

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Spring 2010
Vol. 11 no. 1
ISSN: 1542-0884

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ELEVENTH ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR MAY 22, 2010 IN ANNA, ILLINOIS

The Eleventh Annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America is set to begin at 9:00AM on Saturday, May 22, in the meeting hall of the Stinson Memorial Library, 409 S. Main Street, Anna, Illinois. This magnificent building will be the focal point for the meeting. The morning session of three lectures will end at noon, after which a box lunch will be provided to every registered attendee. Tours will run from 1:00 to 4:00 PM, after which a reception will be held in the Giant City lodge from 4:30 to 6:00. Dinner will be on your own. The registration desk will open at 8:30AM.

Enclosed in this newsletter is a form to pre-register for the annual meeting and to renew your membership in the Society. Please fill out the form and mail it to us by May 17. Make checks payable to the Walter Burley Griffin Society.



Anna Library, Street View

As announced in the fall newsletter, three subjects will be explored in the morning session: Paul Kruty will recount the creation and importance of the Stinson Memorial Library, Griffin's principle public building from his American years; Richard Mohr, author of *Pottery, Politics, Art: George Ohr and the Brothers Kirkpatrick*, will help unravel the meanings of the whimsical and challenging products of the famous Anna Pottery, run by Wallace and Cornwall Kirkpatrick; and Richard Helstern will reveal the complex history of Bruce Goff's Duncan house, built in the 1960s in forest land east of Cobden and now a bed and breakfast. Richard Mohr, professor of Philosophy at the University of Illinois, is also the country's leading expert on art tiles; members will remember his beautiful and revealing presentation about such tiles in Prairie School buildings at the Grand Rapids meeting. Richard Helstern practices ar-

chitecture in Carbondale, has taught at SIU-Carbondale, and has followed the story of the Duncan house since its inception. Paul Kruty will be his usual self.

The afternoon will be devoted to looking at Griffin's work and other buildings in Anna, visiting collections of Anna pottery and local history, and examining the Giant City lodge, one of five Illinois rustic state park lodges built by the C.C.C. in the 1930s.

Readers will note a change: the logistics involved with bringing a large group to Bruce Goff's Duncan house proved insurmountable. While the afternoon sites will keep most of us occupied, the more ambitious might wish to try a side trip to Cairo, the nineteenth-century town at the confluence of the Ohio and Mississippi rivers, some 35 miles south of Anna. Board members Paul Sprague, who first discovered Cairo and its architecture in 1969, and Jon Pohl, who surveyed Cairo for the Illinois Historic Structures Survey in 1972, are themselves planning to visit this interesting city at the very southern end of Illinois on Saturday afternoon. Any members and guests who would like to accompany them are welcome. Information on this possibility will be forthcoming.

More generally, and because Anna is a major distance from the Chicago area, attendees may wish to do some exploring on their own before or after the Saturday meeting. Among the recommended sites are, again, Cairo, a short distance south of Anna and home to a grand array of late nineteenth-century architecture. Within striking distance, if a bit more afield are Rosiclare, Cave-in-Rock and old Shawneetown, all on the Ohio River, the latter with its Greek Revival bank from the 1830s; and McLeansboro, with several stunning Second Empire buildings, including a notable bank. Yet a bit farther east, on the banks of the Wabash River, is the utopian village of New Harmony, with its Philip Johnson and Richard Meier additions to the early 19th-century townscape. Highly recommended for overnight accommodation is the New Harmony Inn and Conference Center, designed by Indianapolis architect Evans Woollen. To the west of Anna are the French developments along the Mississippi River, including most famously Ste. Genevieve, Missouri, with the largest collection of 18th century French buildings in the continental United States, as well as Chester and Fort de Chartres on the Illinois side.

AND AN ANNA EXTRA!

The Griffin Society is pleased to announce a new publication scheduled to be available at the annual meeting in May. *Modernism Comes to Main Street: Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library*, researched and written by Paul Kruty, presents the story of the library in Anna as told through original letters and documents, historic and modern photographs, architectural drawings, anecdotal records and scholarly analysis. Also included is a discussion of Griffin's landscaping and the Stinson Library by Paul E. Sprague. Check the Society's website for further information and updates.

See you all in Anna in May!

GRIFFIN, THE "COMPLETE DESIGNER"

In the latest issue of *Style 1900* magazine" Rock Crest/Rock Glen features prominently in an article called "Poetic Spaces: Designing *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the 'Total Work of Art'" [Spring 2010, pp. 56-65]. The German compound word in italics comes from composer Richard Wagner's characterization of his own operas, but has been extended by several historians through the years to include works in the fine and applied arts as well as architecture whose creators seek to control every aspect of their creations. Author C. J. Hurley argues that this idea can be found in a number of followers of the Arts and Crafts movement, among whom he includes Walter Burley Griffin, particularly as exemplified at Mason City.

Hurley, a master craftsman who operates a decorative arts studio, characterizes Rock Crest/Rock Glen as "a shining example" among early twentieth-century "planned communities [that] explored the ideal of the built environment working in harmony with the natural one" (p.60). He concludes that, at Rock Crest/Rock Glen, "Griffin designed a gesamtkunstwerk enclave, harmonious in its relationship to the site and in the congruous use of organic building materials."

The section on Griffin is accompanied by Marion Mahony's colored silk perspective of the entire Rock Crest/Rock Glen, now at the Art Institute of Chicago, and five photographs of the Joshua Melson house—three color and two black and white—taken by Griffin Society board member, Mati Maldre.

EVANSTON REPORT: RESTORATION AND ADDITIONS TO TWO GRIFFIN BUILDINGS

By Jon S. Pohl

Griffin board member Jon Pohl, AIA, is an Associate Principal and Senior Project Manager at the Chicago firm of Perkins & Will (which is celebrating its 75th anniversary this year). As a member of the Evanston Landmarks Commission, Jon hears presentations and proposals concerning alterations to Evanston's landmark structures. Recently, these have included two well-known Griffin buildings: the Carter house and the second Comstock house.

The Frederick Carter House 1024 Judson Ave, Evanston, IL

Griffin Society members will recall touring Mark Ouwelen and Sarah Harding's house in June of 2006 at the annual meeting held in Evanston. At that time, Mark and Sarah had not yet moved in and the house was devoid of furnishings and personal touches. That has now changed and, we can safely report, changed for the better. Not only has the main house been stabilized and the interior restored but the grounds and the existing garage have been vastly improved and upgraded.



Carter House, Street View

The site plan shows the extent of the exterior improvements. Much has changed since '06 in both the front and rear yards. Changes to the front yard include removal of the existing concrete driveway, which was replaced with a much narrower pedestrian walkway with a carefully placed jog in order to preserve the

magnificent oak tree on the north side of the walk. Thus, there is no longer street access to the garage. The front yard is now flanked by large planting beds at either end of the yard immediately adjacent to the sidewalk. These beds are filled with low growing indigenous plant material. The front-yard landscaping was also significantly improved by systematically removing the overgrown evergreens located immediately in front of the living room. The plantings that replaced these shrubs have also been located in front of the living room but they have been spread out and pulled away from the house in such a way as to allow the watertable to be clearly seen from the street.



Carter House, Garage

The rear yard has also been vastly improved. All of the overgrown underbrush along the south and west property line was cleared and replaced with carefully placed evergreens and deciduous trees and shrubbery. The existing pergola (not by Griffin) has been retained, as has the exterior seating area which now communicates with the existing garage by way of a swooping curved brick walkway.

The jewel of the rear yard is the restored yet new-and-improved garage and its attendant hardscape. In 2006 when Mark and Sara purchased the property, the garage was in very poor condition. The opposite is true today. Mark and Sara enlisted the services of Tom Bassett-Dilley Architects to transform completely the old garage into a glorious two-story coach house in a way that complements the main house. This was accomplished by restoring the exterior and the first floor of the garage and by adding new liv-

ing quarters above with the addition of a new cross gable. The original imposing garage doors along the alley on the west side of the garage were restored and an entrance vestibule to the garage was added to the east elevation. A generous outdoor patio was added to the south of the entrance vestibule to the garage. This patio and entrance, in turn, connects with the swooping brick walkway curving back to the main house. The east edge of the new patio is separated from the rear yard by a low brick wall capped with a continuous stone header and watertable, thus visually relating the new coach house to the main house. An existing entrance on the south elevation has been reused to create a new access point to the quarters on the second level. The new living space on the second floor is an open plan and includes a seating area (i.e., a living room), a sleeping area (a bedroom), and an eating area (a kitchen). A pair of French doors lead from the kitchen to a new balcony above the entrance vestibule on the east elevation. The new interior space is detailed with wood trim based on the some of the detailing of the main house. This entire open interior is painted white to produce a clean and contemporary feeling.

Hurd Comstock II House
1631 Ashland, Evanston, IL

Early in 2007, local contractor Gaylord Otte purchased the Comstock II House with the intention of thoroughly restoring and expanding it to suit the new millennium. On 15 May 2007, the Evanston Preservation Commission reviewed and approved Mr. Otte’s proposed plans. A “Conditions of Approval” notice was issued on 22 May 2007 allowing Mr. Otte to proceed with his intended plans.

Due to damage caused by roof leaks the entire porch roof, entry canopy, overhanging eaves, as well as the roof and ceiling framing above the second-floor north bedroom, had to be completely rebuilt. Mr. Gaylord and a helper have taken these elements apart one piece at a time and replaced them using Griffin’s framing details. New materials were used and some modifications were made to satisfy the Evanston Code Official. This careful attention to major structural problems coupled with the fact that Mr. Otte is doing the work in his spare time has contributed to the time it has taken to get this far. While the house is almost completely enclosed, a great deal of both exterior and interior finish work remains to be done, as can be seen from the photos.



Hurd Comstock II House, Street View

At the time the house was in very poor condition. The plans show a major addition to the east elevation to provide functional and livable space on both the first and second floors. Mr. Otte, working in conjunction with his restoration architect, Peter Mayer, has been careful to make sure the new construction can be clearly seen as an addition rather than seamlessly blending it with the original house. This has been accomplished with a one-foot offset in plan that carries through from the first floor to the second-floor roof line on both the north and south elevations. This offset was, in fact, discussed at length by



Hurd Comstock II House, Under Construction

the Preservation Commission. One of the criteria for judging alterations is that an addition be made in such a way as to be easily distinguished from the existing structure. The exterior of the addition will be finished in stucco to match the existing and the existing east elevation will be removed and reinstalled on the new east elevation.

CANBERRA PROBLEMS, II

The Griffin Society of Australia released a statement in January condemning a second inappropriate structure proposed for a key area of the Canberra plan. The Society declared that the 17-story building, close to Lake Burley Griffin at the end of Edinburgh Avenue, is “unacceptably unsympathetic to the National Capital Plan.” The statement continues:

“The height and scale of the proposal called ‘Nishi’ on this location is at odds with the geometry, landscape design and symbolism of the Griffin plan. Perusal of the planning report submitted by the proponent in support of the works application makes no reference to the Griffin Legacy or the National Capital Plan.

“Walter Burley Griffin rejected towers. He emphasized that buildings in Canberra should be horizontal, not vertical: “the necessity of making these large units stand end on end, as in the congested American cities, can be avoided in a Capital City, securing a horizontal distribution of the large masses for more and better air, sunlight, verdure and beauty.”

“Professor James Weirick has pointed out that the principle of horizontal building masses in the design of Canberra is particularly important. The National Capital Plan *Policies and Standards for Urban Design* inscribe the principle that ‘Buildings in Central Canberra should be of a height generally not greater than the height of the mature tree canopy (typically 3 to 4 stories).’ The principle is fundamental to the character of the city created since the 1920s.”

UPDATE: KENILWORTH CLUB WINDOWS

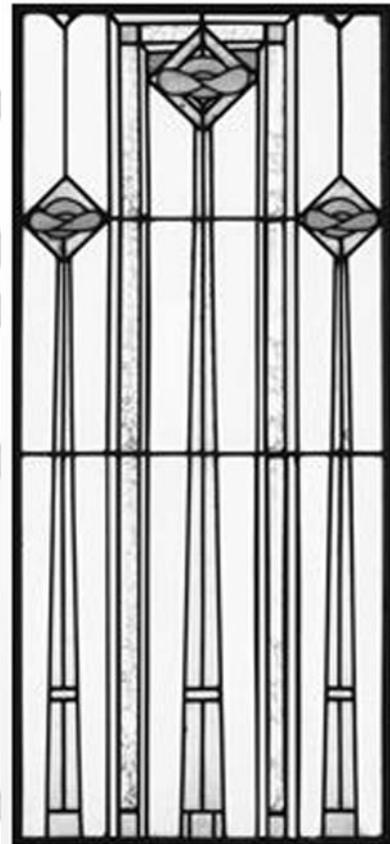
By Charles Pipal

Charles Pipal, AIA, is a preservation architect in Riverside, Illinois, and an instructor in Historic Preservation in the School of the Art Institute. As a board member of Landmarks Illinois, he was directly involved in the resolution of last fall’s attempt to sell a group of windows from George Maher’s Kenilworth Club at auction. Here

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is Charlie’s account of the story of the windows since the report in last fall’s Griffin newsletter.

In mid-November, Landmarks Illinois, a statewide non-profit advocacy group, was notified by one of its members that five George Maher-designed art glass windows from the Kenilworth Club (1906) were to be auctioned at Christie’s in New York on December 8, 2009. This information was obtained from the “PrairieMod” website. The windows were five of at least ten original windows in storage in the basement of the club. The windows had been removed from their original location after subsequent alterations were made to the building. Landmarks Illinois notified the Board of Directors of the Kenilworth Club and Assembly Hall Association (KAH) that these windows were protected by a preservation easement held by Landmarks Illinois. The agreement specifically called out the windows in storage as protected elements. In addition, Landmarks Illinois also contacted Christie’s to let them know of its legal interest in the windows and Christie’s agreed to not sell them without Landmarks Illinois’ consent.



Kenilworth Club Window

In December 2009, three members of the KAH board presented a request to the Easement Committee of

Landmarks Illinois to release the windows from the easement agreement, thus allowing the sale. The Easement Committee of Landmarks Illinois voted to recommend to its Executive Committee to not allow the release of the windows from the protected elements of the easement and therefore not allow the sale. The Executive Committee upheld the Easement Committee's decision. Chris Botti of Botti Studios subsequently made a generous offer to transport the windows from New York back to Illinois and to construct safe storage units for all of the stored windows at the club. Thanks to the vigilance of one individual and the action taken to enforce the easement, the collection remains intact and on site. We are hopeful that Mr. Botti will complete his work soon and the windows will be further protected for long-term preservation and possible reuse for later restoration work.

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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