

The Milwaukee Times

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February 1, 2021

Mr. John Gurda, chair
Citizen Advisory Committee on the Naming of Public Buildings, Facilities and Streets
City Hall, Room 205
200 E Wells St.
Milwaukee, WI 53202

Dear Mr. Gurda:

My name is Lynda Jackson Conyers and I am the president of The Milwaukee Times Weekly Newspaper Printing & Publishing Company located at 1936 North Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Drive in Milwaukee. I am writing today to express my strong support for a proposal seeking to recognize architect Alonzo Robinson, Jr., by renaming the Fire Department headquarters building (711 West Wells Street) in his honor.

A quick google search of the internet reveals very little information about the life and work of Alonzo Robinson, Jr., one of the first African American architects in Wisconsin. Regardless of the existing historical record, Mr. Robinson left an indelible mark on the City of Milwaukee. The Fire Department headquarters was one of the first of many Milwaukee-area landmarks which he designed. Other notable accomplishments include: the Vel Phillips YWCA, the headquarters of the Polish Association of America, the Doyne Park Shelter House, the Hillcrest Nursing Home, the McKinley Marina, a sixth floor room at the Milwaukee County Court House, the Central City Development Corporation and many others, including dozens of church buildings.

Robinson earned an architectural degree in 1951 from Howard University in Washington, D.C. He moved to Milwaukee in 1954 because he was offered a job as an architectural designer. When Alonzo Robinson's career was beginning, there were only 50 Black architects registered in the US. Although there is no listing for Robinson in the American Institute of Architects from that era, a Milwaukee city directory from 1955, indicates he was working as an architectural designer for the City Bureau of Bridges and Public Buildings. He would later become a partner in the Waukesha firm of DeQuardo, Robinson and Crouch. A listing from that time cites Robinson as "the only Black architect in Wisconsin."

For a number of years, Robinson served as a lay reader with the United Methodist Church and after his death in June 2000, a church periodical states that Robinson was responsible for designing "hundreds of buildings in the Milwaukee area" and numerous churches, including Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church.

Robinson began his professional career shortly after the beginning of the modern civil rights movement. Before the 1950s, professional opportunities were few and far between for African Americans and membership in most professional organizations not possible. These obstacles render Robinson's

professional legacy even more remarkable and the need for belated recognition of his accomplishments an urgent necessity.

One of Alonzo Robinson's designs, the Community Design Center at the University of Wisconsin, was apparently commissioned partly to encourage young African Americans to consider a career in architecture. I sincerely believe that renaming our Fire Department headquarters would help to fill the void in the historical record which currently exists concerning Robinson's accomplishments. I believe that according Mr. Robinson this honor would also inspire more African Americans to consider an architectural career. As an African American businesswoman, I can identify with the struggle that Alonzo Robinson, Jr., undoubtedly endured as he was beginning his professional career in 1954. Recognizing his achievements would inspire others to follow in his footsteps.

If I can be of further assistance, please contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Lynda Jackson Conyers". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Lynda Jackson Conyers, president
The Milwaukee Times Weekly Newspaper Printing & Publishing Co.