

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: Boynton Chapel United Methodist Church

AGENDA ITEM: A

OWNERS:

HPO FILE NO.: HP2021_0356

APPLICANTS: Linda Davis

DATE ACCEPTED: 11/29/2021

LOCATION: 2812 Milby Street, Houston, Texas, 77004

HAHC HEARING: 12/15/2021

SITE INFORMATION: Lot 1,2,3,4,5, & 6, Block S, LeeLand Park, City of Houston, Harris County, Texas. Designation is requested for the one-story brick church. The building is on a 30,000 square foot lot.

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY:

The Boynton Methodist Chapel Church is a beautiful example of a modernist community-centered chapel. The building is located on the corner of Tuam and Milby, just a few blocks north of the University of Houston campus. The chapel was designed and constructed by African American architect John S. Chase in 1957, during the early years of his private architecture firm. Many of the ideas Chase espoused in his thesis on designing churches for African American communities are exemplified in the design of Boynton's chapel.

Boynton Methodist Church was first organized in 1880 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Burr. At the time known as Dallas Street Methodist Episcopal church, Boynton was renamed to its current title under the leadership of Pastor Felix Wade Logan in 1936. Over the next few decades, the church moved to a property on Scott St. near Jefferson and acquired the property of the current chapel in 1955. After raising money and commissioning the architect and builders, the current chapel was completed and dedicated on January 5th, 1958.

Boynton's congregation includes some of the most notable members of the Third Ward community, including Madge (Madeline) Bush, Forde McWilliams Sr., Christian Adair, and many more business owners and professionals. The congregation at Boynton is going strong to this day and includes many families of whom multiple generations still attend.

The current Pastor, Reverend Linda Davis, was appointed in 2016. She is seeking protected landmark designation for 2812 Milby Street to preserve the chapel, record its history, and give the church and its congregation the recognition and protection they deserve. The Boynton Methodist Chapel church meets criteria 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 8 for Protected Landmark designation.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE*THIRD WARD*

The Third Ward is one of Texas' oldest African American communities. In 1837, Houston was incorporated and divided into four wards with Third Ward southeast from downtown. This area quickly became an important center of African American-owned businesses and a hub for black culture.

Originally comprising the area east of Main Street and south of Congress Street, freed slaves began moving into the neighborhood en masse after the Civil War, eventually occupying property in the heart of the ward by the 1870s. In 1872, Reverend John Henry "Jack" Yates led influential African Americans in raising \$8,000 to purchase 4 acres of land which would become Emancipation Park, the first park for black Houstonians and home to the annual Juneteenth Celebration.

The African American population continued to explode through the 1930s, eventually reaching heights over 66,000 people. Dowling Street, now Emancipation Avenue, saw a rapid increase in African American owned businesses and became the area's main business corridor.

The neighborhood is known for its numerous bungalows and row, or shotgun, houses. These historic examples of African American architecture are still preserved today through organizations like Project Rowhouses and other affordable housing organizations.

Third Ward also has an unusually high concentration of churches numbering in the dozens, including the oldest African American church congregation in the City of Houston, Trinity United Methodist church.

HISTORY OF BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

The Boynton Methodist Episcopal church was organized in 1880 in the home of Mr. and Mrs. William Burr. There were eight founding members present at this historical meeting. After meeting for several months, presiding Bishop Erastus O. Haven, appointed Rev. Peter Bush as the first pastor. Construction of a church building began on the corner of Paige and Dallas, which was given the address of 2811 Dallas. The first name given to the church was Dallas Street Methodist Episcopal Church.

The church grew from a one room frame structure to one that included a swimming pool, roof garden, fellowship hall, kitchen and parsonage. This was built under the leadership of Reverend Sid U. Johnson, who served from 1917-1926. Over the next 10 years, leadership and guidance of the church was under the following ministers: Rev. Phillip E. Jackson, Rev. R.H. Warren, Rev. Mumford Fountain, Rev. C. C. Minnigan, Rev. Edward Lee, Rev. Lucious Harrison, Rev. J.W.H. Moore, Rev. C. H. Pemberton, and Rev. G. E. D. Belcher. By the 1930s the church was re-named to Boynton Chapel United Methodist Church, the name that remains with the congregation to this day.

The period in Boynton's history between 1936 and 1956 was one in which the church experienced some very gloomy, as well as some very glorious days. Rev. Felix Wade Logan was appointed to serve in 1936. The church was then heavily in debt, but under Rev. Logan's leadership a ten thousand dollar mortgage was

paid off. The church recalls burning the mortgage in 1944 with Bishop Brooks assisting. Rev. Logan started the slogan "Boynton Chapel – *The Church of Cordial Welcome.*" Also during Rev. Logan's tenure, the Church acquired some property on Scott St. near Jefferson. Rev. Logan pastored Boynton Chapel for eleven years and oversaw a growing congregation.

In 1947 Rev. Andrew J. Newton became Senior Pastor and served until 1951 during which time the church completed payment of the Scott St. property. In 1952 Rev. JH Callier's tenure began. Boynton experienced a period of indecisiveness, as the church was in an area of the city undergoing rapid change. Scott street was rapidly becoming a commercial corridor. Many members realized eventually the church would have to relocate again, but many others protested the decision as many had become attached to the Scott street property. The same year Boy Scout Troop #484 was organized at the church, Rev. Callier passed away on Dec. 18, 1954. As the demographic of the area was changing with the times, Pastor Callier's vision of relocating the church was set in motion.

In 1954, Rev. Homer D. Pace was appointed Senior Pastor. He quickly began to formulate plans for the new church. The church sold the properties on Scott St and began construction on the present location of Boynton Chapel United Methodist Church, on the north east corner of Milby and Tuam. The church was completed and dedicated on January 5, 1958. Pastor Pace remained the pastor until 1962. Rev. Phyiemon Titus was appointed to serve as Rev. Pace's replacement, and the church saw growth and a thriving ministry. In 1969 Rev. Clifton N Bonner was appointed, and during his tenure the Church acquired adjacent property on the north west corner of Tuam and Lucinda for parking. Rev. C. S. Weaver served from 1972 through 1975, and Rev. Elmer T. Albury served from 1975 through 1981.

Rev. Robert E. McGee was appointed Pastor in 1981. Rev. McGee was young with new ideas, a profound background in the Bible, and plans to make Boynton Chapel the church of the Past, Present, and Future. This was a time of spiritual renewal and vision casting. Under Pastor McGee's leadership the church celebrated the 106th and 107th Church Anniversaries. The church school was revitalized, prayer and bible study groups were organized, the choir flourished and ministries such as the Women's and Men's ministry made a mark with special celebrations and occasions. The church underwent a much-needed renovation without ever missing a Sunday worship, thanks to one particular Sunday where the congregation met at Adair's Park! Pastor McGee served until 1987.

In 1988, Rev. JB Black was appointed Pastor. He continued to build the ministry through Christian education and the commemoration of the Pace Hall. As a tribute to former Pastors, portraits were displayed for the first time as a part of their fervent pastoral leadership and Boynton Chapel UMC's rich history. These displays continue to this day. Pastor Black served until 1993. In 1994, Rev. Frances EW Guidry was appointed Senior Pastor, she was Boynton Chapel's first female pastor. She served for two years. In 1997, Rev. Wanda Bess was appointed as Pastor. Under Pastor Bess' leadership Boynton Chapel formulated a vision, mission and purpose that moved toward spiritual growth and community development. Rev. Bess served until 2005. In 2005, Rev. Kendall Graham was appointed Senior Pastor. Rev. Graham continued the vision of community involvement by expanding the food bank to help feed the community. Mission trips to Jamaica further expanded the reach of Boynton's involvement and vision of ministry.

Rev. Graham soon left Boynton and Rev. Howard Turnley was appointed. He served the church and community as Senior Pastor until retiring.

Rev. Linda Davis was appointed Senior and is currently Pastor of Boynton Chapel UMC. Rev. Davis continues the vision and mission of the church by being evangelistic and missional in expanding the ministry to encompass the needs of the community while focusing on the growth and development of the congregation.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RENOVATION HISTORY

ARCHITECT JOHN S. CHASE

John Saunders Chase was born on January 23, 1925, in Annapolis, Maryland. He attended Hampton University, earning a Bachelor of Science in Architecture degree from Hampton University in 1948. Hampton's job placement program led Chase to Austin, Texas, where he worked as a draftsman and contractor. On June 7, 1950, at the University of Texas in Austin, John Saunders Chase became the first African American to enroll at a major university in the South. He went on to become the first African American graduate of the University of Texas. Mr. Chase had to submit an appeal to the State of Texas to sit for his licensing exam without the required apprenticeship hours because no one would hire a black man to work in an architecture firm in the south in the 1950's.

Mr. Chase went on to establish his own practice, *John S. Chase A. I. A.*, in July of 1954 at 2916 Blodgett Street while working as a professor at Texas Southern University. On the weekends, John and Drucie Chase would pack up their two young sons and travel around the state, attending church services and meeting people. The two would work as a team, making friends and building relationships that would eventually lead to projects that would help to build John Chase's practice. Projects designed by Chase's firm include: the George R. Brown Convention Center, the Washington Technical Institute, Links, Inc., National Headquarters, Delta Sigma Theta National Headquarters, the Harris County Astrodome Renovation, the Thurgood Marshall School of Law, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. School of Humanities at Texas Southern University. Chase was later awarded a commission to design the United States Embassy in Tunis, Tunisia; a fifty-million-dollar complex.

John Chase was the first African American licensed to practice architecture in the state of Texas, and later was the first African American to be admitted to the Texas Society of Architects, and the Houston Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Chase was also the first African American Architect from the State of Texas to be elevated to the AIA College of Fellows in 1977. When President Jimmy Carter selected him in 1980, Chase became the first African American to serve on the United States Commission on Fine Arts.

John S. Chase built his career first and foremost on designing churches for African American communities. His 1952 Master's Thesis, "Progressive Architecture for the Negro Baptist Church," is an incredibly forward and optimistic paper on the greatest opportunities found in the church for African Americans. Not just a simple design exercise, it uses detailed data-driven analysis to describe the form, function, and use of a hypothetical church as a place firmly at the center of its community and not just a brick box to worship in on Sundays. All of his churches firmly reinforce his ideas, and the Boynton Chapel is no exception.

ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

The original drawings for Boynton in February of 1956 include an attached house for the pastor, a central courtyard, and many more classrooms, including a library, kitchen, and dedicated bible study rooms. Although the attached house only appears in the earliest drawings, the classrooms appear to have been omitted relatively close to the start of construction. The church's ability to serve its community and congregation was clearly a key pillar, and both the architect and building committee seemingly tried to include the expanded classrooms to the last minute.

As all of Chase's works, Boynton Chapel makes explicit room for community service functions. Despite the reduced quantity, the structure includes a half-dozen rooms on the west side, accessible via a main hallway to the left of the narthex. Today these are used for Sunday school, bible study, nurseries, vacation bible study, and breakout rooms as the needs of the church demand. The west of the sanctuary originally used a sliding partition to allow for a separate meeting hall or room to extend the aisles for extra seating facing the pulpit. Access to the classrooms and meeting hall are immediate; both can be accessed from a hallway or door immediately present on the west and north sides of the narthex respectively. The equal respect given to the communal spaces as the main sanctuary, accessed via door on the east side of the narthex, is indicative of Chase's emphasis on the community functions of a church being just as important as Sunday worship.

One of the more striking features common to most of Chase's churches is at first easy to miss: the wealth of natural lighting. Both the north and south walls of the sanctuary include fixed arrangements of stained red, yellow, and clear rectangular glass panels framed in wood from the foot of the altar all the way back to the temporary wall. Unique to his work are eight cross-shaped skylights over the altar, providing so much light that until recent renovations no interior lights were necessary during the day. These sets of windows and skylights were framed by one final cross-shaped window behind the altar, facing east so as to catch the rising sunlight during morning service.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Boynton Chapel Church is dominated by its rectangular sanctuary aligned lengthways with Tuam Street, with the pews facing east towards the pulpit and Milby Street. Each wall of the sanctuary is a 8-9 foot

wall of fixed arrangements of stained red, yellow, and clear rectangular glass panels framed in wood. The southwest corner of the building is the narthex which faces Milby street. It consists of two double doors framed in four stained glass arrangements by Carrol Simms, a famous Black artist and professor at TSU with Chase, depicting scenes from the bible.

The west end of the building includes multiple classrooms and restrooms on both sides of a connecting hallway running north-south connected to the narthex's northwest corner, with a multi-use communal room between the main sanctuary and the classrooms. The communal room is separated from the rest of the interior with a partial wall ten and a half feet high and doors connecting each side of the room to any adjacent areas. Above this wall, between the sanctuary, communal room and narthex is another arrangement of stained red, yellow, and clear glass panels. Several of the framing wood pieces are emphasized to create a wooden cross, centered near the ceiling, running the length and width of the glass panels.

The east wall of the sanctuary contains the altar, pulpit, choir stands, and prayer benches. Centered behind the pulpit is a single large but narrow window shaped like a cross, and two planters, one on each side of the window. Over the pulpit is the bell tower, and each slope of the roof contains four cross-shaped skylights, framing the pulpit in swathes of natural light at all hours of the day.

The southeast corner of the sanctuary contains a small choir room for storing robes and materials, and the northeast corner contains the pastor's study. Adjacent to both the sanctuary and pastor's study is the finance room, a surviving room from the originally envisioned pastor's residence, sticking out the north face so as not to disturb the lines inside the sanctuary.

RENOVATION HISTORY

Boynton Chapel Church has only undergone one major renovation in its history, in 1986. Unfortunately, this renovation appears to have destroyed one of the rectangular stained-glass arrangements that made up the west face in the triangle between each roof slope and the classrooms below. It currently is a solid wall.

Minor recent changes to the interior include replacing light fixtures used for events in the late evening and night in the sanctuary, narthex, and communal room, the addition of a tech room to the northwest corner of the sanctuary, and replacing the temporary partial wall dividing the communal room and sanctuary with a permanent partial wall.

One of the more recent and regrettable changes is fortunately very reversable and ripe for a small restoration grant. Due to leaking issues with the cross shaped skylights, all the skylights were sealed and no longer let in any natural light, necessitating the addition of stage lighting in the sanctuary. However, the skylights still exist in their entirety; no part of the skylights were removed or replaced. Thanks to incredibly detailed descriptions, cross sections, and descriptions of the skylight supplier in the architectural drawings, there is a wonderful opportunity for a restoration grant to restore these skylights to their former glory. The drawings are so detailed it should be possible to construct replicas from scratch if necessary, but as the skylights are still installed and in great condition all that should be necessary is a reroofing and resealing the troublesome areas around the frames.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by Walker Shores, Intern for the Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

- | S | NA | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| | | S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present; |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride. |

AND

- | | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)). |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

- | S | NA | |
|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| | | S - satisfies D - does not satisfy NA - not applicable |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | (1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code; |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | (2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director; |

- (3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or
- (4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: APPROVAL

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

EXHIBIT A
CURRENT PHOTOS
BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2812 MILBY STREET, HOUSTON, TX 77004



EAST FACE ALONG MILBY STREET
BY GOOGLE STREET VIEW



SOUTH FACE ALONG TUAM STREET
BY GOOGLE STREET VIEW



WEST FACE ALONG LUCINDA STREET
BY GOOGLE STREET VIEW

EXHIBIT B
HISTORIC PHOTO C. 1957
BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2812 MILBY STREET, HOUSTON, TX 77004



PHOTO NEGATIVE BY HOUSTON POST
PROVIDED BY HOUSTON METROPOLITAN RESEARCH CENTER

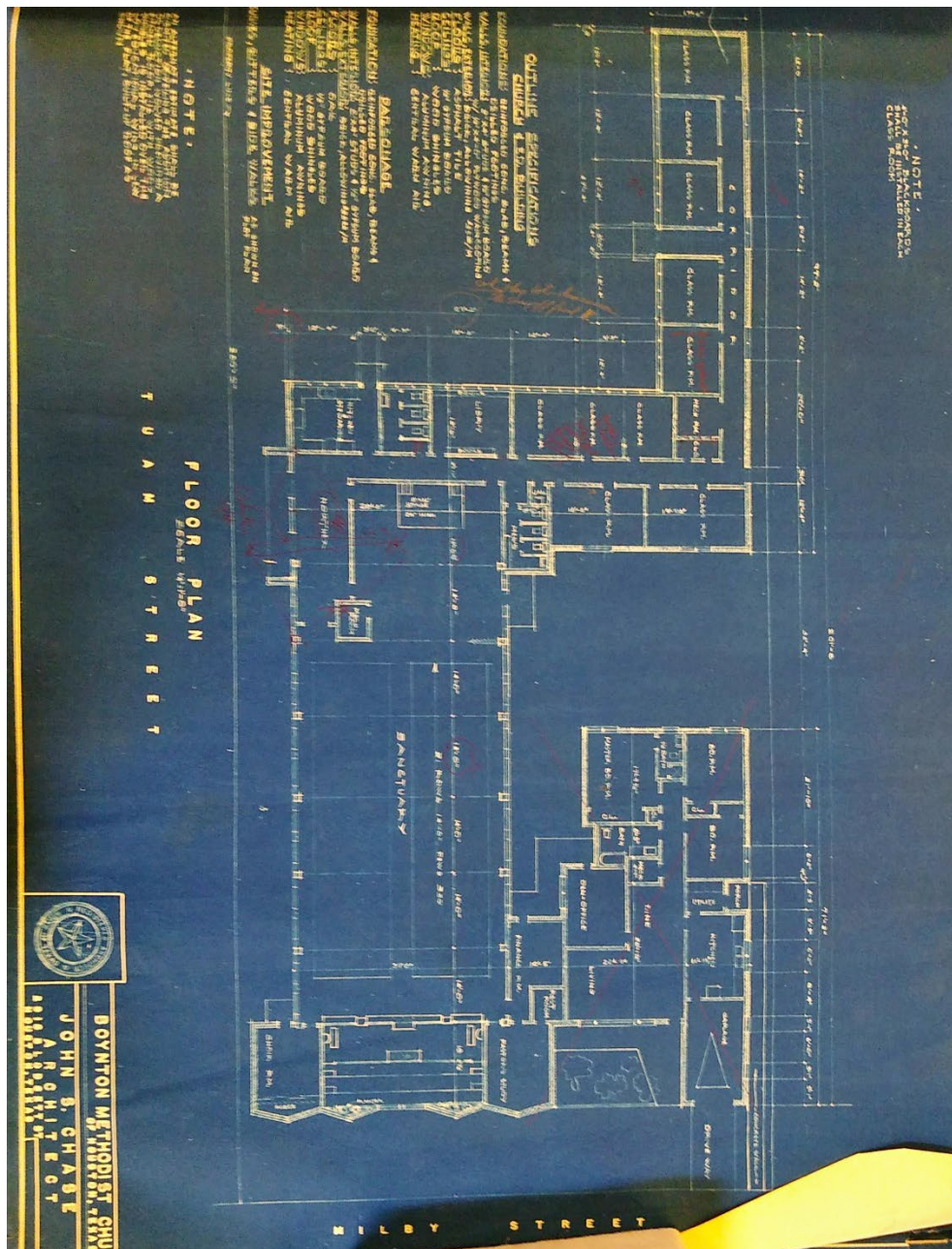
EXHIBIT C
HISTORIC PHOTO c. 1980s
YOUTH CHOIR AT ENTRANCE
BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2812 MILBY STREET, HOUSTON, TX 77004



PROVIDED BY BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

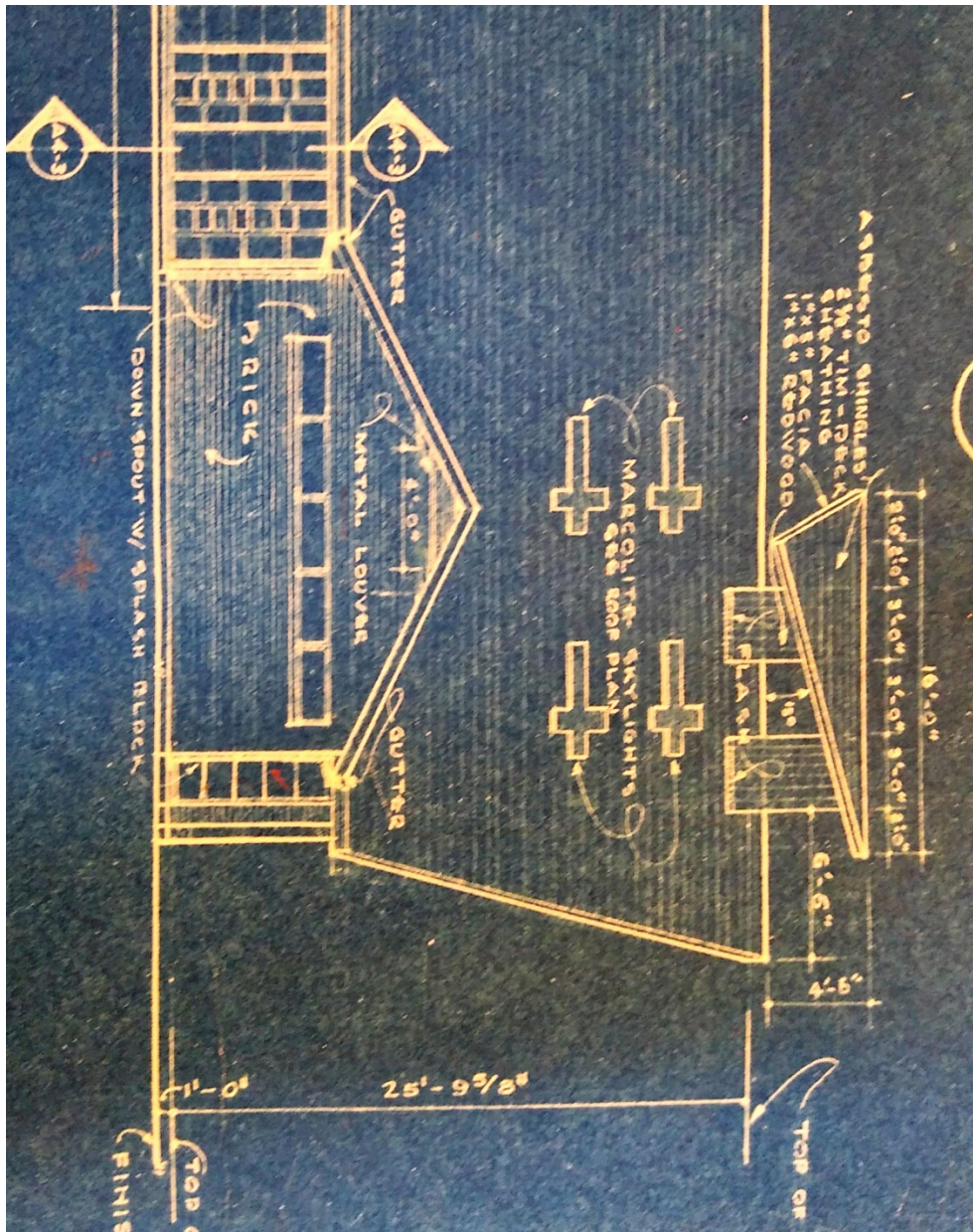
EXHIBIT D SITE PLAN

ORIGINAL SITE PLAN BY JOHN S. CHASE
BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2812 MILBY STREET, HOUSTON, TX 77004



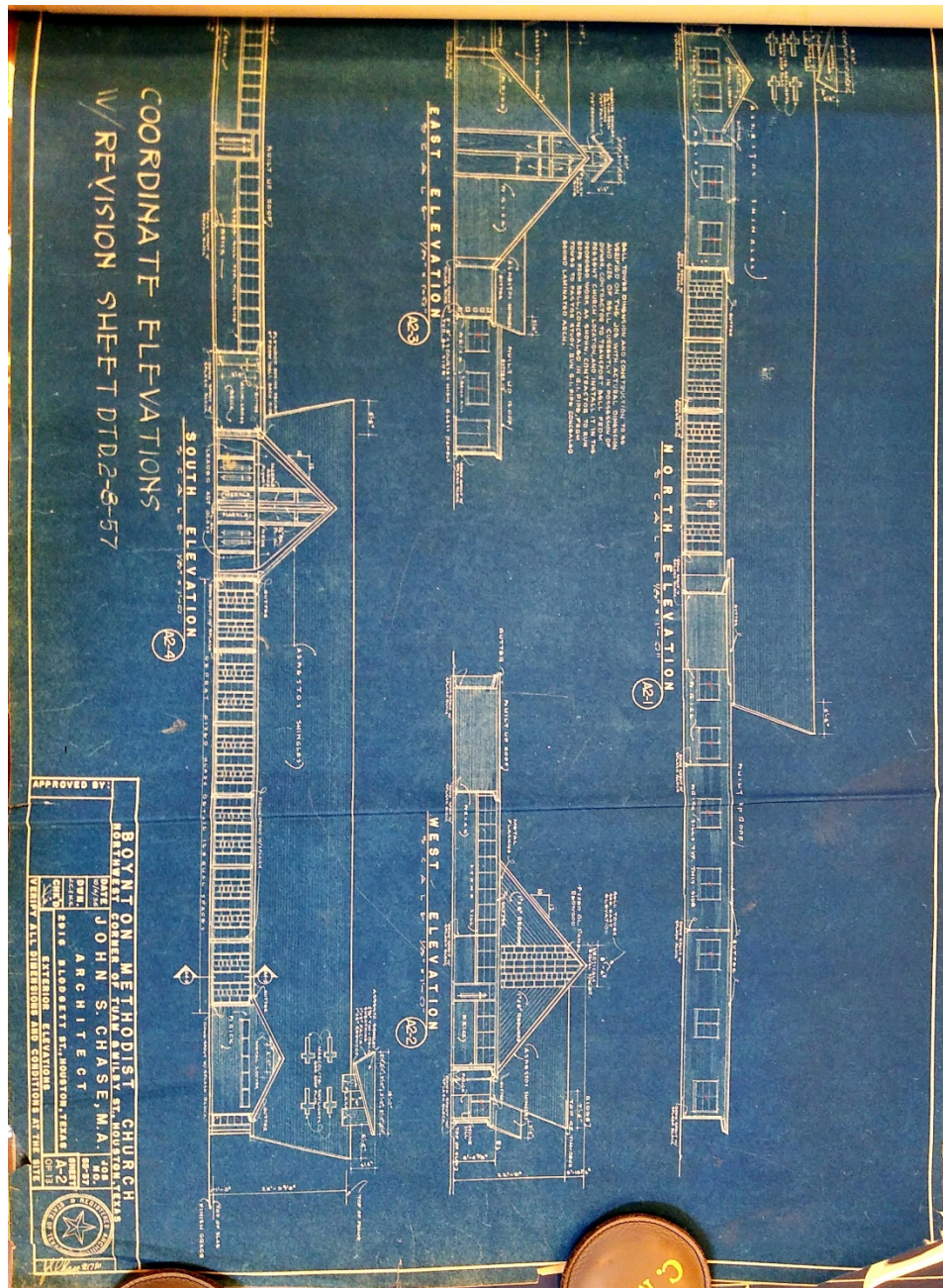
PROVIDED BY HOUSTON METROPOLITAN RESEARCH CENTER

EXHIBIT E
ARCHITECTURAL DETAIL
DETAIL OF NOTABLE ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES BY JOHN S. CHASE
BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2812 MILBY STREET, HOUSTON, TX 77004



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EXHIBIT F
ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW
OVERVIEW OF ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES BY JOHN S. CHASE
BOYNTON CHAPEL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
2812 MILBY STREET, HOUSTON, TX 77004



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