

# THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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## SIXTEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

### WEEKEND OF 19-21 JUNE

### JOIN US IN MADISON, WISCONSIN!

The sixteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in Madison, Wisconsin, on the weekend of 19-21 June 2015. So keep the dates free! We are currently working toward visiting a wonderful selection of buildings by Sullivan, Wright, Maher, Purcell & Elmslie, and Claude & Starck, in conjunction with our local chair, architectural historian Gary Tipler. The main Griffin connection to Madison, of course, is the Robert Lamp house, a Wright project from 1903 in which Griffin was heavily involved—and a building whose surrounding properties are being completely transformed at this moment (check [Prairiemod.com](http://Prairiemod.com) for updates). Lectures and tours are scheduled for Saturday, 20 June. Look for details on our website and in the spring newsletter.

## A MEETING OF MINDS IN MASON CITY

### By Kathleen Cummings

The Walter Burley Griffin Society of America returned to Mason City on Friday, May 30, and Saturday, May 31, for its 15th annual meeting which included outstanding lectures and tours of thirteen buildings in and around the Rock Crest/Rock Glen development. This year more than one hundred twenty-five attended, including a contingent of six Australians from the Walter Burley Griffin Society Ltd. As members arrived in Mason City, they viewed historic photographs of Rock Crest/Rock Glen displayed at the Stockman House Visitors Center, watched an interpretive movie and, we hope, visited the gift shop to buy our new book about Rock Crest/Rock Glen.

Convening officially at the Mason City Public Library late on Friday morning, the meeting opened with a welcome from Peter B. Griffin, President of the Society and an introduction to the afternoon tours by Paul Kruty. Thanks to Bob McCoy's efforts, on Friday and Saturday afternoons we visited all of the Griffin buildings—the Blythe, Page, Rule, Schneider, and Melson Houses—as well as those by William Drummond, Barry Byrne, local architect Einar Broaten, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Curtis Besinger.

On Friday evening, the distinguished Griffin scholar James Weirick, Professor of Landscape Architecture and Director of the Urban Development & Design Program at the University of New South Wales, gave the keynote address. In his talk, "The Griffins and the Garden Suburb: From Canberra to Rock Crest/Rock Glen and Castlecrag," Weirick showed how the Rock Crest/Rock Glen community was part of "a bigger idea." The fusion of nature and architecture began among the Griffin's Australian Federal Capital competition drawings of late 1911, particularly as a neighborhood of residences embedded in the landscape of one of Marion Griffin's presentation drawings. Weirick then introduced the key aspects of the Rock Crest/Rock Glen project before carefully describing the creation and meanings of Castlecrag, the garden suburb in a for-

est setting designed by the Griffins and implemented in the 1920s on Sydney's north shore. His lecture was a fascinating exploration of the "modernist and antimodernist" aspects of these communities.

Saturday morning's speakers were introduced by Griffin board member Anthony Rubano from the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. Adrienne Kabos of the Walter Burley Griffin Society Ltd. spoke about their "Battles" (a la Marion and the *Magic of America*) that continue to be fought in Australia to encourage preservation of the Griffins' work. Kabos described the history of the Castlecrag subdivision, a project of the Greater Sydney Development Association formed by the Griffins and a group of prominent Australians on 650 acres of land on Sydney's Middle Harbor. She explained that the Australian Society was organized in 1988 around the thwarted effort to preserve Griffin's Duncan House at Castlecrag as a museum. In 1990 the Society received a grant to produce the definitive book on the subject, *Building for Nature: Walter Burley Griffin and Castlecrag* (1994). They successfully worked to establish the Griffin Conservation Area so that heritage controls could be introduced. The Society produced a brochure for Castlecrag residents and realtors to inform them about its history and make suggestions about how they might maintain the Griffins' legacy on their properties. More recently they helped in the effort to find a home for the Eric Milton Nicholls papers—actually the surviving contents of the Griffins' personal and professional papers—at the National Library of Australia. See their fine website ([www.griffinsociety.org](http://www.griffinsociety.org)) for more information on their work.

In his talk, "A Few Words about Rock Crest/Rock Glen," Paul Kruty gave a detailed account of the architecture, landscape and planning of the Mason City development. Kruty set the stage with a swift yet thorough review of the careers of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin before they arrived in Mason City. Then he chronicled the story of Rock Crest/Rock Glen starting with Wright's arrival in 1908 and ending with circumstances left when the Griffins departed for Australia. Kruty wove into the story all of the clients, their projects, and the architects who built in and around Rock Crest/Rock Glen. His talk had the precision, thoroughness, and enthusiasm for the Griffins that we all admire. Kruty's discussion is expanded in the essay in the Society's new book about Rock Crest/Rock Glen.

Richard D. Mohr then presented the paradox of styles that Prairie School architects used for art tiles in his talk, "Prairie School Art Tiles in Mason City and Beyond." Mohr explained that they either embraced the sentimental, pictorial tiles of the Arts-and-Crafts aesthetic or preferred an "atomic simplicity," favoring shapes and colors of undecorated tiles and emphasizing fire variations and rich glazes. Mohr showed the relationship between glass and tile patterns by Marion Mahony and featured the Blythe and Schneider House tiles that we later viewed in these houses. Most impressive was his analysis of the long-puzzling tile installation inside Dwight H. Perkins's Lincoln Park Refectory, now Café Brauer, in Chicago. Mohr identified the tiles as Rookwood's work but rejected the idea that an in-house artist or Marion Lucy Mahony or Lucy Fitch Perkins might be the artist. Instead, he made the case that the real artist was Jesse Arms Botke, a talented muralist in Chicago. Mohr compared her nature images published in exhibition catalogs (eucalyptus trees not native to Chicago's lakefront!) to nearly identical ones in the Café Brauer murals' night scenes. Bravo! Mohr concluded with the "train wrecks" in the use of Prairie School art tiles. Thankfully, his recent articles for the *Journal of the American Art Pottery Association* provide sources for learning more.

The second part of the Saturday morning lectures focused upon the Melson House. Both the architect Dan Naegele and Peggy Bang spoke about the impact of Marion Mahony Griffin's rendering of the Melson House as they were first learning about the Griffins. Naegele saw the rendering and took his students from Iowa State University to Mason City to find the house. Studying the rendering and floor plans, Naegele became fascinated with the four corners of the Melson House. Naegele described the relationship to Wright's work, especially the 1907 Fireproof House, and he presented his thoughts about the Stockman House as a variant.

Peggy Bang, the final speaker, told us that when she saw the rendering of the Melson House she had "an unquenchable thirst" to learn more about Marion. She thought, "Wouldn't it be great to live in an MMG house?" After she and her husband Roger bought the house and acquired copies of the working drawings, they began their restoration. The 1950s-era flowered wallpaper and picture windows were removed and gradually Peggy and Roger restored and updated the landmark building. Peggy solved

the mystery of the bright pink trim on the Melson House that we've all seen in early color photographs and slides: she recounted how an earlier owner had painted the concrete pink to anger her philandering ex-husband. Fortunately, the trim now has been repainted grey. Bang calls her house a masterpiece, "a work of art that influences and intrigues many people for many years." We look forward to reading Bang's soon-to-be-published book about the Melson House.

Another exciting event accompanied the lectures and tours: the launching of the Griffin Society's latest publication, its third following *Marion Mahony and Millikin Place* (2007) and *Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library* (2010). The new book, *Rock Crest/Rock Glen, Mason City, Iowa: The American Masterwork of Marion M. and Walter B. Griffin*, will surely stand as the definitive study of Rock Crest/Rock Glen. It also provides a model for future studies of Prairie School architecture and planning. It begins with an essay about the history, sociology and industry of Mason City. Written by Bob McCoy, who penned the first study of the Rock Crest/Rock Glen for the *Prairie School Review* in 1968, this essay is full of information about the families as well as the businessmen and developers of the site. Paul Kruty treats the Griffins' role in its development from beginning to end. Paul E. Sprague gives the defining characteristics of Griffin's style and provides individual entries for Griffin's Mason City houses as well as the unbuilt projects. Weirick's essay is the finale, linking Rock Crest/Rock Glen to the later Castlecrag project. An appendix includes two critical texts about Rock Crest/Rock Glen: essays by Griffin from *Western Architect* (1913) and by a critic in *The American City* (1916). The book includes a useful bibliography.

Many, many thanks are due to Bob McCoy, his "Mason City helpers," and the owners of eleven private houses that were opened for our meeting. It was exciting, too, to see the restored Stockman House and the Historic Park Inn Hotel, two Wright masterpieces that were open for tours during our meeting. Now on to Madison, Wisconsin in 2015!

## JARVIS BEACH AND LAKE BURLEY GRIFFIN

A movement is afoot to honor the legacy of Marion Mahony Griffin by naming a public space in Chicago after her. Following a failed attempt to do so with a fragment of land along the sanitary canal last year, the idea has been rekindled by Rogers Park Alderman Joe Moore. The idea this time is to rename a beach along  
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James Weirick, Paul Sprague and Paul Kruty, in front of the Stockman House. Photo by Peter Kruty.

Lake Michigan for her. Jarvis Beach, like Touhy and Estes beaches, was simply named for the Chicago street that ends at the lake at that point (although Jarvis itself was named for a prominent developer of Rogers Park). 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. The proposal will be presented to the Park Board in November with a decision announced next February.

A second question of renaming pertaining to the Griffins was sent to us by Glenda Korporaal and it involves Canberra's Lake Burley Griffin. A half century ago this year, the Molonglo River that meanders through Canberra was finally dammed, approximately following Griffin's proposal on the original plan. It was named Lake Burley Griffin at the time, in honor of Walter but employing the British usage of the last two names as a double name. Now a discussion has arisen about renaming the lake something "better," including Lake Griffin, Lake Walter Griffin, Lake Griffin-Mahony, Lake Canberra, and even Lake Menzies, for Robert Menzies, Australia's longest-serving prime minister and in that office at the time that the lake was created. Glenda reports that this is all probably a tempest in a teapot, but who knows?

See *Canberra Times*, 14 October 2014.

## CENTER NAMED FOR BOB MCCOY

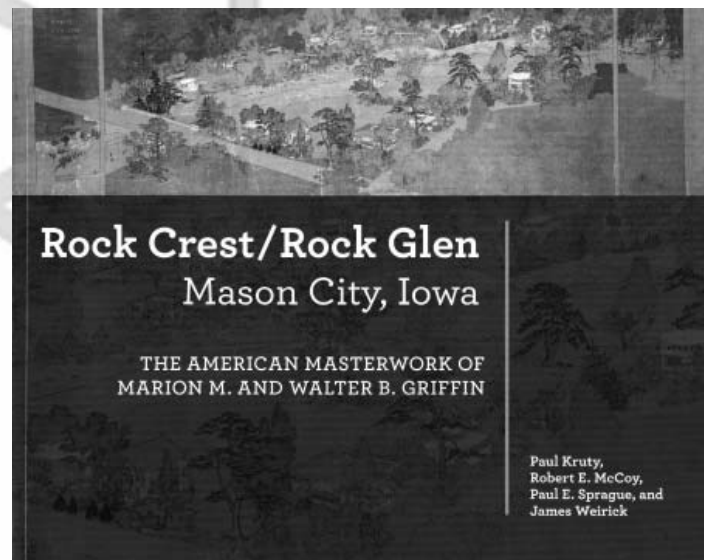
The headline in Mason City's *Globe Gazette* says it all: "Architecture Center renamed for McCoy." The news item of 19 August 2014 was announcing that the Architectural Interpretive Center, the visitors' center in Mason City located just north of the Stockman House and loosely based on Griffin's 1907 Interlocking Squares house, has been renamed the Robert E. McCoy Architectural Interpretive Center in honor of the person whose individual work has contributed most to the rescue, rehabilitation and renown of Mason City's Prairie School architecture. Bob's first response to being shown the new name on the building (after "I was flabbergasted") was: "I feel grateful, pleased and a bit self-conscious when I think of the other people who have worked on projects." As the newspaper explained, "With others, McCoy had a major part in the moving of the Stockman House to its present site and then oversaw the creation of the Stockman House Museum. His devotion to the Stockman House has seen him take on many roles, from presiding over meetings to mowing the lawn." The reporter continued, "The Architectural Interpretive Center came about as a result of McCoy and others in the River City Preservation group purchasing a duplex north of the Stockman house with funds from a bequest. They oversaw moving the duplex to the north so that the center could be built, with funds from Vision Iowa and others." Congratulations Bob!

## AUSTRALIANS ON TOUR

Following the Mason City meeting, three of the six Australian attendees continued to Chicago to visit Griffin sites in the city and suburbs. John and Adrienne Kabos and Michelle Burton toured the Frederick Carter house in Evanston as guests of Sarah Harding; continued to the Armstrong School for an extended look at Marion Griffin's Fairy mural; traveled to the H. V. Peters house, where board member Tannys Langdon treated the group to a gourmet lunch; and ended this perfect Griffin day at the William Emery house in Elmhurst hosted by Terri Zusag. The lucky group also included Jane Block, Paul Kruty, and Peter Kruty. The next day, the Australian trio toured Chicago's Beverly neighborhood with Mati Maldre and visited a number of the Blount houses. Back in Sydney, Adrienne's thank you note recalled the visit as "a dream come true to see so many Griffin buildings."

## A NEW GRIFFIN SOCIETY PUBLICATION NOW AVAILABLE: ROCK CREST/ROCK GLEN MONOGRAPH

The Griffin Society is pleased to announce the publication of its latest book on the work of the Griffins, available on the Society's website, [wbgriffinsociety.org](http://wbgriffinsociety.org): the first monograph devoted to the Griffins' 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 contrasting points of view. 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](http://www.wbgriffinsociety.org).



## CORNELL STORE AND FLATS RESCUED

The Cornell Store and Flats, at 1220 E. 75th Street in Chicago, threatened with demolition earlier in the year as reported in the last newsletter, has been acquired by the artist/activist/entrepreneur Theaster Gates, who is contemplating a full restoration. On Monday, 2 June, Charlie Vinz of the Theaster Gates Studio led James Weirick, Tim Samuelson, and Paul Kruty on a tour of the blighted building. Although surviving in a truly miserable state, the exterior walls, upper floors and roof seem to remain structurally sound, and there have been very few alterations to the architecturally significant elements of the building.



James Weirick on the roof of Griffin's Cornell Store and Flats, 1908. Photo by Paul Kruty.

## STINSON CENTENARY CELEBRATION IN ANNA

On Saturday, 16 August, scholars, historians, librarians, thespians, and local Anna-ites assembled at the Stinson Memorial Library to celebrate the one hundredth anniversary of the library's official opening. On a warm summer's day—almost cool by southern Illinois standards—Stinson library director Lisa Live-say welcomed the group, Don Burnett, president of the library board, introduced the building and its architects, Griffin Society President Peter Burley Griffin

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fin recounted his own introduction to Walter Burley Griffin's legacy and his family's various connections with the Griffins, followed by a guest appearance by Captain Robert Burns Stinson himself (!), as presented by the actor Pete Housman. Following a short break came the day's highlight for many: the Beard Judging Contest. After a dry if witty tour of the beard throughout history by John Watkins, non-natives (thus presumably incorruptible) Peter Griffin, Paul Kruty, and Alesha Cerny served as judges. Following a hamburger & hot dog lunch on the lawn and a chance to tour the library and examine the rare documents and letters from the library's collection on view, Paul Kruty presented the building's design and construction history, historian Darrel Dexter presented the story of Stinson's life, and Alesha Cerny from the National Park Service explained the procedure and the current status of the application form for naming the library a National Historic Landmark. The afternoon concluded with a program of musical numbers by local young talent, including the "cheep cheep" ladies trio from Meredith Willson's *The Music Man*. Thus was this internationally significant building honored by the town that brought it into existence.



Flanked by the grand prize winner and the runner-up of the Union County Beard Judging Contest [Richard Hill (r) & Jeff Linson (l)], Capt. Stinson [a.k.a. Pete Housman] basks in the limelight at the celebration of his bountiful bequest.

## HOUSES FOR SALE: TANNER AND EMERY

Tallmadge & Watson's 1909 masterpiece, the Louis A. Tanner House at 9640 S. Longwood in Chicago's Beverly neighborhood, has come on the market for the first time since 1971. Beautifully sited on the glacial ridge above Longwood Drive, the house is within a few blocks of Wright's Evans house, among many other Prairie-School buildings, and within a mile of the Griffin buildings on Griffin Place. The vintage masterpiece, lovingly restored by its long-time owners Bob & Rose Wagner, was included in the walking tour during the Griffin Society's meeting in Beverly in 2004, hosted by Mati Maldre.

Griffin's early masterpiece, the William H. Emery House (1903) in Elmhurst, remains on the market. Stunningly restored and expanded by John Eifler & Associates, the result won a Richard H. Driehaus Foundation Preservation Award.

For more information on both houses, visit the [Prairiemod.com](http://Prairiemod.com) website.



Tanner house. Photo by Mati Maldre.

## HASBROUCKS TO BE HONORED

The Society of Architectural Historians is honoring Marilyn and Wilbert Hasbrouck at its 2014 SAH Awards Gala, to be held on Saturday, 8 November at the Fortnightly Club of Chicago, 120 East Bellevue Place, Chicago. The theme of the evening is "Honoring Architectural Excellence," which highlights the contributions of excellence in five areas: Preservation Advocacy, to be awarded to Ben Weese; Stewardship of the Built Environment, given to Tim Samuelson; Architectural Conservation, awarded to Robert Furhoff; Conservation of the Natural Environment, given to Toni Preckwinkle; and the Hasbroucks' award for Architectural Media, which recognizes the couple's

outstanding contributions to architecture through the publication of *The Prairie School Review* and their incredible Prairie Avenue Bookshop. Bill has been on the Griffin Society's board since the Society's founding, and Marilyn has been a steadfast supporter of the group, including offering sage advice concerning the layout and presentation of the Society's first publication, *Marion Mahony and Millikin Place*. For more information on the event, call 312.573.1365 or visit [sah.org/gala](http://sah.org/gala).

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

State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

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