

**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

Allen Wise, President
Linda Y. Jackson, President-Elect
Melissa Berry, Vice President
Lori Martin, Vice President
Christina Randle, Secretary
Clay Cary, Treasurer
Clayton Bullock, Immediate Past President

DIRECTORS

Melissa Alaya
Katie Carmichael
Miriam Conner
Sareta Davis
Harmony Grogan
Stacey Kaleh
Yung Ju Kim

Richard Kooris
Perry Lorenz
Kelley Cooper McClure
Alyson McGee
Elisha Perez
Mueni Rudd
Shubhada Saxena
Michael Strutt

2020-2021 REPRESENTATIVES

Charles Peveto, Austin History Center Association
Bob Ward, Travis County Historical Commission

ADVISOR

Cyndee Lake

STAFF

Lindsey Derrington, Executive Director
Meghan King, Programs and Outreach Planner
Lesley Walker, Development and Grants Coordinator

February 25, 2022

Terri Myers, Chair
City of Austin
Historic Landmark Commission

Re: Reverend Jacob Fontaine Gold Dollar Building

Chair Myers:

Preservation Austin exists to empower Austinites to shape a more inclusive, resilient, and meaningful community culture through preservation. We write today to express our concerns about proposed changes to the historic Reverend Jacob Fontaine Gold Dollar Building located at 2402 San Gabriel Street.

This building is in the former Freedman's Colony known as Wheatville, founded in 1869 by freedman James Wheat on the edge of the Shoal Creek flood plain. Not only is this property and area historically significant, but the first known owner of the house has a noteworthy history, as well. Had it not been for his efforts, the University of Texas, whose presence threatens to engulf the modest property, might not exist in Austin.

Rev. Jacob (Jake) Fontaine was born into slavery in Arkansas in 1808. He was brought to Austin in 1839 as the personal secretary of Texas president Mirabeau B. Lamar.

In 1867, after Emancipation, Fontaine founded the First (Colored) Baptist Church in Austin, the first of many churches he founded in Central Texas.

In 1876, Fontaine established the *Austin Gold Dollar*, the first black-owned newspaper in Austin out of his home, the property on San Gabriel.

In 1881, Fontaine emerged as one of Austin's leading advocates for the establishment of the University of Texas in Austin, even though it would be decades before Blacks could attend the university. Rev. Fontaine died in 1898 and is buried in Oakwood Cemetery.

The City of Austin has declared this building a landmark and the previously proposed changes to the balcony and roof would certainly harm its architectural as well as historic integrity.

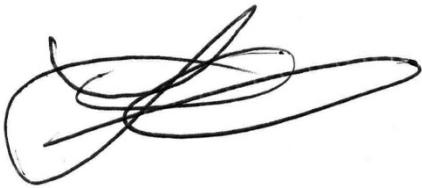
Preservation Austin supports calls for a rigorous analysis of this landmark's physical evolution to ensure that any changes respect and preserve its historic fabric with minimal intervention. We appreciate the Historic Landmark Commission's extreme care with this case given the erasure of Wheatville, and of so

many other Black settlements in West and South Austin, as well as continued threats to African American heritage throughout the city.

Also, if possible, we would encourage outreach to any of Rev. Fontaine's descendants who may still live in the area who may not be aware of these proposed changes. And, given the controversial issues related to erasure of African American places and spaces, perhaps this could provide a path to a broader discussion about historic preservation in Austin.

Thank you for your service, and for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke at the bottom.

Lindsey Derrington
Executive Director