

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

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

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC **JOHN J. GLESSNER HOUSE**

AND/OR COMMON

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER **1800 Prairie Avenue**

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN **Chicago**

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT **7th**

VICINITY OF

STATE **Illinois**

CODE

COUNTY **Cook**

CODE

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input 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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME **Mrs. Marian Despres, Chairman**

STREET & NUMBER **The Chicago School of Architecture Glessner House
1800 South Prairie Avenue**

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

VICINITY OF

STATE

Illinois

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. **Cook County Courthouse**

STREET & NUMBER **Clark and Washington Streets**

CITY, TOWN

Chicago

STATE

Illinois

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE **Historic American Building Survey OAHPS NPS Department of Interior**

DATE

1963

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS **Library of Congress**

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

DC

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7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

From the exterior, Glessner House, is massive yet elegant. The foundation is limestone mixed with patches of brick and mortar ending at ground line. The stone-like walls are actually 6 to 8 inch sheets of granite bonded into brick, the courtyard walls are light pink brick with limestone lintels and sills on the windows. The frame interior walls are brick faced with plaster applied on the brick.

The doors are oak with heavy iron strap hinges and latches. Steep pitched gable roofs are covered with terra cotta tiles, the ell roof has copper sheatling.

Since a rare account of the house exists written by Glessner himself it is appropriate to quote: "The courtyard elevation, of common brick of slightly pinkish color, with gray limestone trimmings, is quite as interesting as the street fronts, though in a different way. By special arrangment the same brick was used in the adjoining house, so that all walls of the courtyard are of the same texture and color."

When first built, the house was subject of much remark by passers-by, because of the narrow windows in its north side along 18th Street, just enough to light the narrow corridors, these critics not realizing that on the sough side looking on the courtyard, Mr. Richardson had put generous windows that let in a flood of sunlight when the sun shines in Chicago.

All bathroom walls and floors are of white glazed tiles; the back entrance corridor and kitchen walls, and the carriage house and stables (now garage) are of white glazed brick. The heating is from the furnace room under the garage, thus avoiding the dust and dirt and noise of coal and ashes in the house,--a hot water system in it, admirable for the time when it was put in.

Either the floors are deadened or the ceilings doubled, or both, so that sounds do not carry through the house, basement and furnace room ceilings are plastered, and all have cement floors.

The kitchen and pantries are on the main or parlor floor, are well lighted, well ventilated, convenient, easily cleaned; and the small dining room adjoining has its table, its little sideboard, its writing desk. The entrance is through the great arch on Eighteenth Street on the small corridor, and thence to these offices. Also there is convenient access down the basement stairs to the school room, so that it is easy to serve company there.

The tiles in the mantels of the first-floor bedroom, and of the second guest rooms are by William De Morgan, with antique Persian tiles in the dining room, fireplaces and irons are old Colonial and old Continental European, and that in library is old Scotch, all of them found in junk

(69)

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input 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	1885-1887	BUILDER/ARCHITECT	Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886)
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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

H. H. Richardson was the second American architect to study at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris (after Richard Morris Hunt). His earlier works, after returning to Boston in 1865, showed some of the eclecticism that dominated architecture in the second half of the 19th century. Glessner House in Chicago is the product of his mature years - in the early medieval idiom that is still called "Richardsonian-Romanesque." The house for J. J. Glessner, a vice president of International Harvester, is one of his greatest houses - the same details reflect this style - heavy, rough stone courses, rounded arches and turrets.

The house, in the center of Chicago's original Gold Coast is fortress-like on the exterior as it was on an urban site but it was planned so that the family rooms open out into a quiet inner courtyard. Prairie Avenue had been the street of millionaires both before and after the 1871 fire - here lived Pullman, Armour, Kimball and Marshall Field. During the 1920's the area deteriorated and today there are a few ghosts of what was once the most fashionable neighborhood in Chicago. John J. Glessner, an aggressive and successful businessman was also a patron of the arts and well known philanthropist. Both he and his wife were influential in furnishing this house and it must have been Richardson's austere style not his reputation, that drew Glessner to him. The architect gave him a great work of art.

There is a long, fascinating account of the client-architect relationship in an unpublished booklet: The Story of a House by J. J. Glessner (reproduced in HABS records). The Glessner family enjoyed living in the house and cared for it - on their deaths in 1932 they willed the property to the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects but the upkeep forced the sale by the heirs. Several deed transfers occurred and alterations imposed on the interior (1946) but today a restoration is underway.

The memorial pamphlet by Glessner describes his house and the architect that created it in detail: "Simplicity and proportion were the strongest characteristics of his work. The same style and finish go all through this house, from front to back, whether in show places or in obscure places.

Altogether, the house was as well built in every detail as the architect could suggest or as we know how to build, and one great cause for satisfaction was that there was absolutely no bill of extra charges. It was completed for the contract price and no more. There were no labor troubles and no disputes with the builders, Norcross Brothers of Worcester, Massachusetts. 1

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9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

See continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

UTM REFERENCES

A	16	448450	4633940	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Lots 39, 40 and the northern 17 feet of lot 38 in Assessor's Division of Southwest Fractional 1/4 of Section 22, Township 39 North, Range 14, East of the Third Principal Meridian.

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 Carolyn Pitts Architectural Historian

ORGANIZATION

DATE

~~Historic Sites Survey NPS Dept of the Interior~~

~~7-30-75~~

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1100 L Street N.W.

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Washington

DC

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 National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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Glessner House

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shops after they had been taken from old buildings; many of the gas and electric fixtures, wall papers, curtains and carpets, except antique rugs, are by William Morris, and have been renewed from the same patterns when renewal was necessary; yellow glass under chipped white glass in the door leading to the courtyard gives a feeling of sunlight in the hall even in cloudy weather.

Mr. Richardson insisted on one or two small extravagances, fine imported marbles in parlor and hall mantels, imported washbowls from the English factories of Meyer-Sniffen, because more generous in size than those to be had here, silver plate on plumbing fixtures, though nickel would have been cheaper and have given less care, but he agreed with Matthew Arnold in bewailing the common "want of fastidiousness and the proneness to mistake nickel for silver" and would have none of that in this work. He was particular about the stair rail and balusters. Of the latter there are four different patterns, one of each on each step, all slender, graceful fine reproductions from some distinguished old Colonial house, the Longfellow house at Cambridge, if my memory is not at fault--but I distinctly remember that they cost one dollar each.

The furniture in the dining room is from designs by Charles Coolidge; in the drawing room from Francis Bacon's designs--in both cases executed by Davenport; there are some Herter chairs, some Scott bookcases and cabinets and beds (in your mother's bedroom and George's); Francis Bacon's furniture in Frances' room and the main guest room, and in the second guest room a set of typical French furniture bought in Paris. One of the Scott bookcases is the first piece of furniture he designed for us. That was in 1876. We thought then, and still think it beautiful as a single piece." 1

There have been unfortunate interior alterations and the courtyard brick is covered with grime but it is to be hoped that the current restoration will return to its original quality.

1

Glessner, John J. The Story of a House Unpublished March 1923. Copy in Collection of George R. Mathey Ipswich, Massachusetts Transcribed in HABS files.

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Glessner's touching record of Richardson's conversation on his death bed with him is worth noting - "I am convinced that this house of ours is the one of all that he built that he would have liked most to live in himself. It was his last work." 2

Richardson's innovations would also be noted as he was an inventive and highly original genius. He was responsible for making windows an integral part of interior design, their size and placement determined by need rather than external symmetry. He transformed the New England cottage into a large, rambling, asymmetrical house in harmony with its site. This very much influenced the young Frank Lloyd Wright. Richardson was also the first American architect to find functional industrial buildings interesting (warehouses, railroad stations, libraries, etc) thus altering the image of the architect as commissioned only by the aristocratic patron. His influence on his contemporaries was enormous. He worked with the painter John LaFarge, the sculptor Augustus Saint-Gaudens and the architects Charles F. McKim and Stanford White. Richardson's architecture, however important to Sullivan and Wright, was eclipsed by Burnham and McKim's "White City;" the Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893.

¹ Glessner, John J. The Story of a House Unpublished, March 1928. Copy in Collection of George R. Mathey, Ipswich, Massachusetts. Transcribed in HABS files.

2

Ibid

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