

HISTORIC PRESERVATION STUDY REPORT

CHARLES ALLIS HOUSE

(Written in August, 1982)

I. NAME

Historic: Charles Allis House

Common: Charles Allis Art Museum

II. LOCATION

1630 East Royall Place

Legal Property Description: Continuation of A. L. Kaness' Subd. of NE ¼ Sec 21-7-22 Block 237 Lot 13 to 16 Incl and SWly 17.6 2' Lot 12

III. CLASSIFICATION

Building

IV. PROPERTY OWNER

County of Milwaukee
c/o Milwaukee County Courthouse, Ed Kornblum
901 North 9th Street, Room 102
Milwaukee, WI 53233

V. DESCRIPTION

The Charles Allis House is a rectangular building two and one-half stories in height resting on a raised basement. The walls, which rise above the roofline, are surfaced with mauve-brown Ohio brick trimmed with Lake Superior sandstone of a similar, but lighter color. The roof is steeply pitched; multi-intersecting gables covered with tile and copper ridge caps. On the main façade flanking the entry are two gabled pavilions perpendicular to the main block. From the roofline rise two decorated chimneys. The cornice is corbelled with the same brick and the guttering is copper. The main entry, which is reached by a double flight of steps, is a segmentally arched, single bronze door with leaded glass surrounded by carved foliated sandstone. Flanking the entry are two large segmentally arched windows, also leaded, with surrounds of the same sandstone pattern. Above the entry is a carved sandstone balcony. Leaded glass is used in all window treatments.

Attached to the west façade is the former coach house. In front of the coach house is a small courtyard and semi-circular drive that is enclosed by a brick wall and wrought iron fence with gates.

VI. SIGNIFICANCE

Date Built or Altered: 1909

Builder/Architect: Alexander C. Eschweiler

The Charles Allis House was cited as significant for its association with Charles Allis, a leader in Milwaukee's business and civic affairs, as a fine example of residential architecture designed by distinguished local architect, Alexander C. Eschweiler, and for its sustained use as a public art museum that has contributed to art appreciation and education in the community. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972 and named a Milwaukee Landmark in 1975.

VII. HISTORY

The Allis house was built as the city residence of Charles Allis, son of Edward P. Allis, founder of the Allis Company, internationally known manufacturers of heavy industrial machinery. After his father's death in 1889, he served as secretary-treasurer of the company. In 1901 the Allis-Chalmers Company was founded with Allis as its first president. Allis-Chalmers became a world leader in the manufacture of agricultural implements and one of the largest producers of armaments during World War II. A prominent citizen, Charles Allis was a director of both the Milwaukee Trust Company and the First National Bank, a trustee of the Northwestern Mutual Life Insurance Company, the first president of the Milwaukee Art Society and a trustee of the Layton Art Gallery.

In 1909, Allis commissioned local architect, Alexander C. Eschweiler to design his residence. Eschweiler was widely recognized for his residential designs. In March 1905 the *Architectural Record* published an extensive portfolio of his Milwaukee work. It could be observed from this article that Eschweiler at that period relied almost totally upon Jacobean and Elizabethan design sources. His work, as exemplified by the Allis house is characterized by taut, smooth surfaces of brick and stone in rich, dark colors. The wall surfaces are broken only by simple fenestration without elaborate applied ornament. The rooflines are steeply pitched with pronounced gabled pavilions located perpendicular to the main block. Although constructed four years after the publication of this article, the Allis house is consistent with Eschweiler's design approach at the period and is significant to his body of work.

Allis resided at the house on Royall Place for the rest of his life, after which his widow maintained it as her residence until her death in 1945. In accordance with the terms of his will, the property and contents were conveyed to the City of Milwaukee for use as an art library and museum known as the Charles Allis Art Library. In 1979 it was given to Milwaukee County and renamed the Charles Allis Art Museum. Allis' library, which consisted mostly of art history books, is still housed in the mansion. Today the house is a public museum containing the Allis collection of oriental porcelains, European bronze sculptures, paintings and graphics and antique furniture.

VIII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends to the Historic Preservation Commission the designation of the Charles Allis House as an historic site as defined in Section 2-335 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

Our recommendation is based on the previous recognition received by this building and on the areas of significance as enumerated above.

IX. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principle concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. These guidelines shall be applicable only to the Charles Allis House. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

The existing building height, rooflines, pitch and gables shall not be changed or modified. Subject to approval of the Commission, dormers, skylights or solar collector panels may be added to the roof surfaces facing west and north if they do not visually intrude upon the east, west, or south elevations and if they are not visible when approaching the house from the north along Prospect Avenue and when approaching the house from the west along Royall Place.

B. Openings

The location, style and material of window and door openings and the number and configuration of panes, shall be retained on all elevations. Additional openings or changes in the size or configuration of existing openings shall not be permitted unless approved by the Historic Preservation Commission, except that restoration to the documented original condition shall be permitted. Approval for changes shall be based on the compatibility of the proposed changes with the style and period of the building.

C. Additions

No additions may be made to the east, west or south elevations of the building. Additions to the north elevations shall be confined to the rear of the building and shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the existing elevations.

D. Porches, Trim and Ornamentation

There shall be no changes to the existing porches, balconies, trim or ornamentation including the copings, chimneys, brick walls, iron railings and carved stone work; except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and material.

E. Materials

Unpainted brick or stone shall not be painted or covered. Any repairs, including repointing of defective mortar, shall match the original in color, style, texture and strength characteristics. Masonry shall be cleaned only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible approved by the Commission. The tile roof, copper ridge caps, guttering and downspouts and the leaded calmes of the window sash shall be retained to their fullest extent possible. Replacement features shall match the original in color, design and texture.

F. Fire Escape

Additional required fire escapes shall be located on the north or west elevations if at all practical and shall be designed and located so as to minimize their visual impact.

G. Signs

The installation of any permanent exterior sign shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign with the historic and architectural character of the building based upon the Commission's review of scale drawings of the proposed design and samples of the proposed materials and colors.

H. Site

The site includes all of Lots 13-16 and the southwesterly 17.62' of Lot 12 in Block 237 of A. L. Kanes' Subdivision in N.E. ¼ Section 12-7-22. New plant materials, paving and fencing shall be compatible with the period residential character of the site. Existing brick walls should be maintained in their present configurations.