

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY - NOMINATION FORM**

(Type all entries - complete applicable sections)

STATE: <b>Wisconsin</b>	
COUNTY: <b>Dane</b>	
FOR NPS USE ONLY	
ENTRY NUMBER	DATE
	<b>APR 11 1973</b>

**1. NAME**

COMMON: **Congressmen to be notified:  
Senator William Proxmire**

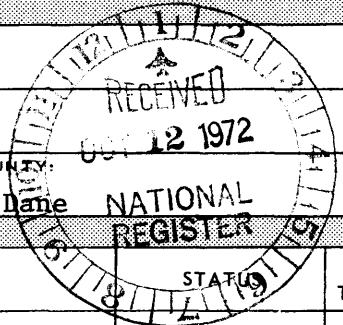
AND/OR HISTORIC: **Senator Gaylord Nelson  
First Unitarian Society Meeting House Rep. Robert Kastenmeier, 2nd Cong.**

**2. LOCATION** Dist.

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**900 University Bay Drive**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Shorewood Hills, Village of**

STATE <b>Wisconsin</b>	CODE <b>55</b>	COUNTY: <b>Dane</b>	CODE <b>025</b>
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**3. CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY (Check One)	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC
<input type="checkbox"/> District <input type="checkbox"/> Site <input type="checkbox"/> Object <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Building <input type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input type="checkbox"/> Public <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private <input type="checkbox"/> Both	Public Acquisition: <input type="checkbox"/> In Process <input type="checkbox"/> Being Considered <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Occupied <input type="checkbox"/> Unoccupied <input type="checkbox"/> Preservation work in progress	Yes: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Restricted <input type="checkbox"/> Unrestricted <input type="checkbox"/> No

PRESENT USE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

<input type="checkbox"/> Agricultural	<input type="checkbox"/> Government	<input type="checkbox"/> Park	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	<input type="checkbox"/> Comments
<input type="checkbox"/> Commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> Industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> Private Residence	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify)	
<input type="checkbox"/> Educational	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Religious		
<input type="checkbox"/> Entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> Museum	<input type="checkbox"/> Scientific		

**4. OWNER OF PROPERTY**

OWNER'S NAME:  
**First Unitarian Society**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**900 University Bay Drive**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Shorewood Hills, Village of**

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

CODE:  
**55**

**5. LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.:  
**Dane County Register of Deeds**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**City-County Building, 210 Monona Avenue**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Madison**

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

CODE:  
**55**

**6. REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE OF SURVEY:  
**Wisconsin Survey of Historic Sites and Buildings**

DATE OF SURVEY: **1970**  Federal  State  County  Local

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS:  
**State Historical Society of Wisconsin**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**816 State Street**

CITY OR TOWN:  
**Madison**

STATE:  
**Wisconsin**

CODE:  
**55**

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

STATE: <b>Wisconsin</b>	FOR NPS USE ONLY
COUNTY: <b>Dane</b>	
ENTRY NUMBER: <b>APR 11 1973</b>	DATE

7. DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	(Check One)					
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> Good	<input type="checkbox"/> Fair	<input type="checkbox"/> Deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> Ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> Unexposed
	(Check One)			(Check One)		
	<input type="checkbox"/> Altered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Unaltered		<input type="checkbox"/> Moved	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Original Site	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (if known) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The dominant feature of the First Unitarian Society Meeting House is its plow-like, or ship like "prow" jutting northeast into the prairie, giving the viewer a strong sensation of motion. This form is so lyrical that various metaphors have been attached to it, the best-known of which is Wright's own analogy of hands folded in prayer. The "prow" is actually a multi-purpose auditorium used for worship, social activities, or lectures or concerts. Each use requires a different arrangement of the lightweight, moveable pews. In the worship mode, the congregation faces a massive stone pulpit above which rises a choir loft, and on both sides of which are louvred windows overlooking spreading trees and a distant lake.

The roofing system over this "prow" is the most interesting structural part of the Meeting House. Inside a ridge line is centered over the auditorium running from the rear, over the pulpit, and culminating in a soaring apex forty feet above the ground. But though the interior ceiling form is basically triangular, the exterior form, viewed in section or from the rear of the building, is trapezoidal. Viewed from the northeast, Wright's roof-form is a trompe-l'oeil as it appears as though it would have a triangular section. The space between the exterior trapezoid and the included triangle-ceiling is used for the roof framing.

"The roof is supported by a series of trusses built entirely of nailed 2 x 4's and 2 x 6's, 'a sort of hammer-and-saw field day,' according to the Taliesin people. Each pair of trusses acts like a center-hinged arch. Top chords, progressively shortening from base to prow, are in the same plane. Lower chords are in a warped plane nearly horizontal at the base and nearly vertical at the prow. This creates an interesting warped ceiling shape."<sup>1</sup>

Thus, though one would swear the roof has a ridge pole when one views the prow from beneath or the front, in fact there is no ridge pole. The roofing material over the "prow" is green copper laid in geometric strips to emphasize the shape of the roof and its overhanging, sheltering lines.

The prow-form intersects the main body of the Meeting House, which is a fairly straight-forward Wright statement not unrelated to earlier houses and Prairie buildings. It is long, low and linear, with exaggerated eaves hugging the ground and giving a very strong feeling of "shelter." Below the roof the exterior material is largely indigenous stone roughly-cut and laid in the familiar Wrightian random fashion. In the outer wings, massive stone piers alternate with floor-to-ceiling doors and windows, giving both immediate visual and physical contact with the outside. At critical points in the plan, where the building turns corners or ends, extra-large stone piers penetrate the roof to call attention to their unusual and dramatic function.

Entry to the Meeting House is gained from the southeast end of the building, where one passes beneath an extremely dramatic over-hanging roof which swoops down to nearly six feet from the ground, requiring tall individuals to duck for entry.

<sup>1</sup>Arch. Forum, Dec., 1952, p. 87.



SEE INSTRUCTIONS

8. SIGNIFICANCE

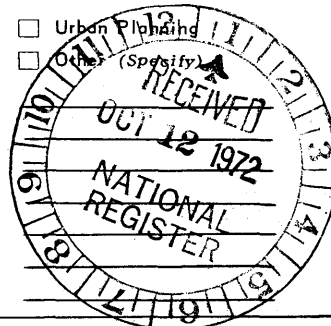
PERIOD (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- Pre-Columbian       16th Century       18th Century       20th Century  
 15th Century       17th Century       19th Century

SPECIFIC DATE(S) (If Applicable and Known) 1947 and 1951.

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE (Check One or More as Appropriate)

- |  |                                      |   |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal              | <input type="checkbox"/> Education   | <input type="checkbox"/> Political      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prehistoric             | <input type="checkbox"/> Engineering | <input type="checkbox"/> Religion/Phi-  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Historic                | <input type="checkbox"/> Industry    | osophy                                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture             | <input type="checkbox"/> Invention   | <input type="checkbox"/> Science        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape   | <input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Art                     | Architecture                         | <input type="checkbox"/> Social/Human-  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Commerce                | <input type="checkbox"/> Literature  | itarian                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Communications          | <input type="checkbox"/> Military    | <input type="checkbox"/> Theater        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conservation            | <input type="checkbox"/> Music       | <input type="checkbox"/> Transportation |



STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Ordinarily buildings less than 50 years old and religious structures do not qualify for the National Register. However, the First Unitarian Society Meeting House meets two criteria which warrant its inclusion on the Register, namely [1] though a religious building, it derives its primary significance from architectural distinction, and [2] though less than 50 years old, it is a major work of a master architect of worldwide renown. Indeed, this building is one of only four Wright-designed buildings in the state of Wisconsin which were selected by the American Institute of Architects as being worthy of being "forever preserved."<sup>1</sup>

According to Vincent Scully, Jr., this building came fairly late in Wright's career (designed in 1947) when he was reacting to "International Style pressure" with new imagery and dramatic forms and spaces. Out of his office in this period came the Guggenheim Museum and later the Beth Sholom Synagogue, called Wright's "Own sacred mountain."<sup>2</sup> The imagery at First Unitarian...a ship, praying hands...cannot be denied, nor can the structural virtuosity called upon to create such drama. Also employed here was an unusual organizational grid, in this case an equilateral triangle, though increasingly elsewhere a circle. Such nonrectangular grids helped Wright achieve one of his most enduring goals: the breaking of the "box." The 60° triangles are recalled in floor scoring and some furniture, as well as in acute and obtuse angles in wall planes.

The observed imagery and grids in the building are reinforced by Wright's own statement about the design: "As the square has always signified integrity and the sphere universality, the triangle stands for aspiration. Here is a church where the whole edifice is in the attitude of prayer."<sup>3</sup>

The parish and the minister, who has been with the congregation since 1952, are lavish in their praise for the Meeting House. The attraction of a Wright masterpiece has had economic impact as the congregation nearly doubled in the first two years after the completion of the building, while Sunday school attendance increased 50 per cent. The parish was responsible for much of the construction of the building, hauling all the sandstone 30 miles to the site, plastering walls, and doing many other chores. Taliesin staff landscaped the site and manufactured the furniture. William C. Wright, Frank Lloyd Wright's father, was one of the organizers of this parish in 1879, and his famous son was enrolled as a member for many years.<sup>4</sup>

1 - Perrin, p. 140.  
2 - Scully, p. 31.

3 - Architectural Forum, Dec., 1952, p. 86.  
4 - Ibid, p. 90.

SEE INSTRUCTIONS

**9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

- 1] Architectural Forum, December, 1952, article by Herb Jacobs, pp. 85-92.
- 2] Architectural Forum, January, 1948, Wright's drawings for the building and brief text, pp. 118-119.
- 3] Scully, Vincent, Jr., Frank Lloyd Wright, George Braziller, Inc., N. Y., 1960. Figs. 121-123; text p. 31.
- 4] Kaufmann, Edgar, and Raeburn, Ben, eds., Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings, Horizon Press, 1960, p. 338.
- 5] Perrin, Richard W. E., The Architecture of Wisconsin, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Madison, 1967. Pp. 140, 160. Illus., pp. 142, 162.

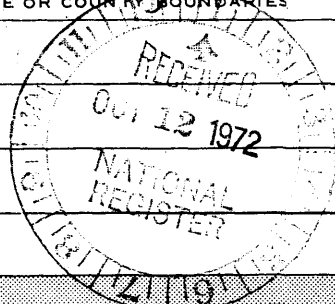
**10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA**

LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING A RECTANGLE LOCATING THE PROPERTY			OR	LATITUDE AND LONGITUDE COORDINATES DEFINING THE CENTER POINT OF A PROPERTY OF LESS THAN TEN ACRES		
CORNER	LATITUDE	LONGITUDE		LATITUDE	LONGITUDE	
	Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds		Degrees Minutes Seconds	Degrees Minutes Seconds	
NW	° ' "	° ' "		N43 ° 04 ' 34 "	W89 ° 26 ' 04 "	
NE	° ' "	° ' "				
SE	° ' "	° ' "				
SW	° ' "	° ' "				

APPROXIMATE ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY: Approximately 4

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTRY BOUNDARIES

STATE:	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE
STATE:	CODE	COUNTY:	CODE



**11 FORM PREPARED BY**

NAME AND TITLE:  
**Jeffrey M. Dean, Preservation Planner**

ORGANIZATION: **State Historical Society of Wisconsin**      DATE: **July 10, 1972**

STREET AND NUMBER:  
**816 State Street**

CITY OR TOWN: **Madison**      STATE: **Wisconsin**      CODE: **55**

**12 STATE LIAISON OFFICER CERTIFICATION      NATIONAL REGISTER VERIFICATION**

As the designated State Liaison 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 National Park Service. The recommended level of significance of this nomination is:

National     State     Local

Name James Morton Smith  
**James Morton Smith**

Title Director, State Historical Society of Wisconsin

Date OCT 6 1972

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register.

Robert Van Udey  
Chief, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation

Date 4/11/73

ATTEST:  
W. J. [Signature]  
Keeper of The National Register

Date 4 9 73

SEE INSTRUCTIONS