

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (1)

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common

(2) Historic (if applicable)

Edward Morehouse house

II. Location

(1) Street Address

101 Ely Place

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)

10th

III. Classification

(1) Type of Property (building, monument, park, etc.)

Building (house)

(2) Zoning District

(3) Present Use

Single-family residence

IV. Current Owner of Property (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Name(s)

Dr. and Mrs. Palmer R. Kundert

(2) Street Address

101 Ely Place

(3) Telephone Number

233-0241

V. Legal Description (available at City Assessor's office)

(1) Parcel Number

(2) Legal Description

VI. Condition of Property

(1) Physical Condition (excellent, good, fair, deteriorated, ruins)

Excellent

(2) Altered or Unaltered?

Unaltered

(3) Moved or Original Site?

Original Site

(4) Wall Construction

Frame

(5) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the present and original physical construction and appearance (limit 500 words).

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (2)

VI.(5) Describe Present and Original Physical Construction and Appearance:

In terms of the exterior of the Morehouse house, the present appearance approximates the original.

The house is sited at the intersection of Ely Place and Summit Avenue. The site is steeply sloped, falling away from Ely Place down along Summit. The main facade of the house faces ~~Summit~~ Ely Place, presenting a two-story appearance. From the back yard, the house has a three-story facade, in accordance with the slope of the site. From the interior of the house one has a commanding view of the Capitol, the stadium and both lakes.

The house is of balloon-frame construction with stucco exterior finish in white and groupings of verticle ribbons of windows. From the rear, which faces the view, fenestration is more pronounced. The second story of the house has less depth than the first, permitting a roof balcony toward the rear, facing the view. The roof is flat, of convention combination built-up construction over wood joists.

In plan, the house has four bedrooms and a "Maid's Room", the latter located on the first floor adjacent to the kitchen. With a basement level which is exposed to the rear, there are three usable rooms located here, one a recreation room, one a study, and the third a utility room. Thus, though basically a two-story house, the architect has succeeded in giving it three liveable levels.

With the exception of floor-to-ceiling windows facing the view, all windows are double-hung with conventional storm and screen sash...a result of the preference of Mrs. Morehouse. Pockets were incorporated above the windows on the exterior for the installation of Keck's exterior Venetian blinds for climate-control. These never were installed, though the pockets are still evident, and the blinds could be installed at any time.

Foundations and foundation walls are conventional concrete.

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

VII. (7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to
Designation Criteria: (Conforms to #3 and possibly #4)

Before and after World War I, the only American architect to stand out above all others in his experiments with new forms was Wright. In Europe, where Wright's work was more influential and better-known than it was in America, a number of major architects in several countries worked independently and, when their work was synthesized in Germany, France and Holland, contributed to the development of a new architecture: the International Style. The three great pioneers of the new style were Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe, both of Germany, and France's Charles-Edouard Jeanneret, who called himself "Le Corbusier." All these men had worked in the creative office of German architect Peter Behrens, as had a group of earlier progressive American architects worked in the Chicago office of Louis Sullivan. Gropius, in 1919, became the head of the Bauhaus at Dessau, a school of design involved with all the arts. In 1925, Gropius designed a great group of buildings, including the school itself, housing facilities and other structures. The Bauhaus was to become identified with the new style and, when the Nazis closed it down in 1933, it was moved, in effect, to the United States. Mies and the painter Laszlo Moholy-Nagy both came to Chicago where, in 1937, the "New Bauhaus" was established (later the Institute of Design) under Moholy's leadership. An American architect was instrumental in the establishment of this New Bauhaus, for it was he who convinced Moholy to come to Chicago and start anew. He was George Fred Keck, painter and architect, who was born in Watertown in 1895 and still practices today (1973). Keck sought the reestablishment of the Bauhaus in Chicago because he believed in its principles and knew all the major principal personalities active in the International Style movement.

Keck established an architectural practice in 1926 after receiving an architectural engineering degree from the University of Illinois in 1920. Perhaps because of his long-time interest in abstractionist painting and his engineering degree, he was not committed to the Neo-Classical Revivalism that was the dominant force in current architecture. Keck established his office at 212 N. Michigan Ave., Chicago, in 1929, and it has remained there to this day. He was joined in practice by his brother, William Keck, FAIA, in 1931. In his Chicago milieu, Keck was a friend of Mies van der Rohe, as both lunched daily at the Arts Club. He also claimed a trans-Atlantic friendship with the great Finnish architect, Alvar Aalto, with whose buildings Keck was in sympathy. By 1937, when Keck built a house for Edward W. Morehouse, a State Public Service Commission economist, he was thoroughly sympathetic with the European developments in the International Style and was in daily contact with some of the major personalities behind its development.

The major elements of the style were defined in 1932 by the great architectural historian Henry-Russell Hitchcock in his book co-authored with Philip Johnson, The International Style. In this style, according to Hitchcock, there is an emphasis on volume or space enclosed by thin surfaces instead of a suggestion of mass and solidity. Regularity and orderliness characterize buildings in the style in their construction, and surface ornamentation is avoided. To the casual observer, these buildings can seem boxy and simplistic. They have flat roofs, smooth wall surfaces, windows with minimal exterior reveals appearing to be a continuation of the surface. A balance of parts is found instead of one-point, axial symmetry, and windows are used in groups or in vertical or horizontal ribbons, frequently "turning the corner."

Keck's Morehouse house is not nearly as severe as the early German work in this style. It represents an American, and even more a regional, approach to houses within the style. Nevertheless, here is a basic, white, cube-like

(continued)

VII. (7) Continued.

form which is broken to the rear by a one-story wing: a concession to the steep site which was Keck's major visual and engineering problem in designing the house. The flat roof, the sense of volumetric space enclosed by thin planes, and a complete absence of surface decoration also place this fine house squarely in the style. The double-hung windows are not characteristic and were included at the insistence of Mrs. Morehouse. Surely, casement windows would have been Keck's original intention.

The main elevation of the house, with its abstract patterns formed by pure white rectangles defined by vertical ribbons and groups of windows, is strongly reminiscent of paintings by the Dutch painter, Mondrian. Active after 1917, Mondrian was very influential with European architects, especially Aalto and Mies, both of whom came to influence Keck. His paintings are two-dimensional planes which are pure studies in geometric and linear relationships: just like the Morehouse residence's facade. (Mondrian also immigrated to the U.S.)

In conclusion, this residence clearly embodies "the distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type specimen, inherently valuable for a study of a period, style..." and is thus eligible for designation as a Madison Landmark. Also, in the opinion of the nominator, it is "representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual genius influenced his age." The Morehouse house is a key ingredient in the University Heights historic district, adding an extra dimension to the more popularly-recognized masterpieces located there, including the "Airplane House," and the first Harold C. Bradley House.

City of Madison Landmarks Commission
 LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (3)

VII. Significance

- | | |
|--|---|
| (1) Original Owner
Edward Morehouse | (2) Original Use
Single-family residence |
| (3) Architect or Builder
George Fred Keck & William Keck, FAIA
Chicago, Ill. (Native of Watertown) | (4) Architectural Style
International Style (Regional) |
| (5) Date of Construction
1937 | (6) Indigenous Materials Used
None |
| (7) On a separate sheet of paper, describe the significance of the nominated property and its conformance to the designation criteria of the Landmarks Commission Ordinance (33.01), limit of 500 words. | |

VIII. List of Bibliographical References Used

1. Hitchcock and Johnson, The International Style, paperback (New York, 1966)
2. SHSW archives, the George Fred Keck and William Keck collection, under acquisition.
3. Interviews with the Keck brothers over a period of several months.
4. Many articles in architectural magazines, particularly Architectural Record.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.