

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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Please email news items to the editor.

EIGHTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY/SUNDAY, 17-18 JUNE 2017

JOIN US IN SOUTHERN ILLINOIS: EDWARDSVILLE & ST. LOUIS

The eighteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in downstate Illinois near St. Louis, Missouri on Saturday, 17 June, and Sunday 18 June. The featured building will be the Ralph Griffin house in Edwardsville, built for Walter's brother's family in 1909-10. Visited by the Griffin Society in 2002, the house is now fully restored and is one of the subjects of a new book being issued by the Society at the June meeting (see announcement to follow).

We will meet Saturday morning at the Lovejoy Library on the campus of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville (SIUE). Doors will open at 8:00 for on-site registration and book sales, and the meeting will begin at 9:00. Following the morning presentations in the library's Abbott Auditorium, we will visit the extraordinary collection of architectural ornament by Louis Sullivan housed on campus and tour Buckminster Fuller's powerful geodesic dome, completed in 1971, and now housing the Center for Spirituality and Sustainability. The afternoon will continue with tours of several buildings in Edwardsville, including the Ralph Griffin house, and will end with a reception in the Griffin house yard. On Sunday morning, we will meet to visit Sullivan's Wainwright building in downtown St. Louis, and have scheduled the Wainwright tomb in Bellefontaine cemetery to be open for us at 11:00.

The conference hotel is the Holiday Inn Express at 1000 Plummer Drive, Edwardsville, IL, 618-692-7255. It is five minutes by car from the Ralph Griffin house and close to the campus of Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. Ask for the Griffin conference rate. Reservations must be made by 17 May to get the conference discount.

[NOTE: The fall announcement that the meeting would take place on the campus of Principia College proved to be premature. After the newsletter was mailed, we were informed that our use of the campus was no longer possible.]

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. Please be sure to include your email address. The cost will be \$35 for the Saturday/Sunday meeting and tours, \$10 for the box lunch and, of course, registrants must also have paid their annual dues of \$25 to the Society.

BOB MCCOY AND THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL

Almost a half century after he published the first major article on Rock Crest/Rock Glen, which appeared in the third quarter 1968 issue of *The Prairie School Review*, Bob McCoy is still working to champion the extraordinary architectural heritage of Mason City, Iowa. In February he presented a six-lecture series entitled "Mason City's Prairie School Architecture: Frank Lloyd Wright and Walter Burley Griffin" at (what else?) the Robert E. McCoy Architectural Interpretive Center. Congratulations, Bob! Keep up the good work.

IN HER OWN RIGHT, MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN, REVISITED

Following its successful five-month run at the Elmhurst History Museum, “In Her Own Right,” the exhibition examining the career of Marion Mahony Griffin, closed on 12 March. But wait! It is now in transit, scheduled to reopen on 5 May at the Charles H. MacNider Art Museum in Mason City, Iowa, where it will remain on view until 16 August. 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 Charles H. MacNider Art Museum is located at 303 Second Street SE, Mason City, IA, 50401, phone 641-421-3666, www.macniderart.org. Check for summer hours.

CORNELL STORE & FLATS ON ENDANGERED LIST

In early March, the advocacy group Preservation Chicago released its annual list of most endangered sites in the Chicago area. Among the threatened buildings was Griffin’s Cornell Store & Flats, which has been languishing for years and is currently facing demolition by neglect. This designation of “most endangered” follows a similar listing in 2016 by Landmarks Illinois. Located at 1220 E. 75th Street, the building was designed in 1908 and built the following year. Interviewed on the WTTW program “Chicago Tonight,” Preservation Chicago’s executive director Ward Miller called the Cornell Flats “one of the few commercial buildings built in the prairie style of architecture in Chicago.” The group’s website further 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.”

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

VISIT TO THE ARMSTRONG SCHOOL A GREAT SUCCESS

The visit to Chicago’s Armstrong School on 11 March to see Marion Mahony Griffin’s 1931 mural, *Fairies Feeding the Herons*, held in conjunction with the show at the Elmhurst museum, was a great success. According to Peggy Lami, who organized the event, eighty-three people from greater Chicagoland traveled from a variety of neighborhoods and suburbs, including Hyde Park, Elmhurst and Oak Park, to Rogers Park to view the mural. As Peggy recounts, “Neighborhood residents, scholars, former students, and small children gathered to see the paintings, marvel at them, talk, and stay to talk some more. Magic in the hall created a sizzle of joy, wonder, and togetherness.” Historic preservationist John Waters, who confirmed that “the murals are really stunning,” reported that “there was a steady stream of visitors while I was there.” The event was jointly sponsored by the Elmhurst History Museum and the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America.



Pilgrims at MMG’s mural *Fairies Feeding the Herons*.

Photo by John Waters.

IN HIS OWN RIGHT

Viewers in central Illinois were treated on 11 March to an encore performance of “Walter Burley Griffin: In His Own Right,” WILL-TV’s 1998 documentary about Walter and Marion Griffin, as part of the public station’s annual fund drive. The film was produced locally by Alison Davis, who took advantage of the 1997 international symposium on the Griffins hosted by the University of Illinois to interview many of the speakers, including H. Allen Brooks, James Weirick, Paul Sprague, Anne Watson and Paul Kruty, as well as such notables as Larry Perkins, Mati Maldre and Janice Pregliasco. After twenty years, the contents and production values are as valid and engaging as ever.

NEW BOOKS

Frank Lloyd Wright: The Early Years: Progressivism: Aesthetics: Cities. By Donald Leslie Johnson. Routledge, London & New York, 2017. 310 pages. ISBN 978-1-4724-5802-5.

Donald Leslie Johnson, the architectural scholar and retired professor of architecture who lives near Adelaide, South Australia, has issued another book of interest to Griffin and Wright scholars. In its three hundred plus pages, with more than seventy-five illustrations, the author delves into the diverse set of subjects announced in his title—from general topics to specific buildings by Wright—in order to reassess the architect's significance. Johnson divides his subject into three large sections: Conditions; The Aesthetics of Progress; and The City Scientific. In each division there are a myriad of new facts and personal interpretations that should stimulate thought among Wrightians and even a few Griffin enthusiasts.

Of interest to specialists are several discussions addressing very particular issues in the Prairie School, including Johnson's dismissal of Wright's role in the design of the block of 26 houses on both sides of William street in River Forest (pp. 272-73). Though generally conceded to be designed by Harry F. Robinson, probably in cooperation with William Drummond, the houses were the subject of a monograph issued in 2014 that crediting the entire development to Wright himself. Entitled *The Anonymous Frank Lloyd Wright and the 700 William Street, River Forest Project* and written by William Allin Storrer with Richard Johnson and Dominique Watts, the book is part of the authors' attempts to find the "lost Wright" buildings among the work of various members of the Prairie School. As Donald Leslie Johnson makes clear, the authors' enthusiasms appear to have gotten the better of them.

Frank Lloyd Wright and Mason City: Architectural Heart of the Prairie. By Roy R. Behrens. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2016. 144 pages. ISBN 978-1-46711-860-6.

This latest book on Mason City architecture follows numerous examinations of the extraordinary collection of Prairie School buildings that put this modest country town on the international architectural map. Beginning with Robert McCoy's 1968 analysis of Rock Crest/Rock Glen, continuing with Ronald Schmitt's 1977 inventory of Mason City's architecture, Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney Robinson's *The Spring 2017*

Prairie School in Iowa of 1977, David Gebhard and Gerald Mansheim's *Buildings of Iowa* (1993), Alisdair McGregor's *Grand Obsessions* (2009) and Katherine Haun and Pat Schultz's *The Historic Park Inn Hotel and City National Bank* (2010), among many other books and articles, these studies in many ways culminated in the Griffin Society's 2014 publication *Rock Crest/Rock Glen, Mason City, Iowa: The American Masterwork of Marion M. and Walter B. Griffin*, when a quartet of historians and architectural historians examined Mason City's development, landscape and architecture from a variety of angles and viewpoints.

One might ask, then, why the author felt the need for this latest book. While the title proclaims the subject to be Wright and Mason City, without reference to Griffin, the cover illustrations are evenly divided between Wright (three images) and the Griffins (three images). Once again—and in a place where Griffin can fairly be said to overshadow Wright—it is Wright's name that captures the cover. The section describing and analyzing Rock Crest/Rock Glen is heavily dependent on the Griffin Society's 2014 publication, which, admittedly, is given credit in particular places, but which barely covers the debt owed to the earlier publication. As a derivative work apparently intended to bring Mason City's significance to a wider audience, it does provide another way to keep the enthusiasm for this architectural gem in the public spotlight.

GRIFFIN SOCIETY ANNOUNCES ITS FOURTH BOOK

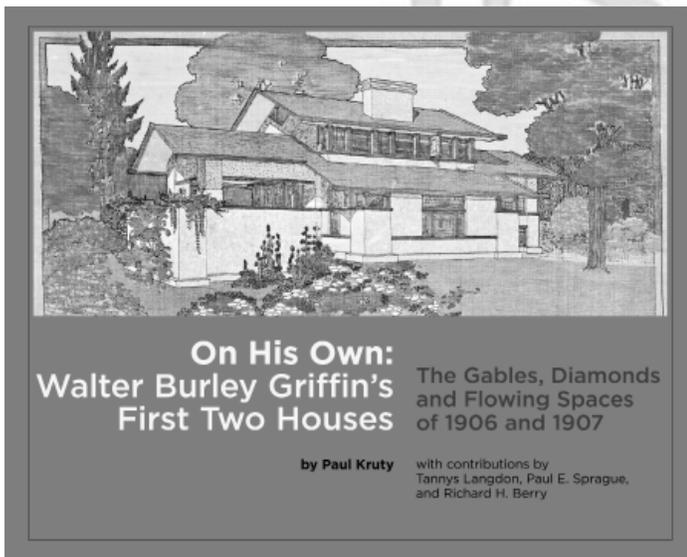
The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will launch its fourth book at the Society's June meeting in Edwardsville. Entitled *On His Own: Walter Burley Griffin's First Two Houses; The Gables, Diamonds and Flowing Spaces of 1906 and 1907*, the book includes essays by Paul Kruty, Paul E. Sprague, Richard 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 experiential

tion 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.

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: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

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