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FOURTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR 22 JUNE IN EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

The fourteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in Evanston on Saturday, 22 June 2013. As usual, the cost will be \$10 for the Saturday meeting and tour and, of course, registrants must also have paid their annual dues of \$25 to the Society.

In returning to Evanston, the Society plans to visit several Griffin buildings not available previously, as well as a choice group of related houses that will include work from among the following: Spencer & Powers, Tallmadge & Watson, George Maher, Dwight Perkins, Myron Hunt and Frank Lloyd Wright. The meeting will coincide with an exhibition on Canberra and the Griffins' relationship with early European Modernism being organized by Professor David Van Zanten of Northwestern University. The meeting and tours are being arranged and coordinated by Tom and Janna Hagensick. Check the website for further updates. Full details will appear in the Spring 2013 newsletter. Mark your calendars and plan to be there!

MINNEAPOLIS ARCHIVES HOSTS THIRTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

By Anthony Rubano, IHPA

More than fifty members traveled to Minneapolis to attend this year's conference of the Walter Burley Griffin Society. Expertly coordinated by architectural historian Richard Kronick and Griffin Society member John Clouse, the conference focused on the work of Purcell & Elmslie, colleagues of Walter Burley Griffin.

The conference kicked off with the annual meeting of the Griffin Society board of directors. Thankfully beer, in addition to the necessary a quorum of board members, was present. Both fueled the many lively and often simultaneous discussions, which brought some much needed color to the hotel's pallid interior.

The meeting of public lectures, held the next morning at the Elmer L. Andersen Library at the University of Minnesota, happened to coincide with the excellent exhibition "Marquees on Main," which featured drawings and designs of mid 20th century movie theaters by the Minneapolis firm of Liebenberg and Kaplan, culled from the holdings of the Northwest Architectural Archives. Dispersed around the region, these theaters are exuberant examples of Streamlined and Postwar design and have nothing to do with Walter Burley Griffin.

After Peter Burley Griffin's introductions, the conference began in earnest with Barbara Bezat, Archivist at the Northwest Architectural Archives, University of Minnesota Libraries, giving a fascinating show-and-tell of selected Archive items, which included drawings, manuscripts, and ephemera by or about Purcell, Elmslie, and Griffin, with special emphasis on P&E's ill-fated submis-

sion to Canberra's Parliament House competition. Dick Kronick spoke of the impact of Theosophy on the work of William Gray Purcell and the spiritual symbolism he embedded in his designs. Paul Kruty deftly analyzed the relationship between Griffin and Purcell.

After attendees boarded a tour bus for the four buildings on the afternoon's agenda, Dick Kronick gave thorough overviews of each building. The first stop was Purcell & Elmslie's Powers House of 1910, with a long living room centered on an inglenook with a burst of polychromed terra-cotta ornament. Its owners, Allen and Ginna Amis, have taken meticulous care of the house and have even reconstructed several of the architect-designed stencils that ringed several of the rooms.

Owned by the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, the Purcell-Cutts House of 1913 by Purcell & Elmslie seems filled with ingenious touches wrought for the benefit of Purcell's two young children—among them, leaded glass panels that read "Peek-a-boo" and an upstairs bedroom that sports a cozy corner and fireplace where, Purcell described, "[on a] cold snowy night, two little rosy cheeked lads sit candle-on-table eating their prunes and crackers with milk and waiting for Father to come home." The spectacular vaulted living room is dominated by Richard Bock's magnificent sculpture with a title reminiscent of Monty Python: "Nils, the Goose Boy." Bock took as inspiration an episode from Selma Lagerlöf's 1906 book, *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils*, depicting Nils Holgersson hanging onto the neck of a farmyard goose as it flies up to join a flock of its wild cousins.

Purcell & Feick's Stewart Memorial Church of 1909 has been called the first modern church in Minnesota. Intersecting rectilinear trim accents a startlingly cubic worship space. The Redeemer Missionary Baptist Church bought the building in 1988 and undertook a major restoration in 2000.

The last stop of the day was the Snyder House at 4101 Lyndale Avenue South, the home of its stewards, Thom and Martha Sandberg. Designed by its original owner, Kirby Snyder, the 1915 home is a fascinating mixture of the Prairie Style and other contemporary design trends, like Art Nouveau and Classicism. Murals ornament the central stairhall, and sixty-four art glass windows filter light into the eclectic structure.

Sunday morning, those who participated in the op-

tional tours were treated to several additional buildings. The first of the day was Sankaku of 1972 in suburban Burnsville by John Howe, who was Wright's chief draftsman from the 1930s until Wright's death in 1959. Wright often said that Howe was "the pencil in my hand." The major rooms of the house take full advantage of the sloping site that overlooks a picturesque lake. The house's complex interpenetrating volumes can't be adequately captured by photographs.

Louis Sullivan's National Farmers' Bank must have been the only bank in the country open that Sunday. John Clouse was able to convince Wells Fargo to open its Owatonna branch for us. After a mostly overcast Saturday, the cloudless Sunday sky let the sun pour through the leaded glass windows. On the mezzanine overlooking the banking floor, Paul Sprague, who first wrote about the bank more than forty years ago, spoke to attendees about the building's design.

Before we proceeded to the next scheduled stop, some of us snuck a peek of the exterior of P&E's cottagey Buxton House of 1912 on Owatonna's Main Street. Although we would have liked to "rest a while," as the house's stencils entreated, we made our way to P&E's J. H. Adair House of 1913, a larger and more formal composition than Buxton. Its breezy sunroom opened to the exterior by hinged, folding windows. A semicircular arched fireplace dominated the living room, the same centralizing element Sullivan used on his bank down the street.

The final stop was at the Owatonna campus of the University of St. Thomas. The first of two buildings toured was the Norman-styled Gainey House by prolific St. Paul architect Edwin H. Lundie, which was finished in 1957. It's big. And definitely not what Sullivan, Elmslie or Griffin would have designed. Frank Gehry credits the inspiration of his Winton Guest House (1982), the second opened house, to the serene still lifes of Giorgio Morandi and to Philip Johnson's admiration of one-room buildings. From the exterior, it's an assemblage of playful forms that the Wintons hoped their grandchildren would enjoy visiting. From the interior, the spaces pinwheel out from a central, pyramidal living room. The house was originally built on Lake Minnetonka, but with the threat of demolition, the University of St. Thomas moved it 110 miles to its Owatonna campus. It opened last fall. Thus ended an engaging, pleasant, and lively Griffin meeting.

NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA:

The latest “News Update” (issue 58, August 2012) of the Walter Burley Griffin Society, Incorporated, of Australia reminded us that “It is a good time to visit Canberra,” as the capital city celebrates its one-hundredth anniversary. Next August, the Society plans a seminar titled *The Griffins’ Canberra: 100 years*, which will include guided tours of Canberra and web videos of the event for the Society’s website. The Society has been instrumental in fending off an endless series of plans for various memorials by Lake Burley Griffin at Canberra that would compromise the parts of the city that actually follow Griffin’s prize-winning design. The newsletter also reports the more troubling news concerning the Griffins’ breathtaking movie theater in Melbourne, which has been neglected to the extent that a group called “The Friends of the Melbourne Capitol Theatre” has been formed to help with its restoration, the group’s specific purposes being “to undertake necessary repairs to the auditorium ceiling lighting which has been disconnected since 2003, and to allow greater public access and public hiring of the theatre.” Let’s wish them the best of luck.

WRIGHT CONSERVANCY MEETING IN MASON CITY

By Randolph C. Henning, AIA

Randy Henning, a charter member of the Griffin Society, is the author of “AT TALIESIN”: NEWSPAPER COLUMNS BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND THE TALIESIN FELLOWSHIP, 1934-37 (Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT’S TALIESIN, ILLUSTRATED BY VINTAGE POSTCARDS (University of Wisconsin Press, 2011); and THE ARCHITECTURE OF ALFRED BROWNING PARKER, MIAMI’S MAVERICK MODERNIST (The University Press of Florida, 2011). He kindly provided the following review of the recent gathering of Wright people as it relates to Griffin people.

The Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy held its 23rd annual conference on October 10-14 in Mason City, Iowa. While the primary focus was certainly on Frank Lloyd Wright and, deservedly, the recently restored City National Bank & Park Inn Hotel (by *Wright On the Park, Inc.*, to the tune of \$20 million), interestingly Walter Burley Griffin stole some of the attention, albeit not without considerable merit. Mason City, after all, has the largest collection of Griffin designs built within a Griffin designed development in the entire United States.

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Wright’s Park Inn Hotel was largely open to the attendees to tour. Incredibly, all five of the extant Griffin homes in the historic (and Griffin designed) Rock Crest/Rock Glen development—the Joshua Melson, James Blythe, Harry Page, Arthur Rule and Sam Schneider houses—were open for tours as well. Wright’s Stockman house (relocated to a new site adjacent to the Rock Glen neighborhood and subsequently restored), William Dummond’s Yelland house, Einer Broaten’s Drake house and Barry Byrne’s Gilmore and Franke houses, along with Curtis Besinger’s later usonian MacNider house were also open to tours. The Mason City Architectural Interpretative Center, which was based upon Griffin’s unbuilt interlocking squares project (in this author’s opinion, much was lost in the translation from vision to fruition) exhibited photos, both vintage as well as contemporary views, of the Prairie School works along with physical three-dimensional basswood models built by Iowa State University and University of Illinois students of both built and unbuilt Prairie School works interspersed throughout the exhibition area.

Curiously, the keynote address for the Wright conference, presented on Thursday morning by Northwestern University Professor David Van Zanten, did not concern the subject of Frank Lloyd Wright. Professor Van Zanten’s paper was titled “*The Griffins, Canberra, the Parliament House Competition and Their Trip to Europe (1914)*.” Technical difficulties aside, the talk was far reaching and shed considerable light on Griffin’s meetings with certain European architects during his trip there in 1914. The following day, our own Paul Kruty presented a spirited and informative paper titled, “*Rock Crest/Rock Glen—An Introduction to Walter Burley Griffin’s Ideas About Architecture, Landscape and Planning*.” While paying proper homage to Wright, Professor Kruty nevertheless brought an appropriate perspective of Griffin’s significant involvement in Mason City to the Wright biased participants. After Kruty’s lecture one singularly intriguing question was asked: “What might have Griffin done had he received the commission for the City National Bank & Park Inn Hotel project and not Wright.” The answer to that can be pondered for quite a while. And, of course, the continuing debate on the proper pronunciation (and butchering) of Marion Mahony’s last name continued on at the conference.

BOOK REVIEW: THE GRIFFINS' GRAND OBSESSION

By Myron A. Marty

Drake University, emeritus

McGregor, Alasdair, *Grand Obsessions: The Life and Work of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin*. Penguin Group (Australia, 2009). 545 pages. Clothbound, \$49.95.

Alasdair McGregor's story of the lives of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin begins with an account of his visit to Frank Lloyd Wright's Home and Studio in Oak Park. In a tour group of one, he hoped to engage his guide in a conversation that would help him understand what "Frank Lloyd Wright's presence in Oak Park had to do with a purpose-built city of less than a hundred years standing in far-flung Australia." He was there specifically, he told his guide, to learn about the Griffins and their relationship with Wright, for whom Marion had worked off and on for fifteen years; Walter was a key assistant in the early 1900s.

The guide's response was a blank look. "In an instant," McGregor remarks, "I realised that [he] had never heard of the two names I had invoked." Indeed, the only name spoken on the tour was that of Frank Lloyd Wright. Should the author's uninformed guide seek enlightenment about the persons he mentioned, he would find it in McGregor's *Grand Obsessions: The Life and Work of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin*. There he would learn about the background and accomplishments of two remarkable individuals, both of whom held degrees in architecture and were licensed to practice their art. The book might also lead other tour guides to give the Griffins the attention they deserve as they lead visitors through Wright's hallowed place. With its lively, compelling writing based on extensive research and its judicious placement of illustrations, *Grand Obsessions* brings its subjects' extraordinary accomplishments to life. That McGregor is an architect and an Australian with a distinctive perspective on the Griffins and their work is evident throughout.

McGregor begins his account of the careers of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin with their days in Frank Lloyd Wright's studio and continues with a cursory but insightful review of their shared work in America, particularly in the Chicago area and Mason City, Iowa. So impressed is he that he surmises that if the Griffins had remained in the United States

their careers could quite easily have risen to rival that of Wright, "but perhaps not with the colour lent by their former employer's personal life."

But they left America for Australia in 1914, two years after Walter won the international competition to design Canberra, the nation's new capital. Marion's assistance as an extraordinarily gifted graphic artist contributed to her husband's success in the competition. For a while they attempted to maintain their practice in the United States, but the surrogates left in charge failed them, and they ended it.

Bringing the Canberra design to fruition involved many battles and proved to be a lost cause for Walter and Marian. They were disappointed, of course, but rather than returning to the United States they turned to other work in Australia, aptly described by McGregor. It included developing Castlecrag, a community near Sydney. In this, too, they encountered formidable obstacles, but they nonetheless seemed to live fulfilling, happy lives. (In this part of the book, if not throughout, one wishes for maps.)

Next came an opportunity to design a library for Lucknow University in India. Initially Walter worked there alone, but Marion joined him after striving to find ways to maintain their practice in Australia. Their time in India was cut short by Walter's sudden death in 1937, at age 60. The book's final chapters recount Marion's return to America, by way of Australia. She practiced architecture briefly and dedicated herself to writing *The Magic of America*, her four-volume memoir and manifesto. In her declining years in Chicago she drifted slowly into dementia and died in 1961, six months after her 90th birthday.

McGregor draws extensively on *Magic*, and he deserves much credit for deciphering the manuscript's sprawling, sometimes incoherent contents. He calls it "far from a straightforward recounting of the adventures of two architects." Interwoven through its "irregular biographical frame," he says, are "random utopian meditations on the role of architecture" in many fields of human endeavor, including anthroposophy, to which "she became a passionate adherent..." Marion had another passion: contempt for Frank Lloyd Wright, which he returned in full measure. (The manuscript has never been published, but it can be read online at:

<http://www.artic.edu/magicofamerica/index.html>

This site is provided by the Art Institute of Chicago's Burnham and Ryerson Libraries.)

McGregor concludes that the Griffins' greatest monument is not found in their buildings, but rather in "the way they lived their lives, the way they bestrode three continents, absorbing the wonder and magic in each environment—teaching, bewitching, badgering and cajoling all those with whom they mixed—never resiling from a belief that there is a better way for the individual, for communities, for humankind, and for the planet."

This is a handsome, beautifully designed, illuminating book—a welcome addition to Griffin studies, both in America and Australia.

Note: our readers know Myron (Mike) Marty as the author of FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S TALIESIN FELLOWSHIP (1999), coauthored with Shirley Marty, and COMMUNITIES OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: TALIESIN AND BEYOND (2009). Professor Marty recently informed us that after publishing 475 reviews of 550 books in the ST. LOUIS POST-DISPATCH newspaper over a 43-year period, as well as numerous reviews in a variety of other publications including several dozen of Wright books in the JOURNAL OF THE TALIESIN FELLOWS, that this will be his last book review. We wish him well.

INDIAN MONOGRAPH AVAILABLE

The Griffin Society is pleased to make available a limited number of new copies of the ground-breaking book, *Two American Architects in India: Walter B. Griffin and Marion M. Griffin, 1935-1937*, published in conjunction with the international conference, "The Griffins in Context: American, Australia, India," held at the University of Illinois in October 1997. Written by Paul Kruty and Paul E. Sprague, the book is a comprehensive examination of the brief but productive period during which the Griffins worked in northern India. Long unavailable and difficult to find, the book is for sale through the Griffin Society for \$25, which includes shipping and handling. (A few used copies are currently available on Amazon for up to \$98.82 plus shipping.) Copies may be ordered on the website or by writing to the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America, 1152 Center Drive, St. Louis, MO, 63117.

CARTER HOUSE DOORS

The following offer is being made by Mark Ouweleen to members of the Griffin Society, particularly homeowners of Griffin houses: "I have the pleasure and honor of living in the Carter House in Evanston. Over the years a number of the internal doors have been removed, and we currently have them in storage. It occurs to me that some others who live in Griffin houses might be able to put some of them to use." Mark's email address is mouweleen@gmail.com, where he is happy to correspond with interested parties.

VIEW THESE TWO ON YOUTUBE

Two notable videos related to the Griffins are currently posted on youtube, one a public lecture and the other originally a program on a local PBS station. On Heartland Highways, a regular feature produced by public television station WEIU from Charleston, Illinois, an episode that first aired on 7 May 2012 features Millikin Place in Decatur, Illinois [google "Heartland Highways Program 1010"]. Among those interviewed is Lucien Kapp, who lives in one of the post-Wright/Mahony/Griffin houses, but who is an expert on the street and was an invaluable asset to the Griffin Society both in arranging tours and providing information for our monograph, *Marion Mahony and Millikin Place*. Indeed, during the program Lucien holds up a copy of the book and recommends it to the hosts. Secondly, you can find James Weirick delivering the annual Jorn Utzon lecture at "2012 Utzon Lecture with Professor James Weirick." Weirick, who is Director of the Urban Development and Design Program at the University of New South Wales in Sydney, presented his hour-long talk, entitled "Griffin and Canberra: 100th Anniversary of Walter Burley Griffin's Success in the Australian Federal Capital Competition," on 23 May 2012. During the lecture James is his usual engaging, informed, and provocative self.

SOCIETY'S TWO PUBLICATIONS AVAILABLE

Everyone who is interested in the Griffins and in the Prairie School will want to own the Society's two original publications, available through the website and by ordering directly from the Society's headquarters in St. Louis.

Marion Mahony and Millikin Place presents for the first time the whole exciting story of the development of Millikin Place in Decatur, Illinois. As Paul Kruty explains, "The history of Millikin Place is the personal story 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."

Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library reveals the international significance of the Griffins' major public building in the United States, a work that H. Allen Brooks called "a brilliant design and a fitting climax to Griffin's American career." Drawing on the priceless collection of letters and documents surviving at the library, Paul Kruty recounts the story of the commission, design, construction, and reception of the building, as well as its contexts in Griffin's career, the public library in America, and the architect's intention to create a Modern representational public architecture.

Marion Mahony and Millikin Place sells for \$29.95, while *Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library* sells for \$25, plus s & h. Griffin Society members receive a 20% discount on both publications.

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 friends. The Society needs your financial support. All donations 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 both membership and meeting at that time.

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