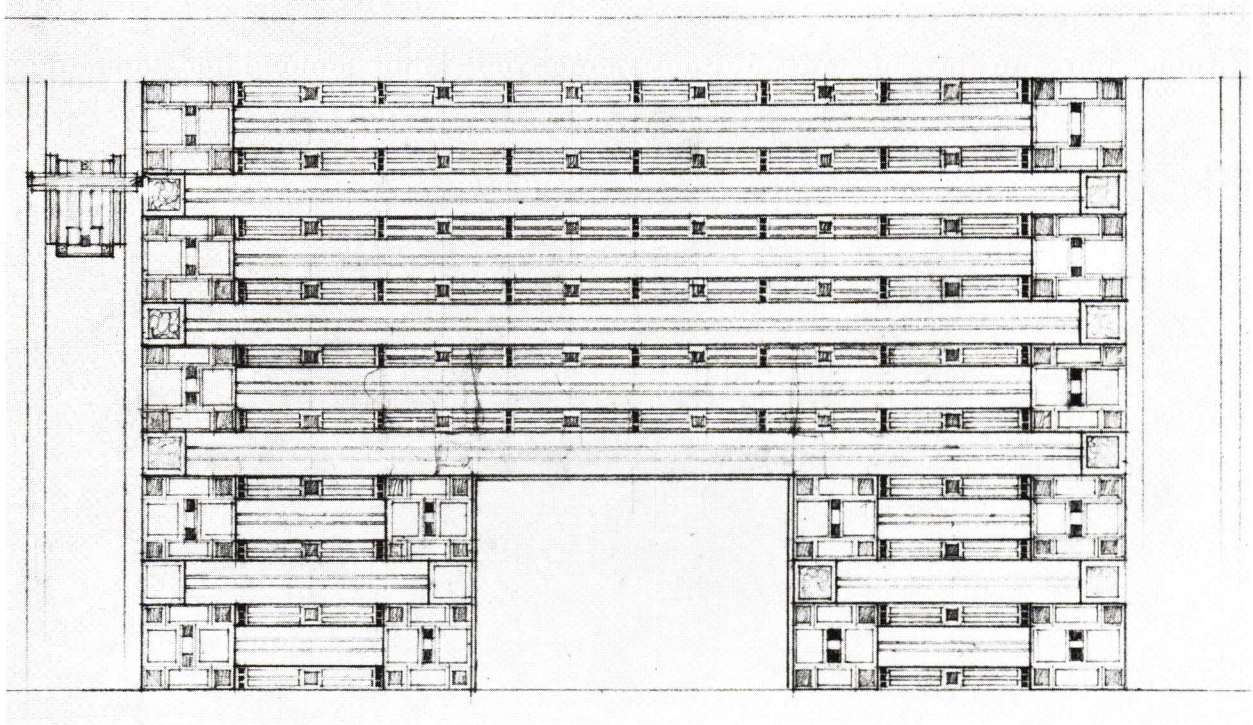


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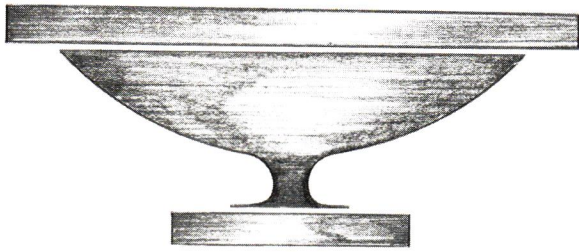
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*ABOVE: This preliminary drawing for the fireplace in the J. E. Blythe house was later redone in a much simpler design keeping the same overall proportions. See the fireplace photograph on page 31 for the executed design. Drawing Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City.*

*COVER: Walter Burley Griffin's house for J. E. Blythe as it appeared shortly after completion. Note the stone walls and the turn around provided in the public street adjacent to the house. Refinements such as these are evident throughout the Rock Glen / Rock Crest area. Photo by Kirk.*

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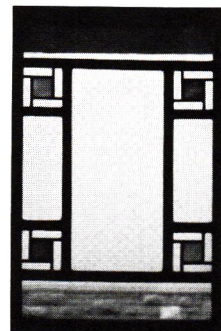
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*Rule house window design.*



## *From the EDITORS*

*The past several issues of this journal have had the editorial comments on this page directed to the problems surrounding the implementation of the Chicago Landmarks Ordinance. The progress of events in that regard have been agonizingly slow, but satisfactory so far as they go, as is sometimes the case in matters accomplished after careful deliberation.*

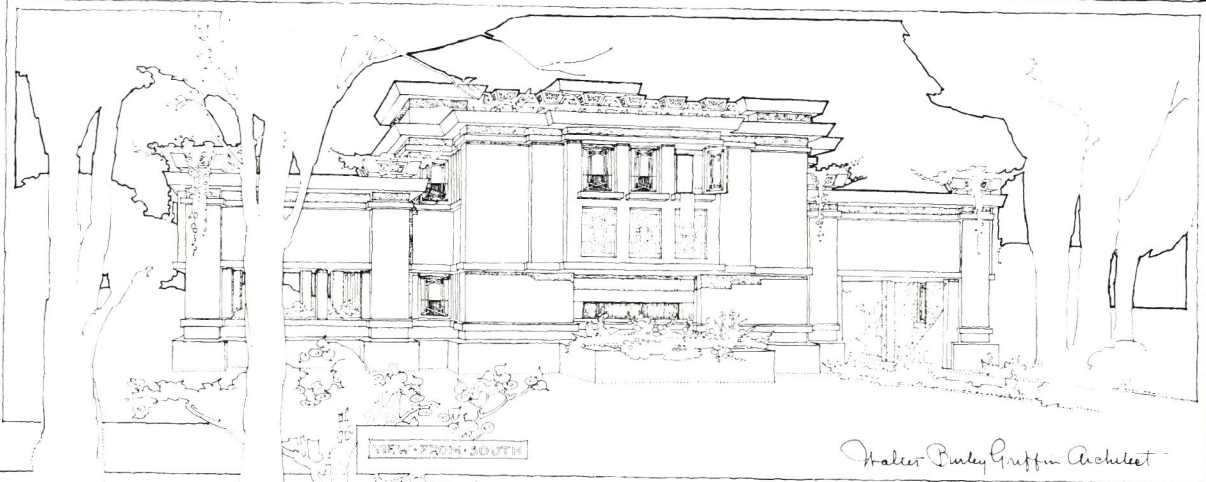
*The Ordinance has been passed and funded, and a distinguished Commission appointed. A young man, apparently well qualified, has been appointed Executive Secretary. Quarters for the Commission offices have been found in one of Chicago's city owned landmarks (the Reid, Murdoch & Co. building designed by George C. Nimmons in 1913, a fine, well preserved example of commercial architecture in the Prairie idiom). Still, we hear voices of concern, our own included, about the lack of real accomplishment other than organizational.*

*No building as yet has been declared a Chicago Landmark under the terms of the ordinance. Were one of the designs of Sullivan, Burnham & Root or other architects of the Chicago School threatened with demolition tomorrow, there would be no legal recourse to prevent its loss. Not even the most obvious structures such as the Auditorium Building, the Robie House or the J. J. Glessner house have been declared landmarks. We repeat our suggestion of last quarter that the Glessner House be used as a test case to establish a precedent for legal protection of Chicago's great works of architecture.*

*Rumors of possible developer acquisition of the Chicago Stock Exchange as well as the assembling of property surrounding the Charnley house may be more than rumors. When the announcement of demolition comes, the wreckers will follow swiftly. Before that occurs, the Landmarks Ordinance must be more than paper legislation, it and its administrators must have power. The mechanics are finished, the time to give the Commissioners power is now.*

# Rock Crest/Rock Glen Prairie Planning In Iowa

by Robert E. McCoy\*



*The author of this essay is an architectural historian by avocation. Dr. McCoy is a practicing Orthopedic surgeon who, with his wife, has a broad interest in the arts. He became particularly interested in the work of Walter Burley Griffin and his contemporaries when he and Mrs. McCoy purchased the James E. Blythe house a few years ago. Because of Dr. McCoy's interest, we are now privileged to know the events surrounding the development of a unique community of Prairie houses in Mason City, Iowa.*

In the introduction to his book, *Architecture, Ambition and Americans*, Wayne Andrews makes some statements which, on reflection, seem axiomatic. "The most vital American architecture of any given time will usually be located in those communities where the most money was being made and enjoyed."<sup>1</sup> "A certain prosperity must be assumed and no misgivings entertained as to our right to enjoy the pleasures of the world . . . (before) the architect . . . (will be led to spend) more time and energy than is reasonable, and the client . . . to invest more money than common sense would dictate."<sup>2</sup>

This sort of a flourishing economic situation existed in the prairie town of Mason City, Iowa at the time the Prairie School of Architecture reached its zenith. As if in response to the axiom postulated above, the captains of finance of that burgeoning

1 Wayne Andrews, *Architecture, Ambition, and Americans*, The Free Press of Glencoe Collier-Macmillan Limited, London, 1964, Foreward, page xvii.

2 *Ibid.*, page xv.

\*The author would like to thank a number of persons for their advice and assistance in gathering material for this article. Original owners, their decedents and present owners of all the Prairie houses in Mason City were cooperative and helpful. Others who deserve particular thanks include Sally Chappel, John S. Van Bergen, Allan Drummond, Roy Lippincott and the late Barry Byrne.

young city on the edge of the great plains turned to the group of architects they felt could best express their own and their community's sense of developing greatness. The results were two commercial buildings of lasting architectural merit and a planned community development that was unique for its period and, after a half century, remains unique as the largest group of Prairie School dwellings unified by a common site of natural beauty. The events and the personalities which went into this development are of importance both as social and architectural history.

At the close of 1851 the total population of Cerro Gordo County, Iowa was eight. At the outbreak of the Civil War there was a population of 940 people scattered throughout the county.<sup>3</sup> This in itself was not unusual and, without a doubt, there were a great number of new communities in the surrounding area experiencing a similar growth. North Central Iowa was an unusually fertile area where the prairie stretched flat and unending as far as the eye could see. In what is now the Mason City area, virgin turf was underlain by a layer of black topsoil reaching eight feet in depth. This rich

3 *Mason City Globe Gazette Centennial Edition*, June 1, 1953, section seven, p. 6.

farmland was to give solid economic support to the town named Shibboleth started in its midst. As it grew and changed its name to Masonic Grove and then to Mason City, its history was that of a pioneer agricultural community with stores, grist mills and smithies springing up to support the surrounding farm area.

Travel was very difficult over the existing primitive roads and the expense of getting agricultural goods to market was almost prohibitive. Like other towns in the surrounding area, the new community sought rail transportation both as a means of improving its rather isolated lot and to insure its growth. The early city fathers took up this struggle with great vigor. Large purchases of railroad stock by the general public and repeated increases in tax levies were resorted to as inducements to the railroads. The community efforts were gradually successful. In 1869 the coming of the first locomotive of what later became the Milwaukee system released a celebration such as the town had never seen before.<sup>4</sup> Over the next thirty years the arrival of the Rock Island, the Great Western and the Minneapolis and St. Louis railroads virtually assured the future of the community. Now other phases of the economy developed. The banks gradually expanded and profited from the founding of the first one in 1869.<sup>5</sup> The first industry was the Randall saw and grist mill founded in 1855 and rebuilt to produce eighty barrels of flour a day after it was washed out by a spring flood on the Winnebago River.<sup>6</sup> The latter revision was to allow it to compete with the flour mill built by H.G. Parker on Willow Creek in Rock Glen in 1870 with an output of eighty barrels a day. It was the dam for the Parker Mill which, years later, was to provide the pond about which Walter Burley Griffin planned his Rock Glen Development.

In 1871 a small brickyard was started that by 1882 turned out 400,000 bricks a year.<sup>7</sup> After geologic surveys revealed large deposits of blue and yellow clay to a depth of forty feet, the company was reorganized in 1884. This clay could be used for making high quality bricks. In 1892 the Mason City Brick and Tile Company was founded. Before the turn of the century the city broadened its base with the founding of an electric power generating plant, two newspapers and two breweries (whose operation was prohibited by law in 1882).<sup>8</sup> In 1899

Jacob Decker bought a small, three-year old packing plant and in two years boosted its yearly production tenfold to nearly 5,000 hogs. Geologic surveys also showed large quantities of limestone; and, with these natural resources at hand, an outside promoter organized the Northwestern States Portland Cement Company. Grossly undercapitalized, the plant was begun on the farm of banker C.H. McNider after giving him stock as payment. He took over its management in 1911 when it got into financial difficulties, and subsequently it did well under his leadership. In 1910 the Lehigh Portland Cement Company of Pennsylvania bought an adjacent farm and built a plant with a capacity of 5,000 barrels a day.<sup>9</sup>

A rapidly expanding market for brick and tile products opened when the farming community realized that their farm productivity could be greatly increased by tiling their fields to improve drainage. With this impetus and the inexhaustible deposit of blue and yellow clay to the south and west of the original town, the brickyards boomed.<sup>10</sup>

By 1912 Mason City manufactured "more brick and tile and more Portland Cement than any city of any size in the world."<sup>11</sup> It had added concerns manufacturing automobiles, gas engines, threshing machines, tinware and iron castings, and its annual freight tonnage exceeded that of any city in the state. In five years there had been no business failures.

The acceleration of the economy of the town was paced by its growth in population. The growth that distinguished it from its neighboring county hamlets had all taken place in a roughly forty-year period since 1870. In the decade from 1900 until 1910 the population increased from 6,746 to 11,230, a percentage rise of 66.5, and in the next ten-year period the population increased by 78.7% to 20,065.<sup>12</sup> This period of rapid expansion coincided with the flowering of the Prairie School of Architecture.

This was a bustling, rapidly expanding economy that was literally bursting at the seams. Local individual initiative was being richly rewarded and minimally taxed. It was a colorful era and the town seemed to be almost overpopulated with talent, striving, competing, arguing and struggling. In this little microcosm of America's industrial and westward expansion the business leaders were important and were not inclined to hide their light under a

4 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 14.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*, p. 21.

10 *Ibid.*

11 *Mason City Commercial Club*, 48 page descriptive souvenir book, August 10, 1912, p. 3.

12 *Globe Gazette*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

bushel. The houses they lived in and their business establishments reflected their individual feelings of grandeur: they were the fertile ground on which the architecture of the period had its considerable impact.

Three men, James Blythe, J.E.E. Markley and Joshua Melson, were chiefly responsible for the flourishing of Prairie School architecture in Mason City in the nine year period from 1908 until 1917. Two were law partners with broad financial interests and the third was a real estate developer, builder and self-styled architect. James E. Blythe was the pioneer of the trio. Born in Cranberry, New Jersey in 1856<sup>13</sup> he graduated from Hanover College<sup>14</sup> and came to Nora Springs, a small rural community near Mason City, where his brother was practicing medicine in June, 1877. The last of August of that year, he moved to Mason City, then a town of fifteen or sixteen hundred people where he was employed by the law firm of Goodykoontz and Wilbur. He became friends of C.H. McNider, a seventeen-year old boy who had been working two years for the eight year old Cerro Gordo County Bank as a messenger boy by day and janitor by night. They shared a room for a time,<sup>15</sup> and their friendship was to last for several years as both grew powerful in financial and political circles.

The year 1877 was a very prosperous one in North Central Iowa due to the unusually large wheat crop. When J.E. Blythe started work his employer's safe was full of papers of various kinds for collection, Goodykoontz and Wilbur being somewhat lackadaisical in their monetary zeal. Not so James Blythe. He hired a driver and team and traveled the entire county collecting thousands of dollars of accounts due. The following spring he was admitted to the bar on examination and formed a partnership with Goodykoontz.<sup>16</sup>

In 1881 Mr. Blythe married Grace Smith, an unusually well educated woman who was a talented singer and, later, a sought-after lecturer on many topics, political and intellectual. She came from a gifted family: in 1908 her brother, Judge Clifford Smith, left Mason City to become the chief reader of the Mother Church of the relatively new Church of Christ Scientist in Boston.<sup>17</sup> Mr. Blythe felt he needed a partner and in 1881 induced Mr. J.E.E.

Markley to leave his \$12.50 per month job with a law firm in Marshalltown, Iowa and join him as a partner.<sup>18</sup> In their association, Blythe was the hard-headed businessman. He saw to it that the firm's collections were made and each January he knew the current status of the accounts receivable. A good business lawyer, he received considerable work from the railroads as they pushed into the country. He, more than anyone in the firm, had the ability to sense profitable business ventures, and once started, he could be relentless in seeing a project through. Aesthetically he had a deep interest in his collection of oriental rugs and semi-precious stones and, later, in Prairie School architecture.<sup>19</sup> He became powerfully involved in Republican politics and in 1898 he sought the Republican nomination as representative to Congress. His chances looked excellent when the Republican district convention convened in August of 1898. The balloting was heated and lengthy and Blythe, who had led, lost on the 366th ballot,<sup>20</sup> at least in part due to the influence of Charles McNider.<sup>21</sup> Mr. Blythe could not easily forget McNider's role in his defeat and from then on, they were adversaries in a competition that, twelve years later, was instrumental in the building of two banks on opposite corners of the street within the same year.

J.E.E. Markley, Blythe's partner, was born at Ankeny Fawn, near Mansfield, Ohio in 1857.<sup>22</sup> His father was a banker who lost his bank in the panic of 1865. He repaid his depositors with his own money and then, instead of trying to start over, came west in a covered wagon and settled with his family in Cedar Falls, Iowa. From there young J.E.E. Markley went to Cornell College and then to the University of Iowa Law School where in 1878 he was in the first class to graduate. After his brief interlude of practice in Marshalltown he came to Mason City to join James Blythe as a partner and met and married Lilly Emsley, the daughter of a prominent family. Her father, Thomas G. Emsley, had been the founder and first president of the City National Bank. He died while his wife was still relatively young and Mrs. Emsley took over the bank and ran it as its president for many years.<sup>23</sup> Mrs. Emsley gave the city the square block obliquely across the

13 *Who's Who*, Mason City, Iowa, 1929, no pagination.

14 From a manuscript in the possession of Rob Roy Cerney, a former law partner of James Blythe.

15 Interview with General Hanford MacNider, June 18 1966.

16 Cerney, *op. cit.*

17 Interview with Mrs. Daisy Hathorn, November 5, 1965.

18 Cerney, *op. cit.*

19 Interview with Rob Roy Cerney, December, 1964. At his death he left behind a collection of thirty five Japanese prints including works by Hiroshigo, Kunisada, Yoshikagn and Zola.

20 *Globe Gazette*, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

21 Hanford MacNider, *op. cit.*

22 *Who's Who*, Mason City, Iowa, 1929.

23 Interview with Miss Doris Markley, October, 1965.

intersection from her bank to be used perpetually as Central Park.<sup>24</sup>

Mr. Markley was one of the two greatest trial lawyers Mason City had in its first half century. His practice ranged over a broad area and he tried cases over much of northern Iowa and southern Minnesota. He represented the Burlington Railroad on many cases and also handled many cases for other railroads. He was a great student of law, a gigantic bluffer and a shrewd judge of people. He had little interest in fees as long as he was trying interesting cases.<sup>25</sup> He traveled widely in his later years and collected antiques and works of art all over the world, bringing them back to his traditional, white-pillared, southern mansion. At home, Mr. Markley was an enthusiastic golfer, an ardent sailor and possessed an excellent sense of humor. On more than one trip to Tokyo he stayed at the Imperial Hotel. On one of those occasions, he told the manager he was interested in seeing the hotel because back home in Mason City, he owned a hotel by the same architect that was just like the Imperial Hotel, the only difference between the two being a few million dollars.<sup>26</sup>

Joshua Melson, born in 1865, came from Pocahontas County, Iowa to work with the local contractor and self-styled architect, E.R. Bogardus who built many of the fine residential and commercial buildings in Mason City at the turn of the century. Melson soon separated from Bogardus<sup>27</sup> and flourished in his own right. In 1898<sup>28</sup> he built the gracefully Romanesque First Congregational Church.<sup>29</sup> He remained a bachelor for many years; and in 1902, at the age of thirty-seven, he bought a National Electric car, the first electric and the third car of any description in the county.<sup>30</sup> He made a dashing figure as he drove it down the streets of Mason City, austere, somewhat distant and seemingly self-satisfied<sup>31</sup> perhaps because 1902 was a singularly successful year in his life. Having acquired a reputation as a quality builder, he was currently in the process of constructing Mason City's largest building, the Commercial Block, for a group of local entrepreneurs headed by James E. Blythe who was president of the Commercial Savings Bank that it was to house.<sup>32</sup>

24 Interview with Mrs. Daisy Hathorn, November 5, 1965.

25 Cerney, *op. cit.*

26 Markley, *op. cit.*

27 *Globe Gazette, op. cit.*, p. 18.

28 *Ibid.*

29 *Ibid.*, p. 8.

30 *Ibid.*, section 5 page 2.

31 Interview with Mrs. Curtis Yelland, June, 1965.

32 *Globe Gazette, op. cit.*, section seven, p. 22. The other

At a cost of \$117,000 they intended their five-story building to "stand as the largest office building in their generation, a fitting moment to their memories."<sup>33</sup> Their plans initially called for its construction of reinforced concrete, but unfortunately, just as their project was to start, a seven-story building of that material collapsed in Los Angeles and they reverted to the use of wood. They had cause to regret this choice of materials in 1927 when the building was destroyed by fire.<sup>34</sup>

Joshua Melson's life changed after he met and married a widow four years his senior. She had been a popular school teacher after her husband was killed and was a universally liked, refined lady whose great personal warmth made up for Mr. Melson's reserve. It was apparently an ideal marriage although they had no children. Their first house in another section of town was not particularly prepossessing. Mr. Melson then bought the tract of land on the south and east side of Willow Creek from Mrs. A.T. Parker, the owner of the Parker mill, intending to develop it.<sup>35</sup> He had a reputation for honesty that made his word as good as a contract.<sup>36</sup> He was an architect by reputation if not by training, and people would bring the picture of a house in a magazine and he would draw the plans.<sup>37</sup> He intended to put this reputation to good use in 1908 when he first advertised his subdivision in the *Mason City Globe-Gazette*.

A 22-acre tract bounded on the north by State Street, on the South by Parker Street, on the East by Cottage Avenue and overlooking Willow Creek from the East, will be developed by its owner, J.G. Melson. This is only 10 minutes' walk from the post office. The foundation is now in for the first of ten houses — a beautiful \$3,000 (house) is soon to be ready . . . (Melson) will sketch plans for a house designed as you desire, build it for you and dispose of it to you, as above stated, or sell the lot to you . . . A beautiful drive through the entire tract will be laid out and maintained.<sup>38</sup>

builders were John Willson (the father of Meredith Willson of *Music Man* fame); George Winter, cashier of the Commercial Savings Bank; State Senator A. H. Gale, cashier of the City National Bank and Arthur Rule's brother-in-law; and T. R. Glanville, a local department store owner.

33 *Ibid.*

34 *Ibid.*

35 Daisy Hathorn, *op. cit.*

36 Interview with Mrs. A. A. Adams, June 14, 1966.

37 Yelland, *op. cit.*

38 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, April 15, 1908.



The first house he built probably did not sell immediately for he moved into a cottage style house at 351 Park Drive in his subdivision in 1909.<sup>39</sup> In an effort to promote his development more effectively, he held a well-publicized auction on June 30, 1908. J.E.E. Markley introduced the auctioneer and announced that a park reserve would be withheld along the creek and would be submitted to the voters for purchase as a city park. Unfortunately, lack of bidding limited the sale to only two lots.<sup>40</sup>

At the time Mr. Melson was platting the first restricted residential area in Mason City<sup>41</sup>, other forces were stirring in the commercial area. In January of 1908, the City National Bank announced it was considering abandonment of its plans for remodeling in favor of building on the lot it had recently acquired across the street.<sup>42</sup> On the 31st of the same month, Charles McNider, by then President of the First National Bank, rapidly becoming one of the largest in the state, announced the purchase of twenty-two more feet of frontage on Main Street with the intention of building a new bank building.<sup>43</sup> McNider in 1911 would assume control of the cement plant<sup>44</sup> which produced its first clinker the day of their bank building announcement.<sup>45</sup> His vice-president, O.T. Denison, as president of the Mason City Brick and Tile Company, would absorb the other eight brick and tile manufacturers in the city by 1913.<sup>46</sup> The competitive thrust of these men could not be underestimated.

The directors of the City National Bank may have decided to compete in quality rather than in quantity with their competitor across the street. At any rate, the credit for their selection of Frank Lloyd Wright goes to one of their directors, J.E.E. Markley.<sup>47</sup> Markley's wealthy mother-in-law, once president of the City National Bank, was a Unitarian and

39 *City Directory*, Mason City, 1909. The current address of this house is 339 South Maryland Avenue.

40 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, June 30, 1908.

41 *Mason City Globe Gazette Centennial Edition*, June 1, 1953, section five, page 8.

42 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, January 14, 1908.

43 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, January 31, 1908.

44 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, Centennial Edition, June 1, 1953, section seven, p. 21.

45 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, January 31, 1908.

46 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, Centennial Edition, June 1, 1953, section seven, p. 21.

47 Markley was blessed with fellow directors who could be expected to be sympathetic to his suggestion of Wright: Mrs. Emsley, his mother-in-law and former president of the bank was an ardent admirer of Wright's uncle, Jenkin Lloyd Jones. James E. Blythe, his senior law partner, was to be the main bulwark of the domestic development of the Prairie School in

very deeply impressed with the thinking of a Unitarian preacher, Mr. Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who frequently came through the area in the spring of the year on a lecture circuit. He was also the editor of a Unitarian paper which Mrs. Emsley endorsed wholeheartedly. During a fund campaign for a new YWCA building, she offered to donate \$1,000, quite a sum at the time, if it could be agreed in advance that Jenkin Lloyd Jones' journal would always be placed in a prominent place in its public rooms: her proposal was turned down.<sup>48</sup>

When J.E.E. Markley married Mrs. Emsley's daughter, Lilly, they were anxious to have their two daughters, Marian and Doris, educated by someone sympathetic to their views. In 1902 the Markley's eldest daughter, Marian, entered the Hillside Home School at Hillside, Wisconsin, operated by the Misses Jane and Ellen C. Lloyd Jones, sisters of Jenkin Lloyd Jones, and of Anna Lloyd Jones Wright, the mother of Frank Lloyd Wright.<sup>49</sup>

Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural activities began in that environment when he designed the Romeo and Juliet Mill and his first house, a somewhat conventional Queen Anne style home for the Misses Lloyd Jones at Hillside in 1886<sup>50</sup> and 1887<sup>51</sup>, respectively. His much more monumental and revolutionary stone structure for the Hillside Home School was designed in 1902 and probably executed shortly after that.<sup>52</sup> It must certainly have been a dominating feature of that rolling Wisconsin countryside when the Markley's brought first their daughter Marian and then their daughter Doris to the Hillside Home School. No doubt on one of those visits, Mr. Markley made the connection leading to Wright's selection when the City National Bank decided to build new quarters<sup>53</sup>.

Mason City. Senator Gale was the uncle of Blythe and Markley's law partner, Arthur Rule who later bought the first house Griffin did for Blythe. J. E. Moore lived in "Stonyacre" the mansion which eventually became Markley's home in Rock Glen. Perhaps a chief reason for the success of the Prairie School development in Mason City was that it could be "kept in the family."

48 Interview with Mr. Ralph Lloyd Jones, June 19, 1965. (Mr. Ralph Lloyd Jones lives on Rock Crest and attended the Hillside Home School with Marion Markley. He is a first cousin of Frank Lloyd Wright.)

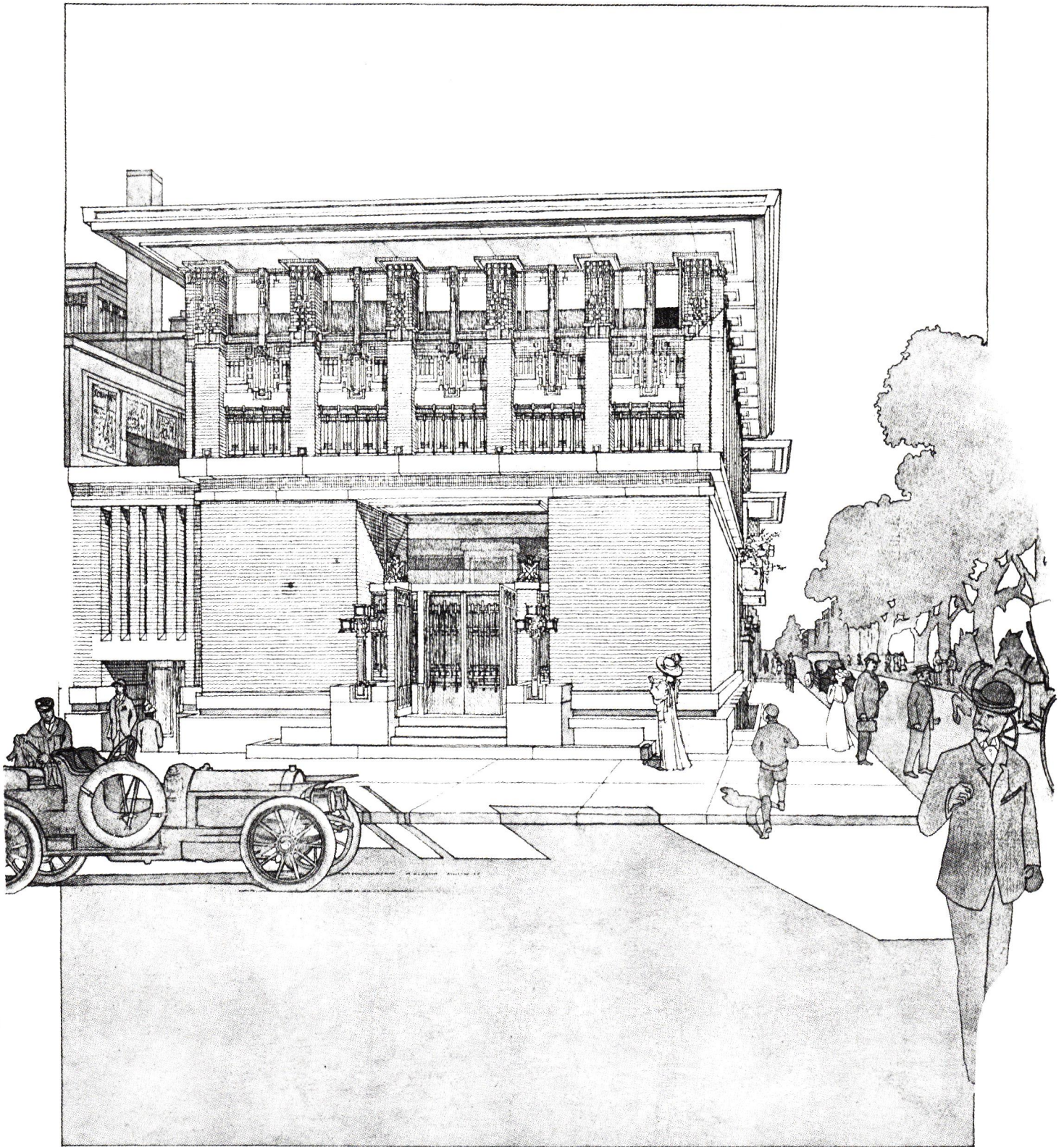
49 *Ibid.*

50 Edgar Kaufmann and Ben Raeburn, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Writings and Buildings*, Meridian Books, The World Publishing Company, Cleveland and New York, 1964, p. 339.

51 Henry Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials*, Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1942, p. 107.

52 *Ibid.*, p. 112.

53 The decision of the City National Bank to build a new bank building was announced in the October 28, 1908 issue of the *Mason City Globe Gazette*.



*This drawing of the City National Bank Building and Hotel appeared in the Wasmuth Portfolio of drawings by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1910. Wright was in Europe preparing this and other drawings for publication at the time of completion of this particular structure.*



*The City National Bank as it appeared in 1912. The connecting Park Inn is in the right background.*

The December 10 issue of the *Mason City Times-Herald* indicated that Blythe and Markley had decided to build a business block in the lot they owned immediately west of the City National Bank site, facing the City Park, but no mention of the architect was made. Apparently Wright was already at work on the plans, however, because on January 22, 1909 a description was published for the buildings eventually built.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately for the First National Bank, its directors had to defer their plans by one year when a tenant refused to vacate his lease.<sup>55</sup>

It is assumed that the construction of the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel buildings did get underway about April 1, 1909, as planned. Wright made frequent visits to town to supervise the construction, but his visits caused little public notice. Before he left for Europe Wright and Markley argued about advance payment of some fees but Markley probably won out.<sup>56</sup> When he abruptly left his practice and went to Europe with Mrs. Cheney in late October, 1909, the *Mason City Globe-Gazette* gave no notice of the event. The *Mason City Times-Herald* article however carried four headlines about "The Eloping Architect" and concluded by printing the *Chicago Tribune* article of the preceding day.

54 *Mason City Times Herald*, January 22, 1909.

55 *Mason City Times Herald*, February 4, 1909.

56 Interview with Hugh Shepard, May, 1965.

Clearly Wright's work was finished in Mason City. No local press mention is made of Wright's successor in the continuing supervision of the bank-hotel project; but John Van Bergen,<sup>57</sup> who assisted with the drawings of the bank-hotel, recalls William Drummond as the chief draughtsman and the man who most likely continued the supervision of the construction after Wright's departure to Europe.<sup>58</sup>

On August 29, 1910, Blythe, Markley, Rule and Smith were in their new law offices<sup>59</sup>, and the opening of the Park Inn, as the hotel was now called, twelve days later was truly a gala occasion.<sup>60</sup> The Park Inn symbolized the arrival of culture and tasteful opulence to this exploding Prairie town. The knowledgeable citizens who were aware of architectural trends, and there were more than a few, could take satisfaction that their city was developing along lines equal to the most sophisticated in the world. When the bank building was

57 Telephone interview with John S. Van Bergen, November 5, 1966.

58 Peisch probably bases his statement (*The Chicago School of Architecture*, p. 96) that Wright had to leave the completion of the Mason City project to the supervision of von Holst and Mahoney, on his apparently erroneous assumption that the working drawings of the hotel were not complete when Wright left the country. However, Mahoney, no doubt, was familiar with the project. It is probably because she did assume responsibility for the unfinished and unstarted designing of Wright's commissions that she was ultimately sought out by Melson for his home.

59 *Mason City Times Herald*, August 29, 1910, p. 3.

60 *Mason City Globe Gazette*, September 10, 1910, p. 4.



Today the City National Bank has been remodeled into shops as shown in the top photo. The Park Inn remains essentially as built as can be seen in the lower photograph. The signs are of recent vintage.

occupied on November 5, 1910, they published its description as written by Wright.

The building for the City National Bank of Mason City was designed with the idea that a bank building is itself a strong box on a large scale; a well-aired and lighted fire-proof vault. The problem was complicated by the commercial consideration of offices overhead for rent . . .

The bank room itself was moved aside from the party line to insure light and air on all sides; the ground space thus left was utilized for office quarters. By this means a continuous border of windows was carried around the high banking room at the ceiling, affording light with perfect

distribution as well as good ventilation. These windows form a frieze of light within the bank room; they combine with the office windows in the frieze which the whole superstructure becomes, outside; then the walls of the bank, sixteen feet above the sidewalk, are a solid mass unbroken by openings save the entrance. The entrance and upper windows are guarded by heavy bronze castings so that the bank, itself, is a strong box splendidly lighted and ventilated.<sup>61</sup>

Blythe and Markley's City National Bank Building was finished at a cost of \$65,000 and the Park Inn at a cost of \$90,000. A few months after the turn of the year, McNider and Denison's First National Bank moved into its new eight-story quarters which were expected to cost \$200,000.<sup>62</sup>

During 1907 and 1908, Wright had been a frequent guest at the Markley Home, a stately, white-pillared mansion built twenty or thirty feet from the edge of one of the cliffs bordering Rock Glen on the north.<sup>63</sup> Wright certainly was aware of the Glen as a place of natural beauty. On one of his visits, he designed a stone wall at the back of Markley's immediate yard.<sup>64</sup> The stones extended upward from the rugged cliff as a natural continuation to divide the high area next to the house from the formal gardens between the base of the cliff and the creek a few feet below. A second wall used concrete spindles, balustrades, and a "stone" lantern to separate the formal gardens from the creek. Wright expressed the idea that their carriage house, perched on the edge of the cliff, was in a better location than the house with respect to the natural surroundings.<sup>65</sup> However, when he designed a house for Joshua Melson's lot which extended from the street on the opposite side of the creek back to the cliff, he set the house facing the creek well back from the edge of the cliff. In the Wasmuth Portfolio, the house designed for Melson is in its Rock Glen setting facing the creek, though erroneously designated as the Isabel Roberts House. It was identical in plan to the Isabel Roberts House built in River Forest in about 1907.<sup>66</sup> It had a two-story living room with diamond-shaped leaded windows rising the two stories of its front elevation and an interior second story balcony at the back of the living room as in his first *Ladies Home Journal* House. The

61 *Mason City Times Herald*, November 5, 1910, p. 5.

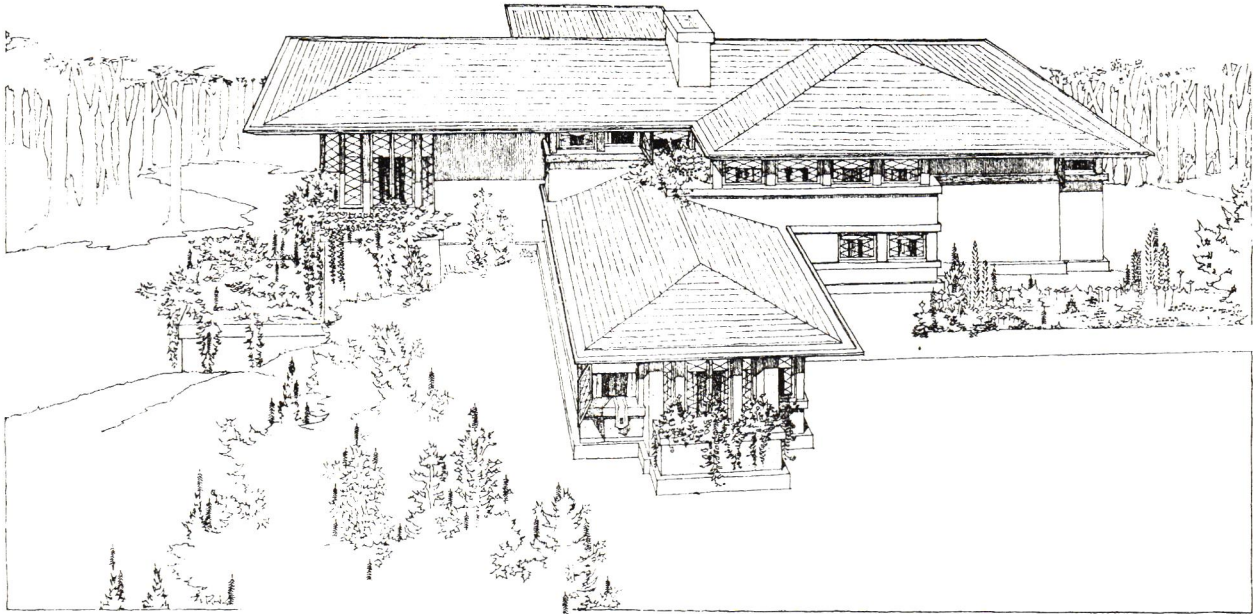
62 *Mason City Times Herald*, January 3, 1911, p. 1.

63 Interview with Doris Markley, October, 1965.

64 Interview with Harold Bianco, September 29, 1965.

65 Doris Markely, *op. cit.*

66 Henry Russell Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials*, Duell Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1942, p. 44.



*This drawing from the Wasmuth portfolio is identified as the Isabel Roberts house of River Forest, Illinois. Actually, it is the first house designed by Wright for Joshua Melson in Mason City, Iowa.*

exterior was plaster. It is not known why the home was never built for Melson. Perhaps, as Marion Mahoney says, Wright did not integrate its design sufficiently with the cliff setting.<sup>67</sup>

Only one Wright house was actually built in Mason City. It was done for another neighbor of Markley, Dr. G.C. Stockman, who commissioned one of Wright's small plans containing all the essential Prairie School floor plan features. The Stockman house, except for minor ornamentation

<sup>67</sup> Marion Mahoney, *The Magic of America* typewritten manuscript in the Burnham Library of the Chicago Art Institute, section 13, p. 114.

*The house below was built from plans by Frank Lloyd Wright for Dr. G. C. Stockman. Well preserved, the house still stands within a block of the Rock Glen community. A PSP photo.*

and its entry and sunroom, is similar to the Stephen M.B. Hunt house in LaGrange, Illinois, built in 1907.<sup>68</sup> The floor plan of the two houses is shared by Wright's project, "a fireproof house for \$5,000," for the Curtis Publishing Company in 1906<sup>69</sup> and by several other small Wright houses. The Stockman floor plan was inverted end for end from the latter. Though similar, its exterior trim is a tasteful improvement over that of the Hunt House.

The two completed houses above resemble and invite comparison with the front elevations of the

<sup>68</sup> Hitchcock, *In the Nature of Materials*, illustration 130.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, illustrations 128 and 129.



Robert W. Evans House, and the Ward W. Willitts house.<sup>70</sup> In comparing the three houses one sees a drastic diminution of scale take place from the massive but pleasing scale of the Willitts house, the "first masterpiece among the Prairie Houses"<sup>71</sup> to the modest scale, still pleasing, of the Stockman house. The ribbon window treatment with the overhanging hip roof remain. As the scale shrinks the floor plan changes from a huge cruciform outline through the L-shaped plan of the Evans house to the square plan of the Stockman or Hunt houses, the essentially square outline being broken only by the appended entry-way and solarium. The living and dining rooms are confluent, separated only by a massive roman brick fireplace in the prairie idiom, and both communicate with the solarium. The kitchen is, typically, the only room separated by walls from the rest of the downstairs. The house was always a source of deep personal pride to Dr. Stockman and still retains its original character, unaltered.

After Wright's exodus in October, 1909, a quite beautiful small prairie house was built. It was probably designed by William Drummond while

70 *Ibid.*, illustrations 144-146 and 73-76.

71 *Ibid.*, illustration, p. 73.

*The Curtis Yelland house shown here was probably designed by William Drummond. Details from the interior of the Yelland house are shown on page 15.*

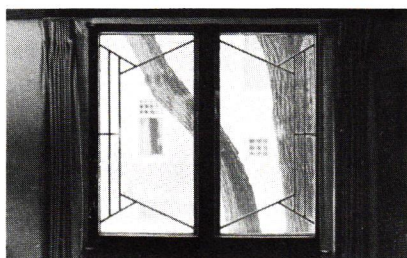
supervising the completion of the bank and hotel.<sup>72</sup> First occupied in 1911,<sup>73</sup> it was the first Prairie School house built in Joshua Melon's tract. It was build for Curtis Yelland then a postal clerk who, being young and inexperienced in architectural matters, probably selected his architect on the advice of Joshua Melson from whom he bought his lot in 1909.<sup>74</sup> The style of its horizontal board and batten exterior with the battens grouped in pairs is typical of the style of Drummond. The trim includes rectangular bands framing and accentuating the upper story windows and emphasizing the transition from board and batten to plaster just below the second story windows. The hip roofs, house and front porch, have a wide overhang and the balcony

72 Though there is no written record of its actual designer, it was undoubtedly done by one of those supervising the construction of the bank and hotel. It is definitely established by letters from Allan Drummond, William's son, and John Van Bergen that the supervision of the bank and hotel was done by Drummond who was also the chief draughtsman on the project. He also assisted on the design of the Isabel Roberts house (*The Prairie School Review*, Vol. I, #2) which was originally projected for Melson.

73 City Directory, Mason City, 1911.

74 The property abstract shows a \$2,500 mortgage on his property by Curtis Yelland in 1911, presumably to pay off the cost of construction of his house. The abstract shows that he first bought the lot from Melson in 1909.

*Yelland house leaded windows.*



on the rear is the same as on Drummond's own house.<sup>75</sup> The only leaded windows in the Mason City development are in this house.

Within, the usual square floor plan of the small Prairie house is observed with an entry at grade level on the west side. This leads either up a few stairs to the living room or through a short hall to the back door and up into the kitchen as in the Stockman house. A screened front porch extends across the entire front of the house. The living room is a very pleasing exercise in symmetry. Looking onto the front porch is a ribbon of five windows with a cushioned window bench beneath. This is flanked on either end by rather long rectangular radiator enclosures which project their long axis into the room. Symmetrically placed doors to the porch are at the far side of these. Centered along the opposite wall, the simple roman brick fireplace is flanked by a door to the dining room on the left and one to the entrance on the right. At the extreme ends of this wall are glassed bookcases built into an aperture screened above by vertical square wooden spindles. These glass doors have wood muntins in a triangular design like Griffin's fenestrations. The dining room has china cabinets of similar construction but using a different design.

75 Letter from Allan M. Drummond, William Drummond's son, December 3, 1966.



For some time in advance of his departure, Wright must have tried to make a financial arrangement with one of his associates whereby he and they could share in the proceeds of his unfinished projects. He approached Barry Byrne who was just getting started in Seattle with Willatzen, but Byrne did not feel it was a good opportunity.<sup>76</sup> Wright may have made similar offers to others of his associates such as Marion Mahoney, who Manson felt would have been the logical choice.<sup>77</sup> Since she had never practiced independently to any substantial degree, that kind of responsibility may not have been her wish. Design and not practical consideration was where her genius lay.<sup>78</sup> She had worked in both von Holst's and Wright's offices. Van Holst ultimately assumed Wright's practice and put Marion Mahoney in charge of the Prairie School phase of his operation. When Mahoney and von Holst then utilized Walter Burley Griffin as landscape architect, she began a collaboration which would have far-reaching consequences for herself and Mason City. Their acquaintance began in the days when they both were at the Oak Park studio of Frank Lloyd Wright. At that time she had been Wright's chief designer and Griffin had been the man in the office to whom Wright most often turned for criticism and advice.<sup>79</sup> Griffin and Mahoney's friendship ripened to love during a summer which found them spending every available week end canoeing the nearby rivers of Illinois. During this period she fancifully began referring to him as her Socrates and to herself as his

76 Interview with Barry Byrne, September 6, 1965.

77 Manson, Grant C., *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910, The First Golden Age*, New York, Rheinhold, p. 212.

78 Barry Byrne, September 6, 1965.

79 Interview with Barry Byrne, January 22, 1966.



Xantippe.<sup>80</sup> On June 29, 1911 Marion Mahoney and Walter Burley Griffin were married.

Either shortly before or shortly after her marriage she introduced Griffin to Joshua Melson and James Blythe. She was already well-enough known to Melson that he came to her in Chicago with his problem and, apparently, they always held a warm affection for each other.<sup>81</sup> In her manuscript *The Magic of America*, she describes the encounter that produced the contract:

He was known as Don Melancholio. He got sketches for his home from one architect after another, including FLW<sup>82</sup> but nothing satisfied him though one at least was charming enough as plans go. But still he wandered on.

At about this time, I had settled myself in the office of WBG. One day the Don came and asked me if I would make him sketches for his house. I begged off saying Mr. Griffin's office was pressed with work and I felt in fairness to him I couldn't take time off for other work. Then he revealed his problem. He and Mr. Blythe of Mason City had bought 18 acres on the banks of the river in their home town and would I make a prospective drawing of it.

The spark caught and I said I thought I could do that but if it was a landscape scheme he ought to talk with Mr. Griffin about it, and I showed him some of Griffin's houses, etc. He had a talk, had Griffin go down to Mason City for a day at the end of which the two gentlemen signed away their so-called liberties in a contract which bound each of them to do nothing on the property without Mr. Griffin's approval.

80 Marian Mahoney, *op. cit.*

81 Interview with Barry Byrne, January 22, 1966.

82 From Mahoney's statement, corroborated by Hitchcock, Wright had designed a house for Melson. To what extent Wright had envisioned a naturally unified Rock Glen project is not known though Mahoney's statement here seems to discount this. Peisch says: "... it created an unalterable breach between the Griffins and Frank Lloyd Wright who seems to have taken offense at not having received this commission. Whether Wright meant to leave the Mason City project for a better time we do not know. It is possible that after planning the bank and hotel for Messrs. Markley and Blythe, he received his first word about Rock Glen, and considered that an informal contract existed between himself and his clients. This is what Griffin's later partner and friend, Barry Byrne, had to say: 'If he had not gone abroad for a year at that time, we may assume he would have carried out the work at Rock Glen. He certainly thought so, and in those days was bitter in his remarks about Walter and Marian doing the work.'" Peisch, Mark L., *The Chicago School of Architecture*, New York, Random House, p. 98-99.

The two men had bought this property because they thought it a lovely spot for a home. The rest of the river frontage had been ruined. Below was a miserable factory, above a rubbish dump. The banker and the businessman then put off and put off building, each mistrusting what the other might do. To such impasses does this fetish of personal liberty, misplaced liberty, lead us in our chaotically conceived social system . . . The Town Planner would be an impartial arbitrator whose only personal interest would be to maintain the high standard of the whole property.

And Mr. Griffin came home with the job of designing the home of Mr. Melson, our Don, in his pocket. The other architects had handled the house simply from the architect's point of view, locating at the normal building line distance from the street frontage, but Griffin as soon as the house was mentioned, inspected the property to select a particular lot and advised an abandoned quarry site on the river bank and drew a picture in Mr. Melson's mind of a house perched at the extreme back of the lot on top of the quarry precipice, continuing and giving finish to the quarry face and commanding views up and down the river. Melancholy flew out and an enduring enthusiasm filled its place in our Don. Only once did it seem for a moment to have returned, when the old "sad face" appeared in the office saying he was going to have to charge up his electric light bills to Mr. Griffin for — and then the smile wrinkles began — everyone, and that was the whole town, who crossed the bridge which connected "downtown" with the residence district — whether pedestrian or motorist, stopped to look up the river at the fascinating sight of Rock Crest's initial building — a castle indeed for it was a unity with the whole precipice — completely reflected in the smooth waters above the old dam; and he couldn't resist the temptation of keeping his whole house lighted up to make the most of a spectacle of it.

A location was also selected for Mr. Blythe's house — on the opposite bank — a gentle wooded slope, charming and gracious, extending from the house to the river, a complete contrast to Mr. Melson's site.

Operation had scarcely begun when the town approached the owners to buy the property for a park but they realized they should have done this long before and rather than interfere with the men of vision in whose hands the whole would be better safeguarded than in the hands of the officials, instead of using their right of eminent



domain, they would perhaps take on the restitution of other parts of the river frontage, perhaps converting the dump into a park. They agreed to accept Griffin's suggestion to dump their rubbish — not garbage, of course, which should be burned in incinerators as it is done in Australia — along and under the bridges approaches to the river thus with stone facing building up another precipice and enclosing the property making advantageous building sites for three houses on this street frontage.<sup>83</sup>

When he came to Mason City to make the contract for Rock Glen Griffin's star was rapidly rising while Wright's was in relative eclipse, at least in this country. It was as the young champion of the Prairie School movement and indeed of American versus foreign design, that he concluded his agreement here. His visit was described in the July 20, 1912 *Mason City Times* as follows:

W.B. Griffin, the architect who recently sprang into international prominence in the building world, by reason of his plans and specifications for a new capital for the Australian commonwealth to be located near Sydney, N.S.W., is a business visitor in Mason City today. Griffin, who has offices in Chicago has designed several residences for Mason City persons and is here now submitting plans to J. G. Melson and Harry Page for new houses which they are about to build on the east side.

When the discussion concluded, J.E.E. Markley, James E. Blythe, J.G. Melson and W.J. Holahan entered into a written agreement to preserve and improve the natural beauty of their lands and the stream flowing between them.

In their agreement they stipulated that this land should in the future be used only for residence purposes and for gardens, shrubbery, grass plants and garden accessories. They stated that the ground should be laid out so that all the houses and buildings subsequently built there should face the stream, and that no buildings of any kind should be placed between the houses and the stream except for ornamental structures. Mr. Markley agreed to remove the building at the south end of the present Rock Glen Street and make that yard blend with the rest of the property. He and James Blythe were then going to lay out the portion of land they owned in common substantially in accordance with the plans and recommendations of Griffin, except that they planned to omit the waterfall at State Street and the reservoir of water on the bluffs above the mill. Mr.

Melson agreed to tear down the Parker Mill and deed its land to Markley and Blythe except for enough land immediately around the west end of the dam to build a power house as planned by Griffin.<sup>84</sup> On June 2nd of the following year, they re-executed essentially the same agreement, this time including their wives and future descendants.

The vision which had caught their fancy was Griffin's description of their little valley and probably subsequently Marion Mahoney's rendering of the entire Rock Glen project on satin, a drawing which, poorly reproduced, appeared in the August, 1913, *Western Architect*, and now is a part of the collection of the Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago.

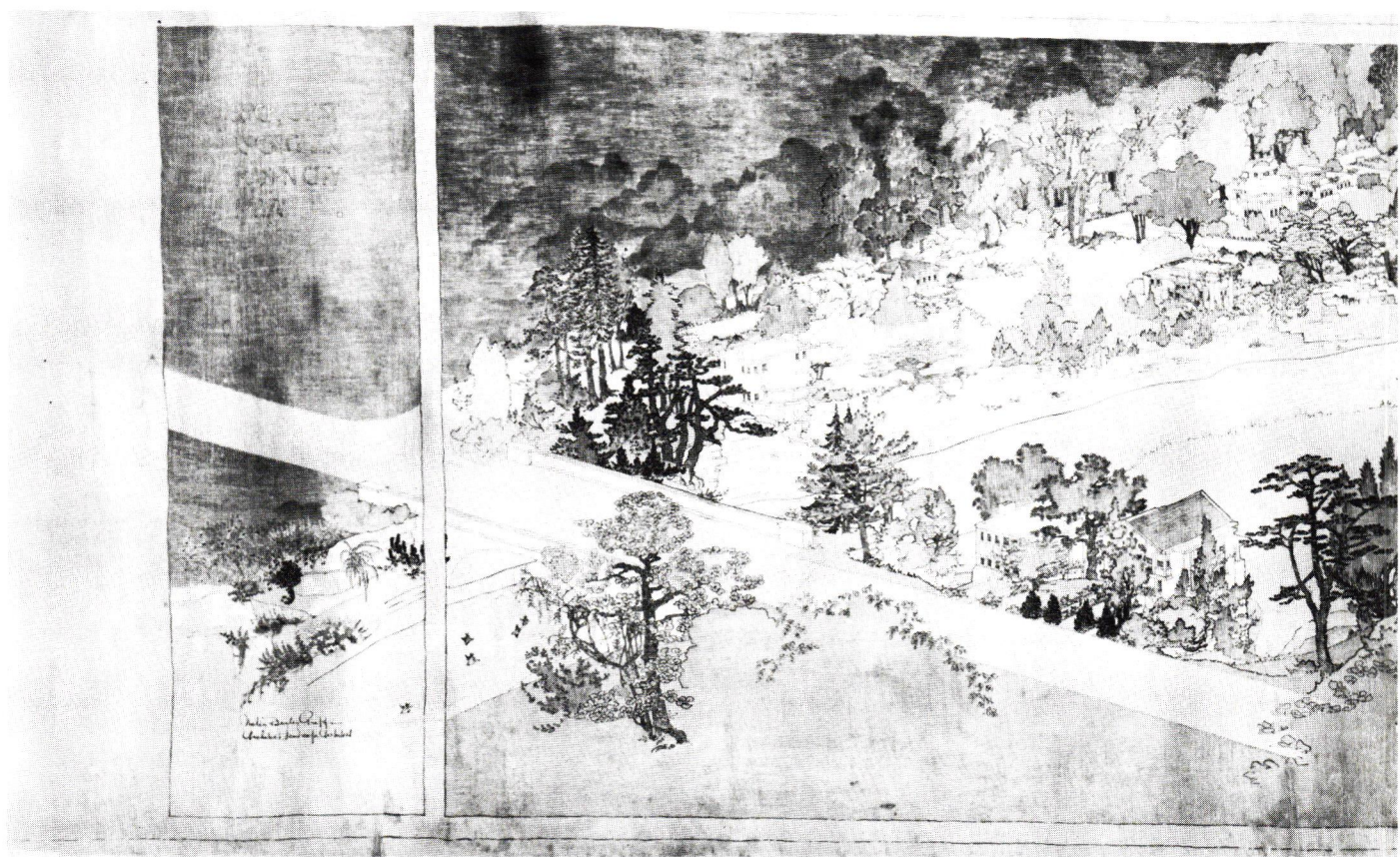
After the frustration of the Ridge Quadrangle and the Grinnel subdivision and many unexecuted neighborhood plans, Griffin and Marion Mahoney may have felt a sense of triumph when the businessmen of Mason City "signed away their rights." The satisfaction was by no means onesided, however, and these businessmen, once they had a concrete project for their own sense of creativity, became visionaries who were no less passionate than the architect in seeing their project carried out. The townspeople were unaware of the origin of their ideas on property restitution and attributed the ideas to them: Melson is remembered as having had very particular ideas of how the Glen land should be used and was "very sticky" about seeing that his ideas were enforced. Actually this inclination to plot a naturally beautiful subdivision was Melson's before he met Griffin, who gave the ideas form. He introduced the idea of restricted neighborhood planning to Mason City, and James Blythe enforced it with his legal background.

Under Blythe's influence the north side of the creek developed more rapidly than the south side. The first house on Blythe's side was built for Harry Page on land purchased from Blythe. Page's role in the overall undertaking is not clearly understood, but it was certainly more than the passive role of one led to his interest by James Blythe or by his very close friendship with Arthur Rule.<sup>85</sup> He came to his interest in the Prairie School by a different route than the other men, having made contact with Purcell and Elmslie as early or earlier than the others had contacted Mahoney and Griffin. His interest was active enough for Purcell to believe "Page was the promotor of the Mason City subdivision carried out so beautifully by Walter Burley

83 Marian Mahoney, *op. cit.* number 13, p. 1, *et. seq.*

84 Agreement between Melson, Markley, Blythe and Holahan dated July 30, 1912.

85 Letter from Edith Carrington Rule, September 7, 1965. Harry Page was Arthur Rule's best friend.



*Much of what we know of Walter Burley Griffin's work is through the drawings done by his wife, Marion Mahoney Griffin. Before joining Griffin, in his practice and later in marriage, Marion Mahoney spent about twelve years in the Oak Park studio of Frank Lloyd Wright. Many of the Wright renderings for the period 1898-1910 were done by her although her monogram signature seldom appears on Wright's work as it does in the lower right hand corner of this drawing of the Rock Crest, Rock Glen Community in Mason City, Iowa.*

*This rendering, executed on silk in colored inks, shows most of the houses actually built in the Mason City, as well as a number which never got off the drawing board. Locations of the various structures which were built is not always accurate but in general, one can get an excellent idea of the overall community plan from this drawing. The street in the foreground is State street and the view is from the northwest. The James E. Blythe house is illustrated at the right center. The original of this illustration is now in the collection of the Burnham Library of the Art Institute of Chicago and we publish this photograph through their courtesy.*





*The east elevation of the Page house as it is seen from the creek. The wide central window was originally two windows identical to those on the sides.*

*The Page house as seen from the street or west side. The garage was added after the house was completed. It was not part of Griffin's original design.*



Griffin.”<sup>86</sup> Purcell’s elevational rendering of a single story house for Harry D. Page is in existence dated April 18, 1912.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps Page was simultaneously considering other plans by Griffin and was finally one of the factors in the decision of the developers to turn to Griffin for a unified plan. He, with Melson, was one of the two men to whom Griffin submitted plans on July 20, 1912,<sup>88</sup> and he accepted Griffin’s plans in time to have his house completed yet that year.<sup>89</sup> He was then thirty-seven and had come home from his first year at college several years before to take over his father’s flourishing lumber business.<sup>90</sup> He lived in the house only until 1917 when his wife, Nellie, died<sup>91</sup> and he sold the house. In 1920 he married Marian Markley,<sup>92</sup> the older daughter of J.E.E. Markley and moved into a conventional house next door to the Markley mansion.

The Page house, first occupied in 1912, has the most Japanese appearance of the Rock Glen project, an appearance it owes chiefly to its roofline. Its high, deeply overhanging, gabled roof has projecting peaks that turn slightly upward at each outer extremity. The walls are built of reinforced concrete framework and stuccoed clay tile. The structural members are clearly outlined, projecting four to six inches from the stucco walls of the two upper floors. The ground story of rough ashlar provides a sub-

86 Letter from David Gebhard, November 21, 1966.

87 *Ibid.*

88 *Mason City Times*, July 20, 1912.

89 City Directory, Mason City, 1912.

90 *Who’s Who*, Mason City, Iowa, 1929.

91 Elmwood Cemetery Records, Mason City, Iowa.

92 *Who’s Who*, Mason City, Iowa, 1929.

stantial base for the upper floors. The ribbon windows are treated in the way that is characteristic for Griffin. The individual window units are divided into an interesting geometric design by means of wood muntins, each one consisting of three parallel strips of wood, the outer two being 3/8” in width with the central 1/4” wide strip recessed 1/4” of an inch to give a very pleasing effect, particularly when the texture is emphasized by direct sunlight. The side toward the creek has an arched window<sup>93</sup> in the stone first story. Though as small as Wright’s smaller houses, this house is much more successful, with a variety of structure seen only on his larger houses. Built on a gentle slope toward the creek, it shows two stories to the street but three to the creek. The house appears to rise from a base of roughhewn stones which project considerably beyond the walls of the upper two stories on the house’s high, front elevation. This coupled with the fact that the stone base does not follow completely the more angular outline of the upper walls, prevents the house from seeming strikingly high for its width. The single arched fenestration of the basement level enhances the feeling of solidness given by the platform from which the house arises. The floor plan is roughly cruciform with the arms of the cross of varying degrees of shortness, some being very short. The living room projects in the wing toward the creek and is separated from the dining room by a massively handsome fireplace of roman brick on

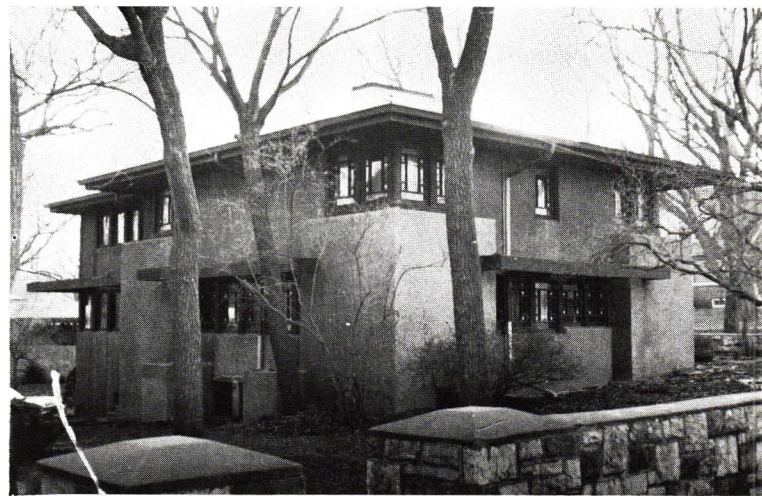
93 This was mistakenly taken to be a tunnel entrance by James Birrell. James Birrell, *Walter Burley Griffin*, Queensland University, Brisbane, p. 57.

*The south elevation of the Page house as seen from the meadow in front of the J. E. Blythe house.*

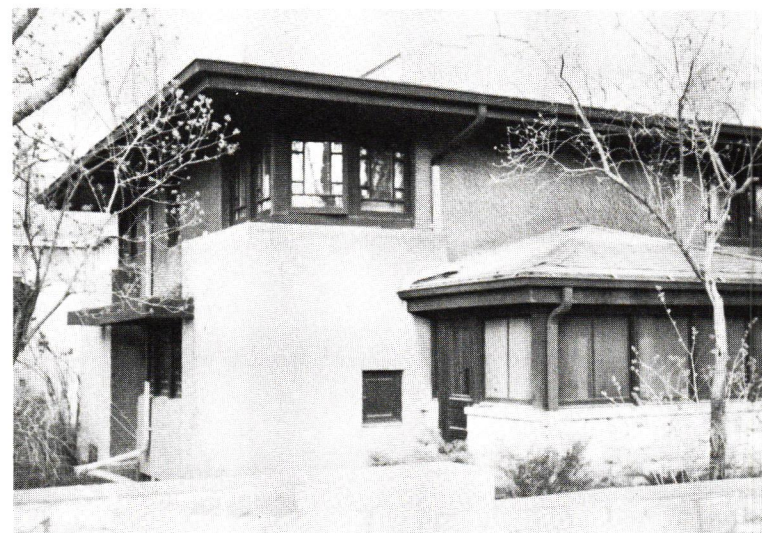


all four sides. Except for the fireplace the only other structure that demarcates the living room from the dining room is the rather massive overhanging oak cove which hides the indirect lighting.<sup>94</sup> The cove is 6-1/2 feet from the floor in rooms with an 8-1/2 foot ceiling. No upper wall is between the cove and ceiling as the cove passes between the living and dining rooms. The dining room flows directly into the solarium, the kitchen again being the only downstairs room isolated by walls from the rest of the first floor. The house is still in excellent repair and has kept pace with the passing years. A two-car garage has replaced the street service entrance very harmoniously, and the kitchen has been expanded into some of the new space thus provided. The mullions between the middle two of the four windows looking outward from the living room and solarium have been removed making picture windows, and the wood mullioned casement windows on the main floor have been replaced with plain plate glass casements. New rectangular windows have been cut in the stone base to the north and south beneath the living room. The huge picture window facing the creek from the solarium was part of the original design.

After his initial success in selling the lot to Page for development in the proper Prairie idiom, Blythe found that much of the development would remain up to him. Griffin prepared a plan (see pp. 26, 51) for the development of the entire north boundary of the area. The original rendering of the State street wall of the Glen for its developer, James Blythe, shows three houses. The one nearest the creek is identical to the one finally done for Sam Schneider. Since the westernmost of the three houses as depicted was quite different than eventually executed for J.E. Blythe, this rendering clearly antedates the working drawings for the J.E. Blythe (Rule) House dated November 4, 1912. It also indicates clearly that Griffin was the chief designer of the Schneider House, though Barry Byrne completed the working drawings and later revisions and undoubtedly supervised its construction. Between the revision, dated August 1, 1914, and May 29, 1915 he changed the design of the wood mullions of the windows to a geometric design completely dissimilar to Griffin's. The middle of the three houses in Griffin's rendering is the largest of the three and has one chief story and a full basement story facing the Glen with a large roof garden comprising the third. It's north and south walls are connected with



*Illustrated above is the view from the northeast showing the house built for J. E. Blythe but generally referred to as the Rule house. Below is the same house as seen from the west. The present entrance replaces the original simple open entrance which had an overhanging trellis. This house is the second house Griffin designed for this site. The first design can be seen as part of the rendering illustrated on pages 26 and 27 of this issue.*



<sup>94</sup> According to Mahoney, Griffin was the first of the Oak Park Studio to use cove lighting. This was first done in his Sloan house. Mahoney, *Magic of America, op. cit.*, marginal note on page from *Western Architect*.

the walls of the adjacent structures on the east and west by rather high stone walls. Judging from Marion Mahoney Griffin's description of the meeting of Blythe, Melson and her husband, the site of Blythe's final house for himself was selected at that initial time. However, to keep his development progressing, Blythe first built what was to be the second house in the Glen from plans representing a drastic revision by Griffin of the westernmost of the three proposed houses along the northern boundary of the development.<sup>95</sup>

The Rule House was a very successful study in symmetry. Built on an essentially square floor plan, excluding the solarium, it could be viewed from any of the other three sides and convey essentially the same image. Surfaced entirely in stucco with a low, broadly overhanging hip roof, its elevations are dominated by the massively solid stucco piers at each corner surmounted by a corner pair of windows, one facing in each direction directly beneath the eaves. Squarely in the middle of each side at the level of the top of the first story windows was a projecting trellis sunshade that gave relief and

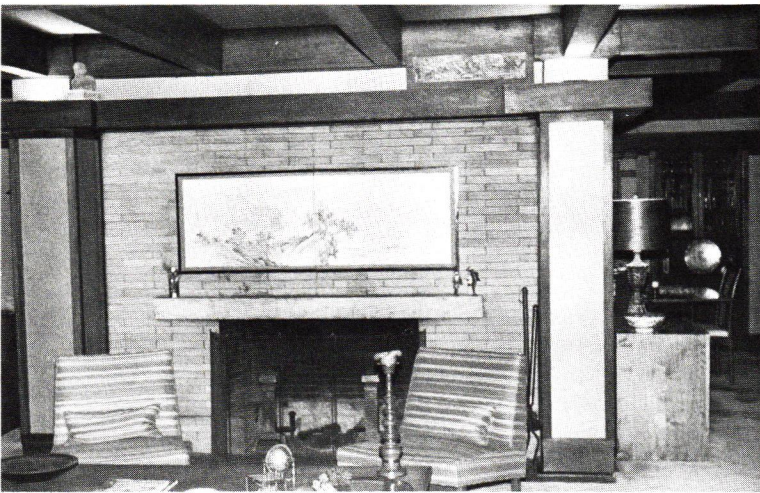
95 The dates on the working drawings done for James E. Blythe are 1912-11-4 and 1912-11-19. He moved into it in time to be listed there in the 1913 city directory but moved to his final residence on its completion by 1913. He was first listed there in the 1913 city directory. The working drawings of that house were dated 1913-7-24 and 19-13-28. The second house built by Blythe came to be known as the Blythe House and his first was referred to as the Rule House even in the August, 1913 *Western Architect* although Arthur Rule was first listed at that address in the 1915 Mason City directory.

*TOP: Rule house second story windows.*

*CENTER: East face of the Rule house.*

*BELOW: The Rule house as seen from the common meadow area from the south east.*





*Rule house living room fireplace.*



*Rule house interior.*

served to further emphasize the symmetry. Below that shade on the two sides not containing entrances was a ribbon of five windows, all formed of wood muntins in the Griffin manner using a design individual to the house. On the side containing doors the front and rear entrances were arranged in a completely symmetric fashion. The single story solarium had a low hip roof and was articulated to the main portion of the building by a somewhat narrower waist. Open to the weather by large square apertures in its sides the solarium was protected by a projecting wooden sunshade or trellis which passed circumferentially around its three free walls.<sup>96</sup>

96 Apparently similar to the Gunn house in Chicago, the interior view of the living room together with its floor plan purported to be that of the Rule House in the August, 1913 *Western Architect* is probably that of the Gunn House at 10561 Longwood Drive in Chicago. It was built in 1911-12 by Griffin. Birrell, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

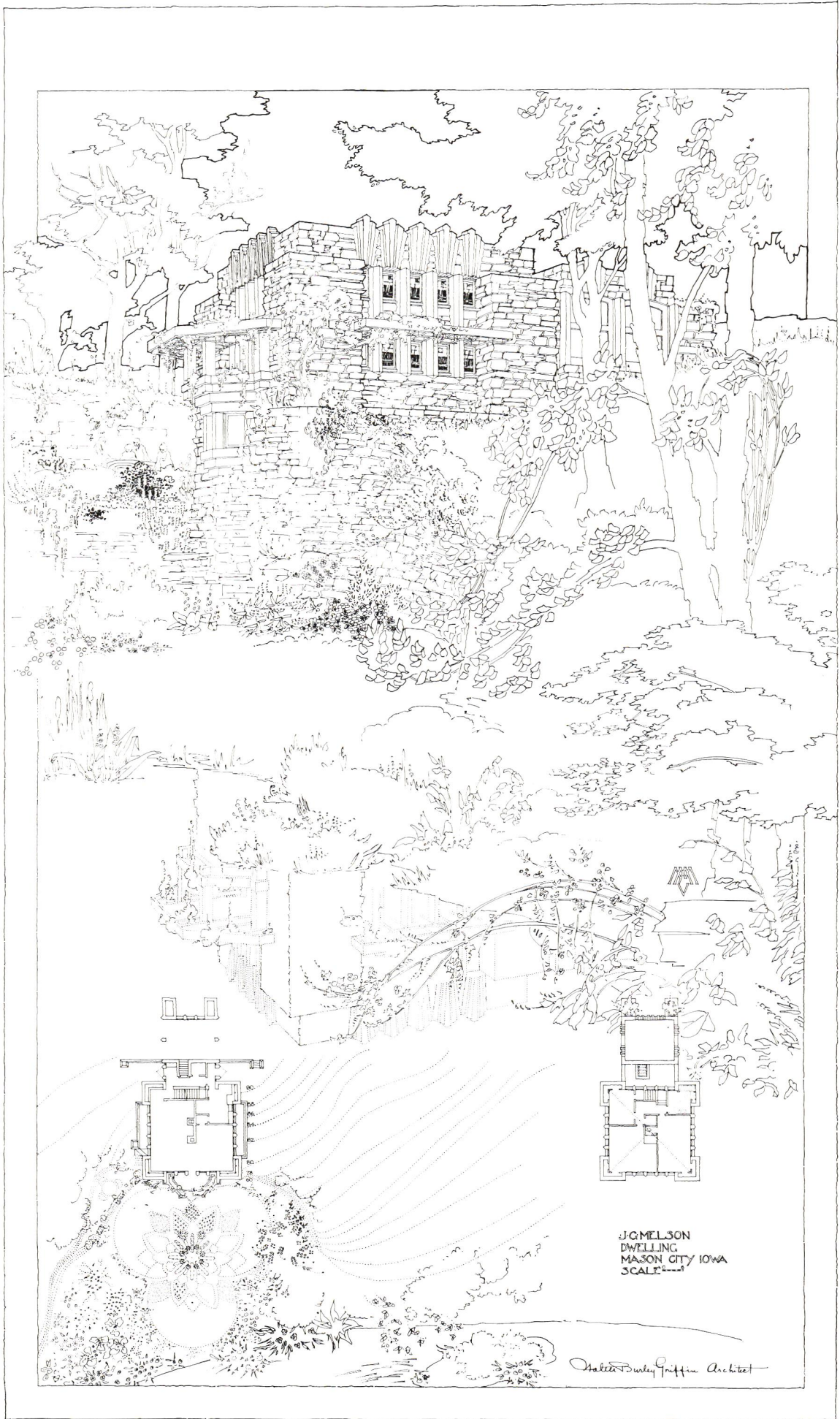
The Melson House is a monolithoid statement entirely of rough ashlar perched on the edge of a limestone precipice from which it seems to emanate and share a common being. The elements of its design and floor plan are the familiar elements most central to Griffin's vocabulary in this period, but they are modified by the unique site to such a degree that the basic similarity of the structure to the Rule House, across the creek, only slowly becomes apparent. The walls of the house facing the creek are continued down to the floor of the valley by a wall of stones laid against the side of the cliff beneath the house without mortar. On scrutiny it is seen that the house is as small as Wright's less successful small structures and generally square in floor plan, excluding the two-car garage. It has the four heavy corner piers which were perhaps used by Griffin to a greater extent than by any other Prairie School exponent.<sup>97</sup> Griffin's departure from the idiom of Wright is most strongly noticeable in the complete absence of any roof overhang. The stone wall carries the verticality of the cliff on upward past its junction with the roof. The roof is completely hidden from the viewer below by the crystalline sunburst of stone radiating from the tops of the upper story windows.<sup>98</sup> This crystalline quality is further emphasized by the pentagonal prisms of poured concrete that form the massive mullions for the windows that recede from view between them. On each of the three free faces of the house proper, the space devoted to windows is confined to the central portion of the wall by the massive piers that flank it. On the elevation facing the creek, the piers are dominated by a massive projecting bay that grows upward by successively projecting stages that suggest a crystal formation from the relatively smaller bay of the family room on the lowest level to the larger bay off the living-dining room on the middle level. The projecting quality of the bay is further emphasized by the heavy trellis of eight 2x12 beams that projects from the upper surface of the bay on the middle story. The roof of this bay forms a porch for the two bedrooms facing the creek on the top level. On the other two walls of the house where the windows are recessed between the piers, the windows are arranged in ribbons of five windows on each floor that are functionally in agreement with

97 In *The Magic of America*, *op. cit.* number 9, p. 27 Mahoney states: "The elimination of external walls as walls in dwellings and other buildings and substituting piers and grouped fenestrations came about (in Wright's practice) after Griffin entered into partnership with Wright."

98 The treatment above the windows of the Melson house clearly anticipates the treatment above the windows of Newman College done in Melbourne, Australia in 1916.



*Drawing reproduced through the Courtesy of Northwestern University.*

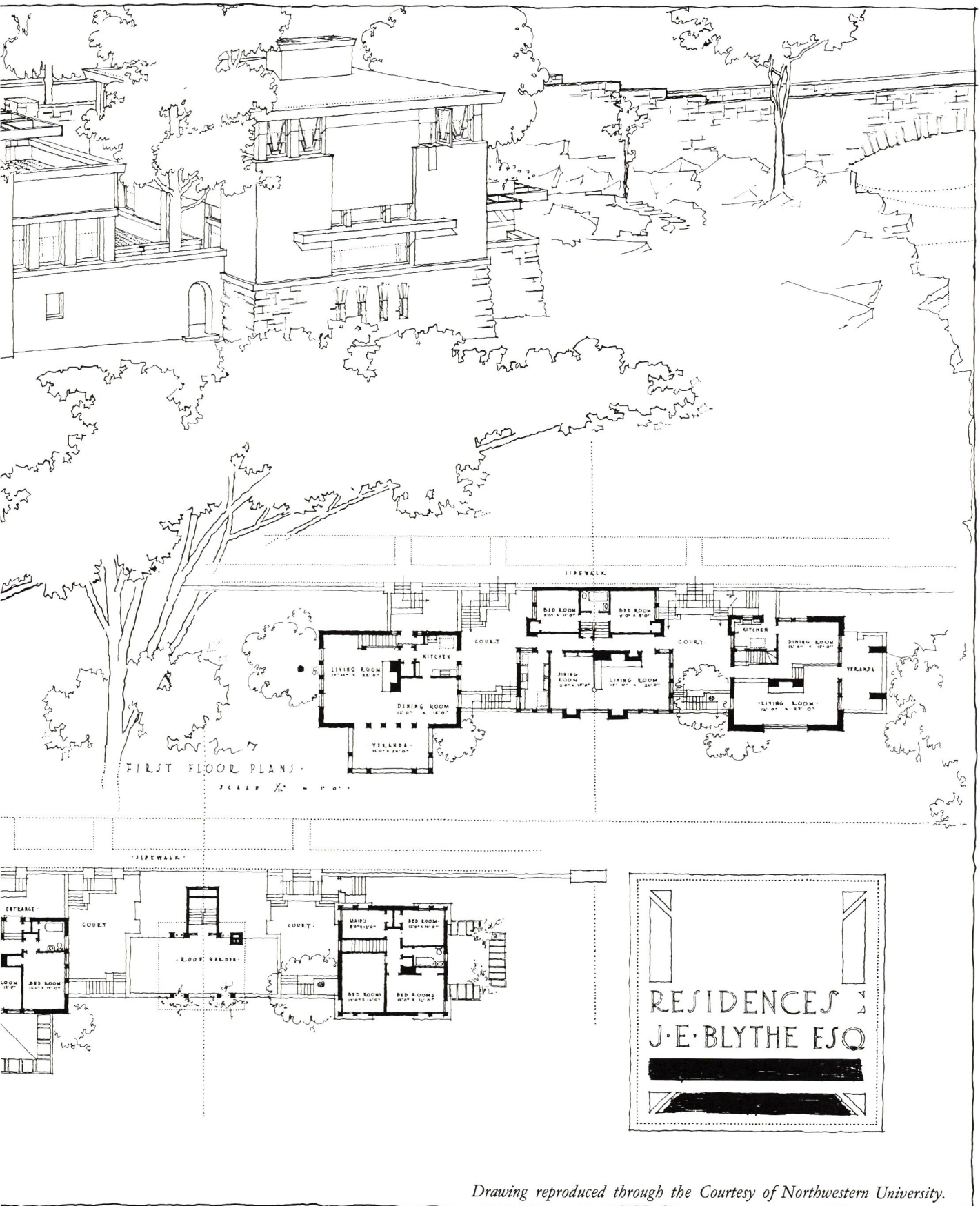


J.G. MELSON  
DWELLING  
MASON CITY IOWA  
SCALE 1" = 10'-0"

*Charles Burley Griffin Architect*



*This drawing shows Griffin's original scheme for the development of the north side of Rock Glen along State Street. Only the easternmost house, on the right, was actually built as shown. That house became the Sam Schneider house. This*



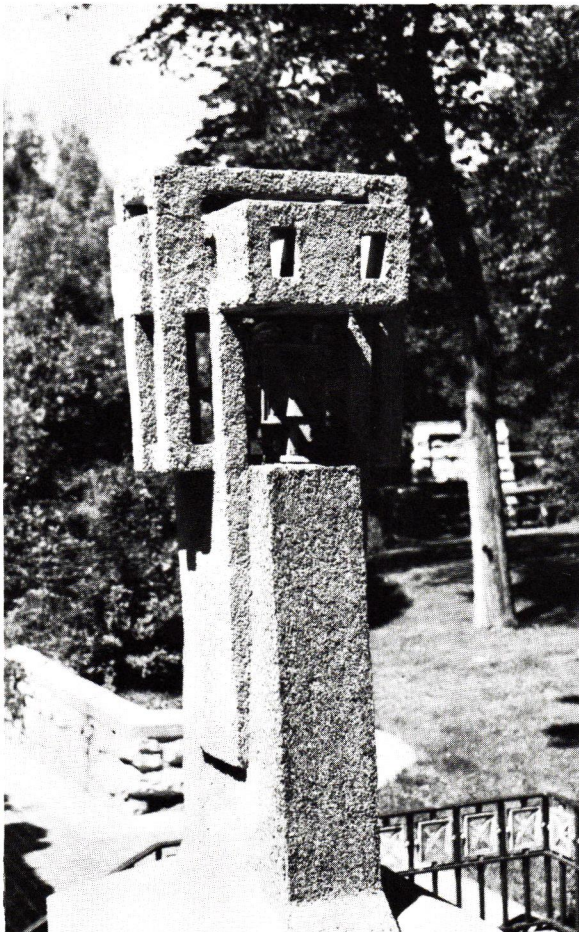
*Drawing reproduced through the Courtesy of Northwestern University.*

*drawing, along with many similar ones, was given to Northwestern University by Marion Mahoney Griffin. For reasons known only to her, most, but not all, of the drawings have Griffin's name carefully blocked out with india ink.*



*This exterior light fixture was designed by Griffin for the Melson house. The metal insert has been added to the original design.*

*The J. G. Melson house as it appears today. This is the south elevation as seen from the street. The two planters in front of the house originally extended to the height of the garage roof.*



common Prairie School practice. Aesthetically, however, the ribbon windows depart from their customary contribution to the horizontality of the structure because of their heavy vertical concrete mullions which span the two stories and are capped by the even more strongly vertical stylized keystones of concrete over the upper windows. The result is a very strongly individualistic statement of evolution from the common Prairie School background.

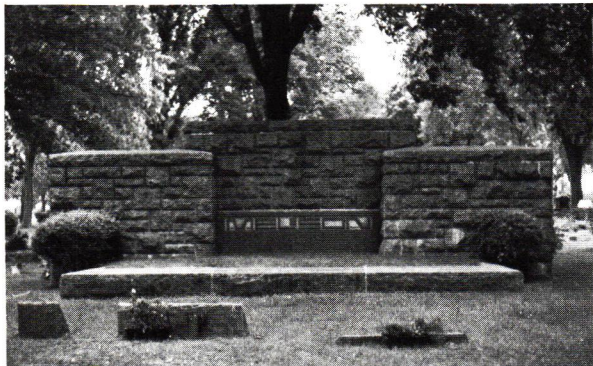
Front and back the house is entered by symmetrically placed portals partially sheltered above by a jutting triangle of concrete. As in the Blythe House where the garage is also on the same level as the main floor, the front and back entrances communicate directly with each other and the basement and the garage so that one may go directly from either entrance to any room on the main floor except the solarium. The living room communicates openly with the dining room from which it is separated by a heavy stone fireplace. The heavy corner piers seen on the outside are put to excellent use within. On the grade floor they provide book cases in the living room and china cabinets in the dining room, while upstairs they provide two good-sized walk-in closets for each bedroom. In the basement, beneath the living room the recreation room or study with its jutting bay opposite a massive stone fireplace provides a majestically secure retreat.



*The north face of the Melson house is an extension of the natural stone cliff rising from the floor of the Glen below.*

When the Melsons moved into their new "castle" as it was called, it lived up to their expectations. Mrs. Melson was very fond of its natural setting and the birds and squirrels that inhabited it. She used to say the length of time it took her to do her dishes was dependent on the number of squirrels on her window sill because she used to feed them.<sup>99</sup>

The Melsons' happiness was shortlived. After they had lived in their new home only a year and a half or two, Mrs. Melson died.<sup>100</sup> Her stricken husband was heartbroken and decided to bury her in surroundings in keeping with the home in which she had lived. He turned to Griffin's successor,



<sup>99</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. A. A. Adams, June 14, 1966.

<sup>100</sup> March 15, 1915 — grave marker in Elmwood Cemetery, Mason City.



*The fireplace in the Melson living room is built of similar stone to that used on the exterior, but the joints have been more deliberately dressed. The stones over the opening echo the exterior design.*

Barry Byrne, who built a massive but simple mausoleum of rough hewn stone in the Prairie style.

Many wonder to what extent much of Griffin's work after 1911 was influenced by his wife, Marian Mahoney. Lippincott, who was the chief draughtsman on the Blythe house, asserts that she exerted no significant influence on that structure, unless on minor details such as ceramic tile design,<sup>101</sup> and Byrne agrees with this belief.<sup>102</sup> However, Byrne feels that much of the design for the Melson house was Marian's. When the A.A. Adams family bought the house from Melson in 1920, Mr. Melson stated simply that it was the work of Walter Burley Griffin. However, Marian Mahoney's hand was apparent in at least some of the details in or about the house. When Melson showed them the house he showed them a pen and ink drawing of the house done on a white satin panel by Marian Mahoney. They wanted very much to have it with the house, but Mr. Melson refused to give it up. Marian repeated the sharp triangular canopies jutting over the front and rear entrances of the house in the design of the library table inside the house. She also did a table scarf design using the same triangular points.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>101</sup> Telephone interview with Roy Lippincott, August 30, 1965.

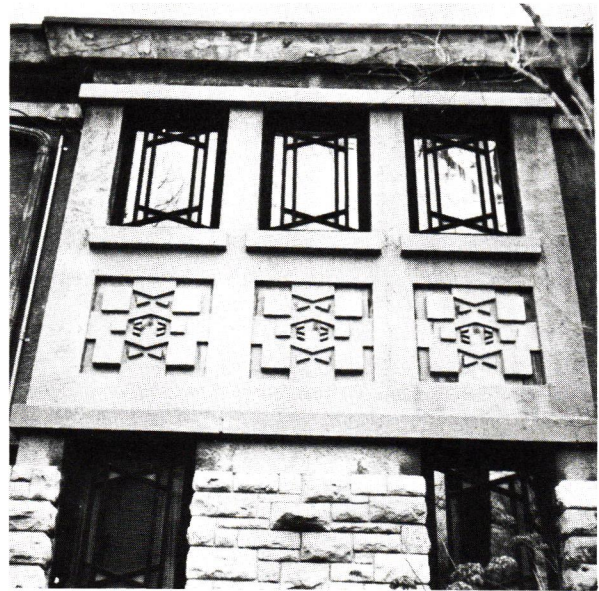
<sup>102</sup> Byrne interview, Evanston, January 22, 1966.

<sup>103</sup> Telephone interview with Mrs. A. A. Adams, June 14, 1966.

The Blythe House lives up to the aspirations of its first owner. Built on elongated lines it is the most spacious of the houses in Rock Glen, arraying a thirty-three foot living room, an eighteen foot solarium and a garage all in line facing the cliff wall on the opposite side of the creek. The nearly flat hip roof ends in concrete cornices with only a few inches of overhang and plays an unimportant role in comparison to the walls themselves.<sup>104</sup> Their ornamental panels pick up the pre-Columbian theme stated strongly by the cast concrete and stone wall which originally enclosed a fern garden along the front of the house. The heavy cornice edging the roof belongs more to the walls than to the roof and it is repeated by subsidiary concrete cross-bandings lower on the wall.

Originally the front elevation displayed perfect symmetry; the cornice of the billiard room on the north over the garage was identical in level and mass to the cornice capping the wall of the open porch over the solarium. Between the heavy cornice and the ornamental concrete band ten inches below in the billiard room, windows thirteen feet long and ten inches high admit light on the east and west without destroying the symmetry with the concrete banding on the opposite end of the house. A picture window in the east garage wall also gives balance.

104 Marian Mahoney wrote, "The house fitted the site like a glove. Since it was on the lower levels it was flat roofed to least distract the views of the dwellings above." *Magic of America, op. cit.* caption of picture p. 113.



*Ornamental panels in cast concrete separate the first and second story windows of the J. E. Blythe house.*

*This extraordinary photograph shows James Blythe casually examining the construction of the roof of his house. The forms and reinforcing bars are clearly evident. Behind Mr. Blythe in the background can be seen the already completed Page house.*

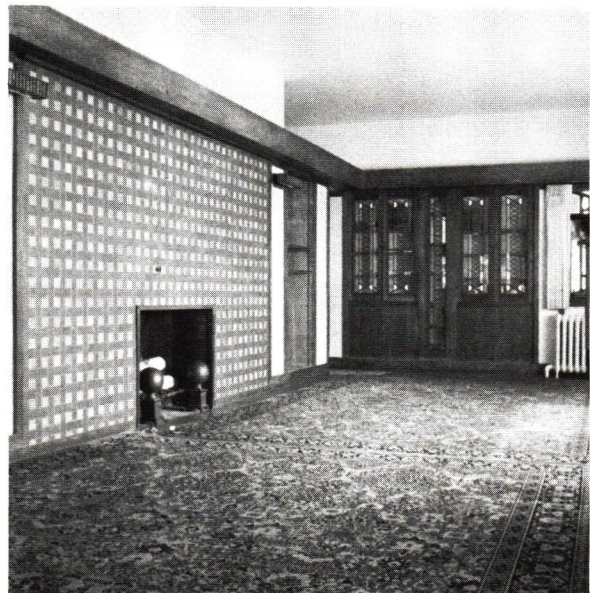


The resulting angular structure makes no attempt to cling to the ground by strong horizontal lines in the manner of Wright, but, like the Melson House, makes a strong departure from the Prairie School idiom externally. Perhaps Griffin's most personal design, it is a superb embodiment of the Prairie School *Spirit*.

Within, the Prairie School vocabulary is more closely adhered to. The living room, dining room and solarium share in the open plan and are interconnected and delineated by a heavy jutting lighting cove of walnut stained oak 1-1/3 feet below the ceiling. The other moldings are also of the Prairie School design elaborated by Wright.<sup>105</sup> The built-in cupboards in the dining room and bookcases are very plain in their wooden elements, but their doors have leaded glass windows which use iridescent triangular and diamond shapes in simply stated geometric designs. The huge fireplace facing is unique. Perfectly flat and flush with the wall, it is without a mantel. It is made of a simple interwoven design of Italian tile and contrasts sharply in size with the relatively small fireplace aperture.<sup>106</sup>

105 Wright, Frank Lloyd, *Modern Architecture* (The Kahn Lectures) Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1931. Quoted in Kaufman, Edgar, *An American Architecture*, p. 73, Horizon Press, New York, 1955.

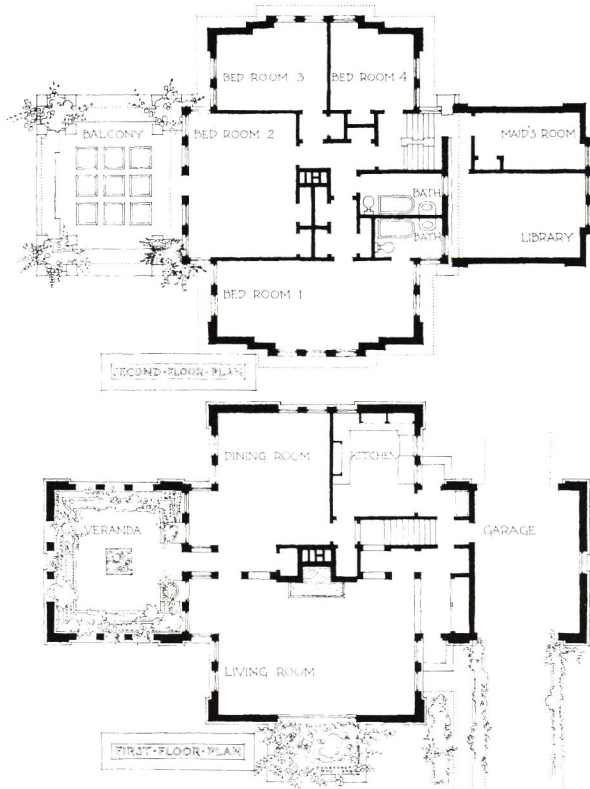
106 The original, more intricate, design is illustrated on p. 314 of *The Magic of America*, and elsewhere in this issue courtesy of the New-York State Historical Society.



*The Blythe house fireplace was faced in Italian tile which remains in its original condition. The cabinets in the background are of oak with leaded doors continuing the design of the exterior windows.*

*The east elevation of the James Blythe house as it appeared shortly after completion. A few minor alterations have since occurred but it remains essentially the same and stands as an example of Walter Burley Griffin's finest work.*





*These plans of the Blythe house were prepared by Griffin before it was built. The second floor plan was altered slightly in construction with the veranda now enclosed and used throughout the year.*

The entrance hall and corridor leading to the spacious living room are intentionally cramped to give dramatic contrast when one steps suddenly from the hall through a narrow aperture into the spacious living room to view the solarium beyond.

As has been mentioned above, much or all of the Rock Glen, Rock Crest development was done against the background of Griffin's successful competition for the planning of Canberra. Lippincott indicated that his first work for Griffin began when he started spending nights and weekends helping with the Canberra project.<sup>107</sup> This was about eighteen months before the winner was announced, or about the early part of 1911. The Griffin's marriage was in late June of that year and their first contact with Blythe, Melson and Page in Mason City must have come about the same time inasmuch as their agreement was probably concluded in July 1912<sup>108</sup> in time for the Page house to be completed

later that year.<sup>109</sup> The working drawings on the first Blythe (Rule) house were dated March 4, 1912, and those on the second Blythe house were dated July 24, 1913. According to Birrell, Griffin spent from August, 1913 until November, 1913 in Australia.<sup>110</sup> During that period Roy Lippincott was left in charge of Griffin's office which had recently been moved to the Monroe Building<sup>111</sup> and further working drawings for the Blythe house were dated August 28 and September 4. Mahoney also says the working drawings of the Blythe House were just finished when Griffin was called to Australia. Lippincott no doubt supervised at least part of the construction of that building as it was occupied by some time in 1914.<sup>112</sup> The Melson house was completed between 1912-1914.<sup>113</sup> After his return to this country, Griffin made a trip to Europe<sup>114</sup> before leaving this country for good in May, 1914<sup>115</sup> in company with his wife Marion and his sister and new brother-in-law. Roy Lippincott and Genevieve Griffin were married the night of their departure and accompanied the Griffins so Lippincott could take charge of the private office Griffin was authorized to establish in Australia.<sup>116</sup>

Anticipating a temporary stay in Australia, Griffin contacted Barry Byrne in California and formulated an agreement whereby Byrne would take over Griffin's Chicago practice pending Griffin's possible return. Byrne accepted the practice as something over which he was to have full control with no

109 City Directory, Mason City, Iowa, 1912.

110 Birrell, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

111 Lippincott, *op. cit.*

112 City Directory, Mason City, Iowa, 1914.

113 Overexact interpretation of the exact date when a building was started or completed is to be avoided. The dates of working drawings are of definite help. It would seem that dates of first listing in a city directory would also provide valid indications of a date by which a building was occupied. Even so there are contradictions. For instance, in the case of the Melson house, there are no working drawings, the date of first listing in the city directory is 1912. Roy Lippincott states the plans were on the drawing board on Griffin's return from Australia (this according to Birrell would have been November, 1913). Several Mason City natives recall the house took three years to be built by a Scottish stone mason who came here each spring and returned to Scotland each fall, and Marion Mahoney remembers Griffin scaling the full height of the side facing the creek after its completion. (*Magic of America, op. cit.* Section 13, p. 114). He is also said (Adams *op. cit.*) to have delayed his trip to Australia long enough to come out and mix the interior paints himself. Nevertheless Griffin is said to have returned permanently to Australia in May of 1914. (Peisch, *op. cit.*, p. 127.)

114 Lippincott, Letter, September 20, 1965.

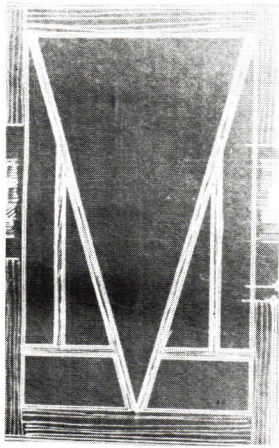
115 Peisch, *op. cit.*, p. 127.

116 Lippincott, *op. cit.*

107 Roy A. Lippincott, Letter, September 20, 1965.

108 Mason City Times, July 20, 1912.





*Original Griffin window design for the Schneider house.*



*This photo shows the Schneider house from the southeast as it appeared before any alterations were made.*

strings attached. Previously when Wright had asked him to take his practice on the eve of Wright's departure for Europe, Byrne had refused. The arrangement with Griffin, however, promised to be much more satisfactory.<sup>117</sup>

Byrne continued the Rock Glen development where Griffin left off with the Schneider house. The first working drawings of the Sam Schneider house are dated August 1, 1914 and name as architect Griffin and Byrne in that order. The windows are typical Griffin windows based on a triangular figure. The final revision of the working drawings lists Griffin and Byrne as architects on some sheets and

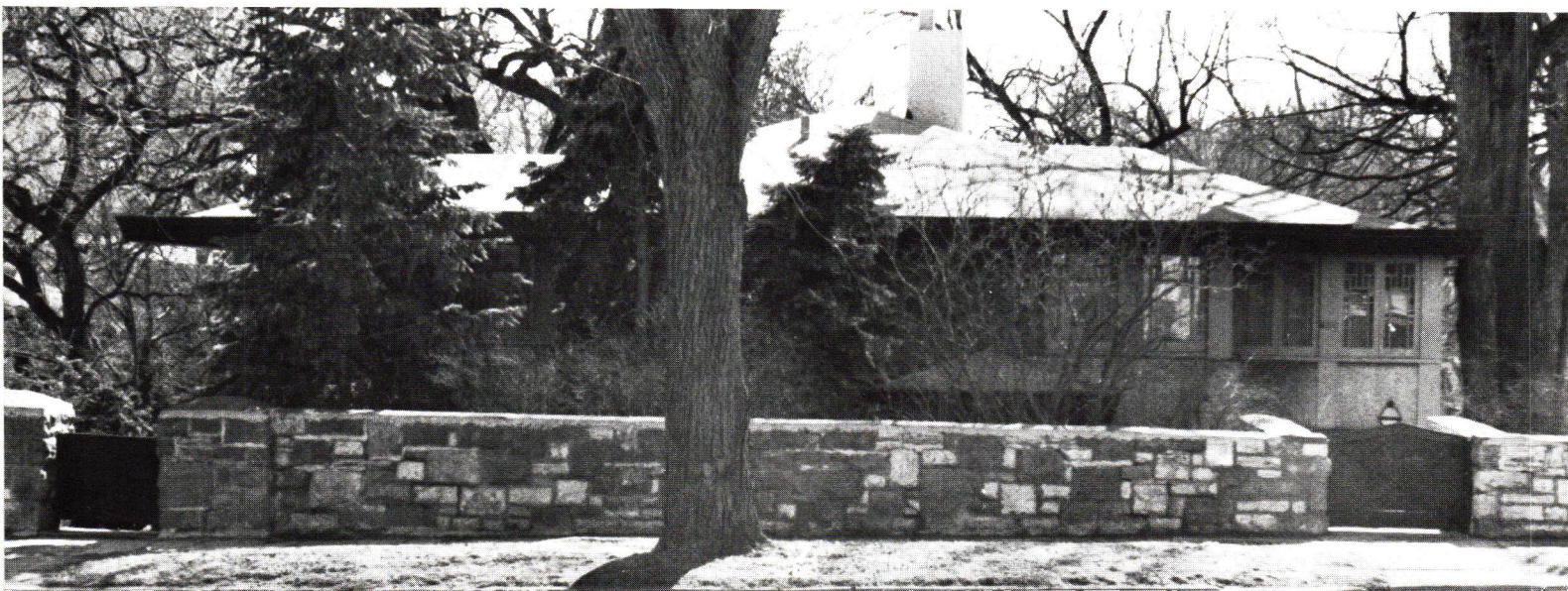
<sup>117</sup> Telephone interview with Barry Byrne, September 6, 1965.

Byrne only on others. Those drawings dated May 29, 1915 show a geometric window design very different from Griffin's in being basically rectangular. The overall plan of the house is essentially the same as in the original Griffin rendering of the three dwellings on the State Street border of Rock Glen.

Byrne's client, Sam Schneider, was the secretary of the Mason City Loan and Trust Company and vice-president of the Security National Bank.<sup>118</sup> His wife Cornie had been an art teacher in the Mason

<sup>118</sup> City Directory, Mason City, Iowa, 1915.

*The north or State street elevation of the Schneider house.*



City Public Schools before their marriage and was an admirer of Prairie School architecture.<sup>119</sup> The house which was finally completed for them under Byrnes' supervision was a charming example of an architectural innovation credited to Griffin by his wife. She felt his treatment of relatively small dwellings was more successful than Wright's. One of the devices he used was to have the dining room level several feet above the living room while communicating freely with it. The contrasting story-and-a-half height of the living room gave a spaciousness and openness that could not be achieved by other means.<sup>120</sup> This was borne out in the completed Schneider house. In it the solarium and living room were on a level lower than the dining room, the latter two rooms being separated by a massive fireplace with flues on each end and by a bookcase. The high living room allowed a second bank of narrow windows above the large main picture window, increasing the feeling of spaciousness of the living room. With its floor on the same level, the lower ceiling and clerestory windows in the solarium add further to the great feeling of variety of the house and bring the limestone cliff on the opposite margin of the creek into those at a greater distance from the windows. There is a strong functional as well as esthetic element in the design, for the above is one of many unique qualities possessed by the house which help relate it to its site. It stands at the base of an approximately twenty foot embankment on the top of which runs State Street, a main thoroughfare. To reach the front entrance, one goes down a few steps from street level and crosses a small bridge. Entering the house at the dining room level the visitor can go upstairs to the sleeping floor or down a few steps to the living room. The very strongly up and down exterior lines of the basic Griffin design were pleasingly and imaginatively modified by Byrne in a remodeling project done for its second owner, General Hanford MacNider, the son of Charles MacNider. He added a second story sleeping porch cantilevered out over the west end of the house and a master bedroom over the solarium.

A casualty that apparently died on the drawing board before Griffin left America was the Holohan house. William Holohan was the owner of the Ideal American Laundry and the International Harvester store facing Central Park opposite the Park Inn as well as being a Republican politician who had many dealings with James Blythe.<sup>121</sup> He, with Joshua Melson, owned the land involved in the Rock Crest

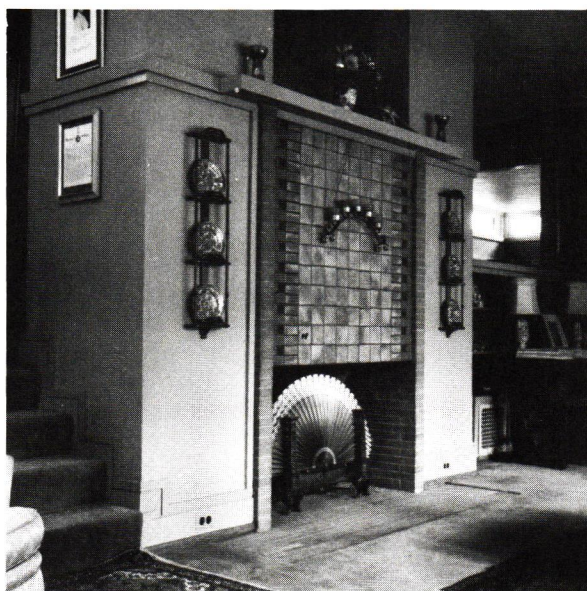
119 Interview with Mrs. Howard O'Leary, March, 1967.

120 Marion Mahoney, *The Magic of America*, New-York State Historical Society copy, Caption of picture, p. 2 and 78.

121 Interview with Dr. C. M. Franchere, December, 1964.



*The dining room of the Sam Schneider house as seen from the solarium. The practice of using different elevations requiring short stairs was a common element in Walter Burley Griffin's residential designs.*



*The Schneider house fireplace.*

*The west side of the Schneider house has this unusual bridge to the front entrance from the street sidewalk.*



*The Sam Schneider house from the southwest as it appears today.*

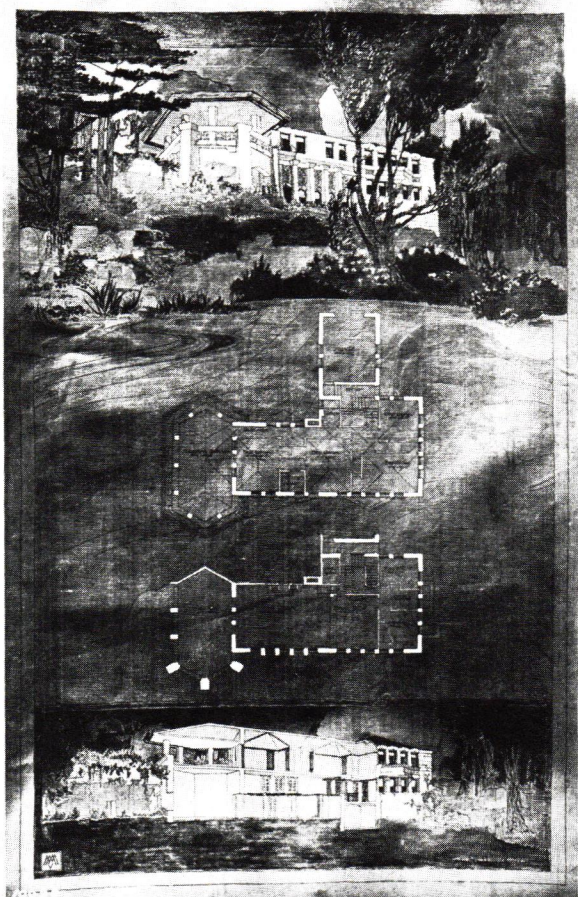


portion of the Rock Crest-Rock Glen project, his being the westernmost portion of the crest. He was involved with Melson, Markley and Blythe in the original development agreement with Griffin.<sup>122</sup> The dwelling Griffin designed for him was illustrated in the August, 1913 issue of the *Western Architect*.<sup>123</sup> It was quite strikingly individualistic, bearing a slight similarity only to the projected central unit of Griffin's initial State Street plan. It was to perch high on the sloping side of the high bluff which replaced the cliff at the western end of the development. The *Western Architect* illustration was a beautiful Marion Mahoney rendering on satin bearing her monogram as well as Griffin's signature.

The extremely rugged projected building anticipates many of the devices later used in Australia and shows a hip-roofed structure with a two-story elongated hexagonal pavilion at one end and the living portion of the house at the other on an axis of 90° to the hexagon. The pavilion contained a deep cave-like structure on the ground floor and a porch above open on all sides but shaded by a massive hip roof supported on eight square pillars. The exterior of this end of the building was punctuated by several square vertical pillars at the ground level with many massive triangular outcroppings of concrete above. Had it been constructed it would have been an even more outstandingly individualistic probing of new directions than the Melson House.

The masters of Rock Glen turned repeatedly to the office of Griffin and Byrne as the changing needs of their lives unfolded. As mentioned previously, when Minnie Melson died in March, 1915, Josh

*This rendering of Griffin's design for the Holahan residence is all that remains of an interesting project which was never built.*



122 Agreement between Melson, Markley, Blythe and Holohan dated July 20, 1912.

123 *The Western Architect*, August, 1913, p. 79.

Melson sought Byrne's help in the design of a fitting mausoleum. A first design was too costly and a second more simple one was adopted and executed in the Elmwood Cemetery.<sup>124</sup>

In the same year James Blythe had the need of a suitable wedding present for his daughter<sup>125</sup>, Maude, who married Hugh Gilmore, a young man from Harvard who was to become the Mason City Superintendent of Schools. Byrne then prepared the plans of Blythe house number three, or the Gilmore House as it became known. The first working drawings were ready on September 27, 1915<sup>126</sup> and showed a house which, masterfully adapted to its difficult site, continued the theme started by Griffin. As with the other houses except the Rule house, its base was of rough-hewn stone over the entire first story with the upper story of stucco. The geometric window designs used elsewhere in the Glen are changed here to multiple uniform rectangular panes in the casement windows. The eaves are narrow and the wall surfaces clean and unadorned. The street embankment being lower than that of the Schneider house, the building is entered from the street level. The elevations facing the street and the glen each present perfect symmetry except for the dining room projection on the east which is one story lower. One enters a vestibule about seven feet by ten feet with a ceiling and roof at door height. From

124 Telephone interview with Barry Byrne, September 6, 1965.

125 Letter from Robert Blythe Gilmore, January 12, 1966.

126 Working drawings provided by present owners, Mr. and Mrs. J. B. Chauncey.

*The Hugh Gilmore house as it appears today. This view from the southwest identifies it as a large building although from the street or front side it appears much smaller.*



there a clerestory lighted stair leads up a half story to the sleeping floor or down a half story to the living area. The L-shaped living room, twenty feet by thirty feet in greatest dimensions is spacious by any standards.

As in the Schneider house, where it disappeared for the first time, the cove lighting is again absent from the architect's vocabulary. A new departure from the Prairie School idiom is the disappearance of the openness of plan. The dining room is separated from the living room by double doors and, less significant, the living room is separated from the lower portion of the entrance hall by a single door. The fireplace is very simple, of greyish-tan roman brick and has a heavy piece on either side of a centrally recessed area over the fireplace aperture, the entire fireplace being framed by a margin of smooth bedford stone. An exterior balcony was originally opposite the fireplace until the Gilmores converted it to a spacious alcove to accommodate a large sofa. Several casement windows were removed over the sofa to provide a large picture window. The original upstairs contained three bedrooms and a bath. All had tent-type ceilings whose longitudinal center ridge ran in a north and south direction. The master bedroom was eighteen feet by seventeen feet in greatest dimensions not including its quite adequate separate dressing room. By closing a door this, with the bath, became a separate suite. Subsequently another still larger master bedroom has been added over the dining room wing.

Several unexecuted projects in Rock Glen must have brought Mr. Byrne varying degrees of dis-

*The front entrance of the Gilmore house is on a level of its own with stairs up to the sleeping areas and down to the living areas.*



satisfaction. As one of the initial stipulations of the agreement between the original developers of Rock Glen, Mr. Markley agreed to tear down the wooden superstructure of the 1870 Parker's Mill which had originally stood on the property.<sup>127</sup> When the frame structure was removed the thick stone foundation was capped with concrete which served to preserve the base and provide new support for the controls of the flood gate to the mill race. On July 10, 1915 he made a pencil drawing of a small, low summer house for James Blythe that was a gem of simplicity. It was to be built on the concrete cap of the mill which was otherwise somewhat unsightly from the Blythe living quarters. The small square structure was to be built on the south end of the rectangular mill. Of the same width as the mill, it was to be rotated 90° so that three of its four corners would present triangular projections over the edge of the mill slab. The south end of the slab was to be bounded by a concrete wall containing planters. For some unknown reason this was never built.

A second project was a home for a physician, Dr. C. E. Dakin, who began practice in Mason City in 1901 and met Barry Byrne through James Blythe. The house was to have been built about forty feet back from the cliff on the southeast bank at the apex of its curve as it turned north. The site was somewhat higher than that of the Melson House with a good straight view upstream to the foot-bridge. The house was to be four stories high on its downhill side.<sup>128</sup> The relationship of client to architect was always a completely satisfactory professional one<sup>129</sup>, but some events and finally the World War in which Dr. Dakin served postponed the plans of the Dakins past their time of possible fruition.<sup>130</sup>

Samuel Davis Drake managed a large Mason City insurance agency as well as several family farms. He bought a lot on Rock Crest from Melson a short distance downstream from where Dr. Dakin planned to build. With this lot he either bought or planned to buy all the land downstream as far as State Street.<sup>131</sup> He engaged Griffin or Barry Byrne as his architect but the relationship became very unsatisfactory to both Byrne and his client and was terminated.<sup>132</sup> Mr. Drake then had a young local architect named Einar Broaten draw up plans which

127 Agreement between Melson, Markley, Blythe and Holohan.

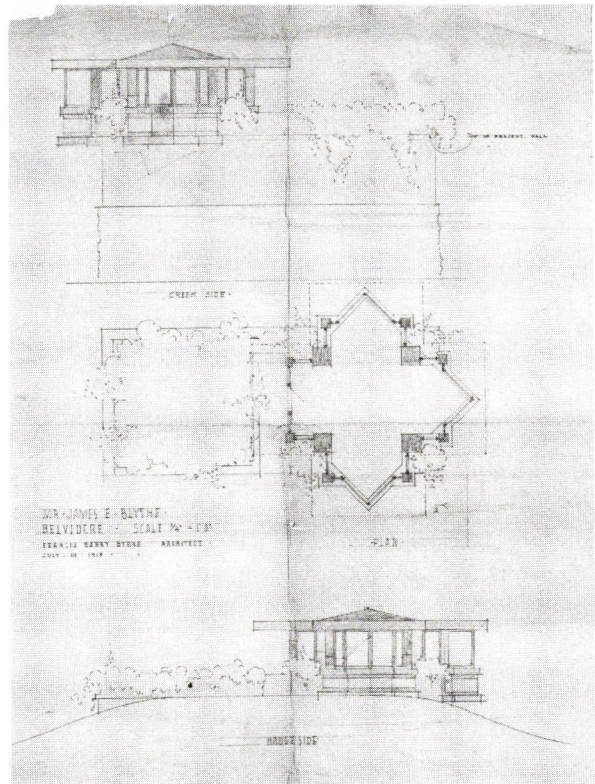
128 Interview with Mrs. C. E. Dakin, May 23, 1966.

129 Telephone interview with Barry Byrne, September 6, 1965.

130 Dakin, *op. cit.*

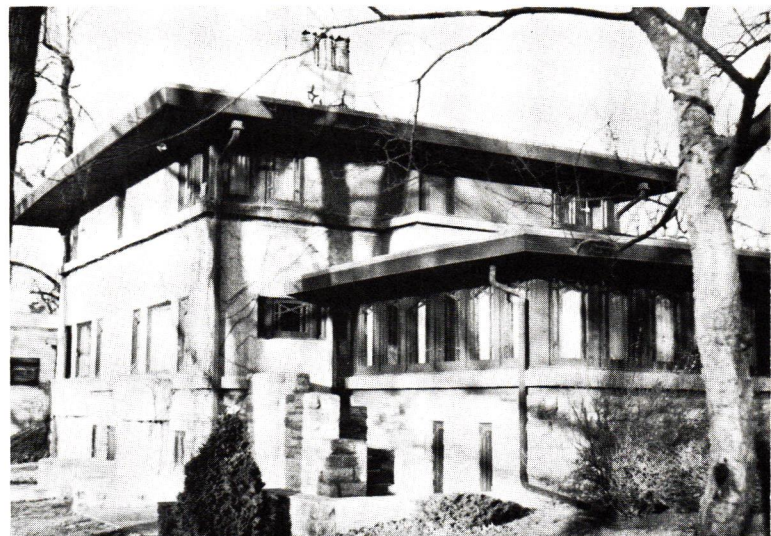
131 Interview with Francis Drake Repp.

132 Interview with Barry Byrne, September 6, 1965.



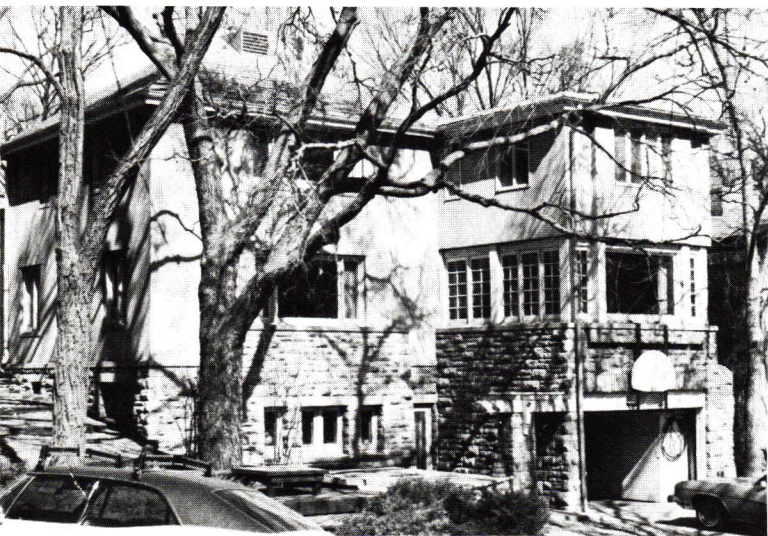
Barry Byrne's drawings for "Belvidere" were designed for James E. Blythe in 1915 but never built.

The house of Samuel Davis Drake as seen from the southwest corner has the solarium in the foreground.

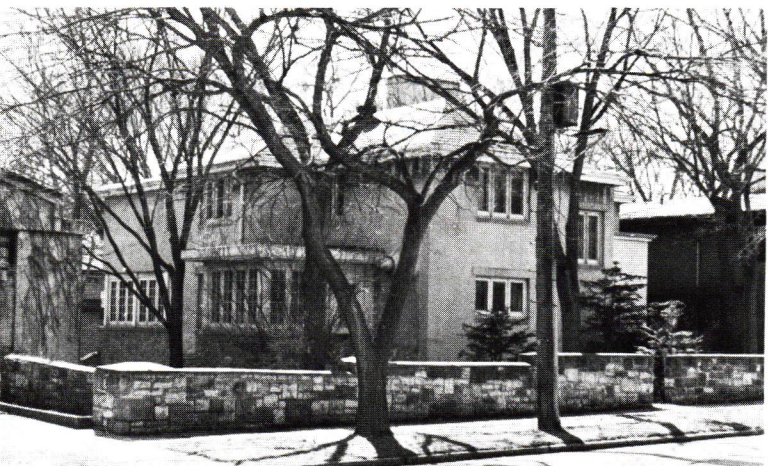




*The Samuel Davis Drake house as seen from the east or street side.*



*Above is the E. V. Franke house from the southwest. The third story over the garage was added after the original house was constructed. Below is the Franke house from the northeast.*



may have been derived from those of Byrne. Mrs. Dakin was under the impression the house was built by Byrne. Construction was started in 1914 by the builder of the Sam Schneider house and the house was completed in 1916 with the earmarks of a Prairie School house though with some discrepancies in the way they were synthesized. Broaten was apparently very pleased with his result because in the 1917 city directory he used a photograph of it in his advertisement.

The house has the form of a large square with a projecting solarium on its south and an entrance and a garage projecting from the east side. The house and solarium are hip-roofed while the garage and entrance roof are gable-roofed. The articulation of the house with the garage and entrance is intricate. The house is of stucco with a stone base and discontinuously on the first story, panels of stone are centered on each wall of the garage. The windows are in the idiom of Griffin rather than Byrne and are similar to those of the Blythe House.

Inside, the house is very comfortable and livable. Its construction was simultaneous with that of the Sam Schneider house and by the same contractor. It therefore shared the same quality and techniques of construction as well as many nuances not used in other houses of its day such as intramural vacuum conduits to a vacuum cleaner motor located centrally in the basement, speaking tubes between separate parts of the house, casement windows with screen and storm windows loading from within, and the use of skylights, in this case over the central stair. As with the Sam Schneider House, it did not retain the cove lighting of the other Griffin houses in the glen.

Byrne's last client in Rock Glen,<sup>133</sup> was Edward N. Franke, secretary and treasurer of the Franke Land and Investment Company at the time of Byrne's commission.<sup>134</sup> For him he designed a house located between the Rule and Gilmore houses on State Street. Completed in 1917, the year Franke became president of the Central Trust Bank, the house stuck to the Rock Glen theme of rough hewn stone base sheathing the lower story. The stucco above was smooth for the first time in Rock Glen and the windows were glazed with rectangular panes separated by multiple plain wood muntins. Here for the first time there was no attempt at any type of symmetric treatment and no lines of the house about the eaves or elsewhere were for ornamentation. This represented a further evolution toward what Byrne felt to his own style in which he sought to combine the simplification he admired in Gill and the modern European work with what he perceived to be the basic and determining element in the buildings of Louis Sullivan. That element he decided was one of "plastic envelopment", of the building functions of structure and use, which he concluded was Sullivan's great contribution to architecture rather than the very original ornament Sullivan developed.<sup>135</sup> Since the house was built, its external appearance has been very considerably altered by additions which include a room over the solarium, replacement of almost all the small paned casement windows by picture windows, many of them resembling "Chicago" windows.

In 1917 Byrne completed the Franke house, his last house in Rock Glen, leaving only one narrow lot<sup>136</sup> to interrupt an unbroken succession of six Prairie School houses around James Blythe's Rock Glen development. The Rock Crest development

133 Several years after completing his work in Rock Glen Byrne did have another commission in Mason City. One block to the west of the Markley house Byrne extensively remodeled the white clapboard colonial house of Charles MacNider. The house was thoroughly traditional therefore none of the Prairie School vocabulary could be used in the project and we have not covered it in this study.

134 E. V. Franke was no known relation of J. B. Franke of Fort Wayne for whom Byrne built a house in 1914 though both commissions came to him through his collaboration with Griffin in 1918 or 1919. Another house in the prairie style was built for Carl F. Franke of Mason City who was E. V. Franke's brother and vice-president of the Central Trust Bank. Located directly across the street from Wright's Stockman House its deeply overhanging hip roof was removed by the present owners. Its architect is unknown.

135 Letter from Barry Byrne, September 19, 1966.

136 The empty lot was finally filled in when Curtis Besinger, a gifted product of Wright's Taliesin fellowship built a dwelling for Tom MacNider, the grandson of Charles and son of Hanford MacNider. By then stone of the type used in the

opposite had not fared quite so well, with one house of Griffins, one house possibly modified from plans by Griffin or Byrne and two dead on the drawing board.

Though sixteen houses had been projected in the original layout depicted by Marion Mahoney and only eight built, the degree to which the goals of the development were realized were unexcelled by any other Prairie School development in this country. Unexecuted developments projected by Griffin in this country included the Trier Center, Ridge Quadrangles, Emory Hills, the Clarke Subdivision, Idalia, and Mossmain. His genius remained a constant quantity through these projects which all ended in failure.

What then made the difference in Mason City? It is true that the same level of prosperity as that present in Mason City in the decade 1907 to 1917 may not have prevailed as a second variable in all these locations. However, given the possibility that it may have been present in some, the thing lacking was a local champion willing to make the cause his own and support it with his money, his energy, the force of his personality and, above all, never tire until his will prevailed. In Mason City, except for the individual developer, the conditions were the same on both sides of Willow Creek. In Rock Glen James Blythe must have been the deciding variable. His financial and political roots grew deep in the structure of the community. He couldn't be discharged and driven away if he mischanced to alienate others with his zeal. Teamed with men like Melson, Markley and Page astride the crest of a rapidly expanding economy he could provide the solid local backing so absolutely necessary before an architect and planner could successfully execute a unified community development.

other buildings was no longer practical and therefore concrete block was used. This harmonized better than brick with the stone and stucco of the adjacent buildings and was appropriate for the vice-president of the Northwestern States Portland Cement Co.



Curtis Besinger

## *Some Recent Work*

*The architect for the two houses illustrated on these pages, Curtis Besinger, spent several years working with Frank Lloyd Wright. Later he was Architectural Consultant to House Beautiful Magazine. Professor Besinger is currently teaching in the Department of Architecture at the University of Kansas. He also continues to maintain his own private practice of architecture.*

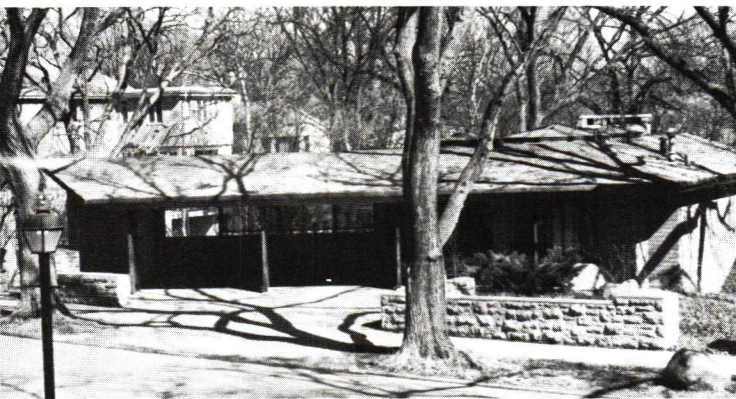


*The east elevation of the house now occupying the lot just north of the Page house in Rock Glen at Mason City Iowa. It was designed by Curtis Besinger for Tom McNider in 1959.*

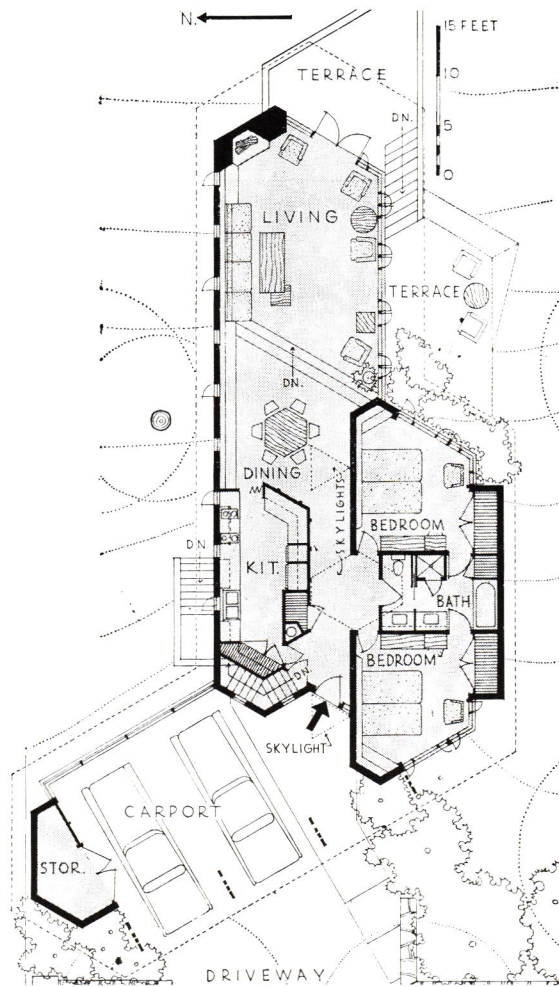




*The McNider house seen from the southeast showing its relationship to the Page house.*



*The Tom McNider house as it is seen from the west or street side. The Franke house can be seen in the background.*



*Plan of the Tom McNider house. The architect has used an obtuse angle grid for the basic module. This has the advantage of achieving a much more open and unconfined interior space on an otherwise small piece of property.*

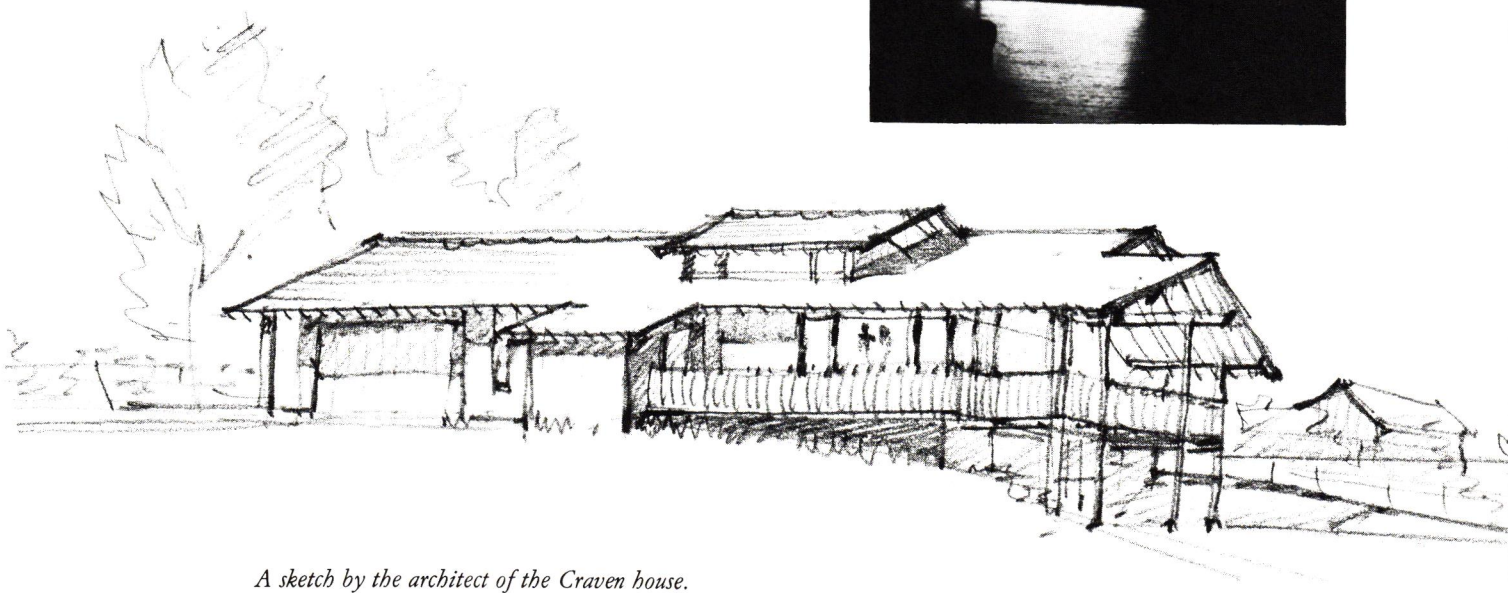
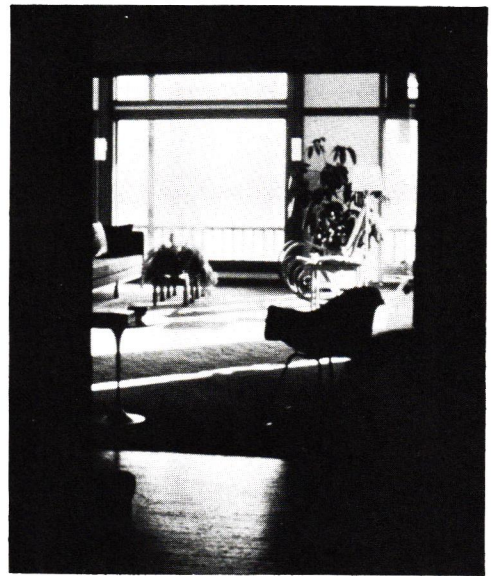


*This house, done for the Craven family by Besinger, is really the result of a sensitive remodeling of an existing farm house in Northwestern Missouri.*



*Elements of the Prairie School are evident throughout the Craven house. The detailing might be called "Oak Park revisited" in contemporary manner.*

*Another view of the Craven house.*



*A sketch by the architect of the Craven house.*



## *Hugh Garden In Iowa*

by Wesley I. Shank\*

*The work of Hugh M. G. Garden has been recognized in recent years as some of the most significant of any produced by the Prairie architects around the turn of the century. Wesley Shank, now teaching architectural history at Iowa State University, has accomplished what most historians only hope for. He has found and documented a previously unknown but significant structure by an important designer.*

The First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Marshalltown, Iowa, is a little-known early commission by the Chicago architect Hugh M. G. Garden. Built during 1902-1903, it is an example of the modern architecture of the Prairie School and shows a surprisingly early acceptance of the style by people beyond the immediate Chicago area.

The modern architecture of which this church is an example occurred during the second stage of a two-stage pattern of development. During the first stage, which accompanied nineteenth-century industrialization and urbanization in Europe and America, architects devised methods to solve the problems of construction and of functional architectural planning as the result of having to design several completely new building types, office buildings, railroad stations, department stores, and others. In the second stage, reached by Chicago architects toward the end of the nineteenth century and by

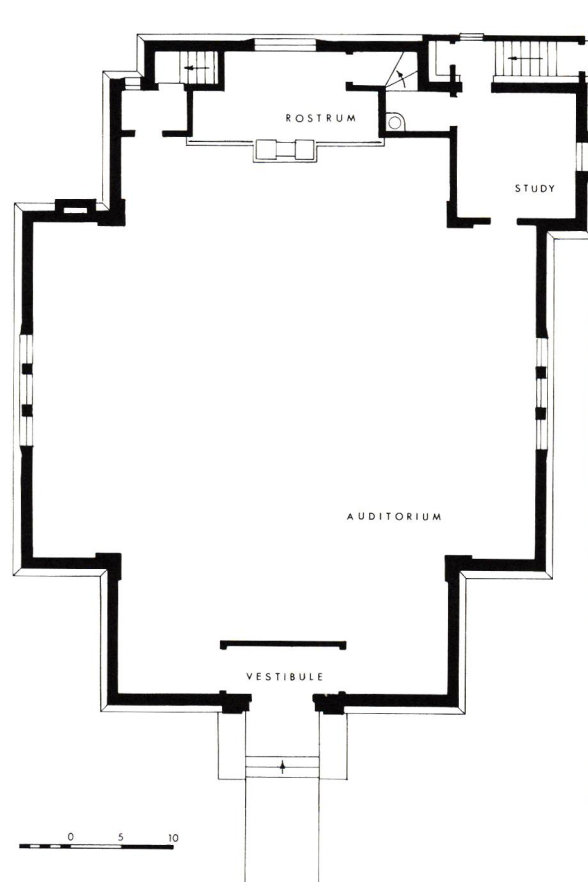
European architects at the beginning of the twentieth, a contemporary architectural expression was developed which took its inspiration not from historic architectural forms, but partly from building use, materials of construction, and structural system, and partly from very simple geometric patterns in one, two, or three dimensions.

Some Christian Science churches which were examples of only the first stage of development were described in an article appearing in *The Craftsman* magazine for 1904-1905, of which Gustav Stickley was the editor and publisher.<sup>1</sup> The writer of the article commented on the unusual overall forms of the six churches about which he wrote, recognizing that these forms were largely the result of the application of the methods of architectural planning devised during what has been called here the first stage of development. He looked then toward the factors affecting the formulation of the building

\*The author wishes to express his thanks to Professor Lawton Patten who originally brought the subject of this essay to his attention.

1 "The Architecture of Certain Christian Science Churches," *The Craftsman*, VII (Oct. 1904 - Mar. 1905), 689-692.

program — or the statement of the architectural problem to be solved — in search of an explanation. Speaking of Christian Science in this regard he said: "Being a departure, rather than a stage in evolution, the movement is untrammled by tradition. As a result, the buildings demanded by it as places of instruction and worship, are free to develop into unusual forms."<sup>2</sup> He went on to quote a statement made by an unnamed active worker in the movement to the effect that Christian Scientists "are inclined to discard many time-honored customs, and to introduce entirely new designs for church auditoriums; planning simply for convenient and comfortable rooms wherein to congregate and hear the truth. These places of assembly are distinguished for extreme simplicity, for freedom from historic decoration, for the absence of pagan symbols adapted to ornamentation, and for disregard of obsolete ideas..."<sup>3</sup> The first church discussed in this article was the Mother Church in Boston built in 1880. Its interior was described as expressing well the Christian Scientists' ideas about churches, for the functional requirements of "acoustics, ventilation, seating capacity and means of entrance and exit" had been principle determinants of the design, and the natural qualities of materials had been utilized as a means of enhancing the architectural effect of the interior spaces. The Romanesque design of the exterior, however, was dismissed as "conventional", although it was thought to have been honestly done.<sup>4</sup> The second church described followed a simplified version of the Renaissance style, and the other four were of more direct Classic derivation. The writer of the article was able to see, however, that in spite of the distractions of the historic architectural details, these churches did not resemble any traditional church.<sup>5</sup> Thus, his comments show that he realized that in these churches an important architectural advance had been made which today may be looked upon as the first stage in the development of modern architecture. His comments also show that he felt the need for the accomplishments of the second stage, that of architectural expression along contemporary lines, by his attempt to explain away the historic forms. Since Christian Science was a strongly philosophic movement, he continued, it was fitting that it utilize, in the case of the buildings decorated with Roman-inspired forms, the architectural forms of the civilization which developed philosophy to a high



*The plan of Hugh Garden's First Church of Christ, Scientist. Measured and drawn by Wesley I. Shank.*

level.<sup>6</sup> The explanation is weak, and today no further comment is needed on it.

Had the person writing about the six Christian Science churches known of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Marshalltown — it had been completed by the time that the article was published — he would have been able to cite an example in which contemporary architectural expression had been achieved. Contemporary expression of use, materials, and structure, and the use of simple geometric patterns, then, are the identifying marks of the fully modern architecture. With respect to use, a Christian Science church, as mentioned before, is a "convenient and comfortable room in which to congregate and hear the truth." In the Marshalltown church Hugh Garden used a Greek-cross plan. The main roof follows the slope of the four steep gables and intersects at the crossing. Since the arms of the cross are short and wide, the effect of the church auditorium is almost that of one large volume. The large windows and their placement close to the sloping line of the eaves indicate the large well-lit auditorium whose ceiling follows the form of the intersecting roofs. Use, therefore, is expressed in this example of modern architecture by expression

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 692.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 689.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 690.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 691, 692.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 691.



*An interior photo of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Marshalltown, Iowa. All photos in this article are by Ken L. Henderson.*

of the qualities of the enclosed space itself. The expression of materials, also characteristic of modern architecture, was not completely new in the second stage, for it will be recalled that the use of the natural qualities of materials to enhance the Romanesque Mother Church was noted. In many Victorian buildings too, the color and texture of stone, brick, tile, slate, and wood are important to architectural design. But in the fully-developed modern work, color and texture replaced fashioned forms. In the Marshalltown church the qualities of materials are exploited in the modern way. The building rests on grey stone foundation walls, and the stone is exposed. The walls above are of wood frame construction finished in smooth stucco. A large wooden water table makes the transition between stucco and stone. In the design of the frame walls there is, however, an inconsistency, a slight inward slope or batter. Masonry walls are battered because they must thicken toward their base in order to support their own accumulated crushing weight. A battered wood frame wall belies the lightweight quality of this type of construction.

Within the building the wooden doors, wainscot, trim, and the exposed structural members are of dark stained walnut. The large windows are glazed

in greenish-yellow opalescent glass which, with its simple straight-line pattern of lead comes, constitutes the main decorative feature of the church interior. Even the glass is used in a way which, true to second-stage principles, brings out the inherent qualities of the material, its opalescence, color, and pattern. The interior walls are plastered, and simple walnut moldings of rectangular cross section limit the area of plaster surfaces, thereby recognizing and deriving decorative interest from the fact that small areas of unobstructed plaster are less likely to crack. Expression of structure is a further type of expression characteristic of modern architecture which is seen in the Marshalltown church. In the auditorium large wooden brackets carrying posts support the wooden roof beams at the corners of the "crossing," and the beams carry exposed purlins. Further expression of structure is seen at the exterior of the gables, where bracketlike projections from the window mullions support — or appear to support — the overhand of the roof.

Several decorative features of the building involve the use of simple geometric patterns that are mainly lineal. The exterior moldings, window trim, and water table are of exaggerated size and are made up in most cases of wooden moldings which seem to overlap one another. The head and jamb moldings of the high windows in the gables join a horizontal molding band which continues around the corners

of the building. Within the building there is a low, level wainscot scarcely higher than a large baseboard, which diminishes in height toward the rear of the auditorium with the rise in the sloping floor. This wainscot is constructed of horizontal walnut boards and battens, again an example of a continuous line pattern. The interior doors are also of walnut of essentially single-panel type formed by two planks placed vertically and joined by a narrow molding along the vertical joint. The double lectern, however, is of oak and includes the decorative use of some thin, parallel bands projecting from the surface of the wood and spaced apart a distance about equal to their own width. Similar bands decorate the horizontal walnut molding at eave level in the auditorium, and they also appear on most of the exterior trim that frames the window openings.

Having seen the Marshalltown church, one might conclude that the decorative features of Garden's work are quite original. This is not true, for the building is similar in this respect to other work of his at this time and to buildings by the whole group of young Chicago architects who are usually designated today as the Prairie School. Frank Lloyd Wright was one of them, and Louis Sullivan their intellectual leader. Their work follows similar principles and shows similarities in appearance. During this time Garden also designed the Albert F. Madlener house in Chicago where, in the entrance hall, he used horizontally banded paneling similar to the low wainscot of the Marshalltown church, and in the dining room paneling he made use of narrow decorative projecting bands of wood as he did in the rostrum and the various moldings of the Marshalltown church.<sup>7</sup> Wright also used such bands in the interior trim of the Bradley house in Kankakee and in the buffet of the later Robie house. The use of the moldings subdividing the plane of interior plaster in the Marshalltown church is a treatment used by many of the Prairie School architects, including Wright, Griffin, and later Byrne. The large-scale exterior pattern formed by the connection of gable window jamb trim and horizontal molding band corresponds to a design technique which Garden utilized in his design for the Schoenhofen Brewery Building, where brickwork bands define a panel pattern that included large areas of a facade in each panel.<sup>8</sup> The originality of the decorative aspects of the Marshalltown church, then, is the originality to be found in the work of the Prairie School as a whole.

7 Bernard C. Greengard, "Hugh M. G. Garden," *Prairie School Review*, III, No. 1, 1966, p. 9.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 11.

The construction contract dated 12 November 1902 between the church and the builder establishes Hugh M. G. Garden of 172 Washington Street, Chicago, as the architect of the church, even though Garden was then working in the office of another architect, Richard E. Schmidt.<sup>9</sup> Other papers now in the possession of the church show that Garden received a commission of \$480.00 — \$250.00 on 10 March 1902 and \$230.00 on 16 September 1902. He also received \$20.00 in traveling expenses to come to Marshalltown on 3 November 1902. Concerning the building, the *Evening Times-Republican* of Marshalltown for 4 November 1902 stated that the seating capacity was to be approximately four hundred people and that the cost would be from eight to nine thousand dollars including the cost of the land and the furnishings.<sup>10</sup> The construction contract was written for \$5115.00, excluding the cost of the stained-glass windows and three lighting fixtures.<sup>11</sup> These items were made by Giannini and Hilgart, who did similar work for Wright and other Prairie School architects, and were donated to the church by two members of the building committee.<sup>12</sup> The present lighting fixtures are, unfortunately, recent replacements, but the original window glass is in place.

Having considered this church as an example of Prairie School architecture, one might then ask why a church congregation in a small, central Iowa town would engage one of these young architects. The circumstances seem to be of two kinds. The first was the existence of a web of personal connections between people in Chicago and Marshalltown, and the second was the fact that what Christian Scientists thought was architecturally correct for a Christian Science church was consistent with the architectural principles of the Prairie School. With respect, first, to the personal connections between Christian Scientists in the two cities, it was found that one of the two readers who conducted the dedication services for the Marshalltown church was a reader in the First Church of Christ, Scientist, in Chicago and was the sister of a Marshalltown resident. The other reader was a member of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist, in Chicago, whose building was designed by Garden and completed in 1901. In addition, a former soloist at the

9 *Ibid.*, pp. 6, 7.

10 "New Scientist Church," *Evening Times-Republican*, Marshalltown, Iowa, 4 Nov. 1902.

11 Construction contract, in possession of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Marshalltown, Iowa.

12 Invoice No. 1174, Giannini & Hilgart, dated 30 Sept. 1903, in possession of the First Church of Christ, Scientist, Marshalltown, Iowa.



Third Church sang at the Marshalltown dedication ceremonies.<sup>13</sup> It may be supposed, then, that these personal connections supply a plausible explanation for the fact that Garden was offered the Marshalltown commission. A newspaper report goes so far as to indicate that the Marshalltown church was modeled on the Third Church.<sup>14</sup>

Of greater importance than the personal connections was the fact that what Christian Scientists wanted in the architecture of their churches was consistent with Prairie School architectural principles. In the dedication of the Third Church of Chicago, the reader officiating noted in his address the following aspects of the interior of the new auditorium "its great breadth and simplicity of

13 "New Church Dedicated," *Marshalltown Times-Republican*, 31 August 1903, p. 7.

14 "New Scientist Church", *op. cit.* Garden's Chicago church seems to be another free-lance commission worth further investigation. It is much larger than the Marshalltown church and of rather imposing appearance.

surface and line" and the fact "that its most striking feature is the simplicity, breadth and power of its proportions."<sup>15</sup> Of its exterior, the reader said that "it expresses in a simple way the uses for which it was built, and in this way achieves any expression of style which it may have;" and that "the solidity and strength of the materials (granite for the base and enameled brick and terra cotta for the walls), with their texture and color, give to the building that quality of enduring repose which should characterize all buildings which stand for great truths."<sup>16</sup> With respect to the Marshalltown church, a newspaper statement dated 4 November 1902, expressed the church's ideas about its proposed building as follows: "Christian Scientists look upon their church buildings as a concrete manifestation of the spiritual truths of Christian Science, and consequently in the present structure the architect has given the building the qualities of simplicity, steadfastness, and truth embodied in a quiet unostentatious structure of simple gables, strong and enduring construction that it is believed are not out of harmony with the truths of Christianity. No effort has been made to make the building showy or important, indeed the contrary is true. . ."<sup>17</sup>

These Christian Science ideas about church architecture are similar to those of the architects in the second stage of development of modern architecture — the expression of the building materials, their color and texture and their use in structure, from which the communication of strength results; and the expression of use and the fact that style derives therefrom. The general statement that Christian Scientists consider their church buildings as a manifestation of the spiritual truths of their religion may be accommodated within the scope of a broader statement made in 1906 by Louis Sullivan, whose principles guided the Prairie School architects. Sullivan said that we should "consider . . . each building of the past and the present as the product and index of civilization of its time; and the civilization of the time, also, as the product and index of the thought of the people of the time and place."<sup>18</sup> It was therefore not surprising that the Christian Science congregation in Marshalltown should select a Prairie School architect from Chicago to design their church.

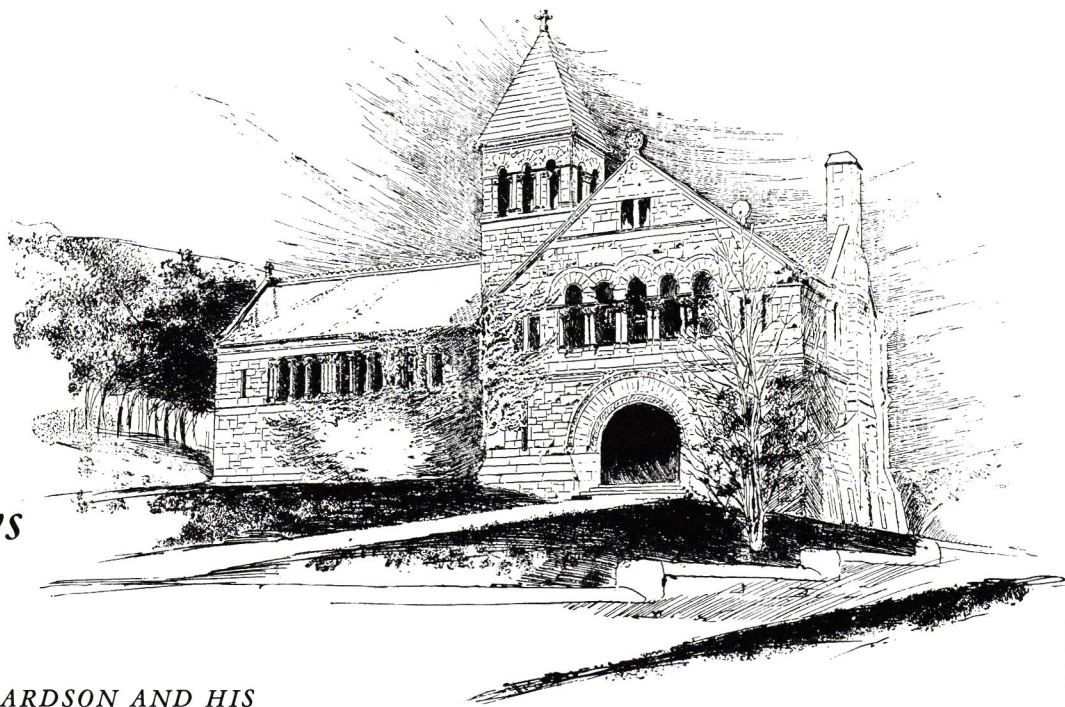
15 "Dedication of the Third Church of Christ, Scientist, of Chicago," *The Christian Science Journal*, XIX, No. 5, Aug. 1901, p. 281.

16 *Ibid.*, pp. 281, 282.

17 "New Scientist Church", *op. cit.*

18 Louis Sullivan, "What Is Architecture? — A Study of the American People Today," *The Craftsman*, X, No. 2, May 1906, p. 146.

## Book Reviews



LIBRARY; NORTH EASTON.

*HENRY HOBSON RICHARDSON AND HIS WORKS* by Marianna Schuyler Van Rensselaer. The Prairie School Press, Palos Park, Illinois, 1967. 152 pp., illus., \$25.00.

If any testimony were needed for the tremendous surge of interest in architectural history across the country, it would be provided by the number of excellent reprints of architectural classics recently published. And now, at long last, the first biography of an American architect has again been made available, a book already out of print in 1935 (as Henry-Russell Hitchcock then noted), a book searched for by countless librarians and architectural historians in countless book-stores: I am of course speaking of Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer's *Henry Hobson Richardson and his Works*. It came out in 1888 (in an edition of 500 copies, which may account for its excessive rarity), that is only two years after the premature death of the man whose life and works it wanted to record for posterity. Richardson had died in 1886, at the age of 48, and the book was written in a spirit of fresh grief and extravagant admiration. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's concluding words are these:

... we may call him with confidence not only the greatest American artist, but the greatest benefactor of American art who has yet been born.

This is an evaluation which of course has not stood the test of time. In the long run, Richardson's reputation was based on a different and more sophisticated view, one which saw in him more the pioneer of bold new forms than the master of eclectic revivalism. It was Lewis Mumford in the 1930's who first looked at Richardson "in context" and restored his by then rather tattered fame; Marianna Griswold Van Rensselaer (1851-1934)

lived long enough to see this happen. Her book had not been an evaluation, but a labor of love - by a cultivated, Victorian lady, close to her subject (although she characteristically never made clear how well she actually knew Richardson), a book stylistically impeccable, imbued with a remarkable esthetic and architectural sense, but lacking the bibliographic apparatus we would now insist on. Mrs. Van Rensselaer's facts, however, were accurate; her research was diligent - and she had access to Richardson's letters and could interview his friends and colleagues. Thus the book, including its fine appendix of Richardson's works and extracts from some of Richardson's documents, was the basis for all future research, particularly for Henry-Russell Hitchcock's *The Architecture of H. H. Richardson and his Times*, which came out in 1938, and - significantly - was reprinted already in 1961.

The reprint of Mrs. Van Rensselaer's book by the Prairie School Press is not only a public service, but also a first-rate technical job: it is actually somewhat superior to the original, because it is on good paper (the poor quality of the 1888 pulp paper may be another reason for the rarity of the book: many copies simply disintegrated). The rich illustrations which were one of the glories of the book are handsomely reproduced, the line drawings as well as the half-tones. One added feature - and a very attractive one - is the instructive introduction by James Van Trump, well-known editor of *Charette*.

Adolf K. Placzek  
Avery Librarian  
Columbia University



*THE MEANINGS OF ARCHITECTURE, Buildings and Writings* by John Wellborn Root. Edited by Donald Hoffmann. Horizon Press, New York, 1967. 238 pp., illus., \$15.00.

Among architectural historians there has long been a lively interest in the work of John Wellborn Root. This interest has had several sources. One is undoubtedly the renewed attention drawn to Root's masterpiece, the Monadnock Building, by its juxtaposition with so many recent excellent structures on Dearborn Street on the western edge of the Chicago Loop. The Monadnock now acts as a kind of gateway for perhaps the finest urbanistic experience in the United States. Another reason is certainly the republication of Harriet Monroe's biographical memoir of Root. Since Miss Monroe's treatment of her brother-in-law was, in Carl Condit's phrase "excessively adulatory", a number of questions have naturally been raised. The latest contribution to the Root literature is this handsome volume, edited by Donald Hoffmann, who has long been working on the Root problem.

The chief values of the work are to be found in the compilation of Root's theoretical writings and in the portfolio of photographs and drawings of his buildings which accompanies them. The essays, many of which have previously been buried in obscure places, show that Root possessed a first class theoretical mind. He was completely aware of the contributions of Viollet-Le-Duc and Gottfried Semper to the lively discussions of the eighteenth-seventies and eighties and made a very fair evaluation of their respective positions. His writing is marked by clarity, grace, and what is usually lacking in Louis Sullivan, a delightful sense of humor. The witty "(C)ode for the Guidance of Persons Practicing the Profession of Architecture in the United States" is as fresh and relevant as the day it was published in 1889. The editing is excellent, and we must all be grateful to Mr. Hoffmann for making these essays conveniently available once more.

The photographs are somewhat of a mixed bag. Certain of them are necessarily poor because they are old; there is, after all, no way of taking a new picture of a building which has been demolished. Others, like Richard Nickel's photographs of the Monadnock are excellent. These leave nothing to be desired; still others, like Mr. Hoffmann's own shots of the Kansas City Board of Trade, seem to have suffered in the process of reproduction. These actually looked better in the December, 1967 issue of the *Architectural Forum*, where they were also published. For this kind of failure the publishers must be held accountable. The poor depiction of the

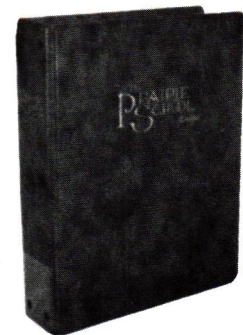
trading hall is especially to be mourned. It must have been one of the great interiors of nineteenth century America, comparable to Adler and Sullivan's Auditorium Theater and the waiting room of the St. Louis Railroad Station.

Finally we must observe that the entire volume whets the appetite for the definitive study of Root's life and work which Mr. Hoffmann has long been engaged in preparing. In this respect it is well to observe that this book was not intended to be such a treatise. Readers should not expect to find here an exhaustive list of his works or an analysis of the place of any one of them in his total oeuvre. The Provident Trust Building in Cleveland, which so interested many members of the Society of Architectural Historians last year, is not included here, and there is no particular reason why it should have been. Mr. Hoffmann's purpose was evidently to provide a convenient introduction to the theory and the buildings of John Root. In this he has, on the whole, succeeded admirably. We await his comprehensive study with heightened anticipation.

Leonard K. Eaton  
Professor of Architecture  
University of Michigan

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## Letters to the Editors

Sirs:

. . . The material on Harvey Ellis is excellent. I must say that the photographs — and especially the sketches — cast a strange new light on both Richardson and Sullivan. At the very least, they seem to indicate that the ornamental and plastic idiom which both men employed was shared by at least one other designer. Might there have been still others of whom we do not yet know?

Kennedy's piece is very good — well-researched, well-written and pleasantly discreet in both its tone and its judgments.

Over against my positive vote on the Ellis material, I must register a negative one, on your new policy of including contemporary work in the *Review*. Its very well-deserved success springs from the fact that it concentrated on a very specific body of *historical materials* unusually compact and limited in both time and space. The new work you are now publishing may or may not represent, in purely formal terms, some sort of descent from these earlier prototypes. But the point is, at the very least, moot: to declare . . . work as being in the Prairie style involves value judgments with which not everyone will agree. In any case, the inclusion of such new work in the *Review* introduces an ambiguity which I, for one, find disturbing because it's so unnecessary. There are plenty of journals in which he can publish but only one which can devote 35 pages to Ellis!

James Marston Fitch  
Professor of Architecture  
Columbia University

Sirs:

Much as I enjoyed the double issue devoted primarily to the mysterious Harvey Ellis, it seems to me that Mr. Kennedy is pushing history too far in ranking Ellis with Richardson, Root, and Sullivan. William Gray Purcell's appraisal of Ellis as 'greater than Richardson' becomes a bit ludicrous when one sees, for example, Ellis's sketches for a residence as reproduced on page 29 — a pastiche of one-third Glessner house, one-third Ames Gate lodge, and the rest from various of Richardson's small library buildings.

Sullivan has as many apologists as he needs, but I must take issue with Mr. Kennedy's opening statement that 'John Root without Daniel Burnham might never have become anything but a designer

without clients.' Root was hardly a 'paper' architect — as his sense of materials and of engineering testify. As to clients, Root brought to the partnership not only the commission for the John B. Sherman house, which became their first important executed building, but the crucial commissions from Owen F. Aldis, acting for the Brooks brothers of Boston — the Montauk, the Monadnock, and the Rookery.

Donald Hoffmann  
Art Editor  
Kansas City Star  
National Director, SAH

### Preview

The final issue of Volume V of *The Prairie School Review* will be devoted to the Gamble House in Pasadena, California, designed by the brothers Charles and Henry Greene. Thus for the first time we will cover a building which was not actually a part of the midwest Prairie movement but rather a parallel and similar vocabulary in the development of modern architecture.

Several recent books will be reviewed including the following:

*Architecture in California*

David Gebhard and Harriette  
Von Breton

*The Robie House*

Frank Lloyd Wright

*The Imperial Hotel*

Cary James

*Chicago, An Extraordinary Guide*

Jory Graham

The editors continue to welcome letters for possible publication. Letters may concern articles published in the *Review* or any other appropriate subject. We also continue to be interested in articles for possible publication. Authors should submit outlines to the editors for review prior to completing their manuscripts.

### In Chicago

The editors of *The Prairie School Review* are beginning a comprehensive bibliography of writings by and about Frank Lloyd Wright. Anyone who has knowledge of unusual or little known material which should be included in such a volume is invited to contact W. R. Hasbrouck at 12509 South 89th Avenue, Palos Park, Illinois 60464.



*This map of the Rock Glen/Rock Crest area shows the entire area as it was originally proposed for development by Walter Burley Griffin and his clients. Courtesy of the New-York Historical Society, New York City.*

