

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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TENTH ANNUAL MEETING, SET FOR JUNE 20, 2009 IN KENILWORTH, ILLINOIS

Save the date! The tenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held on Saturday, 20 June, in Chicago's north-shore suburb of Kenilworth. The morning session of lectures and announcements will be held from 9:00 am to 12:00 noon in the Kenilworth Assembly Hall, designed and built in 1906 by George W. Maher and located at 410 Kenilworth Avenue at Richmond Road.



Presentations include Kathy Cummings discussing Maher's planning in Kenilworth, Sharon Darling on Teco pottery, and Paul Kruty's examination of Trier Center and the Tempel subdivision, located in nearby Winnetka. After lunch, houses by Griffin, Maher, and John Van Bergen in Kenilworth and Winnetka will be open for tours.

The morning events, which include the annual meeting and lectures, are free to members of the Griffin Society or Pleasant Home Association. Tickets for the afternoon tours are \$10.00 for members of either organization. Tour tickets for non-members of either group are \$35.00 (\$25.00 for Griffin Society membership plus \$10.00 for the tour). On site registration begins at 8:30am.

Please reserve your space at the meeting and tours by June 6, by emailing info@WBGriffinSociety.org or phoning Peter Griffin at: 314-644-4546

STYLE 1900 FEATURES THE GRIFFINS

The Griffins took center stage in the Summer 2008 issue of the influential magazine *Style 1900*, with a feature article written by associate editor Eve M. Kahn. Entitled "On the Trail of Architecture's Dynamic Duo," the article recounted the Griffins' careers, and the prolonged neglect and continuing re-discovery by the historic architecture community. As Peter Griffin, founder of the Walter Burley Griffin Society was quoted, "We have over 300 members and keep growing." The article is beautifully illustrated with eight color and nine black-and-white images, and includes a list of books, websites, and locations where Griffin buildings survive. The full citation is *Style 1900* 21 no.2 (Summer 2008): 72-79.

BERRYS GARNER PRESERVATION AWARD

Rich and Mary Berry, owners of the Ralph Griffin house in Edwardsville and active members of the Griffin Society, were the worthy recipients of a Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award, administered by Illinois' premiere preservation organization, Landmarks Illinois, and given last October at the Chicago Club. Griffin Society members will remember touring the Berrys' Griffin house as part of the 2002 annual meeting.



Griffin House (left) and West House (right). Photo courtesy of Rich Berry

The project involved acquiring and preserving the house adjacent to their Griffin masterpiece, a house whose story was intimately tied to the Griffin building, as the ancestral home of Ralph Griffin's wife's family—the Hadley/Wests. As reported in Landmarks Illinois' newsletter, *The Cornerstone*,

“This Italianate house, located 30 miles north-east of St. Louis, was constructed in 1858 for E.M. West... In 1940, the lot was re-zoned for business use. The house was expanded with a large one-story rear addition and converted into a funeral home. Much of the original grounds were paved over for parking and accessibility ramps were attached to the original front porch. After the property was vacated in 2004, the owners of a neighboring Walter Burley Griffin-designed residence [the Berrys] purchased the house to ensure it would not be demolished for commercial development. Over the next 2-1/2 years, the new owners returned the structure to its 1860s appearance by rebuilding and recasting ornamental elements on both the interior and exterior. Alterations from the first floor's use as a funeral parlor were reversed, a hidden fireplace was unveiled behind 1950s cabinets,

and paint analysis helped recreate period finishes. To complete the deconversion back to a single family house, the asphalt parking lot was torn out and the grounds fully restored. It is now once again a jewel of the city's local landmark district.”

The Society congratulates the Berrys and looks forward to the day when we can return as a group to view the Ralph Griffin house in its original context.

ADDITION TO THE GRIFFIN CANON?

In a recent issue of *Nineteenth Century*, the quarterly magazine of the Victorian Society in America, Paul Kruty argues that a cottage in Maine that was built in 1900 by the office of Dwight Perkins was actually designed by Griffin while working for Perkins.



Bustin Cottage. Photo courtesy of Peter Kruty Editions

In the article, entitled “A Prairie-School House in Coastal Maine: Finding the ‘Cottage on Bustin’s Island’,” Kruty examines surviving documentary evidence, legal records, and newspaper accounts to establish the credible date for the design and construction of the building, recounts the activities in Perkins’ office that would have led him to turn over the small project to his rapidly rising assistant, and examines the building itself in light of Griffin’s early work, particularly its striking plan—the first example of Griffin’s open plan, later appropriated by Wright for the “Fireproof House for \$5,000.” The full citation is *Nineteenth Century* 27 no.2 (Fall 2007): 11-18. You can order the magazine at: <http://www.victoriansociety.org/>

WILLIAM DRUMMOND'S 1910 CURTIS YELLAND HOUSE

by Robert E. McCoy

During the Mason City Prairie School tours of our Rock Crest / Rock Glen National Historic District, held on June 21, 2008, the Yelland House was one of our real show-pieces. Designed by William Drummond while here supervising Frank Lloyd Wright's City National Bank-Park Inn Hotel building, it embodies the qualities of the Prairie School house for middle-class America developed while Wright, Mahony, Griffin and Drummond were together in the Oak Park Studio. In it, the living room, dining room and veranda became one large private living space.



Yelland House, before the fire. Photo courtesy of Bob McCoy

The house was painstakingly restored by its previous owners and sympathetically furnished by the current owner. The owner and a friend have been accumulating Wright artifacts through the years. The house seemed the perfect place to display these elements, including carpet from the Arizona Biltmore cut down for the living room and new Stickley reproductions that emphasized the living room symmetry. Tour attendees found it a high point.

A half-year later, on December 8, with snow on the ground, fire made it a shambles. The entire interior and furnishings were severely fire-charred, a large area of the roof was lost, and the water used to extinguish the fire caused most of the plastering to fall to the floors in this water saturated house without heat or other utilities through the winter. Art glass in the windows and interior was severely damaged. In the southwest corner, where the fire began, the roof is structurally unsound and needs replacement. The fire insurance proceeds are not available to the owner though significant "contents" insurance will be. A non-profit

corporation has been organized and given Iowa non-profit status and a 501 (c) (3) application has been made to the IRS. The owner seeks restoration help. Anyone interested in assisting with this restoration of a significant part of the Rock Glen / Rock Crest National Historic district should contact the owner, John Westfall at jwestfall@dowa.com. His home phone is 503-274-9450



Yelland House, after the fire. Photo courtesy of Bob McCoy

GRIFFIN ON THE INTERNET

by George Shutack

There are many resources on the World Wide Web related to Walter Burley Griffin, Marion Mahony and the Prairie School architects. Here is a list of some of them.

National Societies

www.WBGriffinSociety.org

The Walter Burley Griffin Society in the America has the mission: "To preserve the legacy of architects Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin and the Prairie School of Architecture."

www.GriffinSociety.org

Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc. was established in 1988 in Sydney, Australia, the Society commemorates the lives and works of Walter Burley Griffin (1876-1937) and Marion Mahony Griffin (1871-1961) and promotes the environmental ideals and community life they fostered in Australia.

Archives and Research Sources

www.artic.edu/aic/libraries/research/specialcollections/digitalcollections/allcollections.html

The Art Institute of Chicago's Digital Collections. Explore the *The Historic Architecture & Landscape Image Collection* that includes photographs of many Griffins' works.

www.artic.edu/magicofamerica/

The Art Institute of Chicago has created the electronic edition of Marion Mahony Griffins' unpublished manuscript "The Magic Of America". The manuscript is over 1,400 pages with approximately 650 accompanying illustrations. "The Magic of America" was meant, in part, to be a testament to Walter's and Marion's life and work together.

ryerson.artic.edu

Art Institute of Chicago, Ryerson and Burnham Archives, has many books and letters on Griffin.

www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/indiv/avery/

Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York has many items on the Griffins, including 118 architectural drawings, circa 1909-1937.

www.nyhistory.org

The New-York Historical Society Library has one of the three known copies of "The Magic Of America."

www.blockmuseum.northwestern.edu/collections/griffin.html

Block Museum of Art, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois. In 1950, Marion donated 120 original drawings to Northwestern's art department, The Mary and Leigh Block Museum of Art.

www.nla.gov.au

National Library of Australia houses thousands of original drawings and photographs including the Eric Milton Nicholls collection, which has been digitized and is available online.

www.naa.gov.au

National Archives of Australia has many letters and drawings related to Canberra and other Australian Griffin projects.

Griffin Buildings Open To The Public

www.cooleyhouse.org

G. B. Cooley House, Monroe Louisiana



Cooley House. Photo courtesy of Mati Maldre

www.stinsonlibrary.org

Stinson Memorial Library, Anna, Illinois



Stinson Library. Photo courtesy of Mati Maldre

Prairie School Architects

www.ci.chi.il.us/Landmarks/Architects/Griffin.html

City Of Chicago website on various Prairie School and Chicago architects.

www.prairiestyles.com

The Prairie Styles website displays the works of about 20 Prairie School architects.

www.prairieschooltraveler.com

The Prairie School Traveler is a great resource for finding the locations of Prairie School buildings throughout the USA.

www.organica.org

A nice resource for photos with links to the *Guide to the William Gray Purcell Papers, Prairie School Exchange* and a bibliography for *Progressive Architecture in The Architectural Record, 1891-1925*.

Architectural Tours

www.toursdart.com

Karen Bergenthal runs Tours d'Art in Milwaukee Wisconsin. In her past architecture tours, she has taken groups to see Griffins' work in Australia. Her September 2009 Frank Lloyd Wright In Iowa will (tentatively) visit the Griffin's Benjamin Ricker House in Grinnell and the Joshua Melson House in Mason City.



Melson House. Photo courtesy of Mati Maldre

THE GRAND RAPIDS MEETING: A SUCCESS AND MORE

by Jane Block

Over eighty dedicated devotees of the work of the Griffins gathered in Grand Rapids, Michigan, last June for the ninth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America. For the second year in a row (following the previous year's Decatur meeting), the chief subject of the event was the work of Marion Mahony Griffin, with Walter in the background and with Frank Lloyd Wright lurking nearby. The meeting was held in the meeting hall of the Fountain Street Church, whose attached chapel was designed by Alden Dow, the Michigan architect and Taliesin Fellow who continued practicing in the Organic Tradition of American architecture through much of the twentieth century.



Amberg House Photos courtesy of Mati Maldre

Following welcoming remarks and announcements by President Peter Griffin, local chair Tom Logan introduced the group to Grand Rapids by providing a delightful account of the history of the city, of the Heritage Hill neighborhood, and of the May and Amberg families, whose foresight as clients bequeathed to the world houses by Mahony and Wright. The story of the preservation of Heritage Hill against the ravages of urban renewal was particularly telling. Next, Paul Kruty recounted the place of the May and Amberg houses in the histories of the Prairie School, of Wright's career, and of the blossoming of Mahony's creative work as she became chief designer for Herman Von Holst, the architect who took over Wright's practice during his year-long absence in Europe during 1909-10. Finally, Richard Mohr, the country's reigning expert on American art tiles, focussed his keen eye on "Art Tiles in Prairie School Buildings," showing a wide variety of building types, from residences to public casinos, including work by Walter Griffin, Marion Mahony,

Frank Lloyd Wright, Robert C. Spencer, and Dwight Perkins. The group saw tiles from, among others, Wright's hotel and bank in Mason City, Perkins' Cafe Brauer, Mahony's Robert Mueller house (visited at last year's Decatur meeting), and Griffin's Ricker house, known to the Griffin Society from the 2005 meeting in Grinnell, Iowa. Mohr's carefully argued and illustrated conclusion—that the landscape panel Marion Mahony placed in the Ricker and Mess houses is probably the most perfect creation among known tile ensembles in the entire Prairie School—brought shivers to many members of the audience who have examined both installations.

After lunch, with members scouting one or another of the surprising number of good restaurants in

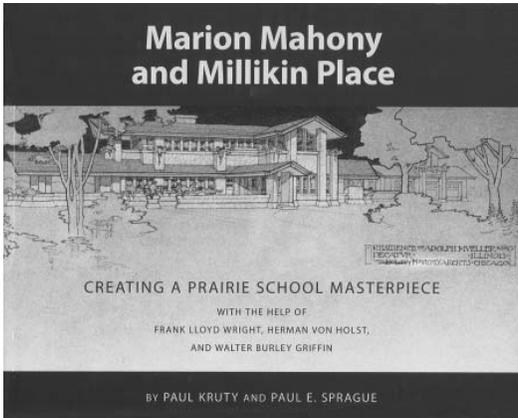


Grand Rapids, self-guided tours commenced. Open houses included an interesting example derived from Wright's "Fireproof House for \$5,000," as published in the *Ladies Home Journal* of April 1907. Completed in 1915 by the local firm of Osgood & Osgood, it was constructed following the published plans without any direct contact with Wright or any other member of the Prairie School. Wright's house for Meyer May, designed in 1908, provided a look at one of the great buildings created at the end of Wright's Prairie period, beautifully restored between 1985 and '87, courtesy of the Steelcase company, and opened since as a house museum. Finally, the house designed by Marion Mahony in 1909 for Sophie May's parents, David and Hattie Amberg, and constructed in 1910 by Herman Von Holst very near to Wright's May house, provided an illuminating contrast to the Wright building. In light of Richard Mohr's morning lecture, the Society members were keen to examine up close the sgraffito and colored tile decoration under the gable ends of the house. As the final building on the afternoon tours, the Amberg house was also the site of a wonderful reception given to the Society by homeowners Tom and Anne Logan. And so, a great big "Thank You" to the Logans, to everyone involved in making the Ninth Annual Meeting such a success, and to the loyal members of the Griffin Society. See you all at the Tenth Annual Meeting!

SOCIETY'S FIRST BOOK AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE ONLINE

“Since 1913, when they were fully completed, landscaped and furnished, three houses standing on an Illinois street called Millikin Place have formed one of the most important groupings of upperclass residences of the early modern American architecture that we now call the Prairie School.”

Thus begins the first chapter of the first publication issued by the Griffin Society:



Written by Paul Kruty and Paul E. Sprague, with an introduction by James Weirick, the book is intended to make a major scholar contribution to the literature on the Griffins. Quoting from Paul Kruty's preface, "Here for the first time a complete account of Millikin Place and its legacy are available in a single volume. Nearly every page contains factual material never before published, while much of the rest is to be found only in a wide range of obscure sources."

Yet the book presents the information as the exciting story that it unquestionably is. As Prof. Kruty further explains, "The history of Millikin Place is also the personal history of Marion Mahony and Walter Griffin. The chain of events set in motion in September 1909, when Mahony agreed to complete Wright's buildings while he was abroad for a year, not only brought Walter and Marion together in Decatur, but it soon led to their marriage, and later to the extraordinary Rock Crest/Rock Glen commission in Mason City, Iowa, and finally to Australia."

Marion Mahony and Millikin Place sells for \$29.95 for members, which includes S&H. The non-member price is \$35.95, including S&H. Check the Society website at: www.WBGriffinSociety.org for more details.

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:

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