

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@prairiem.com

Please email news items to the editor or designer.

SIXTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY 20 JUNE 2015

JOIN US IN MADISON, WISCONSIN!

Here are important details for the sixteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America, to be held in Madison, Wisconsin, on Saturday, 20 June:

MEETING: The meeting will begin promptly at 9:00 AM on Saturday morning in the main auditorium of Frank Lloyd Wright's First Unitarian Meeting House, located at 900 University Bay Drive in Shorewood Hills. The building will be open at 8:00 and we urge everyone to arrive by 8:30. You can park in the adjacent church lot. Morning lectures will take place in this space, which we have reserved from 8:00 AM to 1:00 PM. Lecture topics will include Wright/Griffin's Lamp house in Madison; John Nolen's 1911 plan of Madison and its relationship with the design of Canberra; and the architecture of the local Prairie School firm of Claude & Starck. Prof. James Weirick, our fabulous keynote speaker at last year's meeting in Mason City, is returning as one of the session presenters.

LUNCH & TOURS: Box lunches will be delivered to the church at noon. From 1:00 to 5:00 we will be visiting a selection of houses in and around Madison. As of this newsletter, we have secured Louis Sullivan's Bradley house, Frank Lloyd Wright's 1st Jacobs house, a wonderful shingle-style house near the Sullivan building, and a selection of houses by Claude & Starck. Be assured that, with the expert help of our local chair, architectural historian Gary Tipler, there will be more to come by 20 June.

ACCOMMODATIONS: A block of rooms has been reserved at the Hilton Madison Monona Terrace, 9 East Wilson Street, Madison, 53703, for the nights of Friday and Saturday, 19 and 20 June. To get the Society's group rate, you must stay both nights. The cutoff date for this rate is 20 May. Reservations should be made directly with the hotel at 877-510-7465. Use the booking code: WALTER Or book online at: <http://www.hilton.com/en/hi/groups/personalized/M/MSNMHHF-WALTER-20150619/index.jhtml>

This hotel is centrally located, two blocks from the State Capitol building and two blocks from the "Monona Terrace" center, a complex loosely based on Wright's original conceptions from the 1930s-1950s. The hotel is a ten-minute drive from Wright's First Unitarian Meeting House, where the Griffin meeting will begin on Saturday morning. There are many other hotels in the downtown area, as well as several outstanding B&Bs along Lake Mendota.

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 Griffin Society's headquarters. The cost will be for \$15 for the Saturday meeting and tours, \$10 for the box lunch and, of course, registrants must also have paid their annual dues of \$25 to the Society.

MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN BEACH CELEBRATION!

Be at 1208 W. Jarvis Avenue near the shores of Lake Michigan on Saturday morning, May 9th at 10:45 am! For that's when the official dedication of the Marion Mahony Griffin Beach will take place, thanks to the hard work of Alderman Joe Moore; the encouragement and support of Victoria Walker, the Australian Counsel General in Chicago; and the energy of a battery of dedicated souls, beginning with Julia Bachrach, Joan Pomeranc, Kathy Cummings, and Amanda Roberts, among a host of others. Alderman Moore announced the successful renaming of Lake Michigan's Jarvis Beach as the Marion Mahony Griffin Beach last fall. As reported in the last Griffin newsletter, the need for Chicago to honor Marion Mahony Griffin is self-evident; that it should take place in Rogers Park seems appropriate, considering that she lived in the neighborhood for more than twenty years, that her wondrous mural is located in West Rogers Park, that three houses by her husband were built in Rogers Park, and that the largest collection of her inked renderings are at nearby Northwestern University. Check PrairieMod for the latest information. Alderman Moore's statement, "My Decision to Support Renaming Jarvis Beach and Park," as well as Paul Kruty's letter of support to the alderman, may be found at: www.ward49.com/site/epage/154783_322.htm

The order of events is as follows: 10:45am—arrival for dedication. 11:00—dedication and unveiling of plaque. 11:30—reception at FLW's nearby Emil Bach house for speakers and guests. 12:00—public tours of the Bach house. 1:00pm—finish.

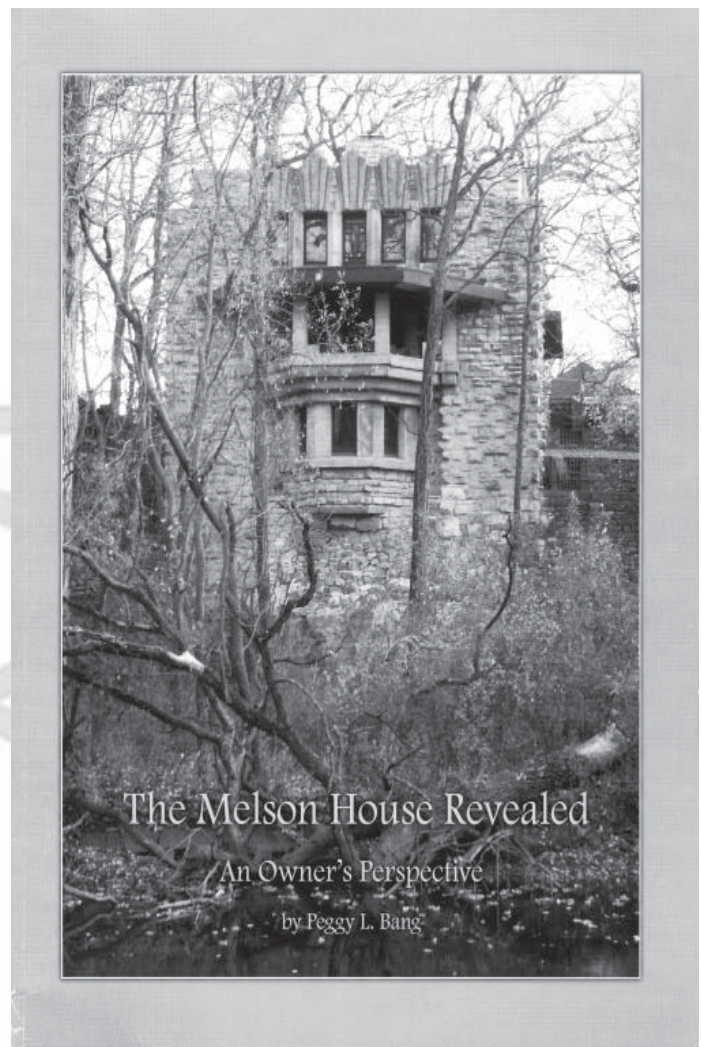
NEW BOOK! THE MELSON HOUSE REVEALED

An Owner's Perspective, by Peggy L. Bang

Peggy Bang, owner with her husband Roger of the Joshua Melson house in Mason City, has just published an engaging account—"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. As the *Mason City Globe Gazette* of 21 February reported, for Peggy and Roger Bang, who have lived in the magnificent Melson house for twenty-one years, returning it to a form that the Griffins would recognize has been "kind of a love story"—one that we can now all read about in this personal narrative.

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. Peggy writes that she and Roger will be at the Madison meeting, offering the book to Griffin Society members for \$21.40, which includes sales tax.



MARION MAHONY FIXTURE TO A.I.C.

The Estate of Charles T. Martin, Jr. recently donated a chandelier designed by Marion Mahony Griffin to the Art Institute of Chicago. The chandelier hung in the All Souls Unitarian Church in Evanston, Illinois, where Charles and his wife Margaret were parishioners. When the church was torn down in 1960, they rescued the chandelier and displayed it in their home in Winnetka, Illinois, for over 40 years.

The fixture is now the only fragment of Mahony's church to enter a public collection in the Chicago area. A similar chandelier owned by church member Georgia Lloyd was exhibited as part of the Griffin exhibition at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney in 1998, but that fixture was returned to the family and its present whereabouts are unknown. As Paul Sprague reported in *The Griffin Newsletter* back in Spring 2000, the Wolfsonian Collection in Miami acquired two examples of this remarkable fixture in the 1980s; but on a recent visit, Paul Kruty reports that today these two stunning works were sitting on the same shelf supported by the same piece of styrofoam as they appear in Sprague's photograph from 2001—where they have probably rested since 1983. The architectural curators at the Art Institute, in contrast, intend to put the Martin family's fixture on display in their architectural fragments gallery in the near future.



All Souls Unitarian Church, Evanston, Illinois, designed by Marion Mahony in 1903.
Interior detail showing five pairs of hanging fixtures and two examples attached to piers.

MODI REGALES OBAMA & ABBOTT WITH TALES OF GRIFFIN

So ran the headline in the Indian newspaper *The Hindu* on 16 November 2014. Imagine Narendra Modi, the Prime Minister of India, explaining to Tony Abbott, the Prime Minister of Australia, and Barack Obama, the President of the United States, about the Chicago architect who designed Canberra and died in Lucknow. But this, indeed, did happen at the G20 summit held in Brisbane, Queensland, last November. Although there was but brief media mention in the U.S. and Europe, coverage in Asia of the exchange was universal. The *ANI News* (bureau of Asian News International) headlined its piece, "Walter Griffin—the man who connects India, U.S. and Australia." The *Times of India* elaborated on "the fascinating story of an American architect who had an emotional link with their countries." The spokesperson of the India Ministry of External Affairs, Syed Akbaruddin, tweeted, "The life of Walter Burley Griffin is a common link among USA-Australia-India which our leaders appreciated." Mr. Akbaruddin also posted a photograph on Twitter of the three leaders engaged at the very moment the three were discussing Griffin.

HOUSE UPDATES

Miscellaneous Items on Griffin/Mahony Buildings

GILBERT COOLEY HOUSE, Monroe, Louisiana. Following the impressive acquisition of this important building by the City of Monroe and the Masur Museum of Art, the establishment of a lecture series, and the start of a major fund-raising campaign for restoration of the house, the Cooley House Foundation and its mission seem to have stalled. Although financial difficulties beset most cultural institutions these days, it seems nearsighted to let so great a treasure as the Cooley house continue to languish. Griffin Society regular and Cooley Board member Sharon Jones reports that the building is still open to visitors who call ahead, but its continuing restoration appears no longer to be a top priority in town. It is clearly time to get the restoration of this amazing building back on track.

JENKS SUMMER HOUSE, Elkhorn, Wisconsin. The auction of the property did not take place last December as scheduled “due to title issues,” according to the estate lawyer, who further reported that at present (March 2015) “the house and property remain in the same or similar condition” as they have been. Thus, while there has been no resolution to the fate of this important Griffin building—at least the house still stands.

ADOLPH MUELLER HOUSE, Decatur, Illinois. Last year Millikin University acquired the Adolph Mueller house, also on Millikin Place, arguably Marion Marion’s most complete and successful building and one that marked the beginning of her relationship with Walter Griffin, to serve as the University President’s residence and provide a location for receptions and events. Ironically, this fabulous house was owned by Millikin University once before and used for this same purpose, and then regrettably sold following the economic turndown of 2008.

Although the house has been preserved in excellent condition, there has been one catastrophe: someone demolished the Mueller’s bat house, formerly in the yard behind the house and one of the more unusual creations of Mahony, Griffin, and the Prairie School.



Mueller’s bat house, now demolished
Photo by Paul Sprague

EDWARD IRVING HOUSE, Decatur, Illinois. In 2013 the Irving house on Millikin Place changed hands once again. Its new owners, enthusiastic Wright Conservancy members but eagerly embracing the fact of Mahony’s contributions to this grand house, have undertaken the arduous task of recreating as many of the lost items by Mahony and George M. Niedecken as possible. They graciously opened the house on the Saturday following Thanksgiving as the featured site on Decatur’s Heritage & Holly Home Tour. The Open House was coupled with a lecture by Prof. Paul Kruty in the Millikin Homestead about the Irvings and Millikin Place, which was followed by a book-signing of the Griffin Society’s first publication, *Marion Mahony and Millikin Place*.

ROBERT LAMP HOUSE, Madison, Wisconsin. The intriguing and even mystifying Lamp house, built under the name of Frank Lloyd Wright but showing a number of suggestions of the hand of Walter Burley Griffin, is at the center of a development dispute that has come to some sort of resolution. A developer acquired many of the properties surrounding the landlocked Lamp house and proposed a variety of tall buildings for the sites. In February, the Madison Plan Commission recommended to the City Council a revised proposal for a Marriott hotel at the corner of East Washington Avenue and North Webster Street. The design is a 10-story building that met some of the concerns voiced in September when the previous design was rejected. The concerns were mainly about the amount of shade that would be cast on the flat-roofed Lamp house, whose original roof garden, now enclosed, was one of its signature (and very, very Griffinesque) achievements.

SOCIETY LOSES A GREAT FRIEND IN JACK JONES

The Griffin Society lost a loyal friend with the recent death of Jack C. Jones at age 87. Jack and his wife Lois, along with their two sons, acquired Griffin’s William Sloane house in Elmhurst in 1964 and have lived in it ever since. Keeping this frame-and-stucco building in perfect condition has been one of the Jones’ first orders of business. In fact, Jack prepared the form for placing the house on the National Register of Historic Places, which was listed in 1985. Always proud of his treasure, Jack nevertheless pointed out the few adaptive changes he allowed architect Donald Michaelis to make, including added decorative details. With an engineering degree from Georgia Tech,

Class of '53, Jack got a job with the international firm of Harza Engineering, and spent much of his career traveling to dam sites under construction or needing inspection. In this capacity, he visited India several times and made a point of uncovering as many of the surviving Griffin sites in Lucknow, including Griffin's grave, as possible. His photograph of the monument to Gandhi eventually erected in place of Griffin's un-built monument to George V was on display in the Krannert Art Museum as part of the exhibition on the Griffins in India that accompanied the international symposium held at the University of Illinois in 1997.

The Sloane house, along with the William Emery house across the street, was featured on the afternoon tour of the first Griffin Society meeting in June 2000. In 2012, Lois ordered a copy of the Griffin Society's recent publication on the Stinson Memorial library as a present for Jack, first alerting Peter Griffin to the fact of Jack's worsening condition. The Society extends its condolences to the Jones family. We will all really miss you, Jack.

GRIFFIN SOCIETY GRANT FOR CASTLECRAG BOOK

The Walter Burley Griffin Society of Australia is in the process of publishing a new book about the Griffins' Castlecrag. Begun as an updated version of their important earlier publication, *Building for Nature: Walter Burley Griffin and Castlecrag* (Walter Burley Griffin Society Incorporated, 1994) by Meredith Walker, Adrienne Kabos and James Weirick, the project has developed into a major new look at this great achievement of the Griffins' Australian years. Adrienne reported to Peter Griffin in February that "the book is now 224 pages in length, and includes a wonderful introductory essay by Dr. Anne Watson, an essay written by historian Dr. Ian Hoskins locating the Griffins' work in the context of Sydney at the time, short essays on each of the Castlecrag houses and longer texts on each of the six houses built beyond Castlecrag; a section with perspectives of sixteen unbuilt projects with short descriptions; and concluding essay detailing the Griffin legacy, followed by a bibliography and index. The book has over 260 images, many taken by Mati Maldre, with contemporary colour photographs commissioned by expert architectural photographer Eric Sierins, historical photos from the National Library of Australia as well as a private collection." In a note to Paul Kruty, Adrienne hoped to get the work to the printers before May 2015.

To make sure this happens, the Griffin Society of America has made a contribution of \$2000 toward the cost of completing this major publication, allowing us to be listed as a Principal Sponsor. As Bill Hasbrouck, among the board members who gave unanimous consent to the Society's donation, opined, "This looks to be an important book which will be highly desirable."

LITERATURE: MORE (MOHR) ON PRAIRIE TILES

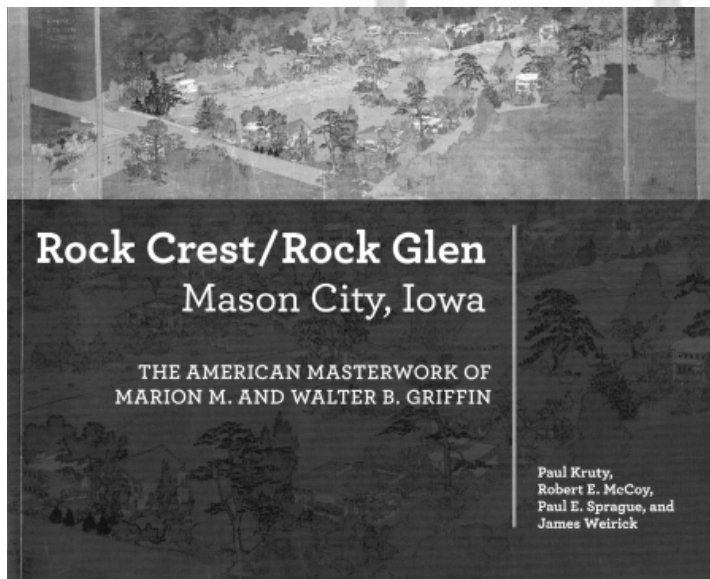
Prof. Richard D. Mohr, who enlightened and entertained us with his dissection of art-tile aesthetics and historiography, particularly as it relates to the Prairie School, at last year's meeting in Mason City—and whose on-going series on the subject in the *Journal of the American Art Pottery Association (JAAPA)* has caused many of us to hold our collective breaths these many years—has just published his very last installment of the long-running series. Richard reports that "Basically, it is the material I presented at Mason City." The article's full citation is: Richard D. Mohr, "A Puzzling Sentimentality: Art Tiles in the Prairie School, Part V—The Series Concluded," *JAAPA* 31:2 (Spring 2015): 15-21.

A NOTE ABOUT CHICAGOISMS

A book with the intriguing title *Chicagoisms: The City as Catalyst for Architectural Speculation* appeared in 2013, published by Park Books in Zurich, Switzerland, and edited by Alexander Eisenschmidt and Jonathan Mekinda, whose own introductory essay states that the book's avowed purpose is to "probe the extent of Chicago's capacity to spark the imaginations of architects and engineers, artists and urbanists, and to foster the spread and cross-fertilizations of ideas about the modern city" (p.16). The fact that in twenty essays covering 171 pages there is not a single mention of Walter Burley Griffin or Marion Mahony Griffin suggests that the word about the Griffins, through so many possible routes including our Society and its publications, has still not got out to those who should know.

**LATEST GRIFFIN SOCIETY
PUBLICATION AVAILABLE:
ROCK CREST/ROCK GLEN MONOGRAPH**

The Griffin Society's latest book on the Griffins, available on the Society's website, wbgriffinsociety.org, 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 four authors examine this amazing development from different 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, www.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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Walter Burley Griffin Society of America

1152 Center Drive

St. Louis, MO 63117

Phone: 314-644-4546

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