

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Wingspread
other names/site number Johnson, Herbert F., House

2. Location

street & number 33 East Four Mile Road not for publication
city, town Racine vicinity
state Wisconsin code WI county Racine code 101 zip code 53402

3. Classification

| | | | |
|---|---|-------------------------------------|------------------|
| Ownership of Property | Category of Property | Number of Resources within Property | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | Contributing | Noncontributing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input type="checkbox"/> district | <u>1</u> | _____ buildings |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input type="checkbox"/> site | _____ | _____ sites |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure | _____ | _____ structures |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object | _____ | _____ objects |
| | | <u>1</u> | _____ Total |

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 1

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. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official _____ Date _____

State or Federal agency and bureau _____

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

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. See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper _____ Date of Action _____

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic/single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Foundation/Center

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Wrightian

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Kasota sandstone on rock ballast
walls brick and red plaster, oak and
cypress siding

roof red tile

other concrete floors

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

In 1981 the Johnson Foundation in its publication Wingspread accurately described the house:

Visitors approach Wingspread at the entrance of Four Mile Road. The drive, marked by easy turns which follow the land lines of the prairie, crosses a wooded ravine before the building comes into view with its dominant earth colors.

The 12-acre conference center site is extensively landscaped in a manner which follows the natural contour of the Midwestern terrain, with a formal planting in the area near the house. The plantings of evergreens and other trees specified by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1938 have now matured to create a harmonious balance with the architecture. To the observer the effect is one which combines strength with composure.

The Wingspread site is part of a larger, contiguous area on Wind Point, which has been designated as a Wisconsin wildlife refuge. Wind Point is itself a promontory jutting east into Lake Michigan and dominated by a headland lighthouse. Wingspread is therefore within walking distance of Lake Michigan's western coastline. Another feature of Wingspread's grounds is a ribbon of nature walks extending through woods, pasture, the ravine and beside reflecting pools. ...

Architects find particular interest in the zoned plan of the structure and the tall spaces of the central living area flowing upward around the chimney shaft, which extends through the clerestory roof.

Wright called Wingspread "the last of the prairie houses" which he began thirty years earlier. It is the largest and most dramatic of his prairie-inspired homes and draws for its central portion upon the prototype of all prairie houses--the Indian wigwam, with a fire in the center and a hole in the top to let the smoke out.

The domed structure of the former Johnson family residence housed the living areas, with the elliptical chimney stack as the central feature of the massive room. Four wings are flung out from the living area. Originally, these were a master's wing ending in a cantilevered porch and

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D NHL criteria 4:

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1938

Significant Dates

1938

Cultural Affiliation

Significant Person

Johnson, Herbert F.

Architect/Builder

Wright, Frank Lloyd

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

"Wingspread" and the Johnson's Wax Building in Racine were built at about the same time (1937-1938). Herbert Fisk Johnson was the President of Johnson's Wax Company. Wright considered the Herbert F. Johnson House the finest (and most expensive) house he had built up to that date. It is so completely wedded to its site, rolling grassy slopes and shallow ravines, that it seems to grow naturally from the earth. This large Prairie house sitting squarely on the land has the same surprise feeling upon entering--a sense of expansiveness, of soaring, moving, unending space, rather like a Gothic cathedral. Wright said that the reality of a house is not its walls or roof, but the space within. He spent a lifetime exploding the box-like rooms of traditional houses. He designed integrated, beautiful rooms to live in and extraordinary exterior forms that are inseparable from them. The Johnson house also displays what Wright called the "eloquence of materials," beautifully finished and integrated surfaces of wood, concrete and brick put together with respect and taste.

Hitchcock, in discussing the Herbert Johnson house at Wind Point north of Racine, quoted Wright as saying that it was the last of his Prairie Houses. The house is "zoned" in great radiating arms -- the living quarters in the center, the masters' rooms in one wing, a children's wing, services in the third and guest rooms and garage in the fourth. It is an elaborate expansion of the plan for the Coonley House (1907) in Riverside, Illinois. Resembling a great bird or an ocean liner, it seems to float over the grassy slopes and gentle ravines. The complex was presented by Mr. and Mrs. Johnson to the Johnson Foundation in 1959 and today it is one of the most important educational and cultural conference centers in the Middle West.

Frank Lloyd Wright planned the house so well that no major architectural changes have been necessary in converting the building into a conference center. The grounds also house an outstanding collection of sculpture including works by

9. Major Bibliographical References

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 # _____

See continuation sheet

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of property 11.8 acres

UTM References

A

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 0 |
| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

C

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 5 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

B

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 0 | 7 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 0 |
| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

D

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|------|---|---------|---|---|---|----------|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 6 | 4 | 3 | 6 | 7 | 4 | 0 | 4 | 7 | 3 | 6 | 3 | 5 | 0 |
| Zone | | Easting | | | | Northing | | | | | | | | |

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary encompasses the 11.8 acres that was deeded by the Johnsons to the Foundation in 1959 and includes the house and its immediate grounds.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Ms. Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

organization History Division, NPS date 1/29/89

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extending, at its opposite end, into a mezzanine overlooking the living room; a children's sleeping wing with its own playroom overlooking the swimming pool; a guest wing to the west; and a service wing.

The wings now are used as conference rooms, including a theatre-conference room for showing films, and offices clustered about the central lounge.

Through his use of widespread wings, Wright laid the basis for the zoned plan of the house, which was the principal departure from his previous house designs. The zoned plan was carried out in the living area despite the great height of the clerestory ceiling about the chimney stack. The structure provides a low-ceiling sitting room under the mezzanine, with a library alcove from which steps lead up to conversational furniture groupings on the long sides of the chimney stack.

The stack offers a separate fireplace to groupings on each of its four faces, as well as one on the mezzanine level. The portion of the central room adjoining the service wing formed the dining area. The great room opens on four sides to terraces through walls of high, narrow glass doors.

A number of the interior walls are finished in "cherokee red," slightly concave brick and rough plaster. The wood in the interior of the building, including several expanses of paneling in the living room, is American oak. The grain of the wood is used to emphasize the horizontal and vertical lines of the architecture.

Exterior walls are formed from the same red brick found on the interior, with cantilevers and balconies of lap siding cut from California cypress, a wood also used in the pergolas, on which there rests a full growth of wild grape vines.

The chimney stack rises in three tiers, pagoda-like, and culminates in a glass lookout or belvedere. From there one can see the 30-acre grounds and Lake Michigan about 1/2 mile to the east.

Footnote

1. Richard Kinch, Wingspread--the Building (Racine, Wis.: The Johnson Foundation, 1981), p. 13-16.

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Carl Milles, David Aronson, Robert Cook, Milton Hebard, Berto Lardera and Emilio Greco. The master builder for both the Johnson's Wax Company building and "Wingspread" was Ben Wiltscheck, who executed a number of Wright's works.

Frank Lloyd Wright was ignored after he finished his earthquake-proof Imperial Hotel in Tokyo in 1922. In the 1930s came a series of commissions that would, once again, put him in the forefront of American architecture. Houses like Wingspread and Falling Water were designed and built. This fallow period in the late twenties was not lost on architectural critics: Lewis Mumford praised Wright not only for his pioneering residential work that revolutionized the intent and technique of architectural design the world over but also for a philosophy and insight into human needs of permanent value. Alexander Woollcott, writing in a New Yorker Profile, concluded that "If I were suffered to say who is the one American genius, it would be Frank Lloyd Wright."

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- Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks. Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph, 1937-1941. Photographs by Yukio Futagawa. Tokyo, Japan: A.D.A. Edita, Ltd., 1986.
- Twombly, Robert C. Frank Lloyd Wright, An Interpretive Biography. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.
- Wright, Frank Lloyd. Architectural Forum, 2,2 (January 1938).

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Part of the Northwest Quarter of Section 27, Township 4 North, Range 23 East, described as follows: Begin at a point in the North line of said Section 27, located South 89°43'17.5", East 1494.71 feet from the northwest corner of the Northwest Quarter of said Section 27, run thence south 01°18'40" West 795.00 feet, thence South 45°39'17" East 379.45 feet, thence South 13°56'47" East 321.63 feet, thence South 30°47'20" West 231.85 feet, thence South 22°33'49" West 230.33 feet, thence South 01°25'43" East 29.54 feet, thence North 88°51'06" West 356.19 feet, thence North 00°34'14" West 475.89 feet, thence South 89°42'46" West 149.94 feet, thence 371.92 feet Northeasterly on a curve of Westerly convexity whose long chord bears North 21°06'28" East a distance of 364.45 feet, thence North 41°06'46" East 162.96 feet, thence 236.54 feet Northeasterly on a curve of Easterly convexity whose long chord bears north 21°34'48" East a distance of 231.64 feet, thence North 01°18'40" East 655.00 feet, thence South 89°43'17.5" East 50.00 feet to the point of beginning; containing 11.831 acres, more or less.