



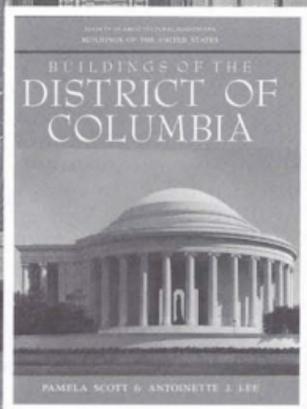
# the Newsletter

of The Society of Architectural Historians

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## Inside ...

SAH Headquarters Moves to Chicago, BUS Fundraising Campaign, Electronic Survey, 1996 SAH Call for Papers, Summer Tour of Russia and more.



# Seymour H. Persky Gives James Charnley

In an act of generosity unprecedented in the history of the Society, Board member Seymour H. Persky has given the James Charnley House on Astor Street in Chicago to the Society of Architectural Historians for use as its national headquarters. The gift was received in early March, and plans are progressing for moving the headquarters to Chicago this summer.

The James Charnley House was designed by Adler and Sullivan and constructed in 1891. Frank Lloyd Wright was the member of the office given design responsibility for the commission. The resulting design bears the hallmarks of both Sullivan and Wright. Located at the southeast intersection of Astor and Schiller streets in the Gold Coast area of Chicago, the building is sited on a lot that projects into, and interrupts the line of, Astor Street from the north. Built of a tawny Roman brick over a limestone basement level, the blocky massing is counterpointed by the prominent wooden balcony at the second story above the main entrance. The building contains approximately 6,000 square feet of space on four levels, including a light-filled basement. A magnificent stairwell in the central third of the upper floors is illuminated by a large skylight. The stair is flanked by major rooms at the three upper levels. Carved ornament enriches the parlor and dining room on the first story. A small garden separates the building

from its neighbor to the south; a brick party wall on the east abuts open space now available for parking. Substantial storage space at the basement level will allow the Society to maintain back issues of the *Journal*, other publications and the archives in an easily accessible area.

A student of Chicago architecture and an important collector of architectural fragments, drawings, and furniture, Seymour Persky has had a long-time love affair with the buildings of his native city. In September,



*Seymour H. Persky in the doorway of the Charnley House. Photo by Elaine Harrington.*



# House To Society As National Headquarters

1994, he leased the James Charnley House from the Skidmore, Owings and Merrill Foundation with an option to purchase. Mr. Persky worked with architect John Eifler to consider using the Charnley House as a residence and building an addition on vacant land to the east to house his collections. After deciding that the necessary changes would damage the building, Mr. Persky suggested in early December that he would consider buying the building and giving it to the SAH if we would make it our national headquarters. In mid-January, the Board of Directors voted overwhelmingly to accept Mr. Persky's generous offer. Mr. Persky assigned his lease on the Charnley House to the Society and provided the funds to exercise the purchase option. The purchase price of the Charnley House was \$1,650,000.

The Charnley House was the site of a luncheon, hosted by Seymour Persky, for the Board of Directors and officers during the October 1994 Board meeting. The building is one block from the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts, one block from Lake Michigan and near the Chicago Historical Society and the Newberry Library. Individuals and organizations in Chicago have been quick to express their enthusiasm for this move. The Richard S. Driehaus Foundation has awarded the Society \$10,000 to begin an endowment fund for the house. To date, an additional \$1,000 has been pledged by two anonymous donors and by Marian Card Donnelly. A Charnley House Committee will be appointed by the Board to consider issues of fund raising, maintenance, and building use. Efforts will be made to continue to build an endowment for

maintenance of the building, and all Society members are encouraged to consider providing financial support for the move and for the endowment.

Seymour Persky was born in Chicago. He received his bachelor's degree from Roosevelt University, of which he is a trustee, and his law degree from

DePaul University. He practiced law for 25 years before beginning to invest in residential real estate. He now owns and manages a collection of apartment buildings throughout the Chicago area and is president of Parliament Enterprises, Ltd. Mr. Persky serves on the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, is a trustee of

many important institutions in the city and has been a generous supporter of preservation and religious organizations.

The Charnley House was purchased in 1986 by the Skidmore, Owings & Merrill Foundation as its headquarters and it also served as the home for the Chicago Institute for Architecture and Urbanism. In 1989, the SOM Foundation completed a major restoration of the building spending approximately \$800,000 to remove a later wing on the south side, to construct a copper standing seam roof, and to repair all elements of the building. New electrical, heating, and plumbing systems were also installed.

Sadly, it will not be possible for Susan McCarter and other members of the staff to relocate to Chicago. A Search Committee, chaired by First Vice-president Patricia Waddy, has been formed to seek a new Executive Director. (Please see the announcement in this issue of the *Newsletter*).

Future issues of the *Newsletter* will carry information about the schedule for transfer of the headquarters to Chicago. The Society will either rent the building at 1232 Pine Street in Philadelphia for income or sell the building and add the proceeds to the endowment fund. Until further notice all correspondence should be directed to 1232 Pine Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107-5944.



All photos of the Charnley House by Merrick, Hedrich-Blessing.