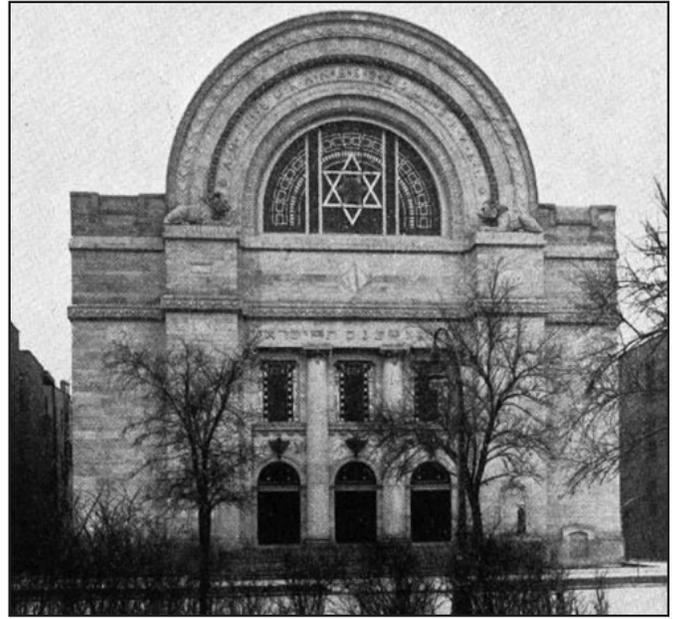


Shepherd's Temple



Overview:

Shepherd's Temple, a majestically scaled church that dominates historic West Douglas Boulevard, was originally built as the Anshe Kanesses Israel synagogue. Sadly, this magnificent edifice stands vacant, deteriorating and without adequate funds for the long-desired dream of its owner to restore it to an active house of Christian worship. Once one of North Lawndale's grandest temples, unless its current pastor can raise the desperately needed funds to complete his vision, it may soon have a date with the wrecker's ball.

Shepherd's Temple
3411 W. Douglas Blvd.
Architect: Jacob S. Aroner
Date: 1914

History:

In a neighborhood with large Jewish institutions, Anshe Kanesses Israel, now known as Shepherd's Temple, was built in 1913 and was Lawndale's largest. According to Dr. Irving Cutler, Anshe Kanesses Israel, or the Russische Shul as it was called, had a seating capacity of 3500 and contained 35 Torah scrolls. Some of the best cantors from the east coast and Europe would conduct high holy holiday services. It was designed by architects Aroner and Somers, who also designed movie theaters throughout the city, including the long-demolished Joy Theater on Roosevelt Road. The building cost \$100,000 and reflected a Byzantine-revival style, once popular for synagogues of that day.

North Lawndale was once the home of one of the largest Jewish populations in the Midwest. Starting in the 1920's, as the Jews started moving out, former synagogues were converted to churches. By the mid-1950's, North Lawndale had become a predominantly African-American community and most of these former Jewish houses of worship had been sold to a variety of Christian denominations. The African-American Friendship Baptist Church began to hold services in the building in 1962. In the summer of 1966, according to community leaders Gerald and Lorene Earles, who were there to witness the event, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at Shepherd's Temple during his tumultuous summer in Chicago.

Threat

The building is currently owned by a small Christian congregation, Abundant Life World Outreach. Led by Pastor Steve Bartlett, the congregation of approximately 100 members has been struggling with efforts to secure financing to manage a plethora of building code violations and to stabilize the building. Uncertainty looms over the building because of the congregation's tenuous financing circumstances, and the desire of the City's Buildings Department to come to some resolution with the property. This is an especially dire situation given the larger number of significant historical properties within two blocks of Shepherd Temple, most notably the old Hebrew Rabbinical College, which was demolished in November 2010.

