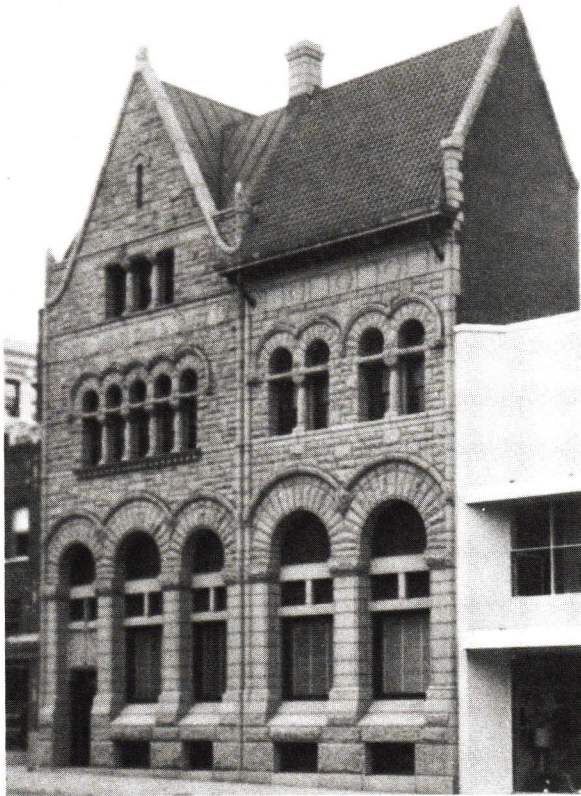


The
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Review

Volume XI, Number 2

Second Quarter, 1974

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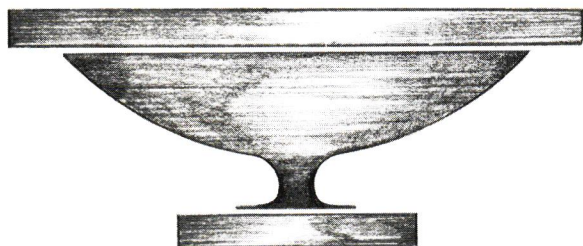
ABOVE:

The State Savings and Loan and Trust Company. The right portion is Wood's addition of 1906 to Patton and Fisher's original building, 1893. T. M. Karlowicz photo.

COVER:

Detail at entrance of Wood's office building pronouncing a tribute to the Prairie School. Photo by Mitzie Nevins.

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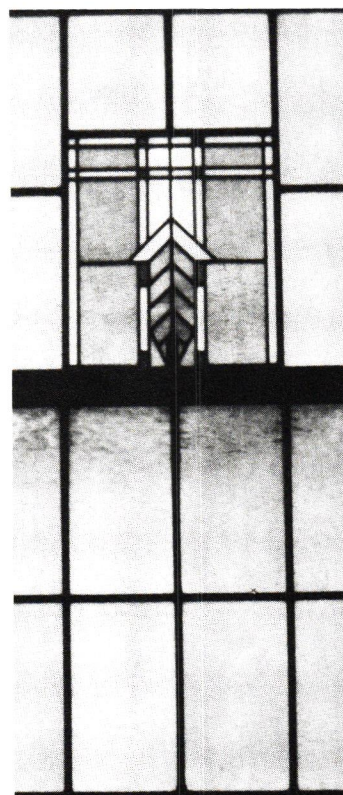
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Wood's office building, 1911-12.

From the EDITORS

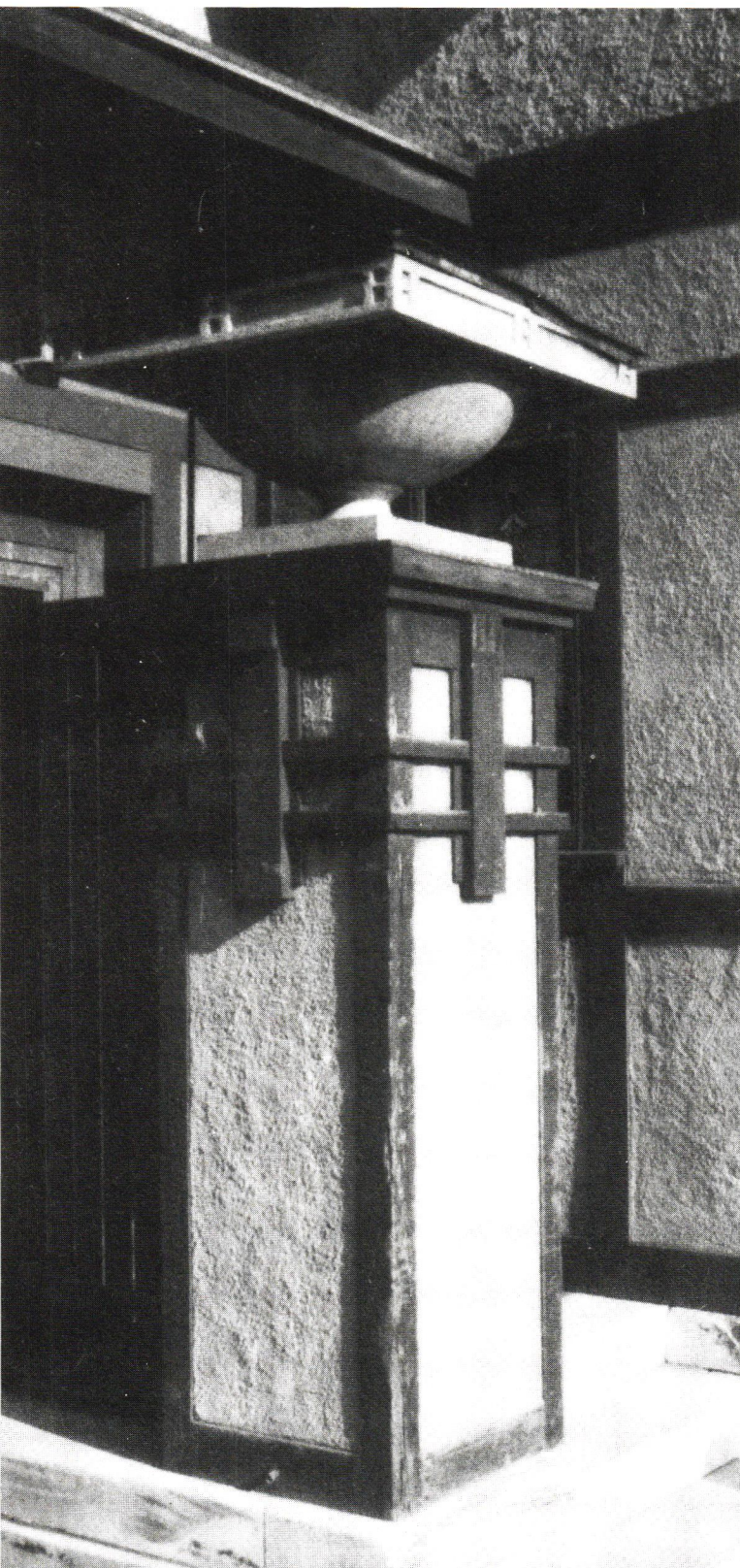
Last quarter we wrote here about the saving of the Wainwright Building in St. Louis. This brought to mind the rarity of that occasion. Few preservation oriented organizations actually save buildings. Most busy themselves with telling others why buildings should be saved. The doing of it is left to others and usually the others never appear on the scene.

Several times you have read here about The Chicago School of Architecture Foundation and its work to save and restore The Glessner House in Chicago. The Foundation has saved Glessner House but until recently that was their only claim to preservation. They, and this writer must be included in the group, became guilty of telling others what should be done but not practicing their own dogma. Happily, the events of recent months have proven this not the case. Several members of the Glessner Board of Trustees, led by Ruth Moore Garbe, have succeeded in what is perhaps the most important preservation effort Chicago has ever experienced: Glessner House no longer stands alone. The buildings and space around it now are also part of The Prairie Avenue Heritage District.

The District, bounded on the north by Eighteenth Street, now includes both sides of Prairie Avenue for a full block south. Directly across from Glessner at Eighteenth is the Kimball House by S. S. Beman, and immediately south of Kimball is Cobb & Frost's Coleman/Ames house in all it's brownstone glory. South of Glessner is that rarest of commodities in Chicago, open land — to be an architectural park — bounded on it's south by the Elbridge Keith house with it's Second Empire details obscured only by a coat of grey paint. The entire District is on the National Register and, more important, has the city's blessing for landmark status. This last detail is vital and factual. The city of Chicago has agreed to work with the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation to bring the street back to its original charm and to assist in completing the park between Glessner and Keith.

The saving of the Glessner House has long been a fact. The saving of the other three houses and the space around them came as a result of nearly a year's work negotiating for the purchase of the properties and their protection by agreements with the new owners to give the Foundation some measure of control of the future disposition of the buildings and the land. Various agreements were reached, with the Keith House actually having what is believed to be the first transfer of title which carries with it an encumbrance which prohibits the new owner from alteration or demolition without prior permission of the Chicago School of Architecture Foundation. The next step is to see if this legality will benefit the new owner through reduced taxes. If it does, a giant step for preservation will have been taken in Illinois.

The Chicago School of Architecture Foundation has proven to be the most, in fact the only, effective instrument for preserving buildings in Chicago. Under the roof of its headquarters, the Glessner House, are nearly a dozen other groups related to architecture, all of which are working together to preserve our heritage. They have made great strides in a short time but much remains to be done. Help them.



Ernest M. Wood: *A Provincial Testament*

by James R. Allen

A chapter in the history of the Prairie Style should be devoted to provincial phenomena. Provincial followers of Wright provide an expanded view of his influence beyond the established relationship with architects who were members of the master's intimate circle.¹ Moreover, provincial practices offer an opportunity for study of regional applications or adaptations of the Prairie Style. One such practitioner was Ernest M. Wood of Quincy, Illinois, whose probable contact with the circle of Wright may account for his remarkable achievement.

Ernest Michael Wood was born in Quincy to Edward M. Wood and Rebecca Montgomery Wood in 1863.² All evidence indicates that Wood confined his architectural practice to the Quincy area, indeed that he resided in that city without interruption until very late in his life.³ He married in 1903, but left no children.⁴ At his death in 1956, a bachelor brother, Howard O. Wood, survived Ernest.⁵

1 Lloyd C. Englebrecht, "Henry Frost: The Prairie School in the Southwest," *Prairie School Review*, Vol. VI, No. 4, 1969, pp. 5-29. H. Allen Brooks, "Percy Dwight Bentley at La Crosse," *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. IX, No. 3, 1972.

2 *Adams County Birth Records*, June, 1863.

3 *Quincy City Directories*, 1863-1938; Obituary, Ernest M. Wood, *Quincy Herald Whig*, March 11, 1956, n.p.; and Interviews: Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck, Quincy, September, 1970; Mrs. M. Huck, Quincy, June, 1971.

4 *Adams County Marriage Records*, 1903, and Obituary, *op. cit.*

5 *Adams County Death Records*, 1959, and Obituary, *op. cit.*

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Records of Wood's career remained in the hands of surviving relatives until sometime in the 1960s when most were unfortunately lost.⁶ The remaining information on the architect owes to oral tradition, a few surviving drawings and specifications and, of course, the buildings themselves. Fortunately, most of the designs executed by Wood have survived. The remarkable commentary they provide shows that this local architect went through a progressive assimilation of the Prairie Style and that earlier stages of his development seem to have predisposed him favorably to the example of Sullivan and Wright. An unmistakable consistency in Wood's development can be traced from his earliest architectural experience to a mature mastery of a Whighian idiom.

In 1886-87, as he approached twenty-five, Wood secured a position as draftsman for Quincy architect Harvey Chatten, with whom he remained until about 1890-91.⁷ Apparently, this was his only professional training. Records of any previous education have not survived, and there is only one reference to this earlier period in his life which attributes him as "... being especially good in painting, etching and woodcarving."⁸ Perhaps such talents were sufficient for the needs of Chatten as Wood is the only draftsman listed in his employ from 1886 to 1891.⁹

Thus, the period of work for Harvey Chatten had singular importance for the professional foundations of Ernest Wood. Contemporary biographers agreed that Chatten was one of the most respected architects in the area.¹⁰ His reputation earned him some coveted commissions, including many for the wealthier residential clientele in Quincy, and this also undoubtedly had its importance in the education of the young draftsman.

Regarding Chatten's background, one reference, useful to this discussion, has it that he "... early decided on his life work, securing his training in the office of the late Robert Bunce and in the offices of prominent Boston architects."¹¹ Enough is known



Ernest Wood participated in the design of this house for R. F. Newcomb. Harvey Chatten, architect, 1890-91. J. R. Allen photo.

about Robert Bunce to indicate that he had a respectable local practice in Quincy which Chatten inherited. Concerning Chatten's period of training in Boston, however, there are no details available, though some features of his designs seem derived from Eastern precedents.

The house for Richard F. Newcomb, a wealthy Quincy industrialist, 1890-91, is an example of Chatten's ability on a large scale.¹² Its style combines Romanesque masonry treatment with Queen Anne massing and details. While the design may not qualify as a masterful example of its type, it is nevertheless an impressive conception. A general willingness to experiment (evidenced here in the widely varied and vigorous fenestration, the projecting roof forms, and the use of a wide veranda) can be said to have been typical of Chatten. In addition, this house is a fine illustration of the high standards of craftsmanship which Chatten demanded in every aspect of construction. These traits were transmitted from the master to his draftsman, and because of the likelihood that Wood participated in its design, the Newcomb House is important in the consideration of his debt to Chatten for early indoctrination.¹³

Wood's early development as an architect may not have been entirely the result of his association with Chatten, however. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Quincy became an industrial and commercial center of Illinois, second only to Chicago.¹⁴ The wave of building activity that re-

6 Interview, Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck, *op. cit.*

7 *Quincy City Directory*, 1886-87.

8 Obituary, *op. cit.*

9 *Quincy City Directories*, 1892-93, 1896-1938; for the exception of the years 1894-95. After 1891, Wood is listed as being in private practice.

10 Biographical references to Chatten appear in: David B. Wilcox, *Representative Men and Homes of Quincy*, Quincy, 1899, n.p., and *Portrait and Biographical Record of Adams County, Illinois*, Chapman Bros., Chicago, 1892, n.p., and in an obituary, *Quincy Herald Whig*, May 7, 1930, n.p.

11 Wilcox, *ibid.*, n.p.

12 Carl Landrum, "From Quincy's Past," *Quincy Herald Whig*, June 21, 1970, n.p.

13 Obituary, Ernest M. Wood, *op. cit.*

14 Henry Ashbury, *Reminiscences of Quincy, Illinois*, Quincy, 1882, p. 18, and David F. Wilcox, *Quincy and Adams County, History and Representative Men*, Chicago, 1919, Vol. 1.



This is a sketch of Silsbee's W. S. Warfield House of 1886. It is still standing today in Quincy, Illinois. Photograph from The Building Budget.

sulted from the material growth of Quincy not only contributed to Chatten's success, but also brought the work of Chicago architects to the downstate city, among whom was no less a figure as Joseph L. Silsbee. Three of Silsbee's designs for Quincy were executed.¹⁵ The first, a residence for William S. Warfield, 1886-87, is one of the architect's last works in the Queen Anne style, and it is located, perhaps significantly, across the street from the Newcomb house by Chatten.¹⁶

Inasmuch as the Warfield house preceded the Newcomb by several years, we can be sure that Wood, and possibly Chatten were instructed by Silsbee's example. That they may have had contact with the Chicago architect should not be overlooked. For the young Wood, this would certainly have been inspiring.

The next notable design, therefore, in the discussion of Wood's training is, not surprisingly, Romanesque: the Theodore Poling house, 1890-91.¹⁷ This work has been separately attributed to Chatten and elsewhere to Wood.¹⁸ Among the few recorded examples from this period it is virtually impossible to separate the hand of the architect from that of the draftsman. However, an oral tradition supports Wood's authorship in this de-

15 Susan Karr Sorell, "Silsbee, The Evolution of a Personal Style," and "A Catalog of Work by J. L. Silsbee," *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1970, pp. 5-13 and 17-21. The William B. Bull house is not included in Sorell's catalog of Silsbee's work. It was identified and its authorship confirmed later by Titus M. Karlowicz. Silsbee also submitted a design in competition for the Hotel Quincy. Records of this fourth plan were recently reported to be located in the Newcomb Hotel, Quincy, Illinois.

16 *The Inland Architect*, Vol. VII, No. 1, February, 1886, p. 13.

17 Obituary, Harvey Chatten, *op. cit.*

18 *Ibid.*, and Obituary, Ernest M. Wood, *op. cit.*



Theodore Poling house. Chatten and/or Wood, architect, 1890-91. T. M. Karlowicz photo.

sign.¹⁹ An explanation for this discrepancy is offered by the same source telling of an argument which developed between the two men over the authorship of several designs during this period. Presumably, Wood had assumed more than the usual responsibilities of a draftsman by that time. Whatever the appropriate attribution, the Theodore Poling house can be taken as another important experience for Ernest Wood.

As the best example of the Romanesque in Quincy residential architecture, this house indicates that its architect(s) understood not only the refined use of stone masonry and decorative details of the style, but also the importance of harmonious incorporation of the parts into the whole for which the work of H. H. Richardson and his followers was distinguished. All of the elements of this design are integrated within the asymmetrical scheme. The beautifully conceived entrance, worthy of Richardson, corresponds on the interior to a living hall opening onto the other rooms of the house. The hall also receives the staircase, and its function is similar to the one in the Newcomb house. The interior decoration, although deriving from typical Victorian tastes, deserves mention for its painstaking attention to detail and respect for the integrity of materials.

During, or possibly following the construction of the Newcomb and Theodore Poling houses, Wood established himself in independent practice. However, lack of records has obscured a five-year period of this early independent work. Not until 1897 can a number of noteworthy designs be associated with Wood's name. Significantly, they show a relationship to the earlier work with Chatten and, more importantly, they are evidence of an interest in another aspect of Silsbee's work.

19 Interviews, *op. cit.*, and Letter from Oliver B. Williams, Quincy, April 5, 1971.



The Otho Poling house. E. M. Wood architect, 1897. The material and form of the house are original with the exception of the porch which has been enclosed. J. R. Allen photo.



The Otho Poling and James Neilson houses of 1897 are two examples of Wood's use of the Shingle Style during the late 1890's.²⁰ The architect's interest in the Shingle Style at this period seems to derive from the other example in Quincy by Silsbee: the William Bull house, built in 1887.²¹

Wood's concern in the Neilson and Otho Poling houses appears similar to that of Silsbee. In each case, the exterior surfaces were elaborated by use of shingles in the second story to complement the masonry below. The architect also realized how the sweeping movement of the roof can serve as a major unifying element in the expression of the style. It is also apparent that Wood was aware of the unifying effect created by the movements of the roof outward to include the wide verandas (the veranda of the O. Poling house has since been enclosed) thus providing for a sense of inter-relation between interior and exterior. In examining Wood's efforts in this style,

20 Ernest M. Wood, *Architect's Account Book*, 1896-1901, p. 17.

21 *The Inland Architect*, Vol. VII, No. 1, February, 1886, p. 13. (See also footnote 15)



William B. Bull house, Quincy, as it appeared in the 1890's. J. L. Silsbee, architect. Silsbee's design for Bull may have encouraged Wood's later use of the Shingle Style. Photo courtesy of Helen Bull Spinozza and George M. Irwin.

The James Neilson house, 1897. J. R. Allen photo.

we can recall that Silsbee's influence probably had similar effects on two of his students, Frank Lloyd Wright and George W. Maher,²² for they were to influence, in their turn, the Quincy architect.

After 1900, Wood abandoned the Shingle Style in favor of more contemporary influences from Chicago architects. There remain some possible references to an on-going interest in the work of Silsbee, such as might be suggested by the J. S. Cruttenden house, 1903-04, outstanding for its repertory of Colonial detail.²³ But most of Wood's major work from this second decade of his career derives from the more direct example of Prairie School architects. This aspect of our architect's

22 H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School, Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, Toronto, 1972, pp. 29 and 34; and Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, "The Earliest Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1970, pp. 14-16.

23 Attribution to Wood is based on oral tradition, interviews and letter from Oliver B. Williams, *op. cit.* A building permit was issued to Cruttenden for this property in May, 1904. For a discussion of Silsbee's later Colonial Revival period, see Sorell, *op. cit.*



House for J. S. Cruttenden in the Lawndale subdivision of Quincy. J. R. Allen photo.

development relates to an oral tradition which states that by 1900, Wood had undertaken, on a regular basis, trips to the Chicago area. Although his professional motives for these travels may seem obvious, this tradition does not provide details of the architect's objectives, itinerary or professional associates in the Chicago area.²⁴ Nevertheless, these excursions coincide with a marked change in Wood's work during the first decade of the twentieth century.

This decade, the second of Wood's career, shows a variety of architectural styles including the Colonial Revival, Tudor and, because it was an addition, one example of the Romanesque.²⁵ It is apparent, however, that the architect's concern at this time was not simply eclectic, but rather to take advantage of opportunities for experimentation. There are suggestions that his choices during this time may have been encouraged by the example of Wright and his circle. The W. I. McKee house, ca. 1908, for example, combines a less than conventional Tudor style with a Wrightian flavor in the sharply projecting eaves, patterns of half-timber in the stucco and the horizontal emphasis given to the porch.²⁶

²⁴ Interviews, *op. cit.* In this regard, we are also told that Wood accompanied a client to the Chicago area, apparently to familiarize the client with various aspects of the Prairie house. Interview, Mrs. A. White, Palmyra, Missouri, February 1972.

²⁵ Wood's return to the Romanesque was occasioned by the commission for an addition to the State Savings and Loan and Trust Company building in 1906. The original portion was designed by the Chicago firm of Patton and Fisher, and completed in 1893. See *The Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, November 1891, p. 55, and also *Portrait and Biographical Record of Adams County, Illinois, op. cit.*, pp. 452-455. A sketch bearing Wood's signature and the date is in the building. The State Savings and Loan and Trust Company building was Patton and Fisher's second commission in Quincy, preceded by the Quincy Public Library. See *The Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XI, May 1888 (plate).

²⁶ Architect's drawings, signed and undated, are in the



The W. I. McKee house, circa 1908. References to Wright in this example include decorative motifs applied to the porch posts. J. R. Allen photo.



The Appleton house, 1907. The Colonial Revival appears almost as a disguise for an interest in the work of George W. Maher. J. R. Allen photo.

The period 1900-1910 is characterized by similar experiments which can be viewed as a transition to Wood's eventual adoption of the Prairie Style in the following decade.

Wood's residential designs at this time align themselves with types by a number of Chicago architects. Interestingly, the most frequent medium represented is not the example of Wright but rather that of George W. Maher. The Appleton house, 1907, a Colonial Revival which, although possibly drawing on associations with Wright, bears the influence of Maher particularly in the columned porch and entrance.²⁷ The interior of the house is a

possession of present owners. A date of completion in 1908 is probable. Interview, Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Leavitt, Quincy, March 1971. Wright's Tudor examples are discussed in Grant Carpenter Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910: The First Golden Age*, New York, N.Y., 1958.

²⁷ Architect's drawings, signed and dated, last noted in the possession of Mrs. C. L. Redd, formerly of Quincy.



House for W. A. Dodge, circa 1910, Warsaw, Illinois. One of Wood's most polished products drawing upon study of Maher's work. J. R. Allen photo.

fine acknowledgement to Colonial prototypes, but details, such as horizontal bands of woodwork at eye-level around the rooms and geometric arrangements of cabinets around window seats, are indications of other interests at work.

The rusticated stone on the exterior of the Appleton house is applied to underlying brick masonry construction. The architect's experience with brick masonry design began early in the 1890s, and by 1900 this increasingly important material naturally occupied much of his attention.

Wood's designs from this period in which brick is used take the form of a rectangular block offset by horizontal lines expressed in the elements of the porch and eaves, and usually with a symmetrical balance of elements along the dominant street elevation. The form, especially in the types and balanced arrangements of windows, owes directly to examples in the work of Maher. In the Julius Kespohl house, 1908-09, the attempt at modifying the block-like form of the house includes the band of inset masonry directly beneath the eaves as well as their marked overhang.²⁸ The fenestration here represents a conspicuous reference to Maher in the shape and role given the third-story windows.

The use of brick is more confident in the later Dodge house, ca. 1910, located in the small community of Warsaw, 30 miles north of Quincy. The wide porch and the porte-cochere, supported by characteristic piers, were incorporated into this plan

28 Letter, Oliver B. Williams, *op. cit.* A building permit was issued for this property in November 1908.



The Julius Kespohl house, 1908-09. J. R. Allen photo.

to relieve the massive rectangularity, and to serve as functioning elements in the horizontal orientation. Fenestration is more numerous and relaxed than in previous examples and is in harmony with the expanses of wall.²⁹

The fine example of this house can be taken as an overture to Wood's work in the Prairie Style. After 1910, Wood assiduously devoted his practice to a study and assimilation of the style deriving particularly from Frank Lloyd Wright. So exclusive are his apparent interests at this time that they seem to constitute a personal answer to Wright's entreaties. Surviving relatives tell of Wood's outspoken admiration for Wright and, significantly, Louis Sullivan. They also recall, with some amusement, that this admiration surfaced so predictably in his conversation that it would frequently cause disgruntlement of friends.³⁰

An illustration of this responsive inspiration came in 1911-12 with the design for his own office building.³¹ The structure, with its straightforward references to Wright, was unlike anything in Quincy at the time with its creme-colored stucco over cypress walls. Vertical movement, enhanced by the two pedestals with their characteristic Prairie Style

29 Architect's plans for this house have not been located. A date of completion circa 1910 has been suggested. Interview, Mr. Leon Lamet, Warsaw, Illinois, September 1970.

30 Interviews, Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck and Mrs. M. Huck, *op. cit.*

31 A building permit was issued to Wood in October 1911, while a notice of completion of the construction appears in *Construction News*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 18, May 4, 1912, n.p.



Wood's office building, 1911-12. This building on Eighth Street in Quincy remains largely unchanged.

Photo by Mitzie Nevins.

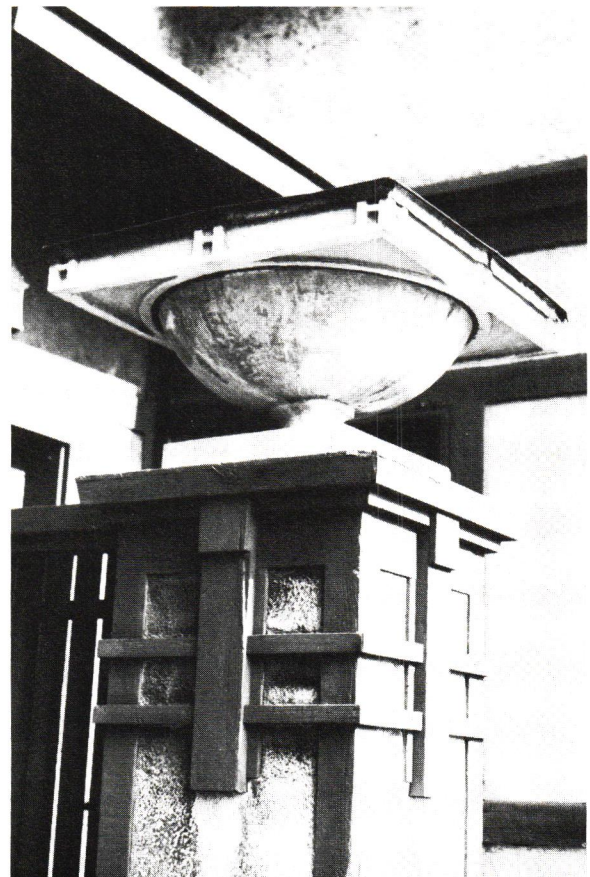
planters, is checked by the dark-colored frame elements in the stucco and along the sharp overhang of the eaves. The entrance is to the left, where a vestibule opens into a hall with low ceilings and a small hearth placed against the far wall. Actually, this hall effectively served as a reception room while working areas of the building adjoin it to the rear and side.

On close inspection there is evidence that the entire design scheme had come under the architect's scrutiny to assure accord with the stylistic expression. Cabinets, the low-set fireplace, leaded glass windows, and the skylights over the drafting room are all in accord with the Prairie Style.

The plan for his office was followed by the striking residence in Quincy for Mrs. F. Halbach, 1912.³² Wood continued to rely on a symmetrical approach for the street elevation. Nevertheless, the inter-relationships of elements created within this symmetrical plan can hardly be called static.

The balanced frontality recalls Wright's Winslow house. Other references may have been provided by

³² Architect's drawings, signed and dated, are in the possession of present owners.





Residence for Mrs. Frederick W. Halbach, 1912. J. R. Allen photo.

the Francis Little house, 1903, Peoria, Illinois, and the Ingalls house, 1909, River Forest, Illinois.³³ In view of his known travels, it is possible that Wood was familiar with these and other examples as well. However, the Halbach house does not appear to be derived from any specific precedent. It reveals the assimilation of the functional role of various elements of the Prairie Style. The brick piers at the corners and intermediate ones that define window space, the inset band of stucco which lends visual emphasis to the eaves, the unified fenestration, and the projecting porch are among the elements obviously derived from examples by Wright. But they combine here in a unique form. Looking back to the Dodge house, the Halbach is a convincing example of the progressive assimilation which was taking place.

The low hipped roof is noteworthy since it depends for its effectiveness on the relationship to the smaller forms of the porte-cochere and porch, key elements in the design. Its unifying effect helps integrate interior with exterior while retaining privacy. To further that purpose, Wood took advantage

33 Frank Lloyd Wright, *Ausgeführte Bauten*, Berlin, 1911, pp. 18-19. In addition to references obtained from direct contact with Wright's work, it should be noted that Wood's library included Wasmuth's 1911 edition of *Ausgeführte Bauten*. Wood may have had recourse to the Little house in the portfolio.

of the raised level of the house well above the street, as well as to enhance the approach to it. Furthermore, the porch serves as a module for the hall and the adjacent living and dining rooms. These rooms, provided with wide openings, recall the interior plan that formed a part of Wright's fifth design presented in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1903.³⁴

Between 1912 and 1914, a significant departure from the symmetry of the Halbach house and Wood's office building is discernible. The next known residential design by him is that for Joseph Albers, 1914, in Warsaw, Illinois.

The asymmetrical arrangement of elements in this plan, together with the orientation of the narrow elevation to the street side, add to the maturing assimilation of the Prairie Style. Brick and stucco are employed here in much the same fashion as in the Halbach house, but the total effect is no longer dependent on a dominant frontality. The spacial movement of forms can only be fully realized in this example by going around the house, and a more dynamic relationship of the Prairie house to its surroundings is effected.

The prevailing appearance of horizontal movement in the Albers house is accomplished by the extended profile of the eaves, and emphasized by contrasting bands of wood set in the stucco, a string

34 Reprinted in *Architectural Essays from the Chicago School, From 1900 to 1909*, Ed. by W. R. Hasbrouck, The Prairie School Press, 1967.



Residence for Joseph Albers, 1914, Warsaw, Illinois. J. R. Allen photo.

course of stone capping the brick portion of the walls and, in the brick as well, by the raking of mortar along the horizontal.

Entrance is at the side and into a hall which, unlike previous examples, was intended as an intermediate step to the interior plan rather than a functional part of the living spaces. Broad openings, however, do provide easy access to the main areas of the house. Staggered arrangement of spaces contrasts to the frontal symmetry of the Halbach house. At the end of the hall the staircase descends to display a Prairie Style pattern in its balustrade.

Since the Albers house is in very good original condition, the importance of high standards of workmanship deserve mention here again. Deriving in part from his early association with Harvey Chatten, it distinguishes the work of Wood and certainly figured in this provincial architect's appreciation of Wright. There is first-hand evidence, for example, that Wood specified only the finest materials available and that this was followed by his own frequent supervision of the construction.³⁵ Other qualities also made him especially compatible with

35 The control that Wood exercised over all phases of construction is indicated by the terms set down by the architect in his specifications, especially those examples from 1910-20. This is confirmed in first hand accounts, interviews, Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck and Mrs. M. Huck, *op. cit.*

fellow architects of the Prairie Style. Throughout his practice, Wood gave special attention to the aesthetic functions of wood, and the woodwork of the Albers house, especially the interior wall paneling, is a fine example of this interest having attained a mature expression. Other aspects of interior design were apparently included in the architect's concern, for the Albers house features free-standing furniture, built-in cabinets, and light fixtures which show the broader acceptance of Wright's expression.

As with the design for Albers, most of Wood's association with developments in Chicago is visible mainly in residential work. Whatever the reasons, there are few commercial or public works by him. One of these, the Quincy Chamber of Commerce, 1914-1915, provides some insight into his approach to a commercial project during this period.³⁶

Certain conditions for this structure were imposed by the need to fill an existing narrow corner lot in Quincy's business district while also providing sufficient office space and display area. Wood's solution took the form of a steel frame building.³⁷ The most noteworthy aspect of his design is the Sullivanesque treatment of the steel skeleton, re-

36 Architect's plans, signed and dated, have survived. A few references to the construction and the architect appear in J. A. Heller, *Two Years Inside History of the So-Called Chamber of Commerce, Quincy, Illinois*, Quincy, 1917, pp. 5-9.

37 Structural steel for the Commerce building was produced by the Michaelman Steel Company, Quincy, Illinois.



Wood's Chamber of Commerce Building, 1914, reflects important developments in design of the tall commercial building. J. R. Allen photo.

vealed in the vertical brick piers on the north and west elevations. As in the Wainwright Building, the steel "ribs" are enclosed in alternate piers. The proportions of the building, however, suggested a need for over-all horizontality, and the verticals of the piers were effectively checked by the base of the ground floor, string courses and the "cornice." Exterior embellishment is unobtrusive and, significantly, rather than adding decorative emphasis to the main entrance, Wood incorporated it as regular interval in the base of the composition.

On the interior of the Commerce Building, office space is arranged around central corridors on the first and second floors. Each of these floors is almost identical in plan, which includes an assembly room complete with a low set brick hearth at one end. The entire third floor originally served as a single open display area, but has since been divided into suites for rental.

Wood's production of residential plans seems to have moved at a fairly steady pace during the decade 1910-1920. The A. W. Mackey house, 1916-17, in Palmyra, Missouri, and only a short distance from Quincy, is a more dramatic example of Wood's mature Prairie Style work.³⁸ As one of his larger

endeavors, its size puts it in keeping with some of the elegant houses in Chicago's suburbs by Wright and members of his circle.

The material, like that of the J. K. Eyman house (see below), is stucco over tile walls. The wall surfaces are plain expanses of stucco and serve to give emphasis to the roof which recalls the sweeping horizontality of Wright's mature Prairie houses.

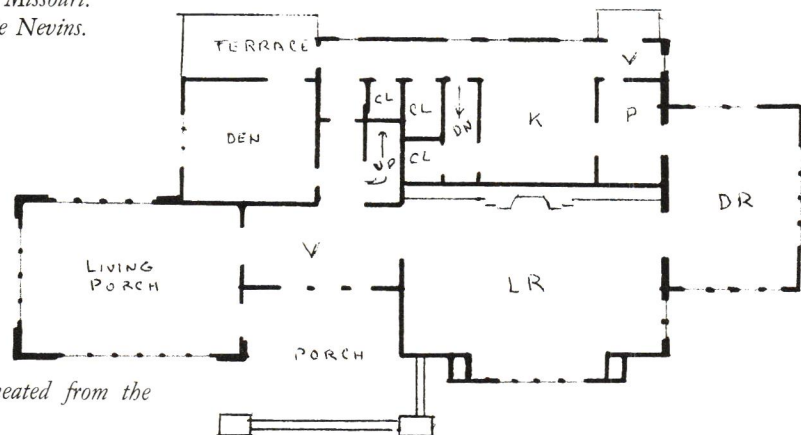
With regard to these observations, it should be noted that Wood did not attempt to imitate the full range of Wright's idiom, especially on a large scale. Whether or not Wood would have been capable is moot, because the likelihood for opportunities to do so in the Quincy area was small. His assimilation of the Prairie Style may have required selectivity, and undoubtedly economic conditions had their influence. Nevertheless, considering the local building scene, it is remarkable that he managed to provide effective residential types in the Prairie Style for over a decade.

Of particular note in the Mackey house is the mature Prairie School interior plan. Entrance is gained to a hall, much like that in the Albers house, 1914, while the hall opens in such a manner as to allow continuous movement across the front of the house to the dining area at the far side. The hall is relatively small; its sole function is to bring together at one point interior spaces from both levels. By comparison, the only areas that remain somewhat restricted by their location are the kitchen and

³⁸ Architect's drawings, signed and dated, are in the possession of the owners.



*The A. W. Mackey house, 1916, Palmyra, Missouri.
Photo by Mitzie Nevins.*



The Mackey house. First floor plan delineated from the drawings.

pantry: both are concealed at the rear of the house.

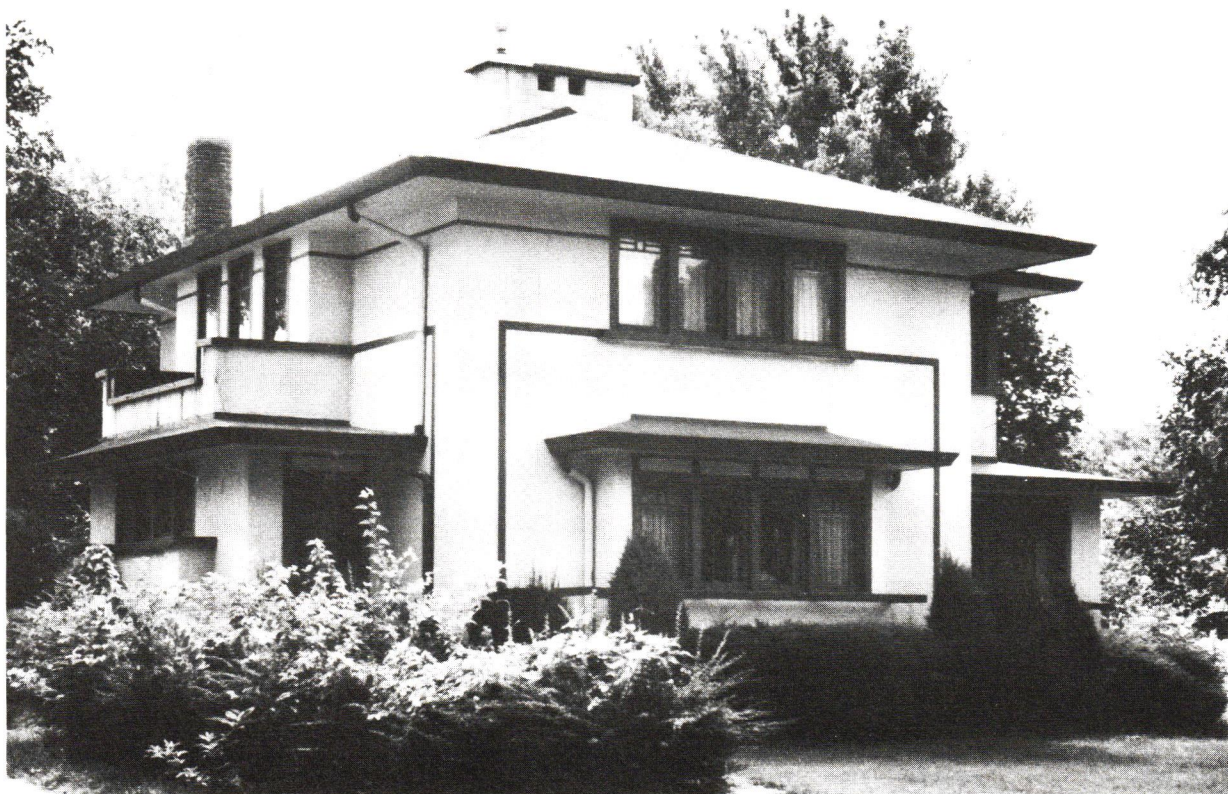
Prairie Style aspects of the interior, such as the brick hearths and decorative motifs in the woodwork, had by this time become an established part of his idiom. Of particular distinction in this house is the expanded function given the window. Fenestration helps integrate the interior and exterior space while also realizing the most benefit from indirect natural light. As if to compensate for the inconsistency of daylight, however, the architect provided electric lighting in the form of fixtures mounted flush with the ceiling above the windows.³⁹

In sharp contrast to the imposing scale of the

³⁹ Another design near Palmyra by Wood was for Alonzo White, 1917. Interview, Mrs. A. White, Palmyra, Missouri, February 1972.

Mackey house is a design that followed it by less than a year, the F. D. Thomas house, Camp Point, Illinois.⁴⁰ Although much smaller, the Thomas house does not sacrifice any of the success of the former. Simplified wall surfaces of stucco accentuate the darker areas of frame and emphatically call attention to the fenestration. This window treatment is among the most pleasing in Wood's residential work, especially where a band of nine sashes extends around three sides of a bedroom. With the shift of the living porch (which is the greatest variant from the Mackey house) to a position adjoining both the living and dining rooms, a relatively small interior living space is made to

⁴⁰ Architect's plans, signed and dated, are in the possession of the owners.

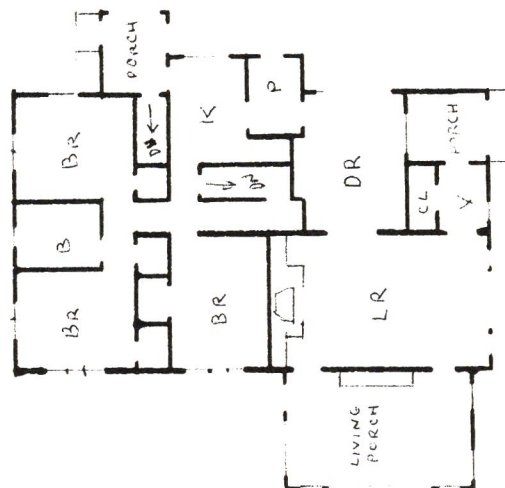


*The F. D. Thomas house, 1917, Camp Point, Illinois.
From Northwest. Photo by Mitzie Nevins.*

appear functionally more open and expansive because of the continuous windows of the porch.

One final example from this decade of residential work represents the formal conclusion of Wood's domestic development. The date of construction of 1919 for the J. K. Eyman house, Warsaw, Illinois, reflects the swiftness of Wood's assimilation of the Prairie Style into his own expression.⁴¹ Like the Thomas house, this one is also, and not surprisingly, modest. A formal difference from previous examples is the use of a gabled roof. Exposed beams carry its weight, while simple, uninterrupted pier forms meet the gable on the north elevation. These piers, together with the simple penetrations of the window openings, are the only modulation given the stucco wall surfaces. The fine original mullioned windows which were contained beneath the north gable have been removed, but their form can be appreciated in the architect's drawings.

The simplicity of the exterior is echoed on the interior. Partitions have been reduced to a minimum, permitting unimpeded movement across the



The J. K. Eyman house. Plan delineated from the blueprints.



⁴¹ Architect's plans, signed and dated, are in the possession of the owners.

main living areas. The living porch in this example is contained within the projection of the north gable. The living room, which joins the porch, was given an accent on its wide gabled ceiling with decorative patterns of molding set into the plaster.

The Eyman house draws upon a rationale for building which Wood had pursued throughout his career. In applying this rationale, particularly to small plans such as the Eyman house, the architect achieved a reduction of form to its essentials, and relationships of interior space to a basic and forceful statement. Although Wood produced some impressive house plans after 1920, he achieved his most creative expression in the previous decade.

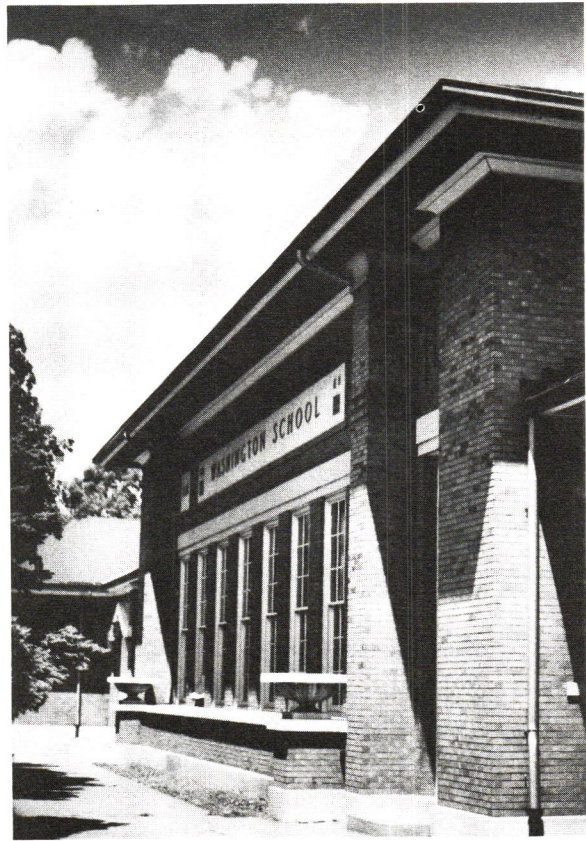
By 1920, Ernest Wood had reached fifty-seven years of age with a marked decline in the amount of production thereafter which corresponded to what H. Allen Brooks called the "Demise of the Prairie School."⁴² As he approached sixty, however, there remained to be made one notable contribution to the Quincy area.

Washington School, 1922, embodies what Wood assimilated from his study of the Prairie School architects.⁴³ This design is a fine example of form determined by function while demonstrating a pervasive concern for maximum efficiency of space utilization.

To accomplish this, Wood arranged the classrooms in rows along both side elevations and on right angles to the office areas at the front; each classroom thereby benefits from one continuous

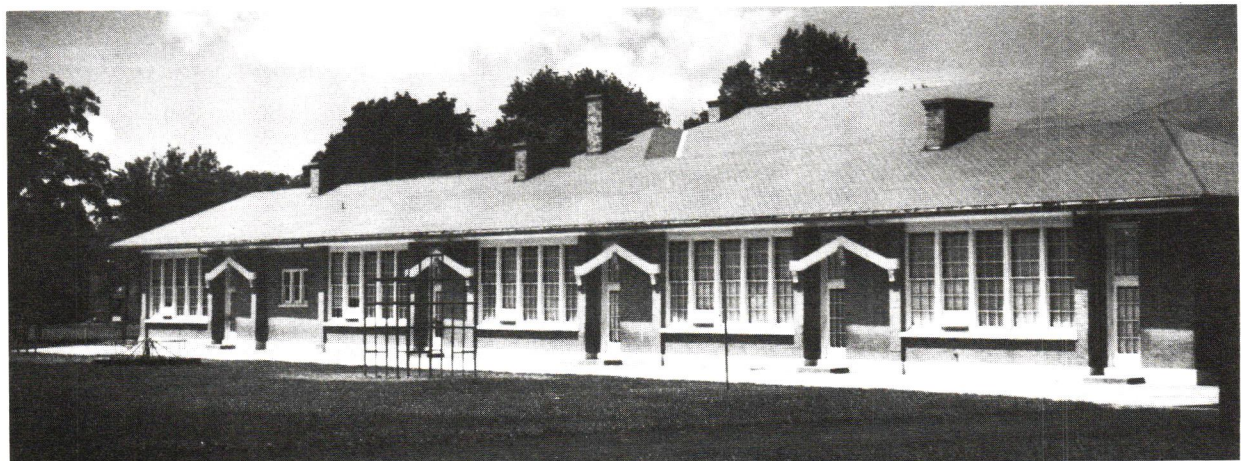
42 Brooks, *The Prairie School*, *op. cit.*, p. 336 ff.

43 Although plans for Washington School are lost, the architect's specifications are on file with the Quincy Public School System; Ernest M. Wood, *Prospectus to the Contractors of Washington School*, Quincy, June 1922. In reference to Washington School, Wood's obituary, *op. cit.*, states: "It received attention in magazines and was visited by architects and educators from many cities." However, the specific sources concerning this account have not been located.



*Detail, southeast elevation of Washington School.
Photo by Mitzie Nevins.*

*Photo by Mitzie Nevins.
One of the classroom wings of Washington School.*





The Winkler house, 1929, Hannibal, Missouri, is Wood's last known work in the Prairie Style. J. R. Allen photo.

wall of fenestration. Except for the single story and separate access points, this arrangement was not greatly different from other school classrooms. But the determination of other interior spaces distinguished this school. The two rows of classrooms and one of offices have three adjoining corridors which facilitate easy access to any part of the interior. The area enclosed by these corridors accommodates the gymnasium, auditorium and other common facilities. Thus, the intervening corridors effectively buffer the classrooms from areas characterized by a high concentration of noise. The electrical and plumbing system of the school, which has not required extensive maintenance since its original installation, features a centralized access system. Electrical circuits can be reached in crawl areas along the length of each corridor, and access to water and sewer lines is gained through removable panels in the walls.

Although a late work in Wood's development, the Washington School ranks among the best school designs by architects of the Prairie Style. It is also the culmination of Wood's achievements. Too little is presently known about his work during the remainder of the twenties, and practically nothing about the last decade of his career. What is known would support Brooks' observation regarding Percy Bentley's deference to shifting demands of clientele. The Williams house, circa 1928, for example, was done for a client who had lived in England, and accordingly requested Wood to design an "English" house. On the other hand, he may have been drawn by a restlessness of spirit which was the undoing of

George Maher, for in his commission to do the Winkler house, in Hannibal, Missouri, the following year, he returned to the Prairie Style.⁴⁴

Ernest Wood lived on to retire in 1938, and he died eighteen years later, in 1956. Lack of information makes this period of his life as an architect a virtual mystery, except that he is still remembered as a personable character around town with a few idiosyncracies, and that he maintained a lively interest in civic and cultural affairs. His dedication to the assimilation of discipline and principles expressed through the idiom of the Prairie Style has been overlooked, and it was easy to look upon Wood as a mere imitator. In retrospect, the deliberateness with which he recapitulated precedent and requisite developments inherent to the understanding of the Prairie Style gives testimony to the noteworthy accomplishments of a solitary but unforgettable figure in Quincy's architecture.⁴⁵

44 Brooks, "Percy Dwight Bentley at La Crosse," *op. cit.*, p. 17. See also Brooks, *The Prairie School*, *op. cit.*, pp. 318-319 and 329-330.

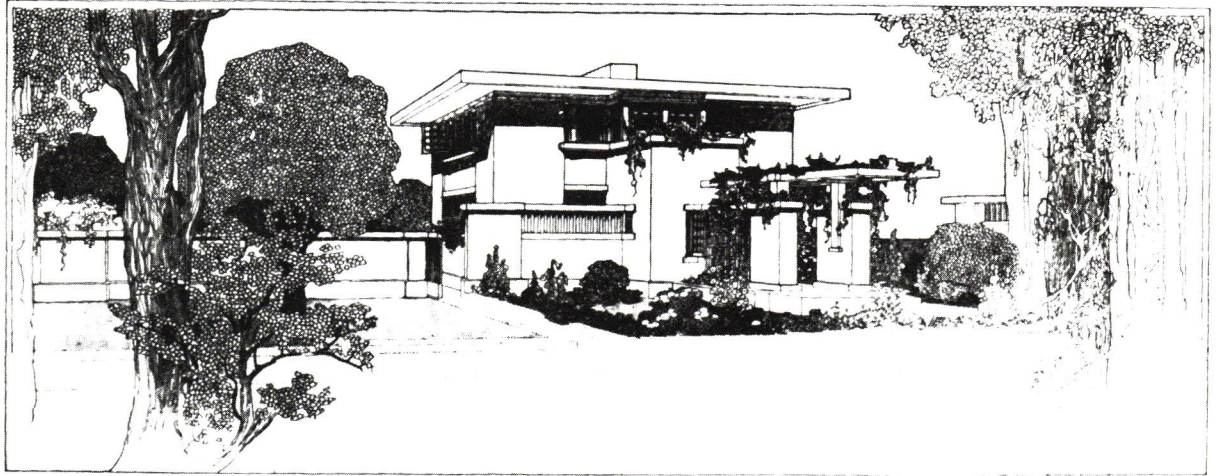
45 What is meant by Wood's solitariness needs some explanation. A quick survey of Prairie Style architecture in Quincy and its environs will show a large number of attempts at its expression. Such an overview will reveal an inconsistency in quality and character. This essay would be misleading if it did not note that at least two others made forays into the Prairie idiom. One was a contractor and builder, Martin Geise. The other was an architect, George P. Behrensmeyer, a contemporary of Wood who, while well-trained, was not the beneficiary of pervasive assimilation (either by schooling or self-discipline) of Wrightian principles. A comparative study would be enlightening, especially for local interests. For the purpose of this essay, it would serve to emphasize that Wood was solitary in his accomplishments, for it would show that the best of the Prairie Style in the area is his.

The Williams house, circa 1928, Quincy. E. M. Wood, architect. J. R. Allen photo.



One Book--Two Reviews

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT: AN INTERPRETIVE BIOGRAPHY, by Robert C. Twombly. Harper & Row, New York, 1973, x plus 373 pp., illus., cloth, \$10.00.



This quarter we are trying a new approach to reviewing a book. We have asked two men, both very capable, to comment on Robert Twombly's book on Frank Lloyd Wright. This book has received mixed reaction from Wright scholars since its appearance about a year ago. Mr. Severens is Assistant Professor in the Department of Art at Oberlin College, while Mr. Kalec is Assistant Professor in the Department of Design and Communication at the Art Institute of Chicago.

Of the many biographies of Frank Lloyd Wright there is a dearth of substantial, informative, or creative interpretations of his life or his works. Vincent Scully's book on Wright comes to mind as does Norris Kelly Smith's. Most of the rest are twice told tales reconstructed for lay audiences from Wright's own *Autobiography*. They should be subtitled *Let Them Eat Pablum*. Now along comes Robert Twombly's *Frank Lloyd Wright, An Interpretive Biography*. This is not a twice told tale but a substantial piece of work based on original research done over the course of several years. A great amount of new material, especially the early formative years, is brought to light.

The first chapter covering the years 1867-1893 is the best in the book. Utilizing newspaper accounts of the period Twombly has succeeded in putting together for the first time an accurate chronology of the wanderings and family life of William Carey and Anna Lloyd Wright, and their children — Frank, Jane, and Maginal. Their up-rootings and down-

settlings through 6 towns in four states no doubt had an influence on young Frank. The second significant influence on Wright's life was the break up of his parents' marriage which Twombly shows to be almost wholly Anna Lloyd Wright's fault. Frank Lloyd Wright's stint at the University of Wisconsin; his first architectural "job" working on the Lloyd Jones chapel at Helena, Wisconsin; and Wright's ultimate flight to Chicago are also covered in depth with new supportive material in the first chapter.

Chapter Two, 1893-1901, is also full of information and interest depicting Wright's own home life in Oak Park, his rise in stature as an architect and as a gentleman of social status. Besides the chronicle of events (mostly gleaned from newspaper articles), Twombly makes an interesting case of showing how Wright's domestic designs were, in effect, responses to his own family background — attempts to sort out in his mind, architecturally, how Wright felt family life should be ordered. The rest of the book,

covering the years 1901 to post 1959 is much less satisfying than the first two chapters. The extent to which Twombly has investigated and analyzed Wright's childhood and maturity has not been extended throughout the book. Certain events are reported in depth with new data but the chief value of the bulk of the book is in its pinpointing of certain dated and events.

Twombly seems to be at his best when supported by scores of old newspaper articles and he is free to sift through these reports and compile them into a meaningful whole. Unfortunately, newspaper accounts provide a narrow window to anyone's life, especially someone like Frank Lloyd Wright. The names, dates, facts are interesting as raw data but not interesting enough nor substantial enough by themselves to carry a whole biography. Twombly does try to transcend his sources and he succeeds many times (as in his analysis of Wright's architecture as a symbol of the Wright vs. Society relationship at any particular time). The sorrow is that Twombly does not attempt often enough. Lacking is a sense of the real man as a human being. Perhaps more interviews with people who knew Wright, worked with him, loved him, hated him, could have quenched the musty smell of faded clippings.

A minor point, but one that is irritating, is the amount of re-phrasing and chopped-up quotations that are used to present Wright's ideas. For those who are familiar with Wright's writings it is frankly boring to plow through page after page of isolated quotes and second hand accounts that could have been presented in a way that would be exciting and vital. As this material exists now it reads like so much padding between areas of investigation. Far better for Twombly to have wholly written his own interpretation or to have included the necessary Wright text verbatim.

Robert Twombly has come up with an impressive amount of new information and many interesting conjectures of Wright's life based on this new data. For this reason alone the book is successful. When Twombly attempts architectural criticism however, the results range from exasperating to erroneous. His analysis of the Guggenheim, frankly presented as a personal view with reasons why he felt as he does, is charming and genuine. It should have been a model for Twombly's other architectural criticisms. Unfortunately, it was not. Too often Twombly simply states something unequivocally and unsupported by facts or reasons, and then moves on to another subject. A prime example is

his analysis of the Imperial Hotel as an "aberration, a monumental dead end, a distraction." Twombly sees no reason to elaborate or to defend his position even though it is at odds with the mainstream of criticism about Wright's work. He simply makes his statement and moves on. Throughout the book Twombly substitutes personal taste for sound architectural analysis — "Lake Tahoe project . . . buildings and houseboats . . . (happily) never left the drawing boards", "Winslow house . . . thematically dissonant", "Willitts . . . rigidly conceived . . . wings non-functional", ". . . disastrously ugly Lloyd Jones house". It is one thing for a person not trained as an architect or architectural historian to present his criticisms about a building based on a logical analysis and quite another for an author to drop acid plums throughout his book without any substantiation.

Twombly's non-architectural background shows up most clearly in his analysis of the Prairie houses. He cites the Robie, the Glassner, the Coonley houses as "reaching into space", having unbounded energy, while their "aggressive individuality . . . threatens to tear the building asunder". In contrast, Twombly calls the Heurtley, the Henderson, the Thomas, and the Hunt houses "boxy, squat, self contained". He further contrasts the good and the bad by comparing the Heurtley (bad) with the Robie house (good). This type of analysis implies a hierarchy of houses with the free flowing, expanding, dynamic house of thrusting walls and roof as the highest and best type and the self contained, serene, compact houses as being a failure or a lesser creation. Followers of this line of thought have always had trouble with Wright because his buildings do not always follow a straight line of creation from "enclosed" to "expanded". The buildings which deviate from this supposed line of creation are labeled as false starts, relapses, and dead ends. Historians end up trying to explain away some of Wright's best houses.

The whole fallacy of this hierarchical notion of architectural history is that it is based on the view which historians take today concerning the "expanded" building as being the highest ideal, at least in Wright's work. It would seem that Wright himself did not regard the "expanded" building as the only or best or ideal norm. One of Wright's last designs (1958) was a clinic for Dr. Jarvis Lauchauer, an enclosed cubical form with high clerestory windows. From the architect's point of view (as Wright's was) the form comes from the circumstance — client, site, budget, climate, program. Different forms are ap-

propriate for different circumstances. It would then seem more profitable to analyze each building in relationship to its circumstances and what the architect did within those circumstances than to "rank" buildings which have few commonalities on some arbitrary scale of architectural values.

One of the most disturbing aspects of Twombly's book is his analysis of Wright's last years — particularly the Taliesin Fellowship. Unquestionably Twombly has trouble with the whole notion of the Fellowship. Perhaps he sees it as an obstacle between himself and Wright rather than as an extension of Frank Lloyd Wright. Twombly lets his own disdain for the Fellowship (particularly the Fellowship after Wright's death) get in the way of making any intelligent analysis of it. The whole relationship between Wright and the Fellowship, and the Fellowship and Wright's legacy (post 1959) is a highly complex matter which will take a book in itself to document and explain. Twombly could have at least pointed the way toward what such a book could be; instead he slips into snide remarks, ramblings about seances and other trivia, and criticism based on faulty information. A case in point — the development of the land around Taliesin (Spring Green) is not a case of development vs. farming as Twombly seems to imply. Agriculture on those small, hilly Wisconsin farms is no longer economically viable (as much as we might wish it so). The southern part of Wisconsin is fast becoming a resort area for the middle class of Chicago. The only question about the ultimate use of the Wisconsin River valley is whether it will be exploited by the motel chains, gift shoppes, and tourist attractions or whether it will be planned as a total community (resort or year around) by the Taliesin Associated Architects.

Twombly raises some very provocative questions but supplies few answers (or very convincing ones). One such question is the comparison between the Oak Park staff and the Taliesin Fellowship. One could question the validity of such a comparison given the difference in time, temperament and personnel of the early 1900's vs. the late 1930's, 1940's and 1950's. Twombly himself is a house divided. First he writes of the "derivative buildings" of Walter Burley Griffin, the "unabashedly imitative" work of William Drummond, and the "dependent" work of John S. Van Bergen — all of whom worked for Wright in his Oak Park studio. Later on in the book, in order to point up the failure of the Taliesin Fellowship to train creative architects (Twombly's view) he says, "Others, like Walter

Burley Griffin, Barry Byrne, and William Drummond, later achieved considerable prominence in their own right. . . . Taliesin graduates . . . have not equalled the achievements of their Oak Park predecessors. . . .," " . . . a few others (Taliesin Fellowship trained architects) are prominent professionally but it is unlikely they will match Griffin's, Drummond's, or Byrne's impact on architectural history".

Twombly simply can't have it both ways and be very convincing. Actually the comparisons are complex and demand more time, thought, and space than Twombly has managed to give them.

Some of Twombly's data concerning the work of the Taliesin Fellowship is in error. It is simply untrue that Taliesin apprentices were given no significant responsibilities. The Fellowship, in one sense, was Frank Lloyd Wright's office. Without the apprentice's work in calculating structural and mechanical systems; preparing working drawings, cost estimates, and specifications; and supervising the actual construction, the great amount of work done by Wright from the late 1930's on, would have been drastically reduced. There is simply no evidence that the Taliesin apprentices took any less responsibility than the Oak Park draftsmen.

Frank Lloyd Wright, An Interpretive Biography is somewhat of a paradox. In parts it digs deep and surfaces well with new material and ideas. In other parts it is dull, inaccurate, and wordy. All in all it would not be a book to recommend to anyone as their introduction to Frank Lloyd Wright. There are too many errors and prejudices for that. (Still tops as a first reader — Wright's own *An Autobiography* followed by Norris Kelly Smith's *Frank Lloyd Wright, A Study in Architectural Content*). Twombly's book works better as a book for people who already know a great deal about Wright and want additional data and a few insights.

THE Biography of Frank Lloyd Wright has yet to be written. Wright's very long life and staggering proliferation of ideas and buildings mitigates against any fast or easy documentation, much less interpretation. Books such as Twombly's add bits and pieces to the known area. Someday enough of the parts will be found for someone to begin to put them all together. Meanwhile we will have to be satisfied (and even eager) to encourage such books as Twombly's. Historians will need all the pieces they can get.

Reviewed by Donald G. Kalec
The Art Institute of Chicago

The 2nd Review

Despite the richness of Frank Lloyd Wright's personal life and career, he remains an elusive, enigmatic, and mythical personality, largely through his own design. From *The Ladies' Home Journal* publications of 1901 which announced the prairie houses to the *Architectural Forums* of 1938, 1948, and 1951, which he used to publicize his work, Wright sought public acceptance and understanding. However, he never really respected or trusted the architectural critics and historians who attempted to interpret his work. The tone of his writing is decidedly didactic, but he was apparently unconcerned, and for the most part unaware, of the numerous contradictions and factual inaccuracies which abound in his publications. In terms of his birth date, the duration of his academic work at the University of Wisconsin, and the divorce of his parents, he perpetuated positions which he must have known were erroneous. He wrote with the dogmatic fervor of an Old Testament prophet; yet he could end his biography of Louis Sullivan with "but the pen is a tricky tool — fascinating but treacherous," a statement which not only undermines the credibility of any acknowledgment of Sullivan as his teacher, but which also subjects the entirety of his writings and pronouncements to other than literal interpretation.

Confronted by a subject who consciously and unconsciously obscured both the details and the meaning of his life and who would not have been cooperative if he were still alive, Twombly has written a biography which is no small accomplishment. He has ambitiously organized the vast material and frequently has added new research and fresh analysis. The writing is lucid, personal, and casual — a welcome contrast to the messianic and self-indulgent prose which has come out of Taliesin after the death of Wright in 1959. High standards of scholarship are apparent in the more than fifty pages of documentation at the end of the book with many significant additions to the bibliography. Undoubtedly the book will be recognized as an eminently successful biography, but it is the purpose of this review to analyze how Twombly interprets Wright's architectural career. Buildings are the decisive events in an architect's life, and by viewing them primarily as biographical illustrations, Twombly does not succeed in establishing a new approach to the architecture which would place him among the current authorities, Norris Kelly Smith, Vincent Scully, H. Allen Brooks, and Leonard K. Eaton.

In the preface Twombly states that the book

emerged from his doctoral dissertation for the University of Wisconsin, and the geographical proximity apparently led to his concentration on the Wisconsin years of Wright's life. Much new material, therefore, is added concerning the boyhood years, the return to Spring Green in 1910-1911, the marital problems of the 1920s, the Taliesin Fellowship of the 1930s, and the present work of the Taliesin Associated Architects. But for the years when Wright's base was elsewhere — Chicago, Tokyo, Los Angeles, Phoenix, and New York — Twombly relies far too much on already published material. The emphasis on Wisconsin becomes even more disturbing when one realizes that the author has not arrived at this bias from a conscious conviction that these years have been slighted in the previous literature.

The geographical unevenness leads to a second problem, the unjustifiable deemphasis of Louis Sullivan throughout the book. Wright's apprenticeship with Adler and Sullivan, 1887-1893, receives only two paragraphs which in itself is a grave shortcoming. Wright's work for Joseph Lyman Silsbee in 1886-1887 was of a shorter duration and was far less significant but it is given equal attention, probably because Silsbee had Wisconsin ties to the Lloyd-Joneses, Wright's maternal family, which led to the Unity Chapel of 1886 in Helena on which Wright worked. It is not simply a matter of omitting the role of Sullivan in Wright's formative years. The discussions of Wright's architectural philosophy which occur later in the book generally fail to indicate how most of Wright's ideas emerged out of a Sullivanian context. It may even be argued that Wright began to write and lecture on architecture because of the enormous prestige that such activities gave to Sullivan after his architectural productivity was on the decline.

This is not the place to argue the influence of Sullivan on Wright's emergence as an architect; others have done the task very satisfactorily. But it is unfortunate that Twombly did not investigate more thoroughly the later events which indicate that Sullivan and Wright realized that the ideas which they shared were far more important than the bitterness which separated them in 1893. Both Sherman Paul and H. Allen Brooks have suggested that Sullivan's *Kindergarten Chats* of 1901-1902 emerged from the lectures which Wright and Sullivan delivered at the Architectural League of America convention of 1900. In 1913-1914 when the personal reunion of the two architects presumably occurred, Sullivan's banks respond specifically to Wright's earlier bank projects. When on his deathbed in 1924, Sullivan gave to Wright more

than one hundred of his drawings and he extracted the promise that Wright would write his biography, a promise which was not fulfilled until 1949 with the enigmatic tribute, *Genius and Mobocracy*. These three events alone suggest that Wright and Sullivan were interrelated in architecture, in philosophy, and in their personal lives to the extent that a biographer of either cannot minimize the role of the other.

When Twombly does not have new research to offer, he leans too heavily on the brilliant analysis and interpretation of Norris Kelly Smith, and to a lesser degree on that of Vincent Scully. A review of one book usually is not the place to extol the virtues of another, but Twombly adopts so many of Smith's conclusions that the reader often wonders whether it might be preferable to read Smith in the original. In particular the treatment of the prairie houses follows Smith's polarities of formality and informality, freedom and order, shelter and openness, and family integrity and the independence of the individual. One primary reason for writing a new biography would be to understand better Wright's architecture through new interpretations of specific buildings or through a major revision concerning the meaning of the entire oeuvre, neither of which the book accomplishes.

Twombly uses the formal analysis of the buildings as a means of illustrating biographical conclusions which he develops first as an historian. The description of the Winslow house of 1893, "it is jarring and inharmonious in its parts, has a strangely stark facade, and lacks the repose characteristic of Wright's later work," (p. 43) is based on the assumption that it is the point of reference from which Wright can develop, and the approach fails to recognize the house as a masterpiece in its own right. When the Heurtley house is analyzed as less confident and skillful than the Robie house, Twombly again is not interested in the building for its intrinsic quality, but instead in terms of his pre-established concept of the evolution of the prairie houses. Furthermore, there is insufficient evidence that the closed forms and the inward orientation were specifically intended to strengthen the Heurtleys' unstable marriage. Houses, especially those which Wright designed for himself, are the most effective vehicles for illustrating biographical data, and since Wright concentrated on the house as an architectural problem they should and do assume major importance in the biography. But as a consequence the public buildings, particularly the early ones, are not well integrated into the content of the book. Twombly does treat the later buildings, both houses and public buildings, with increasing skill, although one never feels that they have a life of their

own. The small number and uneven quality of the illustrations also reveal the author's subordination of the architecture in the biography.

The book begins with the peregrinations of the Wright family from Wisconsin and Iowa, to Rhode Island and Massachusetts, and back to Wisconsin as a result of William Wright's vacillation in politics, preaching, music, and lecturing. Twombly rightly stresses the role of the father as a source for Wright's later restlessness and his ambiguous attitude toward family life. Another paternal influence was music which Twombly interprets as important in establishing the young Wright's aesthetics as the more frequently cited introduction by his mother to the visual arts with the prints of English cathedrals which were hung in the nursery and the Froebel blocks. The opening chapter is unquestionably the most outstanding in its fresh approach, its new information, and its convincing conclusions.

When Wright went to Chicago in 1887, he immersed himself in the widespread intellectual questioning of man's role in an urban, democratic, and industrial society. In architecture, Chicago School technology, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and the debate over the relation of form and function furnished a ferment of ideas which played a much greater role in Wright's development than Twombly has indicated. The lack of new research here is particularly unfortunate since it gives the impression that Wright was predestined for greatness on the basis of his Wisconsin background and that Chicago was simply the stage on which he worked out the first phase of his career. Wright was most extroverted and gregarious during the Chicago years, and *An Autobiography* abounds in vivid descriptions of his associations at the Adler and Sullivan office and later with the Steinway Hall group of young progressive architects. Consequently, the evolution of the prairie houses is more than Wright's personal response to his equivocal attitude toward the family, and factors such as the sociological changes in family structure and the emerging technology must be considered more fully. Instead of analyzing these aspects in depth, Twombly traces Wright's activities in the 1890s far too superficially in terms of his memberships and social associations, his speeches and publications, and his mastery of middle class living in suburban Oak Park. With the turn of the century, the Robie and Coonley houses are interpreted as the examples of excellence toward which Wright was striving. The greatness of the two houses is unquestioned, but the Willitts and Elizabeth Gale houses are unjustifiably relegated to secondary importance despite Wright's belief that they were the most influential in

Europe and that they provided sources for Falling-water twenty-five years later.

Twombly handles the crisis of 1909 very skillfully, presumably because Wright's decision to abandon his Chicago practice and to flee to Europe resulted from internal motives which the biographer is best able to identify and analyze. In addition, the professional reasons which are given are cogent ones: that he was being judged as a member of the Steinway Hall group rather than on his own merits, that he was still being considered a follower of Louis Sullivan, and that his work had reached a climax and that a denouement had begun. With Wright's return to Wisconsin in 1911, Twombly again is effective in interpreting Taliesin as an extension of his personality. The analysis of *The Japanese Print: An Interpretation* of 1912 is a creative probing into Wright's philosophy of art, and careful research has revealed that the year 1913 marks the inception of the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo. Twombly also points out the inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the *An Autobiography* account of the commission, and along similar lines he emphasizes that Wright's view of himself as a persecuted genius did not begin until 1914, despite his tendency later in life to date that characterization to the 1880s.

The treatment of the architecture of the middle

years is not as successful, because Twombly more than ever seems to start with Wright's life and then turns to buildings as illustrations. The Bach house in Chicago and the Bogk house in Milwaukee, both of 1915, are described as block-like expressions of increased privacy and retreat, and the textured concrete block houses in California of the 1920s are seen as the culmination of a process toward seclusion and escape, both reflecting Wright's marital difficulties. The question which must be raised is how do the far more important commissions; Midway Gardens and the Imperial Hotel, relate to Wright's personal life. Twombly recognizes that Midway Gardens was Wright's attempt at synthesizing the arts and that it revealed his recent exposure to contemporary European art in the sculpture and the murals and his reaffirmation of his western hemispheric roots with the Pre-Columbian ornamentation. But the statement that the Imperial Hotel was "an aberration in his career, a tour de force contributing little to the overall development of his architecture, an isolated though monumental dead end" (p. 142) is simply unacceptable.

The remaining chapters deal with Wright's increasingly eccentric last years and with Taliesin as an institution. Despite the frustrations which most scholars working on Wright have faced, Twombly



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should have approached this area more with a desire to understand than with his admittedly one-sided criticism. The Taliesins in Wisconsin and Arizona are effectively contrasted, but the concentration on only the two Usonian houses of Herbert Jacobs in the Madison area is regrettable in that Wright's Broadacre City was a plan for the entire United States. In addition, the overall intellectual context of the work of the 1930s is sacrificed for a narrower analysis of Wright's personal recovery as a creative architect. Consequently the meaning of Usonia as a response to the Citrohan designs of Le Corbusier and the Dymaxion world of Buckminster Fuller is generally overlooked. Furthermore, the research is not sufficiently extended to include the clients, many of whom are still living, and the Taliesin Fellows who supervised the construction, most of whom are still practicing architecture. Twombly does significantly conclude that the term Usonia applies only to a small group of houses which were constructed immediately before and after the Second World War and that the utopian vision of the 1930s lapsed into rather perfunctory house designs in Wright's last years. Fallingwater is masterfully analyzed as a study in contrasts and the Guggenheim Museum is interpreted as Wright's final statement on the unity of form and function.

The sheer volume of Wright's late work — buildings, writings, and public statements — and the far less comprehensive secondary sources for the period make a definitive assessment extremely difficult at this time. Confronted by that part of Wright's career in which the most work needs to be done, Twombly seems all too satisfied with a compilation of the complicated and disjointed material. Wright's late buildings may be a series of self-immortalizing spectacles, but this characterization does little to resolve the more important questions concerning the quality of the late architecture and the new aspect of overt symbolism in the buildings. Instead of tackling these problems, Twombly chooses to conclude the biography with two somewhat irrelevant themes, the undistinguished work of the Taliesin Associated Architects after 1959 and the perpetuation of the myths about Wright by the entire Taliesin community. A skillful biography has been written which will effectively serve as a more factual but less poetic counterpoint to Wright's *An Autobiography*. But for the full profundity of Frank Lloyd Wright and the significance of his architecture, the buildings themselves still furnish the most complete and eloquent testimony.

Reviewed by Kenneth W. Severens
Oberlin College



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Preview

The third issue of Volume XI of *The Prairie School Review* will include two articles on three buildings by Louis Sullivan. One of these has not previously been published. The others have received only marginal attention. All have now been carefully documented and photographed for this issue.

Letters to the Editors

Sirs:

Your republication on page 14 of your 3rd quarter 1973 issue of that photograph reputedly showing Louis Sullivan and his wife Margaret gives me the opportunity to question the identity of the couple pictured. Certainly the photograph was made in Sullivan's rose garden at Ocean Springs as Albert Bush-Brown, *Louis Sullivan*, fig. 37, and Bob Warn suppose, but I seriously doubt the persons shown are Sullivan and his wife.

My reasons are these: The two individuals seem — to me at least — to bear only the vaguest resemblance to the Louis and Margaret Sullivan known to us through authenticated photographs. Both of the persons standing in Sullivan's rose garden also seem older than either Sullivan or Margaret would have been during the years that they vacationed at Ocean Springs. If the photograph is of them, it had to be taken between their marriage in 1899 and their separation in 1909. During that decade Sullivan's age ranged from 42 to 52 and Margaret's from 27 to 37. In my opinion the two persons shown, and certainly the man, are older than 52 and 37.

Two photographs made during the decade in question, one of Sullivan and the other of Margaret, are preserved at the Avery Library. According to a notation on it, Margaret's picture was made just after her marriage to Sullivan in 1899 when she was 27. Sullivan's photograph appeared in an article by Lyndon Smith about the Ocean Springs estate published in the June 1905 *Architectural Record*. Judging by Sullivan's apparent age in the photograph, it was taken shortly before publication when he was 48 years old. I think when these photographs are compared to the one of the couple most observers will conclude as I have that the photograph in question was taken not of Sullivan but probably by Sullivan — a competent amateur photographer — of two now unknown friends during their visit to his place at Ocean Springs.

Paul E. Sprague

Sirs:

Certainly the *Prairie School Review* has been a memorial to Dick Nickel over the years. His sensitive photographs and devotion to the work of Louis Sullivan will never be equalled. And certainly all who appreciate and love the work of Louis Sullivan should know that the largest collection of Sullivan's ornament, purchased from Dick Nickel in 1966, is on permanent display at the *Edwardsville* campus of Southern Illinois University, just twenty minutes east of St. Louis — not at Carbondale as was incorrectly stated in the second quarter 1973 *Prairie School Review* editorial. I hope that you will publish this letter or at least mention your error so that *Review* readers are correctly informed. . . .

John Celuch, Curator
Sullivan Ornament Collection
SIU Edwardsville

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