

THE GRIFFIN NEWSLETTER

PUBLISHED BY THE WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN SOCIETY OF AMERICA

Fall/Winter 2022-23
Vol. 23 no. 2
ISSN: 1542-0884

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Please email news items to the editor.

TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL MEETING

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, 3-4 JUNE 2023

EVANSTON, ILLINOIS

Mark your calendars for the next Griffin meeting, scheduled for the weekend of 3-4 June 2023 in Evanston, Illinois. Board member Tom Hagensick has secured the auditorium of the Block Museum at Northwestern University for the morning session of lectures. Details of speakers, afternoon tour sites, and supplementary events on Sunday will be forthcoming. See you there!

TWENTY-FIRST ANNUAL MEETING: AN ELMHURST EXPERIENCE

In 2022, for the first time in three years, the Griffin Society held an annual meeting. On 7 May, on a crisp, clear spring day, half a hundred intrepid Griffin archi-friends arrived in the Griffin family's home town. Doors opened at 8:00AM at the Schaible Science Hall of Elmhurst University for registration. The morning session, held in a terraced, semi-circular lecture hall, began at 9:00 and ended for lunch at noon. Following President Peter Burley Griffin's opening remarks, Michael Allen, President of the National Building Arts Center in Sauget, Illinois [web.nationalbuildingarts.org], explained the purpose of this extraordinary institution in a talk entitled, "Archive and Artifact: Building a New Institution." Located in 13 buildings on 15 acres of an old steel casing company built in 1922 and closed in 2001, the collection includes thousands of objects salvaged from an array of historic buildings, many from St. Louis but also with examples from around the country, plus an incredible archival assemblage of journals, pamphlets and ephemera. In an engrossing manner, Michael explained the challenges and accomplishments encountered in managing such an operation and future plans.

Moving from the general to the specific, Mary Brush, of Brush Architects, Chicago, recounted the preservation efforts involved in managing a sixty-year-old Bruce Goff remodeling in "A Prolonged Effort: Restoring Bruce Goff's Bachman House." In 1947 Goff was commissioned to remodel an 1889 frame house located a few blocks from the intersection of Foster and Broadway on Chicago's north side. A Chicago Landmark since the early 1990s (like Goff's other design in Chicago, the Turzak house visited by the Society in 2018), the Bachman remodeling presented an incredible challenge for preservation and restoration. Mary's engaging account of her ultimately-successful travails was further enhanced by comments from one of her fully-dedicated client/owners, present in the audience.

Following the mid-morning break we were treated to a presentation of the stunning digital recreation of Solid Rock commissioned in September 2021 by the Griffin Society from Studio GWA in Rockford, Illinois. Aaron Holverson, a partner and senior project architect, and Jason Truax, architectural designer, explained the process of "Recording Solid Rock" With paired projectors in operation, they showed us the level of detail captured by their scans, as well

as the possibilities for producing plans and sections from those scans.

The session ended with Paul Kruty telling the history of the Griffin family in Elmhurst, presenting their family home, replete with Walter's landscaping, and their church, decorated with Walter's Sullivanian stencils—both buildings gone long since—as well as a handful of Walter's earliest architectural projects for friends and neighbors. Among his most important clients was the T. E. Wilder family, whose barn and stable for their estate was located a short distance from our lecture site, a project designed by Griffin while working for Wright and constructed under the aegis of Wright's office.

Afternoon tours included the two Elmhurst houses designed by Griffin—the 1903-4 Emery house and the 1909 Sloane house—as well as Wright's 1901 Henderson house, a commission brought into Wright's office by Griffin and supervised by him. These three masterpieces had been part of our last visit to Elmhurst, in 2000 during the first Griffin Society meeting. An added treat for this return visit was "Robinwood," a house designed by the New Jersey architect Joy Wheeler Dow and built directly east of the Griffin homestead in 1908 while Walter lived across the fence. A final stop at the Elmhurst Art Museum to visit Mies Van der Rohe's McCormick house as the temporary exhibition, "Houses of Tomorrow: Solar Homes from Keck to Today," completed the eventful day.



Mary Brush Presenting



Michael Allen Presenting



Aaron Holverson and Jason Truax Presenting



Registration Desk



Lunch Time after the Morning Sessions



Photo of the Bachman House, taken in April 1975, by Paul Kruty

MILLIKIN PLACE LAMP POST

During the first week of June 2022, two lamp posts at Decatur's Millikin Place, according to Brigitta Kapp, were "maliciously and intentionally knocked down by most likely teenagers after prom night joy rides." A door cam captured the event at 4:20AM, but without enough light to record any of the vital information. Brigitta reports that Lucien, grand keeper of everything Millikin, took action immediately. He began by retrieving the old matching extra bricks that he had stored in their backyard for decades and cleaning and readying them. The restoration and reconstruction—complicated, time-consuming, and expensive—is still very much on-going as of December 2022. "The progress is frustratingly slow," Brigitta explained. "The brick work has been done quite a while ago, but the iron work is still not finished; supposedly the twisted metal of the lanterns is the hold up."

For those interested in helping, Brigitta explained she is on the board of the Millikin Place Improvement Association, at 5 Millikin Place, Decatur, IL 62522, and she can be reached at bkapp47@comcast.net. The Griffin Society has contributed \$500 toward the project.



The photo, courtesy of Brigitta Kapp, shows the vandalized fixture on the north side of Millikin Place immediately west of the Robert Mueller house on the day after the event.

SOLID ROCK: THE TRAGEDY ENDED

By Paul Kruty

During May and June, Solid Rock was gutted and razed. What follows is an account of the events leading up to that ending. At the first indication of the threat of demolition in 2020, the Griffin Society solicited a world-wide call for letters in defense of the building. Other than embarrassing a few people, this did nothing to save it under Winnetka city ordinances. Then we tried to find new buyers when the first buyer agreed to sell it rather than demolish it. Again, without success. The firm that did buy the house in February 2022 from the first developer is notorious for showing contempt for preservationists and as builders of aesthetically-challenged teardowns across Winnetka. In between, the first owner had allowed us to do a digital scan of the building and site. The firm that accomplished this made a presentation at the May meeting recounted above. The state of Solid Rock in September 2021 in every detail is now digitally preserved. The Society paid some \$6,000 to accomplish this.

Because of the attitude of the owner/demolition contractor, there was no possibility that the Griffin Society or any other public preservation group could negotiate salvaging parts of the building or even studying it during demolition. Instead, Eric Nordstrom and Tim Samuelson approached the owners ostensibly about simply salvaging elements for recycling and were allowed to take what they wanted. Yet the Griffin Society was very much involved in the whole process, although in the shadows. While it is true that Eric, with Tim, got permission to go onsite during demolition, it was Griffin board member Eleanor Grumman who was unexpectedly contacted by the developer about the Society's interest in salvaging bits. Eleanor promptly called me early on Monday morning, 16 May, with the news. I immediately called Tim, who immediately called Eric, and by noon Tim and Eric were meeting with the developer on-site. That day they began removing windows, fixtures, and casement hardware. Three days later, they were finished (Tim having actually spent a night in the empty building). We offered them the use of Eleanor's garage for temporary storage, but they decided instead to take it to Tim and Eric's own storage facilities.

There the house sat for several weeks—windowless, behind a chain-link fence, but otherwise undisturbed. On Monday, 13 June, preservation architect Chris Enck, now a Griffin board member, noticed

that big equipment had shown up. He called me in Urbana, I quickly called Tim, and soon Tim and Eric were on-site again, with Tim recording every construction detail as he could make it out from the rubble and standing walls.

From the outset, Tim has been clear that the point of the salvage and recording is to preserve the information and to disperse the saved material to appropriate institutions. We have been assured that this will not jeopardize our ability to help distribute them, including to Australia. Think of Tim and Eric as agents acting on behalf of the Griffin Society, which itself was powerless to accomplish what Tim and Eric did so magnificently.

The first fruits of the salvaging operation are in the works: Tim has arranged through Akky Van Ogrtrap and Adrienne Kabos of the Griffin Society of Australia for two of the windows to be shipped to Sydney for permanent installation in the Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences (MAAS, formerly known as the Powerhouse Museum).

CHRIS ENCK JOINS BOARD

We are pleased to announce that Chris Enck has joined the Griffin Board. With a passion for historic buildings, Chris specializes in the restoration and rehabilitation of building envelopes and materials on a wide range of existing buildings. He has spent the last 15 years working in the Chicago area and currently does consulting work with Revive Architecture in Evanston. Chris is always looking for alternatives to demolition and has been involved with building relocations, deconstructions, and material reuse projects. He has recently restored the Keck and Keck designed Fagen House in Lake Forest and is currently working on the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Kathryn and Lloyd Lewis House in Mettawa, IL.

PICKWICK THEATRE IN JEOPARDY?

On 6 December, the management of the Pickwick Theater—the site of 2018’s annual Griffin meeting—announced its decision to close the historic theater in early January, sending shock waves through the architectural and movie-going worlds. The Vlahakis family, who have owned the building and managed the theater since 1967 (and saw it listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975, its entry form written by Chicago photographer, historian, and Griffin Society member, the late Tom Yanul), stated that they simply could not afford to keep it open.

Within a few days, a myriad of interested parties offered to come to the rescue. On 11 December, the Chicago Tribune reported that “The Pickwick Theatre may have a new operator in the wings.” The Vlahakis family apparently is not planning to sell the building at this point.

MATI MALDRE PHOTOGRAPHS

Mati Maldre, one of the original Griffin board members and the mastermind behind the two meetings held in Beverly/Morgan Park (2004 and 2016), has been busy scanning his photographs. A selection of fifty of them, titled “Griffin Architecture in America and Australia,” is online at <https://www.griffinsociety.org/mati-maldre-exhibition/>. The set includes some of the best-known shots of the American work plus an equal number of lesser known views of Australian work. Sponsored by the Griffin Society of Australia, it consists of photographs taken for Mati’s book *Walter Burley Griffin in America* (University of Illinois Press, 1997), the Australian component of which was made possible by two grants to photograph the Griffins’ work in Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Canberra, and the Griffin-designed cities of Griffith and Leeton.

Mati’s new website, www.MatiMaldrePhotography.com, offers many hundreds more of his photographs, taken over many decades.



Melson House: One of Mati’s most iconic images

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Once again, please renew your Griffin Society membership for 2023. Again, we have not raised our basic dues of \$25 over the life of the organization and yet have been able to host the meetings and newsletters as well as sponsor publications and preservation projects. But we do need our members to renew to continue making these things possible. Thanks so very much.

GRIFFIN SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

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.

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.

Walter Burley Griffin and the Stinson Memorial Library: Modernism Comes to Main Street. By Paul Kruty. 2010.

Marion Mahony and Millikin Place: Creating a Prairie School Masterpiece. By Paul Kruty and Paul E. Sprague. 2007.

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.) 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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Phone Number: _____

Email Address: _____

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