

# HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

## LLOYD R. SMITH HOUSE “VILLA TERRACE MUSEUM OF THE DECORATIVE ARTS”

(Written Spring 1982)

### I. NAME

Historic: Lloyd R. Smith House

Common: Villa Terrace Museum of the Decorative Arts

### II. LOCATION

2220 North Terrace Avenue

Legal Property Description: Glidden & Lockwood's Addition in NW ¼ Sec 22-7-22, Block 3, Lot 6-NE 50' Lot 5-SW 50' Lot 7 & Land Adj SW'ly

### III. CLASSIFICATION

Building and site

### IV. OWNER OF PROPERTY

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

### V. DESCRIPTION

The Lloyd R. Smith House is an adaptation of a 16<sup>th</sup> century villa of rural northern Italy. Located on the City's upper east side in North Point South, its setting on a bluff overlooking Lake Michigan affords two distinct approaches; one from the street and the other from the lake. From the street elevation, the front cortile is surrounded by living quarters on three sides. The center pavilion is a two-story gabled block measuring 128 feet long. From this rises a low-hipped attic story, pierced by three gabled dormers. This pavilion is flanked by gabled wings two stories in height measuring 108 feet long. The fourth side of the cortile is a one-story wall that connects the two wings. The lakeside elevation is Palladian in form with an extended center pavilion that is pedimented with a plain raking cornice. It is flanked by arcaded porches that are topped by sunrooms and balconies. The rear entry opens onto an expansive, raised terrace that extends the entire length of the house.

Erected in 1923, the Smith House was built on a concrete foundation and faced with red Illinois brick, laid in common bond and painted white. The stone trim, as found in the colonnades, window and door surrounds and exterior staircases, was quarried and carved Italian limestone. The roofing material is barrel tile in shades of reddish-brown. Rising from

the roof are chimneys capped with the same tile. The numerous window grilles, fences, railings, and gates are wrought iron.

The classical axiality of its design is evidenced by the on line citing of the main entry gate through the middle of the center pavilion with the rear twin staircases and the gardens below the bluff. The main gate is a handsome quatrefoil design that opens onto the cortile. The cortile is a formal garden of precisely manicured shrubs combined with a mosaic of black and light gray pebbles gathered from Lake Michigan. At the center of the garden is a fountain and basin with a statue of the Greek, God, Hermes. It was reported that the torso was of the original 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D. sculpture, and the head, legs, and arms were restored in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by the sculptor, Giovanni Berini. Erected in 1967, it replaced a pedestal fountain. On all four sides of the cortile is a groin-vaulted loggia formed by a round-arched colonnade that springs from Tuscan order columns. The vaulting is finished with a smooth, gray exterior plaster that extends as pendants on the walls. The walkways of the loggia are maroon brick laid in a herringbone pattern. There are numerous entries off the cortile into the house, but the main entry is at the southeast corner and is a single heavy paneled oak door. At the opposite corner is a concrete staircase with a stone carved newel post and railing, which ascends to the second floor balcony along the full length of the center pavilion.

The rear terrace is surfaced with reddish-orange quarry tile and is surrounded by a brick wall and stone carved balustrade. It is entered from the house by a single door that is surrounded by a stone segmental pediment and pilasters. The side porches are formed by a series of round arches that form vaulted bays and spring from Composite order columns. The vaulting is finished with the same exterior plaster as the loggia. From the terrace descends a grand stone-carved twin staircase that leads to the multi-level formal gardens below the bluff.

With the review of historic photographs and buildings permits, the exterior of the Lloyd R. Smith house has remained virtually unchanged. However, one minor known alteration was the removal of the wooden shutters.

## **VI. SIGNIFICANCE**

Date Built or Altered: 1923

Builder/Architect: David Adler, architect

The Lloyd R. Smith house was cited as significant for its association with Lloyd R. Smith, a prominent industrialist and civic leader; as an exceptional mansion that combined the talents of architect, David Adler; artist, Cyril Colnik; and landscape architect, Rose Standish Nichols; and as a public museum of the decorative arts that has significantly educated the Milwaukee community in art appreciation. It was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1974, recorded for Historic American Buildings Survey in 1971, and named a Milwaukee Landmark in 1968.

## **VII. HISTORY**

The structure, now known as Villa Terrace, was built as the city residence of Milwaukee industrialist Lloyd R. Smith and was originally named *Sopra Mare*.

Smith was president and chairman of the board of the A.O. Smith Corporation, a major international company that pioneered in the manufacture of pipe for oil and gas lines. Smith was the grandson of Charles Smith, who with his brother, C.J. Smith, founded the company in

1874. First known for perfecting the tubular bicycle frame, the Smith Company was the nations largest producer of bicycle parts in 1985. In 1903, the company was named A.O. Smith Corporation after Arthur O. Smith, son of Charles, and the father of Lloyd. Today it is one of the 500 largest manufacturers in the United States and the world's largest producer of automobile and truck frames, of fiberglass reinforced plastic pipe, and a major producer of animal feed processing and storage systems.

Other than being a civic leader and industrialist, Smith was known for his philanthropic interest in medicine. He contributed generously to Columbia Hospital, for example, to establish the first convalescent serum center in the United States.

The Smith house was designed by David Adler, a noted country-house architect of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Born in Milwaukee, he was the son of Emanuel D. Adler, a wealthy clothing wholesaler. Adler graduated from Princeton University in 1904 and in 1906 entered the prestigious Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris for five years of additional architectural training. He returned to the United States in 1911, where he was first employed in the office of prominent Chicago residential architect Howard Van Doren Shaw. After establishing his own office in Chicago, Adler maintained a practice as a society architect designing large residences and luxury apartments houses. The majority of his work was in the Chicago North Shore suburbs, with major commissions in Long Island and southern California. As evidenced by the variety of his designs, Adler borrowed profusely from English, French, Italian, and American Colonial antecedents. His versatility as an architect, and his ability to satisfy the tastes and demands of his wealthy clients, made him one of the Midwest's most sought after residential architects of the period preceding the Great Depression. When the Smith house was constructed in 1923, Adler was at the peak of his career. The only Adler designed residence built in Wisconsin, the Smith house was an adaptation of a 16<sup>th</sup> century villa of the type found in rural northern Italy. It is similar in design to an earlier Adler villa for Charles B. Pike of Lake Forest, Illinois. The Smith house was the last of Adler's Italian villa essays.

Villa Terrace is significant for the fine materials and outstanding craftsmanship exhibited in its construction. Rare aged woods, Italian limestone, and handmade roofing tiles were used to enhance the antique appearance of the mansion. Of particular note is the abundance of fine ironwork by noted Milwaukeean Cyril Colnik. Colnik was one of the most skillful iron workers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. His elaborate, original designs earned him a gold medal at the Chicago world Columbian Exposition of 1893 and prestigious commissions for ironwork for many fine residences, churches and public buildings. For the Smith house, he executed the gates, fences, railings, grilles, door hardware and lighting fixtures. It constitutes one of the most complete collections of Colnik's later work and is a testament of his artistry and craftsmanship.

Another significant aspect of the Smith house is the landscape treatment. To provide a proper period setting for the mansion when viewed from Lincoln Memorial Drive, the Smith's employed well known landscape architect and authority on Italian gardens, Rose Standish Nichols of Boston. Miss Nichols resolved the dilemma of how to relate the lofty white mansion perched at the edge of a precipitous bluff with its lake level formal gardens located far below by employing a scheme adapted from Italian Renaissance landscape gardening. Twin staircases descend in numerous short flights from the mansion's broad terrace to the formal garden, with its geometric plantings beds and symmetrically arranged walkways. The garden is virtually unaltered from its original state.

After Smith's death, his widow continued to maintain Villa Terrace as her residence. In 1967 she donated the house to Milwaukee County as a decorative arts museum. It is presently

operated as the Villa Terrace Museum of the Decorative Arts and contains antique furniture, glassware, ceramics and silver.

## **VIII. STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends to the Historic Preservation Commission the designation of the Lloyd R. Smith house as an historic site including both building and grounds as defined in Section 2-335 of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

## **IX. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES**

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

### **A. Roofs**

The existing building height, rooflines, pitch, dormers, and gables shall not be changed or modified. All roof elevations are significant to the structure's architectural integrity. The addition of dormers, skylights, or solar collector panels will not be permitted unless approved by the Commission.

### **B. Openings**

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

### **C. Additions**

All elevations in this case are significant to the structure's architectural integrity. No additions may be made to any elevation of the building unless approved by the Commission.

### **D. Porches, Trim and Ornamentation**

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

### **E. Materials**

Integral to the design of this structure are the materials and their colors. Painted surfaces such as the brick walls shall remain unchanged and the color of the walls

shall remain white. Unpainted brick and stone shall not be painted or covered. Any repairs, including reporting of defective mortar, shall match the original in color, style, texture, and strength characteristics. Masonry shall be cleaned only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible approved by the Commission. The tile roof, iron railings, grilles, gates and fences shall be retained to their fullest extent possible. Replacement features shall match the original in color, design and texture.

F. Site

The site shall be retained in its present condition. Unless approved by the Commission, the drives, gardens and cortile shall not be altered, redesigned or reconstructed.

G. Signs

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