

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

I. Name of Building or Site

(1) Common

(2) Historic (if applicable)

Herbert A. Jacobs House

II. Location

(1) Street Address

441 Toepfer Avenue

(2) Ward (available @ City Clerk)

District 11, Ward 1

III. Classification

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

Building (single-family residence)

(2) Zoning District

R 2

(3) Present Use

Single-family residence

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

(1) Name(s)

Jerome S. Schmidt (Attorney)

(2) Street Address

441 Toepfer Ave.

(3) Telephone Number

238-3347

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

(1) Parcel Number

0709 - 282 - 0512

(2) Legal Description

Lots 7 & 8, Block 3, Westmorland

VI. Condition of Property

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

Fair

(2) Altered or Unaltered?

Unaltered

(3) Moved or Original Site?

Original Site

(4) Wall Construction

Plywood, some masonry (brick)

(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 plan, the Jacobs house consists of an "L"-shaped building folded around a brick chimney mass, which serves as the unifying, central vertical element. A small house, it has only ~~two~~ two bedrooms in the east wing, and then a "study," which, presumably, could serve as a third bedroom. There is one bathroom, and the cooking, dining, and living areas are integrated into one space, though divided visually from each other by the chimney and a brick wall.

The "L" shape wraps around an exterior "garden" which is located on the far side of the house as viewed from Toepfer Avenue. Both sides of the "L" facing the garden are glazed from floor-to-ceiling. The facade facing Toepfer Avenue was designed for privacy. It consists predominantly of horizontal boards. The flat roof soars well beyond the walls on all sides of the house, and under the eaves facing Toepfer is a narrow ribbon of windows which floats the roof away from the boards below and allows a sense of spatial extension from within the house.

A one-car carport was included on the left side of the Toepfer facade, and entry to the house is gained by walking through the carport-entry and turning right to the main entrance.

A heavy emphasis was placed on horizontality in the design of this house. Horizontal boards, ~~rough~~ raked joints in the masonry, and a soaring, flat roof combine to make this dramatic effect.

The present appearance is much like the original, though the house is in need of ~~some~~ maintenance and minor repairs.

[NOTE: This site is under consideration for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places. Sept., 1973.]

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LANDMARKS AND LANDMARK SITES NOMINATION FORM (4)

VII.(7) Significance of Nominated Property and Conformance to Designation Criteria:

From the time of the construction of Wright's Allen house of 1917 in Kansas, until the Willey House of 1934 in Minneapolis, Wright did no buildings in the Midwest except for those at his own residence and office at Taliesin. When Wright's Midwestern practice did begin to take hold anew, America was emerging from the national depression which began in 1929. It was logical that many felt the nation's housing problems required new tactics, and that many looked to prefabrication as the answer. Wright's interest in the house for the common man also was piqued though he, as other Prairie School architects, was used to relatively wealthy clients and had always built rather impressive houses. Wright's answer was not complete prefabrication, but a mixture of simplicity and some ingenious new construction methods. The "Usonian" house was born, named with a fabricated word which Herbert Jacobs related to Samuel Butler's name for the United States. Wright termed his house in this period a manifestation of the "spirit of democracy." His first opportunity to build a democratic Usonian house came when Madison newspaperman Herbert Jacobs, and his wife, visited Taliesin in the autumn of 1936 to offer Wright "a sort of challenge." Wright accepted the challenge, later writing "The house of moderate cost is not only America's major architectural problem, but the problem most difficult for her major architects. As for me, I would rather solve it with satisfaction to myself and Usonia than build anything I can think of at the moment." The resultant Jacobs house, at 441 Toepfer Ave., was the first Usonian house built in the nation.

Including architect's fee, the house cost \$5,500 in 1937, and it received more reader-response than any other of Wright's houses when the Architectural Forum devoted its January, 1938, issue to Wright's work. So many people asked for "something like it" that Wright eventually designed some forty such houses. On August 18, 1939, for example, Loren Pope wrote to Wright from Falls Church, Virginia, saying "We like the Herbert Jacobs house, both for myself and for the price, and we think it would fit well on our lot." As a result, the Papes built a similar house in 1940, and it is now owned by the National Trust for Historic Preservation.

The Jacobs house carries forth Prairie School principles Wright helped developed around 1900. It emphasizes the horizontal earth-line even more strongly than does, say, the Harold C. Bradley house, and relies on the same brick and wood for materials. The roof still carries beyond the walls to cast a heavy shadow, and the windows are banded together in horizontal strips. Where brick piers tie the Bradley house to the ground, a massive brick chimney anchors the Jacobs house and serves as the "fulcrum" about which the plan is spun and organized. Though carrying through such Prairie School principles, the Usonian houses tried new things in the interest of economy. The attic and basement were eliminated, and the house was set onto a concrete slab without the usual footings. Instead of normal balloon-frame construction, Wright designed walls in a sandwich fashion with a plywood core lined with building paper on both sides, and then faced on the exterior and interior with wooden siding screwed tightly to the core. The wall sections, assembled in advance, were joined together at the corners like a kind of box. The roof was flat, instead of gabled or hipped, to keep down the cost of its construction.

New architectural techniques also were tried to give the Jacobs house both a sense of protected, enclosing and private ~~space~~ shelter; and a sense of expansive, outward-reaching space.

The Jacobs house, combined with the Unitarian Society and the Gilmore House, are the great trilogy of Wright buildings in the Madison area.

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

VII. Significance

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| (1) Original Owner Herbert A. Jacobs | (2) Original Use Single-Family Residence |
| (3) Architect or Builder Frank Lloyd Wright | (4) Architectural Style Wright's Usonian period |
| (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. Wright, Frank Lloyd. The Natural House. (New York, Horizon Press: 1954).
2. Jacobs, Herbert A. Frank Lloyd Wright: America's Greatest Architect. (New York: 1965).
3. Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. In The Nature of Materials. (New York: 1942).
4. National Trust for Historic Preservation. The Pope-Leighey House. (Washington, D.C.: 1969).
5. Scully, Vincent. Frank Lloyd Wright. (New York: 1960)
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