

John J. Glessner House (Now Chicago  
School of Architecture Foundation)  
1800 Prairie Avenue  
Southwest corner of S. Prairie  
Avenue and E. 18th Street  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS No. ILL-1015

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
17-

PHOTOGRAPHS  
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

*Revised Copies of Measured Drawings*

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation  
801 - 19th Street N.W.  
Washington, D.C.

JOHN J. GLESSNER HOUSE  
(Now Chicago School of Architecture Foundation)HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
17-

- Location: 1800 Prairie Avenue, southwest corner of S. Prairie Avenue and E. 18th Street, Chicago, Cook County, Illinois.
- Present Owner and Occupant: The Chicago School of Architecture Foundation, a non-profit educational foundation organized to develop public appreciation for the architectural monuments of the Early Modern Movement in the Chicago area and to provide research facilities for interested persons.
- Present Use: Headquarters of the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation, space is used for offices, library, exhibits, and lecture rooms.
- Statement of Significance: Designed and built between May 1885 and December 1887, this house is considered the last of the fully personal works of the architect H. H. Richardson and one of his finest houses. The house was designated a Chicago Architectural Landmark in 1958, "In recognition of the fine planning for an urban site, which opens the family rooms to the quiet serenity of an inner yard; the effective ornament and decoration; and the impressive Romanesque masonry, expressing dignity and power." [Quoted from the plaque placed on the house by the Commission on Architectural Landmarks.]

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Legal description of property: Property Assessors Division of SW fr'1 1/4. Sec. 22, 39, 14, recorded May 7, 1855. Block 9, Lots 38, 39 and 40.

The following was obtained from Book 502A, pp. 77-79, Cook County Recorder's Office. On March 24, 1885, John J. Glessner bought lots 39, 40 and the northern 17 feet of lot 38 from Samuel B. Barker for the sum of \$50,000.00 (Document 616860, Record 1602, p. 468). Glessner owned the property until December 1, 1924, when he turned the deed over to the Chicago Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (Document 10574474), with the understanding that they would take possession of the house after the death of Mr. and Mrs. Glessner. When they died, in 1932

and 1936 respectively, the high cost of maintaining the house forced the A.I.A. to return it to Glessner's heirs. On June 15, 1937 the house was accordingly transferred to Francis G. Lee [Glessner's son-in-law] (Document 12089976). On November 1, 1938 Francis G. Lee, Mrs. John G. M. Glessner [a widowed daughter-in-law], Elizabeth G. Edge, and Francis G. Mather sold the property to the Amour Institute of Technology (Documents 12138879, 80, 81, and 82). Finally, on April 1, 1958 the Illinois Institute of Technology sold the property to the Lithographic Technical Foundation (Document 17171192).

2. Date of erection: Design initiated May, 1885; built June 1, 1886 to December 1, 1887.
3. Architect: Henry Hobson Richardson.
4. Builder, suppliers, etc: Narcross Brothers, Worcester Mass., contractors; plumbing manufactured by Meyer-Sniffen in England.
5. Original plans, construction, etc: 102 of the original drawings for the house are in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. Also see the Supplementary Material, for a description by the owner of the circumstances surrounding the building and furnishing of the house.
6. Alterations: In September, 1946, Friedman Alschuler, and Sincere, architects, 28 East Jackson Blvd., Chicago, Illinois, converted the building to make it a research center. Most of the work involved the positioning of laboratory equipment, with the original plan as well as the finishes and permanent furniture being left untouched. The stable loft and the open areas of the basement were extensively partitioned. The stable door was replaced and the loft door closed up. The fixtures in the stable, kitchen, and laundry were for the most part removed, as was the coal furnace and its coal bins and chutes. New lighting fixtures were installed, and many of the unused original fixtures are now broken or lost. The wood work of the school room was painted. The door of the underpass on the east facade of the house was replaced, and the courtyard entirely paved to serve as a parking lot.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

There was an old Chicago Saying which described Prairie Avenue as, "The sunny street that holds the sifted few." [Arther Meeker, Prairie Avenue (New York: 1949), p. 10.] It was a wide tree lined avenue stretching south from the Loop, one

block west of the railroad yards which still line the Lake shore. Here, in the 1880's "the houses grew bigger and grander, the elm trees taller, and the gardens more spacious" [Ibid., p. 15]; here dwelt Armour, Pullman, Kimball, and, of course, Marshall Field who had employed Richard Morris Hunt to build his two million dollar house, and who in 1886 lighted the length of Prairie Avenue with special calcium lamps for a party that cost \$76,000 [John Drury, Old Chicago Houses (Chicago: 1941), pp. 35-39]. After the great fire of 1871 and before the deterioration of the area in the 1920's those who lived here truly were "the sifted few."

Just why the fashionable district did not develop on the north side closer to the view and breezes of the lake, mystified the late 19th century architectural critic Montgomery Schuyler. In an article written for Harpers Magazine in 1891 ["Glimpses of Western Architecture," pp. 395-406, reprinted in his American Architecture, 1892, pp. 112-167, and finally reprinted in the posthumous publication of his American Architecture and Other Writings, edited by William H. Jordy and Ralph Coe, Cambridge: 1961, pp. 245-291] Schuyler observed, "To the majority of people who live where they will and not where they must, this is a considerable exception, and one would suppose the fashionable quarter would be that quarter from which the lake is most accessible... For it happens that the dwellers upon the south side are cut off from a practical or picturesque use of the lake by the fact that the shore to the south of the city is occupied by railroad tracks, and the nearest houses of any pretensions are turned away from the water, of which only the horses stabled in the rear are in a position to enjoy the view." [1961 reprint, p. 276.]

Drury, p. 25, described Prairie Avenue as "the most exclusive and fashionable neighborhood in Chicago." Now the street is entirely changed. A few of the old houses, such as the Glessner house have been preserved by institutions, but many were destroyed by their owners. Not able to sell them, the owners could at least lessen the taxes by demolishing the houses [Meeker, op. cit., p. 3313]. Now the gaps between the few battered ghosts of Prairie Avenue's former glory are filled with factories and parking lots.

Among the sifted few was John J. Glessner, who in 1886 built his house at the corner of Eighteenth Street and Prairie Avenue, diagonally opposite Pullman's huge mansion and across the street from W. W. Kimball's smaller French chateaux, which was designed by the popular architect S. S. Beman, costing about one million dollars [Drury, op. cit., pp. 49-53].

Glessner was born in 1843 in Zanesville, Ohio, into a simple family of old Anglo-Saxon stock. After a public school education he worked for a while in the newspaper business before entering the farm machinery trade, in 1864 becoming the vice-president of the company of Warder, Bushnell and Glessner. After the Chicago fire of 1871 all the suppliers of farm machinery began to expand rapidly amid fierce competition making use of advertising, salesmen, traveling agricultural lecturers, and newspapers. The leaders, McCormick and Deering, bought coal fields, iron works and timber lands in an effort to cut their production costs. So intense was the competition that soon it became obvious that the market was being swamped. By 1902 things seemed dangerous and George W. Perkins, J. P. Morgan's "right hand man," called Cyrus McCormick and the other leaders of the industry to New York and, after long negotiations ended the war by merging all the competitors into the new International Harvester Company. Under the leadership of Cyrus H. McCormick, who became the first president, McCormick, Deering, Plane, and Warder, Bushnell and Glessner combined and the Milwaukee Harvester Company was bought out. There were four vice-presidents: Harold F. McCormick (to be the next president), James Deering, William H. Jones, and John J. Glessner. Glessner had brought his company through the harvester war and was finally honored by being chosen to represent it in the leadership of International Harvester. He had fought as hard as any of them (some of the promotional literature of Warder, Bushnell and Glessner is now in the Chicago Historical Society) and, though not able to stand on a level with the giants, McCormick and Deering, he was able to expand from 800 machines sold in 1871 to 25,000 sold in 1884, /figures from A. T. Andreas, History of Chicago (Vol. 3, 1872-1885, Chicago, 1886), p. 504/. Cyrus H. McCormick, The Century of the Reaper (Cambridge, 1931), p. 111, ff. presents a clear picture of this period.

In 1870 Glessner had moved from Springfield, Ohio where the company plant was located, to Chicago to be closer to his midwestern market. He brought with him his wife, Frances, whom he had just married, and the two of them settled down with an increasing brood of children to a quiet but respectably active private life in the midst of the "harvester war." Glessner was a very active member and once the president of the Chicago Commercial Club, among other things writing a lively little book on the members, Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot?, (1924) and a longer 213 page history of the Club, The Chicago Commercial Club, (1910). He also was a trustee of the Chicago Orchestral Association, on particularly intimate terms with the director, Mr. Thomas, and the musicians, and a trustee of the Art Institute to which he gave some personal possessions of artistic merit. (See Supplemental Material.)

Mr. Glessner was also a trustee of the Chicago Orphan Asylum, president of the Board of Directors of the Rush Medical College, president of the Chicago Relief and Aid Society, and president of the Chicago Citizen's Association when the Chicago River Drainage Canal Bill was successfully pushed through the state legislature.

John J. Glessner's personality is less thoroughly documented: the only direct statement upon this subject comes from Drury's chatty book, where we are informed, on the authority of the Glessners' neighbors: "They were conservative, quiet people, educated and cultured..." [Drury, op. cit., p. 46]. A great deal more revealing, however, is the booklet which Glessner wrote for his children in 1923 describing the house and his life in it. Reading between the lines one is at once struck by Glessner's solid interest in culture and education: the education he provided his son, his wife's Monday morning reading class, and the numerous anecdotes about the Chicago Symphony Orchestra's visit to the house. His artistic taste is also illustrated: Glessner seems to have had little respect for the contemporary over-ornamented style of architecture, dismissing the aesthetics of his old Park Avenue house as "attractive within in spite of white marble mantels and similar so-called adornments." His taste may have owed something to that of his wife Frances of whom he wrote: "Her remarkable sense of the value of color and fabric and form and arrangement were what made our three homes in Chicago so attractive..." The furnishings of the house, aside from the usual sentimental bric-a-brac, reflect a simple but well-educated taste: Morris rugs and hangings, dining room furniture by Coolidge, a huge Richardsonian desk in the library and a carefully picked collection of etchings, drawings and paintings. The Glessners were up-to-date in their taste, but they seem honestly so.

John J. Glessner was a prominent man of the world ("doing men" as he describes the Chicago Commercial Club, and thus himself) [John J. Glessner, Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot? (Chicago: 1924), p. 7] and played a part in one of the most fast-moving periods of the history of business. Although fighting a fierce business war, he often turned to the quieter pursuits of music, learning, and art with the same straightforwardness and lack of self-conscious tradition, the same love of "simplicity and proportion" which guided H. H. Richardson. It seems quite evident that it really was Richardson's style, not his reputation, that made Glessner choose him as the architect of his house. Richardson gave him a revolutionary house, yet a simple one, well proportioned, inward-looking and quiet, fully harmonious with the furnishings and family which so gratefully dwelt there.

C. Bibliography:

1. Primary sources: The records of the Cook County Recorder's Office (cited on p. 1).

An unpublished booklet written in March, 1923, for his two children, J. J. Glessner, The Story of a House. A copy is presently in the possession of George R. Mathey, Turkey Shore Road, Ipswich, Massachusetts. The contents include:

- 1) A photograph of H. H. Richardson.
- 2) 13 page typescript, a narrative description of the house with background information about it, signed by J. J. Glessner (transcribed below in Supplementary Material).
- 3) 4 page typescript "Why we built the house on this plan and how we came to select this architect," by J. J. Glessner, but not signed, reproduced in full by Henry-Russell Hitchcock, in The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times (Hamden, 1961), pp. 328-330.
- 4) Photograph entitled "Keynote of House showing Adingdon Abbey in Great Britain."
- 5) Old photographs (of high quality), 12 exterior views, 34 interiors, some of which have been copied herewith for HABS.
- 6) Small photographs of the basement plan and two principal floor plans.
- 7) 6 page typescript of miscellaneous remarks about the house from Mrs. Glessner's diary.
- 8) 1 page of photographs of other houses by Richardson of this same period.
- 9) Newer photographs: 7 exterior views, 2 interiors, some of which have been copied herewith for HABS.

102 drawings related to the designing of the house are now in the Houghton Library at Harvard University. 52 have been copied on microfilm and deposited in the Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago.

2. Secondary sources:

Architectural Record, Vol. VI, No. 1 (July-September, 1896), p. 86. Photograph.

Drury, John. Old Chicago Houses. Chicago: 1941, pp. 44-48.

Glessner, John J. Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot? Chicago: 1924, p. 19.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell. The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and His Times. Revised edition, Hamden: 1961, pp. 267, 271, 277-278, and 328-330.

The Inland Architect and Builder. Vol. XI, No. 1, Photograph section.

Meeker, Arther. Prairie Avenue. New York: 1949.

Mumford, Lewis. The Brown Decades. New York: 1931, p. 120.

Pickens, Buford. "H. H. Richardson and Basic Form Concepts in Modern Architecture," The Art Quarterly. Vol. III (1940), pp. 273-291.

Scully, Vincent J. Jr. The Shingle Style. New Haven: 1955, p. 98.

Schuyler, Montgomery. American Architecture and Other Essays. Edited by William H. Jordy and Ralph Coe, Cambridge: 1961, pp. 283-285.

Van Ransellear, Mrs. Schuyler. H. H. Richardson and His Work. Boston: 1888, p. 109.

Van Zanten, David T. "H. H. Richardson's Glessner House, Chicago, 1886-1887," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians. Vol. XXIII (May, 1964), pp. 107-111.

D. Supplemental Information:

The following is transcribed from an unpublished booklet by J. J. Glessner, The Story of a House, written for his two children in 1923, and now owned by George R. Mathey, Turkey Shore Road, Ipswich, Massachusetts.

"My dear George and Frances:

Mankind is ever seeking its comforts and to achieve its ideals. The Anglo-Saxon portion of mankind is a home-making, home-loving race. I think the desire is in us all to receive the family home from the past generation and hand it on to the next with possibly some good mark of our own upon it. Rarely can this be accomplished in this land of rapid changes. Families have not held and cannot hold even to the same localities for their homes generation after generation, but we can at least preserve some memory of the old.

Your forbears as far back as I have traced on both sides of the house have made their altar around the family hearthstone, and have tried to keep to its legends when compelled to leave it.

My father's house was very attractive to me. I well remember when he built it, and though I was quite a small boy, the odor of fresh plastering still remains in my nostrils in this long retrospect. And because this recollection persists, I wish to tell you something about our Chicago house at the corner of Prairie Avenue and 18th Street, the home of your childhood. Much of what I write may be well known to you already, part of it may be new, and part may perhaps be irrelevant.

The description of this home may give some indication of how a man of moderate fortune would live in the latter part of the 19th century and the earlier part of the 20th -- an average man with a modicum of this world's material possessions, but by no means rich, except in family and friends.

The house was built in 1886. On the morning of June 1st of that year, I sent word from my office to your mother that wheel barrows, spades and picks had just then been sent to the site of our proposed new home, that digging would begin at one o'clock, and if she would take Frances and nurse, etc. in the carriage, and let George drive my horse and buggy and stop at the office for me, and all of us reach the site soon after twelve o'clock, you two children--George then fourteen and a half years and Frances a little more than eight years old--might throw the first soil from the foundation trenches. And that we did.

Just eighteen months after that to the day, we occupied the completed house. Because of its plan, we were able to move all of our household belongings through the courtyard entrance from the alley, and place them in the house before our neighbors suspected even that we were about to move.

These were good, kind friends of ours, these neighbors, the finest and most considerate that any one ever had, and they welcomed us warmly--the Shortalls, the Spauldings, Harveys, Hibbards, Kelloggs, Dexters, Sturges, Walkers, Otises, Pullmans, Amours, Doanes, Keiths, Fields, Hendersons, Clarks, Grays, Allertons, etc., etc., and many others of the same class who came afterwards. Farther south on the Avenue were the Spragues, Bartletts, Hutchinsons, Judahs, Hamills, Lancasters, Gettys, Hughitts, Keeps, Haskells, Henry Blairs, and others, and on the Avenues both east and west were other dear friends.

We slept in this house for the first time on the night of December 1, 1887 and never in the old house after that. The fire on the hearth typified the home, so we carried the living fire from the hearthstone in the old home at Washington and Morgan Streets, and with that started the fire on the new hearth, accompanied by a little ceremony that I don't know if you remember or not; but the old home had been pleasant with many intimate social gatherings--for your mother had ever the genius for generous friendships and hospitality, and the life in the new home must be a continuation of the life so happily lived in the old, and carry on without break its customs and traditions. And so it was with the fire: the old did not go out, the new merely continued its warmth and glow.

The Virginia Creeper vines on the courtyard walls were carried from the old home. All were properly trimmed before replanting except one which was fifty-five feet long, and which when planted was trained its full length. We hardly expected that to grow, but it did, and flourished. The vines on the front were different. Some of our Boston friends knew of Richardson's work here, and when Boston's Commercial Club came to visit ours, June 11, 1887, and I was taking a carriage load of these visitors to Washington Park Club for luncheon and to see some horse racing, several asked if they couldn't be taken past my home, then building, and one--Alpheus Hardy--wanted the privilege of sending Boston ivy to grow over the walls. From plants that he sent came all the vines now on front of the house.

Almost at the beginning--that is, on Sunday December 4, 1887--we brought our long time familiar and dear friend Prof. David Swing, and other dear and intimate friends, Franklin and Emily MacVeagh and Fames, in to dine and to approve our new habitation. We took them all over the house, upstairs and downstairs and in every room. Before saying good night at starting home, the Professor, then pastor of Chicago's Central (undenominational) Church, said a little prayer of blessing upon the house and its inmates and the friends who might from time to time be gathered within its shelter. And so our new home was started.

Then followed luncheons and teas and receptions and dinners of farewell on the West Side and of welcome to the South.

Here in the new home your mother at once resumed the open house of cheer that had lent charm to the old on Sunday afternoons and evenings, and on holidays for the waifs and strays, so-called, who so often find holidays depressing, young men

and women without families or homes in the city. I think there were scores of them before the World's Fair; and at that time and afterwards we tried to make our home a harbor of refuge, not for the casual visitor only but for the University professors and their families, and other fine and gentle folk not yet sufficiently established and with few acquaintances and connections here.

Here, too, she founded the Monday Morning Reading Class that has had continuous existence for more than thirty years. Perhaps this might be called an outgrowth of a smaller company that had had irregular meetings for reading and study in the old home, but of this later organization neither illness, nor health, not pleasure has interrupted the regularity of its weekly meetings through the winters and springs, and its course of study, and, incidentally, its monthly luncheons; and nothing has marred the pleasure of this association together of these cultivated, congenial women. In these three decades there have been few resignations, and no loss of interest, and the meetings are more highly praised now than ever before. The eighty or more members of the class are kind enough to say they find in our library an atmosphere of peace and contentment and charm that has brought genuine affection one for another. The Reading Class has been a great factor for kindly good will, and your mother has been its tutelary genius.

Of course there was something more than the reading. While that went on the ladies' fingers were busy with sewing and other womanly occupation, and when the reading stopped doubtless their tongues grew active in womanly conversation. During the World War the class knitted sweaters, etc., for the soldiers, and since the armistice it has been making sweaters and blankets and garments for convalescents and infants at Cook County hospital. The amount of this work has been enormous; it has been exceedingly well done, is most gratefully received, and the members of the class have great satisfaction in doing it.

Just a word more about your mother: She had a clean and wholesome and orderly mind, a heart overflowing with love for family and friends and for all in any need. Her remarkable sense of value of color and fabric and form and arrangement were what made our three homes in Chicago so attractive, and even the small and mean hotel apartments we occupied in the summers for your health, and the various houses in California we rented in the winters for her health, were made homely and pleasant by her deft touches.

A story apropos: A dear old lady once said to me in all seriousness, "Mr. Glessner, you are a very important member

of this community; you have a position of great prominence and influence; you get it from your wife and your house." Don't think this disparagement of me. I thought it a real compliment, for I selected the one and I built the other.

This is not the place for any panegyric upon your mother, nor to recount "her many little unremembered acts of kindness and of love:" if I began that I might not complete this story of the house. She was only a slip of a girl when I brought her to Chicago. Chicago was truly the Garden City then, with no apartment houses, few double houses, and only occasional blocks of houses. Even the lowly homes were detached cottages, usually of wood and behind wooden sidewalks, but each with a small plat of ground.

Our first habitation in Chicago, northeast corner of Park Avenue and Page Street, was rented in 1870, and we lived there for five years. The second home, northeast corner of Washington and Morgan Streets, we bought in 1875, and lived there about twelve years. The third, southwest corner of Prairie Avenue and 18th Street, we built in 1886, and have lived there since then.

The Park Avenue house belonged to Judge McAllister, and his family had been its only occupants until we rented it. Here George was born, and afterwards the little brother who died. It was a frame house with a nice but narrow lawn on three sides, and was made attractive within in spite of white marble mantels and similar so-called adornments.

We wished to possess our own home, and bought on Washington Street the house that had been built by Sylvester Lind and occupied by him, then sold to Jacob Beidler, who lived there some years, and sold to me. Both of these families were well known in Chicago at that time. This house was of brick, on the street corner, and the grounds extended for half the block frontage on both streets. Our neighbor, Thomas M. Avery, with a similar lot next east of this, joined with us to remove the dividing fence. His house on the corner of Washington and Sangamon Streets, close to Sangamon, and ours on Washington and Morgan Streets, close to Morgan, left one glorious lawn between, all grass, with bright flowers at the borders, and the only division visible was a big, splendid elm tree that stood just inside of my line. At the Morgan Street side was a great pear tree, the largest I had ever seen, and several large maple trees. Again the house was made charming inside. Frances was born there. It really was a cross to leave that place, but the changing neighborhood and the demand for a little more room for you growing children made it necessary.

Then came the present house. Over the thresholds of this has passed a regular procession of teachers for you -- in literature, languages, classical and modern mathematics, chemistry, art, and the whole gamut of the humanities and the practical, considerable beyond the curricula of the High Schools. Whether this plan of education was wise or not may be questioned, but unfortunately George had developed a severe case of hay fever while he was yet less than four years old, and we were advised not to subject him to the nervous strain of a school where he would meet the competition of others. Of this I am sure, that it gave to each of you a great fund of general information, a power of observation and of reasoning, an ability and desire for study, and to be thoroughly proficient in what you might undertake. If ever there was a royal road for that, you had it, whatever its defects may have been in other respects.

The school room, approached from the front door without going through other parts of the house, was a rendezvous for George's friends and teachers alike, for they were all comrades together. Here they had their long, long thoughts of youth, their boyish activities, their fire brigade, their regularly organized telegraph company, presided over, as a labor of love, by Norman Williams, one of the ablest and most astute of lawyers, with wires connecting seven different residences of the members, all centering in this house. Every boy was as free to come and go as George himself, until they dropped it all for the delights and wider associations of college. And then similar activities for Frances and her friends--much studious application, of course, but a plenty of amusement and gentle recreation, and never any shirking. Oh the joys that emanated from that room-- No espionage, no punishment, no need for that; no too hard and fast rules, no too rigid disciplinary regulation.

This house was designed by Henry H. Richardson of Brookline, Mass., its construction being under the direct supervision of his assistants and successors, Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge. Shepley and Coolidge were graduates of Harvard and of Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Richardson had a standing offer with the Institute to take into his office for training and employment after their graduation the best three men developed by each class at "Tech," and often said that these two were the ablest he had found. Rutan was his engineer. Shepley was of St. Louis and afterwards married Richardson's daughter: Coolidge was of Boston and married Shepley's sister. Richardson was America's foremost architect at that time, and one of the ablest ever produced here. He would have had a far greater reputation had he lived long enough to do more work. He was building two other residences at the same time

he was building ours-- Mr. Warder's in Washington and Franklin MacVeagh's here, and of course he had built others. At the time of his death builders were at work upon sixteen important structures of his designing. All together he had had only sixty-four commissions in his entire professional career. From what he told me and what his young men said afterwards, I am convinced that this house of ours is the one of all that he built that he would have liked most to live in himself. It was his last work. Just three weeks before his death, as your mother and I sat with him in his bedroom in his home,-- for he was unable to leave it, -- he marked in the drawings the places for the lighting fixtures, and turning to me, said: "There, Mr. Glessner if I were to live five years longer, that is the last thing I would do on your house, my part is finished." On that day, when I felt that I ought not to stay longer and bother him, while he was so ill, his office force begged me to stay--otherwise he would go downstairs to his office, which would be bad for him. On this occasion I saw his bath tub, which had two steps built in it to help him in getting in and out. Over his bed he had two large iron rings suspended by straps from the ceiling, that he might grasp these when he got up or turned over. Though he made a trip to Washington after this interview, he did no more work of any kind, and in three weeks from that day he was no more.

Simplicity and proportion were the strongest characteristics of his work. The same style and finish go all through this house, from front to back, whether in show places or in obscure places. The roofs are of red baked tiles, unglazed, the outside walls on the streets are of Wellesley granite, and all walls are lined with hollow brick, to which the plastering is attached without laths, so there is no place for mice behind the plastering; all bath room walls and floors are of white glazed tiles; the back entrance corridor and kitchen walls, and the carriage house and stables (now garage) are of white glazed brick. The heating is from the furnace room under the garage, thus avoiding the dust and dirt and noise of coal and ashes in the house,-- a hot water system it is, admirable for the time when it was put in.

Either the floors are deadened or the ceilings doubled, or both, so that sounds do not carry through the house; basement and furnace room ceilings are plastered, and all have cement floors.

The courtyard elevation, of common brick of slightly pinkish color, with gray limestone trimmings, is quite as interesting as the street fronts, though in a different way. By special arrangement the same brick were used in the adjoining house, so that all walls of the courtyard are of the same texture and color.

Altogether, the house was as well built in every detail as the architect could suggest or as we know how to build, and one great cause for satisfaction was that there was absolutely no bill of extra charges. It was completed for the contract price and no more. There were no labor troubles and no disputes with the builders, Norcross Brothers of Worcester, Mass., or if there were any they were settled by the architect's superintendent, -- Cameron, from Richardson's office, who gave his entire attention to this building. George Bosworth succeeded Cameron as superintendent.

The tiles in the mantels of the first-floor bedroom, and of the second guest rooms are by William De Morgan, with antique Persian tiles in the dining room, fireplaces and irons are old Colonial and old Continental European, and that in the library is old Scotch, all of them found in junk shops after they had been taken from old buildings; many of the gas and electric fixtures, wall papers, curtains and carpets, except antique rugs, are by William Morris, and have been renewed from the same patterns when renewal was necessary; yellow glass under chipped white glass in the door leading to the courtyard gives a feeling of sunlight in the hall even in cloudy weather.

Mr. Richardson insisted on one or two small extravagances, fine imported marbles in parlor and hall mantels, imported washbowls from the English factories of Meyer-Sniffen, because more generous in size than those to be had here, silver plate on plumbing fixtures, though nickel would have been cheaper and have given less care, but he agreed with Matthew Arnold in bewailing the common "want of fastidiousness and the proneness to mistake nickel for silver" and would have none of that in his work. He was particular about the stair rail and balusters. Of the latter there are four different patterns, one of each on each step, all slender, graceful, fine reproductions from some distinguished old Colonial house -- the Longfellow house at Cambridge, if my memory is not at fault-- but I distinctly remember that they cost one dollar each.

And then the grille and other iron-work on the front door, and other outside iron-work, he would not have painted, but that must be Bower-barffed, a process that I think has not come into general use, at least I don't recall seeing it elsewhere, but it has completely protected the iron-work from rust, though exposed to the weather all these years.

He maintained that the windows of a city house were "not to look out of" and should not be large: "You no sooner get them than you shroud them with two thickness of window shades, and then add double sets of curtains."

When first built, the house was subject of much remark by passers-by, because of the narrow windows in its north side along 18th Street, just enough to light the narrow corridors, these critics not realizing that on the south side, looking on the courtyard, Mr. Richardson had put generous windows that let in a flood of sunlight when the sun shines in Chicago.

The house responds: it seems available for almost any social function. Large companies have been entertained in it comfortably and easily; there are two or more entrances or exits to every principal room, so that it is easy to move about, and passages are so planned that servants rarely are in evidence. Music and dramatic readings have been given to hundreds of persons, and receptions to more than four hundred at one time, without any feeling of crush, confusion or heat. Elaborate course dinners have been served in its rooms to more than one hundred guests at a time, the cooking all done in our kitchen and by our own cook. Twice the full Chicago Orchestra has dined there, and once the Commercial Club.

The kitchen and pantries are on the main or parlor floor, are well lighted, well ventilated, convenient, easily cleaned; and the small dining room adjoining has its table, its little sideboard, its writing desk. The entrance is through the great arch on Eighteenth Street to the small corridor, and thence to these offices. Also there is convenient access down the basement stairs to the school room, so that it is easy to serve company there.

Several times Mr. Thomas brought one third or more of the Orchestra to the house unannounced, as surprise for your mother upon her birthday or some other anniversary, and found it easy to smuggle them into the house without her knowledge. The first she might know of it might be when, sitting at dinner or at a late supper, some soft strains of music floated from the front hall. On the 25th anniversary of our wedding, Mr. Thomas brought the entire orchestra in by the Eighteenth Street door, up the back stairs, and their presence was not known until by his signal they began a delightful concert.

To begin the New Year on Thursday, January 1st, 1903, we gave an afternoon reception to mark your mother's birthday, and with the invitations enclosed Alice's card. At four o'clock lovely strains of music from a double quartet of horns came from the upper hall. The musicians had slipped in through the Eighteenth Street door and up the back stairs with no one the wiser except you two, and you were told that some refreshment might be provided. The men had asked Mr. Thomas to bring them up and give them the privilege of playing for us. Mr. Thomas

said that always before that he had brought the orchestra--this time the orchestra had brought him. After the quartet there was other music by about thirty men of the orchestra. Mrs. Thomas had brought Horation Parker, eminent organist and composer, to the reception, and he stayed through the concert.

Three weeks later we gave a dinner to the full orchestra and a few other guests, about one hundred in all. After the dinner the men gave us varied musical and comic stunts, dressing in costume and imitating great artists with great exaggerations, and finally playing the metronome movement from Beethoven's Eighth Symphony on pots, pans and dishes-- a wonderful and really musical performance.

After all these years the house is full of associations, of course. In this parlor Frances was married, in February, 1898, by Rev. Philip Mowry, then of Pennsylvania, who had performed the same office for your mother and me twenty-eight years before. The rugs were up and the furniture removed, to make smooth the space necessary for the wedding party and the wedding guests. In the former was Alice Hamlin, who had come from her home in Springfield, Ohio. After the ceremony we were happy to announce another wedding in prospect -- George's engagement to Alice for the following June.

Twenty-two years later our Golden Wedding celebration was combined with the "coming out" party we gave for Frances Glessner, for her twentieth birthday, December 7, 1920. The two anniversaries came on the same day, but until they were in the house our guests did not know they were celebrating more than Frances' presentation to society. And two years after that we had the pleasure to present another granddaughter to our Chicago friends-- Frances Lee, at a gathering of equal size and quality.

Among other things that have helped to make this home what it is is quite a collection of steel engravings of the time that Chas. Sumner called their golden age, mostly framed in the somewhat elaborate fashion of the early 80's--the work of our old and valued friend, Isaac Scott. The gathering of the prints consumed a number of years. As in those years the bottom of our purse was easily reached, our choice of what to buy was by elimination. First having one hundred or more plates sent home at a time, usually on some Saturday night in the winter, we would throw out all that did not strongly appeal to us; then go through the remainder a second time, leaving only the choicest; then a third or even fourth time, until there were left only those we "couldn't live without." It was hard to decide upon that but we had only so much -- or rather only so little that we could spend.

There are a few paintings and drawings, and these by personal friends--Hubert Herkomer, John Lafarge, Albert Herter, Hopkinson Smith, Joseph Linden Smith. Also a monotype, so-called, by A. H. Bicknell, an unusual print, made by smearing a copper plate with printer's ink, and then rubbing off in spots to make the lines and shades of the picture, and then printing after the manner of an etching. In this way each print requires the artist's work as much as a painting. An alcove in the hall was prepared especially for drawings, with cork walls to receive thumb tacks, but used otherwise when the smoky atmosphere compelled putting pictures under glass.

There are some excellent photographs, especially that of Richardson the architect, taken from the oil portrait by Herkomer. This portrait was painted under peculiar circumstances. Herkomer had designed for himself a house in the Bavarian highlands, and was not satisfied with the elevation. Coming to this country with some pictures, he called on Richardson with the request that he be permitted to paint his portrait. "But I haven't money to pay for it," objected Richardson. "You don't need to pay money for it," said Herkomer. "If you will sketch an elevation for my house I'll paint your portrait." And that was all the contract. The elevation was drawn, the portrait was painted. Herkomer showed us the work and promised to etch it and give me the first signed proof, and Richardson agreed to sign also, but alas the great architect died and his widow was unwilling that the portrait be taken to England to be etched. So I lost my double-signed proof; but Mrs. Richardson had the portrait photographed, enlarged by heliotype process two copies printed and the plate destroyed. This is one of those two copies and now hangs in the hall. In the painting the coat was a warm light gray, the waistcoat a brilliant primary yellow and the necktie a bright red.

At this time Mr. Richardson weighed three hundred and seventy pounds. There was nothing self-assertive about him, but he would have been marked in any company. Big-minded, big-bodied, big-hearted, he was a dominating personality, large in his own and other arts, in his views of life and of affairs generally. He was doomed to early death, and he knew it, but was not made unhappy either by the fact or his knowledge of it. When I saw this portrait of him, framed, on the sofa in the Richardson library, I was startled: it seemed almost that the man himself was sitting there. The portrait was never quite completed. A close examination of the photograph will show the texture of canvas visible about the eyes and around the mouth.

There are some other photographs and some Braun autotypes of classical subjects.

There are collections of Calli and Venetian and other rare glass, of porcelains and pottery and bronzes, of De Morgan and Minton and other tiles in addition to those in mantels, of jewelry and table and other silverware, especially a George IV tea-set, well authenticated, that bears his crest, first as Prince of Wales and afterwards as King of England. (Query: Was this the set he gave to Mrs. Fitzherbert? You know, George IV really married Mrs. Fitzherbert in 1785, and finally separated from her afterwards that he might marry another and have royal children to perpetuate the dynasty. There is the silver coffee-pot, a part of the official plate of the Spanish Admiral Cervera's flagship, Christobal Colon, sunk at the battle of Santiago bay on July 3, 1898, and recovered by a sailor of the American fleet, sold by him to a Navy surgeon, and thence to me; there is a Korean punch bowl and ladle that Sir Purdon Clarke of British Museum said was a museum piece so fine that our Art Institute should keep an eye on it and never let it get away; some interesting old and some more modern furniture, including in the former the mahogany sofa, originally upholstered in haircloth, that was her chief piece of parlor furniture when my mother began her housekeeping, and a beautifully veneered mahogany work-table made by my grandfather Glessner with his own hands, and presented to my mother at her wedding. Some chairs that your mother's mother began her housekeeping with, an old bureau, a family heirloom, once the property of your grandfather Macbeth's mother, etc., etc. The Piano, the action of which was selected by Mr. Stetson of the Steinway firm as the best they could produce, and the case made by Davenport of Boston from design of Francis Bacon, has remained a beautiful and satisfactory instrument all these years.

The furniture in the dining room is from designs by Charles Coolidge; in the drawing room from Francis Bacon's designs-- in both cases executed by Davenport; there are some Herter chairs, some Scott bookcases and cabinets and beds (in your mother's bedroom and George's); Francis Bacon's furniture in Frances' room and the main guest room, and in the second guest room a set of typical French furniture bought in Paris. One of the Scott bookcases is the first piece of furniture he designed for us. That was in 1876. We thought then, and still think it beautiful as a single piece.

A small hanging corner cabinet with delicate cameo carving has a peculiar interest: made to hold some sort of funerary remembrance for a deceased member of her family for a lady who either changed her mind or was not quite satisfied and therefore let it be placed in an exhibition where many persons sought to buy it.

In the dining room is an oak silver-chest that George carved himself and had made up while he was a sophomore in college. The carving is especially bold and spirited, and the whole piece is highly prized. Also there is an imported silk embroidered screen of Spanish production, bought in Paris, that shows some strong Chinese and Oriental characteristics.

There are a few valuable and interesting bronzes-- one of the 85 copies of the head and hands of Abraham Lincoln, made from the original life mask by Leonard W. Volk and given to the small body of subscribers to the fund to purchase the original mask for presentation to the National Government at Washington. The original mask was made by Sculptor Vold in Chicago in April, 1860, the month before Lincoln's nomination for the Presidency, and the hands were moulded by the same artist in Springfield on the Sunday after the nomination. Lincoln had been whittling with his jackknife and had a piece of broomstick in one hand at the time. There are several small medals, not purchasable but given us by the artists or subjects, some Japanese vases, and bronze moulds of your mother's hand and of Frances' baby hand. Your mother's hands and arms in the flesh at the time of her marriage were surpassingly beautiful, as lovely as any mortal ever had. Several bronze statuettes are from plaster models for large statues by your mother's cousin J. C. A. Ward. The bronze busts in the library are copies of antiques in the Naples museum.

There are several William Morris floor rugs designed and woven especially for this house, and some antique and unusual rugs. There are Morris curtains and portier, the most important and typical of which had the pattern drawn on the silk by Mr. Morris' own hand, and much, but not all, of the embroidery done by your mother. After these were much worn they were given to the Art Institute here.

The wall papers were also from Morris designs, and when renewed have been continued in exactly the same patterns and colors as when first put on, except in the parlor, where the design and execution in paint on burlaps were by William Prettyman, a distinguished English artist. At the time the house was finished the green walls of the library were painted blue over yellow after repeated experiments by John Leary, an artist from Davenport, and it has not been necessary to repaint them since.

An old Leeds pattern pitcher, to hold six quarts, and bearing date 1811, given by the Pottery to Briggs, the Boston dealer, and by him to me, has stood on the sideboard for a good many years, and has often attracted attention for its size and glaze and graceful shape.

There are a number of interesting clocks-- English and Dutch and French, and American and Japanese. One English tall clock, now in the second story hall, was bought by my grandfather Laughlin at public vendue from his grandfather's estate, and still is an excellent timepiece. Another tall clock, not now in its original case, has been running for more than 125 years, now in the school room. A French clock, a wedding present from my senior partner, Benjamin Warder, and Mrs. Warder, stands on our bedroom mantel and has been running for more than fifty years. Mr. Warder thought a clock the most desirable present that could be given, so constantly in view of the recipient to remind of the giver. There is an old sedan-chair clock, shaped as a great watch. The Japanese clock's hands are stationary--the face revolves.

There are books, several thousand volumes, some of them rare and valuable, collected somewhat at random during our more than fifty years of housekeeping, including many dictionaries and reference works, concordances etc.

There are household ornaments and much bric-a-brac.

I might call especial attention to the library to a tiny terra cotta bust of Cicero that went through the Great Fire in Chicago in 1871, and still bears its marks, though it was buried in sand at the time; to an antique marble head, said to have been taken from some Roman ruin; to a remarkable Hispano-Moresque bowl; to a fine piece of old Satsuma that was used to illustrate an article in Harper's Magazine many years ago; to a pair of mottled Japanese vases from the Centennial Exposition of 1876; to a Greek amphora, decorated, thought to be a fine specimen; some early Wedgewood, etc. In the hall are two early Roman grain jars of unglazed terra cotta, brought from Civita Vecchia. In the parlor there is an interesting fragment of an antique marble statuette that came from Florence. And there are many, many other things.

We have lived with these things and enjoyed them; they are a part of our lives. We don't realize how many they are and how much a part of they are until we begin to catalogue them in our minds. We don't know what we should do without them nor what we can do with them. The best we can do now is to make this imperfect record, together with these photographs, to perpetuate or at least suggest the spirit of the home. That home was ever a haven of rest. It was no easy task to make it so, but it was so made and so kept by the untiring and devoted efforts of your mother.

Perhaps you and those who come after you may be interested to look this record over on some rainy day, when lacking better occupation. I would have you realize that it is more a catalogue than a history, and sadly deficient as either or even as a sketch, but it may recall happy experiences of your own youth here and lead in your imagination to pictures of the happy hours your forbears had here.

Faithfully your father  
John J. Glessner"  
March 1923

## PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement:

The house is considered to be the last of the fully personal works of the architect, H. H. Richardson. In the functional originality of its plan, its simple massing and its use of the inherent patterns of coursed masonry for ornamental effect, this house is one of Richardson's finest designs.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Foundations: Foundations of Joliet limestone blocks mixed with patches of bricks and mortar, terminated exactly at the ground line (that is, below the basement ceiling).
2. Wall construction: Exterior walls of brick bonded into alternately six and eight inch thick sheets of Wellesley Granite with deeper slabs returned at openings to imply a wall entirely of stone. The walls toward the courtyard are of light pink brick with Joliet limestone lintels and sills. Interior walls are of frame construction faced with hollow brick to which the plaster was directly applied (in order to avoid troubles with rodents).
3. Openings: The original east carriage door shows on a 1945 photograph kept in the library of the house (photographer not identified): it consisted of two heavily paneled leaves with heavy iron straps and latches. The exterior front door of the house is in the same spirit; heavily paneled in oak with iron straps and a large, square window behind an iron grill.
4. Roof, shape, covering: Steeply pitched, gabled roofs. Roof surfaces are covered with terra cotta, tar covered tiles, six inches wide with five inches of their length exposed. The roof of the bow of the entrance hall in the ell of the house is covered with copper sheathing.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Stairways: The circular staircase in the tower of the southern wing of the house and the principal stairway had five twisted, carved balusters per step which, Mr. Glessner states in the enclosed booklet about the house, copied those of the old Longfellow house in Cambridge, Mass.
2. Flooring: Oak, strip flooring 2-1/4 inches wide in the principal rooms. Six inch square wide tiles on bathroom floors. Cement floors in the basement and stable. Alternately red and tan tiles, six inches square in the butler's pantry, kitchen, pantry, corridor behind the kitchen, and the conservatory.
3. Walls and ceiling finishes: Basement areas below the stable have the bare, Joliet stone foundations as their walls, basement areas beneath the house have brick walls, and all basement rooms have plaster ceilings.

The school room, entrance hall, library, and dining room have timber and plaster ceilings. The school room, entrance hall, library, parlor, dining room, and upper hall have oaken paneled walls. The southern tower staircase, corridors of the two principal floors of the south wing, and the north corridor of the two principal floors have only an oaken wainscoting, three feet high. The bathrooms have walls sheathed with six inch square tile to five feet from the floor, with the walls and ceiling above this simply plastered. The laundry in the basement, the kitchen, pantries, servants corridor on the ground floor, and the stable and harness room have flat plaster ceilings and walls of glazed, white brick, 2-1/4 inches by 8-1/4 inches with 1/8 inch black joints. All other rooms (principally bed rooms) have simple plastered walls and ceilings.

4. Doorways and doors: Paneled, oaken doors with brass, clear glass, or cut glass door knobs depending upon the importance of the room, cut glass being the most pretentious and clear glass the least.
5. Lighting: Notable examples of Richardsonian, tubular brass fixtures remain in the school room, entrance hall, library, parlor, dining room, master bed room (first floor), upper hall, and especially in the middle bedroom of the southern wing on the first floor.

6. Heating: By steam heat from a coal furnace which has now been removed. In the school room an unusual heating fixture has been contrived with a brass radiating panel in front of coiled steam pipes on the north wall. Similar steam pipe coils (but without the radiating panel) heated the basement level of the southern tower staircase and the laundry.

Prepared by David T. Van Zanten  
Student Assistant Architect  
and  
Osmund Overby  
Supervisory Architect  
National Park Service  
August 1963

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
17-

Addendum to:  
GLESSNER HOUSE  
(Chicago School of Architecture Foundation)  
1800 South Prarie Avenue  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1015

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
National Park Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HABS  
ILL,  
16-CHIG,  
17-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Addendum to:

GLESSNER HOUSE  
(Chicago School of Architecture Foundation)  
1800 South Prarie Avenue  
Chicago  
Cook County  
Illinois

HABS No. IL-1015

Data pages 1 through 23 were previously transmitted to the Library of Congress. This is data page 24.

INVENTORY OF PHOTOGRAMMETRIC IMAGES

The glass photogrammetric plates listed below are not reproducible except with special permission. However, reference prints and film copy negatives have been made from the plates indicated by an asterisk (\*) and are included in the Library of Congress collection of formal HABS/HAER photographs.

- 10 5" x 7" glass plate negatives (5 stereopairs) produced by Perry E. Borchers of the Ohio State University in 1965.

One survey control contact print per plate; survey control information for each pair.

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-201L *	NORTH ELEVATION--LEVEL: LEFT STEREOPAIR
LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-201R	NORTH ELEVATION--LEVEL: LEFT STEREOPAIR
	Left and right overlap: 85%
LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-202L *	NORTH ELEVATION--INCLINED: LEFT STEREOPAIR
LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-202R	NORTH ELEVATION--INCLINED: LEFT STEREOPAIR
	Left and right overlap: 95%

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-203L \*      NORTH ELEVATION: RIGHT STEREOPAIR  
LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-203R      NORTH ELEVATION: RIGHT STEREOPAIR  
Left and right overlap: 85%

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-204L \*      EAST ELEVATION--LEVEL  
LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-204R      EAST ELEVATION--LEVEL  
Left and right overlap: 90%

LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-205L \*      NE--ANGLED VIEW  
LC-HABS-GS05-T-3224-205R      NE--ANGLED VIEW  
Left and right overlap: 95%

PROJECT INFORMATION STATEMENT

Photogrammetric images were incorporated into the HABS/HAER collections in the summers of 1985 and 1986. Inventories of the images were compiled and filed as data pages for each structure recorded. Since the glass photogrammetric plates are not reproducible except with special permission, a reference print and film copy negative were made from one plate of each stereopair and from the most informative plates in sequential sets. The reference prints and copy negatives were then incorporated into the formal HABS/HAER photograph collections.

The Photogrammetric Images Project was a cooperative endeavor between the HABS/HAER Division of the National Park Service and the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress. The reference prints and film copy negatives of the original plates were made by the Library of Congress Photoduplication Service with funds provided by the Library of Congress Flat Film Preservation Fund. Additional reproductions were made by HABS/HAER. The project was supervised by HABS/HAER Architect John A. Burns, AIA, and completed by HABS Historians Jeanne C. Lawrence (University of London) in 1985 and Caroline R. Alderson (Columbia University) in 1986.