

"Save America's Treasures"

Visit to Robie House

Chicago, IL

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Chicago, Illinois**

**Remarks by Hillary Rodham Clinton
October 27, 1999**

Thank you so much. It is such a great pleasure to be here on such a glorious October afternoon for such an important occasion.

I want to thank the University of Chicago, the owner of Robie House, and the Home and Studio Foundation, managers of the property for welcoming all of us here today.

I also want to thank Dick Moe, the president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation for his leadership. And congratulate the Trust on its 50th Anniversary, and I know there are trust members and supporters here in the audience and I thank you all for what you are doing.

I am also particularly pleased that we could be here for such an important announcement. I want to thank Tom Pritzker and the Pritzker family for all of his and their efforts to recognize architectural genius and innovation through your annual Pritzker Prize. We were very honored to host the prize at the White House. And I believe if I am not mistaken, that Tom's mother Cindy is here and I want to thank her and the entire the family, because I believe the Pritzker family is in of itself a treasure-not only in Chicago but in America.

I remember talking to Tom when we hosted the Pritzker awards at the White House about Save America's Treasures and the importance of architecture and especially the kind of commitment that his family has made to highlighting the best of architecture. And we talked about Saving America's Treasures, and I am very grateful that he and his family have translated this interest into a lasting gift to the future. And I want to thank Tom and the Pritzker family foundation for the honor of announcing that the foundation will donate one million dollars to help the Frank Lloyd Wright home and studio foundation restore Robie House to Wright's 1909 design.

We have just walked through the house hearing about its preservation needs and the intent is that when it is finally restored it will have as much of the original furniture as can possibly be obtained and the art glass windows, new roof and drainage systems, the landscaping and planters. So, it will not only be a museum-quality place of destination for visitors literally from around the world, but it will also be a museum and will teach us something about not only Frank Lloyd Wright, but the importance of architecture.

I learned while we were on our tour that in 1957 (as we heard from the provost) Frank Lloyd Wright came back here to Robie House, because the house was threatened with demolition. And he with his characteristic humility did as you've been told called it "cornerstone of modern architecture" and in effect he protested the proposed demolition. Well, he was as he often had been, successful, and we now can look behind me at what has truly been called one of the greatest architectural accomplishments of this century.

It is difficult to believe looking at it that he designed this thoroughly modern house at the dawn of the 20th century—before women won the right to vote, and before the blues came to Chicago and gave birth to Rock ‘n’ Roll, before the civil rights movement challenged us and so many of the other struggles and triumphs of this century unfolded. He really foreshadowed much of what was to come.

When the Robie House was built it was the time of Henry Ford’s model T’s, but the house itself is at much at home in Hyde Park today as it was then. And that is because the Robie House truly does embody an American spirit familiar to all of us.

Long before the American spirit matured to transform our nation and our world—Wright captured much of its potential in bricks and stone; in glass and cement. In the horizontal lines and inviting windows of the Robie House, you can see the inspiration of the Midwestern prairie and the values of democracy and openness that have made America the world’s strongest force for freedom. . . You can sense that restless pioneering spirit that spurred our people to the moon and beyond. And you can have a sense of what must have been inspiring Wright as he finished this the culmination of the prairie style.

The architectural historian Vincent Scully once said that “architecture is the continuing dialogue between the generations.” Well, we can see that dialogue here in Chicago. We see it in what has already been built and what is being built, and the wonderful work of architects from all over the world that Tom mentioned. We know that Chicago has long been a destination point for people who care about not only architecture, but understanding that dialogue between our generations. As many of you may know, Save America’s Treasures is part of that dialogue. The president and I created the White House Millennium Council as a way of trying to mark this moment in time. We knew we wanted to do more with this unique period in history than just encourage everyone to have a great New Year’s Eve Party, and we thought the millennium gave us an opportunity to ask all Americans to find ways to honor the past and imagine the future.

I think that that is succeeding in large ways and small throughout our country, because it is not only the buildings and the other monuments that represent who we are, but it is in fact what you might find in your own attic, the oral history of a relative, the story of your own family’s arrival here in the United States. Faulkner once said “the past isn’t dead, it isn’t even past,” and it’s not only the blood, but the experiences and hopes of ancestors that course through our veins, and only through our language and our legends, our monuments and tradition, can we understand who we are, where we came from, and who we want to be.

Chicago witnessed and fostered some of our nation’s greatest social, political, and artistic transformations, so it is fitting that we find so many American treasures here. I just came from a tour of the legendary blues heaven foundation and Chess Records Studio at 2120 South Michigan Avenue, an address made immortal by the Rolling Stones. Tomorrow I will visit the town of Pullman, one of America’s first planned industrial communities and the site of one of America’s most famous labor struggles. Those sites, along with Robie House, are irreplaceable. If we lose them, we lose our history and our national memory. That’s why, in the State of the Union last year, the president proposed and Congress agreed to fund a \$30 million initiative to help save

treasures such as the poetry magazine archives at the University of Chicago, the Jane Addams Hull House photo archives at the University of Illinois, and two other Wright masterpieces, Tallyesson? and falling water?

Preservation in America has always been a public/private partnership, and the National Trust Millennium Committee to Save America's Treasures is our private sector partner, and I am so pleased for the opportunity to thank Dick and all the trust members for your leadership and helping us to raise more than \$37 million over the past 16 months in private resources to match the federal ones.

There are so many ways that Americans can practice preservation, and if we do just a little more work to help Americans understand that preserving historic buildings and neighborhoods is not only a way of preserving and honoring the past, but of fostering economic development and knitting communities closer together, then we will find that we have far more preservationists than those who are in the audience today.

Dick Moe tells a wonderful story how in Saint Louis, a community activist from a low income neighborhood who had discovered how important preservation could be to economic opportunities, said to Dick, "I am a preservationist." Well, I'd like to see every American feel the same way, and I particularly hope we can enlist children in the cause of preservation. I would like to expand an idea that I learned about from an elementary school in Philadelphia that read about our efforts to save the Harriet Tubman Home, the home of the ex-slave who led so many slaves to freedom on the Underground Railroad, and when we made our presentation there, it got publicity, and there was a class of children in Philadelphia who decided to collect pennies to contribute to the Harriet Tubman Home, and I hope we can encourage even more children to collect pennies for preservation, because we are so grateful for the Pritzker gift, and we are so grateful for the pennies because each in their own way is really a statement of our values. Yes, we honor the past, but by doing so we help imagine and create the future.

Toward the end of his career, Frank Lloyd Wright was asked which of his buildings he was most pleased with, and he replied, "the next one." A quintessential American answer. Because we are taking steps today to help preserve this great masterpiece of American architecture, we have ensured that perhaps some day in the future a promising young architectural student can walk along the concrete balconies of the Robie House, and seeing Wright's genius unaltered by time, can be inspired to build the next one. The real gift that we celebrate today is the gift of inspiration, the gift of recognition, the gift of understanding that the American spirit which has meant so much in this century has to live and deepen into the next, and we do that by honoring the past and imagining the future. And this wonderful gift, from the Pritzker Family Foundation will enable all of us to do just that.

Thank you very much.