



Newsletter

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Charnley-Persky House Designated a National Historic Landmark

Owing to its significance as a pivotal work of modern residential design, the Charnley-Persky House was designated a National Historic Landmark on August 6, 1998 by U.S. Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt. The James Charnley House, as it was originally known, was designed in 1891-92 by Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, two luminaries of Chicago architecture. For decades, the house has been internationally recognized as a turning point in the history of modern American architecture. With their design, Sullivan and Wright rejected historicist precedents in favor of a stark modernism that prefigured Wright's later Prairie School work. Recognizing the groundbreaking nature of this residence, Frank Lloyd Wright called it "the first modern house in America." In addition to being one of the few major residential commissions realized by Sullivan, the James Charnley House also is the only surviving residential design to which both Sullivan and Wright made substantial contributions.

In 1995, Chicago philanthropist Seymour H. Persky purchased the James Charnley House for the Society of Architectural Historians, and the house was renamed the Charnley-Persky House in acknowledgment of his generous gift. The Charnley-Persky House Museum Foundation was created in 1997, as an effective means of managing the property as an architectural monument and educational site, while simultaneously using it as the SAH and BUS national headquarters.

National Historic Landmarks are buildings, sites, districts, structures and objects that have been determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be nationally significant in American history and culture. Many of the country's most renowned sites, including Mount Vernon, Pearl Harbor and the Apollo Mission Control Center, have been designated National Historic Landmarks (NHLs). All NHL sites are included in the National Register of Historic Places, which is the official list of the nation's historic properties worthy of preservation. Of the 65,000 sites that are listed on the National Register, only 2,100 are National Historic Landmarks.

NHL status is an honor for the Charnley House. We will install a National Historic Landmark Plaque, presented to us on November 5, and the house will be featured on the National Park Service website of NHL sites (<http://www.nps.gov> and click on "Links to the Past"). In addition, it provides an important opportunity for the Society to fulfill its mission to heighten awareness and understanding of the built environment in the public realm. Although there are no tax breaks that accompany NHL designation, this status

will enable us to apply for special grants available only to NHL sites. One such funding agency is the Getty Trust, and the National Park Service offers small assistance grants for NHL sites. I am hopeful that we can now develop some materials for the Teaching with Historic Places program, as well as expand outreach activities that will utilize the Society's intellectual resources and the great historic and spatial treasure of the Charnley-Persky House, with which we are entrusted.

Pauline Saliga
SAH Executive Director

Charnley-Persky House Museum Tours and Programs

The Charnley-Persky House Museum is open to the public for docent-led tours, while still housing the national headquarters of the Society of Architectural Historians. Public tours of the house are given every Wednesday and Saturday. Special tour groups, particularly college students, can be accommodated by special appointment. This year the Charnley-Persky House Museum also is offering programs to children in area schools to teach them about architecture and architectural history. For those exploring the house from a distance, the SAH website currently offers information about tours (<http://www.sah.org>). We are in the process of developing a virtual tour of the house, which will be accessible at the same address later this fall. For additional information about tours and our local programming, contact the SAH office at 312-573-1365 or call 312-915-0105 for a recorded message about tour times.

For the three-year period that the Charnley-Persky House Museum has been in the hands of the Society of Architectural Historians, numerous individuals and Chicago foundations have generously supported the programs and operations of the museum. Those foundations include the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, the Chicago Community Trust, the Union League Civic and Arts Foundation, and the CityArts Program administered by the City of Chicago Department of Cultural Affairs. Additional support has been provided by two anonymous donors, Seymour H. Persky, and members of the North State, Astor, Lake Shore Drive Association.

Cover: *The Charnley-Persky House, Chicago, Illinois (Louis H. Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, 1891-92) has been designated a National Historic Landmark in recognition of its architectural and cultural significance. Photograph by Scott McDonald, Hedrich Blessing Photographers.*