

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

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Please email news items to the
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TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY/SUNDAY, 13-14 JUNE 2020

JOIN US IN ELMHURST, ILLINOIS

The twenty-first annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America will be held in Elmhurst, Illinois, the “hometown” of the Griffin family for almost 70 years, and the site of the first Griffin Society meeting in 2000. On Saturday, 13 June, we will meet at Elmhurst College, and are working on a possible extension on Sunday to the historic site of the American Terra Cotta Company in Crystal Lake. The morning session will be held at Elmhurst College. The afternoon tour will include, among a variety of nearby buildings, houses by Griffin and Wright. Other highlights will include the McCormack house by Mies van der Rohe at the Elmhurst Museum of Art and the nationally-known collection of artworks by the Chicago Imagists at the Buehler Library of Elmhurst College. The tentative list of speakers will include Paul Kruty, with a talk about the Griffins in Elmhurst, and James Weirick, returning for the fifth time. Watch for updates on the website and in the spring newsletter.

REVELING ON AND ABOUT DECATUR’S MILLIKIN PLACE

Close to a hundred members gathered at the Commons building of Millikin University on Decatur’s west side on sunny Saturday morning, June 1st, for the annual meeting of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America. Returning to the site of the 2007 meeting, we once again rejoiced at visiting this extraordinary grouping of elite houses on a private street, built between 1909 and 1912, with designs by Wright and Mahony and landscaping by Griffin. A more concentrated series of events would be hard to imagine: the move from the morning lecture venue to the buffet line was no more than a hundred feet, while all the buildings open on the afternoon tour were on a single street—with a reception at the last house. And what a sumptuous feast it was!

Following an introduction by Peter Burley Griffin, President of the Walter Burley Griffin Society of America, the Saturday morning session began with a warm welcome by President Patrick White, whose leadership of Millikin University in the past few years produced the Commons building, site of our meeting. Admiring the attendees for giving up a beautiful spring weekend to make common cause about the Griffins’ work, President White explained his own philosophy about liberal education and briefly reminisced about his serving forty years ago as a graduate aid in the student housing unit at the University of Chicago when Paul Kruty was a freshman nominally under his charge. Small world!

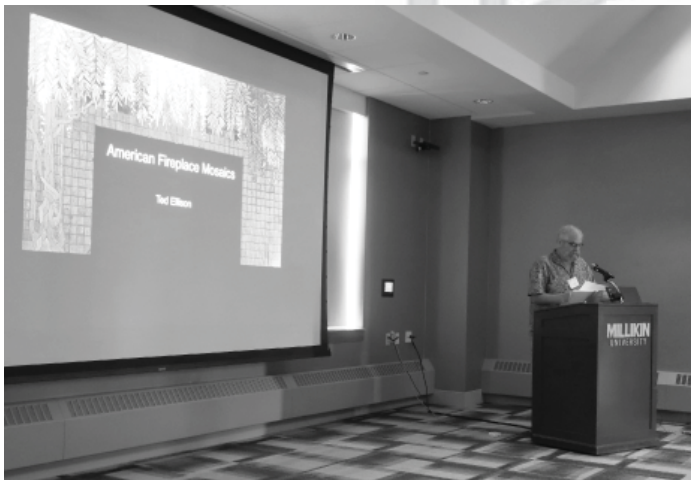
Kruty then introduced James Weirick, who returned for his fourth visit to the Griffin Society to make the case for Griffin’s lost plan for Shanghai, China, created between 1904 and 1906. As Kruty explained, “Today’s topic is a particularly intriguing one—a talk about a Griffin project, done while he worked for Frank Lloyd Wright, for which no physical material survives at all, and which

some scholars think never happened: a topic for James Weirick if ever there was one.” Recapping his previous three lectures, Weirick situated the Shanghai plan in the development of Griffin’s approach to urban design. By the end of Weirick’s discourse, by way of an amazing interplay of separate threads, we were all quite sure that the plan had been a reality.



Registration table

Richard Mohr next introduced us to an exciting presentation by Ted Ellison of Oakland, California, who has been studying the “Mosaic Fireplaces of the Prairie School.” A master at eliciting “Oohs” and “Aahs” from an attentive crowd, Ellison opened our eyes to an overlooked aspect of early modern architecture in the Midwest, particularly through the designs of Giannini and Hilgart and the architecture of George Maher.



Richard Mohr introduces Ted Ellison



Brigitte Kapp, Chris and Pat White (standing)
Lucien Kapp, James Weirick (seated)

Anthony Rubano brought us up-to-date on the success of the Society’s role in preserving Griffin’s Sloane house in Elmhurst by commissioning John Waters to prepare the National Register of Historic Places form. The Sloane house was placed on the register in 2016, which allowed Lois Jones to gift a preservation easement to Landmarks Illinois, the premiere preservation organization in the state. The house is now in the hands of a young couple and out of the clutches of a “tear-down” developer.

Anthony also introduced Mike Jackson, retired Illinois State Preservation Architect, who recounted in engaging detail the story of the restoration of the Dana house, in preparation for the groups’ private tour the next morning.



Anthony Rubano introduces Mike Jackson



Peggy Bang, Ron Duplack, Glenda Korporaal,
Vin Plant, and John Clouse

Finally, Paul Kruty prepared us for the afternoon events, which was to include not only the four principal houses on Millikin Place, but also the Millikin Homestead of 1875, which now houses an impressive basswood model of the Wood house, an unbuilt Wright design of 1917 intended for a wooded tract on Decatur's west side.

Additional offerings for the afternoon included an exhibition titled "Living in Beauty: Inside the Edward P. Irving House," held at the Kirkland Fine Arts Gallery, focusing on George Niedecken's furnishings for the Irving house, curated by Eric O'Malley of Organic Architecture & Design, Chicago; and a visit to the Hieronymus Mueller Museum, on the grounds of the Mueller Manufacturing company a few blocks from Millikin Place, for the complete history of the Mueller family.



Eric O'Malley's Irving House exhibition



Lunch!

This picture-perfect spring afternoon was all the more surprising because the previous week a thunderstorm with gale-force winds had destroyed a dozen of the most magnificent trees on Millikin Place, leaving a monumental clean-up job in its wake. Except for the giant stumps scattered about, no trace remained to mar our trek.



Mueller reception



Storm damage along Millikin Place



Outside of the Irving House



Sunday tour of the Dana-Thomas House



Peter Griffin and Mary Berry

Following our visits to the Robert Mueller, Edward Irving, William Grady, and Adolph Mueller houses, with the contrasting views afforded by the James & Anna Millikin house, now a house museum, we were treated to a generous reception as guests of Pat and Chris White and Millikin University at Adolph and Minnie Mueller's magnificent Marion Mahony house. A sumptuous ending to a memorable day.



Inside the Adolph Mueller House: Dick & Carol Betts talk with President White



Paul Kruty, Peter Kruty, and James Weirick at the Mueller museum

TURZAK HOUSE

We regret to announce that Linda Slager died in late August. With her husband, Walter, she owned Bruce Goff's Turzak house in Edison Park. Members will remember that this lovely couple hosted us through the house in 2018 at the Park Ridge meeting. We extend our condolences to Mr. Slager and hope that the Turzak house eventually finds owners as sympathetic to its preservation as were the Slagers.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The Griffin Society is happy to announce the appointment of two new board members. Joining the board at the fall meeting were Meg Kindelin, president of Johnson Lasky Kindelin Architects, Chicago; and Rachel Leibowitz, assistant professor and co-director of the Center for Cultural Landscape at the College of Environmental Science & Forestry at the State University of New York at Syracuse (SUNY-ESF). Both Meg and Rachel have extensive experience in Illinois and Midwestern preservation issues as well as comprehensive knowledge of the work of the Griffins and the Prairie School. These talented preservationists fill the places vacated several years ago by the retirement of Bob McCoy, Bill Hasbrouck and Paul Sprague from the board.



Board Meeting

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARK: UPDATE REGARDING STINSON

At the fall board meeting, Anthony Rubano reported his findings concerning the state of the National Historic Landmark (NHL) program. This is a Federal listing of a considerably higher level of significance than the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP), as important as that listing is. Members will recall that the Stinson Memorial Library was nominated for NHL status some seven years ago. The program's Midwest coordinator, Alesha Cerny, who spoke to the Griffin Society about the process in 1913 and again at the 100th anniversary celebration of the opening of the Stinson Library in 2014, worked to complete the nomination form at that time. She now explained to Anthony that the program has been in limbo for the past five years, due in the main part to a lack of filled positions in the Department of the Interior who are required, in turn, to appoint people to fill vacant positions on the adjudication committee ruling on NHL applications. (Catch 22?) That situation is apparently being remedied this year to the point that the hearing of nominations is to begin anew in the spring. Bruce Goff's Ford House, on last year's Sunday tour, is in the same limbo as the Stinson Library. We are told that the back log is quite large and may require some time before the application for the Stinson Library is heard. Stay tuned.

NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA

The Griffins' Capitol Theatre in Melbourne, "having been hidden from public gaze for five years, reopened on 3 June 2019," according to a report in the latest "News Update" from the Walter Burley Griffin Society Incorporated. Prominently located in the middle of Melbourne's main commercial district, the Capitol Theatre is one of the Griffins' most well-known buildings in Australia. As Glenda Korporaal reported in our Spring 2018 newsletter, the restoration is the result of a A\$20 million renovation (to which the Griffin Society of America made a contribution), under the direction of its present owner, the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT).

BOOKS AND FINE ART POSTERS AVAILABLE FROM THE GRIFFIN SOCIETY

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 Richard H. Berry, Tannys Langdon and Paul E. Sprague. 2017.

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.

Copies of the exquisite posters hand-printed on fine paper by Peter Kruty Editions of Brooklyn, New York, are still available for the past six meetings, including Mason City, Madison, Beverly, Edwardsville, Park Ridge, and Decatur.

To order copies of each, please see our website: 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: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone Number: _____

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