

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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Walter Burley Griffin
Society of America
1152 Center Drive
St. Louis, MO 63117
314.644.4546

Website: www.WBGriffinSociety.org
Email: info@WBGriffinSociety.org

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Editor: Paul Kruty

pkruty@illinois.edu

Designer: George Shutack

shutack@prairiemm.com

Please email news items to the editor or designer.

FIFTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

30-31 MAY

JOIN US IN MASON CITY, IOWA!

The fifteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in Mason City, Iowa, on Friday and Saturday, 30-31 May 2014. And what a meeting it is looking to be! Thanks to Bob McCoy's continued persistent efforts and goodwill, there will be eleven buildings open for touring. This will necessitate two afternoons of tour times—Friday and Saturday—and include a keynote lecture and reception Friday evening and symposium Saturday morning.

The meeting will start late at 11:30 AM on Friday morning at the MASON CITY PUBLIC LIBRARY, 225 2nd Street SE, Mason City 60401 (641-421-3668), with a welcome, introduction, and box lunch before the afternoon tours get underway. This timing will allow attendees within driving distance to leave from home early Friday morning. There is ample free parking in front of the library. Those who will already be in town Friday morning can go to the Stockman House Visitors' Center at 530 1st Street NE (Mason City 50401, 641-421-3666), which has an exhibition space and a nice book store/gift shop, to pick up their registration beginning at 9:00 AM. Registration will close at 11:00 and move to the Mason City Public Library.

TOURS on Friday and Saturday will begin at 1:00 PM and last until 4:30 PM. Half the houses will be open one afternoon and the other half for the second afternoon, with the Blythe and Melson houses open both afternoons.

Friday evening events will begin at 5:30 with a reception at the MacNider Museum with a keynote address by Professor James Weirick of the University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia.

Saturday morning's session, beginning at 9:00 AM at the public library, will include talks on a wide range of subjects by Richard Mohr, Dan Naegele, Adrienne Kabos, Peggy Bang and Paul Kruty. Lunch on your own will be followed by the second round of walking tours. The meeting ends following the tours, with dinner on your own.

The REGISTRATION FORM is enclosed in this newsletter. Please fill it out, indicating your choice of sandwich and beverage for lunch, and return it to the Walter Burley Griffin Society's headquarters.

Hotel accommodations are filled at the restored Historic Park Inn Hotel. The Walter Burley Griffin Society is holding a block of rooms under our name till the end of April at the Comfort Inn and Suites, Holiday Inn Express & Suites, and Quality Inn & Suites in Mason City.

The cost will be \$35 for the Friday/Saturday meeting, reception and tours, \$10 for the box lunch and, of course, registrants must also have paid their annual dues of \$25 to the Society.

See you in Mason City on May 30-31!



The Blythe and Pages houses in Rock Glen, Mason City, IA Photo by Tom Yanul.

**A NEW GRIFFIN SOCIETY
PUBLICATION FOR MAY:
ROCK CREST/ROCK GLEN MONOGRAPH**

The Griffin Society is pleased to announce the publication of its latest book on the work of the Griffins, to be available for the first time at the annual Griffin meeting in Mason City, to help celebrate our fifteenth annual meeting. Titled *Rock Crest/Rock Glen: The American Masterwork of Marion M. and Walter B. Griffin*, it features essays by Dr. Robert E. McCoy, Prof. Paul Kruty and Prof. Paul E. Sprague covering the social context of the Griffins' work in Mason City, the architectural context of the project in their careers, and closer looks at each of the buildings.

LECTURE SERIES AT UNITY TEMPLE

The Frank Lloyd Wright Trust is offering a mini-series of lectures on the Oak Park period of Wright's career. The series began on 9 January with a lecture by Christopher Vernon on "Walter Burley Griffin, the Oak Park Studio's Landscape Architect, 1901-1906" (the next article is a review of that lecture). The series continues on 10 April with a talk by Paul Kruty entitled "At Work in the Oak Park Studio" examining the relationship between Wright and his associates at the Studio between 1898 and 1909, including Mahony, Griffin, Drummond and Byrne. Finally on 8 May, Wilbert Hasbrouck will present his ongoing research on the artist Blanche Ostertag, speaking on "Influences on Frank Lloyd Wright: Blanche Ostertag and Marion Mahony." These lectures all begin at 6:30 PM and last about an hour.

A fourth lecture will be presented at noon on 5 June in Chicago, rather than in Oak Park, when David Van Zanten will discuss "Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony" at the Gratz Center, 126 E. Chestnut.

**GRIFFIN AS LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:
VERNON AT UNITY TEMPLE**

By Peggy Lami

On January 9 before an enthusiastic audience at Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Christopher Vernon described Walter Burley Griffin's forte as landscape architecture. Vernon, an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Visual Arts at the University of Western Australia in Perth but a native Midwesterner from Indiana, has written and lectured extensively about the lives and work of Marion and Walter Burley Griffin, particularly their design for Canberra. In his lecture, Prof. Vernon pointed out that the Prairie School is the only architecture movement named after a landscape. He went on to highlight Griffin's work – continued beyond walls – in garden design, naturalized native plantings, and manipulation of exterior design to unite structure and setting. Many of the gardens he highlighted once surrounded extant buildings, and now survive only as remnants or are totally lost.

Prof. Vernon recounted Griffin's career, beginning with his childhood in the Chicago suburbs of Maywood, Oak Park, and Elmhurst, noting that in those communities he met future contacts and clients with whom he shared affinities or occupations in architecture, landscape architecture, and town design. In Wright's Oak Park studio Griffin also

met Marion Mahony, his future wife. He held the work of Frederick Law Olmstead and O. C. Simonds in great esteem, knew Jens Jensen, and became acquainted with Thomas B. Bryan, developer of Graceland Cemetery. Griffin also met and was befriended by Stephen Mather, an industrialist and naturalist, who became an Assistant Secretary of the Interior and subsequently first director of the National Park Service.

Working for Frank Lloyd Wright from 1901-1906, Griffin provided landscape plans (as well as building plans) for clients who wished to build in the Prairie Style. He took direction from the designers and naturalists he admired to create garden plans that were distinctly American. He began to favor natural geometries for his plans, such as those found in bee hives or sunflower heads, rather than the stiff formalities of other times in other lands. While working on landscapes for Wright houses that include those for Francis Little in Peoria, IL; Robert Lamp in Madison, WI; Darwin Martin in Buffalo, NY; and Nathan Moore, Edward Hills, William Martin and Peter Beachy in Oak Park, Griffin also had commissions independent of Wright's office. These houses and/or gardens include the William Emery House in Elmhurst, and campus plans for state colleges in DeKalb and Charleston, IL.

After leaving Wright's office, the Griffins worked in partnership, married in 1911, and together continued designing buildings, landscapes, site plans, and town plans, mainly across the Midwest. They relocated to Australia to develop their winning plan for a new capital complex in Canberra. Using a palette of tropical and subtropical materials, Griffin landscapes began to nestle into the Southern Hemisphere. By 1921 the pair was again free for independent practice. They chose to remain in Australia melding nature, art, work, and community into their lives.

Prof. Vernon elaborated on the plan, created before the Griffins left the United States in 1914, for the new housing development in Mason City, Iowa, known as Rock Crest/Rock Glen—the site of this year's annual meeting. Intended for individual building lots and common spaces, a garbage dump along Willow Creek offered Walter and Marion the opportunity to create buildings and the re-creation of a landscape like no other. For developer Joshua Melson they envisioned a craggy house emerging from its natural setting along the limestone bluffs. Vernon closed his presentation by suggesting that in the Melson House we find the richest extension and reflection of any building by its landscape ever realized by the Griffins.

CORNELL STORE AND FLATS IN JEOPARDY

Timothy Samuelson, Chicago's Cultural Historian and a great Griffin aficionado, sounded the alarm that the Cornell Store and Flats, at 1220 E. 75th Street in Chicago, now stands abandoned, with demolition a distinct possibility. Tim reported on 20 January that "local preservation groups are on the case and pressuring the Landmarks Commission to do something." He wrote back on 9 February that "the Landmarks Commission is working diligently to get the place in responsible hands." One possibility seems to be the American social practice installation artist Theaster Gates, who has taken on the responsibility of revitalizing a number of important spaces in blighted neighborhoods. But time is of the essence in this case.

Griffin got the commission in 1908 for the building from the estate of Paul Cornell, the original developer of the village of Hyde Park, annexed to the city in 1889. Cornell also owned land in adjoining city neighborhoods. The project included a small department store on the ground floor and rental apartments above and was Griffin's first important non-residential building. The entrance on the main façade facing 75th street was later altered, while the street itself was lowered for the beginning of an underpass added to ease traffic through a nearby railroad crossing. The rear façade, shown in the accompanying photograph, remains virtually unchanged.



The Cornell Store and Flats, 1908.

Photo by Tom Yanul.

TOM YANUL, PHOTOGRAPHER AND GRIFFIN MENTOR

A true friend of the Griffin Society, the well-known Chicago photographer Thomas G. Yanul died at home in March after a short battle with cancer. He was 74. Tom's connection with Griffin's work reached back many decades. He was instrumental in uncovering the Blount houses in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood. In the enthusiasm of the moment, he bought the 1912 Salmon house at 1736 W. 104th Place, taking out a mortgage that Paul Sprague remembers co-signing at the funeral of Richard Nickel. His photos of innumerable Prairie School buildings by Griffin, Wright, Maher and Spencer, among many others, appeared in a vast array of journals and magazines, including *The Prairie School Review*. As a surveyor for the Illinois Historic Structures Survey in the early 1970s, he traveled the length and breadth of the state searching for significant buildings.

Following years of research into the work of the famous, if eccentric, banquet and panoramic photographer George R. Lawrence, Tom recreated a set of Lawrence's custom-made cameras for his own use, giving him a perspective that few historians will ever match. Thus, the remarkable set of his own panoramas and banquet photos, recently acquired by the Special Collections library of the University of Illinois at Chicago, are part of a long Chicago tradition.

For many decades he photographed events, people, and architecture primarily in the Chicago area but also around the country and in Europe producing, for example, a grand array of panoramic shots of Paris. Griffin Society members will remember Tom's photograph (reproduced below) of the Society's first annual meeting, held on 24 June 2000 at the Emery house in Elmhurst, hosted by the Zusag family.

CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF THE STINSON MEMORIAL LIBRARY

This coming August 14th marks the one-hundredth anniversary of the official opening of the Stinson Memorial Library in Anna, Illinois. To commemorate this historic event, the library is planning a special celebration, which will be held on Saturday, August 16th (two days late, but much more convenient) from 10:00am to 3:00pm. Griffin Society president Peter Burley Griffin will attend as a special guest, as well as board member Paul Kruty, who will say a few words about the importance of this magnificent building. Copies of the Society's book, *Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library: Modernism Comes to Main Street* (2010) about the library will also be available at the event. Should you happen to be traveling north or south through southern Illinois, please stop by!



First Annual Meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America,
24 June 2000, Elmhurst, Illinois. Photo by Tom Yanul.

COOLEY MODEL GOES TO MONROE

At the last meeting of the Griffin Society in Evanston, Sharon Jones of the Cooley House Foundation of Monroe, Louisiana, accepted as a gift the basswood model of the original 1908 version of the design created in 1997 by Jung Mo, a student at the time of Professor Paul Kruty at the University of Illinois. Based on drawings now preserved at the Block Museum of Northwestern University, the model shows the original version of the house. When Captain Cooley finally was able to build his dream house in 1924, Griffin revised the drawings, altering elements to conform with his later architecture without changing the basic conception. The model allows viewers to understand more clearly the first version of this important building. Photographs may be found in *Walter Burley Griffin: Architectural Models of Projects and Demolished Buildings*, published in 2003 by the School of Architecture, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, pages 10-11.

GRIFFIN'S JENKS HOUSE IN PERIL, CONTD

The situation with the 1907 C. L. Jenks summer house, at cottage no. 90, Middle Lake, Lauderdale Lakes, Wisconsin, reported in the last issue, has had dramatic developments yet remains basically the same—and time may be running out. The property is still threatened with being sold at auction to the highest bidder (still no date set), with the result being assured demolition. Last fall's notice on the PrairieMod website (prairiemod.com) resulted in at least one very

one very interested potential buyer looking to acquire a significant "Prairie School" summer house, but five months later that prospect seems to have dimmed.

SCHNEIDER HOUSE FOR SALE

A golden opportunity has presented itself in Mason City. The Sam Schneider house, the Rock Glen home on State Street closest to the bridge over Willow Creek, is available to a lucky homeowner. As Bob McCoy explained in a note in late March, the First Citizens National Bank was forced to foreclose on the unfortunate occupant. Bob explained, "The bank now owning the house is the most philanthropic of Mason City's banks, and has hired the same first-class consultant we had for the Park Inn to come up with the best use for the house. All the neighbors in Rock Glen, as well as Mason City's mayor, are agreed that the house should remain a private residence." An additional difficulty stems from the fact that the property is subject to periodic flooding from the creek, to the tune of three floods in the past fifty years, "never with permanent damage." As Bob further argues, "All the Griffin houses in Mason City, all very different from each other, are conceptually of equal value," with this house having the most complex interior space, as well as a spectacular Grueby-tiled fireplace. We hope Griffin Society members will be able to offer advice when we descend on Mason City at the end of May—and maybe even facilitate a sale! For more information, please contact DeLaine H. Freese, Senior Vice President, First Citizens National Bank, 641-257-5044, dfreesem@firstcitizensnb.com



Sam Schneider House in Mason City
Photo by Paul Sprague

INDIAN MONOGRAPH STILL 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.

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.

Name: _____

Company: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

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