United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

# SENT TO D.C. 8-5-03

# NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Proper	ty						
historic name	Bersbach, Alfred House						
other names/site nu	mber						
2. Location							
street & number	1120 Michig	an Avenue				Not for pub	plication
city or town	Wilmette					vici	nity
state Illinois	code IL	county	Cook	code	031	zip code	60091
3. State/Federal Ag	gency Certificat	ion					
Register of Historic Pla property	st for determination ces and meets the produces not meet the locally.	of eligibility me ocedural and pr e National Regis See continuation	ets the docu ofessional re ster Criteria. n sheet for a	imentatio	on standa ents set f	ards for registering forth in 36 CFR I at this property bents.)	ng properties in the National Part 60. In my opinion, the be considered significant
Signature of certifyi	ng official					Da	te
Illinois Historic Pr State or Federal age		<u>ıcv</u>					
In my opinion, the p continuation sheet for	oroperty me or additional con	eets does nments.)	s not meet	the Na	itional .	Register criter	ia. (See
Signature of comme	nting or other of	ficial				Date	<del></del>
State or Federal age	ncy and bureau					American In	dian Tribe

# Bersbach, Alfred House

Name of Property

# Cook, Illinois County and State

4. National Park Service Certification		
I, hereby certify that this property is: Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action	
entered in the National Register See continuation sheet.		
determined eligible for the		
National Register	<del> </del>	
See continuation sheet.		
determined not eligible for the  National Register		·
removed from the National Register		
other (explain):		
5. Classification		
Ownership of Property		
(Check as many boxes as apply)  X private		
public-local		
public-State		
public-Federal		
Category of Property		
(Check only one box)		
_X_ building(s) district		
site		
structure		
object		
Number of Resources within Property		
Do not include previously listed resources in the count)		
Contributing Noncontributing		
1 buildings		
00_ structures 0_ objects		
	<b></b> /.	

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

# Bersbach, Alfred House

Name of Property

Cook, Illinois
County and State

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

# DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

## DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

# 7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

# LATE 19th and EARLY 20th CENTURY AMERICAN MOVEMENTS/Prairie School

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation CONCRETE

Roof OTHER

Walls BRICK, STUCCO

other LIMESTONE, WOOD

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

# 8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Reg	lational Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for tister listing)
A	Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
В	Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
_X_C	Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D	Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.
Criteria Cons	iderations (Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)
A	owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B	removed from its original location.
C	a birthplace or a grave.
D	a cemetery.
E	a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F	a commemorative property.
G	less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.
Areas of Sign	ificance (Enter categories from instructions)
Architecture	
Period of Sigr	nificance 1915
Significant Da	ates N/A
Significant Pe	rson (Complete if Criterion B is marked above) N/A
Cultural Affili	ation N/A
Architect/Buil	der Van Bergen, John

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References
(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)
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 #
D'annu I anni an af Addisional Data
Primary Location of Additional Data State Historic Preservation Office
Other State agency
Federal agency
_X_ Local government
University
Other
Name of repository Wilmette Historical Museum
10. Geographical Data
Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre
UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing
1 16 442584 4658944 3
2 4 See continuation sheet.
See continuation sheet.
Verbal Boundary Description
(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)
Boundary Justification
(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title

Jessica Westphal/Research Assistant & John Eifler, FAIA

organization

Eifler & Associates

date

03/03/2003

street & number

The Brooks Building

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312/362-0180

\_\_\_\_\_\_

and the brooks building

223 W. Jackson Blyd., Suite 1000

city or town

Chicago

state Illinois

zip code

60606

#### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

## Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

#### **Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Randall Randazzo and Kimberlee Kepper

street & number

1120 Michigan Avenue

telephone

847/251-6527

city or town

Wilmette

state Illinois

zip code

60091

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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#### Setting

The Bersbach house is a multi-level brick and stucco house designed by John Van Bergen in 1915 for Alfred and Helena Bersbach. It is located at 1120 Michigan Avenue in an older section of Wilmette, a North Shore Chicago suburb where brick-paved streets evoke the atmosphere of a previous era. Overall, the property is in excellent condition due to the ambitious and thoughtful restorations guided by its current owners.

#### Exterior

The Bersbach house is a quintessential Prairie School design constructed of brick and stucco. The lakeshore property inspired Van Bergen to place the house at the easternmost flat portion of the lot, closest to the lake. The siting also allows a large expanse of lawn and landscaping to the street (entry) to the west. The house is two stories high, topped by a long, low flat roof with deep overhanging eaves, creating the strong horizontal lines that are a signature of Prairie School houses. These horizontal planes are interrupted by two primary vertical components, the stair hall, expressed by an expanse of vertical art glass windows, and the chimney.

The use of materials plays a large part in the character of Prairie School architecture, and the Bersbach House is no exception. The house is set upon a solid base, or water table, comprised of Indiana Limestone, lending a solid, temple-like appearance to the house. Van Bergen selected a beige/brown tapestry brick for the Bersbach house that contains subtle shades of red-brown, ochre and green in the brick blend. The mortar used on the house appears to be stained a natural yellow-tan color, similar to the color of the sand in the adjacent beach. The horizontal joints appear to be recessed and struck deeper than the vertical masonry joints, thereby emphasizing the horizontal qualities of the house. The brick extends only to the windowsills of the second floor, which, when combined with large expanses of casement windows, gives the impression that the horizontal planes of the roof are floating above the structure below. The brick and massing of the house appears even more solid by the use of brick piers at the outside corners of the significant rooms. These piers are topped with wooden planters and provide a visible connection between the house and the surrounding landscape. The use of stucco on the exterior is limited to the soffit and eaves of the roof overhangs, as well as the second floor cladding. The garage/ guesthouse is also clad in stucco.

Cypress, known for its rot-resistant qualities, was specified for use on all exterior wood and trim. Paint analysis reveals that the trim was stained a light green color, consistent with the subtle green shades of the tapestry brick.

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Art glass is used with abundance throughout the house. As one would expect from an architect trained in the office of Frank Lloyd Wright, the pattern of the art glass is geometric, and is designed with a large "view" clear glass center panel.

### <u>Description – West (Front) Elevation:</u>

The two-story west elevation is clad primarily in tapestry brick and extends nearly the full width of the lot. The horizontal bands of casement windows at the first and second floors are interrupted by the vertical mass of the chimney and the art glass of the stair hall, the most prominent component of the elevation. The original design as published in the Western Architect does not depict a porte-cochere or overhang at the front door. It appears that the current roof and vestibule enclosure was designed by Van Bergen and constructed at the same time as the rest of the house or quickly thereafter. The porte-cochere serves to shelter visitors from the elements at the entry, and serves to visually reduce the mass of the two-story house on the western elevation. Van Bergen placed sleeping porches at the second floor of the north elevation to provide more transparency to the composition. A veranda at the south end extends the horizontal aspects of the house as well. Large brick piers capped with planters serve to terminate the enclosed portions of the house, add an air of solidity to the composition, and separates the veranda as a portion of the house that is clearly associated with the landscape and nature.

#### North (Side Elevation):

The north elevation continues the horizontal wrapping of the house with tapestry brick of the first floor, which is intermittently pierced with windows to provide light to the service portions of the house. These rooms include the original servants' bedroom and the kitchen. The roof over the enclosed sleeping porch rests upon a series of wooden columns, which in turn, are supported by two large brick piers that carry the perceived weight down to the limestone foundations. A slim band of stucco is used to clad the sleeping porch walls below the windowsills. The limestone foundation is stepped at the base to conform to the slope of the adjacent driveway.

#### Description, East (Rear) Elevation:

The east elevation proudly addresses the lake view by two-story walls of brick and stucco containing bands of continuous casement windows. Van Bergen arranged the plan of the house so that the primary rooms of the house, i.e. the living room, dining room and kitchen on the first floor and two of the three bedrooms on the second, are all afforded large sweeping views of Lake Michigan. The prominent component

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of the east elevation is the projecting dining room, which incorporates a continuous band of windows on three sides of the room. Large brick piers capped with planters help establish this component as the dominant feature of the east elevation. The living room to the south also utilizes grouped casement windows, but is interrupted by a curious "picture" (fixed) window in the center. Evidently Van Bergen had planned to place the fireplace and chimney on the east side of the house, evidenced by the longitudinal section illustrating a series of fireplaces in the basement, first and second floor at this location. A change occurred during the design stages that placed the chimney mass on the current west elevation, as illustrated in the rendering and published floor plans of the house. As a result, a large window was installed at the original fireplace location sometime during, or after the construction of the house. The northern portion of the east elevation is comprised of windows associated with the kitchen and kitchen entry. Currently a hallway and greenhouse extend from the basement of the house, beneath the dining room, to the newly remodeled garage/guest house. In this manner the house could be enlarged to accommodate guests with minimal impact on the historical east elevation.

#### Description, South (Side) Elevation:

The south elevation is the narrowest of the three elevations, and is primarily comprised of what was once an open terrace, which has subsequently been enclosed by continuous bands of casement windows. The master bedroom above is set back from the terrace, resting upon the structure of the end wall of the living room below. As is the case with many buildings of this period, the masonry support piers are set in from the corners of the terrace, creating unique "open" corners, further adding to the illusion that the roofs are floating over the space below.

#### Interior

The entryway includes features that are Prairie School signatures that appear throughout the house and make it a unified composition. The entry door is not a prominent component of the front elevation and cannot be seen from the street. The "entry platform" as Van Bergen called it, has been enclosed with a glass and wood vestibule in a sympathetic architectural style. Although the first floor is raised about three feet above grade, the entry door is located essentially at grade, allowing an easy transition from the exterior to the interior of the house.

From the entry, a short flight of stairs leads to the "reception hall," as Van Bergen labeled it in his original plan. The reception hall and stair hall mark the center of the composition, which efficiently provides access to all primary rooms without the need for long hallways. The living room is located on the immediate

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right, accessed by a wide opening. The Roman brick-clad fireplace is located on the west wall directly across from a large expanse of windows and Lake Michigan beyond. A series of art- glass paneled French doors allows access to the veranda to the south, which has been enclosed with casement windows. The dining room is situated immediately east of the stair hall, whereas the kitchen and servants' rooms are placed in the northern quadrant of the house, to the left.

The finishes used in the house display Van Bergen's mature Prairie style. Horizontal bands of mahogany are used for the baseboard and picture rail, uniting the seemingly disparate interior elements such as windows, doors, fireplace and plaster walls. The interior plaster walls, wooden trim, and masonry all echo the exterior materials, further eliminating the delineation between the exterior and interior of the house. The use of hardwood floors throughout the first floor living, dining room and entry create a sense of a continuous flow of space, uninterrupted by doors. Privacy in the dining room can be obtained with two sliding art glass pocket doors, which essentially disappear when not in use. One of the most unique features of the house are the dining room windows, which are designed similar to folding doors. The windows are hinged to one another, rather than to a dividing mullion, so that when fully opened, the windows essentially fold to the sides like shutters, allowing an unbroken panoramic view of the backyard and Lake Michigan beyond.

The kitchen is currently being remodeled with cabinets consistent with the cabinetry used throughout the house. (The original cabinets had been removed in the 1980s.) The art-glass windows above the sink that face east towards the backyard are a unique design, as they abstract the small rectangular patterns of the glass typically used in the rest of the house. In addition to the vertical windows that are similar to those found elsewhere in the house, two narrow windows at the top open horizontally for ventilation. Other remaining original features in the kitchen include a built-in wooden cabinet and a pantry. A winding staircase on the north side of the kitchen leads down to the basement laundry room. At the small landing at a curve in the staircase, there are more storage cabinets and a door to the backyard.

Opposite the kitchen on the west side of the house is a room that is currently used as a study. The study is accessed off the main hallway through a pair of art glass doors that are hinged on the frame and open inward. Two Purcell and Elmslie light fixtures hang from the ceiling. There are a series of eight modestly sized art glass windows around the perimeter of the room.

The staircase is positioned in the middle of the house, and is certainly the most prominent architectural feature. The oversized newel post on the first floor landing serves as a pedestal for a rectangular, freestanding art glass fixture. Smaller newel posts mark the pivotal points on the platform of the stairway and at the meeting points of each section of landings. Instead of a handrail, the staircase has a series of panels composed

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of wooden screens, made up of vertical, wooden, square spandrels. On the platform there is a westerly view through the five long, narrow art glass windows that allow an abundance of light to permeate the stair and hall below. On the north and south end of the platform are sets of thin rectangular art glass windows with a square window underneath. One of these windows still bears the original rollup screens that Van Bergen created for the house.

The second floor hallway is lined with ample storage. There are three linen closets clustered at the top of the stairs. The linen closets have deep, sliding shelves for easy access to its contents. These storage areas share a common wall with the elaborate storage systems in the dressing room of the master bedroom. The closets have drawers and rods for hanging clothing that pull out, and built-in wooden shoe racks that utilize the depth of the wall space. Continuing the central core of the hearth, a fireplace in the master bedroom repeats the rectangular shape of the one found on the first floor.

The two bedrooms on the north side of the house are nearly identical in size. The layout and placement of closets make the two bedrooms interlock like a puzzle. Each has a private doorway leading to the sleeping veranda on the north side of the house. On the sleeping veranda there is a bare bulb light fixture, as was common with newly electrified houses during this period. The bathroom, located on the east side of the second floor, shares a wall with the master bathroom.

Van Bergen designed the basement to be both comfortable and functional. A large playroom is located at the bottom of the stairs. A fireplace with a Sullivanesque-style arched front is one of three that form a central core of fireplaces in the house. The laundry room has expansive built-in tables for folding and sorting laundry and the room was designed with plenty of open space for drying clothing. In the basement the radiators for heating the house were placed on the ceiling in order to keep the floors on the first floor warm. The original heating system is still in use.

The garage/guest house building to the east of the house contains room for three cars, and was originally outfitted with a car maintenance pit, fuel tank (and pump). Clad in stucco and cypress trim, the profile of the garage was kept low as to not interrupt views from the house.

#### Changes

The house has experienced only minor alterations since its construction and has retained its integrity. Copies of the original plans of the house are in the possession of the current owners, as well as the rendering, plans, and building section drawings that were printed in *The Western Architect* in June 1915. It appears that

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a few alterations were made to the house during construction. Firstly, the dining rooms windows were originally drawn as French windows, instead of the bifold configuration that now exists. Van Bergen was required to utilize a large steel header over the dining room windows in order to provide this feature. Secondly, the dining room was delineated as accessed from the living room rather than the stair hall. The sliding art glass doors and hardware attest to this alteration during initial construction as well.

The house has undergone some interior decorating changes since it was built, but those have not impacted its integrity. Some changes transpired soon after its construction due to the harsh climate in such close proximity to Lake Michigan. It appears that the glass entry vestibule was added soon after the house was built, and was probably designed by Van Bergen. The first floor veranda and the sleeping veranda on the second floor were enclosed probably soon after the house was completed in 1916 as evidenced by a newspaper scrap dated January 1916 that was found in the walls of the sleeping porch during renovations. In a 1941 real estate listing the sunroom and the sleeping porch are listed as features of the house.

A real estate listing from 1955 recognizes new Pella screens, new wiring, a new compressor for a vacuum, and redecoration as recent home improvements. An atomic fallout shelter in the cellar is also added to the list of features. The two bedrooms on the first floor, which were originally designed as maids' rooms, probably remained until the late 1970s or early 1980s. A 1973 real estate listing identifies the two bedrooms and adjoining bathroom on the first floor, but indicates that they have been altered with the addition of parquet floors. Sometime between 1973 and 1993 the maids' rooms were combined to form one large room that is used as a study by the current owners.

Between 1955 and 1973 wall-to-wall carpeting was installed throughout the house, and a bar surrounded by wood paneling was added to the basement. In the 1980s the pantry that originally served as a buffer between the dining room and the kitchen was removed and white Formica cabinets were installed.

The garage/guest quarters are located at the north edge of the property to the east of the house. It is believed that Van Bergen designed the structure in stages, first the garage, and then the guest quarters addition to the east. The guest quarters contain a unique fireplace that was probably designed by Van Bergen. Due to its severely deteriorated foundation, the guest quarters have recently been remodeled. An enclosed hallway and greenhouse attached to the house at the basement level now provides a direct connection from the house to the guesthouse, with minimal alteration to the east elevation of the house. The garage/guesthouse is considered to be non-contributing; nonetheless, the building contains certain historical features that link it to the house. In addition to the fireplace mentioned above, the garage retains its original doors and a gas pump,

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nearly identical to the one found in the garage (now a gift shop) at the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio in Oak Park.

Beyond the garage and the guesthouse, the lot continues to slope downhill. The landscape contains wild grasses, sand dunes, and it culminates on a private beach facing Lake Michigan. The natural surroundings provide a perfect setting for a Prairie School home.

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# Statement of Significance

The Bersbach House, located at 1120 Michigan Avenue in Wilmette, Illinois is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for architecture as an excellent local example of the Prairie School style. The period of significance is 1915, the year the house was built. It has been constantly occupied since its construction.

This elegant house is as striking now as it was at the time of its construction in 1915. It is a well-preserved and generously restored house that represents a trend in building that was at the time revolutionary, a quest to articulate in material form a true and original style of American architecture. Because of its architectural significance, the Bersbach House meets National Register Criterion C: "Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction."

#### Prairie School Architecture

The Prairie School was a short-lived, but distinctive episode in the history of architecture. The Prairie School is most often associated with Frank Lloyd Wright and his Oak Park studio and the numerous Prairie School commissions in the neighborhood. However, the Prairie School was formed by ideals that predate Frank Lloyd Wright's fame and included a wider community of architects. The architectural historian H. Allen Brooks organizes the development of the Prairie School into three phases: a late nineteenth century intellectual beginning, Wright at his peak, and the Prairie School after Wright abandoned it (Brooks, 1972: 7-8).

The first stage of the Prairie School was a time of discussion more than action. A network of architects regularly met and discussed ideas at the Chicago Architectural Club, the Architectural League of America, or in Steinway Hall, where a group of young architects shared office space, a receptionist, and drafting rooms (Brooks, 1972: 7). The "18" was the playful name given to the architectural community centered within Steinway Hall (Brooks 30-1). These discussions were influenced by the work of Louis Sullivan, who Brooks calls "the spiritual leader of the Prairie school (Brooks, 1972: 7)." However, the idea of a new school of American architecture existed outside of Steinway Hall. George Maher, another architect who is recognized to have broken with established architectural designs, is also recognized as an influence on Prairie School architects (Brooks, 1972: 36).

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The first designs of the Prairie School in the late 1800s did not yet display the features that are now synonymous with the Prairie School. Many early houses reflect a preference for a picturesque style, consistent with the early work of McKim, Mead and White in the East, and English architects of the early Arts and Crafts period. Both of these sources also promoted the abandonment of classical styles. Louis Sullivan's philosophy was foundational for the Prairie School. Particularly influential was his aim to create a new American School of architecture; his dedication was to infuse this architecture with democratic ideals, and to conceive of a building as an organic thing. Sullivan's ideals later resurface in the writings of Wright and John Van Bergen.

Sullivan advocated that Americans should discard European Schools and criticized Greco-Roman designs in America as fraudulent because their placement in the United States was anachronistic. Sullivan emphasizes this point by explaining: "The Roman Temple can no more exist in fact on Monroe Street, Chicago USA, than can Roman civilization exist there (Sullivan, 1979:22)." Here Sullivan makes architecture synonymous with culture. Structures appropriate for ancient Rome were no longer relevant for Americans at the turn on the twentieth century. "Such an architecture," Sullivan continues, "must of necessity be a simulacrum, a ghost (Sullivan, 1979: 38)." Sullivan believed that the development of an architecture harmonious with "the true spirit of democracy" was appropriate for America (Sullivan, 1979: 15).

Sullivan emphasized the importance of remembering the natural origin of building materials. Sullivan was attentive to the fact that a building is constructed of many parts. He understood that "...the materials of a building are but the elements of earth removed from the matrix of nature, reorganized and reshaped by force." (Sullivan, 1979: 32). Although famous for buildings like the Auditorium Theater that were not only lavishly decorated, but also superbly engineered due to the expertise of Danmark Adler, Sullivan still was conscious of the natural components of a building. During this early period of Prairie School architecture, Frank Lloyd Wright was experimenting with a variety of architectural styles, searching for an expression that would match the ideals of Sullivan.

The second period, during which the first true Prairie houses were built, spanned the first decade of the twentieth century. It was a period dominated by Frank Lloyd Wright and his apprentices, though many other independent architects made valuable contributions. It was during this time that these designs gained international attention and were labeled the "Chicago School". Chicago School now popularly refers to commercial skyscraper buildings in Chicago, built during the 1880s-1890s. However, as Brooks demonstrates with an article by the Chicago architect Thomas E. Tallmadge published in 1908, the phrase originally referred to work by the Prairie School (Brooks, 1972: 9-10). During the second period, the basic elements of the Prairie School were established and to some degree, standardized. These elements include wide, overhanging eaves; a

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horizontal emphasis in the building design; and use of natural materials such as stone, brick, wood, or plaster. Materials were used in a manner that highlighted their natural elements, e.g. the grain of wood trim, rather than the way it was shaped. As Prairie School architects promoted the concept of regionalism, they tended to specify local materials found in the Midwestern landscape.

The third period of the Prairie School spanned from 1910 through the 1930s, although with the onset of World War I the style rapidly declined in favor. Ironically, the Prairie School became most popular after 1909 when Frank Lloyd Wright left for Europe. During this period, "...the participants increased in number, productivity was at a peak, and the most brilliant designs were then produced (Brooks, 1972: 9-10)." The masterpieces of stage three were the product of Frank Lloyd Wright's students and apprentices. Some of these students, including John Van Bergen, saw Wright's abandoned projects to fruition. The Prairie School Style surfaced in designs of bungalow houses. Prairie School forms were published in the pages of *Craftsman* magazine and *House Beautiful*, which were two immensely popular Midwestern magazines (Brooks, 1972: 3-6). It was during this period that architects like John Van Bergen flourished.

#### History of Wilmette to 1914

While Wilmette, Illinois shares general historical trends with other Midwestern suburban towns, it also has unique stories affiliated with its development. The Bersbach House was added to Wilmette's landscape when the village was still sparsely populated. The house and its most important architectural features have remained in the midst of a constantly changing and growing suburban community.

In the eighteenth century what is now Chicago and its surrounding area was occupied by Native Americans. In 1790 a French-Canadian fur trader named Antoine Ouilmette settled in Checaugau and worked for the early settler John Kinzie. In 1797 he married Archange Chevalier, a Pottawattamie woman. One result of this union was the Treaty of Prairie du Chien. This treaty, which was set on July 29, 1829, was between the United States Federal Government and the Chippewa, Ottawa, and the Pottawatomie tribes. Archange Ouilmette assisted the federal government with negotiating this treaty and, as a reward, she was given 1,280 acres of land that was part of the Ouilmette reservation. This treaty The Ouilmettes lived on the reservation until 1838 at which time they moved west with the Pottawattamie. The Ouilmette children inherited the land from their mother when she died in 1840. Since the land was no longer occupied by the Pottawattamie and the Ouilmette descendants chose not to live on it, Archange Ouilmette's children negotiated with the federal government and sold the land to real estate speculators in 1845. Most of this land parcel eventually became Wilmette and part of it became Evanston.

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About the time that the reservation land was sold, non-natives began to settle in the area. During the 1850s and 1860s, innovations due to the industrial revolution significantly altered the landscape. Pickle factories were among the first manufacturing enterprises to open in the area. In 1854, the Chicago-Milwaukee Railroad cut through Wilmette and prompted the rapid residential and commercial development of the community. The 1850s also brought land speculators. In 1857 John Gage bought 118 acres of wooded land north of Elmwood Street, east to Lake Michigan and west to the railroad tracks. This plot of land is where the Bersbach House now stands. In 1869 John G. Westerfield laid out Wilmette Village. Immediately this land had great value as was reflected in the skyrocketing real estate prices in 1870-71. Wilmette was incorporated as a village in 1872.

One early resident, Julia Kirk, who lived at the same address from 1877-1915, saw the transformation of Wilmette from "struggling village to up-to-date suburb" (Bushnell, 1976: 51). In the earliest days Ms. Kirk remembered the "damp and forlorn houses" and the remoteness of Wilmette by commenting, "There was nothing to be seen from the windows but bare trees and bushes, except in front, where we could see our neighbor's house" (Bushnell, 1976: 49). A large population influx occurred after the Great Chicago Fire in 1871. After this devastating event, the city became in many people's eyes a dangerous fire trap. Wilmette became a place where people who experienced and survived the fire could start over.

In the 1880s and 1890s, Wilmette shed its identity as merely a settlement town and blossomed into a largely upper middle class Chicago suburb. The speed and convenience of the trains allowed professionals to travel to their downtown Chicago offices daily with a short train commute. This regular commuter train service had been established in the 1870s. During the late nineteenth century civic and intellectual groups that had a large impact on Wilmette's development were introduced including a literary society and a women's club. A public school system was also developed during this era.

At the turn of the twentieth century Wilmette's population was 2,300. The *North Shore Record*, the first local paper, began in 1900. The desire of the literary for a local public library was answered with a grant from Andrew Carnegie to build such an institution in1902. Like other American towns, Wilmette had to contend with the new "horseless carriages" that more often than not zipped recklessly through the town on roads designed for horse and carriage. In 1910 mass transportation advanced when the Northwestern line began to run direct trains between Wilmette and Chicago. Also in 1910 movie theaters opened in Wilmette. The movies drastically changed how people received information. The theaters served as a community forum for news and entertainment.

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Development of Wilmette, as in most towns, slowed with the onset of World War I in 1914. The outbreak of war is recognized by some scholars as a transitional year in American history that marks the end of the Victorian era and the beginning of the modern era. Interestingly enough, it was also this year that the Bersbach House was designed and built; in fact, 1914 may have been John Van Bergen's most productive year. After the war ended in 1918 Wilmette residents, like other Americans, heralded the call for a return to normal American life. Wilmette continued to prosper. By 1920 the local population was 7,814. A tornado devastated the community on March 28, 1920, but it continued to grow steadily. In 1922 a town plan of Wilmette was created in an effort to logically and methodically guide the town's development. The community steadily grew during the 1920s, as many Chicago suburbs did. By 1930 the population had doubled and reached 15,233.

#### Alfred Bersbach

Alfred Bersbach was a prominent citizen of Chicago and was born in Chicago on November 5, 1856. His father, John Bersbach, immigrated from Germany, and his mother, Madelon Zenner, from France. He had a long career working for the Manz Printing and Engraving Company in Chicago. He married Helena Kolkebeek in 1878. They had four children: Lileau, Amy, Alfred, and Frank. Alfred Bersbach was a member of the Masonic Order, the Chicago Historical Society, and the Chicago Athletic Association. He died on July 18, 1926 in San Diego, California.

In 1914 Bersbach commissioned architect John Van Bergen to design his house on land he had purchased from Northwestern University. While Alfred Bersbach is listed as living at 1120 Michigan Avenue in the 1917-18 Wilmette Directory Index, he lived there for a very short time.

John Van Bergen and Construction of the Bersbach House

John Van Bergen (1885-1969) was raised in Oak Park, Illinois, the neighborhood that would later strongly be associated with Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School. Van Bergen did not receive any substantial formal education in architecture. He was enrolled in architecture classes for only three months at the Chicago Technical College. He received his architectural training after high school, in 1907, by apprenticing for two years in the Steinway Hall office of his neighbor, Walter Burley Griffin. In 1909 Van Bergen was the last person hired to work in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park studio. Although he was only a member of Wright's firm for about a year, he was put in charge of supervising plans for the completion of some of Wright's most illustrious work, including the Robie House on the University of Chicago campus, the Gale house in Oak Park, and arcade building for Peter Stohr in Chicago (Hackl, 1998). After leaving Wright's office, Van Bergen set up his own, and continued to design houses in the Prairie School style through the 1930s, longer than any other

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practitioners of the Prairie School style (Hackl, 1998). Most of Van Bergen's houses are located in the Chicago suburbs and one house, the Alan Miller house, still survives in Chicago.

Van Bergen's career blossomed in 1910. In this year Van Bergen entered a plan in a competition held by the Building Brick Association America. The contest requested plans for an economical, functional, and beautiful house made of brick that would not cost more than \$4000 to construct. Out of the hundreds of entries, Van Bergen's was one of two designs rendered in the Prairie School. A symmetrical, Colonial-Revival styled house won first prize. The other entries were dominated by traditionally-styled structures, especially variations on the Colonial or English Tudor Revival cottages. Compared to the other designs, Van Bergen's Prairie School design stood out as a distinctive style.

From June 1910 to June 1911, Van Bergen worked in the office of William Drummond, another talented Chicago architect who had worked in Wright's studio. After passing his professional architect's examination, Van Bergen opened his own practice in Oak Park in 1911. This exam forced Van Bergen to show competence for designing in traditional architectural styles that he never used in his own designs during his long career as an architect. It was out of his Oak Park office that Van Bergen completed two of his acclaimed designs: the Bersbach and Skillin houses in Wilmette. The years immediately following the opening of this office are among Van Bergen's most prolific. Between 1911 and 1920, while in his Oak Park practice, Van Bergen completed designs for 32 buildings. The designs for the Bersbach and Skillin houses were two of the seventeen designs Van Bergen created in 1914, which was not only a productive year for Van Bergen, but "the climactic year" for the Prairie School (Brooks, 1972: 3). In 1915 fifteen of Van Bergen's architectural designs, including the one of the Bersbach House, were included in the *The Twenty-Eighth Annual Chicago Architectural Exhibition* at the Art Institute.

Van Bergen interrupted his career to volunteer for service during World War I. Upon his return, he began to experiment with early modern styles in addition to designing houses with Prairie School features (Muggenburg, 1974: 132). Van Bergen also prepared plans in 1920 for a pavilion and boathouse to complement the landscape gardening of his friend and colleague Jens Jensen at Columbus Park; however, these buildings never materialized. In 1921 Van Bergen moved his practice to another Chicago suburb, Ravinia – now called Highland Park. His designs were primarily domestic and located in the Chicago area. Two exceptions were the Oak Park Playground shelter houses (1926) and an addition to the Ravinia School in 1927. In the 1940s Van Bergen again volunteered during World War II. After the war he designed modern homes similar to Wright's design interests of that time. Van Bergen worked out of this office until 1951 when he moved to Barrington, another Chicago suburb, into a home and studio he designed for himself. This was one of three houses Van

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Bergen designed that were built in Barrington. He lived in the house briefly, and in 1955 moved to California where his sister-in-law was living. He again built a new home and studio, but unfortunately it was one of many residences destroyed in the Santa Barbara area during the 1964 "Coyote Wild Fire." All of his records and architectural designs were lost.

While living in California, Van Bergen experimented with designs for different types of structures. A futuristic design for a Santa Barbara airport terminal displayed his willingness to experiment with different types of building types and programs. Unfortunately all that exists of this interesting design is a photograph of the model. He designed a Modernistic high school for Hong Kong that, with its wide windows and horizontally emphasized comice line, still is reminiscent of his earlier house designs rendered in the Prairie School style. He also worked on a project for a park and a recreation center in Santa Barbara. Built projects during his time in Santa Barbara include a furniture store (1962) and an elaborate 8,400 square foot residence in Montecito, California. As early as 1967 the Historic American Building Survey recognized the importance of Van Bergen's designs. Van Bergen worked actively as an architect until 1968. He died in 1969. His contribution to architectural history is being brought to the public's attention through the writing of Martin Hackl, who recently helped organize a retrospective of Van Bergen's work at the Chicago Architectural Foundation.

Characteristics of the Prairie School found in the Bersbach House

Architectural historians H. Alan Brooks, James Muggenburg, and Carl Condit all recognize the Bersbach House as Van Bergen's masterpiece. It is considered his most innovative design and, at the same time, his design most influenced by Wright. Indeed, many have mistaken the Bersbach House to be of Wright's design. In addition to being routinely classified as "Riparian" due to its location on the lake, the Bersbach House in the 1950s and again in the 1970s was represented in real estate listings as a Frank Lloyd Wright design.

The author Dixie Legler, in her book, *Prairie Style: Houses and Gardens by Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School*, however, is more diplomatic in her description of the Bersbach House. She explains the house is the culmination of the influence of all of Van Bergen's mentors – Walter Burley Griffin, Frank Lloyd Wright, and William Drummond. According to Legler, "Van Bergen's mentors and colleagues clearly influence the Bersbach House, which reflects Wright's sense of repose, Griffin's muscularity, and Drummond's abstraction (Legler, 1999: 132)." It is important that Van Bergen's work is frequently mentioned as similar to Frank Lloyd Wright because it attests the quality of Van Bergen's work in its own right, not merely as an imitator:

Van Bergen was a fully competent and accomplished prairie architect, and the fact that laymen and learned alike mistake his designs for Wright's is a compliment as well as a perverse comment on nit-

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picking. Van Bergen deserves as much acclaim and hopefully is on the way to getting it...for his quality work makes him a very important man in the tale of the Chicago architectural scene" (Muggenburg, 1974: 133).

Van Bergen's attention to detail is apparent throughout the house. The design communicates his concern for the comfort of the owners as well as the servants. Following Louis Sullivan's commitment to producing organic architecture, Van Bergen was attentive to the interaction between a building and its site. The house does not just sit on the site, but its design fits with the land. The living and entertaining spaces are oriented towards the lake and bring this extraordinary natural feature into the house. By emphasizing the beauty of the site, Van Bergen's dedication to simplicity and communication with nature is underscored.

Because his papers were destroyed and only a few pieces of correspondence exist, a valuable representation of Van Bergen's philosophies is contained in an article he penned published in April 1915, probably as the Bersbach began construction. Van Bergen echoed Sullivan's plea for a distinct form of American architecture. Colonial Revival styled homes were no longer relevant for twentieth century America because, as Van Bergen reasoned, "Our life is one very different from that of the eighteenth century and our works cannot stand on their old foundations" (Van Bergen, 1915: 24). Like Sullivan, who Van Bergen called "the father of Americanism in architecture," Van Bergen cites democracy as an important ingredient in architecture and emphasizes that Greco-Roman architectural forms in America are anachronistic:

The steadily growing democracy of our land demands that our surroundings conform to its ideals....The days of ancient Greece and Rome can never compare with the days that are to come, when love of democracy and fair play has been born in the hearts of men. These days are not long distant and at present the entire world is revolving as never before to a realization of its possibilities. When men once see for themselves, nothing can hold back the tide that will follow and arts and works of every good kind will flourish as never before. Greece and Rome flourished, but in an unnatural way. The master and the slave can never exist beyond their day and as, "The many for the few," was the slogan of the past, "Each for each other," will be the cry of the future (Van Bergen, 1915: 24-5, 30).

Van Bergen recognized his teachers as forward thinking. He wrote this article at the time that the Prairie School was described as the Chicago School:

America, and especially Chicago and vicinity, has produced a school of men of peculiar trend of mind, who were able to look ahead and see a golden future for the architect and his work. They saw a time

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when the best in everything would be appreciated and when honest intent and talent could create to their full..." (Van Bergen, 1915: 25).

A simple and coherent design was the most valuable attribute of a house according to Van Bergen. He explained that, "Exterior and interior must conform, room to room arrangement must be considered, and the whole worked out with the knowledge of sanitation, light, heat, and general comfort" (Van Bergen, 1915: 26). It is not the cost of the house but the coherence of its design that is most important. The Bersbach House is one of Van Bergen's most elaborate designs, yet he also gives ample attention to practical needs.

In his published article, Van Bergen's description of the Skillin house shows that he followed many of the same design principles for the Bersbach House. Van Bergen was attentive to details of the house including everything from the living room fireplace to the placement of electrical sockets. The Bersbach House and the Skillin house share many qualities that distinguish them as Prairie School style houses the most obvious being the accent on horizontal, open floor plans, continuous bands of casement windows, the use of geometric art glass, a large central fireplace and wide overhanging eaves. A published photograph indicates that virtually identical fireplaces were installed in the living rooms of the Skillin and the Bersbach House. The floor plans of both houses are very similar. In the Skillin house, the veranda is positioned at the south end of the living room. The kitchen and service are easily accessed. There is a staircase between the kitchen and the basement laundry area and at the back door that leads directly out to the garage. The maid's rooms are located on the first floor, close to the kitchen. This positioning gives the maids a pleasant living quarters and erases the need for two staircases, as was the standard practice in Victorian homes with servant's quarters on the second floor. Van Bergen positioned the kitchen sink in the Skillin house, as he did in the Bersbach House, "...for light and pleasure while working (Van Bergen, 1915: 32)." Van Bergen discusses in detail how with his designs he hopes to ease the task of window cleaning, changing draperies. He is also attentive to the role of light and color on interior spaces and their effects. For the library, living and dining room he advocates indirect lighting "giving a soft, pleasing effect and removing the usual glare that is so tiring to the eyes (Van Bergen, 1915: 32)." Van Bergen even made sure that outlets were installed for piano, table and desk lamps.

Other examples of Prairie School architecture in Wilmette

There are a number of Prairie School houses in Wilmette, and of the four Prairie School architects who designed houses here, John Van Bergen was responsible for the majority of them. The Bersbach House certainly represents one of the finest Prairie-style homes built in Wilmette. In 1988 all four of Van Bergen's houses located in Wilmette were recognized as architecturally significant structures by the Wilmette Historical

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Society. These houses include a house at 616 Isabella (1910), the C.P. Skillin house at 714 Ashland (1914), The Alfred Bersbach House (1914), and a house at 1318 Isabella (1927). The Wilmette Historical Society also recognized houses designed by other Prairie School architects as architecturally significant, including Walter Burley Griffin's designed Schwartz house at 116 Sixth Street (1910), William E. Drummond's Ralph S. Baker house at 1226 Ashland (1914), and George Maher's house for the Frank Scheidenhelm family at 804 Forest (1906). Frank Lloyd Wright designed the Frank Baker house at 507 Lake (1909) and two American Systems-Built houses at 330 Gregory Street (1919).

In 1967 the Alfred Bersbach House was recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey. In 1993 the Bersbach House was included in the Wilmette Historic Site Survey as a significant structure with architectural merit and was recognized as a candidate for landmark status; the house became a local landmark in 2002. The Bersbach House was also identified in the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency's historic structures survey.

#### Integrity

The Bersbach House retains sufficient integrity for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. Alfred Bersbach sold the house to Eva A. Schram on July 20, 1920. In the 1923 Wilmette Directory Index Elmer and Eva Schram are listed as residents. In the early 1940's the house was again listed on the real estate market, but there is no evidence that the house was sold before Joseph Reeves purchased it on September 13, 1956. The Reeves lived in the house until 1973, and sold the house to Anthony and Diane LaPorta who, in turn, sold the house to the current owners, Randy Randazzo and Kimberlee Kepper in 1993.

Kimberlee Kepper and Randy Randazzo are dedicated to restoring the architectural integrity of the Bersbach House, and began work almost immediately after the purchase of the house in 1993. A modified bitumen roof replaced layers of asphalt roofing. Because a small balcony off the northeast bedroom was causing a leak in the kitchen, the flashing was fixed and the small runoff aperture on the north side of the house was widened. All of the gutters and downspouts were replaced with copper to reconstruct the original appearance of the house.

Regina Art Glass of Schiller Park, Illinois began the restoration of the art glass windows and doors in the house in 1994. The windows facing east were restored first, as they were in greatest need of repair due to years of battering by harsh winds and lake storms. A reinforcement bar was added to the bay of windows on the staircase landing for strength and to prevent them from sagging. Many window sills on the east side needed repair due to water damage. Several windows needed the operators (cranks) repaired after years of neglect. The mahogany woodwork, trim, and baseboards on the first and second floor hallways were covered with dark

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shellac, and in the case of the dining room, covered with a dark brown paint. In 1993 this woodwork was stripped and a simple clear, matte finish was added to enhance the natural appearance of the wood. The birch woodwork in the bedrooms and kitchen had also been painted, and was stripped and stained to match the mahogany wood in other parts of the house.

The parquet floors in the study that were added in the 1970s covered the original maple bedroom floors of the maid's rooms and the white tiles from the adjoining bathroom. The floor for this entire area was replaced with an oak hardwood floor. A radiator and cover were added to this room. Because the room lacked light fixtures, two ceiling fixtures designed by George Elmslie were purchased and added to the study. As in other rooms, the wood in the study was stripped and re-stained, and as the original baseboards had been badly damaged, new baseboards were installed to be in concert with woodwork throughout the rest of the house. A band of trim was reinstalled above the windows and doors to unify the design scheme of the room, consistent with the original design. A closet previously removed during a kitchen remodeling project was replaced. The door to the study was missing, and a new double door with art glass panels was constructed to match the pattern found on other windows and light fixtures. A similar set of double doors was created to fit between the kitchen and the dining room. The door jamb seemed to indicate a swinging door had been there originally, but the baseboard in the dining room seemed to indicate double doors.

Light fixtures in the house are a mix of original and reproductions. All of the newly constructed fixtures were made by Altamira Glass of Oak Park. Much of the work on the lighting occurred in 1995. Box-School light fixtures were modeled after the three original fixtures located in the hallway and garden room. The recreated light fixtures were installed in the kitchen and the entryway. An original sconce in the powder room was moved to the foyer to add light to the area. The ceiling light fixtures in the living room were missing, so new ones were created using a design derived from the sconces on the fireplace and the newel post light fixture in the first floor hall. The sconces in the living room on either side of the fireplace are original. The light fixture in the dining room was originally installed in a Prairie School-style house in Chicago. Shades were removed to show the original bare bulb fixtures on the sleeping porch and the landing near the back door. In the kitchen hangs a Handel chandelier, which was purchased at an auction.

The basement was renovated in 1996. Wood paneling probably added in 1963 was removed from the basement and from the stairway connecting the basement with the front entry. Acoustic tiles, also probably dating to 1963, were removed from the ceiling. The walls and ceiling in the playroom, drying room and hallway were replastered. Two sconces were added to the fireplace. The non-original tiles on the base of the fireplace were removed and replaced with firebrick. Base moldings were created to match those on the other floors. All

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doors and windows in the basement are original and they were all stripped and refinished. The southernmost room, which was originally a windowless storage room, was converted into a bedroom and windows were added.

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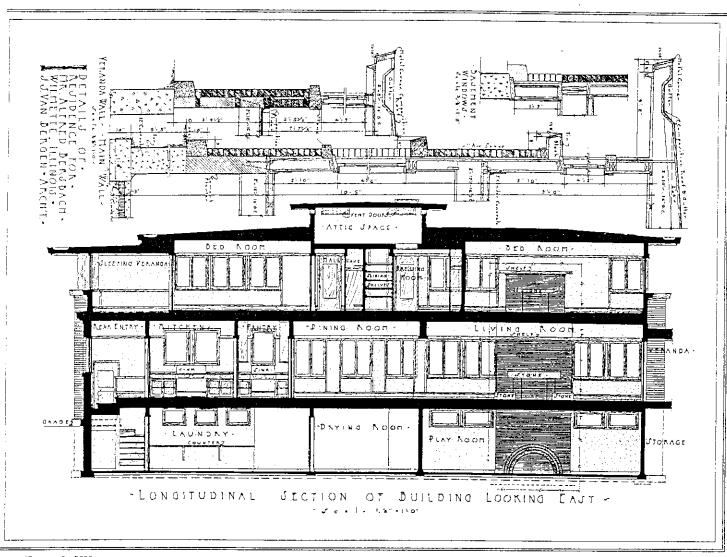
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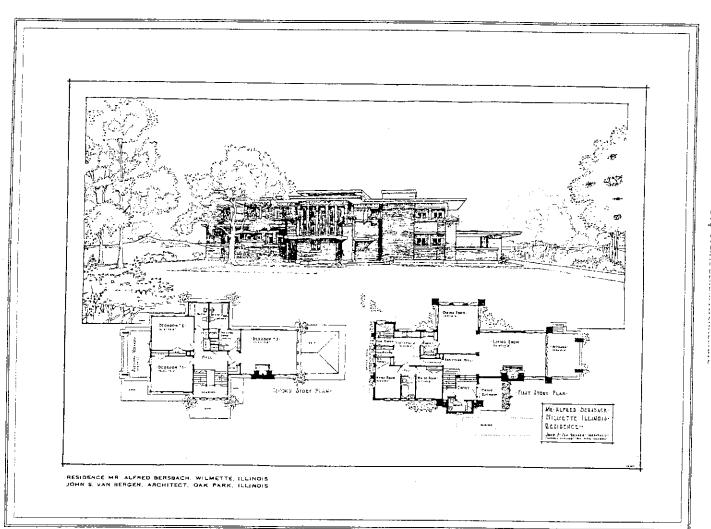
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#### BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

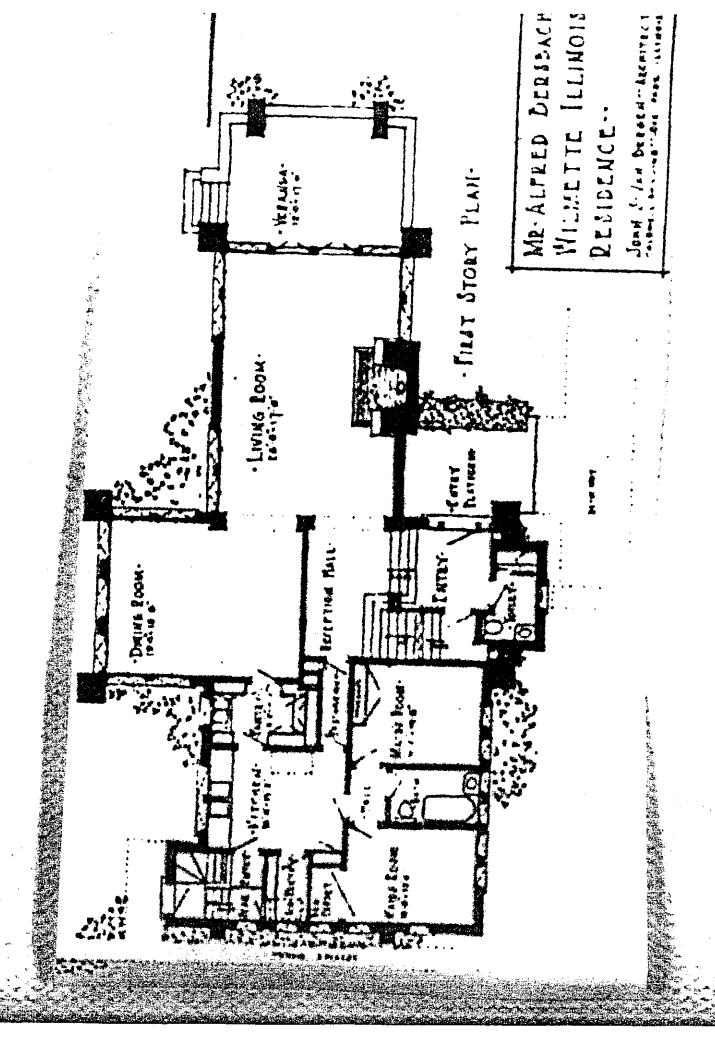
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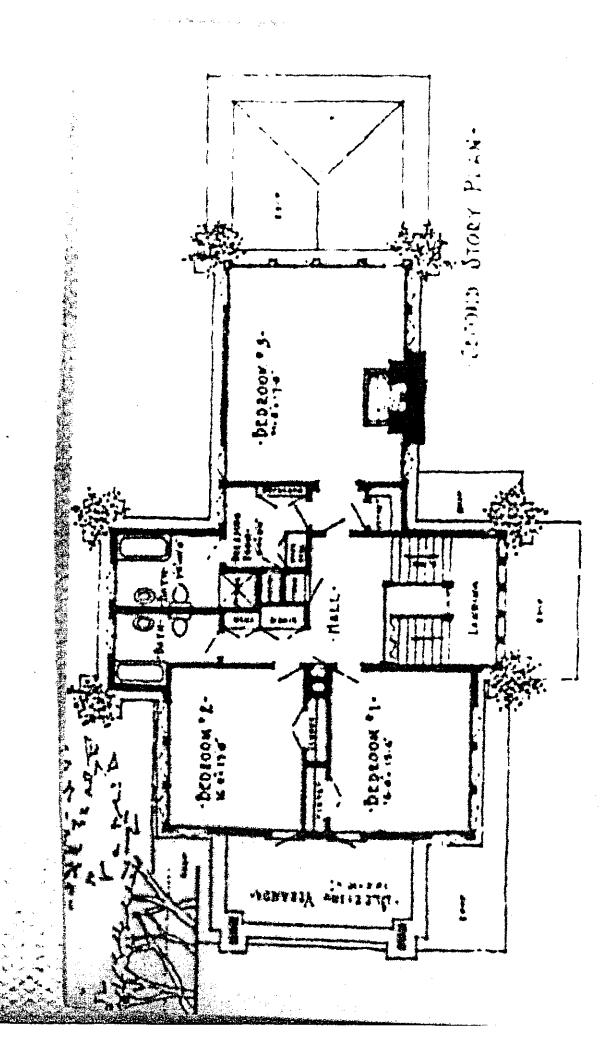


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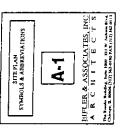


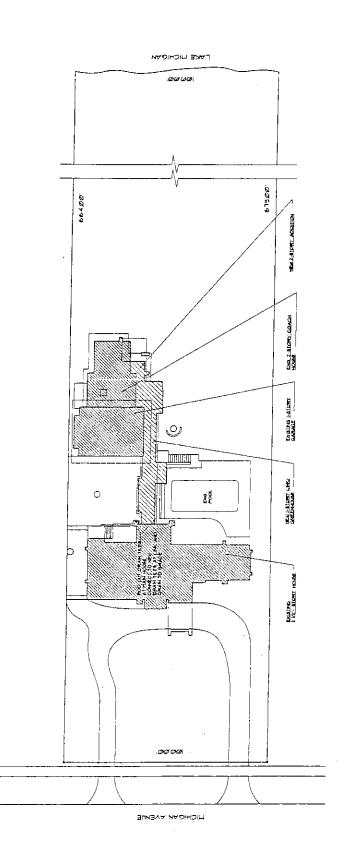
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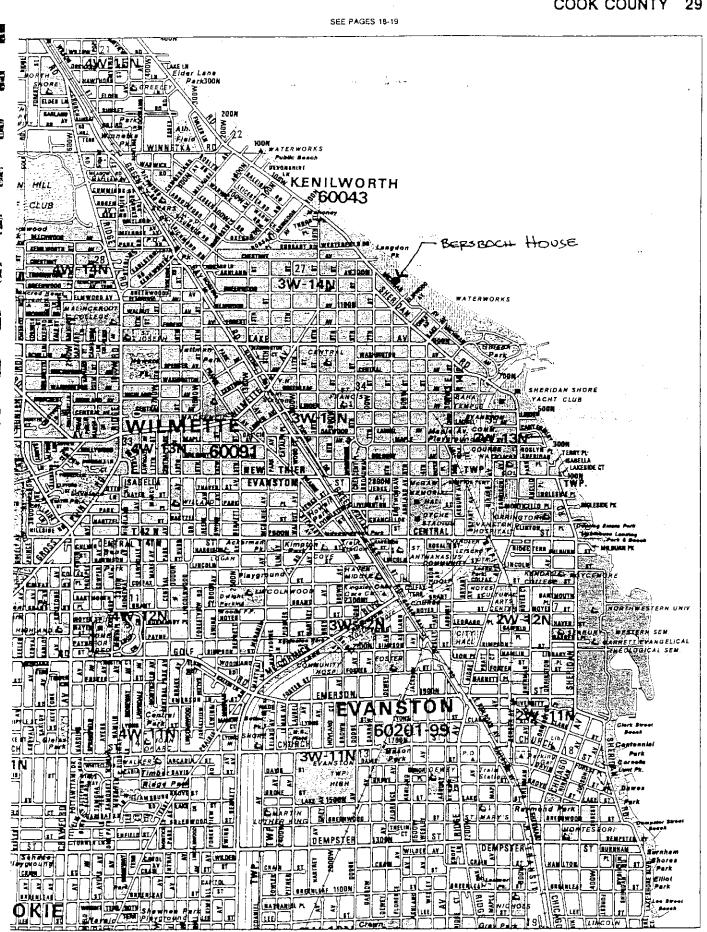




ALLEWATIONS TO THE
KEPPERRANDAZZO
RESIDENCE
1120 Michigan Avenue
Wilmerie, IL. 60/01







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DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STATE EQUIVALENT,
   Immaculate Conception Church,
   1315 8th St., NW,
   Washington, 03000946,
   LISTED, 9/17/03
   DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STATE EQUIVALENT,
   Seventh Street Savings Bank,
   1300 7th St. NW,
   Washington, 03000944,
   LISTED, 9/17/03
   (Banks and Financial Institutions MPS)
   DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA STATE EQUIVALENT,
   United Brotherhood of Carpenters and Joiners--Local 132,
   1010 10th St. NW, 1001 K St. NW,
   Washington, 03000945,
   LISTED, 9/17/03
   FLORIDA, PINELLAS COUNTY,
   Pass-A-Grille Historic District (Boundary Increase),
   Pass-a-Grille Way, 1st Ave., Gulf Way, Sunset Way, 32 Ave.,
   St. Pete Beach, 03000943,
   LISTED, 9/15/03
Bersbach, Alfred, House,
   1120 Michigan Ave.,
   Wilmette, 03000941,
   LISTED, 9/17/03
   ILLINOIS, LAKE COUNTY,
   Stevenson, Adlai E., II, Farm,
   25200 N. Saint Mary's Rd.,
  Mettawa vicinity, 03000918,
  LISTED, 9/14/03
   ILLINOIS, WINNEBAGO COUNTY,
  Jameson, H.D., House,
   900 N. Prairie St.,
  Rockton vicinity, 03000915,
  LISTED, 9/14/03
  KENTUCKY, HARLAN COUNTY,
  Lynch Historic District,
  Roughly bounded by city limits, L&N RR bed, Big Looney Cr., Second, Mountain,
  Highland Terrace, Liberty, and Church Sts.,
  Lynch, 03000086,
  LISTED, 9/15/03
  NEW JERSEY, SOMERSET COUNTY,
  St. John's Church Complex,
  154-158 W. High School,
  Somerville, 03000933,
  LISTED, 9/15/03
  PENNSYLVANIA, BRADFORD COUNTY,
  Wyalusing Borough Historic District,
  Roughly bounded by Prospect, First, Second, Third, Noble Sts., and Taylor
  Ave.,
  Wyalusing Borough, 03000934,
  LISTED, 9/15/03
  WASHINGTON, SPOKANE COUNTY,
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