

# 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, ELSAH & ST. LOUIS

*The eighteenth annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in downstate Illinois near St. Louis, Missouri. 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 will be the subject of a monograph to be issued by the Society in time for the June meeting. The Society plans to stop in nearby Elsau, Illinois, to tour Principia College, the extraordinary campus designed by California architect Bernard Maybeck, and to visit Louis Sullivan sites in St. Louis on Sunday. Watch for further information on our website and in the Spring 2017 newsletter.*

## GRIFFIN, WRIGHT, SEYFARTH & GOLDBERG IN BEVERLY & BLUE ISLAND

By Mary Berry

On 18 June 2016, the Seventeenth Annual Meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society was held at the Arts Center of the Morgan Park Academy in Chicago's Beverly/Morgan Park neighborhood, with tours continuing to Blue Island and, the following morning, to Elmhurst. The meeting site began as a preparatory school of the University of Chicago, with buildings designed by Dankmar Adler, Louis Sullivan's former partner. Although these are long gone, Dwight Perkins' 1900 gymnasium, built while Griffin was working for Perkins, remains among later campus structures. In addition to the clutch of Griffin houses on 104th Place, afternoon tours gave access to Wright's 1900 Adams house, Bertrand Goldberg's 1939 Heimbach house, and numerous buildings by eclectic architect Robert Seyfarth. Sunday morning offered the opportunity to tour Griffin's two Elmhurst masterpieces, the William Sloane and William Emery houses. Concurrent with the meeting, the Ridge Historical Society, long a strong supporter of the Griffin Society, hosted an exhibition of photographs by Mati Maldre illustrating the Griffin houses in Beverly, and generously offered its rooms for the Friday board meeting.

On Saturday morning, Peter Burley Griffin, President, welcomed the attendees and introduced guests with news about upcoming events in Elmhurst and San Diego. Lance Tawzer, Elmhurst History Museum's curator of exhibits, and Dr. Anna Rubbo from Columbia University announced the museum's exhibit "In Her Own Right: Marion Mahony Griffin," which runs from 7 October through 12 March 2017 [see item below].

James B. Guthrie, AIA, Gill Foundation President, invited us to a series of events in October surrounding the extraordinary career of San Diego architect Irving Gill, including a symposium scheduled for 20 October investigat-

ing “Irving J. Gill and the Chicago School,” which includes panelists Tim Samuelson, Paul Kruty, and David Jameson [see item below].



Mati Maldre explains to Jon and Luci Pohl his photographic exhibition of Griffin’s local buildings on display at the Beverly Arts Center

Board member Kathy Cummings then introduced the morning’s four scheduled speakers. Anthony Rubano of the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency began by discussing “Griffin’s Sloane House and its Preservation.” He first recounted the Griffin Society’s connection with the Elmhurst building. In December 2015 Lois Jones, the house’s longtime owner with her husband Jack, contacted the Society after Jack’s death [see *Griffin Newsletter*, Spring 2015]. Lois was concerned about the future of the house when she is unable to keep it.

In 2006, after the 2002 demolition of the Stephen Beggs house, Elmhurst created a Historic Preservation Ordinance which designates landmarks, but this does not make them immune to demolition; nor does listing on the National Register of Historic Places. However, National Register listing *does* provide eligibility for preservation easements. A preservation easement, a legal agreement between the owner and a qualifying not-for-profit organization, is the strongest and only perpetual protection for historic properties. In granting an easement, the owner and future owners must maintain the building, while in accepting the easement, the not-for-profit must monitor it annually. The financial benefit of an easement is the eligibility for a charitable donation income-tax deduction based upon an independent appraisal of the value of the easement.

Lois Jones showed great interest in this possibility. However, the Sloane house was not listed on the National Register, so in January 2016 the Griffin Society funded a consultant to prepare and present a National Register form. John H. Waters, whose previous submissions to the National Register include Bruce Goff’s Ford House and a revised version of the Rock Crest/Rock Glen form. [Since the June meeting, Waters’ form, following discussions about what to do with the 1960s additions, passed the state advisory board and is headed to the Keeper’s desk in Washington, DC.]

The second speaker, Robert Bruegmann, is distinguished professor emeritus of Art History, Architecture and Urban Planning at the University of Illinois, Chicago. His talk, “Griffin and the Mainstream of Modernism,” evolved from his work as editor and contributing author of the upcoming book *Art Deco Chicago: The Making of American Culture*. As an alternative to the iconic buildings of the International Style, the buildings that now come under the heading of *Art Deco* are articulated, complex, and often decorated, as the term implies. In the most general way, then, the buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright from 1913 to 1930, including Midway Gardens, are examples of decorated modernism and, in some sense, Art Deco. The same applies to much of Griffin’s mature work. Bruegmann cited examples by Griffin including the Capitol Theatre in Melbourne, the Australian incinerators of the 1930s, and Griffin’s last works in India.

While this was the central message of Bruegmann’s lecture, he also captured the sheer creativity of the architectural, graphic, industrial and fashion design that falls under the rubric Art Deco, as revealed in the Schwinn bicycle, the radio flyer wagon, and the T-9 Sunbeam toaster. In fact, Chicago was the center of commissioning, manufacturing, and distributing industrial design in the late 1930s.

Following a coffee break, the mood changed considerably as we listened to Christopher Enck, of Klein & Hoffman, Restoration Architects, and the Winnetka Historic Preservation Commission, discuss “Van Bergen on the Move: Saving the Irving House.” This account of his rescuing a threatened house by John Van Bergen (who began his long career working for Griffin, followed by a stint with Wright) kept us wrapped in suspense. In 2012, the property on which the 1928 house stood was sold

to a developer, who only wanted the lot. Following negative coverage in the press, the developer resold the property to another developer. Again, the new owner did not want to restore the house but offered it to anyone who would move it.

Discovered during this controversy was the fact that, before the house was built, the owners erected a small garage where they lived first—and this garage was designed by Rudolph Schindler in 1920 while he was working for Wright! This building was dismantled by another preservationist and remains in a storage unit.

Chris Enck volunteered to help with the move and, as these things happen, was soon the chief mover behind the move. To do so he had to have it cut in three pieces. Each section needed to be moved, turned and tarped. Power lines needed moving and stop lights coordinated. By October 2014 the house stood on the parking lot of a defunct Dominick's grocery store. New owners, Whole Foods, granted a limited extension of the "storage" period, until March 2015, when the house was moved to its new site in Evanston.

Although the fabric of the house remained intact, all heating, electrical, plumbing and roofing were replaced. In a complicated maneuver, the foundation was laid after the home was on site. The move had been successful despite the many physical, financial and governmental obstacles.

To explain the importance of the afternoon's Beverly tour, the final speaker, Paul Kruty of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, presented the case of the importance of Griffin's group of small houses in "Walter Burley Griffin and the Low-Cost House." Noting that in 1910 the low-cost "workingman's cottage" typically referred to a frame building of 1000 square feet costing about \$2000, Kruty explained that the Beverly story began when Russell Blount went to Griffin as a client for Blount's wedding house. Immediately offered a generous price for it, Blount soon was building Griffin houses on speculation, including the Van Nostrand, Jenkins and Salmon houses to be toured this afternoon. All of these cottages have a ground level floor plan in which the living and dining room are united around the fireplace and the kitchen is enclosed—Griffin's "open plan."

Kruty recounted Griffin's continued interest in the low-cost house, showing a pair of brick house built 1909 for \$3200 each, and his Model Brick Cottage on display at the 1913 convention of the National

Clay Products Association at Chicago's Coliseum. The latter was raffled off by guessing the number of marbles in a glass jar and currently stands in the Gage Park area. After moving to Australia, Griffin designed workers' cottages meant to be built in Canberra, leading to his invention of a system of construction using thin concrete blocks called Knitlock because the blocks are interlocking front and back panels. The structure is flared out blocks that when joined become ribs, while service pipes run through the hollow spaces. Function and aesthetics are fully joined in a single system.

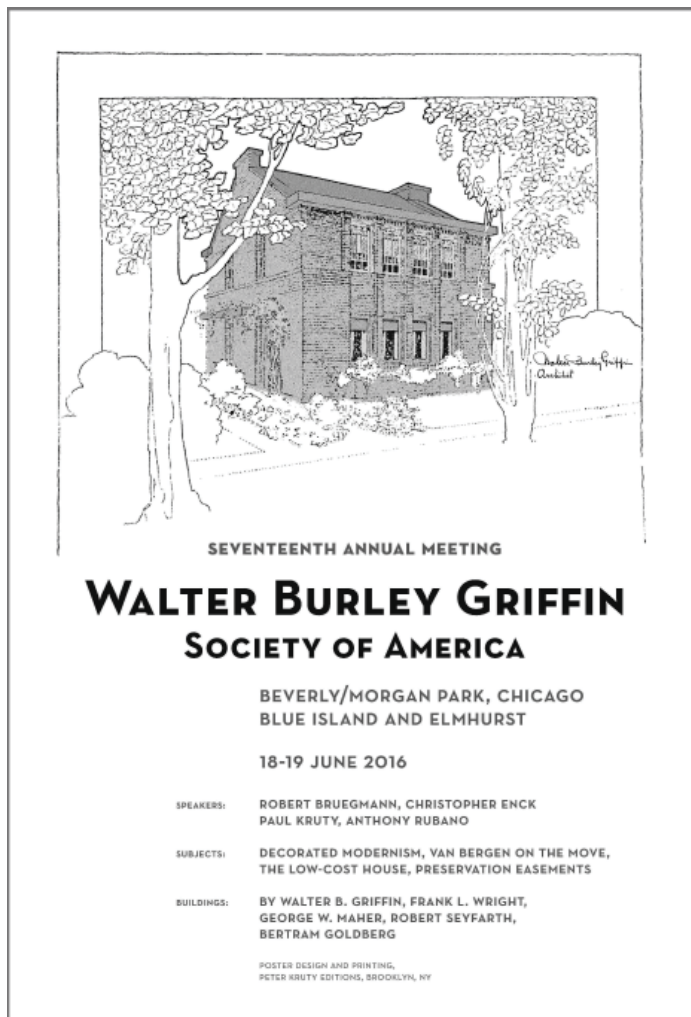
All of these buildings reveal Griffin's abiding interest in bringing well-designed, inexpensive modern architecture to everyone.

Following this last lecture, the mechanics of the afternoon tours were explained and the group broke for a box lunch in the warm afternoon.

#### **IRVING J. GILL: PRAIRIE SCHOOL ARCHITECT**

The symposium and on-going events in Southern California examining the work of Irving J. Gill introduced to us by James Guthrie at last June's Griffin meeting reveal an architect trained in Chicago whose response to the ideas of Louis Sullivan profoundly changed the course of his career. At the symposium held on 20 October, three Chicago scholars—Chicago's cultural historian Tim Samuelson, architectural historian Paul Kruty, and David Jameson of the ArchiTech gallery—presented the case that Gill should be considered a member of a broadly defined Chicago School (a.k.a. the Prairie School). Samuelson introduced the capacity crowd in Gill's La Jolla Woman's Club to Chicago's rise and Gill's education in the offices of Joseph Lyman Silsbee and Louis Sullivan, working alongside Frank Lloyd Wright; Kruty traced the parallel careers of Gill and Griffin, with particular emphasis on their interest in concrete; and Jameson examined the later connections between Gill and Chicago through Alfonso Iannelli, Barry Byrne, and John Lloyd Wright. For more information on Gill and the continuing group of exhibitions, please visit [irvingjgill.org](http://irvingjgill.org).





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

NOTE: The main subject of the conference—Griffin’s low-cost houses—was the inspiration for the conference poster showing Marion Mahony Griffin’s rendering of the Model Brick House exhibited at Chicago’s Clay Products Exhibition in 1913. The hand-printed poster was available during the conference and can be acquired directly from the Society, along with the two previous posters for the Madison (2015) and Mason City (2014) meetings.

### IN HER OWN RIGHT: MARION MAHONY GRIFFIN

On 7 October, the Elmhurst History Museum opened its exhibition examining the career of Marion Mahony Griffin, which runs through 12 March 2017. 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.

A series of accompanying events has been planned, including lectures on 17 November [Anna M. Lewis, “Women of Steel and Stone: Inspirational Architects, Engineers and Landscape Designers from the 1880s to Today”]; 15 January [Debora Wood, “Marion Mahony Griffin: Rendering the Grand Variety of Nature’s Grace”]; and 12 February [John Waters and Peggy Bang, “Marion Mahony Griffin in Mason City, Iowa”]. For a complete list of lectures and activities, visit [www.elmhursthistory.org](http://www.elmhursthistory.org).

In his lengthy review of the show in the *Chicago Tribune* of 16 October, Blair Kamin concluded by lauding Marion’s “role in a team that predated today’s progressive architectural partnerships.” Asking us to “think of Tod Williams and Billie Tsien, the husband-and-wife team picked to design the Obama presidential library,” Kamin mused, “If fate had put them in another time, that honor might have gone instead to Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin.”

The Elmhurst History Museum is located at 120 East Park Avenue, Elmhurst, Illinois. Its hours are Su, Tu-Fr 1:00-5:00 and Sa 10:00-5:00. For more information, please visit [www.elmhursthistory.org](http://www.elmhursthistory.org) or call (630) 833-1457.

### RARE VISIT TO THE ARMSTRONG SCHOOL

#### NOTE: SATURDAY, 11 MARCH 2017

Mark your calendars for next March 11th, when there will be a rare opportunity to visit Marion Mahony Griffin’s 1931 mural, *Fairies Feeding the Herons*. This exciting event, arranged by Peggy Lami, is being jointly sponsored by the Elmhurst History Museum and the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America.

Located just blocks from MMG’s family home at Estes and Damen, the exquisite mural, which measures five by twenty feet, incorporates themes and principles firmly held by Mahony throughout her life.

The Armstrong Elementary School is located at 2110 W. Greenleaf Ave., in Chicago’s West Rogers Park neighborhood. The viewing hours will be 1:00pm to 2:30pm. While there is no admission fee, donations to help preserve this great treasure will be appreciated.

For more information, please contact Peggy at [peggylami@sbcglobal.net](mailto:peggylami@sbcglobal.net), phone 630-280-8008. Also, an RSVP would be greatly appreciated.



Castlecrag residents John and Adrienne Kabos of the Griffin Society of Australia, right, visiting the Armstrong school in 2014 following the Mason City meeting of the Griffin Society of America.

### PEGGY BANG VISITS OZ

Peggy Bang, owner of the Joshua Melson house in Mason City and Griffin Society board member, traveled in September to Australia to see the Griffins' later work in person. While there, she was the speaker at two WBG Society events. In the capital city of Canberra, she presented the Seventh Marion Mahony Griffin lecture at the National Archives, becoming the first American invited to give this lecture to the Society. Her presentation explored the history of the Melson house, its design by the Griffins, and its restoration. Before the evening lecture, popular Canberra radio host Alex Sloan interviewed Peggy on her afternoon program.

A few days later, Peggy spoke at Castlecrag, the Griffin's garden suburb on Sydney's Middle Harbour, a few miles north of downtown. Her lecture, entitled "The Melson House—A Castlecrag Cousin," explored the relationship between the Griffins' Mason City achievements and their later Australian planning developments. At Castlecrag Peggy was able to tour the Moon, Grant, Creswick and Fishwick houses.

As Peggy reported on her return, "It was a trip of a lifetime for me. The tie between the Rock Crest/Rock Glen homes and Castlecrag was fascinating to see and experience."

For information on obtaining a copy of Peggy's book, *The Melson House Revealed: An Owner's Perspective*, write to her at [peggylbang@gmail.com](mailto:peggylbang@gmail.com).

### FISHWICK WEBSITE

Andrew Kirk reports from Castlecrag that the great Thomas Fishwick house of 1929 now has its own website that is a must for all Griffin followers. Launched on 31 July, its address is [www.fishwickhouse.org](http://www.fishwickhouse.org). Here the house—characterized as "one of the most significant and celebrated early 20th century houses in Australia" in *Visionaries in Suburbia: Griffin Houses in the Sydney Landscape* (2015)—can be truly appreciated for its amazing qualities. As Andrew reports, "The website has been in preparation for three years with contributions from many sources. In all, 36 subjects are covered in some detail. It contains more than 150 pictures taken by nineteen photographers, cinematographers and artists who have worked in the house." The website further details the architectural and design features of the house, particularly those demonstrating Griffin's innovation and creativity, and examines its significance.

### SLOANE HOUSE PASSES MUSTER

On 28 October, John Waters presented his nomination for the William Sloane house to be entered into the National Register of Historic Places before the quarterly meeting of the Illinois Historic Sites Advisory Council—and it passed unanimously! Readers will recall that this nomination was supported by funding from the Walter Burley Griffin Society. The house was designed by Griffin in 1909 for the Sloanes and their two children. It has been the home of Jack and Lois Jones for many decades, and Lois hopes that National Register listing will help permit the house to remain in its present remarkable state of preservation for many years to come.

### PETERS HOUSE IN THE PRESS

Griffin's first independent commission, the house for Harry V. Peters, appears as one of the signature buildings in Patrick F. Cannon's new book *The Space Within: Inside Great Chicago Buildings*, published in 2016 by Pomegranate, with photographs by James Caulfield. The entry includes single exterior and interior color photos, while the text notes that "its plan is based on Wright's 'Fireproof House for \$5000,' which, as every Griffin aficionado knows, is actually backwards. It is Wright's Fireproof House itself, of course, which is derived from a series of buildings that Griffin designed, beginning in 1900 and including the Peters house of 1906, in which the plan appears. In any case, it is wonderful to see Griffin's work appearing with greater regularity in such ravishing formats.

## STINSON LIBRARY: ONE OF TWENTY

The Stinson library in Anna, Illinois, is included among a group of twenty libraries across the country recommended by the travel blog BLT, “the blog for lifestyle and travel.” The entry, which appeared in early November under the heading “20 Libraries That Will Make You Forget About Netflix,” begins, “These spectacular libraries are a bookworm’s Narnia,” and further explains that the group includes “some of the most interesting, beautiful, and modern libraries across the United States.” In the same league with the Stinson library, apparently, are Carrière & Hastings’ New York Public Library (1902-11), Helmut Jahn’s Mansueto Library at the University of Chicago (2006-11), Gordon Bunshaft’s (SOM) 1963 Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, Frank Furness’ 1890 library at the University of Pennsylvania, and William Periera’s 1970 Geisel library at UC San Diego. Nice company! Check it out at: <https://www.vacationsmadeeasy.com/TheBLT/20LibrariesThatWillMakeYouForgetAboutNetflix714.html>

## GRIFFIN SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

***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.

All books can be purchased on the Society’s website:  
[www.wbgriffinsociety.org](http://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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Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_

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