



**Name of Property:** Central Congregational Church  
**City, State:** Boston, Massachusetts  
**Period of Significance:** 1894-1896  
**NHL Criteria:** 4, Exception 1  
**NHL Theme:** III. Expressing Cultural Values  
2. Visual and Performing Arts  
5. Architecture, Landscape Architecture and Urban Design

**Previous Recognition:** 1973 National Register of Historic Places, Back Bay Historic District

**National Historic Context:** XXVI. Decorative and Folk Arts  
XXVI. Architecture  
Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century, Gothic Revival

**NHL Significance:**

- Central Congregational Church is nationally significant because it has the largest intact Tiffany-designed ecclesiastical interior in its original location in America, embodying Louis Comfort Tiffany's aesthetic principles of artful decoration, beauty, color, and complete design unity.
- The redecoration of the monumental interior by Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company in 1894-1896 was one of the most extensive church commissions undertaken by the company. All-inclusive, it introduced a host of new elements – complex paint schemes on the walls and ceilings, elaborate hammer-beam trusses, trceries, an entrance vestibule, a choir stall, a chancel rail, sedilia, organ screens, decorative wainscoting, chancel furniture, a lectern, a pulpit, pews, a baptismal font, mosaics, 6 x 12 foot art glass lantern, and 42 large stained glass windows.
- The gigantic illuminated art glass lantern at the crossing of the transept, displayed at the



Tiffany exhibit at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, has no equal in any church setting in America. The 42 stained glass windows represent the scope of Tiffany's glass art as an integral part of a Tiffany-decorated church interior. The 20 complicated, multi-layered figure windows comprise a singular and unmatched collection for their large number and size. The majority of the windows were created by Frederick Wilson, considered by experts to be the finest of Tiffany's window designers.

**Integrity:**

- The cathedral-sized church was designed by Richard M. Upjohn, son of Richard Upjohn, the architect credited with popularizing the Gothic Revival in America. Completed in 1867, it is an imposing polychromatic masonry structure with a 236-foot spire. With the exception of a cast stone ramp added at the Parish House entrance in 1994, the church exterior is unaltered.
- The Tiffany decoration of the church interior, intact and virtually unchanged from its original form, retains the highest level of integrity. Alterations to the sanctuary since the Tiffany decoration have been minimal and have not reduced the integrity of materials, location, design, setting, feeling, association, and workmanship. Changes include carpet replacement and the removal of several front pews from the side aisles and two front pews from either side of the main aisle.

**Owner of Property:** Church of the Covenant

**Acreege of Property:** Less than 1 acre.

**Origins of Nomination:** After preparing a historic structures report for the building, architects at Menders, Torrey & Spencer urged the church to pursue National Historic Landmark designation. The effort was led by Preservation Planner Lynn Smiledge and church historian Charlene James.

**Potential for Positive Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:**

- Designation as an NHL will bring recognition to an extraordinary church interior and a stunning example of the finest ecclesiastical work of the Tiffany Glass & Decorating Company.
- NHL status could assist the church in the preservation of the Tiffany interior and the restoration of the 42 stained glass windows.

**Potential for Negative Public Response or Reflection on NHL Program:** None known.

**Public Comments Favoring Designation (received as of 11/10/11):**

The Honorable John F. Kerry, United States Senator, Massachusetts

The Honorable Michael E. Capuano, U.S. Congress, 8<sup>th</sup> District, Massachusetts

William S. Young, Senior Preservation Planner, The Environment Department, City of Boston

Kathy Kottaridis, Executive Director, Historic Boston Incorporated

The Honorable Scott P. Brown, U.S. Senator, Massachusetts



Virginia C. Raguin, Professor of Art History, Distinguished Professor in Humanities, Worcester, Massachusetts

Sarah D. Kelly, Executive Director, Boston Preservation Alliance, Massachusetts

Meg Mainzer-Cohen, President, Back Bay Association, Boston, Massachusetts

Arthur Dion and Meg White, Directors, Gallery NAGA Fine Art, Inc., Boston, Massachusetts

Sharon Reilly, Executive Director, The Women's Lunch Place, Boston, Massachusetts

Brona Simon, State Historic Preservation Officer, Executive Director, Massachusetts Historical Commission

Ellen J. Lipsey, Executive Director, Boston Landmarks Commission, Massachusetts

Reverend Jennifer Wegter-McNelly, Interim Minister, Church of the Covenant, Boston, Massachusetts (owner)

**Landmarks Committee Comments:**

**Landmarks Committee Recommendation:** Designation. Dr. Stevens moved, Dr. Mills seconded; unanimous approval.

**Advisory Board Recommendation:** Unanimous approval to designate the property as an NHL.