

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Fall 2009
Vol. 10 no. 02
ISSN: 1542-0884

**Walter Burley Griffin
Society of America**
1152 Center Drive
St. Louis, MO 63117
314.644.4546
Website: www.WBGriffinSociety.org
Email: info@WBGriffinSociety.org

Society President
Peter Burley Griffin

Board of Directors
Rich H. Berry
Griffin Homeowner, Edwardsville, IL
Kathleen Cummings
Architectural Historian, Chicago, IL
Eleanor E. Grumman
*Equibase Capital Group, LLC
Chicago, IL*
W. R. Hasbrouck, FAIA
*Prairie Avenue Bookshop, Ltd.
Chicago, IL*
Paul Kruty
*Prof. of Architectural History
University of Illinois at
Urbana-Champaign*

Tannys Langdon, AIA
*Langdon Associates, LLC Architects
Griffin Homeowner, Chicago, IL*
Mati Maldre

*Prof. Emeritus of Art/Photography
Chicago State University
Griffin Homeowner, Chicago, IL*
Robert E. McCoy, Hon. AIA
Griffin Homeowner, Mason City, IA

Jon S. Pohl, AIA
*Perkins + Will, Chicago Office
Evanston, IL*

George Shutack
Prairie Multimedia, Inc., Wayne, IL
Paul E. Sprague
*Prof. Emeritus of
Architectural History
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee*

Mary K. Woolever
*Art & Architecture Archivist
Art Institute of Chicago*

Honorary Director
James Weirick
*President of the Walter Burley Griffin
Society, Inc., Sydney, Australia
Faculty of Architecture
University of New South Wales*

Editor: Paul Kruty
pkruty@illinois.edu
Designer: George Shutack
shutack@prairiemm.com
Please email news items to
the editor or designer.

ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING TO BE HELD IN ANNA, ILLINOIS ON SATURDAY, MAY 22, 2010

Mark your calendars for next May 22nd. The eleventh annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will take place in downstate Illinois among the rolling hills of the Shawnee National Forest, at Griffin's major public building in America—the Stinson Memorial Library in Anna.



Three subjects of interest will be explored at the meeting: Griffin's library; a remarkable house nearby by the great Organic architect, Bruce Goff; and the Anna Pottery, a local company run in the late 19th century by two brothers, Wallace and Cornwall Kirkpatrick. The proposed itinerary is as follows: morning meeting at the Stinson library, with three lectures in the assembly hall—Paul Kruty on the library, Richard Mohr on the startling products of the Anna pottery, and Richard Helstern on the creation of the Goff house for Hugh and Minna Duncan. Box lunch in the library. Afternoon tour: several additional sites in Anna, then to Cobden for a visit to the Union County Historical Museum, which has a comprehensive display of Anna pottery, followed by a tour of Goff's Duncan house located nearby on a ledge in the forest. The afternoon will end with a reception at the Giant City Lodge.

Anna, its neighbor Jonesboro, and Cobden are small towns, so accommodations are limited. Carbondale, which has a full range of chain motels, is about twenty miles north. Because lodging in the immediate vicinity of Anna is limited, you are advised to make your reservations early. The Giant City Lodge (at giantcitylodge.com) has a limited number of rooms. Reservations for next year begin on December 1st and the lodge fills up fast—so don't wait, if this is your choice. There are also many wineries in the vicinity (and even a "Wine Trail" for truly hearty adventurers—check out shawneewinetrail.com), most of which seem to have cabins available. There are also many B & Bs. In Anna, there is the Davies School Inn, a converted school house only a few blocks from the library (davieschoolinn.com)

KENILWORTH MEETING: A WARM AND BEAUTIFUL DAY

By Peggy Lami

“The state of our organization is strong,” announced Peter Burley Griffin at the 10th Annual Meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America, held this year on June 20, in association with the Pleasant Home Foundation of Oak Park. The one hundred people seated in George Washington Maher’s 1907 spectacular Kenilworth Club agreed. Peter remarked that in 1999 nobody at the first meeting imagined the group continuing to explore the work, philosophies, ideals, and ideas of Walter Burley and Marion Mahony Griffin for a decade into the future. The lineup of speakers and topics, now expanded to include others who produced Prairie Style or Arts & Crafts design, is an indication of why the organization continues. Following ten years of fascinating programs, the announcement of Anna, as destination for the 2010 Annual Meeting at the Stinson Memorial Library earned a round of applause. Thanks were also due to Kathleen Cummings, of the Pleasant Home Foundation, for working tirelessly to make the meeting possible, and to the Kenilworth Club for sharing their glorious space.

The morning’s lecture began soon after. Kathleen Cummings, author of *Pleasant Home, A History of the John Farson House*, discussed the role of George Washington Maher, a contemporary of Griffin and Wright, in planning the “ideal home suburb” of Kenilworth. Joseph Sears, a Prairie Avenue developer, purchased 223 acres along Lake Michigan between Wilmette and Winnetka in 1889. Forming the Kenilworth Company, he marketed the village as an escape from crime, grime and noise for Chicago’s wealthy families. Maher, with the Kenilworth Company, laid out a rotated grid oriented northeast to southwest to capture solar advantage for houses and to allow streets to run parallel or perpendicular to the shoreline. He also fashioned the limestone pillars that mark the Sheridan Road entrances to the village and the town’s central fountain.

In this newest and only planned community of the north shore villages, Maher, while joined by other prominent architects, dominated the residential design scene. Thus, Kenilworth contains the largest collection of Maher buildings in any community. Maher saw nearly 40 of his projects constructed between 1893 and 1926, including an eclectic house

for himself at 424 Warwick Road. Only three have been demolished. Contemporary houses by Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Burley Griffin, Thomas Tallmadge, Vernon Watson, and John Van Bergen also can be found in the village, along with the perfectly preserved Mahoney Park by landscape architect Jens Jensen.

Following this engaging look at the development of Kenilworth, we were treated to a very different subject—art pottery. The Terra Cotta Tile Company, founded in 1881 in Terra Cotta, Illinois, by William Gates, produced its first offering of Teco (Terra Cotta) pottery in 1897 after experimentation in the off season with different clays and glazes. Sharon Darling, author mostly recently of *Common Clay, a History of American Terra Cotta Corporation, 1881-1966* (but familiar to all of us for many years for *Teco: Art Pottery of the Prairie School* as well as the trio of *Chicago Metalsmiths, Chicago Ceramics and Glass*, and *Chicago Furniture*), recounted the development of a “ceramic expression of the Prairie School” and described the culture of Gates Potteries, the manufacturer of Teco Art Pottery.

Marion Mahony Griffin was linked to Teco designs from early in the 20th century. Teco lamps, vases, and tiles, applied as integral ornament or found in interiors or exteriors of Griffin houses (i.e., Mess in Winnetka and Ricker in Grinnell) were often designed by Marion. Darling shared photos of Teco in varied colors and glazes by many followers of the Prairie School. Botanical, zoological, or sculptural pieces were sketched amidst birds, flowers, creeks and ponds on the inspirational landscaped factory grounds in McHenry County.

Finally, Paul Kruty recounted a chapter of local urban history in *Subdividing Winnetka*. Walter and Marion Griffin worked with real estate developer William Tempel to create the Trier Center Neighborhood in Winnetka, and to improve Tempel’s extant subdivision to the south. New Trier High School had already been established as the center of a vibrant and growing community, and the two adjacent developments were to provide access to activities and offerings of the school and rail transportation for travel outside the neighborhood.

Walter laid out Trier Center by arranging thirty-five lots for privacy between houses with some property owned in common. The Griffins also designed

dozens of houses for Tempel and for individual lot owners, as well as their Own House within the two developments; only some seven or eight were actually being built. One of those has been demolished and one radically altered. The half dozen remaining Griffin designs are the built fragment of Marion's silk renderings of some of the houses in the two developments now at the Block Museum at Northwestern. Kruty brought along a wooden model of a pair of the houses made by his graduate students. It showed the Solid Rock house, which still stands in altered form on Essex, and the proposed house directly to its south, unfortunately not built.

Afternoon tours on a very warm summer day in Kenilworth and Winnetka provided interior visits to the Kenilworth Historical Society and five private homes. Toured by the WBG Society were the classic Maher houses for Frank Ely and Henry Shultz, Griffin's pair of houses for William Orth, and John Van Bergen's charming house for Barbara Erwin, the daughter of an Oak Park client of Maher. Finally, Jensen's wonderful Mahoney Park walks allowed glimpses of Lake Michigan, as well as two council rings and one gigantic cottonwood tree.

"EXPANDED CONTEXTS OF THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL"

At the annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians, held last April in Pasadena, California, Griffin Newsletter editor Paul Kruty led a session of four papers on the subject of "Expanded Contexts of the Prairie School." Professor Kruty's introductory remarks provide a concise exposition of the state of studies of the Prairie School and of Griffin scholarship at this moment.

The four papers that followed this introduction were "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Paradoxical," by Donald Hoffmann; "Elmer Grey: Prairie School Disseminated," by Chris Czezny Adams; "Marion Alice Parker: Woman Architect of the Prairie School," by Nicole Watson; and "Purcell & Elmslie: Spiritualistic Architecture," by Richard Kronick. The session was well-attended and was followed by a generous question-and-answer period.

Thank you for coming this morning, and welcome to the session "Expanded Contexts for the Prairie School." My name is Paul Kruty, and I teach at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. This session seeks to explore possible lines of research relating to the Prairie School, a subject of special interest to me as well as of some significance to the history of

American architecture.

Centered in Chicago and the Midwest during the early years of the last century, the Prairie School was a loosely connected group of architects united by a set of common goals: in general, to reform American architecture in a number of different ways, including technical, economic, social, and, of course, formal; and, specifically, to rid it of what they perceived to be the evils of the so-called Revival styles—that is, the adaptation of the canonical Western historic styles to contemporary buildings. Although this point of view was quite universally explored, if not accepted by most architects, throughout the Western world by the 1890s, and included lines of thought developed from the rational theory of E. E. Viollet-le-Duc, the picturesque and organic traditions that arose out of the Gothic Revival, and the values of the English Arts & Crafts movement, the Chicago group came to it principally through the figure of Louis Sullivan. Indeed, as most simply defined, the Prairie School architects were the followers of Louis Sullivan. It would probably make more sense to call it "the Sullivan School;" of course, the most common name used at the time was "the Chicago School." By whatever name, they were individuals, seeking individual solutions, united by a shared interest in an idea.

We all recognize early Midwestern modernism. Firstly, because of its simple form, so-called "abstract geometry," and its inventive ornament used judiciously. These are the qualities of Sullivan's own architecture and, thus, their source in Prairie School architecture. Secondly, picturesque and informal composition, at least in residential architecture, attention to "natural" materials, and a very general tendency to accentuate the horizontal—these are features added to the Sullivan formal vocabulary by Frank Lloyd Wright, yes, but simultaneously employed by Robert Spencer, Hugh Garden, George Maher, Myron Hunt, and Elmer Grey, among others, who sought to develop the implications of what Henry-Russell Hitchcock called the "Richardsonian suburban mode." While Wright was the supremely gifted member of the Prairie School, and later rejected any discourse that sought to place him in the group from 1895 to 1915, in fact he was (particularly in the early years) one of a "mighty handful" that worked together to try to transform American architecture under the aegis both of Louis Sullivan's example and his ideas.

As a movement, the Prairie School did not survive the

cultural change engendered by World War I, while its decorated forms held little appeal for the later architects of the International Style, despite the common ancestry of the two modern movements (although there was occasional recognition of the commonalities by members of the two groups). Wright's practice did survive, as we know, as did Walter Burley Griffin's, both with their ideals intact. And to some extent were responsible for a continuing "Organic Tradition in American architecture" that still exists. But these things are not the same as the Prairie School.

The historiography of the Prairie School presents a curious case. The first generation of scholars, led by Allen Brooks and followed closely behind by David Gebhard, Mark Peisch, and then Paul Sprague, laid the groundwork for the flowering of research in the late 1960s and through to the early 1980s, when Bill and Marilyn Hasbrouck published *The Prairie School Review* from 1964 to 1976, and major museums, such as the Art Institute of Chicago and the Princeton Art Museum in 1972, the Milwaukee Art Museum in 1978, and the Cooper-Hewitt in 1984, supported comprehensive exhibitions devoted to the subject.

What happened next was utterly unexpected, if, in hindsight, perhaps predictable. In a word (three words, actually): Frank Lloyd Wright. The world was hit by Wrightomania. Christies couldn't sell enough debris looted from Wright's buildings, and Tom Monaghan couldn't buy enough of what they were selling. Of course, his collection's purported purpose and its collection-catalog's title—*Preserving an Architectural Heritage*—was rendered ironic when the collection was dispersed ten years later, forcing Wright scholars to travel from London to Tokyo, and to track down endless wealthy amateur collectors, in order to reconnect related items that, if once together in the buildings where they belonged, at least for a time had been together near Ann Arbor, Michigan.

But the obsession with Wright had consequences for the Prairie School. As a subject it practically disappeared from the scholarly discourse, as Wright scholarship boomed. Thus, books about *Prairie School Architecture in Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin* of 1982 were replaced with ones entitled *Frank Lloyd Wright in Michigan* of 1991, and *The Wright State: Frank Lloyd Wright in Wisconsin* of 1992, although that same year, 1992, there was a second work called *Frank Lloyd Wright & the Prairie School in Wisconsin*. But this is also illustrative of the changing historiographic role of

Wright's colleagues among the followers of Sullivan: they were becoming the followers of Wright! Thus the emergence of a new definition of the Prairie School as the followers of Frank Lloyd Wright, which is patently false; but also the concomitant analysis of whether a building is "Prairie" or not by how much it looks like a Wright building—which is equally false.

As a consequence, the very significance of the Prairie School was diminished. When the Chicago Art Institute returned to the subject in 1995 with a small show and publication, it now emphasized the regional meaning rather than the national significance of the movement. It was no longer Early Modernism FROM the Midwest, but, as their publication was titled, *The Prairie School: Design Vision FOR the Midwest* [emphasis added].

Yet another skewing of the scholarship grew during these years: the wholesale appropriation of Sullivan, Wright and the Prairie School into the Arts & Crafts Movement, a result, I think, of the continuing rage in the antiques market for Arts & Crafts products. (Has there ever been a Grove Park Conference without a Wright lecture?) And yet the serious case for seeing the Prairie School, including Wright, principally as part of the Arts & Crafts cannot be made.

Another consequence of the "Wright Intrusion," if we may call it that, is that the scholarship on the Prairie School remains an unfinished project. Because of the way individual interests develop, quite early on there were books on lesser individuals such as Henry John Klutho, Antonin Nechodoma, and the Trosts, before there were monographs on Robert Spencer, Dwight Perkins, and William Drummond. But with the cessation of sustained scholarly interest, these foundation studies never appeared, so that now there are still no published monographs on these three important figures; with the more recent change in climate regarding the Prairie School, as we shall see, there is a Perkins book in the works and I, myself, am presently completing the study of Robert Spencer.

The new century, while hardly dampening the frenzy associated with Wright (and apparently the taste for Coonley Playhouse ties and Robie window paperweights), has seen a re-awakening of Prairie School studies, from monographs and exhibitions to internet sites providing a great deal of information and perhaps even more mis-information. Two firms have been the chief recipients of this renewed interest: Purcell &

Elmslie; and the husband-and-wife team of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin. Purcell & Elmslie have seen a number of museum publications on their work since the turn of the century, as well as the posthumous publication in 2006 of David Gebhard's seminal work on the firm.

The Griffins in particular have been given nearly their due. Beginning with major publications on Griffin in America and the Griffins in India in 1996 and 1997, as well as a *catalogue raisonné* of their Australian work, and continuing with a comprehensive exhibition held in Sydney, Australia, in 1998, and international symposia held at the University of Illinois and the University of Melbourne in 1997 and '98, writings on their work now include numerous studies of Griffin's plan for the Australian capital city, Canberra, and most recently a major tome of his complete writings on architecture, landscape and town planning. For the past ten years, there has even been a Griffin Society in America, publishing a newsletter and holding annual meetings. Marion Mahony Griffin has also had a separate burgeoning of interest in her work, including a delightful exhibition at the Block Museum at Northwestern University in 2005 and a comprehensive analysis of her work at Millikin Place in Decatur, Illinois, issued in 2007. She was even "discovered" by *The New York Times* last year, more in connection with her being a woman working for Wright than as a major figure of the Prairie School.

Finally, the task of synthesizing all of this new information and new interpretation into a comprehensible narrative remains to be done. Allen Brooks' magnificent book remains the only possible basic textbook on the Prairie School—and yet it is now almost forty years old.

So, today's four papers draw on the work that has come before, but seek to extend the range of possibilities—by re-investigating the 1890s; by seeking to bring new light on office procedures and neglected voices; and by examining non-architectural interpretations stemming from the architects' own statements of intent. And, of course, by dealing with Mr. Wright, explicitly or implicitly.

Paul Kruty
Urbana, Illinois
April, 2009

KENILWORTH CLUB WINDOWS: A NEAR TRAGEDY

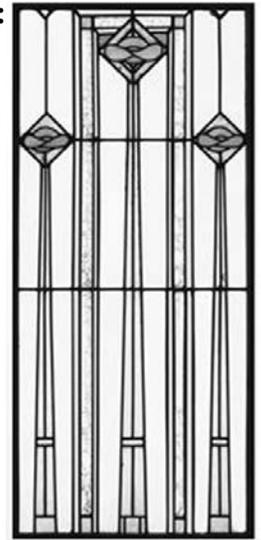
A set of five leaded-glass windows from the Kenilworth Club, site of last June's morning meeting of the Griffin Society, will be auctioned at Christies in New York on 8 December. Jon Pohl forwarded us the following exchange from the PrairieMod website, dated 12 and 13 November. NOTE: read to the end before sending off an e-mail!

Quoting the website's editor:

"A PrairieMod reader sent us the heads-up on a disturbing item... What's especially disturbing about this news is that these windows have been stripped out of a standing and intact building [see below] in an extremely affluent town that is in no danger (at this point) of being torn down. Ironically, I was just at the Kenilworth Club this summer for the annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society and marveled at how beautiful it was, especially with all of the art glass in place. When I contacted the Kenilworth Club directly for a statement, the response I received was: "The decision to sell was made by the Board of Directors at the Kenilworth Club. There is no further information available."... If the Club is in financial difficulties (which I have not received any information about as the reason behind this move), there has to be better ways to raise money than to auction off the historically-significant fabric of your significant buildings. True stewardship is about preserving what is culturally valuable for the generations to come. Shame on you Kenilworth Club. Eric."

The next day, the following reply appeared in the related blog:

"This article has big errors in it! I live in Kenilworth and I am a member of the Kenilworth Club. The Club has indeed been in financial difficulties for many years, trying to make ends meet. The windows that are being auctioned are 'extra' windows that have sat in the Club basement since the Club was new. There are several more of these 'extra' windows. The windows were almost destroyed in at least one flood down there. They were not taken out of the fabric of the building to be auctioned! Ideally the Club would have more members so it would not be forced to sell such a precious resource as some of its original extra win-



dows. The Club has been diligently reaching out to the community for years but fewer and fewer people are joining. It is very sad that it has come to this point. Rachel”

Officials from the Club itself never did respond, but apparently the windows admired by the Griffin Society in June are all safe, at least for the time being.

CANBERRA PROBLEMS

The Australian online journal, “Architecture and Design” (architectureanddesign.com.au/house.aspx) ran the following item about a proposed building in Canberra. The article, by Gemma Battenbough, was dated 17 August 2009. (The spelling has been Americanized.)

The architect of Canberra’s Parliament House, Romaldo Giurgola, has labeled the new Australian Security Intelligence Organization’s (ASIO) building a “monster,” despite its having been designed by former associates, Francis-Jones Morehen Thorp (FJMT). The AIA Gold Medal winner criticized the headquarters’ new glass façade on Constitution Avenue for ruining the sight lines to Parliament House and Lake Burley Griffin. The new building is the wrong shape, in the wrong place, he said, arguing that the linear design is a mistake.

Senator Gary Humphries is calling for the National Capital Authority to chop two stories off the height of the building in order to protect the vistas to Lake Burley Griffin. “I am deeply concerned that the size of the building will interrupt the vista from the War Memorial through to the Parliamentary Triangle,” he said. “It would create a wall-like effect along Constitution Avenue, separating the area to its north from the lake precinct.”

The design has been criticized for departing from the National Capital Plan designed by Walter Burley Griffin that promoted boulevards of active frontages rather than set-back, heavy frontages.

The Walter Burley Griffin Society calls the new plans “intrusive” and “monolithic”. The plans will destroy the symmetrical urban design of the Griffin plan, “degrading” its symmetry, landscape design and symbolism. “The project makes a mockery of Griffin’s design for the municipal axis of the

great national triangle, intended to be a grand terrace of diverse civic and urban activity. The whole eastern half of Constitution Avenue and fronting Parkes Way will be locked into security and defense offices,” says the society.

At time of publication, FJMT was unavailable for comment due to a company-wide conference.

MEMBERSHIP

The Walter Burley Griffin Society Of America is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt corporation under IRS Code 501 (c)(3). We invite you to become a “Friend” of the Society. For annual dues of \$25.00, you will receive a periodic newsletter keeping you abreast of the Society’s activities, such as lectures, tours, exhibitions, and other events related to the Griffins’ work. (\$20.00 for seniors 65 and older.)

The Society seeks comments, advice, suggestions, and news from you, its members. The Society also needs your financial support. Remember that all donations to the Society are tax-deductible.

If you wish to join the Society or renew your membership in the Society, please fill out the following form and mail it to us at the address below - or email us that you are attending the Annual Meeting and you can pay for your membership at that time.

Email Address: _____

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Comments: _____

Mail to:

Walter Burley Griffin Society Of America

1152 Center Drive

St. Louis, MO 63117

Phone: 314-644-4546

Email: info@WBGriffinSociety.org

Website: www.WBGriffinSociety.org