

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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Please email news items to the editor.

SEVENTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY 18 JUNE 2016

JOIN US IN CHICAGO'S BEVERLY NEIGHBORHOOD!

The seventeenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held on Chicago's far south side in the Beverly/Morgan Park neighborhood on Saturday, 18 June 2016. The meeting will highlight the group of Griffin's speculative houses built along the city's gridded streets, plus other low-cost cottages in the area, as well as assorted choice buildings. For those of you who have not seen these wonderful works, here is your chance; for members who attended our previous Beverly meeting in 2004, we can assure you that there will be much that will be new. Watch for further information on our website and in the Spring 2016 newsletter.

ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM IN MADISON

By Eleanor Grumman

The Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society was held in Madison, Wisconsin on 20 June 2015. Morning lectures took place in Frank Lloyd Wright's beautiful First Unitarian Society Meeting House in Shorewood Hills, widely considered one of the most important religious buildings of the twentieth century. Designed in 1946 and completed in 1951, its central space, regulated by a triangular module, was the perfect place for a Griffin meeting. As James Weirick noted at the outset of his presentation, after praising "such an incredible Wright space," he added—to the cheers and amusement of his listeners—"and high time that Griffin was spoke about in a proper way in this Wright space."

The meeting began at 9:00 am with a warm welcome by Peter Burley Griffin, President of the Society. The first speaker was Professor Paul Kruty of the University of Illinois who spoke about Robert C. Spencer, Jr., and his work in Madison. A Milwaukee native, Spencer attended the University of Wisconsin in the 1880s, where he was a founding member of the Sigma Chi fraternity—whose frat house in Madison he designed in 1903, unfortunately no longer standing. Spencer and Wright became friends in Madison and worked on the construction of the University's Science Hall. Like Wright, Spencer returned to Madison as a practicing architect. Of the two houses he later designed for Madison clients, however, only one remains today.

The next speaker, John Holzhuetter of the Wisconsin Historical Society, discussed the long standing relationship among Wright, Robert Lamp and Walter Burley Griffin, referring to their relationship as "an architectural tangle." Lamp and Wright were great childhood friends in Madison who, as early as 1893, planned a cabin for an unowned island on Lake Mendota they named Rocky Roost. In 1903, Lamp commissioned Wright to design a new residence, which Wright virtually assigned to Griffin. The Lamp House, located just a few blocks from Capitol Square in Madison, was open on the afternoon tours and is unlike any other Wright-designed home. It features a third-story roof

garden and an open plan that is more typical of Griffin's work than Wright's. Although Holzhueter credited Griffin with the diamonds set within the brickwork on the main level that create a pattern similar to panes in the leaded glass casement windows, he was skeptical of the larger claims of Griffin scholars. So the controversy continues.

Madison preservationist Gary Tipler spoke next about Claude & Starck and their Prairie School works. Established in 1896, the architectural partnership of Louis W. Claude, who worked for Louis Sullivan when Wright was there, and Edward Starck produced over 175 buildings throughout Madison. In addition to discussing specific details of the many buildings the firm designed, Mr. Tipler made special reference to the houses that would be open in the afternoon.

The last speaker of the day was Professor James Weirick of the University of New South Wales in Sydney, Australia, returning for a second time following his memorable keynote address at last year's meeting in Mason City. Professor Weirick discussed the 1911 plan for Madison by the famous town planner from Cambridge, Mass., John Nolen, and posed the question of whether it influenced Griffin's design of Canberra later that same year. The provocative arguments were woven together with suspense and skill to make several startling conclusions that will presumably be the subject of a future article. It was a special treat for me to meet Professor Weirick since he knew my grandfather, Lawrence Perkins. He told me about a visit he made to Evanston, Illinois, in the mid-1970s and spent Christmas at my grandfather's house. I figure I was there that day, but being about 6 years old at the time I was probably more consumed with opening gifts than meeting a distinguished academic from Down Under. My loss!

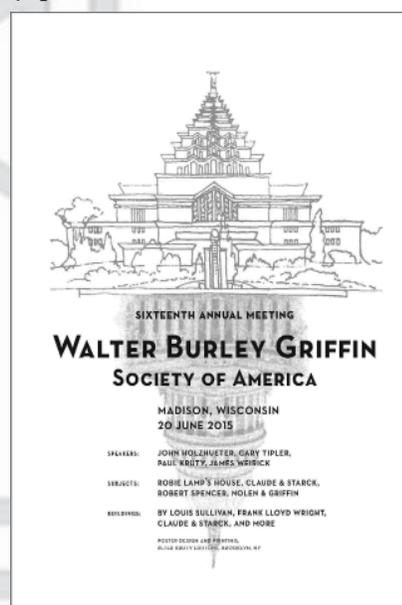
The afternoon tours matched the morning sessions in interest and planning and included, roughly in the order we visited the buildings, Wright's first Jacobs house (the first constructed Usonian house), and Sullivan's design for the extraordinary Bradley House, finished and detailed by his chief draftsman, George Elmslie, and constructed by Claude & Starck. (The house has been home to the Sigma Phi fraternity since 1914, whose members hosted us.) Near the Bradley house, we went inside the first big residence built on University Heights, the shingle-styled Buell house, and were invited into Wright's Gilmore house, not scheduled as part of the tour, by the generous owner. Two groups of Claude & Starck houses on the east

side of town, all interesting in various ways, followed, with the Lamp house being the last building on the tour. The weather held its own, mostly, although several sporadic rain showers caused a bit of excitement. It was a wonderful and fascinating meeting!



Gary Tipler explains the afternoon delights in store for his rapt audience

NOTE: Professor Weirick's lecture was the starting point for the elegant conference poster that showed the Griffins' proposed Capitol building at Canberra reflected below by the eerie reflection of George B. Post's magnificent Wisconsin State Capitol, under construction in 1911. The hand-printed poster, commissioned for the meeting, was available during the conference and can be acquired directly from the Society, along with last year's equally successful Mason City poster.



Poster for the Sixteenth Annual Meeting of the Griffin Society. Designed and printed by Peter Kruty Editions, Brooklyn, NY

“MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN BEACH” A REALITY

On Saturday, May 9th—a cold, blustery Chicago spring morning—the official dedication took place of the Marion Mahony Griffin Beach, the name by which the former Jarvis Beach at 1208 W. Jarvis Avenue in the Rogers Park neighborhood will henceforth be known. Griffin board members present included Kathy Cummings, Eleanor Grumman, and Paul Kruty, while Griffin notables included David Van Zanten, Christopher Vernon, Shiben Banerji and John K. Notz. Chicago Park District historian Julia Bachrach led the proceedings, introducing Alderman Joe Moore, instrumental in bringing the naming to pass, and Michael Wood, the recently appointed Australian Counsel General in Chicago, who himself generously thanked Victoria Walker, the previous Counsel General whose encouragement and support of the project was so crucial to its success. Bravo to all!

JENKS SUMMER HOUSE FINALLY UP FOR AUCTION

The summer house Griffin designed in 1907 for the family of Evanston real-estate mogul Chancellor Livingston Jenks, and subsequently acquired by the family that has owned it for almost a century, will be auctioned to the highest bidder “probably during December 2015,” according to an announcement sent to the Griffin Society on November 1st. Originally dubbed “Woodbank” by the Jenks family, the frame cottage has been known as “Keystone” for as long as the present owners have used it. Set on a generous lot facing the body of glacial water known as Lauderdale Lakes in southern Wisconsin, it was built during a time when such properties were only beginning to be developed for summer homes for successful urbanites. Things have changed dramatically in the past century. Now the land is incredibly valuable while Griffin’s wonderful and important building is considered a liability on the property. Family dynamics have led to the situation where various part owners want their share of the property’s value in dollars, while no one shareholder seems able to buy out the others. Hence the solution whereby the property will be auctioned and the proceeds divided among the shareholders. This, of course, spells annihilation for Griffin’s building unless a sympathetic buyer comes forward. For more information, contact Bill Densmore [wpdensmore@gmail.com].



Julia Bachrach with Alderman Joe Moore (center) and Michael Wood, Australian Counsel in Chicago

EVAN WALKER, FRIEND OF GRIFFIN SCHOLARS

Evan H. Walker, Dean of the Faculty of Architecture, Building and Planning at the University of Melbourne during the years when the joint Griffin symposiums hosted by the Universities of Illinois and Melbourne in 1997 and '98 were being organized, died last February at age 79. With degrees in architecture from the University of Melbourne and the University of Toronto, Dean Walker began working as a practicing architect but switched careers to politics as a member of the Australian Labor Party, where he was an influential minister with portfolios in conservation, industry and the arts in the 1970s and '80s. But he returned to architecture in the 1990s as an academic, combining his life skills to great acclaim at Melbourne. As such he was able to understand the travails of the Griffins with particular insight. He also was well versed in the goals of the Prairie School architects, as he had become a friend of H. Allen Brooks while studying in Toronto, where Brooks was teaching, learning first-hand from that great scholar. In close collaboration with his American counterpart on

the Griffin Exchange Program, Alan Forrester, Director of the School of Architecture at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Dean Walker strongly supported the initiatives of both schools to promote the work of the Griffins in American and Australia. As such his work provided one of the foundations for the creation and success of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America.

UPDATE: MUELLER BAT HOUSE

The bat house at the Adolph Mueller house in Decatur is fully restored and doing fine! The newsletter editors have been informed and, though chastised, are infinitely grateful to hear from Brigitta Kapp that the wonderful garden feature was out for restoration and now stands proudly in the Mueller yard as planned by Marion Mahony and executed under the aegis of Herman Von Holst in the midst of Walter's landscaping. A cherished feature of this complete design. No reports from itinerant bats yet.

UPDATE: CORNELL STORE AND FLATS

The excitement surrounding the events that appeared to save Griffin's important Cornell building, as reported in last fall's newsletter, was premature. Following a series of legal developments, Theaster Gates withdrew from the project and the property was back in jeopardy once again. However, several months later a new buyer came forward. Sources at the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development confirm that the new owner has agreed to keep the building and work to rehabilitate it, with an eye toward possible landmark status. Stay tuned for further developments.

EMERY HOUSE IN ELMHURST FOR SALE

Griffin's early masterpiece, the William and Marjorie Emery House (1903) in Elmhurst, Illinois, remains on the real-estate market. The magnificent house, with fourteen rooms, six bedrooms, and three full and two half baths, sits on a lot that is nearly an acre in size. Recorded by the Historic American Building Survey, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. This incredible house, with its complex interlocking interior spaces, leaded glass windows and original Griffin fixtures, was stunningly restored and expanded by John Eifler & Associates, work was that awarded a Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award in 2005. For information, contact Zachary Zusag [zacharyzusag@gmail.com].

TWO NEW BOOKS FOR HOLIDAY READING!

MAKING MAGIC: THE MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN STORY

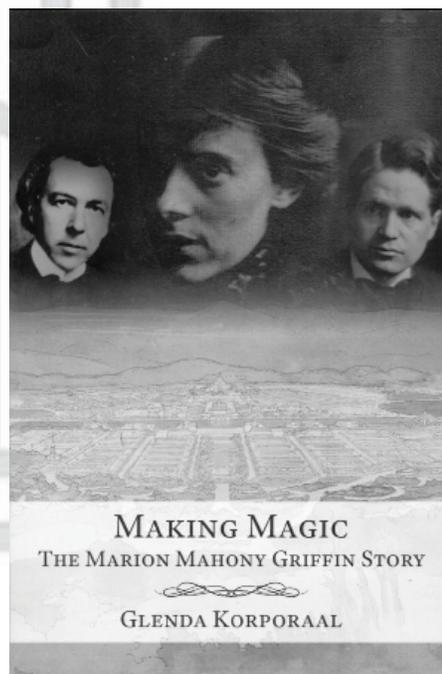
By Glenda Korporaal

Published by Oranje Media, Sydney, NSW, Australia

384 pp, color and b&w images.

ISBN: 9780992476908

Glenda Korporaal, journalist and writer based in Sydney, has drawn on Marion Mahony Griffin's writings and historical records in libraries in Australia and America and conversations with a wide variety of Griffin experts, homeowners, and those familiar with the subject's life, to tell the story of this extraordinary person in lively and readable prose. Calling Mahony "an architect, artist, environmentalist, social observer and community builder," Ms. Korporaal characterizes her as "a woman with a fierce sense of idealism and a passion for nature...a woman in a man's world." Indeed, Northwestern University Prof. David Van Zanten described her to Korporaal as "the Frida Kahlo of the Chicago school of architecture." This first full-length biography of MMG makes her extraordinary story come to life in a manner that will interest everyone who reads it, from historians to general readers. The list price is \$34.95 in Australian dollars. Griffin Society members will recall Glenda's presence at three recent Griffin meetings—Minneapolis, Evanston and Mason City—where, with her vivacious spirit, inquisitive nature, and growing expertise, she made many new friends.



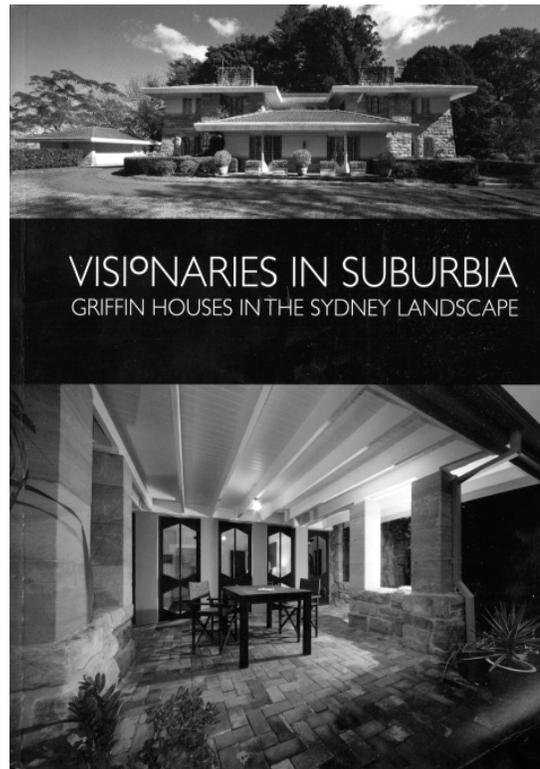
VISIONARIES IN SUBURBIA: GRIFFIN HOUSES IN THE SYDNEY LANDSCAPE

Edited by Anne Watson, with essays by Anne Watson and Ian Hoskins and catalogue entries by Anne Watson, Meredith Walker, Bob McKillop, Adrienne Kabos, Scott Robertson, Andrew Kirk, Michael Thomson, and James Weirick

Published by the Walter Burley Griffin Society Inc.
224 pp, color and b&w photographs
Castlecrag, NSW, Australia, 2015.
ISBN: 9780646935324

This welcome addition to the Griffin literature began as an updated version of the earlier publication (1994) by the Griffin Society in Australia, *Building for Nature: Walter Burley Griffin and Castlecrag* by Meredith Walker, Adrienne Kabos and James Weirick. Under the guidance of Dr. Anne Watson, the project evolved into a major new look at all the residential work by the Griffins, constructed and unbuilt, in the greater Sydney area. Introductory essays place the work in the context of the Griffins' careers and contemporary Sydney. Catalogue entries document and discuss the design and legacy of the twenty-two surviving Griffin houses in metropolitan Sydney, as well as unbuilt houses meant for Castlecrag and beyond. The book has over 260 images, many taken by Mati Maldre, with contemporary color photographs commissioned by architectural photographer Eric Sierins, historical photos from the National Library of Australia as well as a private collection. The Griffin Society of America's grant toward the cost of completing this major publication is included among the Principal Sponsors listed on the acknowledgement page. The list price is \$59.95 in Australian dollars.

The Australian Society launched *Visionaries in Suburbia* in September near Castlecrag in the revitalized spaces of the Willoughby incinerator, a rare Griffin survivor of an unusual building type. The sumptuous and extraordinary volume heralded at that gala opening is a "must" for anyone interested in the work of the Griffins, in modern architecture, or brilliant architectural design anywhere.



AND REMEMBER THESE OTHER NEW BOOKS:

THE MELSON HOUSE REVEALED AN OWNER'S PERSPECTIVE

By Peggy L. Bang

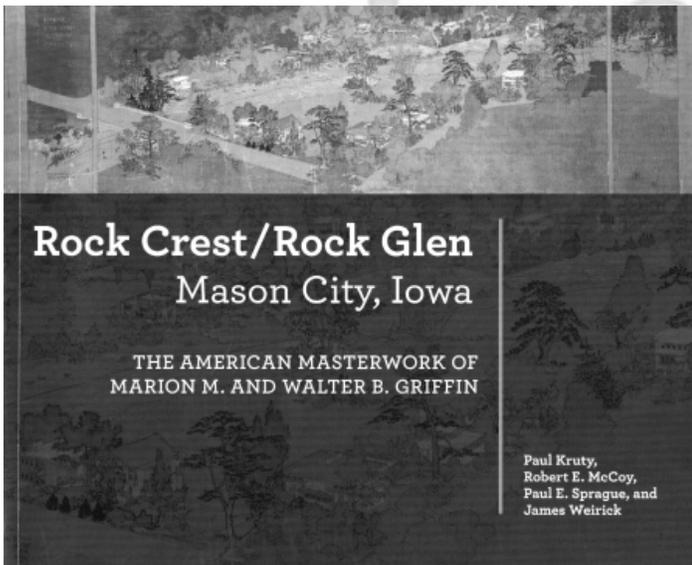
Peggy Bang, owner with her husband Roger of the Joshua Melson house in Mason City, gives "an owner's perspective" of their amazing story to bring this Griffin masterpiece from a fairly decrepit existence with major alterations back to its near-original state. Among the 48 pages of *The Melson House Revealed* are a foreword, an introduction by Robert McCoy, a historical context, six brief chapters on the restoration of the house, acknowledgements and a bibliography. In addition to illustrations of the original plans and drawings, the book contains nearly 100 mostly color photographs.

You may order copies of the book directly from the author by sending a check for \$28.00 to Peggy Bang, 56 River Heights Drive, Mason City, IA 50401. The price includes shipping by insured Priority Mail.

**ROCK CREST/ROCK GLEN, MASON CITY,
IOWA: THE AMERICAN MASTERWORK OF
MARION M. AND WALTER B. GRIFFIN**

*Essays by Robert E. McCoy, Paul Kruty,
Paul E. Sprague and James Weirick*

The Griffin Society's latest book on the Griffins is the first monograph devoted to the internationally significant site in Mason City. Titled *Rock Crest/Rock Glen, Mason City, Iowa: The American Masterwork of Marion M. and Walter B. Griffin*, it features essays by Dr. Robert E. McCoy, Prof. Paul Kruty, Prof. Paul E. Sprague, and Prof. James Weirick covering the social context of the Griffins' work in Mason City, the architectural context of the project in their careers, a closer look at each of the buildings, and a summation of the accomplishment at Mason City in relation to Canberra before it and Castlecrag afterwards. Drawing on unpublished photographs, documents and drawings from the Griffins' office only recently made available at the Australian National Library in Canberra, and supplemented with a host of original sources from a variety of American archives, the authors examine this amazing development from four perspectives. At 180 pages, with 177 black-and-white and 39 color illustrations, the book sells for \$35. To order a copy, see our website, wbgriffinsociety.org.



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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