

SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH
1936 South Michigan Avenue
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

HABS IL-328
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
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SECOND PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

HABS No. IL-328

Location: 1936 S. Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

The coordinates for the Second Presbyterian Church are 41.855696 N, -87.624367 W. These coordinates were obtained in March 2012 from Google Earth, and with, it is assumed, WGS 1984. There is no restriction on the release of the locational data to the public.

Significance: Originally designed by noted architect James Renwick and built in 1874, Second Presbyterian Church was later remodeled in 1900 due to devastating fire that destroyed the interior. The subsequent interior, executed by architect Howard Van Doren Shaw and artist Frederick Clay Bartlett, is a *tour de force* of the Arts and Crafts style and remains the finest of its type in Chicago.

Description: The exterior of Second Presbyterian Church is an excellent example of the Gothic Revival style executed in soft, cream colored, tar stained, rusticated Joliet limestone on the south and east facades and common brick on the north and west. The design features a prominent bell tower at the southeast corner, and pointed arched windows along the north and south elevations. In plan, the building is a non-traditional two aisle plan, perhaps owing to the programmatic, non-processional nature of the service.

History: Second Presbyterian Church has one of the most significant Arts and Crafts interior in Chicago, designed by Howard Van Doren Shaw and Frederick Clay Bartlett. The congregation commissioned James Renwick to design their first building in 1847. The Gothic Revival style church, completed in 1851, once stood approximately two miles from the site of the current church. This building served the church until it was destroyed in the Great Chicago Fire of 1871.

The congregation again commissioned Renwick to design a new building on a new site. The new building was completed in 1874 in a style similar to 15th century English Gothic churches. In 1900, the congregation experienced another devastating fire. The roof over the sanctuary was completely destroyed and extensive smoke and water damaged the nave. Howard Van Doren Shaw, then a young architect and member of the church, was chosen to rebuild and restore the building. Instead of simply replicating Renwick's interior, he completely redesigned it in the contemporary Arts and Crafts style. Shaw was a graduate of both Yale University and MIT. Later in his career Shaw became known for his

Market Square design for the commercial shopping center in Lake Forest, Illinois, as well as the original Goodman Theater. Prior to his death in 1926, Shaw was awarded with the gold medal from the American Institute of Architects for his architectural achievements.

Shaw's redesign of Second Presbyterian Church displayed an intimate understanding of the English Arts and Crafts style. He altered the arches, supports and ceilings, added art glass windows, murals, angels, sculptures, carvings and decorative electrified light fixtures. All elements seemed to take on an organic form, with sinuous, simplified floral forms, in juxtaposition with the modern technology of light bulbs. Shaw used reoccurring biblical imagery in the details of the grape and vine, the pomegranate, the carved animals on the ceiling, and most notably the 175 angels, which are represented throughout the sanctuary. Frederic Clay Bartlett's massive mural behind the choir loft mixes both Arts and Crafts and Byzantine stylistic traits in his tree of life design. Frescos throughout the sanctuary depict the heavenly choir of angels, keeping with the common overarching theme of angels. These have high relief, which is unusual. Bartlett is known for his stained glass and murals as well as his vast collection of important Impressionist paintings, now housed at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Perhaps the most stunning features of the redesigned church are the art glass windows throughout the sanctuary, narthex and auxiliary spaces. The congregation sought the best artists to decorate their church and secured art glass from other churches as well, amassing a stunning array that includes nine windows designed by Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. Two other windows designed by Edward Burne-Jones, executed in the William Morris Studios in London, are considered to be two of the finest examples of English Arts and Crafts windows in the United States. The sanctuary also includes an example of Healey and Millet's fine painted glass and a superb William Fair Kline or the Ascension grouping on the East façade.

Sources: Donnell, Courtney Graham, *Frederic Clay and Helen Birch Bartlett: The Collectors*. Chicago: The Helen Birch Bartlett Memorial Collection, The Art Institute of Chicago, 1986.

Art and History, Second Presbyterian Website.
<http://2ndpresbyterian.org/arhistory/> (accessed November 30, 2010)

Art and Architecture, Friends of Historic Second Church Website.
<http://www.2ndpresbyterianfriends.org/> (accessed November 30, 2010)

Historians: Stephanie Gawur and Emily Wallrath, Historic Preservation Program,
The School of the Art Institute of Chicago, 2010. This documentation was
submitted as part of the 2011 Peterson Prize competition.