

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**



81

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Peterson, Seth, Cottage

and/or common _____ N/A

2. Location

street & number Dell Avenue SW $\frac{1}{2}$, NE $\frac{1}{2}$, Section 31,
Town 13 North, Range 6 East. _____ not for publication

city, town Lake Delton vic. Lake Delton
~~Delton, Town of,~~ and vicinity of Δ congressional district 2nd

state Wisconsin code 55 county Sauk code 111

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public	<input type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture <input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial <input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational <input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment <input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government <input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial <input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: none

4. Owner of Property

name Wis. Department of Natural Resources Attn: J. R. Huntoon, Administrator
Division of Resource Management

street & number Post Office Box 7921

city, town Madison _____ vicinity of _____ state Wisconsin 53707

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Sauk County Courthouse

street & number 515 Oak Street

city, town Baraboo _____ state Wisconsin 53913

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Wisconsin Inventory of Historic Places has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date 1973 _____ federal state _____ county _____ local

depository for survey records State Historical Society of Wisconsin
816 State Street

city, town Madison _____ state Wisconsin 53706

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Seth Peterson Cottage is a small (30-by-36 feet) one-bedroom, summer cottage with random ashlar foundations and walls, and large areas of glass under a shed-roofed living area, which faces a dramatic view of Mirror Lake to the west. The plan is composed of three essential parts: a bedroom, a living-dining area, and a kitchen-bathroom utility core. The cottage is set on a base that emerges from the slope of the ground and juts westward on battered, ashlar stone foundations. The living-dining and bedroom areas are wrapped around the massive masonry core, which houses the kitchen-bathroom and fireplace. A soaring shed roof shelters the living area and reaches down to the flat-roofed bedroom southeast of it.

The cottage is located in Mirror Lake State Park, owned by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR), where there are no current plans for its continued maintenance and use. It is in seriously deteriorated condition, having received no appreciable maintenance for years. The windows are largely broken and covered with plywood. The roof has serious leaks. Repairs and maintenance are needed soon, or the building will be lost due to its neglect. A six-foot, chain-link fence was built by DNR around the house when it acquired the property late in the 1960s. Though DNR is currently updating its Mirror Lake State Park master plan (May 1981), it has made no determination as of this writing as to the future prospects for this cottage, the only Frank-Lloyd-Wright-designed building owned by the State of Wisconsin.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/ humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		

Specific dates October 1958¹ **Builder/Architect** FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT¹

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Seth Peterson Cottage is representative of the late work of a master architect, Frank Lloyd Wright. One of his last works¹, the drawings for the cottage were signed by Wright only six months before his death in April, 1959.

The cottage is the smallest known commissioned residence built by Wright in Wisconsin, and one of the smallest such commissions he ever executed (apparently approached only by the Stevens cottages of 1939 in Yemassee, South Carolina).² It also appears to have been the last Wright building built on a rectangular module,² for the circle and triangle predominated in his work during 1958 and 1959.

According to Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Director of Archives, Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation, Scottsdale, Arizona, "The Seth Peterson Cottage was one of the last works by Frank Lloyd Wright, and for that very reason has great significance. His work was one steadily expanding thesis of organic architecture, and it grew better and better right up to the time of his death in April of 1959."³ The concern of Taliesin's architects and a private client about the fate of this particular house was dramatized in 1976, when Don Loveness replicated the Seth Peterson Cottage on his property in Minnesota. According to Pfeiffer, "...since the original cottage in Wisconsin had become so vandalized, we felt it a good idea to preserve the design in this way."³

In spite of its tininess, the Peterson cottage evidences many of the visual and spatial characteristics of late-Wright houses, and thus well represents this period in his life's work. The dramatic shed roof over the living area, reaching back to a low, flat-roofed bedroom, and both together wrapped around a dominant masonry mass, were frequent qualities of rectangular Wright houses of the fifties. Examples of other shed-roofed houses of this period include the Blair house (Wyoming, 1953), the Buehler house (California, 1948), the Levin (1950), Eppstein (1953), and Harper (1951) houses in Michigan, and the Shavin house (Tennessee, 1952). "These shed roofs have no obvious prototype in earlier Wrightian domestic architecture."⁴

Other qualities found in Wright's houses of the fifties, also found in the Peterson cottage, are his "concepts of free interior space brought to life by horizontal and vertical masses of warm rock or wood arranged as sculptural forms. Even in these more muted rectangular houses of his last great productive period, he often worked with the void of interior space as a sculptor would work with a solid form, molding it by fireplaces, lighting decks, and masonry or wood masses as partial partitions, but letting it flow freely from one area to the next, and always joining it to the large space of the outdoors through large window and door expanses."⁵ The concept of a closed side to the cottage burrowing slightly into a slope found in the Peterson design is found in the Weisblatt (1951) and Pratt (1951) houses in Michigan; and battered-wall, raised deck-prows were incorporated as well in the Weisblatt house and the Penfield house (Ohio, 1954). "The emphasis on horizontality, massiveness, acceptance of the natural site, and open plan appear in all" of Wright's houses during this period.⁶

(Continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Storrer, William Allin. The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright. Cambridge, Mass., 1979.
 Pyron, Bernard. "Wright's Small Rectangular Houses," Art Journal XXIII, Fall 1962, pp. 20-24.
 NOTE: According to Robert Sweeney's complete Frank Lloyd Wright: An Annotated Bibliography,
 Storrer's book is the only publication specifically mentioning the Peterson cottage.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1.29 (56,200 sq. ft.) **ACREEAGE NOT VERIFIED**
 Quadrangle name Wisconsin Dells South, Wis. **UTM NOT VERIFIED** Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UMT References

A	16	271840	4827000	B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C				D			
E				F			
G				H			

Verbal boundary description and justification: The boundary is the original Seth Peterson lot for which the cottage was designed. It is an average of 281 deep from the shore of Mirror Lake. It is 200 feet wide, with the northeast property line located 64 feet northeast from the cottage. The rear lot line is 135 feet from the southeast facade of the cottage.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	code	county	code
state	code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jeff Dean, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

organization Historic Preservation Division date May 29, 1981
State Historical Society of Wisconsin

street & number 816 State Street telephone (608) 262-1339

city or town Madison state Wisconsin 53706

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature Richard A. Erney Richard A. Erney

title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin date August 5, 1981

For HCERS use only	
I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register	
<u>Carol D. Skell</u>	date <u>11/09-81</u>
Keeper of the National Register	
Attest: <u>Richard A. Erney</u>	date <u>11/19/81</u>
Chief of Registration	

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For HCRS use only

received

date entered

007 9 1981

Continuation sheet Seth Peterson Cottage Item number 8

Page 1

Statement of Significance (Continued):

Less has been written about Wright's work of the 1950s than of earlier periods in his career, perhaps because scholars feel it is too recent for detached judgement. It does seem clear, however, that the Seth Peterson Cottage will be a necessary ingredient in a balanced understanding of this period in Wright's career because of its diminutiveness, its late use of the rectangular module, and, within Wisconsin at least, its unique form. Further research by a scholar of Wright's entire oeuvre would be required to determine whether the cottage represents the smallest-scale application of Wright's residential design principles in all, or a period of, his career, in which case its level of significance could be elevated to "national." Based on known information, however, this cottage is properly nominated to the National Register of Historic Places at this time at the "state" level.

¹ Letter to Jeff Dean from Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Frank Lloyd Wright Memorial Foundation, Scottsdale, Arizona, dated May 22, 1981. Date of construction cited therein is affirmed on the presentation drawing and the plot plan for the cottage, both signed by Wright and dated October 1958.

² Storrer, William Allin. These statements are based on a survey of all Wright-designed residences included in Storrer's exhaustive book (see bibliography).

³ Pfeiffer letter.

⁴ Pyron, Bernard, article in Art Journal, page 23 (see bibliography).

⁵ Pyron, page 24.

⁶ Pyron, page 21.