

# THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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## TWELFTH ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR 25 JUNE 2011 IN OAK PARK/RIVER FOREST, ILLINOIS

The twelfth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in the Chicago suburbs of Oak Park and River Forest on Saturday, 15 June. This year the meeting will be centered around the work of Griffin's mentors and associates among the architects of the Prairie School, including Robert Spencer, George Maher and Frank Lloyd Wright. The morning meeting and lectures will be held at Pleasant Home, 217 Home Ave, Oak Park, the restored George Maher mansion that is also the headquarters of the Oak Park Historical Society. Details will be forthcoming on-line and in the Spring newsletter.



President Peter Burley Griffin is welcomed by Director of the Stinson Library, Lisa Livesay, as Prof. Richard Mohr (right), first speaker of the morning, listens attentively from the side.

## ANNA MEETING A RESOUNDING SUCCESS

By Bonnie McCoy, Mason City, IA

The eleventh annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society took place in Anna, Illinois on 22 May 2010. This venue fulfilled one of my long-term wishes, which was to visit the Griffin-designed building which more than any other in the United States reminds me of our home in Mason City, Iowa. My husband, Bob, and I have lived in Griffin's Blythe House (1913) for 47 years. The original design for this home was Griffin's Tempel II (1911), which was a project intended for a site in Winnetka, Illinois. In at least one significant way, which will be mentioned later, the design for Tempel II was altered to more closely resemble the final design for the Stinson Memorial Library.

Registrants at the meeting were accommodated at Giant City State Park, which is located in the 3,700 acre Shawnee National Forest, about 15 miles north of Anna. The Lodge and its 25 to 30 cabins were designed by Joseph Bootten and built between 1933 and 1942 by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). They are now on the National Register of Historic Places. The Lodge

is as beautiful as some shown on Public Television's National Park Series. The cabins are spare, as they should be, but very comfortable.

The formal meeting began at 9:00 a.m. on Saturday morning in the auditorium on the lower level of the Stinson Memorial Library in Anna. I have seen black-and-white photos of this building for many years but being on site and seeing how it relates to its neighborhood was worth the trip. It was gratifying to see the library well used that day and very well maintained.

Peter Burley Griffin, President of the Society, welcomed everyone and introduced the Director of the Library, Lisa Livesay, who graciously welcomed the group. Peter also thanked the staff at the library for offering such generous hospitality.

The first speaker, Richard Mohr, professor of philosophy at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) and American pottery expert, addressed the unlikely topic "Politics and Abjection in Cornwall and Wallace Kirkpatrick's Anna Pottery" and made it one of the highlights of the meeting. The Kirkpatrick brothers arrived in Anna in 1859 with the intent to manufacture pottery. Their products included stoneware, drain tiles, firebrick and commemorative vases. The product line that Prof. Mohr focused on was their pig flasks and snake (whiskey) jugs. These latter two were created as a response to prohibition. At first glance, the viewer could be convinced that they supported prohibition, but after hearing the interpretation of our speaker it became apparent that these objects were exactly the opposite.



Some Anna Pottery is on display in the library's showcase

These two products in all their variations expressed an ironic social commentary against prohibition. Social commentary is well known as an artistic style in the American Art world: Mauricio Lasansky, with his

Nazi series; Kara Walker, in her signature silhouette style expressing her rage over the treatment of African-Americans in this country, and even Jack Levine's oil "On the Convention Floor" exposing the imperfections in our process of choosing national leaders. Being a docent at an art museum whose mission is to tell the story of American Art, I am well acquainted with that style, but for the most part it has been two-dimensional work. I had never seen anything from the Anna Pottery. I came home thinking that either a snake jug or a pig flask would be an interesting addition to the permanent collection of ceramic work at Mason City's MacNider Museum.

Our second speaker was Paul Kruty, professor of architectural history at UIUC. He spoke on the topic "Bringing Modernism to Main Street: Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library." Included in this fact-filled power-point presentation was the history of the town of Anna, an introduction to the library's major donor, the choice of Walter Burley Griffin as architect (a perfect example of the value of connections), all of Griffin's research that went into the choice for the design, the committee whose decisions brought this project to life, the fit of the building in the community of Anna and the enrichment it has provided for 97 years. This story in even greater detail can be found in the publication *Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library: Modernism Comes to Main Street*, just completed by Prof. Kruty and available for sale at the meeting. This is the second publication issued by the Griffin Society.

One of the many things I learned as a result of both the lecture and the book was that Mr. Griffin, perhaps as a result of his 1912 design for the Melson House in Mason City, in which he covered the concrete frame of the house with stones in courses mimicking the natural cliff from which it rises, gained an appreciation for the contrast between the roughness of natural stone and the smoothness of concrete. Following through on that interest, layered stone was added to the design of the unbuilt project Griffin based the Blythe House on, as well as even more roughly cut stone not clearly set in courses on the concrete framed Stinson Memorial Library. It is this combination which creates the resemblance, for me, between these two buildings.

Our third and final presentation of the morning was titled "Building Bruce Goff's Duncan House." Our presenter was Richard Helstern, professor of

architecture at Southern Illinois in nearby Carbonale. Before this meeting my only exposure to Bruce Goff's work was his early design for the Boston Ave. Methodist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. A child prodigy with talent in music, painting and architecture, Mr. Goff (1904-1982) was apprenticed at age 12 to an architectural firm and was advised by Frank Lloyd Wright not to study architecture in an academic institution because it would thwart his creativity. With very little in the area of formal education he nevertheless became the Chairman of the School of Architecture at the University of Oklahoma. His style was labeled "organic." Most of the 140 designs that were built during his career were client and site specific. This was the case with the Duncan House (1965), constructed of 600 tons of local sandstone creek bed rocks in a wooded area outside of neighboring Cobden, IL. This story, as told by Prof. Helstern with beautiful slides, detailed the relationship between architect and client and the immense creativity poured into this project; creativity that placed a much higher priority on form than on function as it sadly turned out. When Mr. Duncan died, his wife moved to a more manageable situation. Unfortunately, owners #2, 3 and 4 have not had the resources to maintain the home as it was designed. It still functions as a B & B and still has great elements of fantasy, but is far from its original glory. I felt privileged to hear the story and see the images at their most perfect, but at the same time regret that it was too impractical to endure, or that it was not possible for the Society to tour the house.

At noon the meeting was adjourned and the 50 plus registrants enjoyed a box lunch outside on the grounds of the Library. The schedule for the afternoon included time to explore the Stinson Memorial Library and to visit St. Ann's Episcopal Church about one block away. This church was built in 1886 for \$600. It was desanctified in 1977 but is being restored and is on the National Register of Historic places. Also within walking distance was the home of John Jackson, one of the men on the Board when Walter Burley Griffin was chosen as the architect for the Library. Jackson commissioned Griffin to remodel his home. Another interesting destination was the Union County Museum in Cobden where we could see more examples of the snake jars and pig flasks from the Anna Pottery. Isom's Antiques in Anna was an even better source of these interesting objects, with an impromptu lecture by the owner who loved his topic. The final suggestion for our afternoon activities was Lincoln Memo-

rial Park in Jonesboro, IL. The third of seven debates between Lincoln and Douglas took place on this site on September 15, 1858. In addition to the plaque which was placed there in 1963 two life-size statues of Lincoln and Douglas were added in 2008 when Jonesboro celebrated its sesquicentennial.

Our final event for the day was a lovely reception at the Giant City Lodge.

Great thanks go to Paul Kruty and Jane Block for organizing this meeting which I found satisfying in every respect.

## COOLEY HOUSE UPDATE

Renovation and restoration of the Gilbert Cooley house has made considerable progress this year. The useful website is up and running ([www.cooleyhouse.org](http://www.cooleyhouse.org)). The Cooley House Foundation Inc. is making considerable progress in fundraising and getting the word out. And a restoration architect has been hired-- John Eifler, of Eifler & Associates in Chicago. According to architect Fred Bennett, the foundation's president, a successful fundraiser was held this past May 20, and a week later John Eifler met with group in Monroe to present his ideas. Members of the Griffin Society will recall Eifler's restorations and additions for Griffin's Emery house in Elmhurst (site of our first meeting in 2000) and Schwartz house in Wilmette (visited in 2005). He has also worked on Griffin's Mess house in Winnetka and Ricker house in Grinnell, Iowa. We were happy to recommend him to the Cooley Foundation and are pleased that he has become their preservation architect.

## GRIFFIN BITS

The latest issue of *Style 1900* (Winter 2010-11) includes a visit to Castlecrag, the suburban community developed in the 1920s and 30s by the Griffins north of Sydney. "Wonders Down Under" by Joe Findlay and James Kane reveals that "Two Sydney suburbs offer a tantalizing taste of Art and Crafts, Australian style," as the article's subtitle explains. A choice selection of photos and drawings helps bring the subject alive, although exactly how Castlecrag fits into the Arts & Crafts movement is never really revealed (Griffin considered himself to be a Modernist and railed against "artificial craft traditions" in one of his essays). An organic architect he certainly was, however, and, as the article makes clear, the houses at Castlecrag are as wedded to the earth as anything Frank Lloyd Wright created.

The Edgewater Historical Society of Chicago held its

22nd annual house walk on 19 September and included on this year's tour were Griffin's Gauler houses. Built in 1908 and designated Chicago landmarks in 2000, the pair have yet to be included in a tour by the Griffin Society.

### ELEVEN YEARS AND RUNNING

The 2010 meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America was the eleventh time the group gathered for conversation, lectures, and tours. Members can be proud of such an accomplishment, as they enter the next decade.

On such an occasion, it is good to reflect on what has been done by recalling some of the highlights. Guest speakers at our eleven meetings have included scholars Paul Sprague, Paul Kruty, Richard Mohr, Kathleen Cummings, Don Aucutt, Dustin Griffin, Mary Woolever, Sharon Darling, Tim Samuelson and Mati Maldre; preservationists, architects, and preservation architects John Eifler, Michael Jackson, Anthony Rubano, Lauren Wagner, Wilbert Hasbrouck and Richard Helstern; homeowners Tom Zusag, Rich Berry, Debra Nemeth, Betsy Downs, and Andrew Kirk of Castlecrag; and local historians, directors and curators Michael Mason, Sheila Perry, Peggy Bang, Bob McCoy, Ed Walker, and Tom Logan.

And, of course, we have visited buildings in a variety of urban settings, landscapes and neighborhoods. These have included the interiors of twenty-four buildings by the Griffins, and the exteriors of seventeen others. The comprehensive list, according to our records, is as follows:

#### INTERIORS:

1. Emery house (1903), Elmhurst, IL 2000, 2006
2. Peters house (1906), Chicago, IL 2004
3. Orth I house (1908), Winnetka, IL 2001, 2009
4. Orth II house (1908), Winnetka, IL 2001
5. Moulton house (1908), Chicago, IL 2006
6. R. Griffin house (1909), Edwardsville, IL 2002
7. Sloane house (1909), Elmhurst, IL 2000
8. Schwartz house (1909), Wilmette, IL 2006
9. Carter house (1909), Evanston, IL 2006
10. Van Nostrand (1911), Chicago, IL 2004
11. Tolles house (1911), Chicago, IL 2004
12. Ricker house (1911) Grinnell, IA 2005

13. Mess house, Winnetka, IL 2001
14. Melson house (1912), Mason City, IA 2003
15. Page house (1912), Mason City, IA 2003
16. Rule house (1912), Mason City, IA 2003
17. Jenkinson house (1912), Chicago, IL 2004
18. Stinson Memorial Library (1912-13), Anna, IL 2010
19. Blythe house (1913), Mason City, IA 2003
20. Schneider house (1914), Mason City, IA 2003

#### MAHONY (for VON HOLST):

21. Irving house (1909), Decatur, IL 2007
22. R. Mueller house (1910), Decatur, IL 2007
23. A. Mueller house (1910), Decatur, IL 2007
24. Amberg house (1910), Grand Rapids, MI 2008

#### EXTERIOR ONLY:

25. Bovee Two-flat (1907), Evanston, IL 2006
26. House for Tempel (1909), Winnetka, IL 2001, 2009
27. Olmsted house (1910), Chicago, IL 2004
28. Blount I house, (1911) Chicago, IL 2004
29. "Solid Rock" house (1911), Winnetka, IL 2001, 2009
30. Comstock I house (1911), Evanston, IL 2006
31. Comstock II house (1911), Evanston, IL 2006
32. Site of Clark Memorial Fountain (1911), Grinnell, IA 2005
33. Blount II house (1912), Chicago, IL 2004
34. Salmon house (1912), Chicago, IL 2004
35. Furneaux house (1913), Chicago, IL 2004
36. Windes house (1913), Kenilworth, IL 2001
37. Clarke house (1913), Chicago, IL 2004
38. Williams house (1913), Chicago, IL 2004
39. Hornbaker house (1914), Chicago, IL 2004
40. Esentrot house (1914), Winnetka, IL 2001
41. Jackson House remodeling (1913), Anna, IL 2010

#### LANDSCAPES:

- Rock Crest/Rock Glen, Mason City, IA 2003
- Millikin Place, Decatur, IL 2007

**BUILDINGS BY OTHER PRAIRIE SCHOOL****ARCHITECTS:****Louis H. Sullivan:**

Wainwright building (1890), exterior St. Louis, MO	2002
Union Trust building (1892), exterior St. Louis, MO	2002
Wainwright tomb (1892), interior St. Louis, MO	2002
Merchants Natl Bank (1914), interior Grinnell, IA	2005

**William Drummond:**

Yelland house (1910), interior Mason City, IA	2003
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**George W. Maher:**

Morse house (1894), interior Grinnell, IA	2005
Kenilworth club (1906), interior Kenilworth, IL	2009
Schultz house (1907), interior Kenilworth, IL	2009
Thomason house (1907), interior Chicago, IL	2004
Ely house (1909), interior Kenilworth, IL	2009

**Frank L. Wright:**

Henderson house (1901), interior Elmhurst, IL	2000
Stockman house (1908), interior Mason City, IA	2003
May house (1908), interior Grand Rapids, MI	2008
City National Bank (1909), exterior Mason City, IA	2003
Park Inn Hotel (1909), interior Mason City, IA	2003
Bach house (1915), interior Chicago, IL	2006
Smith house (1917), interior Chicago, IL	2004

**Tallmadge & Watson:**

Tanner house (1909), interior Chicago, IL	2004
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**Barry Byrne:**

Gilmore house (1915), interior Mason City, IA	2003
Franke house (1917), interior Mason City, IA	2003

**Spencer & Powers:**

Newland house (1912), exterior Chicago, IL	2004
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**John S. Van Bergen:**

B. Erwin house (1922), interior Kenilworth, IL	2009
C. Erwin house (1922), exterior Kenilworth, IL	2009

**Von Holst & Fyfe:**

Le Bosquet house (1912), interior Chicago, IL	2004
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**Myron Hunt:**

Hunt house (1896), interior Evanston, IL	2006
Van Deusen house (1897), exterior Evanston, IL	2006
Pirie house (1898), exterior Evanston, IL	2006
House for Higginbotham (1898), interior Evanston, IL	2006

**LANDSCAPING:****Jens Jensen:**

Mahoney Park (1933), Kenilworth, IL	2009
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**MISCELLANEOUS:**

T. MacNider house (1959), interior Mason City, IA	2003
Drake house (1914-16), exterior Mason City, IA	2003
Einar Broaten Lemley house (1914), interior Grinnell, IA	2005
Proudfoot, Bird & Rawson Shifflet house (1919), exterior Grinnell, IA	2005
Mortimer Cleveland Fellows house (1914), exterior Grinnell, IA	2005
Temple & Burrows Sanders house (1914), exterior Grinnell, IA	2005
Josselyn & Taylor Freeman house (1995), interior Grinnell, IA	2005
Dan Tindall Spaulding house (1905), interior Grinnell, IA	2005
Hawlett & Rawson Grady house (1909), interior Decatur, IL	2007
Hunt, Eager & Burns Rowe house (1915), interior Grand Rapids, MI	2008
Osgood & Osgood St. Anne's Episcopal Ch.(1886), interior Anna, IL	2010
Unknown Giant City Lodge (1933), interior Makanda, IL	2010
Joseph Booton	

*The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America  
is proud to announce the publication of*

**WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN  
AND  
THE STINSON MEMORIAL LIBRARY  
MODERNISM COMES TO MAIN STREET**

By Paul Kruty

With a contribution by Paul E. Sprague

“To create a new public architecture for America, Griffin turned for inspiration to the origins of architecture, on the one hand, and contemporary technology and practice on the other. His solution resulted in one of the most important statements of contemporary architecture to emerge from the theories of Louis Sullivan and the experiments of the Prairie School.”

Written by Paul Kruty, with an analysis of the landscape plan by Paul E. Sprague, the book is the first monograph on Griffin’s major public building in the United States. Historian of the Prairie School H. Allen Brooks called the Stinson Library “a brilliant design and a fitting climax to Griffin’s American career,” while Sullivan/Wright scholar Paul Sprague pronounced it “one of America’s greatest architectural treasures.” Yet there has never been a detailed examination of this extraordinary monument.

Drawing on the priceless collection of letters and documents surviving at the library, Prof. Kruty recounts the story of the commission, design, construction and reception of the building. He then sets it in the contexts of Griffin’s career, the public library in America, and the architect’s intention to create a Modern representational public architecture. Along the way, Kruty provides new details about Griffin’s office staff in 1912-14, the contributions of Marion Mahony Griffin to the design, and the role of the general contractor, Paul F. P. Mueller—the person responsible for the actual construction of more of the great buildings produced by Sullivan and the Prairie School than any other individual, including, in addition to the Stinson Memorial Library, Adler & Sullivan’s Schiller Building and such works by Frank Lloyd Wright as the Larkin Building, Unity Temple, and Midway Gardens.

*Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library* sells for \$25, plus p & h, with a 20% discount price for Griffin Society members.

68 pages, with 60 black & white illustrations. Published by the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America.

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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.

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