

# THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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**Walter Burley Griffin**

**Society of America**

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Please email news items to the editor.

## **NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING**

**SATURDAY/SUNDAY, 23-24 JUNE 2018**

**JOIN US IN PARK RIDGE, ILLINOIS**

The nineteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in the Chicago suburb of Park Ridge on the weekend of 23-24 June 2018. The northwest suburb has much to offer about the developments stemming from the Griffins' accomplishments. In 1925, Griffin drew a city plan for Park Ridge on his first trip back to the States after his departure for Australia in 1914. In the meantime, the prosperous suburb had become home to the sculptor Alfonso Iannelli, whose colleague Barry Byrne built houses there. In the 1930s, Bruce Goff, himself associated at the time with Iannelli and Byrne, created several choice houses in and around Park Ridge. The suburb's crowning delight, the Pickwick Theater of 1929, designed by the well-known firm of Zook and McCaughey and a magnificent Art Deco masterpiece, preserves a plethora of interior spaces decorated by Iannelli, all making a fitting comparison with the Griffins' great Capitol Theatre in Melbourne. Join us as we visit these sites, and hear lectures about Griffin, planning, theaters and Park Ridge, including a return visit by the Australian landscape and planning historian and Griffin scholar James Weirick. A reception at the historic Iannelli Studios is among the planned events. Watch for details in the spring newsletter and at the Griffin website online.

## **SOCIETY MEETS IN EDWARDSVILLE, REVELS IN RESTORED RALPH GRIFFIN HOUSE**

By James B. Guthrie, AIA

Last June 17th, the Griffin Society began to gather after 8:00 AM on a warm, late spring morning in the Abbott Auditorium of the Lovejoy Library on the campus of the Southern Illinois University/Edwardsville. Following a cheery welcome at 9:00 by Society President Peter Burley Griffin, the morning's speakers were introduced by board member Anthony Rubano of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. The first speaker, Paul Kruty, gave an abbreviated yet enlightening account of Griffin's first houses of 1906-07, the subject of the Society's latest publication. Kruty's presentation set the contexts of the subjects to follow, two very significant works of Griffin's, and of that moment in American architectural history. The next two presentations on Griffin's Peters House and the Ralph Griffin House were icing on the cake, made more interesting with Kruty's previous discussion as broader background. Together the presentations gave a very comprehensive look at that early period in Griffin's career and the details of the houses he was designing and building. They are also success stories, as these two revolutionary projects from Griffin's beginnings as a sole practitioner now have been restored and are cared for by families that know and appreciate what they have.

Tannys Langdon, architect and Griffin homeowner, regaled the group with a description of *“Living in Griffin’s Peters House.”* In 1989, Tannys and her husband Ron came upon the Peters House while house-hunting. Tannys described their instant admiration for the architecture in spite of the home having seen many years of neglect and questionable decoration. Langdon walked us through the house. While modest in size it was extensive in its architecture. Describing the entry vestibule as “tiny,” she explained that the small space served to enhance the drama of entering the larger living room with a familiar Griffin tent ceiling. Also now familiar as a Griffin motif, the interior flows from room to room so that the living room melds easily into the dining room. The house also features an abundance of closeted storage spaces, so that clutter is easily avoided in the living spaces.

Working completely within the Griffin building envelope and with minimal changes to the original Griffin plan, they were able to upgrade both the kitchen and the house’s only bathroom. While the interior was being restored, they also took on needed physical repairs. The roof and exterior stucco required substantial repair as did the furnace system, to which air conditioning was added. On the interior they removed old carpeting and refinished the original oak floors. Likewise, they removed layers of wallpaper applied over many years to reveal the original plaster beneath. As Langdon commented, they had not been looking for a historic house, let alone one by Griffin, when they found the Peters House. Now that they have restored it, have enjoyed living in it, and have seen its effect on neighbors and passersby, they cannot imagine a better choice.

Richard H. Berry next recounted *“Restoring the Ralph Griffin House.”* The Berry family acquired the house in 1961, some fifty years after its completion. Since then they have undertaken a considerable effort at caring for the house through restoration, adaption and new construction. This has involved substantial effort as they literally had to work from the ground up. Portions of the perimeter structure, a unique concrete ring foundation, were sinking and required shoring up, as well as the placement of special drainage zones to minimize heave from ground frost. As with most houses of this age, the roof and stucco needed work. In repairing some of the distinctive Griffin windows they worked with a contractor to install new glazing using the original Griffin mullion detail that “hid” the edge of the glass from general view.

As Griffin was keenly interested in the landscape design that surrounded his architectural work, the Berrys were delighted to have access to the original landscape plan with plant call-outs. Because nursery plant palettes change over the years, part of their restoration effort included tracking down plant species that closely matched what Griffin had specified. They were also lucky to discover some of the original plants still growing in their yard, including a rare winter blooming honeysuckle. While they worked to restore the interior, they made every attempt to discover the original Griffin color scheme. They were able to determine that the original scheme had light wood trim, with walls that had a dark green base, a lighter olive green upper area and an off-white ceiling. Because the interior wood trim had substantially darkened with age, they decided to use a simple off-white scheme throughout.

While they wanted to modernize the functionality of the house, they touched very little of Griffin’s original plan. The main change came in the form of enlarging the small kitchen by removing the original maid’s quarters and bringing that floor space into the kitchen. They also added a detached garage off the alley using many of the forms and details found in the house to achieve continuity.

The final touch, and one that most homeowners would probably not even think to do, was buying their neighbors’ property. A historic home built in 1858, the E. M. West house had been converted into a commercial use and its large side yard facing the Griffin house was paved over for parking. The Berrys have now restored this house, too, and have removed the parking lot and replaced it with compatible landscaping. Their Griffin house once again has a wooded prairie setting. Both of these homes were part of the afternoon tours, as well as the third house original part of the family compound, the W. F. L. Hadley house of 1875, across the street from the Ralph Griffin house.

Following a coffee break, and a chance to purchase the Society’s new book and exquisite poster, Michael R. Allen, a lecturer at Washington University in St. Louis and director and historian of the firm Architecture Preservation Research Office, presented *“Notes from Shaping the Future: Historic Preservation in St. Louis.”* Knowing that conference attendees would be touring St. Louis historic buildings the next day, Allen gave the conference an overview of some of the city’s preservation projects and the various preservation approaches being used.

Starting with the Edwardsville campus and the Buckminster Fuller's Center for Spirituality and Sustainability built in 1971, Allen suggested that younger buildings like this offer the ideal preservation project and are the easiest in terms of decision-making in preservation. As the building is intact and un-remodeled from its original construction, preservation could be accomplished with simple maintenance and little controversy.

Adding perspective to preservation's larger social role, Allen suggested that while preservationists look to the past, they are actually the gatekeepers of the future. It is through them that buildings are saved—or not—and it is they who help determine just what and how they are saved. With this introspective thought, Allen proceeded to give a summary of a number of St Louis preservation projects and their various methods and levels of success, including projects on the next day's tour.

The Arcade Building, 1919, was described as a regressive stylized building-using Medieval and Gothic details on an early twentieth-century highrise. The actual arcade of the building was a highly decorated through-block, two-story shopping hall. The original architecture began to change quickly as the decorative parapet was simplified. Over the years the commercial uses have waned and the building experienced many years of abandonment and neglect. By the 1970s talk of restoration began; yet it wasn't until 2007 that renovation actually started, and then, due to recession delays, was not completed until 2016. The project included the restoration of many of the iconic original Gothic elements. The building now houses apartments and university spaces; although the arcade has been renovated, is not open to the public.

Adler & Sullivan's lesser known St Louis skyscraper, the Union Trust Building of 1893, originally with Sullivan's hand well-displayed, suffered its first major alterations in the 1920s when Sullivan's ornament and circular window patterns were removed and heavily altered. Since the 1920s even that configuration was stripped down and then ignored and neglected. Recently, a boutique hotel developer's proposed restoration of some of Sullivan's designs was met with denials. The National Park Service took the position that the 1920s alterations had embedded that history into the building and that taking it back to Sullivan's day would bypass an important historical aspect of the building and impart a "fake history" onto it. Unfortunately, the hotel project has since been canceled

and the building remains empty.

St Louis's prominent Union Station of 1894 is in the midst of a restoration and adaptive reuse project. The head house has just been completed, though its changes are relatively minor as it had gone through an earlier major renovation in the 1980s. According to Tim Samuelson, architectural historian and consultant on the 1980s renovation, the interior color scheme in the main hall had originally been bright and vibrant. The developers of the 1980s and the more recent renovation both altered that color scheme to be muted and in line with then-current sensibilities, not historic accuracy. In the 1980s the train shed had been converted to allow convention facilities. The current project, still in process, anticipates more active uses such as a Ferris wheel.

In a newer example, Allen also discussed the American Stove Company of 1946-48. This was originally a modern mid-rise office building with glass curtain walls and a sweeping modern two-story lobby that included a significant ceiling sculpture by Isamu Noguchi. In 1977 the facades were stripped down and replaced with windowless corrugated metal, the whole converted to a self-storage facility, and the lobby denuded of its decorative motifs. In recent years, the owner of the facility removed some of the lobby's 1977 ceiling to re-expose just a portion of the original Noguchi ceiling. This space was also on the Sunday tour schedule.

Allen presented three more test cases of differing preservation issues. The 1939 National Guard Armory, a masonry structure housing a 36,000-square-foot drill hall, is a problem currently looking for a solution. Various proposals for an adaptive reuse renovation have typically included removal of some of the brickwork and filling up of the drill-hall volume. Allen noted that it is difficult to justify these kinds of alterations as a preservation option. While they may be argued as small and minimally intrusive, they form bad precedent for the near future. The current uses themselves are likely to become obsolete, which will cause the building to go through another adaptive reuse cycle. The end result will be destruction of the historic fabric by incremental demolition.

With the Ferguson tragedy in the public's mind, St Louis recently went through a soul-searching decision regarding a 1914 Confederate monument in a public park. The preservation challenge was how to measure the current social issues against the range of meanings attached to a historic Confederate memorial stand-

ing in a northern city. It represents several layers of history, and thus poses a dilemma for historic preservationists. The mayor of St Louis decided it was no longer appropriate to have such a monument in the city's parks. It has been disassembled and placed out of sight in storage. There are currently no plans to reassemble it in a place where its complicated history can be interpreted.

The James Clemens, Jr., antebellum house of 1860 still stands, but barely. The property includes late nineteenth-century additions for its use as a convent. The Clemens house, owned by James Clemens, a relative of Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain), had the misfortune of being on the north side of the city in a neighborhood ravaged by decades of disinvestment. Its architectural significance is strong, with numerous cast-iron exterior details and fine interior marble and plasterwork, all now in poor condition or missing. The building is still abandoned, neglected and deteriorating. It is also a single survivor of a long row of identical houses. What do to at this point?

As illustrated by this variety of examples, Allen noted that all the various modes of dealing with historic properties are at work in St Louis, including conservation, preservation, adaptive reuse, and neglect. Preservation is a process of adjudication, with many viewpoints and perspectives entering the discussion of what to do with the old architectural fabric. Thus, it is the preservationists and the preservation process that determines the future, an imprecise process producing wildly varied outcomes.

To illustrate this message, Allen concluded his presentation by contrasting the efforts to save the Wainwright Building in St. Louis with the Guaranty Building in Buffalo, both by Adler & Sullivan. In the Wainwright case, St. Louis went to great lengths to preserve and honor the exterior of the building, but sacrificed adjacent historic properties and the original decorative interior to do so. At the Guaranty, the Sullivan interior was seen as a chief priority and was saved in glorious fashion, along with the exterior.

The final speaker was John Celuch, principal of Inlandesign, Edwardsville, and former curator of the Louis Sullivan Collection at SIUE, one of the subjects of the afternoon's tours. Celuch recounted his long history with the Sullivan fragments, which began in 1966, when the collection was installed at the new campus of SIUE. The collection held the majority of objects amassed by the famous Chicago photographer Richard Nickel, who devoted his life, literally,

to saving fragments of Sullivan ornament. Operating from urgency and without a long-term plan, Nickel wound up amassing a huge fragment collection. He approached many of Chicago's cultural institutions in hopes that they would be able to archive and preserve them, but all refused.

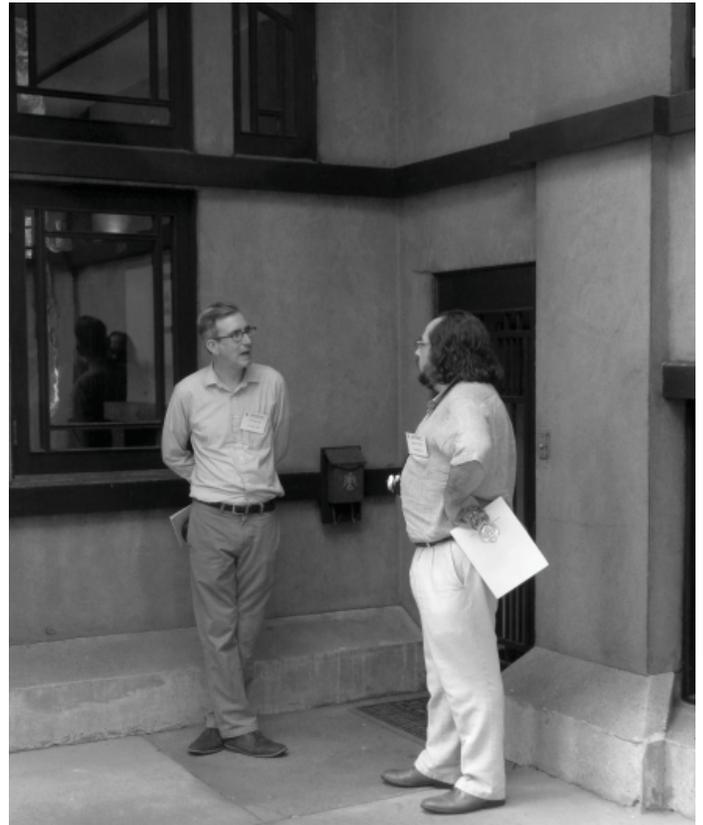
In 1961 Jack Randall, a Chicagoan who knew Nickel, was hired as the university architect to oversee the building of the new campus. Randall pursued Nickel's collection and in 1965 purchased it for \$12,000. It was first displayed in 1966. Celuch traveled to Edwardsville to see the collection, met Randall and was eventually hired as the first curator of the Sullivan collection, an appointment that lasted only three months before Celuch left for military service. Three years later he returned to get a master's degree and to his position as curator. He continued to expand the collection as more Sullivan and other Chicago School buildings were demolished. The collection is now so large that only a portion of it is currently on display. The University has entered into an agreement with the City Museum in St Louis. The intention is to bring the entire collection together and make it available to the public. In the meantime, a large sampling of exquisite, significant examples of Sullivan's genius are on display in the Lovejoy Library, explained with an illuminating text by Paul Sprague.

Following a leisurely lunch-hour with box lunches and self-guided tours of the Sullivan Collection, the group met at the nearby Center for Spirituality and Sustainability, designed in 1970-71 by Buckminster Fuller and Shoji Sadao, to listen to an enthusiastic and informative talk by Benjamin Lowder. The rest of the afternoon took us on tours of the West, Hadley and Griffin houses, followed by a reception at the West house. Sunday morning began with a parking-lot roof-top look at Adler & Sullivan's Wainwright building, with a narrative provided by Paul Kruty, followed by a walking tour of the downtown St. Louis led by Michael Allen. A drive to Bellefontaine Cemetery gave us access to Adler & Sullivan's amazing Wainwright tomb of 1892-93, and ended with views of the Noguchi ceiling for the American Stove Company, now U-Haul Moving & Storage. All in all, another wonderful meeting of the Griffin Society.

# SNAPSHOTS FROM THE EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING



Mary Woolever sells book and posters.



Michael Allen and Anthony Rubano face restoration issues at the Ralph Griffin house.



Benjamin Lowder explains the Fuller dome.



The Griffin Society at the Wainwright tomb.



Michael Allen interprets the Union Trust building.

## **RALPH GRIFFIN HOUSE, II**

Press coverage of the Griffin meeting was ample and much appreciated. The St. Louis Post-Dispatch ran a piece on 10 June by Valerie Schremp Hahn in which she featured Rich and Mary Berry and their heroic efforts to preserve and restore the architectural landmark. Titled “Historic Home in Edwardsville designed by Walter Burley Griffin, who had worked for Frank Lloyd Wright,” the article quoted Mary Berry that, despite its rich complexity in which you discover something new wherever you look, the house makes it easy to focus on the people around you. “It really centers you,” Berry explained, “You feel very comfortable.” The Edwardsville *Intelligencer* covered the story about the meeting itself on 15 June in “Architectural society to meet in city,” explaining the events planned for the meeting and concluding, “The Griffin House has long been recognized as one of the best examples of architectural design in Illinois.”

## **ANNA DISAPPOINTMENT AGAIN**

Once again the move to declare the Stinson Memorial Library in Anna, Illinois, a National Historic Landmark has been put on hold. The project, begun in earnest in spring 2012, has been pushed back time and again. We held out hope that this fall’s meeting, scheduled for 6-7 November, would resolve the issue; but now that meeting itself has been cancelled. The next possibility for finally listing a work by the Griffins as an NHL will be in early June 2018.

## **CORNELL STORE & FLATS [NON] UPDATE**

Griffin’s 1908 Cornell store and flats on Chicago’s south side, listed in March by the advocacy group Preservation Chicago on its annual roster of most endangered sites in the Chicago area and similarly listed in 2016 by Landmarks Illinois, is facing another winter as a dilapidated shell of a building. Preservation Chicago’s website quotes Tim Samuelson, City of Chicago’s Cultural Historian, declaring that the Cornell Store is “one of the top twenty-five significant buildings of any kind in Chicago.” Tim reports to the Griffin *Newsletter* that there is nothing new to report: “The Cornell just sits and rots. I’m afraid it’s a ‘goner’ unless some deep-pocketed angel appears.”

The Griffin Society heard from the present owners last January, who expressed optimism about renovating the property, but clearly the problems remain large.

## **EMERITUS STATUS FOR THREE DISTINGUISHED BOARD MEMBERS**

Three members of the Board of Directors of Griffin Society are moving to emeritus status as of this newsletter: Wilbert Hasbrouck, Paul Sprague, and Robert McCoy. The institutional memory of these three Griffin aficionados is simply staggering. The Society is seeking nominations for new board members willing and able to assist in continuing the legacy of the Society and its accomplishments.

## **“IN HER OWN RIGHT,” MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN, VENUE III**

Following its well-received five-month run at the Elmhurst History Museum and its equally successful showing at the MacNider museum in Mason City, “In Her Own Right,” the exhibition examining the career of Marion Mahony Griffin, will open at a third venue at the Kenilworth Historical Society in Kenilworth, Illinois, in January. Curated by Dr. Anna Rubbo, the exhibition features panels, models, and original drawings covering Mahony’s life from her childhood in Chicago’s northern suburbs, her education at MIT, her work for Wright and Griffin, her moves to Australia and India, and her final return to Chicago. On display are two of Mahony’s “Forest Portraits,” two scale models created by architecture students at the University of Illinois, six original pen-and-ink drawings from the Block Museum, a plate from the Wasmuth portfolio, and a drawing by Louis Sullivan.

The Kenilworth Historical Society is located at 415 Kenilworth Ave., Kenilworth, IL 60043, phone 847-251-2565, [www.kenilworthhistory.org](http://www.kenilworthhistory.org). Check for exhibition opening.

## **RICKER HOUSE ON THE BLOCK**

The spectacular Benjamin and Mabel Ricker house in Grinnell, Iowa, has been on the market in late spring. Acquired by Grinnell College in 2001, and the subject of an exhibition and monograph published by the college in 2012, the house is now deemed unsuitable by the present administration of the college. The word is that a high-ranking administrator “is more of a mid-century guy” and had no use for an “old” house. What a shame; and how shortsighted! Fortunately, the opposite happened when Millikin University in Decatur, Illinois, bought back the Adolph Mueller house, which it had once owned and then relinquished, before coming to its senses. Bravo to Millikin, and shame on Grinnell.

## IRVING HOUSE CHANGES HANDS

The Edward and Florence Irving house, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1909, and constructed at No. 2 Millikin Place, Decatur, Illinois, by Herman Von Holst as revised and completed by Marion Mahony in 1910-11, is in the care of new owners as of early November 2017. Marc Willis, who acquired the house in 2013 and who worked to keep the building's original features while replicating lost elements such as bookcase doors and who has been extremely generous in opening it up to tour groups, put the Irving house on the market in September.

## MATI MALDRE AT THE BEVERLY ARTS CENTER

Chicago photographer and Griffin board member Mati Maldre is currently showing a choice selection of his photos of the architecture and landscape of Beverly Hills/Morgan Park at the Beverly Arts Center, 2407 W. 111th Street in Chicago. Opened on 17 September as part of the Chicago Architecture Biennial, the exhibition will remain open until 7 January 2018. Hours are M-F, 9 to 9, and Sat. 9-5. Phone: 773-445-3838.

## GRIFFIN SOCIETY'S FOURTH BOOK

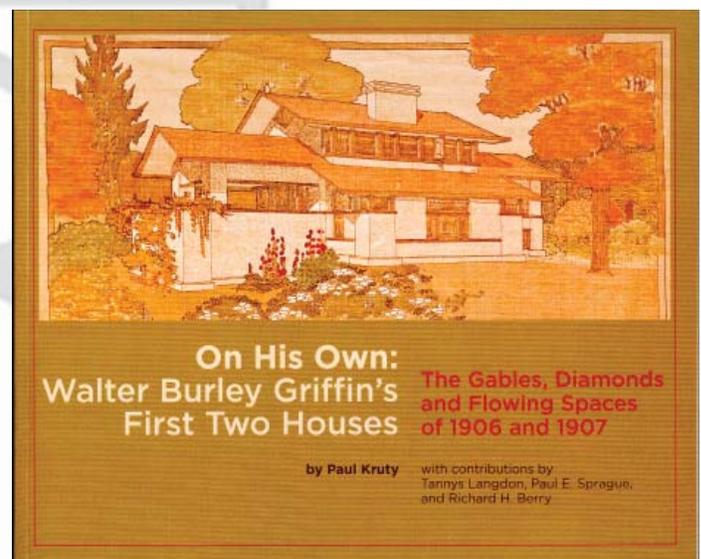
The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America launched its fourth book at the Society's June meeting in Edwardsville. Entitled *On His Own: Walter Burley Griffin's First Two Houses; The Gables, Diamonds and Flowing Spaces of 1906 and 1907*, the book includes essays by Paul Kruty, Paul E. Sprague, Richard H. Berry, and Tannys Langdon. With over seventy illustrations, and a dozen color plates, it presents detailed histories of the Harry V. Peters house, built in 1906-07 in Chicago's Mayfair neighborhood, and the Ralph D. Griffin house, designed in 1906 and constructed in 1910 in Edwardsville, Illinois. Forays into the stories of the clients, social and aesthetic contexts for the houses, and close analysis of historical photographs, contribute to a clearer understanding of two of Griffin's most important buildings.

By focusing on Griffin's first two years of independent practice, Kruty reveals Griffin's initial experimentation with the gabled roof, a form that was to preoccupy him, despite his precocious use of flat roofs, for the rest of his life: "The two buildings are part of an initial creative endeavor that flowed from Griffin's imagination, pent-up as it was during the last year of his fraught relationship with Frank Lloyd

Wright." As Kruty elaborates, "Two other designs, which remained unbuilt projects, complete a quartet of compositions comprising Griffin's first foray into a completely self-controlled design vocabulary" which "show the young architect striving to develop a new vocabulary of form employing symmetrical designs composed of two rectangular masses crossed at right angles, covered with gabled roofs producing raised ceilings and diamond windows, and an inventive use of open, flowing interior space."

In addition to Kruty's essays on each house, architect Tannys Langdon presents an engaging look into modern life in the Peters house, while homeowner Richard Berry reveals the travails and successes of living with the architectural masterpiece that is the Ralph Griffin house. Paul Sprague provides a careful analysis of the landscape plan for the Griffin house. All in all, a worthy addition to library of all lovers of Griffin, Wright, the Prairie School, Chicago and Illinois history, and the glory of American architecture.

*On His Own: Walter Burley Griffin's First Two Houses; The Gables, Diamonds and Flowing Spaces of 1906 and 1907* by Paul Kruty, with contributions by Tannys Langdon, Paul E. Sprague, and Richard H. Berry. St. Louis, MO: Walter Burley Griffin Society of America, 2017. \$25. ISBN 0-9793588-3-3.

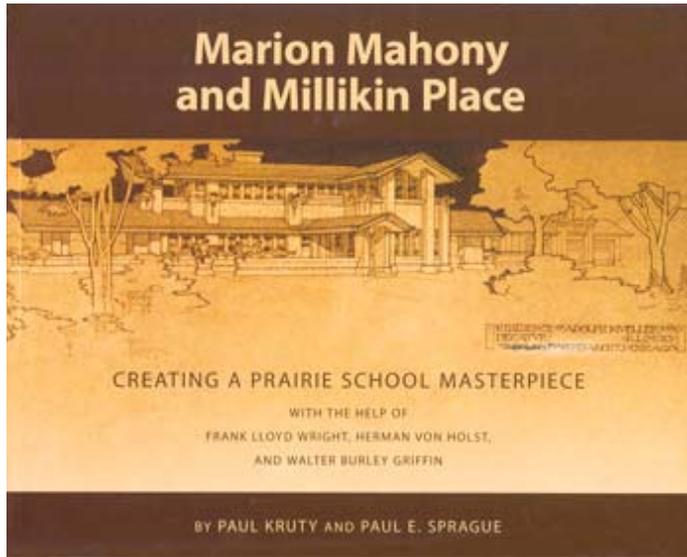


## GRIFFIN SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

The Society's three other publications remain available by direct mail. To order copies of each, please see our website, [wbgriffinsociety.org](http://wbgriffinsociety.org).

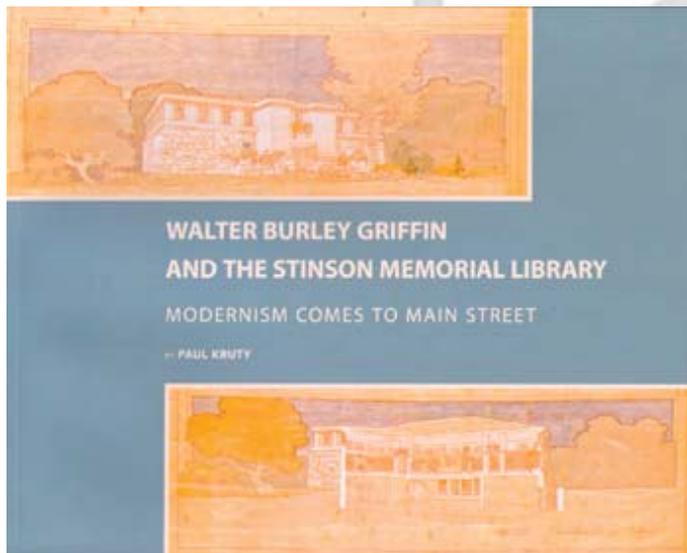
### **Marion Mahony and Millikin Place: Creating a Prairie School Masterpiece.**

By Paul Kruty and Paul E. Sprague. 2007.



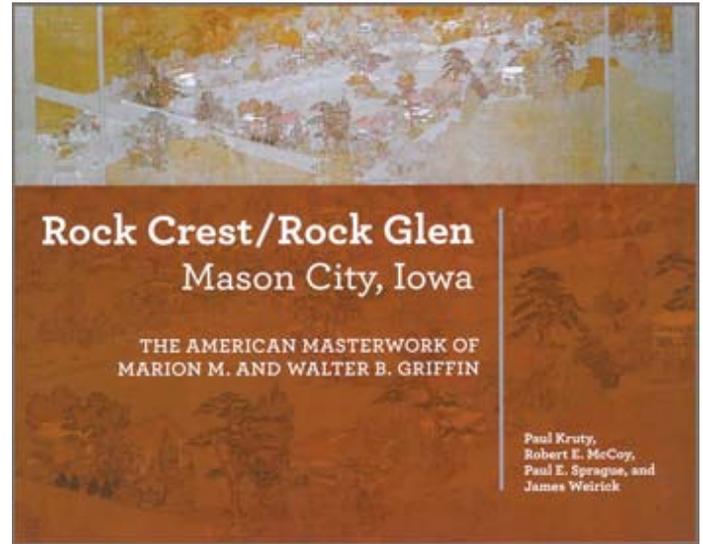
### **Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library: Modernism Comes to Main Street.**

By Paul Kruty. 2010.



### **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. 2014.



## 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: \_\_\_\_\_

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