

TOMEK, F. F., HOUSE

United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1. NAME OF PROPERTY

Historic Name: **TOMEK, F. F., HOUSE**

Other Name/Site Number: "THE SHIP HOUSE"

2. LOCATION

Street & Number: 150 Nuttall Road

Not for publication: __

City/Town: Riverside

Vicinity: __

State: Illinois County: Cook Code: 031

Zip Code: 60546

3. CLASSIFICATION

Ownership of Property

Private: X

Public-Local: —

Public-State: —

Public-Federal: —

Category of Property

Building(s): X

District: —

Site: —

Structure: —

Object: —

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing

1

—

—

1

Noncontributing

1 buildings

— sites

— structures

— objects

1 Total

Number of Contributing Resources Previously Listed in the National Register: 1

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4. STATE/FEDERAL AGENCY CERTIFICATION

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this ___ nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria.

Signature of Certifying Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of Commenting or Other Official

Date

State or Federal Agency and Bureau

5. NATIONAL PARK SERVICE CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that this property is:

- ___ Entered in the National Register
- ___ Determined eligible for the National Register
- ___ Determined not eligible for the National Register
- ___ Removed from the National Register
- ___ Other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper

Date of Action

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6. FUNCTION OR USE

Historic: DOMESTIC

Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: DOMESTIC

Sub: Single Dwelling

7. DESCRIPTION

Architectural Classification: LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS:
Early Modern, Prairie School

Materials:

Foundation: Concrete

Walls: Stucco

Roof: Asphalt shingle

Other: Cedar trim

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Describe Present and Historic Physical Appearance.

The primary source for the description of the home is *Down to Earth, An Insider's View of Frank Lloyd Wright's Tomek House* by Maya Moran.

The Tomek House, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1904 and supervised by Barry Byrne in 1905-1906, is located on the corner of Nuttall and Bartram Roads in Riverside, Illinois.¹ Although Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmsted designed the suburb in 1869, it resembles the suburban ideal Wright envisioned. This romantic village, with plentiful parkland, depressed streets, and acceptance of the nuclear family as the norm, works well with Wright's concepts of flowing interior and exterior spaces and an idealization of the family.² As the nearby Coonley House affirms, Riverside was a perfect landscape, and the site, directly east of Olmsted's Long Common, was a model site, for Frank Lloyd Wright to design a prairie house.

The house is set to the north of the lot, so one gets a long and clear view of the south façade as one is drawn up the extended sidewalk past a planting strip which splits the walk in two. The façade is of natural stucco with rough cut cedar trim and a roof originally of red clay tile, but now replaced with red asphalt shingles.³ The massing of the façade is approximately symmetrical and blocky, recalling the Froebel blocks Wright played with as a child.⁴ The ground floor, an aboveground basement without windows, creates a horizontal band about seventy feet long, extending from one end of the house to the other and defined by cedar trim on both top and bottom. This horizontal movement is broken rhythmically by two symmetrically placed pilasters. The pilasters are unadorned, with only the cedar trim marking their bottoms and tops. The first pair extends forward five feet and surrounds the main door. They support a low entrance roof cantilevering out and the three elements work together to create an intimate opening into the home. These pilasters are only one and one half stories high. The next pair of pilasters is shallower, less than two feet deep, and extends two stories, visually supporting the roof and marking the two ends of the interior of the home. These two pilasters break the long line of the horizontal cedar trim and appear as central structural supports for the home. To the east and west of the interior, the pilasters lose symmetry, as different functions are accommodated on either side of the home. To the east is a rounded raised terrace on the main floor. A low pilaster, approximately two feet wide by five feet long, supports an oversized planting urn, and its height maintains the horizontal band. At this same point, a lower wall passes in front of the façade, concealing a flight of steps to the raised terrace. The low wall, about five feet high and ten feet long trimmed with the same cedar trim on the top and bottom, adds a layer of depth to the façade and keeps the corner of the elevation from being visible, avoiding a box-like appearance. Past this wall, the terrace wall, which maintains the main height, bends away. To the west, rather than a terrace, the house has a square, interior breakfast room.⁵ It reaches up to the lower roof, but

¹ William Allin Storrer, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1984), p 128.

² Frank Lloyd Wright, *Frank Lloyd Wright – An Autobiography* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), book six covers Broadacre City, an ideal suburb Wright designed later in his career, which bears a resemblance to Riverside. For more information on Frederick Law Olmsted's Riverside, see; David DeLong ed., *American Architecture - Innovation and Tradition* (New York: Rizzoli, 1986) pp. 174-177. Albert Fein, *Frederick Law Olmsted and the American Environmental Tradition* (New York: George Brazillier,, 1972), pp. 33-36.

³ A village permit was issued for a new roof on 31 July 1992.

⁴ Joseph Connors, *The Robie House of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 24.

⁵ The drawings are located at Wright's studio at Taliesin, Spring Green, Wisconsin.

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since it is recessed nine feet behind the south facade, it is shadowed by a large cantilever. To maintain the horizontal line, a pilaster extends west two feet, topped by a planting urn and mirroring the one on the east side. There is no low wall in front of this pilaster, however. A much longer wall, extending past the house to a garage was designed, but never built. Instead the house ends in this subtle asymmetry.

Above the long horizontal band, punctuated by pilasters, is a void space, with twelve art glass windows that extend to the eaves. These windows serve to cut the structure off from the roof and create the appearance of a wide hovering roof, unattached and independent from the structure. The two main pilasters reach the roof and bookend the windows, marking the ends of the interior. The low-hipped roof has generous eaves on the south side and long cantilevers on the east and west, the first in Wright's career. To the east, the roof extends fourteen feet unsupported, to shelter the raised terrace. The original owners added pillars to the terrace but not to the rear cantilever, changing the original design. Recent owners have removed them.⁶ The western cantilever is two feet shorter than the eastern, but is supported by the breakfast room walls.

Protruding above this floating roof is the chimney, located to the east of the main door. An upper story lies to the west and is attached to the chimney, visually supported by it. This smaller upper story echoes the cream stucco and cedar trim of the lower floor, but lacks the visual rhythm of the pilasters. Only the chimney juts out a few inches on the east, and is unanswered on the west. The five art glass windows do not visually disconnect the walls from the roof above. However, the windows do extend to the west corner of the building, creating an unsupported corner, which is intriguing and emotionally similar to the extreme cantilever of the lower east end. A low balcony wall extends seven feet past the windows. The window corner and the balcony wall keep the upper story from being read as a box. The upper roof is smaller, but similar to the lower roof, hipped and low. It wraps around the chimney, incorporating that element into the overall massing.

The façade of the Tomek House can be read as a series of intersecting masses, defying the laws of matter but satisfying the laws of logic. The chimney acts as a spindle, a central vertical mass, around which the main horizontal rectangle and the disconnected lower roof have centered. The mass of the square upper floor has attached itself to the chimney, and the upper roof mass ties it to the chimney visually.⁷

The east and west elevations are dominated by their cantilevered lower roofs. While incorporating the same materials, the north elevation lacks the monumentality of the southern elevation. Art glass windows provide light to the ground floor, but also break up the heavy lower rectangle. The kitchen and den comprise the short end of the L-shaped plan and extend past the flat surface of the long living room portion, breaking up the flat horizontalness which makes the

Maya Moran, *Down To Earth – An Insider's View of Frank Lloyd Wright's Tomek House* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995) pp. 25-29. Moran included the plans and a section of the home in her book. Some rooms have different names in the construction drawings and the Wasmuth drawings. Wasmuth names are used here, since these are the more widely circulated drawings

⁶ Moran, *Down to Earth*, p 68. The removal of the supports required the insertion of a steel stiffener beam, welded above the original beam, and reattached to the rafters. The plans were judged to have no adverse effect by the Riverside Preservation Committee, 10 August 1992.

⁷ This reading of the elevation was informed by a similar reading of the Robie house elevation found in; Donald Hoffmann, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House* (New York: Dover Publications, 1984), pp. 39- 42 passim.

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front elevation so powerful. A second entry, from the carriage way, with an exterior stair also lies on this elevation.

Upon entry into the house, the visitor may move to the east or west, into service and playrooms, or may be drawn up a set of wide and welcoming oak steps into the formal spaces of the home. At the top of the stairs is a hall, with seven openings leading into it, the circulation core of the house. Moving clockwise around the hall, straight ahead of the stairs, on the north wall, a door leads to a reception room. On the east wall, an exterior door lies north of the entry to the living room. To the south are the main stairs and the entry to the dining room. On the west wall, the stairs continue to the upper floor, and a small hallway leads to the toilet and kitchen. Congestion in this area is kept to a minimum by eliminating unnecessary doors. Only the reception room, the small hallway near the powder room, and exterior have doors, whereas the dining room and main stairs were designed with doors, they were removed by the Tomeks.

After passing through the hall, the visitor moves to the living room to the east, passing the hearth to the south. The colors in the room are similar to the exterior, smooth stucco walls, but the woodwork is now quarter-sawn oak in pristine condition. The floors are an intricate herringbone parquet pattern with Wrightian banding. There is an abundance of fine oak trim. The bands of art glass windows lining both the north and south sides of the room light it fully and cause a unique patterning of the light. The wide eaves keep direct light and glare from the interior. Radiators, covered by oak grills that are part of the overall design, are built into the north and south walls of the room. The south wall has low radiators with full sized windows, while the northern wall has tall radiators with half sized windows located high on the wall. The ceiling in the living room is crucial to the use of the space. The ceiling in the center of the room is highest, inviting people to come and linger before the hearth. A low bulkhead, which houses a structural steel beam is about two feet lower than the center ceiling and divides the hearth space from the circulation pathways. The ceiling with original colored plaster above the pathways rises above the bulkhead, but is not as high as the ceiling in the center. The oak trim turns this architectural subtlety into a visual map for how one is to move about the room. Facing east, a large picture window is flanked by two smaller art glass windows in the living room alcove that looks out on the terrace, the lawn, and the common beyond.

Circulation pathways are located on the north and south sides of the room, marked by the overhead bulkheads. The pathways lead the visitor through art glass French doors to the raised terrace. The raised terrace, set ten feet above the ground, offers good views of Olmsted's Long Common to the east, and provides considerable privacy from passersby. The low cantilever protects the raised terrace from weather in addition to visually tying it to the overall massing of the home. Facing east, a large picture window, one of the first Wright designed, is flanked by two smaller art glass windows in the living room alcove that look out on the terrace and the common.

After following the northern pathway out to the raised terrace, the visitor turns south, crosses it and re-enters the home on the south, passing through a second set of art glass French doors. From this view, the eye is drawn toward the hearth, the visual center of the exterior. Flat roman bricks and recessed horizontal joints emphasize the horizontalness of the hearth. In plan, the fireplace opening is a half-octagon, with the other half expressed by tiles laid in the fireplace hearth.

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Following the pathway marked by the bulkhead, the visitor passes over the entry stairs through a narrow corridor with windows on either side, overlooking the front yard and the grand stairway. The windows to the exterior are art glass, while the thirteen interior windows are plain. The corridor connecting the living and dining rooms, which is surrounded by glass, has the character of a balcony or a bridge.

Like the living room, the dining room is stucco with oak trim and floors. In both rooms, portions of the walls and ceiling are plastered in autumnal ochres, oranges and browns that emphasize the roughness of the surface. The ceiling is similar with two side pathways marked off by the bulkheads. In the central ceiling space, however, three art glass panels, similar to the art glass windows, shine an autumnal light upon the table. Wright designed a dining set for the room but it no longer remains.⁸ At the west end of the dining area, the small breakfast room has recently been restored. The west wall of the room is banded in art glass and extends past the edge of the house. The breakfast room ceiling was made up of round glass blocks set in a steel grid, giving the room the character of a greenhouse. This ceiling then served as the floor of the balcony above. Constant leaking caused several owners to cover it over. The recent owners removed the accreted materials, removed the steel grid and covered the original ceiling with translucent plastic to return the room to its original appearance while avoiding water leakage.

Turning north from the breakfast room, the visitor passes the rear stairs leading to the ground floor, and into the kitchen, which has undergone considerable change since 1907. The recent owners completed major renovations and returned the original art glass windows that had been removed at some time and stored in the basement.⁹ The kitchen is currently in a complementary style, but is not accurate to the original design.

Turning east to the kitchen, one moves past the toilet and out into the main hall again. The reception room opens off the hall. Windows of a simpler design fill the north wall of the reception room. The walls are of three different colors: orange; light chocolate; and dark chocolate. The window on the east side of the room are arranged to provide privacy from visitors arriving at the rear door.

Turning south to pass up the stairs, the visitor can look at the flow of space between the living and dining rooms. Without doors, the living room, hall and dining room begin to flow, to become spaces rather than distinct rooms, and they begin to be felt as one.

Passing up the steps to the private upper floor, one emerges onto another busy circulation space, with the three bedrooms and a bath opening onto a short hall. The floors on this level are maple and the trim is pine. The detailing is similar in hue, but simpler than that on the more public lower floor. The two guest bedrooms are on the northern side of the building. Both bedrooms have art glass windows, arranged so they seem to connect at the corners and dissolve the barrier to the exterior. The bathroom lies between the two rooms and retains all of the original fixtures.

⁸ Moran, *Down to Earth*, p. 70. In an interview with Richard Novotny, son of the second owner, he recalled that they sold the dining room set when they redecorated in 1940.

Ibid., p. 54. Furniture likely to have been executed by either the Niedecken-Walbridge Company of Milwaukee, or the John W. Ayers Company. Wright used both firms at this time.

⁹ Ibid., p. 56. A permit for rewiring in kitchen and powder room issued by the Village of Riverside in October 1974.

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The master bedroom occupies the south side of the upper floor. Wright designed the furniture for this room as well as the dining room, but it has since disappeared.¹⁰ A large closet is located on the eastern wall. The western end of the room has a door that opens onto the balcony with a translucent floor, providing light to the breakfast room below. Art glass windows fill the southern and western walls, lighting the room and visually dissolving the solidity of the corner where they meet.

A driveway extends past the building on this side, leading to a garage. While Wright intended a detached workshop and garage, it was never executed. The current garage is a non-contributing structure built by the second owner.¹¹

The Tomek House was built in 1905-1906 for Ferdinand Frederick Tomek, who worked for a firm that dealt in wooden moldings and picture frames. He and his wife resided there until 1924, when the house was sold to the Novotny family. The Novotnys resided there for 30 years. In 1954 the house was sold to the Chlumsky family. They lived in the home until 1959, when the Zwiers family purchased it. The Zwiers sold the home to the Moran family in 1974. The Moran family completed many renovation and rehabilitation projects on the home. They renovated the kitchen, which had been substantially altered in the past. The current appearance is more appropriate, while not accurate to the original. They did extensive re-stuccoing of the exterior under the supervision of restoration architect John Vinci and uncovered the original plaster of the interior. They rebuilt the chimney and parapets, resurfaced with copper, and put the kitchen windows back that had been removed in 1940 but had been saved. The floors were restored and new light fixtures were designed which resembled original fixtures that had disappeared. The original bronze gas and electric combination lights were repaired as were many of the sixty-four artglass windows. The owners repaired the breakfast room skylight, making it more faithful to the original design, while eliminating leaks. They reroofed the entire house, rebuilt the chimney and parapets, lined new gutters, reinforced the eastern cantilever and removed the piers added by the original owners. The Tomek house is still a single-family dwelling and has only had five owners since 1906. The most recent owner has done extensive restoration projects. As a result, the Tomek house substantially retains its design integrity.

The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency approved the intensive restoration. In 1979, the owners received a grant for restoration from the Illinois Department of Conservation. The State of Illinois issued a Certificate of Rehabilitation after inspecting of the nineteen-year restoration. In 1993, an Easement was donated to the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy to protect one of the most authentic, important residences created by Wright in his early golden age.

¹⁰ Ibid. , p. 69. Based on an interview with Dorothy Nickol, the Tomek's niece.

¹¹ Permit issued by the Village of Riverside to R. R. Novotny on 2 May 1934 to build a frame garage with a concrete floor, no architect listed.

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State Significance of Property, and Justify Criteria, Criteria Considerations, and Areas and Periods of Significance Noted Above.

In addition to unrivaled public enthusiasm, Frank Lloyd Wright's prairie house has been recognized by architects and scholars as "Wright's greatest invention in this first phase of a long career..."¹ The Tomek House (1905-1906) is a well-preserved example of this prairie house, located in the ideal suburb of Riverside, Illinois. It was given highest significance on the Riverside Historic Structures Survey in 1985 and was cited in the Illinois Historic Structures Survey of 1972.² More than serving as an example of the style, however, the Tomek House documents the development of the style. Assistant architect, Barry Byrne recalled that:

Failing adequate development in his initial use of a given scheme (Wright) would sometimes do as he did in the Robie House, repeat the architectural scheme of another house, in this case the one built for Mr. Tomek, but with the new design highly developed..."³

The Robie house (1908-1909), Wright's most famous prairie house and designated a National Historic Landmark in 1963, is recognized as the "...clearest of Wright's expressions of the prairie house ideal."⁴ In addition to being a good example of an influential and beloved style, the Tomek house is a unique link in the chain of Wright's design development.

In an article for *Modern Architecture* in 1931, Frank Lloyd Wright defined what he attempted to achieve in his prairie architecture. He cited nine qualities of the style. The Tomek house embodies all nine of these qualities.⁵

First- To reduce the number of necessary parts of the house and the separate rooms to a minimum, and make all come together as an enclosed space...

In the Tomek house, the living and dining rooms, separated by the hearth and stair, begin to share space. Bulkheads, rather than walls set off the circulation paths in those rooms. Wright uses compositional elements, stairs or ceiling bulkheads, to define space without dividing it.

Second-To associate the building as a whole with its site by extension and emphasis of the planes parallel to the ground, but keeping the floors off the best part of the site...

The ground floor, unpunctured by windows and outlined by the wood trim, acts as a heavy base for the building. The low-hipped roofs with their wide eaves and dramatic cantilevers emphasize the horizontal. The single vertical element in the composition, the chimney, acts as a visual anchor, tying all the horizontal elements together and rooting them to their site.

¹ Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 684.

² Riverside, Illinois Historic Structures Survey information found at the Riverside Museum, Water Tower, Riverside Illinois 60546. Illinois Department of Conservation, *Illinois Historic Structures Survey* (Springfield: Illinois Department of Conservation, 1974).

³ Barry Byrne, "Review of The Drawings of Frank Lloyd Wright," *Society of Architectural Historians Journal* 22 #2 (May 1963) : 109.

⁴ William J. R. Curtis, *Modern Architecture since 1900* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1987), p. 83.

⁵ Frank Lloyd Wright, *Frank Lloyd Wright - Writings and Buildings* (New York: Horizon Press, 1960), p. 45-47.

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Third-To eliminate the room as a box and the house as another by making all walls enclosing screens...

Boundaries between inside and outside are blurred in the Tomek house. The raised terrace on the east end of the building is an outside space, but it is enclosed by the huge cantilever, visually connecting it to the interior. The breakfast room on the opposite side of the building is an interior space, but protrudes outside the walls. Its translucent ceiling adds to an exterior feeling, as does the lack of support mullion between the two large casement windows. Corner windows and the bands of windows also blur this distinction between interior and exterior.

Fourth-To get the unwholesome basement up out of the ground, entirely above it, as a low pedestal for the living portion of the home...

The ground floor of the Tomek House does serve as a visual pedestal for the dramatic windows and roof forms. Putting the main living spaces on the upper floor provides privacy and dramatic views of the site.

Fifth-To harmonize all necessary openings to "outside" or to "inside" with good human proportions and make them occur naturally-singly or as a series in the scheme of the whole building...

The main entrance does not puncture the flat expanse on the south façade, but is held in place between two pilasters. These pilasters set the area between them off, making the door seem natural, non-violent. The roof over this door is low, cantilevered far out, creating an intimate, proportionate entryway. The band of windows above this door does not puncture the wall, but spans the space between the horizontal base and the roof. A straight band of twelve windows with thin mullions replaces the walls that should support the long roof. Instead, Wright put the supporting piers in the interior spanning the indoor and outdoor spaces with steel. Here Wright "broke the box." A window in the reception room was moved to avoid direct views from the carriage way entry into the room.⁶

Sixth-To eliminate combinations of different materials in favor of mono-material so far as possible; to use no ornament that did not come out of the nature of materials to make the whole building clearer...

Wright varies the color on the inside and the Tomek house retains an unusually large amount of original plaster in an autumnal palette. On the exterior, it is a natural, sand-colored stucco with rough-sawn cedar trim. The wood trim serves to define masses on the exterior and to draw the eye and lead the visitor in the interior. The art glass is integral to the building. It keeps the elements out and adds texture to the void between the horizontal band and the roof. It is also decorative jewelry, filling the organic composition with warm and patterned light. All the original windows are still in place. They contain different widths of zinc coming, a typical Wright design feature in his artglass.

⁶ Maya Moran, *Down to Earth- An Insider's View of Frank Lloyd Wright's Tomek House* (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1995), p. 30.

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Seventh-To incorporate all heating, lighting, plumbing so that these systems became constituent parts of the building itself...

Radiators in the Tomek house are built into the walls, covered by designed wooden screens. The steel beam in the living and dining room ceilings is also the bulkhead that divides the walkways from the central portion of the rooms. The backlit art glass in the dining room and the custom designed light fixtures on the ground floor also incorporate this aesthetic.

Eighth-To incorporate as organic architecture-so far as possible-furnishings making them all one with the building...

Wright designed much of the furniture for the Tomek home. The built-in seats, architectonic sideboard cupboards and cabinets remain, although the freestanding furniture has been removed.

Ninth-Eliminate the decorator...

By creating a unified color palette, providing furniture, and limiting the need for curtains, Wright created a unified, style-less interior that residents of the Tomek house would never need to "update."

By Wright's own definition, the Tomek house is an exemplary prairie style home. Later in his life he saw the house as part of a group "especially suited to the prairie...which are virtual one floor arrangements, raised a low story height above the level of the ground."⁷ Other homes he included in this group were; the Coonley house (an NHL, 1970), also in Riverside, the Thomas, Heurtley and Robie houses. Edgar Kaufmann chose the south elevation of the Tomek house to illustrate a portion of Wright's text discussing perfect, integral forms.⁸

Scholars have come to see the Tomek house, in plan and in elevation, as a predecessor to the Robie house, the prairie house *par excellence*. Built only three years before the Robie house, the Tomek house documents the development of Wright's thoughts as a sketch demonstrates the development of a final design.

In elevation, the Tomek house is the first link in a chain continuing with the Yahara Boat Club first thought to have been conceived in 1902, but later correctly dated 1905,⁹ developing through the River Forest Tennis Club (1906), and ending at the Robie House. The Yahara Boat Club, an unexecuted project, "was the first design in which Wright carried to its logical conclusions his interest in abstract composition."¹⁰ The long, unbroken base, the wide roof disengaged by bands of windows, and the plain end pilasters articulate the mass, resembling the form of the Tomek house. The River Forest Tennis Club was also a narrow building with a cantilevered roof. Its terrace and pointed end bays begin to suggest the end treatment of the Tomek and Robie houses.¹¹ The Tomek house takes these features and develops them further. The pilasters add a

⁷ Wright, *Frank Lloyd Wright on Architecture – Selected Writings 1894-1940* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1941), p. 75.

⁸ Edgar Kaufmann Jr. ed., *Frank Lloyd Wright - An American Architect* (New York: Bramhall House, 1965), p. 54.

⁹ Moran, *Down to Earth*, p.48.

¹⁰ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials – The Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1942), illustration 79.

¹¹ Joseph Connors, *The Robie House of Frank Lloyd Wright* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press,

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sense of rhythm to the south elevation. The low-hipped roof hovers over this articulated mass, and the dramatic cantilever draws attention to it. Low walls and corner windows assure that no portion of the home appears box-like.

The main elevation of the Robie house elaborates on these elements. With the experience of the Tomek house, and with roman brick, a more expensive material, Wright creates a complex elevation that more fully incorporates his design intents. He uses the long, thin roman bricks, with raked out horizontal mortar joints and flush verticals to emphasize the horizontal.¹² Rather than creating a rhythm with pilasters on the lower level, as he does at the Tomek, Wright uses three layers of overlapping brick walls to create “wall screens,” that reinforce the horizontalness of the design. The ends of the Robie house become symmetrical, prow-shaped interior spaces. The front door is switched to the rear of the home. While more fully articulated and without a main door, the exterior of the Robie house resembles the Tomek house. A low-hipped roof cantilevers above the main living space, again visually disconnected from the body of the house by a band of art glass windows. The smaller upper floor, with a low roof with wide eaves, attaches itself to the chimney, the primary vertical element of the composition. In the Robie house, the chimney has been visually enlarged by including a closet space in its mass, adding strength to the vertical element of the composition.¹³ Set backs and corner windows are again used to avoid a boxy appearance. The changes in degree between the elevations of the Tomek and Robie homes suggest a continuum of design.

As the elevation of the Robie house developed from ideas used in the Tomek house, so did the plan. In plan, both of these homes are of the “in-line” type, as defined by Wright. A variation on the cruciform theme, these projects are normally elevated, with a horizontal axis, the living and dining room spaces, through which passes a primary vertical element, the chimney. A cross-axis with vertical implications then passes next to this vertical element, the main entry path in both the Robie and Tomek houses.¹⁴ Wright used this general plan configuration throughout his career, long after he left the prairie style behind, but it was in these two houses that he fully developed the type.

The “in-line” plan began with the unexecuted McAfee house (1894), where the main floor entry created a cross-axis with the primary living space, dividing it in two. Here the stair divides the kitchen and servant’s area. Wright’s prairie ideals of unity of space and economy of elements drove him to use and refine this basic plan in subsequent commissions. The concept appears in the Husser house (1897). Here, Wright uses the entry stairs and a pair of alcoves to create a cross axis and divide the central space into two. He also extends the dining space with a polygonal apse, creating a second cross axis and further defining it as a separate space. This plan is compressed and improved in the Tomek house. Wright pushes the secondary spaces to the back of the home, isolating the formal spaces, the heart of his problem. He reduces the number of elements by bringing the stairs into the home. The stairs and the hearth act together to divide the living and dining room spaces in the center, rather than on the sides, as was done in the Husser

1984), p. 46-58.

¹² Moran, *Down to Earth*, p 27. Wright used this method of laying brick frequently in this period, including in the fireplace in the Tomek house.

¹³ Donald Hoffmann, *Frank Lloyd Wright’s Robie House* (New York: Dover Publications, 1984), p 28.

¹⁴ Paul Laseau and James Tice, *Frank Lloyd Wright – Between Principle and Form* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992), p. 74.

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house. This increases the distinction between the two and eliminates the need for a second cross axis.

In the Robie house, the changes in plan are refinements on the Tomek plan. The great breakthrough of the Robie house was the flow of ceiling space between the living and dining rooms. It is as if Wright stood in the Tomek hall, looking to the south, and saw this possibility of unity of space. In the Robie house, Wright pulls the secondary spaces even further away from the central core and makes the two ends of this main portion symmetrical; both pointed as the prow of a ship. The crucial change made in the Robie house was the division of the living and dining room spaces. The two are again divided in the center by the vertical entry stair-hearth unit. This time, however, the six-foot wide stairway becomes two narrow flights of stairs, rather than a single wider one, and option Wright first considered for the Tomek House according to drawings at Taliesin.. This change allows Wright to widen the pathways between the two main spaces. In the Tomek house, the hall on the north breaks the flow of space, and the dining room is narrow. In the Robie house, the pathways are widened. This strengthens the connection between the rooms and achieves the ideal of unity of space.¹⁵

In the Robie house, Wright solved the design problem of the prairie home. The solution, however, was not born whole, rather its development can be seen in Wright's previous projects, most obviously the Tomek house with the first cantilevers in a residence. In this home, Wright developed the massing of his elevations and finally glimpsed a unity of space. At the time it was built, the Tomek House was on the cutting edge of architectural change and was one of Wright's great contributions to architecture. The repose, the two dramatic cantilevers (two feet larger than those at the Robie House), the masterly touch of knowing where to stop and not overdo, the stately proportions and careful detailing are hallmarks of a mature artist, not to be expected of one in his thirties. The Tomek House contains many innovations that became characteristic of Wright's later work, such as the fenestration, use of glass (art glass, picture windows, and interior glass), corner windows, far-reaching cantilevers, a carport and porch integral to the house and lacking corner supports. In an interview in the later part of his life, Mr. Robie recalled how impressed his contractor was with Wright's drawings. It was tightly designed as a whole, and the drawings left the contractor with no forgotten or undesigned elements to deal with.¹⁶ Perhaps this was due to the fact that Wright had designed this basic building before, in the Tomek house, and in the Robie house he was merely fine-tuning these elements to achieve perfection. In the Tomek house the ideas of the Robie house appear almost fully formed, and in fact Edgar Kaufmann felt;

...the dramatic entrance stair and the main rooms...in the Tomek house, (are) designed with a surer architectural touch than the same elements in the more famous Robie House... The Robie House benefits from better materials and a finer exterior, especially in the expression of its subordinate parts; but in spatial essentials the Tomek house is clearly superior.¹⁷

¹⁵ Hoffmann, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Robie House*, p. 64.

¹⁶ Ferdinand Robie, "Mr. Robie knew what he wanted," *Architectural Forum* 109 (October 1958) : 206.

¹⁷ Edgar Kaufmann Jr., Introduction to *Frank Lloyd Wright – The Early Work* (New York: Horizon Press, 1968), p. xvi.

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While aesthetics are debatable, the development of the Tomek house adds depth to the understanding of the National Historic Landmark Robie House, by lighting the path that Wright's mind took while solving the problem of the prairie home. It is this association, with its place as a well-preserved prairie house, which makes the Tomek house an important work in the history of modernism in architecture.

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Permit File for 150 Nuttall, Riverside, Illinois. Available at Riverside Village Hall Permit Office, 27 Riverside Road, Riverside, Illinois 60546.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- Preliminary Determination of Individual Listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- Previously Listed in the National Register.
- Previously Determined Eligible by the National Register.
- Designated a National Historic Landmark.
- Recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey: #
- Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record: #

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other (Specify Repository):

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10. GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Acreage of Property: approximately .4 acre

UTM References:	Zone	Easting	Northing
	16	432150	4631250

Verbal Boundary Description:

Sublot 4 (except the West 45 feet thereof) in Resubdivision of Lots 4, 5, 6 and 7 in W.A. Havemeyer's Subdivision of Lots 977-981, and the South ½ of Lot 976 in Block 18 in the Third Division of Riverside, in Section 36, Township 39 North, Range 12 East of the Third Principal Meridian in Cook County, Illinois. Pin # 15-36-103-022-000.

Boundary Justification:

The nominated property includes the home and the lot historically associated with the Tomek House.

11. FORM PREPARED BY

Name/Title: Elizabeth Ann Milnarik

Address: 358 Longcommon Drive
Riverside, Illinois 60546

Telephone: (708) 447-1150

Date: September 5, 1998

Edited by: Carolyn Pitts
National Historic Landmarks Survey
National Park Service
200 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106

Telephone: (215)597-8875

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS SURVEY