

# THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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Walter Burley Griffin

Society of America

1152 Center Drive

St. Louis, MO 63117

Website: [www.WBGriffinSociety.org](http://www.WBGriffinSociety.org)

Email: [info@WBGriffinSociety.org](mailto:info@WBGriffinSociety.org)

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Editor: Paul Kruty

[pkruty@illinois.edu](mailto:pkruty@illinois.edu)

Please email news items to the editor.

## NINETEENTH ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY/SUNDAY, 23-24 JUNE 2018

JOIN US IN PARK RIDGE and AURORA, ILLINOIS

**MEETING:** 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 morning session will be held at the Pickwick Theater, 5 S. Prospect Ave, Park Ridge, 60068. Doors will open at 8:30 with the meeting beginning at 9:00. Parking is available behind the theater complex and across the street in the lot of the public library. A guided tour of the building will follow the lectures, with box lunches arriving at noon. The afternoon tour, which includes open houses by Bruce Goff, Barry Byrne and Harold Zook and a late church by Lloyd Wright, will begin at 1:00 and end at 4:30, followed by a reception at the Iannelli Studios Heritage Center, 255 N. Northwest Highway, lasting until 6:00. On Sunday morning, we are offering an additional treat: the owner has graciously agreed to let us visit Bruce Goff's Ruth Ford house at 404 S. Edgelawn Ave. in Aurora. In addition, the traveling exhibition "In Her Own Right: Mahony Mahony Griffin" now at the Kenilworth Historical Society, 415 Kenilworth Avenue, Kenilworth, will be open especially for the Griffin Society on Sunday afternoon beginning at 3:00pm, as well as open during regular hours on Monday, 25 June, from 9:00am to 5:00pm, for those who did not see this beautiful exhibition last year in Elmhurst or Mason City.

**ACCOMMODATIONS:** The cluster of hotels in Rosemont near O'Hare airport offer out-of-town members a choice of nearby accommodations, any of which are some ten minutes (depending on traffic) from the Pickwick Theater. Because of the changing daily offers of most of these hotels, as well as individual membership programs, it was not effective to get a group rate. But we heartily recommend staying at the Hyatt Regency Hotel, 9300 Bryn Mawr, Rosemont, 847-955-9102, designed by the "neo-futurist" John Portman in 1969, and renovated in 2006. It's a hoot.

**ARGUMENT:** The northwest suburb of Park Ridge 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 became 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



Pickwick Theater entrance tower

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 & McCaughey (pronounced McCoy) 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, and Park Ridge, including a return visit by the Australian landscape and planning historian and Griffin scholar James Weirick.

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, \$12 for the box lunch and, of course, registrants must also have paid their annual dues of \$25 to the Society.

### WILBERT HASBROUCK (1931-2018)



Bonnie McCoy, Marilyn Hasbrouck, Bill Hasbrouck and Mary Woolever at the Griffin meeting, Minneapolis, 2012

It is with great sadness that the Griffin Society acknowledges the passing of Wilbert Hasbrouck and expresses its appreciation at his service given through the years to the Society as a Griffin board member since 2000. Bill died in February, having just given up the apartment where he and Marilyn lived for the last dozen years and where the Hasbroucks hosted the board. The Griffin Society extends its condolences to Marilyn, who has been an advisor to the Griffin Society for many years. Several Society members and friends have provided reminiscences of their varied associations with Bill and Marilyn over the years, which we publish here.

### PAUL SPRAGUE

I first met Bill Hasbrouck when he visited me at my Lake Forest home in about 1961 to announce that he was starting a journal about modern architecture in Chicago and the Midwest. He wanted me to write articles for it. I don't recall if he had a name for the magazine at that time, but soon he christened it "The Prairie School Review." His wife, Marilyn, was to edit it. At the time I was employed by Lake Forest University. The next year I moved to Notre Dame University. Bill then lived in Park Forest, a suburb about 25 miles south of Chicago, and worked for the Illinois Central Railroad. This job required him to ride trains from Chicago to stations west of Chicago to check on various operations. Whenever he stopped, he would visit bookstores to find and buy books on architecture. Sometime afterwards he retired from the railroad and became executive director of the AIA offices in Chicago.

Later, when I taught at the University of Chicago, I opened an historic preservation practice that I named "Historic Preservation Services." It was then that Dan Malkovich of the Illinois Department of Conservation was assigned the job of setting up a survey of historic buildings in Illinois. He consulted with Hasbrouck, who recommended me to organize and manage such a survey, which was to be called the Illinois Historic Structures Survey (IHSS). At my suggestion we located the survey office in rooms at the great H. H. Richardson's historic Glessner House on Chicago's near south side. Richard Nickel, remembered for collecting and preserving ornament by Louis Sullivan and others, worked at Glessner House at that time to assist in restoring and maintaining the house. Hasbrouck moved his historic preservation consulting work to several offices he designed in the bedrooms at the front of Glessner House, which also held the Chicago AIA offices. Following the completion of the IHSS in 1975, Bill and I saw less of each other on a daily basis, but remained good friends for the more than forty years since.

### PAUL KRUTY

Wilbert Hasbrouck's passing, in addition to closing an era, takes so many of us back many decades, myself included. I met Bill in 1974 when I began working for the Illinois Historic Structures Survey, located in Glessner House. As head of the Illinois AIA at that time, Bill was located in an office a floor below our attic space. I was already quite fa-

miliar with the *Prairie School Review* from my classes with Paul Sprague at the University of Chicago; and soon would be prowling the picturesque corners of the Keith house down the block from the Glessner house, the first home of the Prairie Avenue bookshop. It was clear from the start that here was an extraordinary apostle of Chicago's modern architecture. His membership on the Board of Directors of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America provided a personal example of his generosity, institutional memory, and general knowledge of all things Sullivanian, Wrightian, and Griffinesque. I particularly remember a board meeting in Evanston when Bill and Marilyn gave apt advice to the Griffin Society, just then preparing to publish the first of its four books on the work of the Griffins in America.

The *Prairie School Review*, Bill and Marilyn's dual effort, grounded all succeeding generations in the story of America's first modern movement in architecture, while Bill's magnum opus, *The Chicago Architectural Club: Prelude to the Modern*, will remain an invaluable reference work for decades to come.

#### JAMES WEIRICK

News of the passing of Wilbert Hasbrouck in February this year was received with all the sadness the end of an era represents, but at the same time it brought back vivid memories of the delight and amazement I experienced when I first discovered *The Prairie School Review*. It was February 1970 and I was in the studio-space of the Yarralumla home of Canberra architect Laurie Virr when he took from his shelves two issues of the PSR: III/2 1966 with David Van Zanten's path-breaking 'The Early Work of Marion Mahony' and V/3, 1968 with Robert E. McCoy's magnificent study of Rock Crest/Rock Glen, Mason City, Iowa. As I recall, Laurie Virr had been introduced to *The Prairie School Review* by his Melbourne friend Peter Wille (1932-1972), a member of the Robin Boyd circle and an avid architectural photographer with a passion for the Australian strand of organic architecture and its worldwide connections.

The *PSR* published and edited by Wilbert and Marilyn Hasbrouck immediately struck me as outstanding in its editorial voice, scholarship, scholarly apparatus and production values—a journal beautiful in itself from typography and graphic design to the binding and heavy paper on which it was printed.

I had made a special visit to Canberra to meet Laurie Virr on the strength of an interview he had given to

the *Canberra News* (29 January 1970) in which he stated, 'it might be possible to save Canberra if we stick to the rest of the Griffin plan.' This call, which has recurred almost every decade since 1912, highlights the different historical uses of the Griffin story in Australia and the United States. In Australia, the Griffins are culturally significant—known almost universally—but their work is compromised and problematic. In the United States, the Griffins are almost unknown but their work is magnificent and mostly intact.

In Australia, the Griffin story has been mobilised in a series of cultural projects. For example, in the period from the 1940s to the 1970s, we have Robin Boyd and James Birrell enlisting the Griffins as 'pioneers of modern design;' Peter Harrison reducing the Canberra Plan to its landscape essentials to win political support at the 1954 Senate Inquiry into the Future of Canberra (a move which in due course led to the creation of the central artificial lake—Lake Burley Griffin—in 1963, more than half a century after its conception); and Hugh Stretton in 1970 casting Griffin as one of the few visionaries who had 'ideas for Australian cities.'

In the United States, the task has been one of projecting the Griffins' body of work into the limelight with value in its own right rather than as a footnote to the work of Sullivan and Wright—or indeed not even a footnote. This has been a project of architectural history rather than cultural history, and the Hasbroucks' *PSR* stands at the cusp of significant change from the early work of Wayne Andrews, Mark Peisch, Carl Condit and H. Allen Brooks to the work of a new generation of scholars. The turning point can be seen in those early essays by David Van Zanten and Robert McCoy, together with the companion publication from the Hasbroucks' Prairie School Press, *Walter Burley Griffin: selected designs* edited by David Van Zanten. Released in 1970, this slip-cased, large format monograph remains the most superb publication of the Griffins' work, or more accurately Marion Griffin's pen-and-ink presentation drawings in their unique format combining perspective, plan and section. As a work of fine art publishing, the Prairie School Press production raises the question of the international renown the Griffins' work may have achieved in their lifetimes with their own 'Wasmuth Portfolio', a venture they could have had in mind when they conferred with Ernst Wasmuth in Berlin during their European tour in March 1914.

*Walter Burley Griffin: selected designs* is, alas, marred by confused extracts from Griffin's writings taken from Marion's 'Magic of America' rather than the original sources. As Wilbert Hasbrouck wrote to me in 1970, 'since completing this book we have begun more intensive work and find that there is much much more to learn.' It is fair to say that almost fifty years later, this is still the case—the long-term legacy of the Griffins' dramatic moves from the United States to Australia and India, and in the case of Marion back to the United States, with consequent dispersal of their office records across three continents, involving vital losses along the way.

In his 1970 letter, Bill advised that annual subscription to *The Prairie School Review* was \$12.00 (including postage to Australia!) with back copies available at \$1.50 each. I can report that I parted with somewhat more than this on various visits to Chicago over the decades, beginning in 1974 the year Marilyn opened the Prairie Avenue Bookshop across then-empty lots from the Glessner House. With Bill's architectural office attached, long visits and long conversations became the quintessential Chicago experience, first on the eponymous Prairie Avenue, then on Printer's Row on South Dearborn Street, and finally in the spectacular bookshop on South Wabash at Van Buren, diagonally across from the site of Steinway Hall.

Wilbert Hasbrouck was everything the world expects of a 'broad-shouldered' Chicagoan: Burnhamesque in presence and manner with big ideas, big plans, big achievements and just that touch of Chicago hustle necessary to get things done. The Prairie School Press, *The Prairie School Review* and the Prairie Avenue Bookshop which he and Marilyn created were only part of his life-work—his encyclopedic study of the Chicago Architectural Club and restoration of Wright's Dana House with its Marion Mahony details must be mentioned—but the deep scholarship into the work of the architects of the Sullivan School that *The Prairie School Review* stimulated must stand as his greatest legacy.

## **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, opened at its third venue at the Kenilworth Historical Society in Kenilworth,

Illinois, in on 12 February. It will run through 26 July. 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 hours.

## **RENOVATING THE GRIFFINS' CAPITOL THEATRE IN MELBOURNE**

By Glenda Korporaal, Sydney



Capitol Theatre Building, main façade

One of the finest examples of the Griffins' work in Australia, the Capitol Theatre in Melbourne, is undergoing a \$A20 million renovation. The building's current owner, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), has announced an appeal for funds for the renovation. Famous for its crystalline-looking ceiling, which would light up with thousands of different coloured globes, the theatre has been shut since 2014. It was opened with much fanfare in Melbourne in November 1924 as one of the most glamorous buildings in the city, which was then Australia's

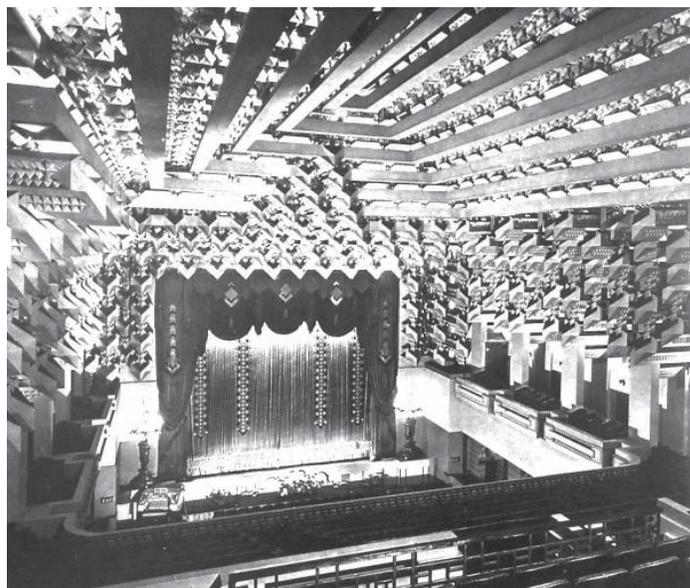
capital. RMIT bought the building, in Melbourne's busy Swanston St, in 1999 to be used as a lecture theatre for students. The renovations, to be completed by the end of next year, will include expanding the use of the theatre beyond film screenings to include theatrical and musical productions. It will also include replacing the 4,000 ceiling lights with LED lights. It will be used by some 1,000 RMIT students each week for lectures, tutorials and showing their own digital works.

"Once again, Melbourne's creative minds will be able to come together and teach and learn and create, all in a truly majestic space," RMIT vice chancellor Martin Bean said at the launch of the appeal. "It's a privilege to be leading the charge towards returning this theatre not only to the students but to the entire Melbourne community." The appeal is being supported by the state government of Victoria which has contributed \$A2.5 million to the project. "So many Victorians have fond memories of the Capitol Theatre, which is why it's so important that we help look after this iconic Melbourne institution," the state minister for Training and Skills, Gayle Tierney, said.

Walter Burley Griffin began working on the building in 1921 after he was effectively pushed out of his role as the Federal Capital Director after a long series of political battles. The project was backed by a group of Melbourne businessmen including the Greek Consul-General, Anthony J.J. Lucas. The theatre originally sat 2,000 people who entered via grand marble stair cases. Theatre-goers were treated to a Wurlitzer organ which was played before the movie would start with the lights turning different colours.

Writing about it two decades later in *The Magic of America*, the then-widowed Marion Mahony declared, "There is still nothing comparable to it in the world. There has been much talk about interior illumination of theatres but here it is done on a grand scale, a stepped, oblong pyramidal ceiling, thousands of different colored lamps hidden by the beam steps and the light thrown up on intensely rich and deeply cut crystalline pattern, cuttings sometimes three feet deep so that, played as a color organ, it glows from alabaster white to rainbow colors in endless combinations and rich with shades and shadows, a mysterious loveliness and a powerful grandeur." She vividly recalled, "As one architect expressed it, he could sit and watch that ceiling for a fortnight and when he came away he would not be able to draw it. The Paramount people at the opening said if it were built in New

York it would be packed continually without their having to give any shows. By means of an electric switchboard this color organ is played for a half hour before each performance as well as in the intermissions."



Capitol Theatre interior

The theatre closed as a cinema in 1963 and was slated for demolition. This prompted one of the first building conservation campaigns in Melbourne which involved the National Trust, the Royal Victorian Institute of Architects and architect Robin Boyd, who did much to revive Griffin's legacy in Australia. Boyd was quoted in the Australian newspaper of 24 December 1965 as describing it as "the best cinema that was ever built or is ever likely to be built." It reopened in 1965 after extensive renovations which saw its entire lower level, including many of its seats and its sweeping foyer, replaced by a shopping arcade. Its capacity was reduced to around 600 seats.

The renovations are being handled by Melbourne architects Six Degrees. "It will be a very rewarding experience to be able to bring it back into the public eye," says architect Peter Malatt from Six Degrees. "We have taken a very subtle approach to it. We are making an effort to make sure the glory of the building is recognised."

Supporters of the restoration project appeal include 27-year-old RMIT graduate and film maker Ling Ang, who has donated \$A500,000. Other supporters include film producer and RMIT adjunct professor Sue Maslin (*The Dressmaker*), Academy Award winning animator Adam Elliot (*Harvie Krumpet*) and Village Roadshow deputy chairman John Kirby.

Six Degrees' work on the building will include rewiring the building and putting in a lift connecting the different levels. "One of the challenges when doing any important work on a very importance heritage building like this is how do you differentiate between the new work and the existing heritage building?" Malatt said. "A lot of the work will be in the area which is away from the original heritage structure." Mallet estimates that about four fifths of the original building is still intact.

Malatt noted, "It is one of the first buildings in Melbourne to be built using reinforced concrete." It was also ground breaking for Australia with the wide reinforced concrete beams across the ceiling which removed the need for pillars in the auditorium. Indeed, the unusual structural system was why the Griffins took so long to get their ideas for the building approved by the Melbourne City Council.

Fortunately, Malatt says, there are no significant problems with its structure. Six Degrees is working with heritage architect Michael Taylor, who was involved in restoring the ceiling some years ago. But seeing the ceiling with its full lighting power will be a sight to behold, says Malatt, who remembers seeing it fully lit up when the ceiling was originally upgraded around 2000. "People will be blown away," he promises.

For information about the renovations and to make a contribution to the RMIT Capitol Theatre Appeal, visit [www.rmit.edu.au/capitol](http://www.rmit.edu.au/capitol).

## GRIFFIN SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

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.

ALSO AVAILABLE:

### **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.

To order copies of each, please see our 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.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

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### **Mail to:**

Walter Burley Griffin Society of America  
1152 Center Drive  
St. Louis, MO 63117

Email: [info@WBGriffinSociety.org](mailto:info@WBGriffinSociety.org)

Website: [www.WBGriffinSociety.org](http://www.WBGriffinSociety.org)