

Charles Lang Freer House

71 East Ferry Avenue

Current name: Palmer, Merrill, Institute of Human Development & Family Life

Local	✓	2/17/81
State	✓	11/6/70
State Marker		
National	✓	4/16/71



Freer House

Historic overview:

The Freer mansion, designed by Wilson Eyre, Jr. in 1887, is one of the finest examples of shingle style architecture. Eyre, Jr. was a recognized master in this architectural style. There is a striking contrast between the shingles and rough stone imported from New York. The interior of this two-and-a-half story building displays twelve fireplaces throughout the twenty-two rooms, with an elevator from the basement to carry wood. There are many balconies, bay windows, enclosed porches, and skylights throughout the house.

Charles Lang Freer amassed a huge fortune through co-ownership of the Peninsular Car Works—a freight car manufacturing company, operating the Detroit steam forge, and controlling a large car works at Adrian. A great art devotee, he dedicated much of his life to his collections of James McNeill Whistler and other contemporary artists. He acquired the Peacock Room, the dining room of a London resident designed by Whistler. It was paneled in Spanish leather and honeycombed with walnut shelves to hold an assortment of porcelain. It was dismantled and installed in Freer's home. His collection of Oriental art of all types became one of the finest outside Japan. Freer bequeathed his entire art collection to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C., and the Freer Gallery was opened shortly after his death in 1919. Since 1921 the Freer House has been the property of the Merrill-Palmer Institute of Human Development and Family Life.