

Suggestion For Chicago Landmark

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks appreciates receiving ideas and suggestions from the public for potential future landmark buildings and districts. By ordinance, Chicago Landmarks must meet at least two of the seven criteria for designation as well as an "integrity" criterion (see back). An indicator of whether your suggestion may qualify is if the property is included in the *Chicago Historic Resources Survey* (CHRS), which is depicted in the city's online Zoning Map and may also be accessed from the Chicago Landmarks web page at www.cityofchicago.org/landmarks.

Please answer the questions below completely and include current photographs (which will not be returned) and any available historic research you may have as part of your suggestion. Please fill out one form per suggestion. The Commission's Program Committee generally reviews public suggestions twice a year. Received suggestions are forwarded by the Committee to the Department of Housing and Economic Development for further consideration.

RETURN THIS FORM TO: Commission on Chicago Landmarks
121 N. LaSalle Street – Room 1101
Chicago, Illinois 60602
Attention: Program Committee

Your Name: Preservation Chicago
Your Address (Street, City & Zip Code): 4410 N. Ravenswood Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60640
Your Telephone Number: (773) 334 - 8800

Suggested Building or Area: O'Hare Airport Rotunda Building with former Seven Continents Restaurant
Address: 10000 W O'Hare Avenue Chicago, IL 60666
Date of Construction: 1962
Architect, Builder, Engineer, Artist, Craftsman: Gertrude Kerbis of C.F. Murphy Associates

Name of Current Owner: City of Chicago
Would current owner consent to landmark designation? Most likely
Historical Importance: A significant work of architect Gertrude Kerbis, known as a trailblazer in the field of architecture. She worked for the C.F. Murphy and Skidmore Owings & Merrill firms from the 1950s until the mid-1960s.
Architectural Importance or Noteworthy Physical Features: Kerbis adapted a unique structural system engineered for this unparalleled circular building that functioned as a multi-purpose, column-free facility with connecting concourses, passenger lounges, and formal dining spaces on its mezzanine level.

- ☒ **Current Photograph(s) Enclosed (REQUIRED – Suggestion form will be returned unless accompanied by current photographs)**
- ☒ **Additional Background Information Enclosed (Up to 5 pages will be forwarded to Commission members for their review; any additional pages will be kept for Commission files.)**

For Landmarks staff use only: Date Received _____ CHRS _____
Aldermanic ward _____

Criteria for Proposed Designation of Chicago Landmarks

- A. In considering areas, districts, places, buildings, structures, works of art, and other objects for potential landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks (a nine-member board appointed by the Mayor and the City Council) is limited in its consideration solely to the following seven criteria, as established in the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect. 2-120-620):
1. **[Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage]** Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.
 2. **[Significant Historic Event]** Its location as a site of a significant historic event which may or may not have taken place within or involved the use of any existing improvements.
 3. **[Significant Person]** Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.
 4. **[Exemplary Architecture]** Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.
 5. **[Work of Significant Architect or Designer]** Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.
 6. **[Distinctive Theme]** Its representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other theme expressed through distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings, structures, works of art, or other objects that may or may not be contiguous.
 7. **[Unique or Distinctive Visual Feature]** Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

Proposed designations must meet at least **two** of the above landmark criteria.

- B. Proposed designations must also meet an additional **“integrity” criterion**, as specified in the Municipal Code (Sect.2-120-630); proposed suggestions must have “a significant historic, community, architectural or aesthetic interest or value, the integrity of which is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express such historic, community, architectural, or aesthetic interest or value.”

The O'Hare Airport Rotunda Building with the former Seven Continents Restaurant meets and fulfills four of the seven criteria set forth in Part A of Criteria for Proposed Designation of Chicago Landmarks, as established in the Municipal Code of Chicago (Sect. 2-120-620): 3) Significant Person, 4) Exemplary Architecture, 5) Work of Significant Architect or Designer, 7) Unique or Distinctive Visual Feature.

It also meets and fulfills the "integrity criterion" set forth in Part B of Criteria for Proposed Designation of Chicago Landmarks, as specified in the Municipal Code (Sect. 2-120-630).

In 1962, Gertrude Kerbis of C.F. Murphy Associates designed the O'Hare Airport Rotunda Building which included the Seven Continents Restaurant. This is an excellent example of a building designed by a woman architect in a male-dominated profession. Kerbis also worked on the original O'Hare terminal structures and the Chicago Civic Center, now known as the Richard J. Daley Center, a Designated Chicago Landmark.

The Rotunda Building once served as the centerpiece of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport. It is an exemplification of mid-century modern airport architecture. Kerbis, under C. F. Murphy, designed an elaborate structural system consisting of one mile of heavy bridge cables spanning a 190 foot ceiling. This system resembles a sunburst pattern sheathed in concrete and is visible from the floor of this unique circular, public, two-story space.

The Rotunda Building is a significant structure by a celebrated architect which is a rare honor for a woman in the early-1960s. The building is located between the original C. F. Murphy-designed terminals and is a formal gateway building to these two separate concourses. Kerbis' beautifully designed and understated building was meant to harmonize with the connecting C. F. Murphy-designed terminal buildings, which also reflect the influences of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, one of Kerbis' professors at IIT.

This ingenious multi-story circular glass and concrete building has a sophisticated three tiered program: a casual restaurant at its base, a more formal restaurant on a mezzanine level above, and an adjoining concourse lobby connection concealed in its central core. It is wrapped by a two-story dining and lounge area with a curving glass wall at its perimeter, which is only visible from within the restaurant interior or from its exterior façades.

We are seeking to protect and landmark this significant feature and unique building celebrating women's early 20th-century accomplishments in architecture and aviation. The structure and its vast circular space within could be honored in March 2019 for Women's History Month and as a precursor to the Chicago Architecture Biennial. Its Chicago Landmark Designation would protect this significant structure within the larger context of future O'Hare Airport expansion plans while celebrating women's achievements. It would also be a great location to tell the story of Chicago's aviation history, airport architecture, and perhaps women's role in aviation like Chicagoan Amelia Earhart, the famous aviation pioneer.

In 2017 the O'Hare Airport Rotunda Building was included on Landmark Illinois' Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois list. Please see attached pages for article from Landmarks Illinois.

2017 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois

Rotunda Building, O'Hare Airport

Chicago, Cook County



Credit: Landmarks Illinois

The Rotunda Building at O'Hare International Airport, built in 1962, is a jet-age relic from the airport's earliest days. It has remained largely intact while most of the original airport has been reconstructed or dramatically remodeled and continues to be redeveloped. The Chicago Department of Aviation is doing long-term planning for new terminal development and gate and concourse expansion. The Rotunda Building, while currently in use, could in the future be vulnerable as major changes and upgrades are planned at O'Hare.

In the 1950s, Chicago's Midway International Airport was the busiest passenger terminal in the country and suffering from overcrowded conditions. Orchard Field, a landing site northwest of the city and 10 times as large as Midway, was selected as the site to build a new state-of-the-art international airport, now known as O'Hare. In the 1960s, construction began on new terminals, infrastructure and support buildings at O'Hare. The architectural firm of C.F. Murphy Associates did much of O'Hare's early work.

The Rotunda Building at O'Hare was centrally located between the first two terminals constructed and served as a hinge between the two sides of the airport. At the crossroads of the airport, the Rotunda's restaurants and bars offered a place to gather and people watch. The second floor wraps around an open two-story atrium and was home to the famed Seven Continents Restaurant, a fine dining establishment in the midst of the bustling airport. At the restaurant, diners from around the world could watch airplanes take off and land. Today, the Rotunda is an oft-overlooked space in the airport, serving as a vestibule to Terminal 3's Concourse G. The Seven Continents Restaurant is long gone, replaced by various leased spaces, including a yoga studio, greenhouse and eating area. To date, the Rotunda has remained surprisingly intact and is a gem within the airport. However, its future remains uncertain.

O'Hare's Rotunda Building was unique for its design, but also for its designer, Gertrude Kerbis (b. 1926) of C.F. Murphy Associates. Kerbis was a trail blazer for women in architecture, which was

still a male-dominated field in the 1960s. During her long career, Kerbis – once a student of Mies van der Rohe at the Illinois Institute of Technology – worked with many high profile architecture firms in Chicago, including C.F. Murphy Associates and Skidmore Owings & Merrill, before opening her own firm Lempp Kerbis in 1967. Kerbis' designs were considered innovative, including the Rotunda's cable and concrete roof truss system, allowing for a very large clear span, and interior features such as a winding tandem stair and circular overlook balcony.

Many midcentury modern- era buildings at other airports are now being recognized for their architectural significance and are being redeveloped. For example, at John F. Kennedy Airport the iconic TWA Flight Center designed by Eero Saarinen (1962) is being [redeveloped into a hotel](#). At Los Angeles International Airport, the Theme Building (1961 by William Pereira and Charles Luckman) is anticipated to be preserved in the airport's current master planning efforts. With the Rotunda Building once the center piece of Chicago's O'Hare International Airport, it too should be recognized and included in the airport's master planning.



Credit: Jahn

Kim Kerbis, daughter of Rotunda designer Gertrude Kerbis, offered this support for Landmarks Illinois' decision to include it on this year's most endangered list:

“The Kerbis family strongly supports the inclusion of the Rotunda Building at Chicago's O'Hare International Airport on Landmarks Illinois' Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois list. Trail-blazing Chicagoan Gertrude Lempp Kerbis became an architect at a time when most women in the field were either receptionists, secretaries or relegated to the interior departments despite their qualifications. Inspired by, then studying and working with modern masters, she forged a unique career that merged her engineering passions with her modernist aesthetic; a fierce independence with a desire to strengthen the architectural community (particularly for women); and her continued pursuit of individual architectural excellence with a desire to pass those skills on to the next generation of architects. Modern architecture made its mark on Gertrude Lempp Kerbis and, in return, she left her mark on it.”

**Nate Lielasus contributed to this article*

What you can do:

- Contact Chicago Department of Aviation Commissioner Ginger Evans and urge her to retain the Rotunda Building as part of future improvements and redevelopment at the O'Hare Airport: <https://www.cityofchicago.org/city/en/depts/doa.html>

Additional Links:

- AIA Chicago presented Kerbis with a Lifetime Achievement Award in 2008. Karen Carter produced a film about her life to mark the occasion: <https://vimeo.com/71756237>
- An oral history of Kerbis can be found here: <http://www.artic.edu/research/gertrude-kerbis-b-1926>