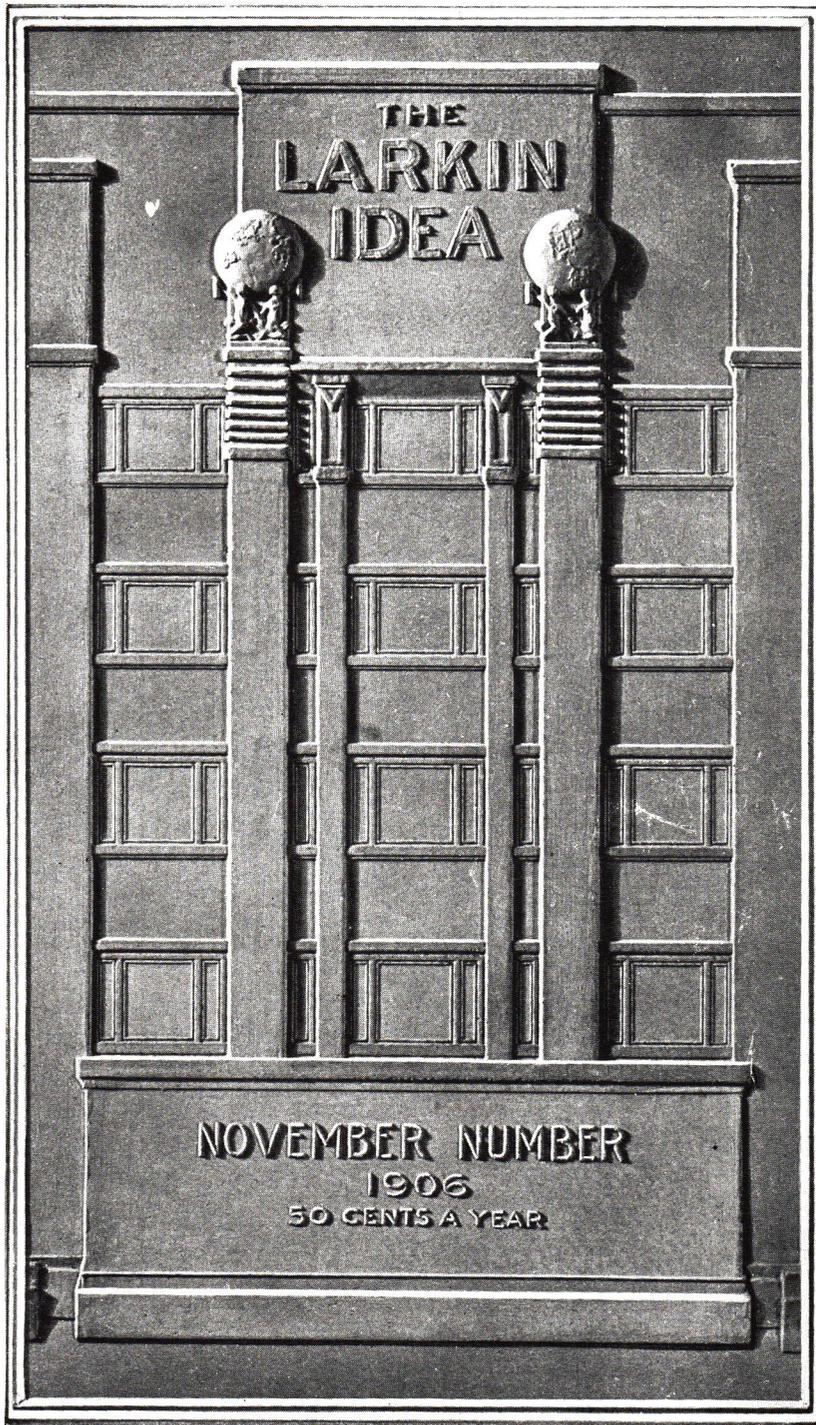


*The*  
**PRAIRIE**  
**SCHOOL**  
*Review*

Volume VII, Number 1

First Quarter, 1970

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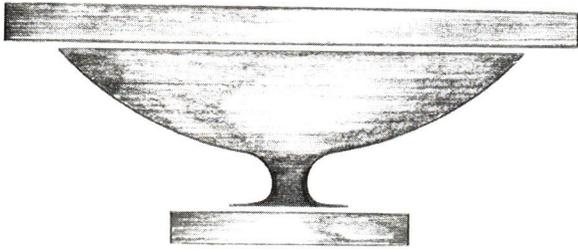


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*ABOVE: This is the cover illustration for the November 1906 issue of *The Larkin Idea* from which we have taken an article by Frank Lloyd Wright describing some of his experiences in designing and building this world famous structure.*

*COVER: Walter Burley Griffin designed a shared entrance walk between the two houses he built at 5917 and 5921 North Magnolia Street in Chicago. The location of these houses was recently discovered by a class of architectural students from the University of Chicago. Photo by Paul E. Sprague.*

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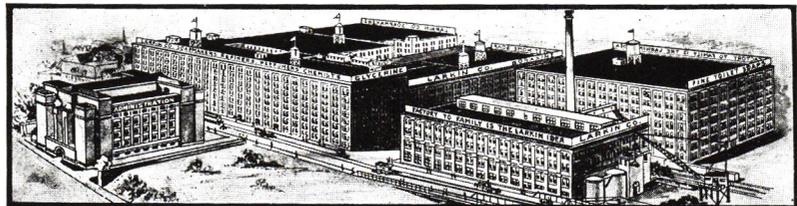
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*The drawing at right appeared on the masthead of The  
Larkin Idea starting with the September 1905 issue.*



## *From the EDITORS*

*The Chicago Stock Exchange will not be named a Landmark Building. This is the decision of the Chicago City Council. The fact that the building meets or exceeds every requirement laid down by the much touted Chicago Landmarks Ordinance notwithstanding, the building will not be so designated. The City Council has followed the recommendation of its Committee on Culture and Economic Development and ignored the advice of the far more qualified Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks.*

*The Committee based its recommendation primarily on the fact that the city allegedly could not afford to purchase the building. They estimated that the cost of purchase and renovation of the structure would be in the range of sixteen million dollars. There is no provision in the Landmarks Ordinance for the course of action followed.*

*Briefly, the Landmarks Ordinance provides as follows: If the structure in question is in fact proven to be of Landmark quality, it shall be so designated. (There is no question that the Stock Exchange Building is of Landmark quality if one reviews the testimony of those persons speaking in favor of the issue, and even less question if one reviews the testimony and qualifications of those persons opposed to its designation.) If, however, after the building is declared a landmark, the owner should request a permit to . . . "construct, reconstruct, alter, add to or demolish" . . . and he should receive a . . . "denial thereof" . . . then there is provision for . . . "The Finance Committee" . . . (of the City Council) . . . (to) "set forth in its recommendation, if a denial, the ways and means available to the City of Chicago for the leasing and subleasing of said property for the purposes of preservation and perpetuation of said landmark." . . .*

*Thus we contend that the City Council has acted in a manner exceeding its authority as outlined in the very Ordinance which it created, and that furthermore they have ignored the recommendation of the Commission which it formed for this very purpose. The Stock Exchange Building was proven in open hearing to be a building of Landmark quality and the ordinance provides that it should have been so designated. Should the owners at a later date ask for permission to demolish it, that is the time when the economics of the situation should be evaluated, not before.*

*We trust that this will be brought to the attention of the members of Chicago's City Council.*

## *A Pair of Early Griffin Houses*



by Peggy O'Connor

*The author of this article is a student at the University of Chicago. This work grew out of a class in modern architectural history taught by Professor Paul E. Sprague. While the entire class made a contribution to the article, it remains the work of the author. The plans for the buildings discussed were prepared by Alan Shulman and the photographs were enlarged by David Travis from negatives taken by Paul E. Sprague unless otherwise noted.*

Recently a class on Prairie School architecture taught by Professor Paul Sprague at the University of Chicago was afforded the unusual opportunity of participating in the discovery, documentation and now the publication of an early and heretofore unknown pair of houses designed by Walter Burley Griffin.<sup>1</sup> When Edward Letchinger, a student in the class, noticed the many similarities between his own home and those discussed in class, he called the

matter to Mr. Sprague's attention. As Sprague had had in mind giving the class some field experience by surveying a few buildings by Van Bergen, Griffin and others, this seemed an opportunity too good to miss. Arrangements were made for the class to inspect, measure and photograph not only the Letchinger's house but also the one next door owned by Joseph B. Kovalchik which was in the same style.

<sup>1</sup> Members of the class, other than the author, who assisted with this project were: Frona Daskal, Robert Eskridge, James Haydon, Glenna Lang, Barbara Mirecki, Charlene Moskowitz, Mark Patronsky, Stephen Piper, Peter Rosen, Carol Shipp, David Steele and Thomas Yanul.

The two houses located on Magnolia Street in Edgewater, a section on Lake Michigan near the border of Chicago and Evanston, were indeed in the promised rectilinear stucco style and were so in-



*The houses at 5917 and 5921 North Magnolia remain in excellent condition having been well maintained since their construction in 1908.*

timately related to each other that the work of Griffin was immediately brought to mind. Their style, however, more solid and Wright-like than Griffin's previously documented work of c. 1909-11, made an absolute attribution risky without some corroborating evidence. Fortunately Professor Sprague had for some time been collecting references to buildings by Griffin and other early modernists and in reviewing his files, found three references from exhibitions of the *Chicago Architectural Club Annuals* that seemed possibilities. The 1909 *Annual* mentioned a pair of houses at Edgewater for John Gauler,<sup>2</sup> and in the 1910 *Annual* there were references to the Elliott and James cottages<sup>3</sup> and a pair of cottages for Charles Anwander,<sup>4</sup> all in Chicago and by Griffin.

6

The next step for the class was a visit to the Cook County Recorder's Office where in Book 538D it was found that lots 12 and 13 in Block 5 of the Rosedale Addition to Edgewater had been sold on January 14, 1908 to John Gauler.<sup>5</sup> William F.

2 Item no. 113.

3 Item no. 214.

4 Item no. 210.

5 Cook County Recorders Office, Cook County Building, Book 538D, Page 121, Document no. 4170406.

Temple, a real estate developer for whom Griffin would shortly be building in Kenilworth, had made the mortgage.<sup>6</sup> On September 15, 1908, Gauler sold lot 13 to Henry C. Jones<sup>7</sup> and it may be assumed that, because Gauler parted with the property so soon after buying it, he had purchased it as an investment and intended to dispose of it as soon as a house was erected. Although Jones is not listed at 5921 N. Magnolia until 1910,<sup>8</sup> it is probable that the house at that address (now Letchingers) was built between the time Gauler purchased the land in January 1908 and when he sold it to Jones in September of the same year. That both houses were in fact built during the spring and summer of 1908 is also implied by the date on the building permits, March 11, 1908,<sup>9</sup> as well as by the initial listing of

6 *Ibid.*, Document nos. 4170407, 4170408.

7 *Ibid.*, Document no. 4261550. According to Chicago city directories Gauler never lived in either house. The Letchingers remember a neighbor telling them that the owner of a butcher shop was the person who had had the houses built. That their neighbor was correct in his memory is confirmed by the city directories which list Gauler as a meatcutter.

8 Chicago city directory, 1910. Data for the city directory was gathered during May and June which means that Jones had moved in between August 1908 and July 1909.

9 Building Department, City Hall, Chicago.

*These two houses were designed in 1908 by Walter Burley Griffin for William S. Orth in Winnetka, Illinois. Photo by Jon Pohl.*



George Elliott at 5917 N. Magnolia (now Kovalchiks) in the city directory for 1909.<sup>10</sup> As George Elliott is certainly the same person mentioned in the *Chicago Architectural Club Annual* of 1910, it would seem that these houses were at once the Gauler houses of the 1909 *Annual* and the Elliott and James [Jones]<sup>11</sup> houses of the 1910 *Annual*.

In any case, since the houses are so obviously a pair — they are in fact identical except for reversed plans and some changes in interior details — there can be no question that Griffin designed both of them at the same time. Indeed, it is very likely that he did so between the time Gauler purchased the

10 For some unknown reason Elliott did not formally purchase the property until Feb. 14, 1911; Cook County Recorders Office, Book 538D, Page 121, Document no. 4709272. According to the Kovalchiks who got their information from a former resident of the street, the built-in bookcases in their living room, which are not found in the Letchinger house, were designed especially for the original owner who was a minister. That this local tradition is correct is supported by the city directory for 1909 which lists "Rev. George Elliott" at the address. At that time the address was 2802 Magnolia, the change to 5917 becoming effective September 1, 1909, when the entire city converted to a revised street numbering system.

11 Presumably the "James" was a printing error with "Jones" intended.

land, January 14, 1908, and the date of the building permit at 5921 N. Magnolia, March 11, 1908. If so, these are among Griffin's earliest independent designs: only his Emery House in Elmhurst, variously dated between 1901 and 1907, his house for Jenkins, Lewis and Dickinson at Hollister, California, dated December 26, 1906,<sup>12</sup> and an otherwise unidentified cottage listed in the *Chicago Architectural Club Annual* of 1907,<sup>13</sup> seem earlier. Two other houses, very close in date to the Magnolia Street houses and probably designed by Griffin about April, 1908 when the property was subdivided,<sup>14</sup> are also very similar in design. These are the William S. Orth houses in Winnetka, Illinois, a north shore suburb of Chicago. This section of Winnetka, originally a part of Kenilworth, was developed by the same William F. Temple who loaned the mortgage money on the Magnolia Street houses. According to the property records<sup>15</sup> he

12 Original plan and perspective, Department of Art, Northwestern University, published by the Prairie School Press in *Walter Burley Griffin: Selected Designs*, edited by David T. Van Zanten, 1970, p. 23.

13 Item no. 208.

14 Cook County Recorders Office, Book 250D, Page 330, Document no. 4233494.

15 *Ibid.*, Document nos. 4233494, 4233495.



*The fireplace at 5917 North Magnolia occupies the center of the house with the dining room on the right and the entrance and stairway on the left. The picture was taken from the living room.*

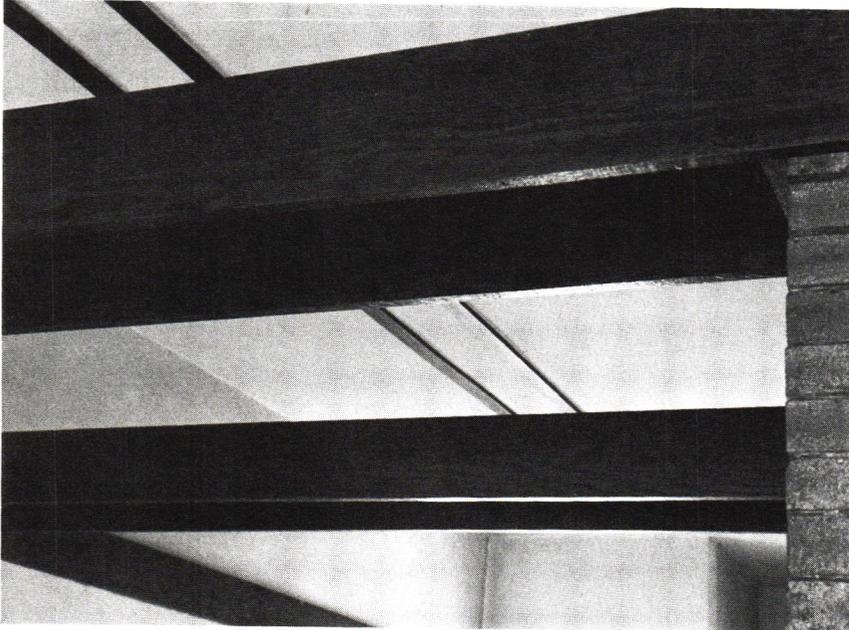
served both as seller and mortgagor of the Winnetka houses. For purposes of comparison it would have been desirable to examine the Orth Houses in detail but unfortunately it was not possible to see the interiors of those houses. A single early photograph of one of the Orth house interiors was found.

But even without having plans available and with only one interior view, a partial and useful comparison is still possible. In both groups Griffin sought to emphasize the interrelationship of the houses by placing walks and entrances between them. Because of the narrowness of the city lots the group on Magnolia Street even shares the same walk. The houses in Winnetka, placed further apart, were unified by means of a low wall which originally linked them. Except for differences in the amount of overhang of the roofs of the porches and in the spacing of their piers, the two groups are virtually identical on the street front. Griffin's treatment of the porches of the Magnolia Street houses, whose piers he located towards the centerline of the porch apparently to reflect the larger piers on the front of each house, seem the more aesthetically consistent.

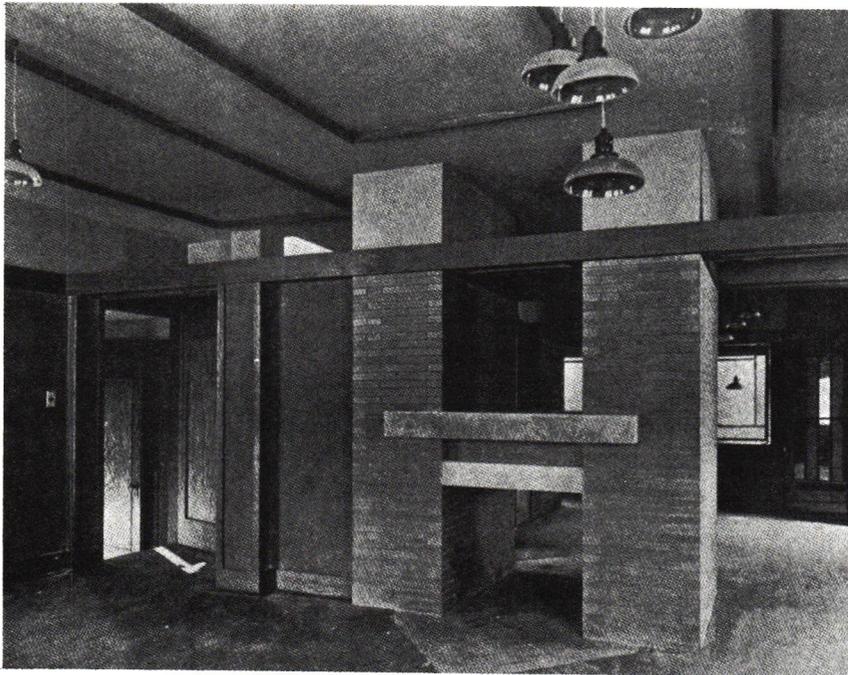
On the sides of the houses that face each other, the major difference between the groups is a polygonal bay, presumably containing the stairs, that projects from each of the Winnetka houses. Although this shape may seem a bit old fashioned for 1908, and more suited to buildings of the 1890's, these additions to the Winnetka houses must certainly have improved vertical circulation within the houses, for their absence in the Magnolia Street houses makes the ascent of their stairs a constricted and sometimes head-banging experience.

Inside each pair of houses there are similar see-through fireplaces,<sup>16</sup> defined at the sides by piers of Roman brick and above by wide horizontal strips of varnished oak. These latter serve also to divide, in a way often used by Wright, the wall area above and below the heads of the doorways. In this case, however, and as opposed to Wright's practice, these

16 Mr. Kovalchik has added metal doors with tempered glass on each side of his fireplace in a successful effort to make it draw properly. Mr. Sprague, who has seen other see-through fireplaces by Griffin and Van Bergen, does not remember having heard of this problem before.

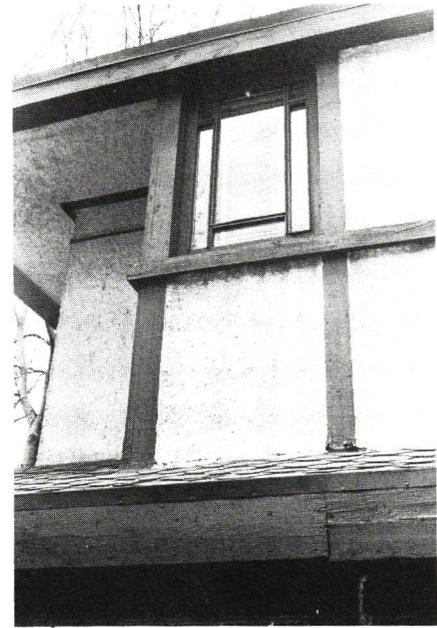


*The open beams between the fireplace and outside wall shown here are actually hollow and serve primarily as visual elements rather than structural members.*



*This is a photo of the interior of one of the Orth houses. The similarity to the houses on Magnolia Street is striking. Photo from *The Architectural Record*.*

*A detail of the southwest corner of the second floor of the house at 5921 North Magnolia Street. The window is typical, although all windows are not identical. Photo by Thomas Yanul.*



*This view of the rear of the 5921 North Magnolia house illustrates Griffin's tendency towards solidity and strength in his designs. The wide corner piers are more evident with the center panel set in slightly. This detail became more pronounced in Griffin's later work.*

10

strips become open beams spanning between the fireplace piers and the outside wall. The effect is to define without actually separating the living-dining space. Thin strips of varnished wood are embedded in the plaster of the ceilings evidently in order to subdivide these upper surfaces in a manner consistent with the rectilinear grid of dark-wood strips that articulates the walls and windows. The latter

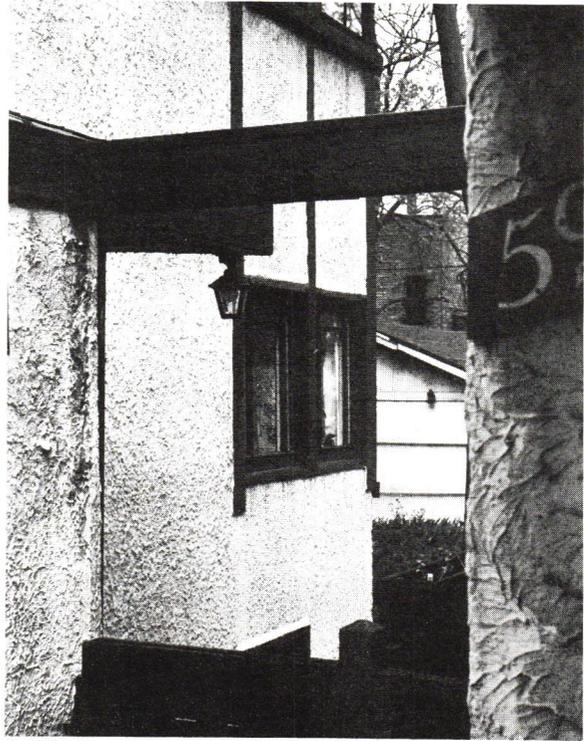
are divided into five glazed lights of unequal size by thin rectilinear mullions and transoms. The Magnolia Street houses have a handsome but simple screen which separates the stairway from the living room. The dining room has a built-in glass-fronted cabinet occupying the space behind one of the two large vertical piers on the outside rear wall of the house.

Except for their rectilinear shape and the attached porches, the Magnolia Street houses are laid out much like Wright's small houses of the type published in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1907 as "A Design for a Fireproof House."<sup>17</sup> The entrances and stairways are on the sides next to the central walk which allows the living-dining space in each to be developed as an open L-shape around the central fireplace. The kitchen occupies the remaining corner. Upstairs there are three bedrooms and bath lighted irregularly, as in Wright's work, by groups of casement windows. In the front bedroom<sup>18</sup> Griffin arranged two windows at right angles to each other in the cut-away corners of the room. But, unlike Wright, Griffin did not fill in these negative corners with flower-boxes or balconies, at least not in the front of the house. At the rear, however, he inserted miniature porches in each corner of the second floor. This results in two quite different facades. At the rear there is a suggestion of great strength while in front there is a more interesting, less rigid, spatial composition. The ceilings are elevated in that portion of the bedrooms toward the center of the house by utilizing the space under the hip roof. But as the roof does not overhang at the sides of the house, the ceilings could not be raised in those areas. The result is that in each bedroom the ceiling has two levels. The effect provides sleeping rooms of an unusual spatial variety; it is an effect, however, that seems overly complex for so small a house.

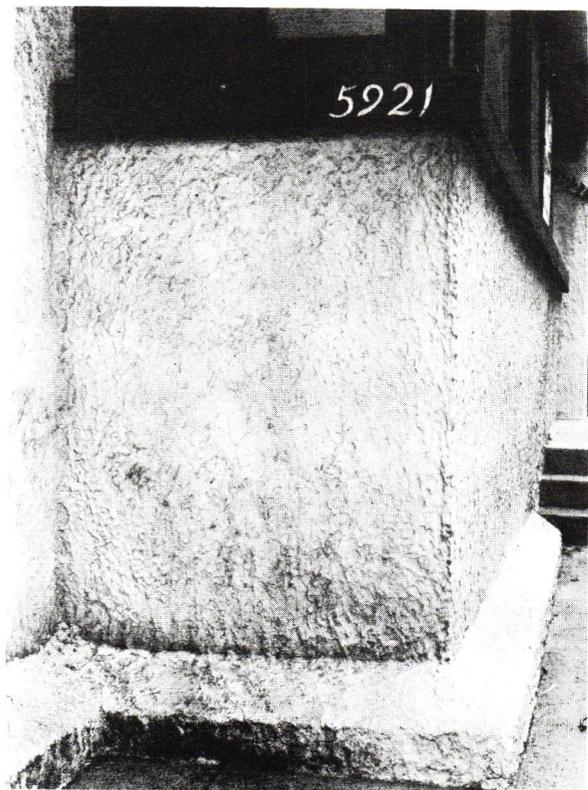
The work of Walter Burley Griffin has been inadequately studied. His designs have usually been referred to only in comparison with those of Frank Lloyd Wright or in relation to his city planning efforts. A great deal of Griffin's work is either unknown or unlocated. Perhaps the success demonstrated by Professor Sprague's class in documenting these early independent executed designs will encourage further research concerning this important architect.

17 Reprinted by the Prairie School Press, *Architectural Essays from the Chicago School*, edited by W. R. Hasbrouck, 1967, p. 17.

18 The front bedroom at 5921 appears to have been subdivided into two rooms. At 5917 this is a single room which, we suppose, was the original form. Our plans, taken at 5921, show the space as subdivided.

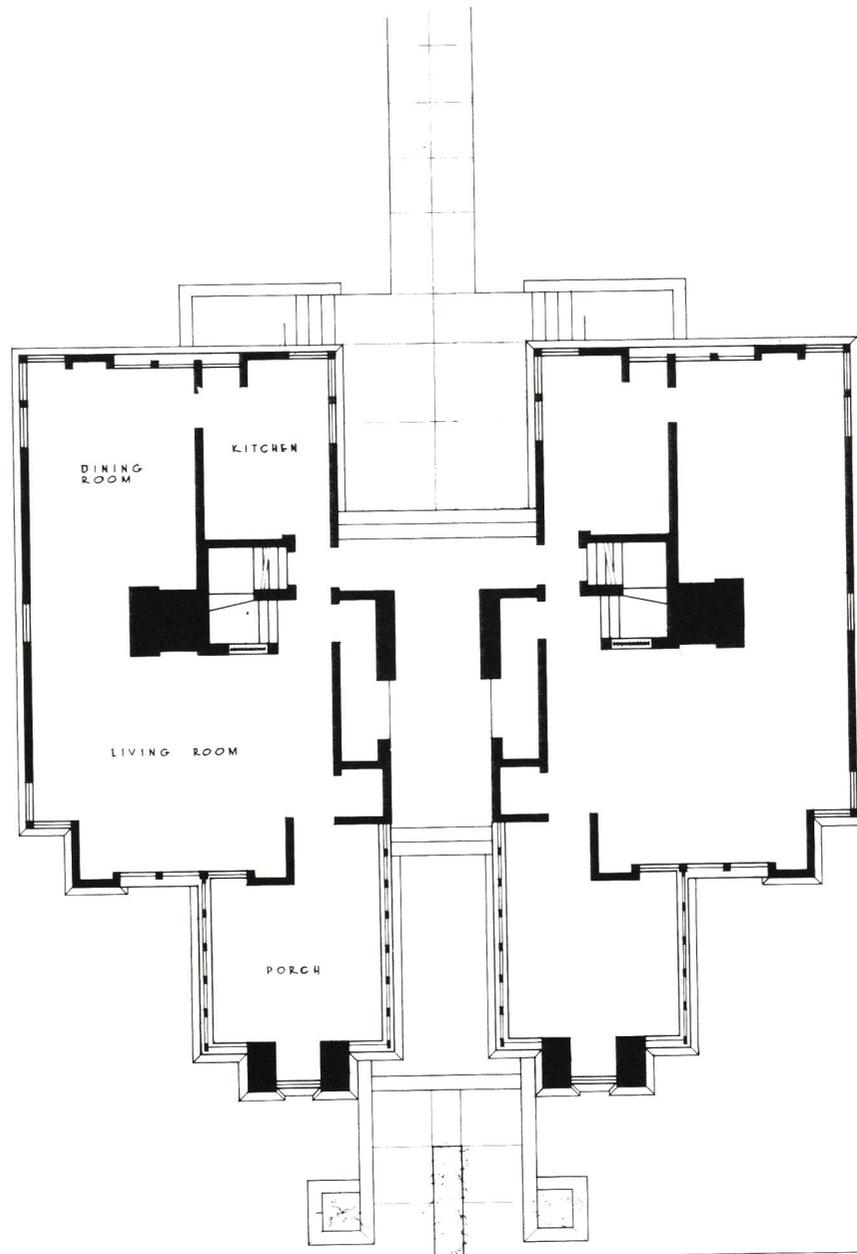


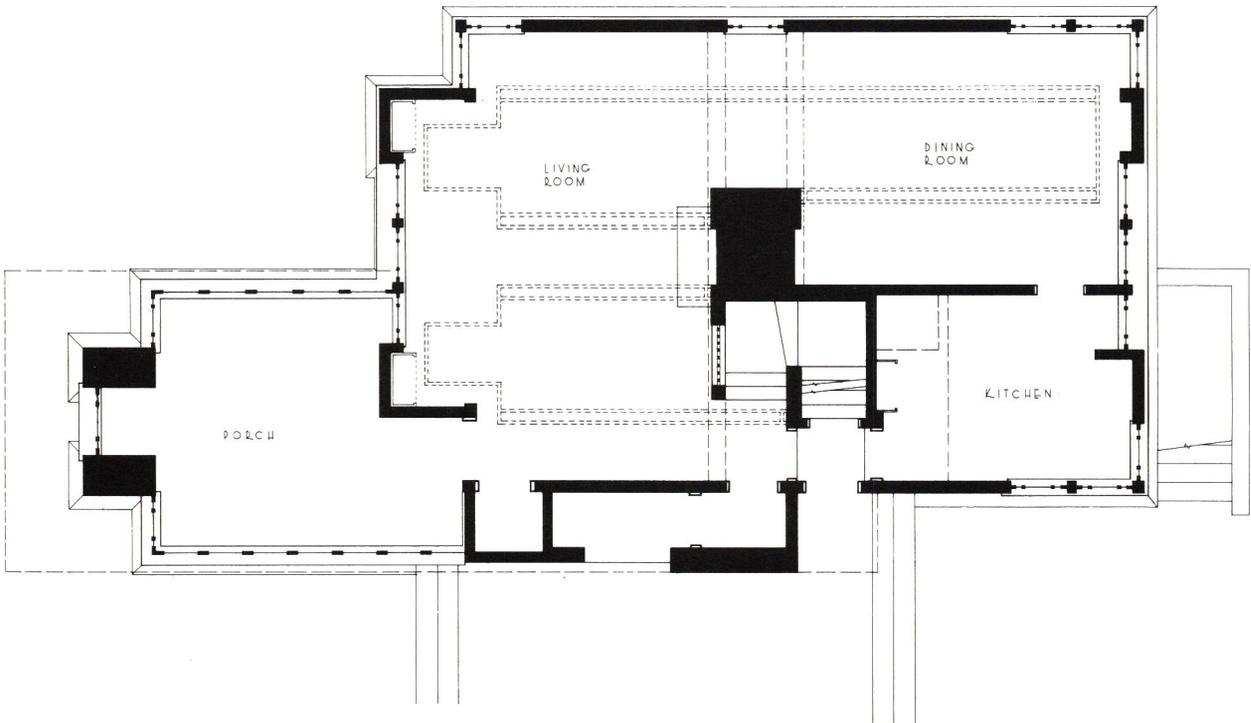
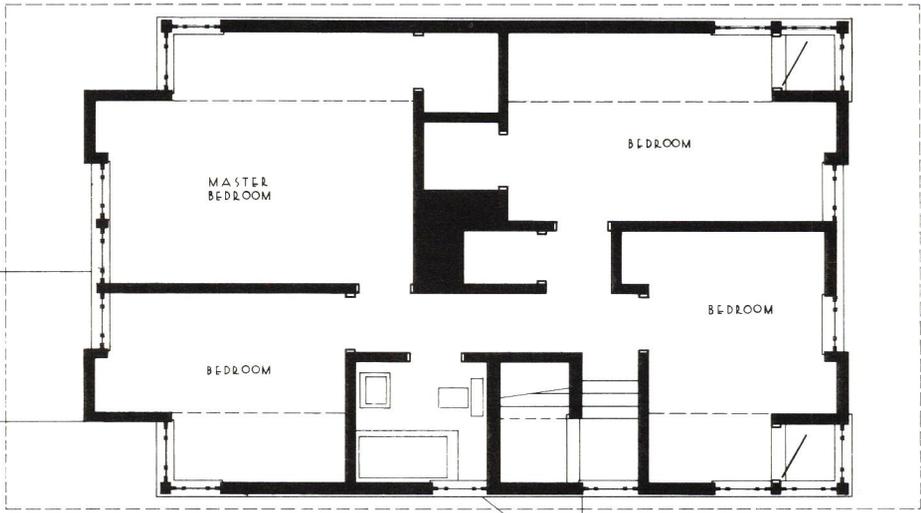
*This illustration shows that the two houses actually were physically joined by both the overhead wooden beam and by the double leafed gate leading to the back yard.*

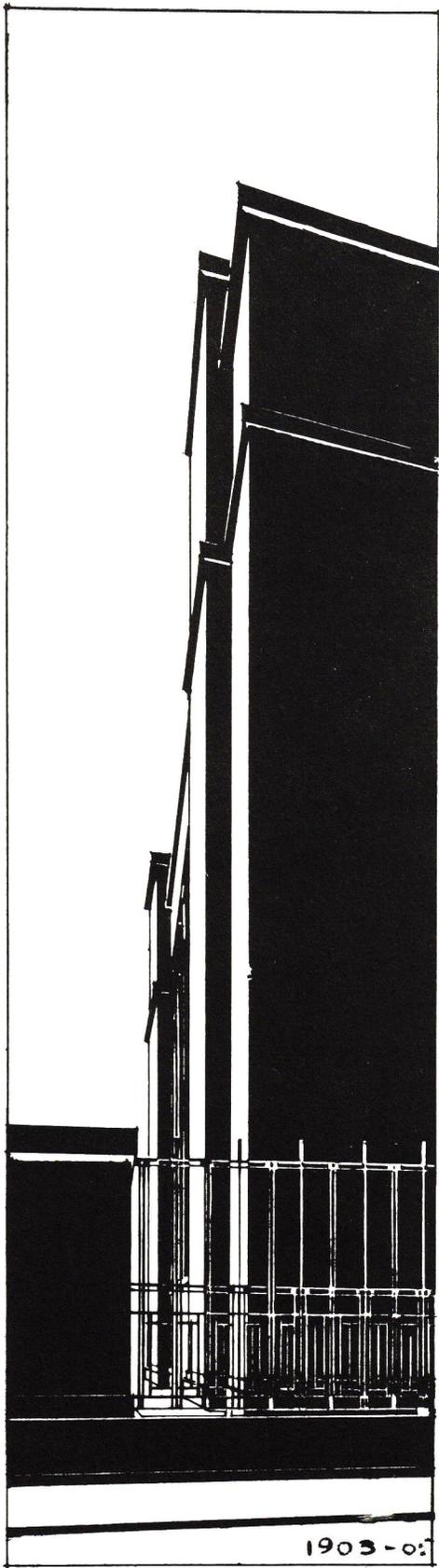


*This is a detail of the base at the exterior of the house on 5921 North Magnolia. Griffin and other Prairie Architects often used a flared base such as this, but it is seldom seen covered with stucco. Generally it is of exposed wood.*

*These measured drawings of the two houses now located at 5917 and 5921 North Magnolia Street in Chicago were prepared by Alan Shulman after measurements taken by Professor Paul Sprague and his class in Architectural History from the University of Chicago in the Spring of 1970.*





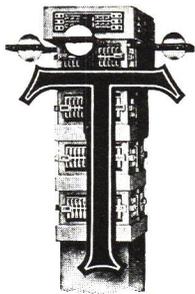
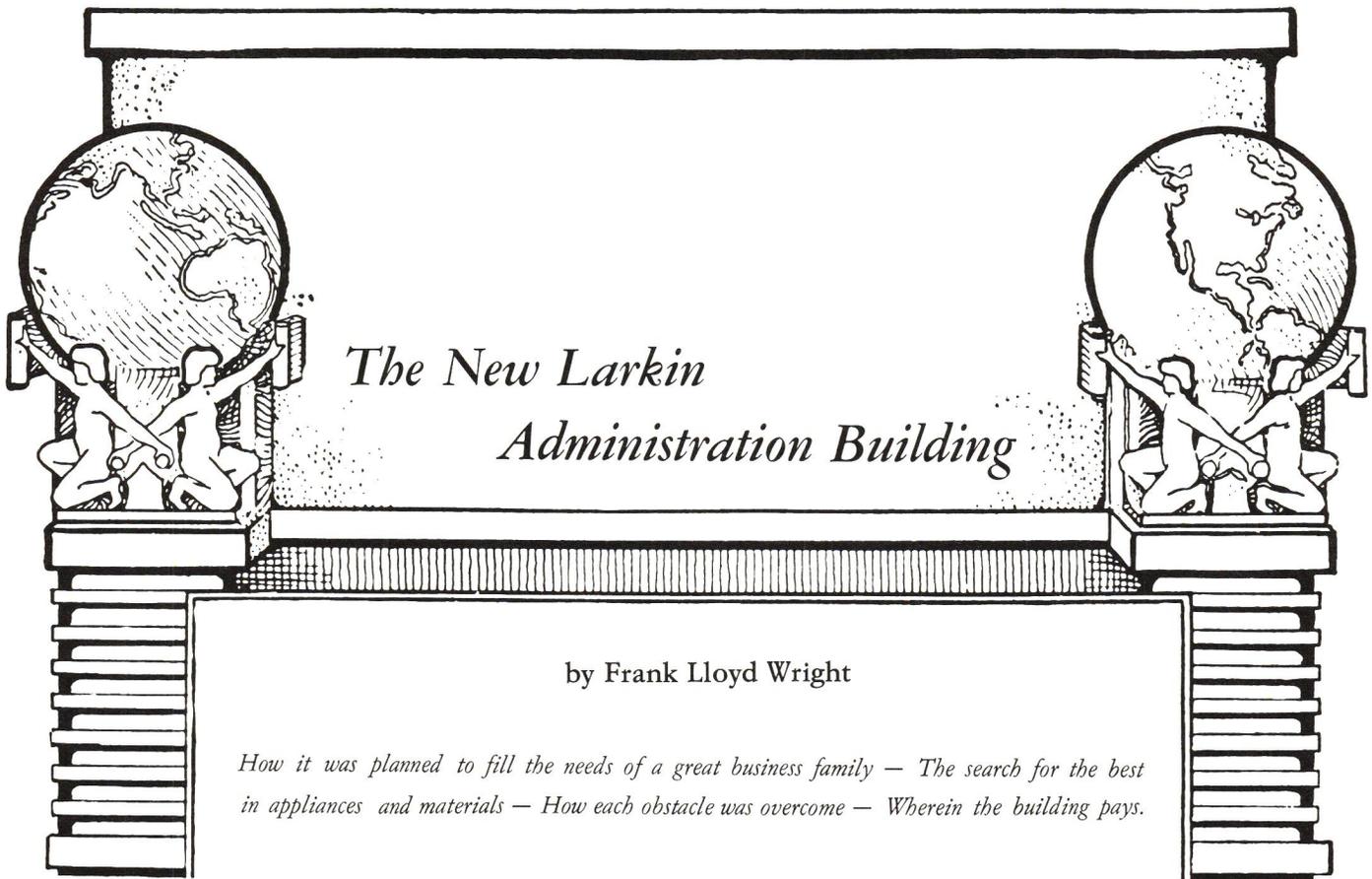


*Several months ago the editors received a brief note from one of our readers advising that he had acquired several copies of *The Larkin Idea*, the in-house magazine of The Larkin Company. He wondered if we would be interested in buying them. We replied that we were if they weren't too expensive. Several weeks passed before a package arrived with 22 copies of *The Larkin Idea* spanning the period of April 1901 through January of 1908. This, of course, was the period during which Frank Lloyd Wright designed and built the famous Larkin Office Building. An accompanying note stated a price but also offered to contribute them if we would make the contents available for study. We agreed.*

*In this issue we are printing on the following pages the first and probably the most interesting article found in *The Larkin Idea*. This item is one of Frank Lloyd Wright's earliest published writings of which we have found no reference in any bibliography.*

*Other material will follow in future issues, most notably some interesting comments concerning Frank Lloyd Wright's design for the Larkin pavillion at the Jamestown exposition.*

*This drawing of the Larkin building was made from a photograph of the building. Reproduced by permission of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. ©Copyright 1962 by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation. Photo by George Barrows for the Museum of Modern Art.*



HE architect has been asked to tell the "Larkin Family" why the big pile of brick across the street from the Larkin factories is an economical head-piece to house the intellectuals of a great industry.

Before the office building was begun the physical side of the plant was well developed in the extensive fire-proof buildings devoted to manufacture; but the brains and nervous system to make its corporeal bulk count for something hadn't developed the proper "forehead" with the sort of working-room behind it that would make its nervous energy and intelligence effective to the utmost and, what is good also, to let the light of the Ideal outwardly shine in the countenance of an institution that has in reality become "a great business of the people."

What the "Larkin Family" ought to know, I am told, is wherein all this expenditure of thousands upon mere brains and countenance, *pays*, particu-

The page ornament and capital letter on this page are both from the original issue of *The Larkin Idea* from which this article is taken.

larly as some of the money has been spent to reach the heart, too.

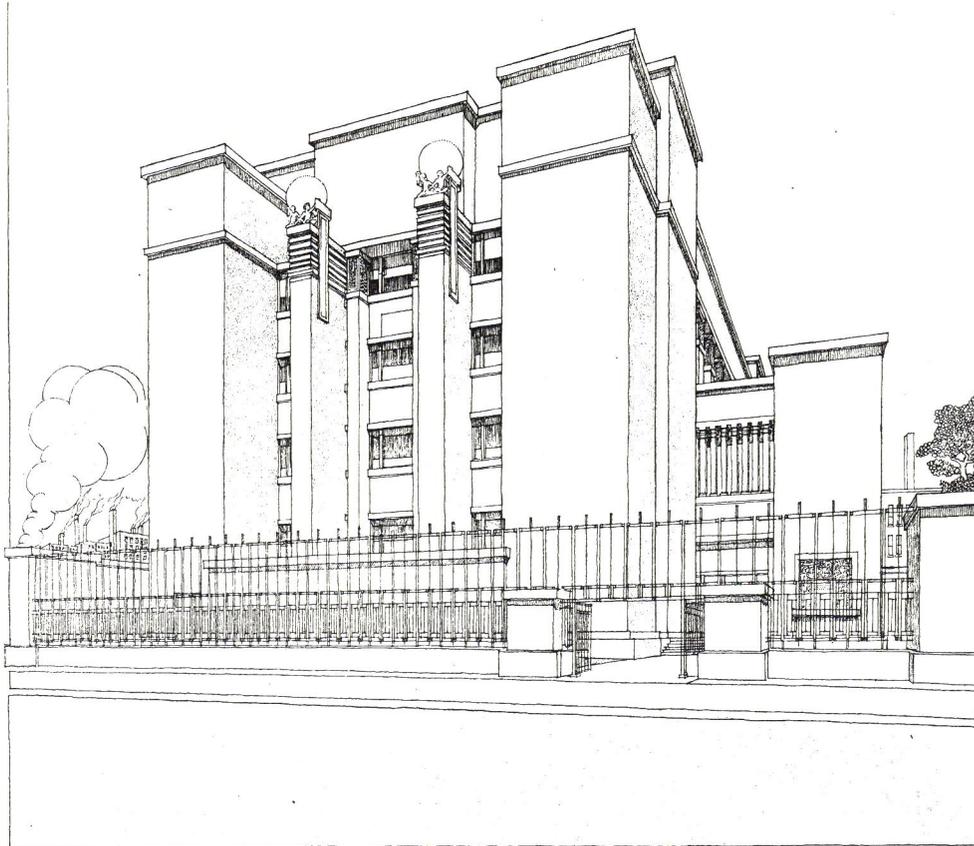
Has the Larkin Company in this instance been true to its traditions and "saved all cost which adds no value?" Perhaps not, if all values are to be reckoned in money. Real values are subjective and more difficult to estimate than the more obvious ones of the balance-sheet.

And yet, if, over-and-above the mere house-room required by 1800 workers; clean, pure, properly-tempered air for them to breathe whatever the season or weather or however enervating the environment may be is worth "money" to young lungs and old ones, we have that, — the best in the world.

If ideal sanitary conditions and toilet facilities are worth "money" we have those, — perfect.

If the positive security insured by the use of permanent fireproof materials throughout an isolated building and its fittings and furnishing is valuable, — we have that.

If a restful, harmonious environment, with none of the restless, distracting discords common to the eye and ear in the usual commercial environment, promoting the efficiency of the 1000 or more young lives whose business home the building now is can be counted an asset, why we have that too, together



*The Larkin building.*

with total immunity from conditions outside the building which are entirely the reverse. If the frame of mind of the worker reacts on his work we have paved the way for a favorable reaction by providing in detail and in ensemble a harmonious unity as complete as it is rare.

If law and order put into close touch with all the facilities for instantaneous inter-communication and easy systematic operation that clever people have yet invented saves time therefore money, — we have that.

In short, if the incentive that results from the family-gathering under conditions ideal for body and mind counts for lessened errors, cheerful alacrity and quickened and sustained intelligence in duties to be performed, we have created some very real values.

There are other things beside, calculated to make this family home helpful and uplifting still more difficult to estimate in money but the men who shape the destiny and determine the character of the work to be done by this family believe in them.

By the shrewd heads of many commercial enterprises these other things are considered to "pay" and are ceaselessly exploited as material for advertising, but I think the belief in them in this case lies deeper than that, for I have felt the spirit of the men behind this work and I know that they believe they pay, as the sunshine and the trees, and as the

flowers and a clear conscience pay: their love of their work and their pride in it would permit them to do no less.

Let us see whether the means chosen for the purpose of attaining all these things were economical and true or not as there are many unusual features in the construction of the building not easily comprehended without some study. To begin with, the site, for an office building, necessarily was unattractive. Smoke, noise and dirt of railroads were round about, which made it seem wise to depend upon pleasantness within, shutting out the environment completely so far as requirements of light and air would permit. The design of the building derives its outward character from this circumstance perhaps more than from any other. So the structure is hermetically sealed with double glass at all window openings. By mechanical means the fresh air is taken in at the roof levels, drawn to the basement, washed by passing through a sheet of water sprays (which in summer reduces its temperature two or three degrees) heated (in winter) circulated and finally exhausted from beneath the great skylight where the winter's snow will melt as it falls.

Outside the building is an enormous pile of impervious brick with splendid deep reveals. The stair chambers, air intakes and exhausts with their necessary machinery, pipe shafts and plumbing are grouped at all the outer corners of the main rectangle where light is least obstructed from the interior. The resultant walls of solid masonry at the corners where wall surfaces usually are slight give a

noble cliff-like mass to the structure. Moreover this insulates the stairways where they serve as practical fire escapes so that all the 1800 occupants of the entire building could safely and comfortably escape to the outside grounds in something like three minutes, if such a need in such a building can be supposed. These chambers also establish a ready means of continuous communication between stories at four points on each floor.

By this means the main building is systematically quartered in arrangement and is wired, heated and ventilated in quadruple insuring easy distribution and positive operation throughout the appurtenance systems with easy inter-communications between floors. Then the superimposed stories necessary to accommodate the required number of clerks are all aired, lighted and unified by a long, open, skylighted central court preserving in the occupation of the interior the character of the family-gathering, making the interior as a whole light, airy and beautiful altogether.

The floor areas surrounding this court have all been kept intact for business; the toilet accommodations, entrance and exit features being clustered in the four storied convenience-annex which is reached directly from Seneca or Swan Streets, at the ends. This entrance annex has been semi-attached to the side of the main structure so as to obstruct the light from it as little as possible.

The top floor of the annex and of the main building with its mezzanine and outlying roof surfaces are the family recreation grounds where the clerks and their guests may be fed and entertained. Here are completely appointed kitchen, bakery and commodious dining rooms, lecture rooms and library, class rooms, rest rooms and roof gardens, and conservatories that will furnish a gay note to the interior summer and winter.

It can honestly be said that there are no flimsy makeshifts outside or inside the building. Simplicity, straightforwardness, good materials and dignified proportion of the various parts are all that give it architectural effect; the sole ornaments of the exterior are the stone groups surmounting the piers advertising and accenting the terminals of the longitudinal central aisle of the interior court, together with the stone bas-reliefs over the water-basins flanking and accenting the entrances.

The exterior is dark in color and durable. The interior light in color and no less durable. The interior walls are lined with a semi-vitreous, hard cream-colored brick. The floors and the interior trimmings of this brick lining have been worked out in magnesite, a new building material consistently used for the first time in this structure. Stairs, floors,



*A steel and magnesite desk. The seats were swung free of the floor from the desk legs.*

doors, window sills, coping, capitals, partitions, desk tops, plumbing slabs, all are of this material and are worked "in situ" without seams or joints with sanitary curves at all wall surfaces, finishing hard and durable as iron, as light in color as the brick work and, not the least valuable of its properties, light in weight also. The solid concrete floors are cushioned with this magnesite and wood fibre permeated and made fireproof with magnesite, deafening the floors throughout the building and rendering them less cold and hard to the foot than masonry would be. They are then finished with a hard, durable surfacing of the magnesite.

The interior represents a full score of old building-problems in a new phase. Many experiments have been made in order that all the various appurtenance systems, filing systems and furnishings might make a time-saving, consistent, cleanly and easily-cleanable whole. To this end also a vacuum cleaning system has been installed with pneumatic motors to do the sweeping and scrubbing; and everything, where possible, has been designed free of the floor. The water-closets and their enclosures are all swung free of the floor with few horizontal joints anywhere in which dirt may lodge and instead of the usual dusty, banging doors, cleanable sliding screens are used. The metal lockers likewise and the metal desks are all designed with metal bases that at intervals only, touch the floor. The seats themselves are swung free of the floor onto the desk legs, never to scrape noisily



*The steel desks and chairs for the Larkin building were designed as a unit. The desk tops were of magnesite.*

about or be lifted by the janitor for cleaning purposes; think of the labor that would be required each night to pile 1800 chairs on top of 1800 desks and then to pile them down again! The desk tops are adjustable to various heights and the cabinets beneath them are interchangeable so that typewriter-and graphophone-desks may be introduced in the rows anywhere at will. The desk tops are of the same material as the floors, as are all the panels in the sides of the desks. The general scheme of arrangement of the desks and filing system is as orderly and systematically complete as a well disciplined army drawn up for review might be and all is threaded together with a system of electric wiring so that the mere pressure of a button puts any official of the organization in instant communication with any other member.

In the interior all matters of heating, ventilating, lighting, plumbing, refrigeration, mechanical carriers, pneumatic cleaning and inter-communication and electrical control have been assimilated into the structure and in such a way that a failure in any point may readily be reached and remedied.

Within the circular Information Desk, a prominent feature of the entrance lobby, are located the telephone switchboards, with a capacity of 300 connections, the electrical Master Clock controlling the numerous secondary clocks and register clocks and automatically ringing the signal gongs throughout the building; the switchboard by which the

electric time system is operated, and private telegraph wires of both the Western Union and Postal Companies. From the visitors' gallery surrounding the lobby, furnished appropriately with steel chairs and writing tables, the operation of all of these devices is in plain sight. Wires extend from the switchboards to all parts of the building, accessible through metal outlet boxes sunk in the floors, permitting at any desk a direct and invisible connection with telephone, phonograph, light or power, or all of them.

Little disorder and no confusion arose from the inauguration of the building, for the building is its own furnishing — or its furnishings a part of the building. Finished, it is complete and ready for use. I know of no building in the country so complete in this respect. This means that patience and study were required in the work; and effort to eliminate all crudities and conflicting parts in order that the result might be simplicity itself.

It has taken a longer time to build the building than would have been necessary if the market had contained all the materials, ready at hand, as it does for ordinary buildings.

Unfortunately there is no ready-made market wherein to let contracts for architectural work of this nature. Work like this is not a matter of stock patterns or stock methods: Established processes dislike interruption; workmen do not like to think; contractors are afraid of the new thing for which they have no gauge; so in this instance the Larkin Company through the medium of an intelligent, experienced contractor, has gone beyond the middle-man in many cases.<sup>1</sup> "From Factory-to-Family" was still the rule in the building of the Office Building; in this instance, however, the family in question is the Larkin Co. itself.

The stone came from Lake Superior quarries direct to the building and was cut on the ground by days' labor at a cost \$20,000.00 less than the work could have been let for by contract to Buffalo.

The magnesite interior trimming throughout the structure was another case of, — from the magnesite mines of Greece direct to the building, — to be manufactured there by days' labor into the various features of the interior, at a cost less than any

<sup>1</sup> Ed. Note: The editorial on pp. 16-17 of the same issue of *The Larkin Idea* (November, 1906) states . . . "No mistake was made in selecting as the builder Mr. Paul F. P. Mueller of Chicago — fellow-townsmen of the architect. To him the general contract was awarded without competition because of his known sympathetic interpretation of Mr. Wright's plans. His co-operation with the architect and with the owner has been most conscientious and intelligent, and his work has, as Mr. Wright in his article has intimated, partaken of the arduous nature of that of a pioneer."

permanent masonry-material known, and with a lightness and a sanitary and artistic perfection very difficult if not impossible to achieve in either stone or terra cotta.

Extreme care has been exercised in searching what market there was for the special thing, in almost every case, wanted. For instance, the iron fence enclosure was put out for bids in Buffalo and Cleveland and the lowest bids received were approximately \$8000.00, many concerns in Chicago were tried with slightly better results until a man was found who had new machinery capable of punching as though it were mere tin, the heavy iron we proposed to use in its construction. This man made the fence for Jackson Park in Chicago and was accustomed to contract for heavy fence by the mile and he was not afraid to undertake to furnish our fence for \$4100.00.

The glass in the ceiling lights cannot be bought again for double the price paid, — another case of finding the right thing after long search. The inside brick will never be sold again at the price the Larkin Company paid for it. The reinforced concrete floor-construction was finally let for half the Buffalo bids and it was found impossible to sublet the plain concrete work of the building for the price which the Larkin Company paid for it. A sub-contract was twice let for the interior trim in magnesite but each concern got into trouble before the time came to "make good" and then the architect and the contractor had to stump the country for means to carry out the work; many men and firms were consulted, in Chicago, in Buffalo, in Dayton, in Pittsburgh and finally in New York they found the man whose experience and ingenuity has aided the contractor in overcoming obstacles which seemed at the outset almost insurmountable. And I might recite in detail most structural items of the features going to make up the construction. All the items — and their name it seems to me is legion — have been threshed out to the limit of endurance, with, in almost every case, a gratifying result.

Besides, this building is a better building in many respects than the one we began to build, for the best in appliances and materials were considered to be economical and some search was necessary to uncover the cheapest and best; moreover, the scope of the building broadened as it progressed; in fact the business grew so fast that new requirements had constantly to be met. The one question the directors were determined to have satisfactorily answered when matters of betterment were under consideration was whether the betterments to be made were real and if they were the answer was always "yes."

But perhaps the final proof, on account of the balance sheet at least, of the care and ingenuity exercised in behalf of the structure is the fact that this thoroughbred, fireproof building, by no means impoverished architecturally, including possibly the most complete heating and ventilating system in the country, with much plumbing and elaborate systems of electric wiring, together with its impressive and extensive fence-enclosure, was erected for approximately 17 cents per cubic foot whereas fireproof buildings by no means superior usually run from 23 cents to 30 cents per cubic foot.

The fact remains, for what it is worth, that in this case the Larkin Company has not fattened the middleman nor paid the high price attached usually to high specialties but comes into possession of a sound, modern, wholesome building scientifically adapted to facilitate the transaction of its business and insure the permanence of its records and continuity of its service to its customers as well as to promote the health and cheerfulness of its official family at comparatively a very low cost.

The ease with which the interior may be cared for, the relatively low cost of janitors' service and of repairs for many years to come will contribute toward a profitable operation.

Finally — it seems to me — that the American flag is the only flag that would look well on or in this building; the only flag with its simple stars and bars that wouldn't look incongruous and out of place with the simple rectangular masses of the exterior and the straightforward rectilinear treatment of the interior. I think our building is wholly American in its directness and freshness of treatment. It wears no badge of servitude to foreign "styles" yet it avails itself gratefully of the treasures and the wisdom bequeathed to it by its ancestors.

There may be some to question whether it is beautiful or not; there always will be the usual two opinions about that, for it has "*character*" and when character is pronounced in buildings or in people there is always a "for" and an "against," — even when one's artistic instincts have not been perverted as ours have been by too much borrowed architectural finery. But in-so-far as it is simple and true it will live, a blessing to its occupants, fulfilling in a measure on behalf of the men who planted it there their two great reciprocal duties, duty to the Past and duty to the Future — duties self imposed upon all right thinking men.



## Book Reviews

*TWO CHICAGO ARCHITECTS AND THEIR CLIENTS: Frank Lloyd Wright and Howard Van Doren Shaw, by Leonard K. Eaton, with an appendix by Elizabeth M. Douvan. M. I. T. Press, Cambridge, 1969. xii plus 259 pp., illus. cloth, \$10.00.*

This interesting book presents a study of clients rather than buildings, their vocations, avocational interests, and their social life in general. Shaw, an architect working in period styles, is well chosen as a foil for Wright, the leader of the progressives. The author, professor of architecture at the University of Michigan, handles the contrast between the two groups with imagination; and his collaborator, professor of psychology at the same place, has contributed a discussion of the problems of representation and interpretation in such a study, primarily sociology.

This is set in a perhaps overly dramatic historical framework which must be distinguished from the material about the clients. The architecture of Wright and the Prairie School of 1890-1913 is seen as one of three great architectural revolutions, the earlier two being the advent of Gothic, appearing about 1140 at St. Denis, and the change to Renaissance style, beginning in Florence about 1420. One may question whether the work in Chicago, taken alone, is quite comparable to the two earlier shifts. The comparable revolution, to my mind, should be seen as the long and complex one which began over 100 years before 1890, of which the Chicago developments were but a part, although an important part; doubtless one of the climaxes. The dramatic framework continues in the picture of Wright as a warrior carrying on a "siege" of the city with Shaw as the defender. I would prefer to think of both as inside the city carrying on a debate, with demonstrations, before the citizens. But these are large questions.

The value of the book lies rather in the material about the clients and the discussion of their traits. Substantial information was found on 40 of Wright's clients of 1893 to 1913, and "profiles" of 13 of these are printed. For Shaw the numbers are 52 and 13. The study is limited to houses, and the client is thus regularly a married couple. The author's discussion of these people, his presentation of what might be called composite portraits of the two groups, is extremely interesting and stimulating. He finds that Wright's clients tended to be industrialists involved in making things, Shaw's business men occupied with the making of money

(Veblen's distinction). Wright's were more often interested in music-making, or in some hobby like photography or printing, often were not college graduates, were acquainted with the technical side of their businesses, not art collectors, not great club members (pp. 62-63). Shaw's clients were more often college graduates, often from Ivy League colleges, were not interested in the technical side of business, collected art and were often supporters of the Art Institute (Wright's were not), and they belonged to many clubs (pp. 168-69). These bits from the summaries can only suggest the fascinating material here, and the reader is urged to see it for himself. That therefore one group would tend toward Wright and the other toward Shaw must be seen as a hypothesis, but it is a plausible one.

Perhaps there are one or two gaps to be regretted in the list of clients. There is no mention of Ward W. Willits, although he commissioned "the first masterpiece" (Hitchcock) of the prairie houses, and Wright apparently felt close enough to urge Willits to go with him to Japan at one time. Mr. Willits told me that Wright later gave him a copy of the Wrightian issue of *Architectural Forum* of 1938 inscribed, "To my best inspiration." He must have been one of the most important clients. Darwin D. Martin is mentioned, but is not accorded a profile, although he built one of the largest of the prairie houses in Buffalo in 1904. Mrs. Martin said to me once that Wright cared nothing for his clients' wishes (perhaps she was thinking of the later house built outside Buffalo, in Derby, in 1927). Their son, Darwin R. Martin, told me that his parents always felt affection for the house of 1904 because (he said) it was the first house they had built, but that the children hated it, it was so dark (one of the few cases, in my opinion, where this criticism was justified). I do not think that these two men would contradict the picture of the clients drawn in the book, but the material on them would have been interesting and a substantial addition.

In the last chapter, "The Failure of the Siege," the author suggests reasons for the decline of the Prairie School after about 1913: the departure or backsliding of some of the architects; the defection of magazines which had featured their work (Brooks); "the increasing feminization of American society," which led to the wife's choosing architect and style for a house (perhaps this needs more study); and an increasing concern for fine art, which drew attention to the eastern part of the United States and Europe (Condit). Doubtless the decline was a fact and these are good reasons. Still, it might be worth while to carry the study further. John S. Van Bergen managed to find clients for prairie style

houses through the 1920s. One wonders who and why. There were some others, beginning in the 1930s. L. Morgan Yost, to mention only one, did houses which, although not so close to Wright's in style, were based on an approach to architecture very like his; and his statements show that he ran into two kinds of possible clients (*The Archi*, Nov. 1941). Would they divide themselves as Wright's and Shaw's did?

However students of society may assess the sociological value of this study, it will have definite value for the student of architecture: it brings us closer to the actual situations in which the architects worked, and thus helps to make our memories of the buildings more vivid.

The book is well and clearly written. Some of the illustrations are not of very good quality, doubtless due to being reproduced from magazines. The designer is not identified but deserves some mention. The text devoted to Wright is limited to the upper half of each page, that for Shaw to the lower, the other half being used for illustrations or left blank, a pleasant novelty. The dust jacket echoes this, carrying a large orange-red square on its upper half, I presume in reference to Wright's red square, whereas the square on the lower half I am afraid is black, I suppose for Shaw. I had hoped for blue, the complementary color, for in the larger historical view Shaw complements Wright; and indeed the present book thus gives a more balanced view of the architectural situation than most books on Wright.

Reviewed by J. Carson Webster  
Northwestern University

*THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE WELL-TEMPERED ENVIRONMENT*, by Reyner Banham. University of Chicago Press, 1969. 295 pp., cloth, \$15.00.

Architectural historians, writers and critics have been in need of a historical look at environmental controls' role in the development of 20th Century architecture. It has been symptomatic of architectural historians and critics to deal solely with interior spaces and their relationship to exterior forms when discussing influences in historical developments. Architectural writers have been content with considering only the derivation of 'styles' or the innovations in the field of structures as being paramount influences in architectural development. Architecture is environment; and architecture as environment is what Reyner Banham's latest book is about.

Banham's work has arrived none too early. Especially when historians and writers are still concerned

only with importance of structure when discussing the influences of technological developments on modern architecture. The only other volume by an architectural historian concerning this subject is Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* (1950). Banham's thesis concerns itself with the importance of environmental control in the development of modern architecture. He has, for some time now, been saying such inventions as the electric light, air conditioning and the suspended ceiling had more effect on the development of modern architecture than the stylistic developments by the mentors in the modern movement. For instance, the development of the skyscraper is due in part to certain environmental controls being made available during the same period of time. The introduction of electrical power service to Chicago around 1882 had as much influence on the evolution of the skyscraper as did the high land costs. An example is the Montauk Building (1881) by Burnham and Root being wired for electric lights while it was being constructed, a year before service was available. Banham cites an example in his opening "Unwarranted Apology" that demonstrates this commonly overlooked influence of environmental control in architecture. In regards to the Larkin Building, he says: "Few architectural writers have made anything of those strong and monumental forms that Wright gave the external expression of his pioneer systems of mechanical servicing, however, except to cite them as the purely formal source of the external service-works of the Richards Laboratories."

The particular interest of this book to Prairie School 'students' is the two chapters devoted to Frank Lloyd Wright (chapters 5 & 6). Banham considers Wright the ". . . first master of the architecture of the well-tempered environment." Wright's Larkin Building and the Prairie Houses are the examples cited. One of the least explored area of Wright's creativity is with regard to his innovative use of environmental controls. Writers and historians overlook the important implications in historical terms of Wright's total integration of his building parts. It is very obvious the creative genius of Frank Lloyd Wright included provisions for mechanical services in the development of his architecture. The period in which the Larkin Building and the Prairie Houses were conceived and executed (1895-1910) represents Wright's most creative period. It is also a period when many later Prairie architects (Drummond, Mahoney, and Griffin) were in the employment of Wright.

The Larkin Building is placed in an important position within Banham's context of an architecture of environmental control. He goes as far as saying:

“Thus Wright, in the Larkin Building design, serves as a bridge between the history of modern architecture as commonly written — the progress of structure and external form — and a history of modern architecture understood as the process of creating human environments.” Wright’s understanding of the importance of environmental control in the Larkin Building is supported in a quote from his *An Autobiography* (1943): “The Larkin administration building was a simple cliff of brick hermetically sealed (one of the first ‘air conditioned’ buildings in the country) to keep the interior space clear of the poisonous gases in the smoke from the New York Central trains that puffed along beside it.” The Larkin Building’s massive, vertical brick walls at the corners contained the main supply and exhaust air-duct systems of the building, in addition to the stair wells. In the interior spaces of the building, hollow bricks forming a coarse grill (a typical Wright device) distributed the fresh air. Very few, if any, architectural writings make mention of these environmental developments. Most are mainly concerned with visual concentration on the internal spaces as related to the monumental exterior forms, without noting the environmental control between both that make the building inhabitable.

Wright’s Prairie Houses are excellent examples of environmental and structural integration. Wright’s holistic view of total integration can be seen in his ability to relate mechanical servicing in both plan and section. Of the four or five Prairie Houses included by Banham, the Baker House (Wilmette, Illinois, 1908) and the Robie House are the two best examples of this type of integration. There are two lessons to be learned from the Prairie Houses. Wright, firstly, created a ‘partnership’ between the structural and mechanical service elements so the whole environment is more than the sum of its parts. He did more than resort to finding clever ways of installing the mechanical equipment (although one could consider his window boxes as a very clever way of hiding equipment). The Robie and Baker Houses are excellent examples of this sort of ‘partnership’. Anyone familiar with the plan and section of the Robie House living and dining rooms can understand this at once. Secondly, the holistic notion of integration of building parts makes Wright’s work modern in its conception. Wright’s holistic view is again seen best in the Robie House. It is a synthesis in the integration of physical elements (with windows, overhangs, etc.), mechanical services (electric lighting, heating units, etc.), and structure. It is the synthesis between these elements that is modern to a level where many contemporary buildings fall short. These qualities make the Prairie Houses the triumphs of environ-

mental art that they are.

One of the faults with this work generally is the amount of omissions in material of certain subject areas. Two such omissions with regard to the Prairie School include the successful integration of electric lights with daylighting in Wright’s Unity Temple, and the use of a multiplicity of bare light bulbs to create spatial effects in the Auditorium Building by Adler and Sullivan.

Although there are omissions in certain subject areas, this merely points to the fact that there exists a vast resource of material regarding the role of environmental control in the development of modern architecture. The depth of the study and the overall content of this work far outrank the omissions or occasional surface treatment in some parts. Banham’s uniqueness rests in his ability to expose the importance of environmental control as a major element among the forces shaping the development of modern architecture. Environmental control has been a tender spot for most architectural historians, and Banham’s book is an excellent attempt at correcting the existing deficiencies in this area. Banham’s thought-provoking work comes as an important (and logical) addition to his previous works. Its importance as to the understanding of where technology fits into the development of modern architecture cannot be overlooked. The new dimension Banham introduces into the historical development of architecture must be recognized and acknowledged; architecture must be considered as environment for people.

Reviewed by William C. Miller  
University of Illinois—Urbana

## Preview

Volume VII, Number 2 of *The Prairie School Review* will have a major article concerning the work of architect Bruce Goff. The article, by former contributor Robert Kostka, will contain many photographs and plans of structures not previously published. The second article will be a photo essay of John Lloyd Wright’s first independent commission. Mr. Wright was kind enough to permit us to use some of his original material for this article.

Several recently published books will be reviewed including the following:

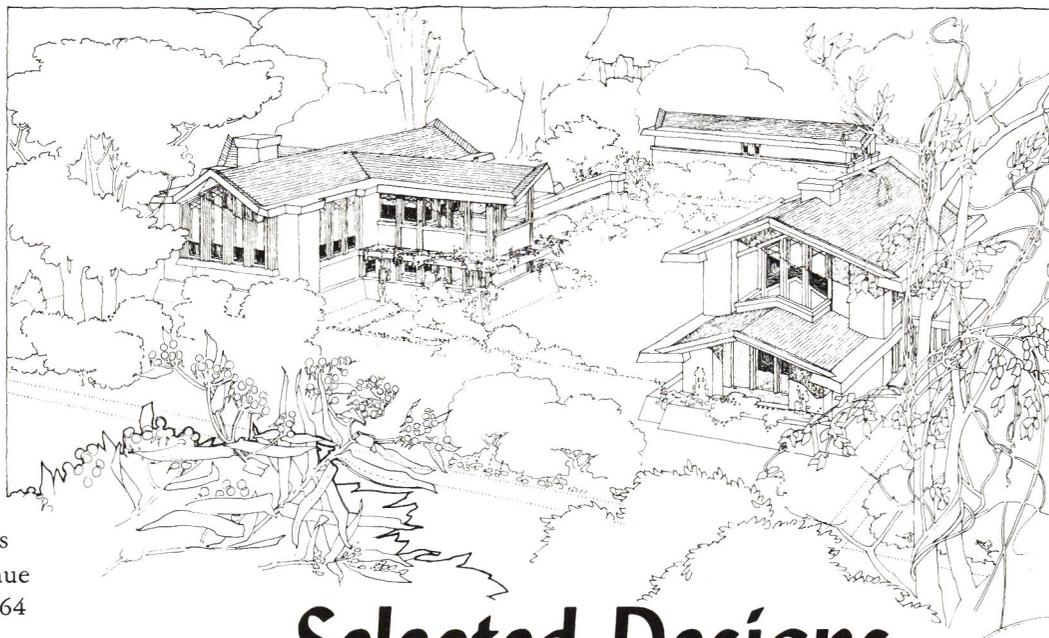
*American Architecture Since 1780*

Marcus Whiffin

*The Rise of American Architecture*

Edgar Kaufmann

# WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN



The Prairie School Press  
12509 South 89th Avenue  
Palos Park, Illinois 60464

## OTHER PUBLICATIONS

**HENRY HOBSON RICHARDSON AND HIS WORKS** by Mrs. Schuyler Van Rensselaer. A facsimile edition of the first biography of an American architect. Cloth \$25.00

**THE HOUSE BEAUTIFUL** by Frank Lloyd Wright and W. C. Gannett. A facsimile of the book designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and printed by William H. Winslow in 1896. Cloth \$22.50

**HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY Chicago and Nearby Illinois Areas**, edited by J. William Rudd. Catalog of work done through 1966. Paper \$1.50

**ARCHITECTURAL ESSAYS FROM THE CHICAGO SCHOOL**, Tallmadge, Sullivan, Jensen, Wright, edited by W. R. Hasbrouck. Articles from *The Brick-builder*, *Ladies Home Journal* and *The Architectural Review*. For the period 1900 through 1909. Paper \$2.50

**JOHN WELLBORN ROOT** by Harriet Monroe. A facsimile of the 1896 edition with a new introduction by critic Reyner Banham. Cloth \$8.50

**THE ROBIE HOUSE, FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT**, by HABS. A complete set of drawings of this famous house by Frank Lloyd Wright. Paper \$2.50

## Selected Designs

The Prairie School Press, Inc. announces the publication of *WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN, Selected Designs* edited by David T. Van Zanten, Ph.D. This magnificent volume includes more than 50 drawings executed by Marion Mahony Griffin. They include illustrations of Walter Burley Griffin's award winning design for the Australian capital city of Canberra as well as numerous other drawings of buildings and projects.

Architect Walter Burley Griffin is usually remembered as a contemporary of Frank Lloyd Wright. His wife, Marion Mahony Griffin, worked with Wright for some 13 years and is generally credited with the rendering of most of the magnificent pen and ink drawings which were done in Wright's studio during the early 20th Century. It was during this period that the "Prairie" house was developed.

After leaving Wright and becoming the wife of Walter Burley Griffin, Marion Mahony Griffin continued to execute her splendid drawings. It is this later work, illustrating the designs of Walter Burley Griffin, which is included in this book. The drawings have been gathered from libraries in New York, Chicago and Australia for this publication.

The text for the book includes a preface and an informative introduction by Architectural Historian David Van Zanten, who has also furnished a chronology of Griffin's life and an excellent bibliography. Finally, there are seven of Griffin's thought provoking addresses and writings on architecture and planning.

The book is superbly produced on 80# laid paper with oblong pages 11-1/2" high by 13-1/2" wide. It is bound in maroon buckram with gold stamped title and is enclosed in a handsome slipcase. The price is \$25.00.

This edition is limited to 1000 copies.

