very poor condition.

Although there is no documentation of how the configuration of the coach house interior may have changed over time, its current configuration would have supported its first use as servants' quarters, its second use as tenement housing, and its third use as artist- or groundskeeper- housing. As such it may retain its historic configuration, although its condition has suffered tremendously.

Integrity

The main building and coach house retain a high degree of integrity. The exterior appearance of the main building and the coach house remain largely unchanged from the original construction date, and similarly from the period of significance. Exceptions are minor and easily restored or reversed including changes to the cornice and chimneys. The interior spaces also remain in much the same configuration as they were upon the completion of the art center renovation. Modifications are minor and documentation exists to support restoration or reversal. There is little documentation of the historic site features that might have been present during the period of significance, but the overall configuration of site's open space remains unchanged.

South Side Community Art Center
Name of Property

Cook, Illinois
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [X] A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [ ] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- [ ] A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- [ ] B removed from its original location.
- [ ] C a birthplace or grave.
- [ ] D a cemetery.
- [ ] E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- [ ] F a commemorative property.
- [ ] G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
Art, Ethnic Heritage-Black, Social History; Politics-Government

Period of Significance
1940-1968

Significant Dates
1941
1943

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)
N/A

Architect/Builder
Lawrence Gustav Hallberg (1844-1915) –architect
Hin Bredendieck (1904-1995)
Nathan Lerner (1913-1997)

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The South Side Community Art Center consists of two buildings located at 3831 South Michigan Avenue in Chicago, Cook County, Illinois. The art center is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance under Criterion A for its significance in the areas of Art, Ethnic Heritage – Black, Social History and Politics-Government. The period of significance is 1940-1968.

As one of only three free-standing art centers established for African Americans through the WPA Federal Art Project, the South Side Community Art Center is a rare example of government support for African American interests in the 1930s and 40s. Responding to the proposal for a community art center, Chicago's African American leaders developed a fundraising and publicity campaign; located, purchased and renovated a building, and engaged artists, writers and performers to teach classes, exhibit or present their work. A unique aspect of the art center was its dual role of showcasing established African American artists and cultivating those who would become nationally known. As recalled in later years by Fern Gayden (1905-1986), one of the center's founders: "There was a supportive feeling among people who worked for the WPA. It brought artists together and gave them dignity. They didn't have to go out and get raggedy, nasty jobs." (1)

Although the center would face financial challenges over the years, the doors were never closed. The South Side Community Art Center is the only WPA Federal Art Project community art center for African Americans to survive to the present day. It is also the only one of approximately 100 Federal Art Project art centers still in its original building and operating under its original ownership, charter and mission.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Introduction

The South Side Community Art Center is comprised of two buildings constructed in 1892 which were purchased in 1940 and repurposed into a community art center between 1940 and 1941. The art center represents the confluence of early 20th century events and issues including:

- The Gilded Age of the late 19th century resulted from the growth of industry and business and gave white businessmen the means to build mansions reflecting their wealth;
- The Great Migration, starting around 1915, brought millions of African Americans North – including hundreds of thousands who came to Chicago in search of jobs and escape from the oppressive conditions of living in the South;
- African Americans arriving in Northern cities including Chicago found Jim Crow segregation laws still relegated them to certain areas to live and work, resulting in the growth of a community which became known as Bronzeville or the Black Metropolis on Chicago's South Side;
- Despite the difficulties of segregation, by the mid-1930s, a strong and active African American middle class had emerged in Bronzeville with a desire for cultural resources. Additionally, the Art Institute of Chicago was one of only two schools that accepted African American students, bringing many hopeful young artists to Chicago. An active African American arts community emerged from two earlier groups, the South Side Art Association and the Arts and Crafts Guild;
- The onset of the Great Depression made employment for African Americans especially difficult; perhaps no group more than artists were challenged by the lack of jobs in their chosen profession. The response of the federal government was the creation of the Federal Art Project which partnered with the South Side's African American leaders and artists to create a cultural institution and provide employment;

- The involvement of the Federal Art Project also resulted in the engagement of two prominent figures in the New Bauhaus movement, Hin Bredendieck and Nathan Lerner, who are credited with employment by the FAP to remodel the building's interior, transitioning it from a home that had been divided into apartments into an elegant community art center;
- The creation of the South Side Community Art Center also addressed social justice issues that were starting to emerge during these years. The center began with a policy of employing black and white faculty and welcoming black and white patrons and students. However, the focus of the art center was primarily on supporting and encouraging the careers of African American artists who were routinely denied the opportunity to exhibit their work in white-owned galleries. Additionally, children's art classes were targeted to African American children in support of their cultural education;
- The onset of World War II brought more changes to the South Side Community Art Center as funding for the Federal Art Project ended in 1943. This change required new fundraising campaigns to make the art center self-supporting.

Most important to the founders was the opportunity for national influence in African American art, cultural development and social justice which they would achieve during what would be referred to by some as the center's "flashy years" – 1938-1946. This goal was reflected in remarks by Peter Pollack, one of the center's founders, at the dedication on May 7, 1941:

"We move closer to the mainstream of a democratic and ever-growing people's art. As we establish a cultural unity and exchange among the people of this country, we lay the basis for unity and exchange and understanding on other levels of our national life...Even more important, however, than surface and physical details is the new and broadened opportunity for cultural development symbolized in the dedication of the South Side Community Art Center...Not only does the Chicago committee plan for the local community but also for the Negro people throughout the country. They envision a national resurgence of artistic activity and are pioneering in that direction among Negroes." (1)

Interest in a South Side Community Art Center

In the October 15, 1938 edition of the *Bulletin of the American Library Association*, Thomas C. Parker (1905-1964), assistant administrator of the Federal Art Project, gave a glowing report of federally sponsored community art centers: "The WPA federal art centers, within a brief period of two years, have already been a most important factor in American community life," Parker wrote. (1)

Parker explained the purpose of community art centers: "Today we are trying to make art an expression of the people, to broaden its meaning through mass participation as well as appreciation. It is our conviction that in a well-rounded community cultural program, the art center should be as indispensable as the public library." (2)

Ten days later, the first meeting of "interested people regarding the South Side's proposed community art center" (3) was called to order at Chicago's Urban League Branch office on Indiana Avenue. The meeting was led by Golden B. Darby (1895-1965), a local businessman, chair of the South Side Settlement House board and now appointed chairman of the art center's Sponsoring Committee.

George G. Thorpe, Illinois' State Director for the Federal Art Project, explained how the Works Progress Administration would support the center. The WPA "will employ and pay the salaries of the staff in charge of the center and will ask the assistance of the Washington office of the Works Progress Administration when necessary." Thorpe also noted that this was the first movement in Chicago for an art center, but that others were

being planned. (4) Ultimately, there were no other community art centers in Chicago or in the state of Illinois. (5)

The division of expenses meant the local committee would be responsible for raising funds to purchase a building for the art center and for its ongoing maintenance. Meeting attendees responded quickly to this challenge, establishing a site committee and a contact committee to reach out to other community leaders.

Thorpe's optimism was clear as he informed the group: "Finances are of secondary importance at present. To create interest is primary. Therefore, make it known to all the people on the south side of the community art center movement." (6)

Minutes for the remainder of 1938 reflect the growing interest in a community art center as they document ardent statements of support: "I believe the art center will be the most important single factor for the improvement of the culture of the people on the South Side" (7) and chronicle discussions about raising funds and creating awareness with exhibitions and events.

Artist and one of the center's founders Margaret Taylor Burroughs (1917-2010) captured the feeling of African American artists who had struggled to make a living and to be recognized for their work in comments she wrote for artist David P. Ross Jr. (1911-1984) to read at the center's 1941 dedication, declaring the center a "…golden opportunity for the development of the young Negro artist…" and candidly asserting what the artists wanted: "We were not then and are not now complimented by the people who had the romantic idea that we liked to live in garrets, wear off clothes and go around with emaciated faces, painting for fun; living until the day we died and hoping that our paintings would be discovered in some dusty attic fifty years later and then we would be famous." (8)

The determination of Chicago's African American community leaders and artists to create the South Side Community Art Center precisely reflected the goal of the Federal Art Project's creators.

The WPA Federal Art Project

As the Great Depression, which began with the crash of Wall Street in October 1929, progressed through the 1930s, President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945) introduced a series of "New Deal" programs aimed at restoring the country's economic stability. What has been referred to as an "alphabet soup" of programs (due to the use of acronyms) ranged from job creation programs including the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), Public Works Administration (PWA), Civil Works Administration (CWA) and National Youth Administration (NYA); direct aid programs including the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA); Social Security Act (SSA) and Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA); and economic stabilization programs including the Glass-Steagall Act (FDIC), National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA) and the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC). (1)

Efforts to provide work for artists started as early as 1933 when President Roosevelt signed into law the Federal Emergency Relief Act (FERA) and later that year created the Civil Works Administration (CWA). CWA included the first program for artists, the Public Works of Art Project which focused on creating art for public buildings. (2)

The largest of the New Deal programs, the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created in 1935. Headed by one of Roosevelt's closest advisors, Harry Hopkins (1890-1946), the WPA provided jobs for more than 8.5 million people between 1935 and 1943. Workers were hired for construction projects including bridges, schools,

courthouses, hospitals, sidewalks, waterworks, and post offices, museums, swimming pools, parks, community centers, playgrounds, coliseums, markets, fairgrounds, tennis courts, zoos, botanical gardens, auditoriums, waterfronts, city halls, gyms, and university unions. Infrastructure projects eventually totaled 40,000 new and 85,000 improved buildings. (3)

In addition to creating jobs for construction, the WPA also sought to support the nation's cultural life through arts-related programming. President Roosevelt's executive order on June 25, 1935 established Federal Project Number One with five divisions, each with specific directives about what they were to accomplish: Federal Art Project, Federal Music Project, Federal Writers Project, Federal Theatre Project and Historic Records Project.

When federal support of artists was questioned, Hopkins answered, "Hell! They've got to eat just like other people." (4) Hopkins' close friendship with First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962) would become critical in defending and supporting culturally focused federal programs. Eleanor Roosevelt felt strongly that American society had not done enough to support the arts, and she viewed Federal Project Number One as a powerful tool to make art and culture part of the daily lives of Americans. Eleanor Roosevelt encouraged the president to sign the executive order creating the program, praised the projects in her "My Day" columns and speeches, and defended them against Congressional critics. (5)

Headed by art administrator and curator Holger Cahill (1890-1960), the Federal Art Project became the largest of the five divisions of Federal Project Number One. Throughout the program's existence, as many as 10,000 artists were engaged in creating new artworks, earning $23.60 a week for their efforts.

With Cahill's leadership, the Federal Art Project took on the ambitious multiple roles of employing visual artists, bringing the arts to a wider audience and creating widespread appreciation for these cultural endeavors.

Directly addressing these roles was the purpose of the community art center program. Thomas C. Parker, Federal Art Program assistant administrator, declared the exhibits, classes and demonstrations were aimed at "Mr. and Mrs. Average American" and that the tremendous response to the art centers was due to outreach to "culturally starved adults and children who are being given their first opportunity to actively participate in the arts and make art a vital part of their lives." (6)

The first community art center opened in Raleigh, North Carolina in December 1936. Within two years, there were 50 centers throughout the country. The number would eventually reach approximately 100 centers. (The total number varies as no official list exists and sources provide totals ranging from 93 to more than 100). Some were full-fledged art centers while others were extension galleries operating in existing art galleries, libraries or schools. Federal Art Project Community art centers were located in Alabama, Arizona, District of Columbia, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Mexico, New York (New York City), North Carolina, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming. (7)

From the Federal Art Project's beginnings, African Americans were included in the opportunity to develop community art centers, although the era's segregation was evident: "An unusual feature of community art center work has been the establishment of extension galleries for Negroes both in the south and in New York City," noted assistant administrator Parker. (8)

Although researchers and authors have documented some of the history of the three largest African American community art centers, the small-scale extension centers have not been thoroughly documented. Research for this nomination is believed to represent the first time that an effort has been made to locate and analyze all available information for a more thorough understanding of Federal Art Project-supported African American community art centers.

Research included primary sources such as the *Fourth Annual Report, Florida Art Project, Works Progress Administration, September 1 -1939 – August 31, 1940; A History of the People's Art Center: 1942-1955*; *The New York Age* (newspaper); *Jackson Negro Art Gallery – Extension Center; Harlem Community Art Center, 1939;* and *The WPA Guide to North Carolina: The Tar Heel State.* The limited number of publications that have addressed African American community art centers were also reviewed including *Muralist Vertis Hayes and the LeMoyne Federal Art Center: A Legacy of African American Fine Arts in Memphis, Tennessee, 1930-1950s* (Tennessee Historical Society publication)*, (Re)Culturing the City: Race, Urban Development and Arts Policy in Chicago, 1935-1987* (dissertation), and *Art for the Millions: American Art and Culture Between the Wars* (book).

An analysis of information from these sources revealed that although accounts vary, as many as 11 art centers were established by or open to African Americans.

Of these, the three that were the largest, most active and had the greatest impact were the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago, the Harlem Community Art Center in New York City, and The People's Art Center in St. Louis. Smaller-scale art centers for African Americans – often called extension centers - were established in other states, sometimes with the sponsorship of white institutions or African American colleges. African American community art centers received varying degrees of notice in official reports. For example, the *Fourth Annual Report: Florida Art Project, Works Progress Administration, September 1, 1939 – August 31, 1940,* (discussed in the following section), briefly provides information about African American extension centers in Pensacola, Miami and Jacksonville. Another report, *Jacksonville Negro Art Gallery – Extension Center,* provides more details about the number of classes, attendance and exhibitions.

The Harlem Community Art Center would play a particularly important role in encouraging and inspiring the South Side Community Art Center's development.

Prior to opening the Harlem Community Art Center, artists in New York City had followed a similar path to those in Chicago, with art classes offered at the public library and YMCA. The first location of the federally-supported art center, 1 West 123rd St. (address is now 31 Mount Morris Park West, extant, located in Mount Morris Park Historic District, NR district, 1973), opened on March 10, 1937, offering classes for children and adults in painting, drawing, sculpture, metal work, pottery, ceramics, hook-rug making, weaving, printed textile design, dress design, wood and leather craft as well as music instruction. Within two months, the center had registered more than 1,600 students. Having quickly outgrown its space, the center soon moved to 290 Lenox Avenue (extant, not NR-listed) and added concerts, dance performances and art exhibitions to the center's offerings. (9)

An official grand opening was held on December 20, 1937. First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt attended the event along with A. Philip Randolph, chairman of the Harlem Citizens' Sponsoring Committee and president of the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters, author and civil rights activist James Weldon Johnson and other dignitaries. (10)

Sculptor Augusta Savage taught many of the classes and became first director of the Harlem Community Art Center. Savage had been teaching classes since 1931 and had been active in the Harlem Arts Workshop and the Harlem Artists Guild. With funding from the State Education Department and the Carnegie Corporation, she established the Savage Studio of Arts and Crafts as the "Harlem branch of the adult education project of the University of the State of New York." (11)

In 1938, Savage left the center when she was commissioned to create a sculpture for the 1939 World's Fair. Artist and writer Gwendolyn Bennett, who had been the center's assistant director, became the second director. Speaking to an audience at a WPA Artist-Teachers Show in July 1938, Bennett made the case for community art centers "Out of approximately 2,000 pupils registered at the art center, maybe five will become artists but the appreciation, contribution of folkways and customs, and the community awareness of art as well as enrichment of those souls who enter our doors is the mainspring of this great project." (12)

Bennett reported on the center's success from November 1937 through March 1939 – 2,467 children and adults were enrolled in art classes, almost 24,000 children and adults had participated in activities, lectures and demonstrations, and thousands more had attended exhibitions. (13)

Although the faculty included both white and African American teachers, there was no doubt that the Harlem Community Art Center was considered a triumph for African American artists. A 1939 report noted the center's success: "The growth of the Harlem Community Art Center is regarded as a landmark in American Negro culture. To say that the achievement of this movement has been one of the most significant aspects of Harlem life during the past few years is to state the situation mildly. Harlem has looked upon this cultural development as one of the most distinguishing signs of its recent advances." (14)

The art center also became a source of pride for city and federal governments, despite the lack of financial support from New York City and the two years of intense pressure required to convince the WPA to support the center. "The Harlem Community Art Center received mention in almost every weekly report from the New York City office to the national office in Washington. Celebrities such as Albert Einstein and Paul Robeson visited the center to much fanfare. Weekly reports noted other international and national guests as well." (15)

The opportunity the Harlem Community Art Center afforded African American artists was noted by artist Vertis Hayes (1911-2000), who would go on to head the Federal Art Center in Memphis, "There are more Negro artists living in New York that any other city, yet most of the art galleries exclude work done by Negroes from any of their exhibitions. (The center) has become an active cultural force in filling a long-neglected need in Harlem. It stands as a tribute to the Federal Art Project and a service to the community without which it would be a great deal poorer." (16)

Despite the center's success, accusations of affiliation with Communists plagued the center as early as 1939 and continued until it closed in 1942. The rumors led A. Philip Randolph, chairman of the center's sponsoring committee, to write a letter to the city's African American newspaper, *The New York Age*, defending the center: "Permit me to reply to an article which recently appeared in your paper charging that the Harlem Community Art Center is under some political party's control…The center, may I suggest, like most institutions among Negroes today, as well as among other people, is a cross section of varied political opinions, but it is not dominated by any single political party." (17)

The rumors continued, eventually focusing on accusations that Gwendolyn Bennett was a Communist. In April of 1941, she was dismissed as director, and an investigation began for "Communist infiltration." In early 1942, Bennett was cleared of the charges of "subversive" activity" but she did not return to the center. (18)

The lack of a director, continual distractions from accusations of Communist affiliation, and the approaching end of federal funding appear to have led to the center's closing in 1942. Similar accusations of Communist affiliation would plague the South Side Community Art Center in the 1950s.

As the Harlem Community Art Center was closing, The People's Art Center opened on April 17, 1942 in St. Louis and operated until the mid-1960s. One of the last community art centers established under the Federal Art Project, the center's establishment followed the pattern of the Harlem Community Art Center and the South Side Community Art Center. The advisory committee to the St. Louis Art Project met in October 1940 to discuss the opportunity. By April 1941, the decision was made to establish the first art center in St. Louis to welcome integrated faculty and students. "It was the consensus of opinion that a center should be established with the special needs of the Negro population in mind but in which all who desired to take advantage of its offerings would be welcome." (19)

The center quickly enrolled children from nearby African American schools in after-school and summer classes. By the fall of 1941, organizers were concerned that most adult participants where white, but reports noted that over time African American adults also began taking art classes. (20)

The center would operate in three locations, first in the parish house (demolished) of the Episcopal Church of the Holy Communion at 2811 Washington Street. In 1945, the building was sold, and the center purchased a Victorian home at 3657 Grandel Square (demolished) for $8,000.

In January 1943, two months before the center received its articles of incorporation, Federal Art Project funding ceased. The center continued operating with support from the Community Chest of Greater St. Louis, assistance from volunteer teachers and registration fees of ten cents per term for children and one dollar per term for adults. (21)

In February 1960, the Community Chest withdrew its funds and supporters once again sought financial support from the community. The center was forced move to smaller quarters provided by the city (address unknown) until closing in 1965. In 1968, a local newspaper carried a notice for a trustee's sale of the Grandel Square property due to a loan default. (22)

The WPA Guide to North Carolina: The Tar Heel State, one of a series of state guides issued by the Federal Writers Project, noted the 1936 opening of the Greensboro Federal Art Center, supported with a $225,000 gift from a local donor and managed by the Greensboro Art Association. The center and its associated funding was clearly off limits to African Americans, as the guide lauded an "extension division for Negroes sponsored, financed and staffed by the Negroes themselves." (23)

The Raleigh, North Carolina art center offered programming for African Americans through a partnership with Shaw University, a historically African American institution. The "Negro Extension" was managed by the art center's white director and included a small gallery and several classrooms on the university's campus. Classes were taught by white artists. Exhibitions from the Raleigh Art Center were brought to the extension center along with "several shows of work by Negroes…for the Negro gallery alone." (24)

In Florida, federally funded but segregated extension programs included the Jacksonville Negro Art Gallery, the Jordan Park Negro Exhibition Center in St. Petersburg, the Pensacola Negro Art Gallery and the West Tampa Negro Art Gallery. The Miami Art Center also hosted exhibits in the city's African American housing project.

A report from the Florida Art Project documenting activities from September 1939 through August 1940 notes that Florida had more art centers than any other state. During this time period, 1,620 exhibitions in 11 art centers and nine extension units were attended by almost half a million adults and 125,000 children. Thousands participated in art classes and many artists had been assisted in finding employment. After a lengthy discussion of the success of the (whites only) Pensacola Art Center, including co-sponsorship by the county board of public instruction and the Pensacola Art Institute and a full schedule of lectures, entertainment and programs, the report briefly notes "Organization of the Negro unit is another expansion of the Pensacola program." (25)

The Miami Art Center was reported to have presented extension exhibits at the "Negro Housing Project" in addition to other locations throughout the city. In Tampa, an extension "Negro unit" was established at the request of the Urban League. (26)

The Jacksonville Art Center's Negro extension gallery merited more detailed notice: "Expanded operation of the Negro extension gallery under the Jacksonville Center has continued to fill a vast need in this phase of Jacksonville's social life. In services extending not only to the Negro population of Jacksonville proper, but from Mayport to St. Augustine talent of the highest quality has been developed through extension classes." (27) Other reports noted the success of this center: from 1936-1939 there were 1,749 classes held for 15,654 students. In addition, the gallery hosted 56 student exhibitions, 14 state exhibitions and 20 federal exhibitions of art. (28)

Only one art center was established for African Americans in Tennessee. The LeMoyne Art Center, located at LeMoyne College, an African American college in Memphis, opened in 1938. (The school became LeMoyne-Owen University in 1968.) The center was directed by Vertis Hayes, an artist who had achieved acclaim for his WPA-funded murals "Pursuit of Happiness," created for the Harlem Hospital Center in New York City in 1937.

The center opened on April 4, 1938 with an exhibit of works by 30 African American artists. The center was housed in two buildings. A small building that had previously been used as the college's music building was converted for galleries and a classroom. (demolished). The center's studio was located in Brownlee Hall (NR-2005). (29)

Exhibits were scheduled on a continuing basis with most featuring artists who were white and male. Exceptions were noted in the local newspaper, such as works by African American artist Samuel Brown and female artist Kyra Markham. (30)

For the next two years, free classes in drawing, painting, design, weaving, leatherwork, sculpture and other topics were offered. In December 1939, the center reported 12,593 visitors to exhibits, 1,943 attendees at gallery talks, 1,378 attendees at art lectures, 776 participants in special activities, 755 senior adults taking art classes, and 4,895 children enrolled in painting classes. (31)

From 1939-1941, teachers came to LeMoyne to take "Art for Teachers" classes along with classes in drawing, painting and art appreciation. The classes resulted in the growth of art programs in Memphis' African American

schools. In 1941, the art center transitioned to become the Art Department at LeMoyne College. Hayes would remain on the faculty until 1949.

Although the Federal Art Project succeeded in providing funding for African American art centers in some locations, in others there would be no centers. "In Alabama, white state administrators outright refused to provide technical assistance to African Americans seeking to establish a community art center in that state." Federal Art Project director Holger Cahill would later recall being told by a white administrator that there was no interest in centers for African Americans because white centers were already established. (32)

The Federal Art Project in Illinois

The opportunity for publicly-supported work as an artist arrived in Chicago in 1933 with the Public Works Art Project (PWAP). Chicago was the base of operations for a five-state district that included Illinois, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota and Wisconsin. In 1934, following Walter Brewster, the first regional director, was Increase Robinson (1885-1991, born Josephine Dorothea Reichmann), an art dealer, art teacher and gallery owner. (1)

After serving as regional director for one year, in 1935 Robinson was selected by Federal Art Project head Holger Cahill as Illinois State Director for the Federal Art Project. Characterized as a person who "talked, walked and painted fast," and "…one of the finest executives I have ever known: a good artist; had excellent taste in art and in the works of other artists; had understanding of people; a really outstanding person; strong organizing forces" (2), Robinson's intensity was credited with much of the success of the Illinois Federal Art Project. Her detractors were fervently critical, with one recalling "I know that Mrs. Robinson wasn't well liked, but I think it was principally a matter of her symbolizing the kind of authority most artists never had to contend with. She was, naturally, in the position of making arbitrary decisions, and I don't believe she had the intellectual capacity nor the human warmth to operate successfully in this area." (3)

For her part, Robinson saw her mission was "to stimulate the American artist to look to his own environment for subjects worthy of his consideration, to make a lively record of the life of our own time and place." (4) Her interpretation of this mandate was decidedly conservative: "no nudes, no dives and no social propaganda." (5)

In 1938, Robinson resigned as director and was replaced by George Thorpe who stayed until 1941. Thorpe and his successor, Fred Biesel, director from 1941-1943, were considered more sympathetic to a wide range of artistic styles.

During the decade of federal support for artists, programs grew steadily and the number of participating artists increased. The effort began with 700 applications to the PWAP to create works of art on "the subject of the 'American Scene' appropriate for the embellishment of federal buildings." From this group, 145 artists were selected and paid $42.50 each week with instructions to produce one painting every week. (6)

Federal support resulted in a large collection of works, "most of which came from Chicago," totaling "513 oils, 736 watercolors and drawings, 200 sketches for larger projects, 73 murals, 56 sculptures, four bas-reliefs for mural projects, 90 editions of prints and nine miscellaneous works." (7)

After the PWAP ended in 1934, the Illinois Federal Art Project (IAP) divided the state into seven districts with the metropolitan Chicago area comprising District 3.

Statewide, the IAP found it difficult to meet the required quota of 90 percent of artists hired on relief and 10 percent hired who were designated as non-relief. In November 1935, a committee of concerned Chicago citizens wrote to WPA Director Harry Hopkins to complain that only six artists had been hired in the non-relief category and 70 artists in the relief category and "thus far the preponderance of the projects have been commercial art in nature and incompatible with the competent work which can be the achievements of the WPA cultural projects….On the question of relief qualifications, these have been up to date too stringent in our area, and a result of this is that many artists in actual relief situations are at present not on relief rolls." (8)

Hopkins directed FAP Director Holger Cahill to reply. Although Cahill began by saying "so far no satisfactory solution has been found," he noted "I may say on this problem I am in hearty agreement with your committee, for I believe, as you do, that the creation of works of artistic merit should be one of the prime objectives of our program." (9)

Despite these challenges, the Illinois Federal Art Project supported approximately 775 artists and administrators between 1935 and 1943 when funding was discontinued.

Growing out of the Illinois Art and Craft Project was another program, the Design Workshop, intended to bridge the gap between artists' work and functional design. The Federal Art Project mandate for the Design Workshop was "to restore, maintain and develop new skills in unemployed craftsmen through the production of useful equipment and environments for tax-supported institutions in the municipal, county, state, and federal governments and any combination of the four." (10)

Laszlo Maholy-Nagy (1895-1946), founder of the New Bauhaus, was engaged to facilitate an understanding of the link between art and design, a decision that would have a profound impact on the Design Workshop, characterized as "a series of creative explosions in Chicago." (11)

Originally founded as Bauhaus (translated "house of construction) in 1919 in Weimar, Germany, the school's mission was to bring together art and architecture. This approach created modern designs that radically departed from traditional styles with an emphasis on simplicity and functionality. Despite its success, the German school closed in 1933 under pressure from the Nazis who saw it as promoting Communist intellectualism.

In 1937, Maholy-Nagy, one of Bauhaus's principal instructors and well-known painter, photographer, graphic designer and sculptor, founded the New Bauhaus in Chicago (later known as the Institute of Design at the Illinois Institute of Technology). The goal of the school was "to train 'the perfect designer' through a modernist and multi-disciplinary curriculum that encouraged experimentation and broke down the hierarchy between fine and applied arts and industry." (12)

The "creative explosion" of the New Bauhuas-influenced Design Workshop would eventually reach the South Side Community Art Center where two prominent New Bauhaus figures, Hin Bredendieck (1904-1995) and Nathan Lerner (1913-1997) would be credited with transforming the old mansion's interior into a modern art gallery.

During these years, in the midst of hiring artists to create everything from large-scale murals to easel-paintings, posters, photography, book illustrations, sculptures and more, the idea of opening community art centers emerged as a way to engage an even larger, hands-on audience for the arts. Peter Pollack, who would be instrumental in starting the South Side Community Art Center, credited Cahill with the idea for community art

centers. In a 1940 speech to the Museum Directors Conference, Pollack quoted Cahill's vision: "A community art center should not be a project superimposed on the life of a community. It should be a project, designed and inaugurated with Federal aid which belongs to and has been created by the community." (13)

It was in this vision that the South Side of Chicago's middle class African American community found its artistic mission.

Establishing the South Side Community Art Center

In the early 1990s, Margaret Taylor Burroughs, one of three surviving charter members of the South Side Community Art Center, looked back more than 50 years to the center's beginnings. She wrote:

"Prior to the advent of the art center, we black artists of Chicago had no place to get together, to exchange ideas or to exhibit our works. There were absolutely no opportunities for us to show in the downtown galleries (these galleries did not recognize art by blacks as legitimate). Only a very few who could afford it were able to attend classes at the Art Institute (of Chicago) or the private art schools." (1)

Early attempts to create opportunities for African American artists started with the formation of the South Side Art Association in 1925. The association provided exposure for African American artists with exhibitions and lectures in various locations, but functioned as a club since there was no gallery or art museum. Reflecting the mores' of the times, Lorado Taft (1860-1936), Chicago's most prominent sculptor and educator – and a white man – was named honorary president of the association.

In the next few years, exhibitions were regularly sponsored for artists including Alice L. Bidwell, Ethel Couch Brown, Charles A. Corwin, Charles H. Mullins, Josephine L. Reichmann, Increase Robinson and Florence White Williams.

By the mid-1930s, another group, the Arts and Crafts Guild, was formed by painters George E. Neal and Will McGill. The guild offered classes and exhibitions and encouraged a network of African American artists. The guild was housed in a renovated coach house at Neal's home at 33rd and Michigan Avenue.

In addition to creating a network of artists, the guild has also been credited with encouraging respect for African American artists and supporting social justice through the kinds of art that members produced. Charles W. White, a guild member who would work extensively with the Federal Art Project as a muralist and whose works were featured in the first exhibit of the South Side Community Art Center, explained:

"He (George Neal) got us out of the studio and into the street...He also taught us the craft aspects of painting technique, but the main thing was that he opened up areas that we had never considered. He made us conscious of the beauty of black people." (2)

Margaret Taylor Burroughs credited the existence of the guild's artists' network as creating an environment that was primed to respond to the opportunity to found an art center, especially after the guild's coach house was destroyed by fire: "Thus when the Federal Art Project came forth with the idea for an art center in the South Side community, we were all quite interested." (3)

Accounts vary on who first thought of the idea of a Federal Art Project-funded art center on Chicago's South Side.

Burroughs attributed the idea to "one Peter Pollack, a Jewish gentleman," as the initial instigator for the center. Peter Pollack (1909-1978), who was white, owned an art gallery on North Michigan Avenue in downtown Chicago. Burroughs recalled Pollack as the first to exhibit South Side Chicago's African American artists on the North Side. Some of these artists would become involved in the South Side Community Art Center, including Burroughs, Bernard Goss, Charles Sebree and Joseph Kersey. (5)

By 1938, Pollack had joined the staff of the Illinois Federal Art Project. As Burroughs recalled many years later, in 1938, "Mr. (George) Thorpe and Mr. Pollack called together a small group of leading black citizens including a few young artists like myself to talk about this proposed art center." (6)

Pollack was a strong believer that community art centers were the ideal way to build new audiences for the arts: "The purpose of the art center movement is not to superimpose preconceived ideas of art but rather to find, develop and broaden the indigenous culture of the community…to advance the cultural level of the nation as a whole." (7)

Pollack believed that a center on the South Side of Chicago could be "the cornerstone of what may shortly become a national center for Negro art" and a means to further the ideals of a democratic society "as we establish a cultural unity and exchange among the peoples of this country, we lay the basis for unity and understanding on other levels of our national life." (8)

Other accounts identify Pauline Kigh Reed, an African American social worker and community leader who would later become the center's president, with suggesting the idea to Pollack. In Reed's recollection, after suggesting the idea to Pollack, she invited four friends, Frankie Singleton, Susan Morris, Marie Moore and Grace Carter Cole, to meet with him. Reed recalled "Contrary to the custom at that time, we didn't ask any other women to join us. We went around the room and named twelve men each – sixty men – who together comprised a spectrum of South Side society at that time." (9)

In the fall of 1938, meeting minutes were titled "Minutes of Meeting of Interested People Regarding the South Side's Proposed Community Art Center." The concept was clearly attracting an increasing number of "interested people" from Bronzeville's middle and upper class as minutes reflect the need to present the idea several times to bring newcomers up-to-date.

At the first meeting to discuss starting an art center in Chicago in October 1938, the Federal Art Project's Illinois State Director, George Thorpe, offered to contact the center's director, Augusta Savage, to ask for information about the center in Harlem. (10)

The next meeting on October 31, 1938 included a report from Chicago physician and chair of the National Association of Colored Women, Dr. M. Fitzbutler Waring. Waring reported on her recent trip to New York City which included a visit with Savage. Dr. Waring was "extremely enthusiastic in her appreciation of what had been done in Harlem." (11)

Meetings ranged from practical matters focused on finding a location for the art center and raising the necessary funds to inspirational presentations. At the November 7, 1938 meeting, Chairman Golden B. Darby gave what was noted as "a very inspiring talk stating his reasons for wanting the art center for the South Side":

1. Because the art center will give employment to 35 or 36 Negro artists.
2. Every community is measured in terms of certain cultural levels. The center will raise the cultural standards of the community.
3. Because all large communities have their art centers and galleries where works of their own artists can be shown.
4. It will offer the opportunity for young people in the city to give vent to their talents. It will also give younger people the opportunity to carry into the home a high appreciation of their work.
5. From the standpoint of civic pride individuals of the community could be proud of such a center in their own community.
6. Because Mr. Pollack, who is considered one of the best art critics in the country, says that we, in Chicago, have much better art talent than artists in New York City, per capita, and that these talents and potentialities should be developed and encouraged.
7. Because art activities diminish child delinquency. (12)

Although the Federal Art Project would pay the salaries of staff, local leaders were responsible for raising funds to acquire a building and to maintain the art center. Fundraising plans began immediately with pledges from founding members, a "Mile of Dimes" campaign, art exhibitions and other activities. Social and civic organizations as well as businesses stepped forward to support the art center by sponsoring exhibitions, providing meeting space and making donations. Women's organizations, in particular, actively supported the effort, including the Illinois Housewives Association, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority and the Federated Women's Clubs.

In December 1938, the Negro People's Theatre Group presented Langston Hughes' play "Don't You Want To Be Free," with the admission price of 50 cents divided between the art center and the theatre. Another performance, supported by the Federal Theatre Project, presented the opera "Mikado" as a benefit for the art center. (13)

The proposed name, South Side Community Art Center, was discussed at several early meetings. At a meeting on November 28, 1938, Chairman Darby reported a "great deal of criticism regarding the name" and that the name "Tanner Community Art Center" had been suggested. No explanation was recorded for the proposed name. The committee voted to hold a "Name the Center" contest in conjunction with the "Mile of Dimes" fundraising campaign. (12) No further mention of a naming campaign is reflected in the meeting minutes, and the name remained South Side Community Art Center.

A most important voice of support for the South Side Community Art Center came from the *Chicago Defender,* founded in 1905 for a primarily African American audience. The newspaper became influential nationally as it attracted millions of readers from across the country with reporting on the Great Migration of African Americans from the South to the North, Jim Crow segregation and other relevant issues. The newspaper did not use the era's commonly used terms "Negro" or "colored." African Americans as a group were identified as "the Race," with genders referred to as "Race men" and "Race women." (14)

On June 3, 1939, an editorial titled "The Need for an Art Center" was published in the newspaper, framing the art center's creation in terms of race relations, democracy and social justice:

"The establishment of a community art center in our midst must not be viewed in a narrow sense, for such an institution will not only serve to give impetus to the dormant talent of those to whom the opportunity for

creative self-expression has been denied, but will also be a lasting medium through which the bugaboo of racial differentiation may be permanently destroyed."

The editorial continued:

"It is probable that no agency has ever exercised as urgent and abiding a hold upon the human imagination as has the creation of the modern art center. Here in our community the element of racial discord, social disparities, undemocratic tendencies, make the existence of a community art center a necessity." (15

The *Chicago Defender's* coverage of plans for the South Side Community Art Center guaranteed a wide audience which would become increasingly important to the center's fundraising efforts.

In June of 1939, with a required payment of $10.00, the application for a charter of incorporation for the South Side Community Art Center was submitted to the Illinois Secretary of State. (16)

By this time, organizers were focused on raising funds with targets ranging from $2,000 to $5,000 to establish the center and support its first years of operation. In addition to a wide variety of exhibits, teas, programs and membership appeals, two innovative ideas were implemented.

The "Mile of Dimes" campaign in 1939 placed supporters on street corners throughout Bronzeville to solicit donations from passersby. Burroughs later recalled the effort: "I well remember that I was 21 years old, and I stood on the corner of 39th and South Parkway (now Martin Luther King Jr. Drive) collecting dimes in a can…I collected almost $100 in dimes." (17) A flyer promoting the fundraiser beckoned supporters to "Open the Doors to the South Side Community Art Center at the End of the Mile of Dimes." The flyer described the result of the fundraising campaign: "A 'Mile of Dimes' will open an attractive gallery where the work of the South Side children and their parents will be exhibited, as well as the creations of professional artists in the community and of the nation. The center will serve as a focal point for community group activities related to drama, music, dancing and literature." (18)

A more elaborate fundraiser was the Artists and Models Ball, an event which would become a major fundraiser in years to come. The first ball was scheduled for March 2, 1939 at the famed Bacon's Casino with a culture-blending theme: "A Night in Paris – Beaux Arts Ball – Jitterbug Revue."

The Sponsors' Committee noted in its January 16, 1939 meeting minutes "the tremendous amount of work to be done to make this affair an outstanding success" and the need to "arouse the curiosity of the public." A committee member stated her belief that "the editors of the five Negro newspapers will cooperate and put biographical sketches in society columns concerning the different artists." (19)

Organizers determined that more committee members were needed, sending "Dear Friend" letters to invite participation, noting "We are now in the midst of planning for our 'Night in Paris Ball' which is to be held March 2nd at Bacon's Casino. Committees with definite duties to perform have been elected but these committees must be enlarged." (20)

It appears that the event was rescheduled for October 23, 1939, and renamed the Artists and Models Ball, and the location was changed to the Savoy Ballroom at 4733 South Parkway (now Martin Luther King Jr. Drive - demolished). Reasons for this change were not noted in available meeting minutes.

The Savoy was the premier Chicago entertainment location for African Americans from its opening in 1927 until it closed in 1954. The *Chicago Defender* lauded the Savoy as "lavish" and imparting an "air of refinement." Even more notable to the newspaper was the Savoy's hiring practices: "In operating this smart ballroom, more than 150 (African Americans) will be employed. Not only will all of the (hired) help be Race people, but wherever it is possible for the management to distribute money by means of purchases it will be among our people." (21) Additionally, the Savoy provided a venue for African American jazz bands and artists including Louis Armstrong, Duke Ellington, Cab Calloway and many others.

Discussion about this fundraising event appears again in the September 12, 1939 meeting minutes when it was reported Floyd Campbell's orchestra would furnish the music and "the committee plans to present many outstanding celebrities, beautiful models and other local talents." (22)

Artists and Models Balls featured a wide range of entertainment, including an art exhibit, music and dancing, food and prizes from local merchants. The highlight of the event was a parade of models dressed in costumes designed by local artists. The Entertainment Committee noted that "about fifty pretty girls had consented to serve as models…" for the 1939 gala. (23)

The balls were an immediate success and would become an annual event for more than two decades, attracting patrons from across the country due to widespread coverage in African American newspapers. By 1941, the balls even caught the attention of the *Christian Science Monitor*, which reported approvingly "Two 'Artists and Models' Balls raised considerable funds. These were a great success and had the support of all, because it demonstrated to the satisfaction of the clergy that they could be a lot of fun and without any objectionable features." (24)

Finding a Site for the South Side Community Art Center

The intent to own a freestanding building for the art center was clear from the first meeting of "interested people" on October 25, 1938, when a site committee was formed. State FAP director George G. Thorpe advised the group "…it is essential, in viewing available sites, to ascertain whether or not there is sufficient space to accommodate the activities of a center." (1)

Early meetings were held at the offices of the Urban League, various South Side offices and a space on East Garfield Boulevard donated by the National Funeral System Association. The site search committee quickly began inspecting various buildings, rejecting one as too small and another as not in a visible location.

A year later the search was still underway. In September 1939, Pauline Kigh Reed, chairman of the Site Committee, asked the Sponsors' Committee to submit suggestions "of buildings which would be suitable and conveniently located for an art center." (2)

By the time a house was purchased for the art center in 1940, Michigan Avenue was the thoroughfare through Bronzeville, an African American neighborhood alive with arts and culture, business and politics that was also known as the Black Metropolis.

The chosen house was located on Chicago's South Side, an area that, despite its somewhat fluid boundaries, was well known for its distinct identity. Neighborhoods developed in this area as early as the 1850s. After Chicago's "Great Fire" in 1871, the South Side grew rapidly.

The South Side encompassed clearly demarcated residential areas for whites and African Americans as well as representing Chicago's late 19th century burgeoning industrial and business enterprises including the Union Stock Yard, the Pullman Palace Car Company and Illinois Steel. The area was initially served by the Illinois Central Railroad and horse-drawn streetcars, followed by cable cars and electric trolleys. (2)

Originally developed in the late 19th century as one of Chicago's premier white residential streets, Michigan Avenue was lined with grand mansions built by Chicago's leading businessmen as testament to their wealth and place in society. Among those building high-style homes on Michigan Avenue, from the Loop to Garfield Boulevard, were J. Ogden Armour, president of the Armour Meat Packing Company, (3724 S. Michigan, demolished); Edwin G. Foreman, president of Foreman Brothers Bank and supporter of Jewish charities (3750 S. Michigan, demolished); John Griffiths, contractor and builder of large-scale buildings such as the Cook County Hospital, Civic Opera House and Merchandise Mart (3806 S. Michigan, National Register, 1982; Chicago Landmark – Griffiths-Burroughs House, 2010); Robert Vierling, president of Vierling, McDowell & Company, manufacturers of structural and ornamental steel for architectural uses (3760 S. Indiana, extant, significantly altered); Martin Barnaby Madden, Congressman and Chicago City Council member (3829 S. Michigan, demolished); and Louis Diesel, president of the Union Stock Yards (3809 S. Wabash, demolished). (3)

Although a small population of African Americans lived on the South Side before the Civil War, the population began to grow in the late 19th century. Enormous changes were underway by the early 20th century. As white families moved further out and World War I brought increased demand for industrial production, African Americans began arriving in Chicago from the South looking for work and housing.

Known as the Great Migration, millions of African Americans left the South, following the railroads north and west. (Between 1915 – 1970, six million African Americans would relocate to Northern cities from Southern states.) The Great Migration was set in motion by factors including African Americans' desire to escape the oppressive injustice of Southern states, the mechanization of agriculture which reduced the need for workers, and growing opportunities for work in increasingly industrialized Northern states.

This transformation was first made evident in the growth of the African American population in Chicago. In 1890 three-quarters of the city's population was first- or second-generation European immigrants. African Americans numbered about 15,000, less than 2 percent of the population. By 1910, the African American population reached 40,000; by 1920, the population had more than doubled to approximately 110,000. Growth continued for the next two decades, reaching 278,000 by 1940. The post-World War II years would bring an explosion of population, reaching 813,000 by 1960.

During the early years of the 20th century, in addition to an industrial and domestic working class, an African American professional middle class emerged. "Recognizing the power that could be derived from this growing community, black leaders began to develop independent black institutions for racial uplift. Between 1890 and 1916 black Chicagoans established Provident Hospital, the Wabash Avenue YMCA, several black newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender*, and local branches of the NAACP and Urban League." (5)

As Chicago's African American population increased, housing segregation practices hardened. White neighborhood associations declared "They Shall Not Pass" and established restrictive covenants that prohibited African Americans' purchase of homes in white neighborhoods. African Americans were relegated to an area of

the South Side which became known as the "Black Belt," a strip of land stretching 30 blocks along Federal and State Streets, extending south from 16th Street to 39th Street, and along neighboring blocks to the east and west.

"Consequently, what gradually evolved in the Black Belt was a complete and independent commercial, social, and political base. A thriving 'city-within-a-city' known as the 'Black Metropolis' would gain nationwide recognition by the early 1920s as a model of African-American achievement and the center of the city's African-American social, economic, and cultural life." (6)

In 1930, the Black Metropolis gained another name – Bronzeville. The name is attributed to James J. Gentry, theater editor for the *Chicago Sunday Bee*. The weekly newspaper was founded in 1925 to provide "wholesome and authentic news" for African Americans. Gentry suggested the name to describe the color of African American skin. The name gained popularity over time when the newspaper sponsored "bronze beauty" pageants and a "Mayor of Bronzeville" contest.

As the African American population grew, white residents began moving away from the South Side, selling their homes and thereby expanding the neighborhood for African Americans. The once-grand mansions became tenant houses, businesses, clubs or schools.

Examples of this transition include the home of builder John Griffiths at 3806 S. Michigan Avenue which was sold to the Quincy Club for black railroad workers upon his death in 1937 (later the home of Margaret Taylor Burroughs). Others included the Phyllis Wheatley Home, a residence serving "honest working girls friendless in Chicago," which occupied a mansion at 5128 S. Michigan Avenue; the Chicago University of Music was located at 3672 S. Michigan Avenue; the Emanuel Mandel mansion at 3400 S. Michigan Avenue was occupied by the black-owned Metropolitan Funeral Home. The Dailey Hospital and Sanitarium, owned and operated by black physician Dr. U.G. Dailey, operated out of side-by-side mansions at 3736 and 3740 S. Michigan. The Chicago Baptist Institute occupied two mansions at 3816 and 3820 S. Michigan Avenue. In 1929, the mansion at 3601 S. Michigan Avenue housed the American Correspondence School of Law, American School of Aviation, American School of Photography, Markus-Campbell Publishing Co., and the Page-Davis School of Advertising, all serving the Bronzeville community. The Swift/Morris house at 4500 S. Michigan Avenue was the headquarters of the Chicago Urban League for many years. The Hoxie house at 4448 S. Michigan was listed as the Martha Washington Home for Dependent Crippled Children in a 1929 directory. (7)

By the time the community's leaders decided to establish the South Side Community Art Center, Bronzeville was the center of a cultural whirlwind that would become known as the Chicago Black Renaissance. Rivaled only by Harlem's Renaissance in New York, this "city within a city" provided fertile ground for literature, music, theater, dance and art.

The Seaverns' House

The mansion purchased for the South Side Community Art Center at 3831 S. Michigan Avenue was built in 1892 for George A. Seaverns Jr. (1864-1942).

George A. Seaverns Jr. built on the success of his father, George A. Seaverns Sr. who had come to Chicago in 1853 at the age of 20.

As did many enterprising young white men in mid-19th century Chicago, Seaverns Sr. had quick success. Within two years of his arrival, Seaverns Sr. purchased property, built a grain warehouse and joined the Chicago Board

of Trade. The board, established in 1848, was the first organized futures exchange in the United States and sparked Chicago's rapid development as a center of the grain market. The board's most important innovation came in 1864 with the creation of standardized contracts for trading grain. "Futures contracts enabled farmers and suppliers to manage risk associated with farming…." (1)

Seaverns Sr.'s contribution to the grain industry was realizing that clean grain sold better than dirty grain. With this insight, he "procured a number of hand-power fanning mills, installed them in his warehouse…cleaned grain…and sold it at a profit of 20 to 25 cents a bushel." (2)

George A. Seaverns Jr., was born in Chicago on January 20, 1864 to George Alfred (Sr.) and Susan J. (Updike) Seaverns. After graduating from Harvard, he married Clara I. Currier on December 3, 1886. The couple had two children: Louis Currier, born in 1888, and George Alfred III, born in 1890. (Both sons died in 1991. Louis died in June at the age of 103; George died in October at the age of 101.)

Seaverns Jr. joined his father's grain elevator business, becoming a partner in the company in 1890. With his father's retirement in 1901, Seaverns became president of Alton Grain Company and Alton Elevator Company. By 1911, he was president of his own firm, Seaverns Elevator Company. The 1911 *Book of Chicagoans* lists his offices in The Rookery and Home Insurance Building. (208 South LaSalle Street, National Historic Landmark – 1975). (3)

By 1892, Seaverns Jr. was well established in Chicago's upper class – married with two sons and working as a partner in his father's company. Seaverns made his success visible when he commissioned architect Lawrence Gustav Hallberg (1844-1915) to design a new house for his family at 3831 S. Michigan Avenue. A permit was issued in May of 1892 for a three-story house which would cost $25,000, a very high price for a home at the time.

Selecting Hallberg further emphasized Seaverns' place in society as the architect had become known for designing many of Chicago's high-style homes. Born in Sweden, Hallberg was awarded a degree in civil engineering from Chalmers Polytechnic School in Gothenberg in 1866.

In 1871, the great fire which burned much of Chicago prompted Hallberg's decision to move to the city. Hallberg believed himself to be well qualified to help rebuild Chicago as he had undertaken similar work in Sweden after a devastating fire in the city of Gefle in 1869.

As noted in a Chicago Landmark nomination for a Hallberg-designed home: "By the early 1880s, Hallberg was well established in Chicago, and through a career lasting until his death in 1915, he designed a plethora of buildings of varied types, including single-family houses; small flat and commercial buildings; religious, institutional, educational and medical buildings; and factories. In the 1880s and early 1890s, he was perhaps best known for his house designs for members of Chicago's merchant class. For these residential designs, Hallberg designed in the fashionable styles of the day, including Romanesque Revival, Queen Anne, and Gothic Revival." (4)

The Seaverns' home was completed in 1892, and the family lived there until 1904. In the years to come, the property changed hands several times. In 1906 it was sold to Ann R. and Owen H. Fay, president of Fay Livery Company, a printers' delivery service. (Fay's fortunes may have increased in 1901 when he was one-half of a

partnership which patented an improved "battery-plate separator – intended for use in secondary batteries…that shall prevent short- circuiting of battery-plates…") (5)

The Fays lived in the house through at least 1923. They rented it out until about 1932, when it was sold to a relative, Victor Rietz, who also used it as rental property. Rietz's father, Edward W. Rietz, and uncles, Charles, August and Frederick, had incorporated Charles Rietz Brothers Lumber Company in Chicago in 1876 with investments in Illinois and Michigan. (6)

It is believed that Rietz subdivided the house into about eight apartments during the 1930s. He deeded the house to the Pennsylvania Mutual Life Insurance Company in 1934. (7)

(Note – With the purchase of the Seaverns home for South Side Community Art Center, newspaper announcements erroneously reported that 3831 S. Michigan Avenue was the former home of Charles A. Comiskey (1859-1931), co-founder of the American League of Baseball Clubs and owner of the Chicago White Sox. The mythology of Comiskey's ownership has persisted for decades with references to the "Comiskey home" appearing in media coverage and publications to the present. However, research for the Chicago Landmarks nomination confirmed that Comiskey never lived at this address.) (8)

Transformation: House to Art Center

Following more than a year and a half of searching, on May 17, 1940, Peter Pollack reported that the "most probable place for the Art Center" had been located at 3831 S. Michigan Avenue. The home was for sale at a price of $7,500. An earnest money payment of $200 had been sent to the Pennsylvania Mutual Life Insurance Company. The building would become the South Side Community Art Center for a down payment of $1,200 and a payment of $100 a month. (1)

With news of impending building ownership, the meeting minutes for May 17, 1940 succinctly noted: "The committee felt that it would be necessary to raise additional funds at this time." (2)

On July 2, 1940, in addition to reporting that fundraising plans were underway, organizers were informed that they now owned the building. Pollack "announced that architects and draftsmen would begin work within the week, and that a caretaker would be placed on the premises." (3)

For the next two months, the focus was on renovating the building with labor furnished by the Illinois Federal Art Project and materials supplied by the local committee. Committee members plunged into the task, cleaning the building's exterior, seeking donations of paint and lumber and installing a new furnace ($528.90, paid in 36 monthly installments of $14.69).

Although the appearance of the building's exterior remained the same, the interior was substantially remodeled to create a modern art gallery. The interior remodeling is credited to architect Hin Bredendieck (1904-1995) and designer/photographer Nathan Lerner (1913-1997), under the auspices of the Illinois Federal Art Project. Both men were prominent figures with the New Bauhaus and brought its aesthetic to the art center. (4)

Hin Bredendieck was born in Aurich, Germany and graduated from the Bauhaus school in 1930. In his early career, Bredendieck was a lighting designer and developed new techniques for mass production in manufacturing. In 1937, he immigrated to the United States and joined Maholy-Nagy at the New Bauhaus in Chicago. (In 1952, he became the first director of a new design program at the Georgia Institute of Technology,

remaining there until his retirement in 1971). (5) One of Bredendieck's most enduring creations was the Kandem writing table lamp, which he and instructor Marianne Brandt created while at Germany's Bauhaus school in 1928.

Although Bredendieck was not an American citizen and therefore could not be employed by the WPA, he was retained as a consultant to the Illinois Federal Art Project's Design Workshop and paid from private funds. As a protégé' of New Bauhaus founder Moholy-Nagy, Bredendieck was instrumental in shaping the Design Workshop through a series of lectures and supervising the work of craftsmen. "All of the design jobs went to Bredendieck for evaluation of the design's quality, the technical feasibility and recommendations for production." (6)

Nathan Lerner was born in Chicago to parents who were immigrants from Ukraine. He was drawn to art by age 16 when he began studying painting at the Art Institute of Chicago. Using a camera to improve his compositional skill, Lerner became interested in photography. When the New Bauhaus school opened, Lerner obtained a scholarship to study photography. He was soon experimenting with light, leading to his invention of the light box which allowed a photographer to "modulate and photograph the effect of light on objects." (7)

In 1949, Lerner and Bredendieck opened the design firm Lerner-Bredendieck Designs. Max Factor, Revlon and other cosmetics and fragrance manufacturers commissioned designs for bottles, some of which are still in use. U.S. Gypsum sold kits at lumberyards for economical do-it-yourself furniture Lerner designed. The company published his design plans in its magazine, *Popular Home.* (8)

Lerner invented many whimsical and creative products during his career that are still in use today including the honey bear bottle, gum ball machine bank, the Wacky-Quacky bathtub toy, Masonite peg-boards to hold tools, and the sponge mop. (9)

Although less is known about Lerner's work with the Illinois Federal Art Project, the WPA National Personnel Records Center lists his employment in the Design Department in Chicago. (10)

The employment of Lerner and Bredendieck by the Illinois Federal Art Project provided the connection for their engagement to remodel the interior of the mansion which would become the South Side Community Art Center. Lerner would later recall the work involved in transforming the Michigan Avenue mansion into an art center starting "from scratch, gutting the flophouse of the old paper board partitions that separated the tiny rooms crammed with beds." Attention to detail included new light fixtures designed to provide light to the artwork while preventing glare. (11)

In an article published in the fall of 1941, Dr. Alain Locke (1885-1954), Howard University professor and a promoter of African-American artists who spoke at the May 1941 formal dedication, described the challenges in transforming the building:

"Eighteen months ago, when I first saw the house which is now the South Side Community Art Center in Chicago, it was at the nadir of its career. Even those who planned its redemption could not quite visualize the transformation…." Locke described in candid terms what happened as whites moved away from an increasing African American population, leaving their grand home behind: "Like so many others in the path of the residential restrictions for the incoming Negro population, it had become a cubicle-partitioned tenement,

housing as many tenants in the basement as once occupied the whole house, and as many more in the converted rear stable." (12)

By September 10, 1940, the committee held its first meeting in their newly purchased and renovated building with the "important business of the evening" focused on forming committees for the October 26 Artists and Models Ball. (13)

As the renovation continued, Dr. Locke noted the scene when he returned for a meeting: "…with the building in the hands of the architects and designers of the Illinois Art Project for remodeling, I had the thrill of attending a committee meeting in the dismantled front room, where with improvised lights and workmen's planks for benches, the campaign waxed warm. Teachers, professional men, social workers, artists, plain housewives along with women who essayed the role of 'society matrons,' all took assignments to solicit materials free or at cost from Southside merchants and firms – paint, wall-board, pine paneling, fixtures, nails, and what not." (14)

The 1993 Chicago Landmarks nomination captures the transformation:

"Its interior conveys a sense of simplicity and abstraction of form within the context of the original house. The first floor was extensively altered…the entire south hall of the first floor has been opened into a single gallery. The walls are covered with unstained vertical pine planks with beveled corners, creating a distinctive yet adaptable surface for displays...The original foyer continues to function as a reception area. It is also finished with pine paneling and has been fitted with a pair of large, unfinished pine, double doors leading to the gallery. The angular treatment of the main staircase, in its altered form, is an artistic expression in itself. The original, spindled staircase has been replaced by railings which are intersecting planes of solid drywall with curved bentwood caps." (15)

Getting Started

In December 1940, with renovation nearing completion, the committee – now identified as the board of directors – turned its focus to the center's curriculum and staffing. Peter Pollack described an ambitious array of programming including "all graphic arts, painting, designing, weaving, lithographing, leather tooling, photography, costume designing and other subjects when there is a demand for them" adding that there would be a staff of approximately 40 selected from the Illinois Art Project's personnel department. (1) All classes and exhibits would be available for free.

Plans were also underway for a formal dedication in 1941. The center divided operations into three categories: exhibitions, school (classes) and lectures.

On December 15, 1940, the South Side Community Art Center presented its "Opening Exhibition of Paintings by Negro Artists of the Illinois Art Project, Work Projects Administration."

The exhibit program provided a blunt assessment of the extraordinary talents of the "South Side Negro Community" and the "dearth of cultural opportunity," declaring "This community has what is probably the meanest cultural environment in the Chicago area – its talents are many, its opportunities few and its frustrations staggering." The South Side Community Art Center, therefore, "…means an opportunity to break through restraint and repression and to meet that basic human need for artistic expression." (2)

The transformation of the old home into an art center was also noted by visitors: "Many persons were heard remarking on the changes wrought in the interior of the building. The simple yet classic lines at the main stairway leading from the first-floor foyer to the second-floor classrooms and the children's gallery brought forth many comments. The lecture-ballroom on the third floor with its warm wall tones, its natural plywood paneling and interesting window treatments was another point of interest." (3)

Free classes were taught six days a week by teachers from the Illinois Art Project including hooked rug-making, weaving, fashion illustration, interior decoration, lettering, poster design, silk screen, lithography, photography, free-hand sketching, drawing, water color, oil painting and sculpture. Rounding out the center's offerings were lectures on art techniques, current exhibitions and other topics. (4)

The South Side Community Art Center was an instant success with 13,500 patrons attending four exhibits and numerous classes between December 15, 1940 and March 30, 1941. (5)

The board of directors was quick to publicize the center's success, issuing a press release in February 1941 lauding the 20 percent growth in February over the previous two months and quoting artist and art center teacher Charles W. White's exclamation "Man, this thing is big!" (6)

The press release also specified that the faculty was integrated: "To date 318 students have studied 648 class hours under 20 instructors, Negro and white, who collectively spend 81 class hours per week teaching at the Art Center." (7)

May 7, 1941 - The Dedication

On the afternoon on May 7, 1941, the First Lady of the United States, Eleanor Roosevelt, stepped forward to address a crowd gathered at South Side Community Art Center, as well as listeners of the Columbia Broadcast System's national radio broadcast. Her remarks, while perhaps considered stereotypical today, were intended as effusive and sincere praise for African Americans' artistic talents:

"…there is no question in my mind that in music, in painting, in sculpture, in drama, you have particular gifts. And in writing also, you have many distinguished people who have brought us much that is a great contribution to the literature of our country." (1)

The auspicious occasion was the result of months of work with Board President Pauline Kigh Reed announcing at the March 11 board meeting that the First Lady's participation had been confirmed.

A letter from President Reed sent on May 19, 1941 (after the dedication) informed the center's members "Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune was very instrumental in procuring Mrs. Roosevelt's consent to dedicate the art center. As a gesture of our appreciation, we are holding a tea in her honor this Friday, May 23rd between the hours of 5:00 and 6:00 p.m." (2)

Mary McLeod Bethune's (1875-1955) support was evidence of the center's importance to the national African American community. Although the letter did not specify how Bethune, who did not live in Chicago, was engaged to assist in contacting the First Lady, her involvement reflects the extensive national network among African American leadership at the time.

One of the most influential African Americans of the 20th century, Bethune was often referred to as the "First Lady of the Struggle," devoting her life to improving opportunities for African Americans in education, politics and economics, decades before the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Bethune accomplished this in a variety of ways including founding and serving as president of Bethune-Cookman College and founding the National Council of Negro Women in 1935, a coalition of organizations which worked to end segregation and discrimination.

After meeting Eleanor Roosevelt in 1927, the two women became close friends and political allies. Bethune also served in President Roosevelt's administration as director of Negro Affairs for the National Youth Administration and, during World War II, as special assistant to the Secretary of War and assistant director of the Women's Army Corps. In 1938, only a few years before the South Side Community Art Center opened, the First Lady challenged the South's segregation laws when she sat with Bethune and other African American delegates at the Southern Conference on Human Welfare in Birmingham, Alabama.

Eleanor Roosevelt's presence at the art center's dedication reflected her passionate interest in two causes – economic and social justice for African Americans and support of the arts as a national pursuit. Her support of community art centers dated as far back as 1937 when she participated in the opening of the Harlem Community Art Center in New York City.

From the early days of the New Deal, the First Lady advocated for her belief that the federal government should be directly involved in the arts. She explained her commitment to the arts in a 1934 address to the Convention of the American Federation of the Arts which she titled "The New Governmental Interest in the Arts":

"I have been tremendously impressed by the interest which has developed since art and the government are beginning to play with each other. I have been interested in seeing the government begin to take the attitude that they have a responsibility toward art, and toward artists. I have also been interested in the reaction of the artists to an opportunity to work for the government." (3)

Eleanor Roosevelt's support of the arts was recalled in later years by many including Don Able, Federal Art Project Administrator for Washington State: "I think that probably the most enthusiastic supporter of the Art Projects and other types of projects that were not work projects was Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt. She was out here a number of times because her daughter lived in Seattle, and she invariably went to the different Art Projects, and particularly projects where women were involved in the Seattle area." (4)

The confirmation that the First Lady of the United States would dedicate the South Side Community Art Center sparked a flurry of planning. Media coverage was equally enthusiastic, with headlines informing readers that the center "preens" for the occasion. The *Chicago Defender* provided details for the event including the preparation of the radio script by members of the Illinois State Writers' Project. (5)

Press releases issued by the South Side Community Art Center board gave details on the day's activities including the Columbia Broadcasting System's plans:

"The broadcast will be heard at 3:45 p.m. Central Daylight Savings Time in Chicago through station WBBM and in the principal cities of the East, South and Midwest. Plans include the placing of a sound-truck on the street in front of the Art Center so that the overflow and passersby may hear the program. An amplifying system is being set up in the Art Center in order that the broadcast may be heard throughout the building." (6)

Many years later, Margaret Taylor Burroughs recalled the day:

"Michigan Avenue from 37th Place to 39th Street was cordoned off from the traffic by public barricades. Crowds of people who could not get inside spilled down the Art Center steps and into the streets in an effort to catch a glimpse of the Great Lady." (7)

Upon arriving at the center, Eleanor Roosevelt offered her good wishes "and also those of my husband, the President of the United States," noting "He feels a great interest in what you are doing here…." Continuing her remarks, the First Lady told the crowd "Now, today it is a joy to be here and to see what this Chicago committee working with the Federal Arts Project has been able to do for the Negro Art Center. I think this is a delightful room. I hope I am going to have an opportunity to see more than I can see at this moment of the work that is here on exhibition." (8)

Also addressing the crowd at the dedication was Dr. Alain Locke who recalled the day in an article published in the fall of 1941: "The fanfare was warranted, for against great odds and through the unusual cooperation of civic and artistic forces, a well-equipped and publicly supported art center had been established in an area fertile with artistic talent, but paradoxically enough, barren in opportunity for the proper encouragement and development of that talent." (9)

Gracing the walls as part of the dedication day was the National Negro Art Exhibition titled "We Too Look at America," featuring water color and oil paintings, sculptures and lithographs. The exhibition's title demonstrated the conviction that the center was a place where African Americans could offer an alternative view of America. (10)

The exhibit included works by Chicago-based artists including William Carter (1909-1996), Eldzier Corter (1916-2015), Charles Davis (1918-1991), Bernard Goss (1913-1966), Archibald Motley Jr. (1891-1981), Frank Neal (1915-1955) and Charles W. White (1918-1979). Artists from outside of Chicago were also featured, among them Richmond Barthe` (1901-1989) who had been trained at the Art Institute of Chicago and gained fame as a sculptor in New York as part of the Harlem Renaissance; Elmer (E.) Simms Campbell (1906-1971), the first African American cartoonist published in national magazines including *Esquire* and Dox Thrash, (1893-1965) whose contributions to the exhibit included fine prints using a technique he invented known as carborundum mezzotint. The titles of some of the works of art: "Slave Rebellion," "Desolate," "The Sense of Loneliness," "Despondent," and "Perhaps Tomorrow," expressed the oppression suffered by African Americans. (11)

The dedication ceremony on May 7, 1941 was followed by a dinner to honor Eleanor Roosevelt at the nearby Parkway Ballroom. Opened in 1940, the Parkway was an elegant location for Chicago's African American community to hold family celebrations, dances, fundraisers, membership teas and graduation balls or to enjoy the sounds of Count Basie, Sarah Vaughn and Nat King Cole. (The facility closed in 1974 and reopened in 2002.) (12)

The evening began with Etta Motten (1901-2004) leading the audience in singing "Lift Every Voice and Sing," noted in the program as the National Negro Anthem. Written by Civil Rights activist James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) in 1900, the song captured the struggle for African American liberty, ending with the words "Let us march on, Till victory is won." (13)

Etta Motten's presence further affirmed the nationally recognized significance of the center's establishment. A singer and actress, Motten was the first black artist to perform in the White House in 1934 when Eleanor Roosevelt asked her to sing "Remember the Forgotten Man," a song about World War I, at President Roosevelt's birthday party. (14) Motten would later live in Chicago, becoming a supporter of the South Side Community Art Center and other African American civic and social organizations. (15)

Addressing the audience, Peter Pollack, now listed in the program as director of the South Side Community Art Center, summed up the challenges in opening the center and looked to the future:

"The response of this community, in particular, faced as it is with the general economic and political problems of the American people and aggravated by its minority status, is more than encouraging. Today we do not praise ourselves for a job completed, but rather we celebrate the laying of the cornerstone of what may shortly become a national center for Negro art." (16)

Two days later, Eleanor Roosevelt shared her experience with readers of "My Day," a daily newspaper column she began writing in 1935 (and continued until her death in 1962.) The column ran in newspapers across the country and millions of readers learned about the center and its importance in her May 9 column:

"Chicago has long been a center of Negro art. Many Negro artists have had a hard time getting their training and have starved as many artists do, even when they have achieved a certain amount of recognition. With the aid of federal money, it (the art center) has been converted to its present purposes. There are classes in drawing, oil and watercolor painting, poster design, lettering and composition. It (the dedication) was a most delightful experience and I am happy to have been able to spend this time in Chicago and to assist at these ceremonies." (17)

Programming in the Early Years

With the center officially dedicated, leaders began a full schedule of activities to accomplish the goals outlined by Chairman Darby at a November 1938 organizational meeting including employment for African Americans, engagement of young people, cultivating new talent and raising the community's cultural standards.

In the coming decade, the calendar would be filled with activities for children and adults including music education classes, musical performances, creative writing and poetry classes, children's theater and art classes. An early press release detailed the many types of art classes offered including graphic arts - linoleum block as fine art and its use on printed fabrics, wood cuts and wood engravings, etching and aquatint, lithography and use of crayon and stone, weaving, ceramics, sculpture, watercolor, photography, costume design, interior decoration, silk screen processing. (1)

Although the Federal Art Project funding included paying instructor salaries, the center had a combination of paid and volunteer staff. Director Pollack noted in his report on the first year of operation that 2,169 students under age 16 and 647 adults participated in classes. He explained: "Special classes under volunteer instruction are being conducted by professional persons whom we are unable to obtain from the WPA employment rolls. These classes include fashion illustration, a poetry class and a children's theatre workshop." (2)

Chicago's local newspapers followed events at the center such as a poetry class taught by Inez Cunningham Stark (1894-1957), a white Chicago socialite and philanthropist. Her students included the as-yet undiscovered poets Gwendolyn Brooks and Margaret Danner. An article described the teacher and her class: "Mrs. Inez

Cunningham Stark, who devotes her Thursday evenings to teaching poetry at the South Side Community Art Center, instructs one of the most interesting classes of students in Chicago – a group of Negro poets. (They) are producing an increasing number of lyrics and ballads which astound their teacher. Mrs. Stark, glamourous in appearance as well as authoritative in her art, finds her pupils extremely original and expressive." (3)

In addition to having an integrated faculty, an unusual feature during this era was integrated classes. A 1944 report described the activities of the Creative Writing Forum taught by Marjorie Peters who was white. Peters had lived in Europe, working as a journalist for French newspapers. At the outbreak of World War II, she returned to the United States and moved to Hyde Park in Chicago where she would teach and encourage writers for several decades. The report noted that the class "has 42 participants at the present time, white and colored. Educational backgrounds range from those of eighth grade graduates through those with college degrees." The report focused on the effect having an integrated class had on the students' work: "Emphasis has developed over the past eight months in fiction, particularly as a medium for the positive approach in inter-racial relations. The group is young, fiery, too well oriented, most of them in urban living, to be content with two-race standards. The work together on writing ideas has shunted off personalities and background differences. And certainly, color has been forgotten." (4)

A primary focus of fundraising appeals was the need to attract young people to avoid delinquency. A promotional brochure declared: "49,351 Children, Pupils in the Crowded Schools of Chicago's South Side Are On the Streets Half of Each School Day; The Art Center Needs You to Help Them." Detailing the center's benefits, the brochure explained: "Art teaches him the meaning of order and control. The Center channels the child's energies into creative expression." (5)

Classes for children in theater, music appreciation and dancing were offered in addition to visual arts. A 1944 report detailed the wide variety of classes: "The 'Little Theatre Project' is to stimulate the imagination of the participant, to familiarize them with elements of dramatic expression, acquaint them with the best dramatic literature and to help in creating an appreciation for theatre." Creative dancing classes for teen-age and younger children "have maintained a higher attendance among these two age groups than any single activity." Students ranging in age from six to 15 attended twice weekly classes in music appreciation which included as part of the instruction "ear training": "where the child with his back to the piano would recognize the various single tones of octaves, thirds and fifths. Also major, minor, augmented and diminished chords." (6)

A reminiscence by a former student nearly four decades later reflected the center's lasting impact. Donald S. Baker Sr. (1937-2009) recalled that his seventh-grade teacher had arranged for him to take art lessons. After his first attempts at being an artist had been ridiculed by friends - "they'd call me 'sissy' and 'puny punk'" Baker believed the center offered a chance to "get some of the guys to come over to the center with me and see for themselves what art was all about." (7)

Baker found the encouragement he was looking for: "A man with a white beard and a blue tam on his head was walking around nodding his head with approval while he was looking at what the kids were drawing. "Good!' he'd say every so often. 'Keep going, art is for you. Get into yourself, that's where your talent is." (8)

In 2009, Baker's obituary noted that he taught art and history at several grade schools. He remained an artist for the rest of his life, calling his work "Resurrection Art." Baker used sticks and branches to create pieces that communicated African American history with titles like "Middle Passage" and "Slave Labor." (9)

Acclaimed Artists
A unique aspect of the South Side Community Art Center was its dual role of showcasing established artists and cultivating those who would become well known artists through exhibits and classes. (See Table 1 for summary of artists.)

War and the Withdrawal of Federal Funding
Even as the South Side Community Art Center opened and successfully built a strong following for its programs, leaders were faced with two challenges – justifying the need for an art center in the midst of world war, and planning for the certain withdrawal of federal funding.

In 1942, the *Chicago Sun* made the case for the importance of the Illinois Art and Craft Project (Federal Art Project) which "has been the subject of bitter attacks" for its employment of artists. The piece emphasized the project's contribution to the war effort: "Since Pearl Harbor our Illinois Art and Craft Project has completely reorganized its workshops into a vital War-Service supply factory. The Army has great need of all sorts of objects which can be designed or produced – or both – by Project craftsmen. New types of technical maps, recruiting booths, visual-aid charts for instruction in aviation mechanics, parachute-folding tables, camouflage design – an endless list of craft work ordered by the Army from the WPA cannot, for obvious reasons, be given in detail." (1)

The article singled out community art centers as valuable resources: "The art centers of Chicago, such as the South Side Community Art Center, Loop Center and Hull House could become enormously valuable centers for civilian morale. Their workshops could be centers for poster work, for filling the demands of art workers and for teaching activities." (2)

Director Pollack addressed the center's role during war-time head-on in his report "What the Art Center Can Do in '42": "The South Side Community Art Center faces the urgent question of continuing its art program during this emergency and is keenly aware that an important part of its program should be to seek cooperation with the civilian and morale defense forces set up by our government in which we believe we can play an active role." (3)

Pollack's statement was followed by a detailed proposal outlining the center's intention to redirect all programs to the war effort. Defining the center's purpose as assisting war and defense agencies and supporting civilian morale, the proposal suggested a variety of programs including consumer education, first aid, air raid precaution, war information and photographic exhibits from the army, navy and war agencies. Classes would include poster making, mechanical drawing, and photography. The center was also proposed as a location for a drive to sell war bonds. Outside of the center, services would be directed to Negro forts, camps and naval stations in Illinois and other states. (4)

After little more than a year of operation, preparations began for the withdrawal of federal funding. The *Chicago Defender* again reminded its primarily African American readership of the importance of the center declaring "The Art Center Must Be Saved!" and pointing out that more than 40,000 people – 79% children and 21% adults – had been served in 1942. (5)

A main source of funding was the annual Artists and Models Ball which attracted attendees from Chicago and around the country. Each year's planners aimed for a spectacular event. In 1942, Margaret Taylor Burroughs directed a performance called "Cavalcade of the United Nations" which the *Chicago Defender* praised as

"original, daring, aesthetic and artistic." The 1943 ball's presentation, "Below the Border," featured Latin American songs, dances and costumes. (6) The show featured Carmencita Romero (1914-2001), a dancer who had started her career in the Negro Dance Group founded by legendary dancer, choreographer and anthropologist Katherine Dunham in the early-1930s.

In February 1943, President Pauline Kigh Reed made an appeal for membership renewal. Her letter informed supporters: "We were fortunate in having the cooperation of the WPA Art Project, but even now, since we no longer have the assistance of the WPA, the community recognizes the importance of the Art Center. We own the Art Center; we bought it; we must support it now." (7)

In 1945, the center's leaders launched what director Rex Goreleigh termed "the most important finance and membership campaign in the history of the center." In a blunt appeal to his "fellow artists" Goreleigh sought their involvement: "…this means you, the artists, whose works are sent out to the entire country by the Art Center so that you may gain recognition you so richly deserve, must not and cannot sit complacently by while others try to make these things possible for you….I want you to come out, take out your membership, encourage your friends to take out memberships, captain a team…I shall be expecting you." (8)

A goal of $10,000 was set for the fundraising campaign. An extensive plan included organizing teams to "canvas" the community, publicity through press releases, magazine articles, radio and speaking to clubs, special exhibitions at the center and satellite exhibits in stores and restaurants, special events featuring music, literature, drama and arts. Records show that the campaign was overwhelmingly staffed with women volunteers who headed teams, solicited memberships and contributions and organized fundraising events. (9)

A promotional brochure focused on the importance of free services to provide a "cultural background" for youth: "Because of the low economic standards affecting the Negro and his children; because of deplorable living conditions in the slum areas; because of over-crowded schools, juvenile delinquency is one of the community's most acute problems. The art center is unique in the contribution it is prepared to make to the cultural development of youth which is one road to the solution of the problem." (10)

David P. Ross Jr., one of the founders of the center and the artist chosen to offer a greeting on behalf of all artists to First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt at the 1941 dedication ceremony, became the center's director in October 1946. In his 1946-47 annual report, Ross noted his pleasure at the center's progress in the past year in reorganizing departments and increasing program offerings. Referencing the citywide fundraising campaign, Ross observed "the results proved conclusively that a direct appeal for contributions thru (sic) a well-organized drive would bring in several thousands of dollars of added revenue each year." (11)

Seventy More Years

With the end of the Federal Art Project came the end of government funding to support the South Side Community Art Center and approximately 100 art centers around the country. Within a few years, most of the art centers closed, with a few exceptions which can trace the legacy and intent of the FAP:

- The Phoenix Art Museum opened in 1936 with well-known artist Philip C. Curtis (1907-2000) as director. The success of the museum led to a fundraising campaign and construction of a new, larger building which opened in 1959. The museum has had several subsequent expansions and is now the largest visual arts museum in the Southwest.

- The Sioux City Art Center in Iowa opened in 1937. When federal funding ended, Sioux City's City Council voted to fund the center and established a board of trustees. In 1997, the art center moved to a newly constructed, larger building.
- The Walker Art Center opened in Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1939 starting with a private art collection and designed to be a regional art center. A new building opened in 1971 and has expanded several times.
- The Roswell Museum and Art Center in New Mexico opened in 1937 through an agreement between the City of Roswell, Federal Art Project, Chaves County Archaeological and Historical Society and Roswell Friends of Art. In the 1940s, the City of Roswell assumed control of the museum. A larger facility was constructed, however, the room that was the original museum remains inside the complex. The room is now a gallery and still has the original tin chandeliers and tin ceiling built by Hispanic WPA workers from Santa Fe.
- The Spokane Art Center in Washington opened in 1938 as a community art school and was considered one of the most successful Federal Art Project centers until closing in 1942. In 1952, the name and concept were revived by Washington State University which opened a center in a new location. In 1963 it became the Corbin House Arts and Crafts Center, and in 1970 the Corbin Art Center, operated by Spokane's Department of Parks and Recreation.
- The Oklahoma Art Center opened in 1937 in the newly constructed Municipal Auditorium in Oklahoma City. Due to the success of the art center, a fundraising campaign began in 1945 and the art center was incorporated when federal funding ended. The center continued in operation, and in 1989 it merged with the Oklahoma City Museum of Art in a new location.
- The Oxford Art Gallery at the University of Mississippi has its origins in the FAP-funded Oxford Art Center. The center opened in 1939 and acquired the private art collection of Mary Skipwith Buie, changing the name to the Mary Buie Museum. The City of Oxford operated the original museum from 1939 through 1974 when it was deeded to the university which expanded the museum.

The South Side Community Art Center stands out among the others as the only center that has never closed its doors and is still in its original building and operating under its original charter and ownership. As noted by Margaret Taylor Burroughs in a 1987 reminenscence: "It hasn't been easy. In the past the South Side Community Art Center has struggled but it has managed to make do." (1)

In the 1950s, as some of the center's founding artists moved away and fundraising became a continual focus, another challenge arose – the "Red Scare," a national fear of Communism sparked by accusations from Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy (1908-1957) and the onset of the Cold War with the Soviet Union. The Red Scare encompassed the art world as many artists were associated with perceived liberal causes such as integration and some identified with Communism.

As rumors spread that the center had been infiltrated by Communists, the executive board voted to restrict artists from meeting at the center to avoid suspicion. In a seeming contradiction to this decision, artist Margaret Taylor Burroughs became president, and in 1951 became chairman of the board, after serving as recording secretary as well as a teacher at the center for many years.

The center experienced continual financial swings throughout the decade with the volunteers serving as staff by the early 1950s.

In 1954 the situation looked brighter. Although there were no exhibits scheduled, director David Ross explained in a letter "The doors of the center are now open daily for the first time in many years," and children's classes were again offered. (2)

Several fundraising campaigns were undertaken during that year. One effort to raise $1,000 was called the Pyramid Drive, led by the center's female leaders who invited women into their homes for refreshments for a $1 donation. Hostesses then encouraged their guests to do the same.

By 1957 the center had gained 500 new members, but the need for funds continued with major fundraising drives in 1958 and 1959.

During these years and into the early 1960s, three board members -Wilhelmina Blanks (1906-1982), Fern Gayden (1905-1986), and Grace Thompson Leaming (1919-1984) - along with young artists Sylvester Britton (1926-2009) and Ramon Price (1930-2000) are credited with keeping the center open.

In a 1959 *Chicago Defender* interview, Wilhelmina Blanks noted "Our center has experienced long years of successful operation and this has been possible only because our friends maintain this cultural asset in our community. But as we enter the 1959-60 season, we find that we are in a particularly difficult financial strain. It is crucially important that the community rally to our support at this time. The very existence of the center is at stake." (3)

The Civil Rights movement of the 1960s once again sparked interest in African American art and created new opportunities for African American artists. A 1968 exhibit, "Black Heritage," included pieces from the collections of the Art Institute of Chicago, the African American Museum of History (DuSable Museum), the center's collection and from private collectors. This exhibit was one of many activities that revived the center and by the 1970s, it was once again debt free. (4)

Despite being debt free, the center saw its fortunes rise and fall in this decade. An article in 1973 noted a new professional photo lab had been installed on the second floor with $2,000 in equipment donated by neighborhood friends. Nonetheless, the article continued: "Lean days are here again. The center is only open 24 hours a week now, and director Jose Williams is paid only $80 a week. (5)

In the decades to follow, the South Side Community Art Center marked its 20th anniversary in 1961, 40th anniversary in 1981 and 50th anniversary in 1991 with commemorative events and publications tracing its history. As the center reached the 75th anniversary of its dedication in 2016, plans were underway for building restoration and new programming and exhibits. In 2017, a wide range of activities included "Farewell 44," a tribute to President Barack Obama featuring works from more than 25 artists in the Chicago area, participation in a Bronzeville Arts District Trolley Tour, an art auction, guided tours and Teen Talk Theatre which gives teens the opportunity to write and perform their own dramas focused on positive development of their community.

Some of the artists who were nurtured by the center in its early days continued an association for many years. Margaret Taylor Burroughs would in later years describe herself as the "griot," an African term for the elder of a tribe who maintains the history and achievements of the tribe. Speaking at anniversary events over the years, Burroughs credited the center with providing exposure to other African American artists. "Here for the first time, I saw the works of many famous black artists including Augusta Savage, Richmond Barthe`, Archibald Motley, William E. Scott and many others," she recalled. (6)

Others maintaining a connection to the center included photographer Gordon Parks who returned in 1982 to sign copies of his novel, *Shannon* and poet Gwendolyn Brooks who taught classes. Eldzier Cortor would be the last surviving founder of the South Side Community Art Center. In 2015, shortly before his death, Cortor returned to Chicago for an exhibit of his work at the Art Institute of Chicago (which now holds 30 of his works in the collection) and a visit to the center for the first time in more than 60 years.

Well known artist Etta Moten Barnett, who sang "Lift Every Voice and Sing" at the 1941 dedication, had returned to the center in 1982 to be honored on her 81st birthday. In her recollection of the "WPA days," during the 50th anniversary in 1991, Barnett observed "Nobody denied being on WPA. We were glad that the government provided the kind of help that let you hold your self-respect intact." (7)

In 1976, Margaret Taylor Burroughs wrote a poem that summed up the vision and purpose of the South Side Community Art Center titled "A Poem for the Artist":

We are the artists
We are the image makers
We are the creators
We are the makers of magic
We are the makers of illusion
We are the creators of reality
We are the creators of the unreal
We make things to seem what they are not
We make things to seem to be what they are
We have the power to produce
Both the seen and the unseen

We are the artists
We are the recorders
We are the historians
We are the storytellers
We are the dreamers
We are the artists
We are the children of the Universe
We are the children of the Cosmos

We are the communicators
We are the celebrators
Our subject matter is the essence of humanity
Our media are lines, forms, colors, and textures
Our media are tones, rhythms, melodies and movements
Our instruments are sound and sight and feeling

We are the artists
We are the creators
Our art is a time capsule

What we set down today is for the future
Those unborn and generations hence
Will learn from and build on what we have done

We are the artists
We are the creators
We are the architects and the builders
We are the enemies of destruction
We are the cleansers and the purifiers
We are the enemies of pollution

We are the artists
We are the priests and priestesses
To the people

Table 1: Acclaimed Artists Associated with SSCAC		
	Connection to SSCAC	**Major Achievements**
Rex Goreleigh (1906-1986) *Oil and watercolor artist*	* Director – 1944-1947 * 1944 – watercolor exhibit	* Established WPA art center in Greensboro, N.C.
Margaret Taylor Burroughs (1915-2010) *Visual artist, writer, poet, educator and arts organize*r	* SSCAC founding member * Docent, teacher, exhibitor, fundraiser	* Founder of DuSable Museum of African American History with husband Charles Burroughs -first museum dedicated to African and African American history and culture * Poem "What Shall I Tell My Children Who are Black" in 1968
Charles Wilbert White (1918-1979) *Muralist*	* Founding member * Inaugural exhibit artist, teacher, exhibitor	* Part of Chicago Black Renaissance in the 1930s * Employed in FAP mural division – painted *Five Great American Negroes* * Rosenwald Fellowship - painted *The Contribution of the Negro to Democracy in America*
Elizabeth Catlett (1915-2012) *Graphic artist, sculptor*	* Studied lithography at SSCAC	* 1940 – won first prize at American Negro Exhibition in Chicago * Rosenwald Fellowship – studied in Mexico * Black Artists' Movement in the 1960s
Gordon Parks (1912-2016) *Photographer*	* Used basement as darkroom * Exhibitor including one-man show in 1941	* Rosenwald Fellowship – documented American life * Photographer for *Life* magazine, 1948-1960 * 1960 – Photographer of the Year – American Society of Magazine Photographers
Richmond Barthe` (1901-1989) *Sculptor*	* Exhibitor	* Rosenwald Fellowship – moved to New York, became part of the Harlem Renaissance * Two Guggenheim Fellowship awards
Vernon Winslow (1911-1993) *Illustrator*	* School manager; center director * Exhibitor in 1941	* Illustrator, *Country Life Stories* * Later became one of the first African American disc jockeys

Acclaimed Artists Associated with SSCAC - continued		
Richard Hunt (b. 1935) *Sculptor*	* Exhibitor	* Created more than 125 public sculptures * Created sculpture for Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History
Gwendolyn Brooks (1917-2000) *Poet*	* Took creative writing classes at center	* First African American to receive a Pulitzer Prize for *Annie Allen* (1950) * First book of poetry was *A Street in Bronzeville* * Poet Laureate of Illinois * Consultant to Library of Congress (Poet Laureate)
Hughie Lee-Smith (1915-1999) *Muralist, printmaker*	* Solo exhibition in 1945	* WPA artist – realist style paintings and prints * Painted *History of the Negro in the U.S. Navy*
Martha Danner (1915-1984) *Poet, editor*	* Studied at center	* Assistant Editor for *Poetry: The Magazine of Verse* * Poem series "Far From Africa" * Poet-in-residence at Wayne State University in Detroit and LeMoyne Owen College in Memphis
Archibald Motley Jr. (1891-1981) *Jazz Age Modernist muralist*	* "Sunday Afternoon" in center's dedication exhibit in 1941	* Worked for Illinois Federal Art Project
Marion Perkins (1908-1961) *Sculptor*	* Participated in center's dedication in 1941 * Exhibited and taught classes	* Created sculptures for Biltmore Hotel in Michigan and American Negro Exposition in Chicago * Rosenwald Fellowship in 1947 to sculpt portrait heads of children of different races
Jacob Lawrence (1917-2000) *Painter*	* 1941 exhibit – 31 panels telling stories of Harriet Tubman	* FAP artist * Rosenwald Fellowship in 1940 for series *The Migration of the Negro* * First African American artist represented by major New York gallery
Eldzier Corter (1916-2015)	* Founding member – works included in first exhibits	* FAP artist * One of first African American artists to feature African American women * 70-year career – works in major museums across the country

End Notes

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South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

http://repository.cmu.edu/dissertations/?utm_source=repository.cmu.edu%2Fdissertations%2F473&utm_medium=PDF&utm_campaign=PDFCoverPages

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Previous documentation on file (NPS):

___ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)
___ previously listed in the National Register
___ previously determined eligible by the National Register
___ designated a National Historic Landmark
___ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #_____
___ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #_____
___ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #_____

Primary location of additional data:

___ State Historic Preservation Office
___ Other State agency
___ Federal agency
___ Local government
___ University

X Other
Name of repository: Chicago Landmarks Commission

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than one
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1	41.824589	-87.622715	3		
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude
2			4		
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION
PIN: 17-34-323-061-0000
Lot 2 in Block 1 of Page's Subdivision of the south 10 acres of the west half of the southwest quarter of Section 34, Township 39 North, Range 14 East of the Third Principal Meridian, in Cook County, Illinois.

The SSCAC is sited on a wide lot, approximately 50 feet x 140 feet. The northeast corner of the site is slightly chamfered due to a jog in the adjacent rear alley. The main building is generally rectangular and is located toward the north of the site providing a larger yard to the south. The coach house is located at the eastern edge of the site, and its rectangular plan is also truncated by the jog in the property line at the northeast corner.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary encompasses the site upon which the South Side Community Art Center is situated. These boundaries have remained unchanged since the property was acquired in 1940.

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Carolyn Brackett, Senior Field Officer date

organization National Trust for Historic Preservation telephone 615-712-0829

street & number 1416 Holly St. email cbrackett@savingplaces.org

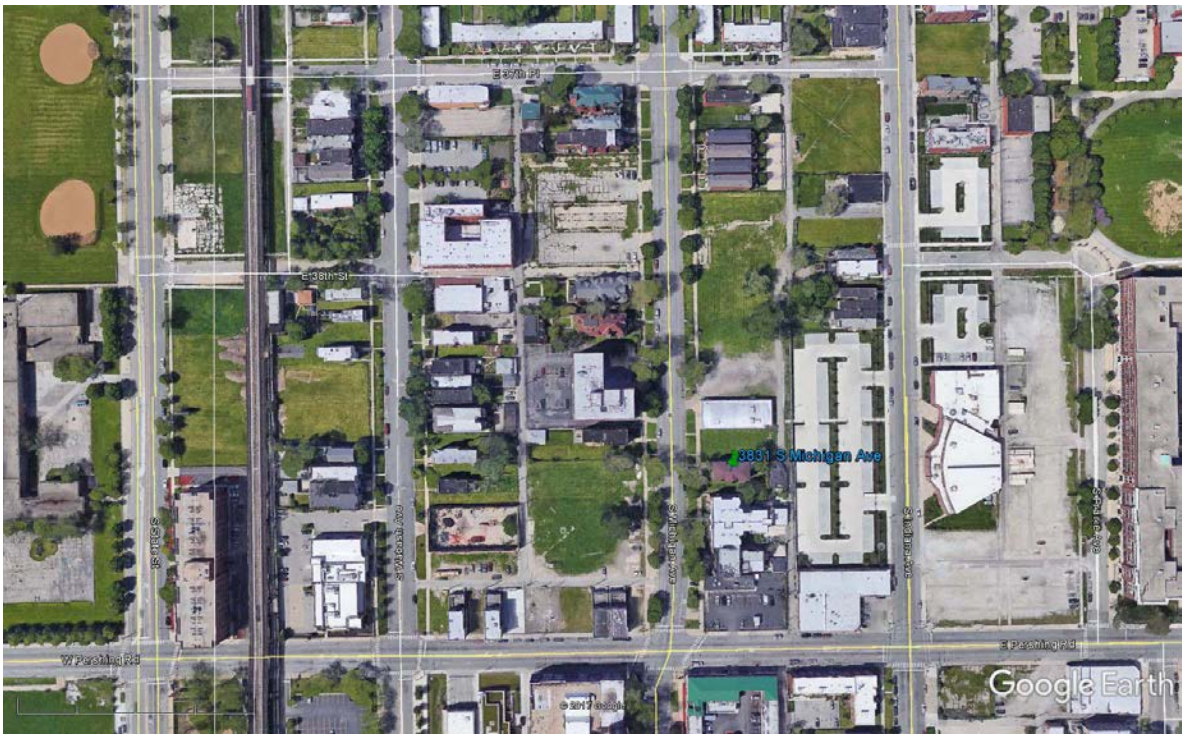
city or town Nashville state TN zip code 37206

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

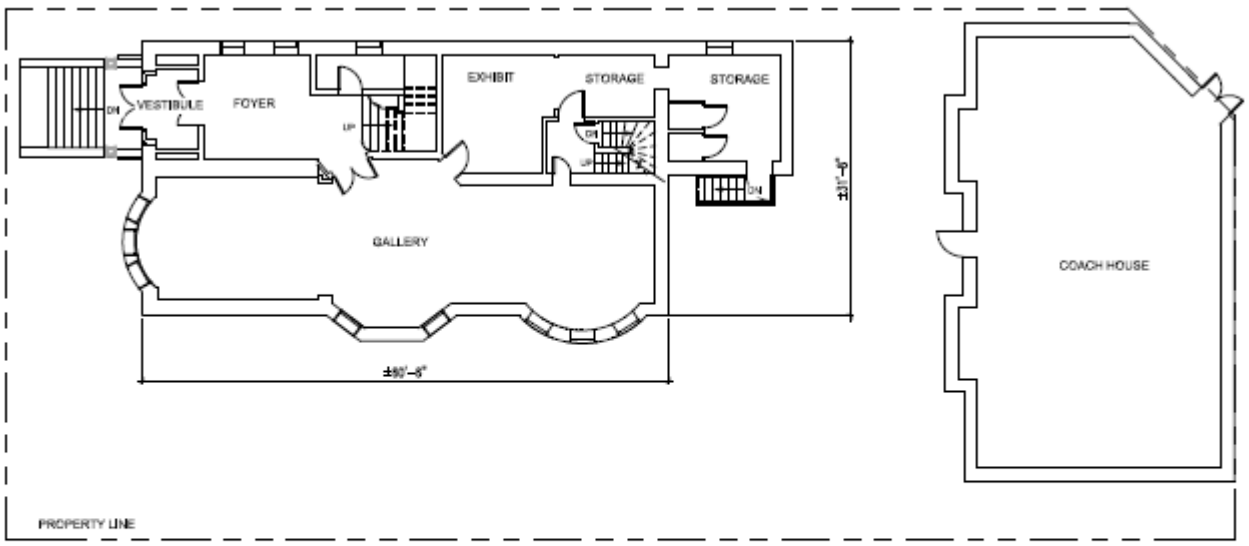
GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)



Latitude	41.824589
Longitude	-87.622715

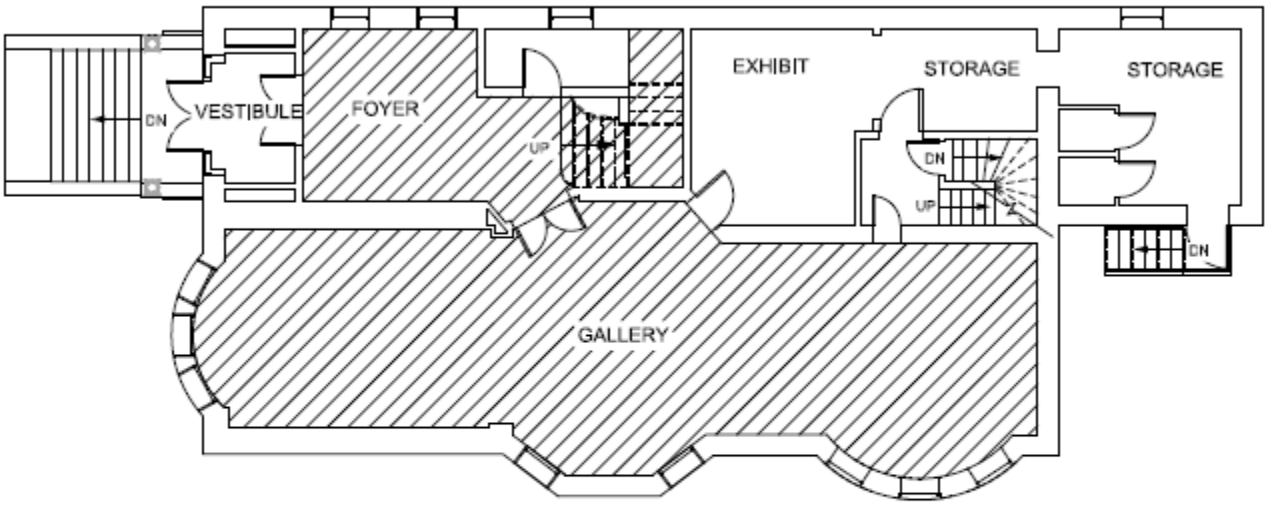
South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

Site Plan



SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
SITE PLAN

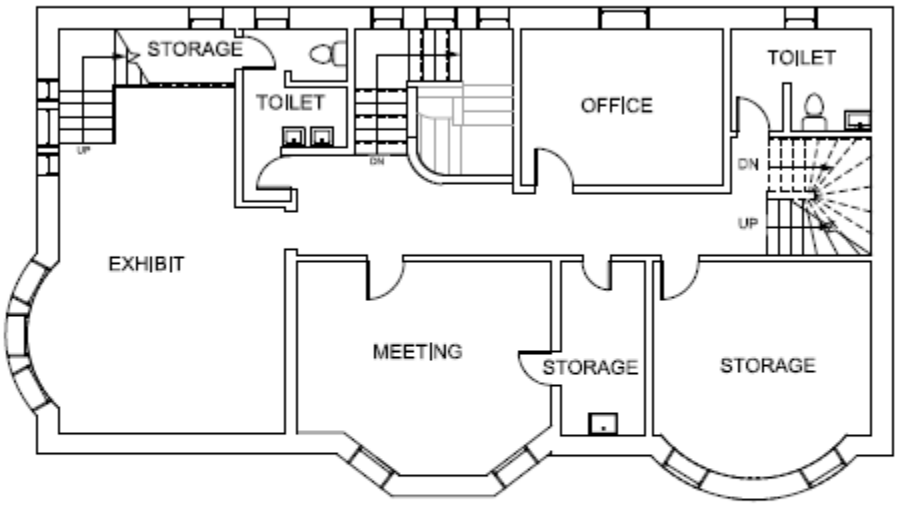
Floor Plans



CHICAGO LANDMARKS CONTRIBUTING
INTERIOR ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

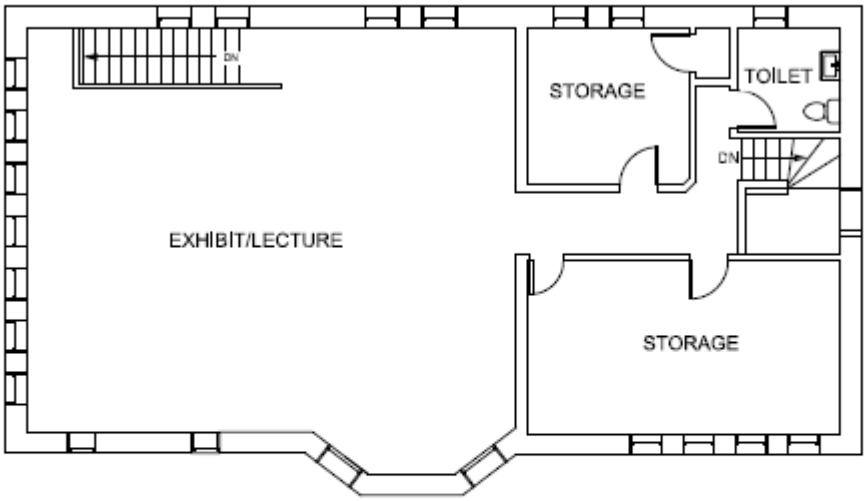
SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State



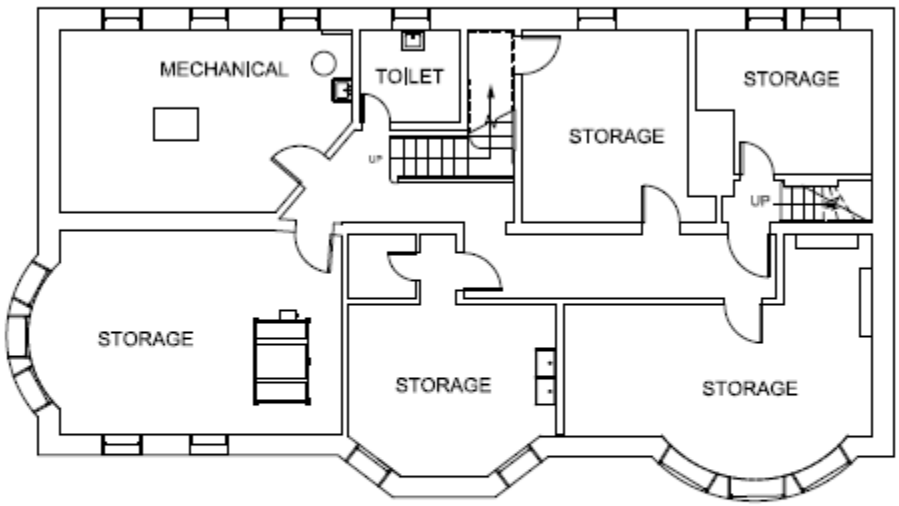
SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
SECOND FLOOR PLAN

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State



SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
THIRD FLOOR PLAN

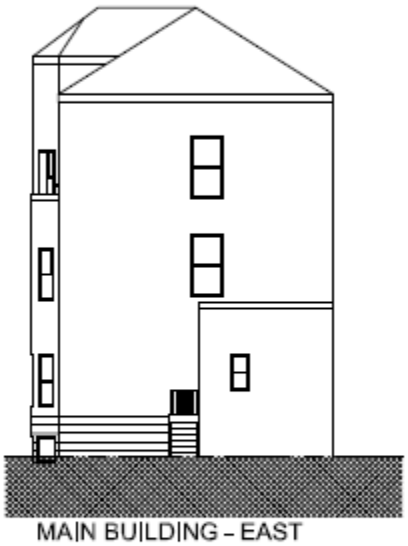
South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State



SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
BASEMENT FLOOR PLAN

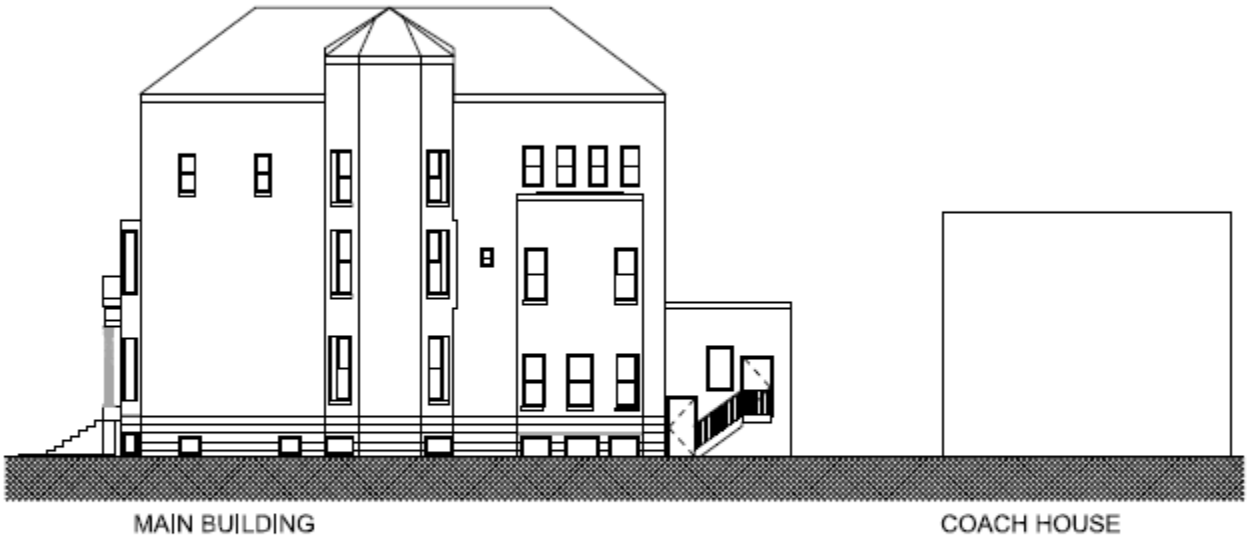
Elevations

MAIN BUILDING - WEST

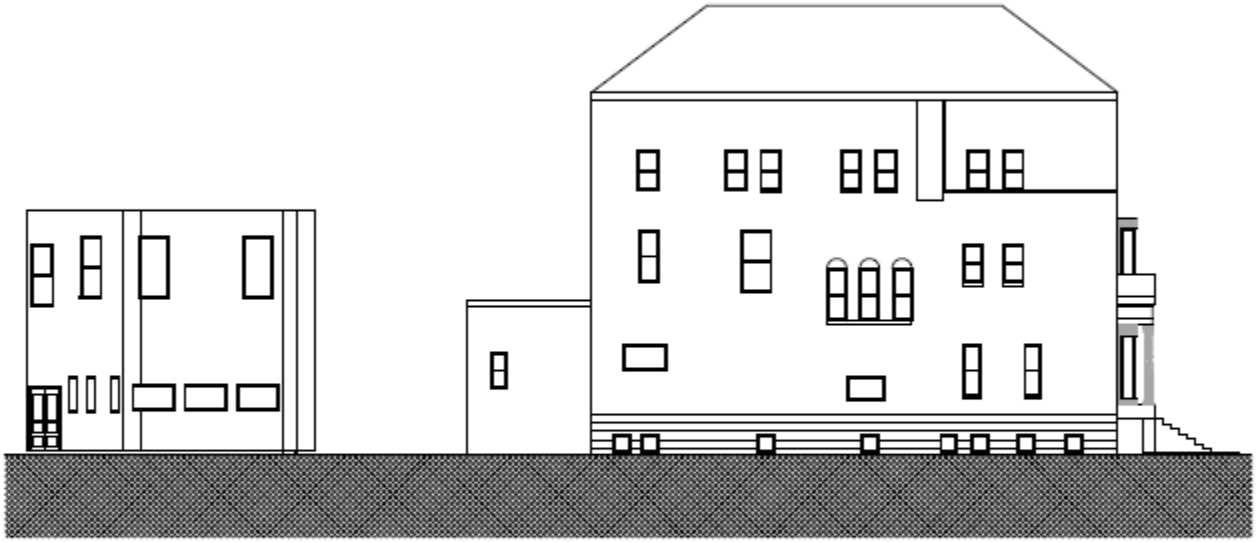


MAIN BUILDING – EAST

SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
EAST & WEST ELEVATIONS



SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
SOUTH ELEVATION



SOUTH SIDE COMMUNITY ART CENTER
NORTH ELEVATION

List of Figures
(Resize, compact, and paste images of maps and historic documents in this section. Place captions, with figure numbers above each image. Orient maps so that north is at the top of the page, all document should be inserted with the top toward the top of the page.

All images are from the Archives of the South Side Community Art Center, Box 112

Photo 1: May 7, 1941, dedication of South Side Community Art Center, from the left: Eleanor Roosevelt, Patrick Prescott, Daniel Caton Rich, Benjamin Johsnon

Photo 2: Art Class at South Side Community Art Center, circa 1940s

Photo 3: May 7, 1941 – dedication of South Side Community Art Center; from the left: Eldzier Corter, Patrick Prescott, Peter Pollack

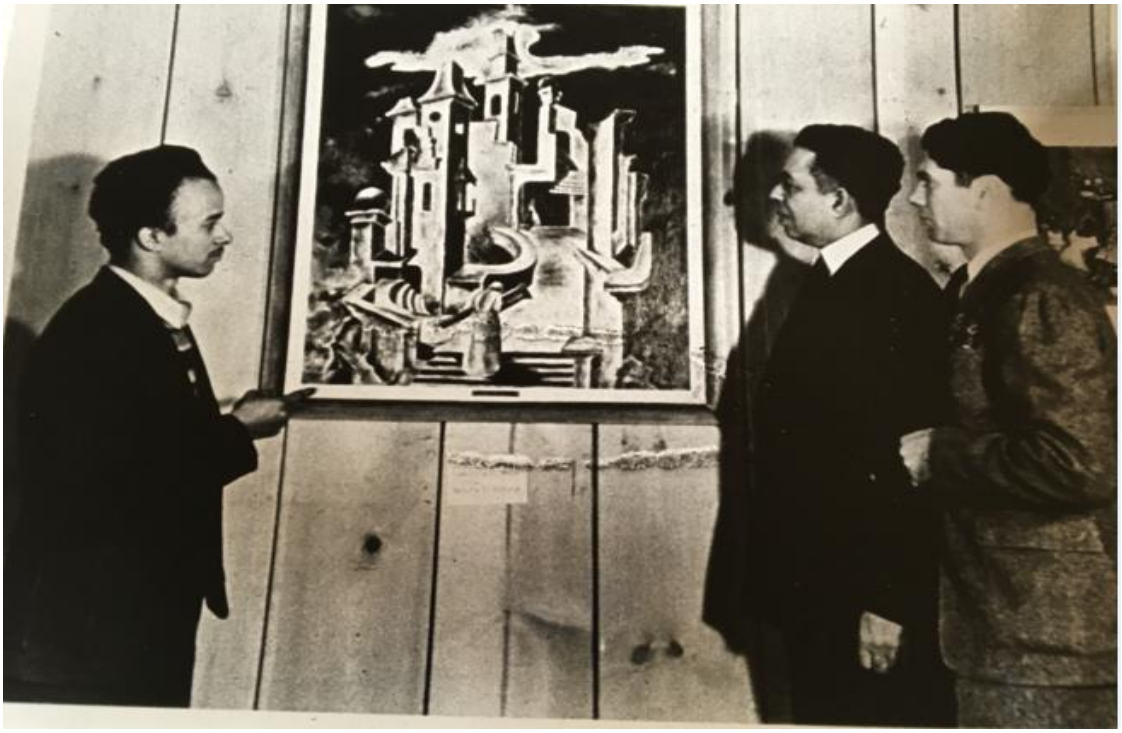


Photo 4: South Side Community Art Center meeting, 1941, from the left: Annabel Prescott, Kathryn Dickerson, Oneita Anderson, Peter Pollack, Lida Tovernier, Pauline Kigh Reed

Photo 5: Media coverage, May 7, 1941 dedication of South Side Community Art Center


FIRST LADY SPENDS BUSY THREE HOURS IN CHICAGO

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

National Register Nomination - Print Photograph Log

Name of Photographer: Bauer Latoza Studio

Location of Original Digital Files: National Trust for Historic Preservation - Chicago Field Office
53 West Jackson Blvd., Suite 350
Chicago, IL 60604

Number of Photographs: 9

Photo #1
South Side Community Art Center, front exterior

Photo #2
South Side Community Art Center, side exterior

Photo #3
South Side Community Art Center, coach house

Photo #4
South Side Community Art Center, front and side exterior

Photo #5
South Side Community Art Center, first floor gallery

Photo #6
South Side Community Art Center, first floor, stairway to second floor

Photo #7
South Side Community Art Center, second floor gallery

Photo #8
South Side Community Art Center, third floor gallery and event space

Photo #9
South Side Community Art Center, back of building

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

National Register Nomination – Digital Photo Log

Name of Photographer: Bauer Latoza Studio

Location of Original Digital Files: National Trust for Historic Preservation- Chicago Field Office

Number of photographs – 15

Photo #1
South Side Community Art Center – front exterior

Photo #2
South Side Community Art Center – side exterior

Photo #3
South Side Community Art Center – side exterior

Photo #4
South Side Community Art Center – back exterior

Photo #5
South Side Community Art Center – coach house

Photo #6
South Side Community Art Center – back exterior

Photo #7
South Side Community Art Center – first floor gallery

Photo #8
South Side Community Art Center – first floor gallery

Photo #9
South Side Community Art Center – front doors, interior

Photo #10
South Side Community Art Center – stairway

Photo #11
South Side Community Art Center - stairway

Photo #12
South Side Community Art Center – second floor gallery

Photo #13
South Side Community Art Center – stairway to third floor

Photo #14
South Side Community Art Center – third floor

Photo #15

South Side Community Art Center | Cook, Illinois
Name of Property | County and State

South Side Community Art Center – third floor

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).
Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, D.C.


SOUTH SIDE
COMMUNITY ART CENTER


SOUTH SIDE
COMMUNITY ART CENTER


EXIT


Celebrating Our Cultural Giants
Curator, Dorian Sylvain


Eldzier Cortor Gallery

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:	Nomination
Property Name:	South Side Community Art Center
Multiple Name:	
State & County:	ILLINOIS, Cook

Date Received:	Date of Pending List:	Date of 16th Day:	Date of 45th Day:	Date of Weekly List:
7/30/2018	8/27/2018	9/11/2018	9/13/2018	9/21/2018

Reference number:	SG100002914
Nominator:	State

Reason For Review:

__ Appeal	__ PDIL	__ Text/Data Issue
__ SHPO Request	__ Landscape	**X** Photo
__ Waiver	**X** National	__ Map/Boundary
__ Resubmission	__ Mobile Resource	__ Period
__ Other	__ TCP	__ Less than 50 years
	__ CLG	

__**X**__ Accept _____ Return _____ Reject __**9/13/2018**__ Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:	
Recommendation/ Criteria	

Reviewer Barbara Wyatt Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2252 Date

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

ILLINOIS
DEPARTMENT OF
NATURAL
RESOURCES

Illinois Department of Natural Resources

One Natural Resources Way Springfield, Illinois 62702-1271
www.dnr.illinois.gov

Bruce Rauner, Governor
Wayne A. Rosenthal, Director

RECEIVED 2280
JUL 30 2018
NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

July 24, 2018

Ms. Barbara Wyatt
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Ms. Wyatt:

Enclosed are the disks that contain the true and correct copies of the National Register nomination recommended for nomination by the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council at its June 29, 2018 meeting and signed by the Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer:

South Side Community Art Center, Chicago, Cook County

Please note: This packet also includes a notarized letter from the current property owner of the First National Bank Building in Danville, Vermilion County, requesting the property be listed in the National Register. The property was not listed due to owner objection, but was formally determined eligible by the Keeper on 11/08/2000.

Please contact me at 217/785-4324 if you need any additional information. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Andrew Heckenkamp, Coordinator,
Survey and National Register program
Illinois State Historic Preservation Office
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

enclosures