



Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission

Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District



Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio 1990 (Village photo)

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number See Continuation Sheet not for publication N/A
city or town Oak Park vicinity N/A
state Illinois code IL county Cook code 031 zip code 60302

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set for in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See Continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:	Signature of the Keeper	Date of Action
<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain: _____)	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of
Architecture Historic District
Name of Property

Cook County,
Illinois
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as
apply)

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in count)

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> building(s) |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> district |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-State | <input type="checkbox"/> site |
| <input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal | <input type="checkbox"/> structure |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> object |

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1,714	209	buildings
1	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1,714	209	Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of Contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

1,255

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

COMMERCE/TRADE/professional

EDUCATION/school

LANDSCAPE/park

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

RELIGION/religious facility

SOCIAL/clubhouse

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

DOMESTIC/secondary structure

COMMERCE/TRADE/specialty store

COMMERCE/TRADE/business

COMMERCE/TRADE/professional

EDUCATION/school

LANDSCAPE/park

RECREATION AND CULTURE/sports facility

RELIGION/religious facility

SOCIAL/clubhouse

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN/Italianate/Queen Anne/Stick-
Eastlake/Shingle/Romanesque/Renaissance

LATE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURY

REVIVALS/Beaux Arts/Colonial Revival/Classical
Revival/Tudor Revival/Italian Renaissance

LATE 19TH AND EARLY 20TH CENTURY

AMERICAN

MOVEMENTS/Prairie/Bungalow/Craftsman

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE//BRICK/CONCRETE

walls WOOD-Clapboard/Shingle

STUCCO

BRICK

roof ASPHALT

METAL – Tin

other CONCRETE

BRICK

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations N/A

(Mark "x" in all boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** moved from its original location.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

CA. 1865 - 1941

Significant Dates

1889 - 1909

Significant Person

(complete if Criterion B is marked)

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

See Continuation Sheet

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- Previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: _____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 705 acres

UTM References

(place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	3	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
2	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	4	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Philip Thomason
organization Thomason and Associates date February 5, 2007
street & number 1907 21st Ave. S. telephone 615-385-4960
city or town Nashville state TN zip code 37212

Additional Documentation

submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 Or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO) or FPO for any additional items

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Multiple
street & number _____ telephone _____
city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listing. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20303.

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7. DESCRIPTION

SUMMARY

The Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District is located entirely within the municipal limits of the Village of Oak Park, Illinois. Oak Park is located in Cook County, Illinois, directly west of Chicago's western edge and nine miles from its downtown. Oak Park developed as a railroad community in the 1840s and gradually became a residential suburb of Chicago by the late 19th century. In 1900, the community contained 10,000 residents and over the next forty years extensive construction and urbanization resulted in population growth to over 60,000. Oak Park continues to be a dense urban community with a population in 2000 of 52,524.

The Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District comprises all or parts of 97 blocks of the Village and is bounded on the north by Division Street, on the west by Harlem Avenue, on the south by Ontario and Lake Streets and on the east by N. Ridgeland Avenue. While there are two clusters of commercial buildings in the district along Chicago Avenue and N. Ridgeland Avenue, the other streets are primarily residential in character. Within this boundary are 1,923 primary buildings, of which 1,714, or 89%, are considered contributing to the character of the district. In addition to these primary buildings, the district contains 820 contributing and 610 non-contributing outbuildings such as automobile garages and sheds.

Buildings in the district are largely single-family dwellings built between ca. 1865 and 1930. As Oak Park grew in the late 19th century, residential lots were platted in the area north of the railroad line and the commercial corridor of Lake Street. Most lots ranged in width from 30 feet to 50 feet although some on N. Oak Park and N. Linden Avenues were larger to accommodate more stately homes. By 1900, many of the lots in the blocks to the immediate north of Lake Street had been developed for single-family homes. This type of residential development continued into the early 20th century as building construction moved north to Division Street. The increased density of the Village during this period also led to the construction of multi-story apartment buildings. These are located primarily in the southern blocks of the district along Lake and Ontario Streets and on N. Oak Park Avenue.

Commercial buildings in the district are confined to two primary locations: Chicago Avenue between Harlem Avenue and Belleforte Avenue, and the intersection of Chicago and N. Ridgeland Avenues. The commercial area in the vicinity of Chicago and Harlem Avenues developed in the 1910s and 1920s to provide neighborhood services and stores and this vicinity contains several multi-story buildings with retail on the first floor and apartments on the upper

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floors. The buildings clustered at the corner of N. Ridgeland and Chicago Avenues are primarily one-story buildings containing offices and stores.

Scattered throughout the district are several churches built to serve congregants in the Village. Most of these churches were designed in the Gothic Revival style and continue to serve their congregations. In addition to the churches the district contains community and social buildings such as the Oak Park – River Forest High School at 201 N. Scoville Avenue. Built in 1906, this school has numerous additions and the campus also includes a stadium completed in 1924. Buildings originally constructed for social purposes include the Oak Park Club built in 1922 at 721 Ontario Street and the YMCA built in 1904 at 156 N. Oak Park Avenue. The boundary also includes Austin Gardens, a Village park at the corner of Forest Avenue and Ontario Street. This park was dedicated in the 1960s at the site of the estate of Henry Austin Sr., a prominent citizen of the 19th century.

Although there are a number of churches, commercial buildings and other property types, the dominant character of the district is single-family dwellings. The earliest of these date to the 1860s when Oak Park emerged as a railroad community west of Chicago. After the Chicago Fire of 1871 many city residents relocated to Oak Park and a building boom began that continued for the next fifty years. Construction in the 1870s took place close to Lake Street and the railroad line and the oldest dwellings in the district are located in the blocks from Lake Street north to Chicago Avenue. Dwellings from this time period generally reflect the Italianate style and have hipped roofs, bracketed cornices and arched windows.

In the 1880s, Oak Park became a desirable suburb of Chicago and offered large building lots, clean air and water and an absence of noisome industries that characterized many areas of the city. Oak Park was an easy commute by rail and streetcar to the city and provided a lifestyle of working in the city while living in a pleasant suburban environment. Hundreds of dwellings were built in Oak Park during the 1880s and 1890s and new subdivisions were created north of Chicago Avenue and east of N. East Avenue.

From 1880 to 1900 the dominant house type built in Oak Park used the Queen Anne style. These houses were generally of frame construction, two-stories in height and with features typical of this popular American style. These houses were asymmetrical in form and featured projecting bays, corner towers and turrets, a variety of exterior materials such as clapboard and shingles, and large porches with milled columns and decorative millwork. These houses were especially well suited for the large families of the period and the middle and upper class residents who made up Oak Park in the late 19th century. Concentrations of these dwellings are generally found in the southern blocks of the district. Other architectural styles built during this period in Oak Park include Victorian Romanesque, Shingle, Stick, and Chateau.

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In addition to houses erected for Oak Park's wealthier residents, a number of houses were also constructed in the late 19th century for working class residents. These were concentrated in the blocks to the east of Harlem Avenue such as along Maple Avenue, N. Marion Street and Paulina, Schneider and Miller Streets. These dwellings are characterized as one or one- one-half stories in height, of frame construction, and built in gable front plans. Rectangular in plan, these dwellings had detailing such as window cornices, milled porches and eave brackets. In Chicago, these houses are known as "Worker's Dwellings" and were a common vernacular style built during this period. This collection of dwellings in the west and northwest sections of the district reflects the wide range of incomes and professions of Oak Park residents in its early years.

After 1900, there was a gradual shift away from the Victorian styles to revival styles such as Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival, and Renaissance Revival. Over the next two decades houses in Oak Park were built to reflect this trend occurring nationwide. The wealth of many of Oak Park's residents resulted in the construction of notable examples of these styles designed by Chicago and regional architects. The district contains hundreds of examples of revival style dwellings from this period. Most Colonial Revival dwellings are of frame construction while many built in the Tudor Revival style are of brick and stucco. These revival style dwellings were built throughout the district as lots were developed north towards Division Street before 1920. Variations of the Colonial Revival style commonly found in the district include Neo-classical and Dutch Colonial. Neo-classical style dwellings are distinguished by their large columned porticos on the main façade while gambrel roof forms are characteristic of the Dutch Colonial style.

Concurrent with the interest in the revival styles was a new form of architecture created by Frank Lloyd Wright and other architects in Oak Park and the Chicago area. Known as the "Prairie School" or "Prairie Style," these buildings were distinguished by their horizontal forms, low pitched roof lines, restrained ornamentation, and open floor plans on the interiors. Wright's home and studio was located at Chicago and Forest Avenues and was the influential center for this style's development in the late 1890s and early 1900s. Some of Wright's finest designs were built in Oak Park such as the Arthur Heurtley House (NHL), the Frank W. Thomas House, and the Laura Gale House. Wright's break with architectural traditions and his new approach to design had a major effect on regional and national architecture. In Oak Park, this was reflected in the dozens of other Prairie School dwellings designed from 1900 to 1920 by architects such as Eben E. Roberts, Tallmadge and Watson and John S. Van Bergen. As a result, Oak Park contains the largest concentration of Prairie School architecture in America and is one of the hallmarks of its architectural heritage.

The Prairie School's popularity waned in the late 1910s and residents turned more towards revival styles as well as the popular Bungalow form and Craftsman style of the period. As lots were developed in the north and east sections of Oak Park, these blocks were characterized by

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one- and two-story frame and brick veneer dwellings dominated by Bungalow and American Foursquare designs. Bungalows built in the district were constructed with horizontal massing, wide eaves, large porches or sunrooms on the main façade and decorative details such as knee brace brackets and exposed eave rafters. These houses are found primarily in the 600-800 blocks of the district.

Of particular importance to the district's architecture are the hundreds of American Foursquare designs and variations. The American Foursquare was noted for its simplicity of form and detail. These houses were built in rectangular or square plans with hipped roofs, hipped dormers at the roofline and often broad one-story porches or sunrooms on the main façade. Decoration on these dwellings was often limited to art glass or stained glass windows and entrances with sidelights and transoms. Square brick or frame porch columns were widely used rather than classical or milled columns. In Oak Park, many of the district's American Foursquares reflect the influence of the Prairie style in their wide eaves, stucco exteriors and geometric inlay on the main façade. Hundreds of these type dwellings were constructed by both owners and developers in the blocks in the north section of the district from the early 1900s to the 1920s. On some blocks such as the 700-800 blocks of N. Ridgeland and N. Kenilworth Avenues these are the dominant house types. The Prairie-influenced American Foursquares are an important house type in the district.

As the population of Oak Park continued to grow by thousands of residents in the 1920s, most of the buildable lots in the Village were developed with American Foursquares, Bungalows, and houses with various revival styles. The development pressures of this decade also led to the demolition of a number of 19th century homes to make way for apartment buildings and flats. This apartment construction was largely confined to the blocks between Lake and Erie Streets near the rail line. Most of these apartment buildings were constructed in revival styles such as the Tudor Revival Santa Maria Apartments built in 1924 on N. Oak Park Avenue. Other three- and four-story apartment buildings were constructed on adjacent blocks, most of which reflected the Tudor or Colonial Revival styles.

By the end of the 1920s, the great majority of the buildings in the district had been constructed and only a few vacant lots were scattered throughout this section of Oak Park. Due to the Depression and World War II, construction on these lots was limited and building activity did not resume until the late 1940s. In the mid- to late-20th century, demolition of buildings and new construction was not widespread in the district except along the commercial areas of Harlem Avenue and sections of Chicago Avenue. The residential blocks in the district remained largely intact during these decades and continued to display their historic and architectural character. Following an architectural inventory, the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1973. Since this time the

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STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE - INTRODUCTION

The Village of Oak Park, Illinois, was first settled in 1835 and incorporated as a village in 1901. Following the Chicago Fire of 1871, Oak Park became popular as a rural suburb of the city and its population increased from 500 in 1870 to almost 10,000 in 1900. By the 1910s the village boundary had been largely subdivided and its population eventually grew to over 40,000 residents by 1920. During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Oak Park was home to architect Frank Lloyd Wright and his family. One of America's most innovative architects, Wright created a new style of architecture which was termed the "Prairie School" or "Prairie Style" and he influenced many architects throughout the Midwest and across America. Wright designed over two dozen buildings in Oak Park and other architects working concurrently with Wright designed dozens of others. Between 1900 and 1920, almost ninety Prairie style buildings were constructed in Oak Park which is believed to be the largest concentration of this style in America.¹ In addition to the Prairie style buildings, the district also contains an impressive collection of 19th and early 20th century Victorian and Revival style buildings as well.

The Village of Oak Park commissioned a study of its architectural legacy in 1970 which resulted in the inventory of 328 buildings identified as possessing architectural merit. As a result of this study, the Oak Park Historic District was created by the Village in 1972 to encourage the preservation of significant buildings and formally recognize the district's importance in architectural history. The newly created Oak Park Landmarks Commission then prepared a National Register nomination for the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District which was listed on the National Register on December 4, 1973.

The Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District was listed on the National Register under criterion C for its architectural significance. As in the case with many early submittals to the National Register, the nomination contained only a brief overview of the district's significance, primarily emphasizing its association with Wright and the Prairie School. The description was also brief and did not include any building inventory or a list of contributing

¹ The author has not identified any source which provides a comprehensive list of Prairie style buildings nationwide. From the available books and literature it appears that the largest concentrations of this style are in Minneapolis/St. Paul MN, Madison, WI, and Chicago and its suburbs. Interviews with Carol Ahlgren, City Planner with Minneapolis and Jim Draeger, Wisconsin Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer indicate that the number of architect designed Prairie style buildings in these cities is substantially less than those in Oak Park. Brian Goeken, Deputy Commissioner of the Landmarks Division of Chicago, thinks that the City of Chicago has an overall larger number of architect designed Prairie style buildings but that they are scattered throughout the city. In his opinion, Oak Park has the largest concentration of Prairie style architecture in the Chicago region.

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and non-contributing resources. The original boundary for the district was drawn to include a large section of the Village of Oak Park. The architectural survey of 1970 identified almost one hundred Prairie School buildings within this boundary including all of those designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in Oak Park.

In 2006, the Village of Oak Park sought to update the nomination through a comprehensive inventory of every property within the district and to reexamine the district boundaries. This effort was undertaken through volunteers and a preservation-consulting firm and resulted in the completion of inventory forms and photographs of approximately 1,923 primary buildings. Following review of the existing boundaries and consultation with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, an expansion of the district boundaries resulted in the addition of 453 properties into the district.

The revised boundaries provide a more consistent approach to the district, as they include buildings similar in style, age, and integrity to those included in the 1973 listing. Major geographic features like Division Street, Harlem Avenue, and Lake Street, as opposed to seemingly arbitrary mid-block divisions, define the updated district boundaries. As with the buildings included in the 1973 listing, the new inclusions provide valuable context for the development of the Prairie style by showing not only the Prairie style, but also the Victorian styles that preceded it and the Revival styles that challenged and, ultimately, prevailed in popularity following it.

This study also updated the nomination to clarify the district's significance on the national level under the following criteria:

Significance under National Register criterion B – The Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District contains Wright's home and studio where he resided with his family for twenty years. During this time period Wright gained national attention through the development of the Prairie style and many of his finest designs were built in Oak Park. Wright's studio, adjacent to his home, was the center for experimentation and innovation as he developed the Prairie style. Architects and draftsman such as Walter Burley Griffin and John S. Van Bergen worked with Wright in his studio and later had notable and successful careers. Wright left Oak Park in 1909 and went on to create approaches to architecture which continue to influence building construction and design today. Wright is recognized as one of America's most talented and innovative architects and his home and studio remain as a testament to his early career.

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Significance under National Register criterion C – The Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District was listed on the National Register in 1973 for its architectural significance. Since this time Oak Park's architecture and the Prairie School in particular have been studied in greater detail by numerous historians and architectural historians. As a result, Oak Park is now recognized as having the largest concentration of Prairie School buildings in America. In addition to 26 buildings designed or remodeled by Wright, the district also contains approximately seventy additional buildings designed in the Prairie style. The majority of these are residences which were built between 1900 and 1920 and designed by architects who worked with Wright or were influenced by him. The original nomination also mentioned that the district contained "excellent specimens of architectural styles from Italianate residences of the 1860s to revived classical and medieval types of the 1920s."² The vast majority of the buildings in the district are dwellings built between ca. 1865 and ca. 1930; they reflect both late Victorian styles and the revival styles of the early 20th century. These buildings reflect the growth and development of Oak Park and assist in placing the Prairie School buildings within their context in American architectural history. As a result, the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District provides a unique urban environment for understanding the development of the Prairie style and its place in American architecture.

It is possible that buildings within the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District may be eligible as National Historic Landmarks under other criteria. For example, the district contains homes associated with noted authors such as Ernest Hemingway and Edgar Rice Burroughs and famous dancer Doris Humphrey. Oak Park has also been home to many of Chicago's business and civic leaders. Research and assessment of these individuals as well as other aspects of Oak Park's history were beyond the scope of this project which concentrates on the significance of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School of Architecture.

The period of significance established for the district is ca. 1865 to 1941. This period encompasses the oldest known buildings in the district to those built before the United States' entry into World War Two. The 19th century buildings demonstrate the design context that shaped the approach of Prairie architects, buildings designed between the turn of the 20th century and the 1920s exemplify the development and height of the Prairie style, and buildings from the pre-war years show varying responses to the Prairie innovations. The district contains numerous examples of Victorian styles such as Queen Anne, the first style Wright worked with as he developed his own approach to design. Within the district are hundreds of revival style dwellings built concurrently with and just after the Prairie School, which illustrate differing approaches to architecture in the early 20th century. The end to the period is marked by the

² Oak Park Landmark Commission, "Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District." National Register Nomination on file with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, 1973.

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break in new building that accompanied the war and the changed approaches to design and materials that followed. This period of significance is justified since the range of architectural styles built within this time span provide the built environment and context in which to evaluate and assess the Prairie School of Architecture.

Within the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District are three properties listed individually on the National Register and two properties listed as National Historic Landmarks. All of these properties are associated with the Prairie School and Frank Lloyd Wright. These are as follows:

Mrs. Thomas H. Gale House, 6 Elizabeth Court – NR March 5, 1970.
Walter Gale House, 1031 Chicago Avenue – NR August 17, 1973.
Arthur Heurtley House, 318 Forest Avenue – NHL February 16, 2000
Frank Thomas House, 210 Forest Avenue – NR September 14, 1972.
Frank Lloyd Wright House and Studio – NR September 14, 1972 and NHL January 7, 1976.

This nomination is organized into the following sections:

- The Growth and Development of Oak Park, ca. 1865 - 1929
- Oak Park's Architectural Development, ca. 1865 – ca. 1900
- Oak Park's Architectural Development, ca. 1900 – 1941: Frank Lloyd Wright and the Rise and Decline of the Prairie School
- Frank Lloyd Wright's Career After Oak Park

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THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF OAK PARK, ca. 1865 - 1929

Oak Park had its origins in the land owned by Joseph Kettlestrings who purchased 173 acres in this section of Cook County in 1833. This property lies along present Lake Street and east of Harlem Avenue. Oak Park, then called Oak Ridge, consisted of a smattering of pioneer homes, squatters' land, and wilderness. Recollections of pioneer life painted a picture of the dynamic prairie landscape ranging from dismal to vibrant. Mrs. Elizabeth Porter Furbeck, who arrived as an infant to the area that became River Forest and Oak Park, remembered severe blizzards, a tornado, and flooding water, alongside Indians passing through peacefully, a seasonal procession of wildlife and migrating birds, and a spectrum of color with the blooming of grasses and wildflowers.³ The prairie community west of Chicago continued to grow during the 1850s and 1860s, as owners of large tracts of land sold off parcels. Land prices increased following the construction of the Chicago & Galena Railroad through Oak Park in 1848. This railroad connected with Galena, Illinois and eventually became part of the Chicago & Northwestern Railroad. The railroad allowed residents to live in Oak Park while working in Chicago and homes owned by prosperous middle class businessmen appeared, as well as a school and a meeting hall.⁴

As the Midwest converted from prairie to farms, Chicago became the nation's largest grain and cattle market. With Chicago's booming economy came deterioration from industrial pollution, crowding, and noise, the very factors that sent its wealthier residents looking for suburban havens like Oak Park and other peripheral neighborhoods of Chicago. In turn, the rapid expansion of the city's suburbs converted natural landscapes into neighborhoods. The affluent flight from the city had begun as early as the 1850s with the coming of the railroad. In 1857, when Illinois legislation created Townships in the out-lying precincts of Chicago, Augustin Porter suggested the name of Cicero for the local Township, which comprised a handful of small communities, including Oak Park. Under this arrangement, Oak Park was often under-represented. Oak Park residents also discouraged saloons and other vices and found its collective moral standard at odds with those of neighboring communities, especially Cicero, where gambling and drinking enjoyed political support.⁵ As Chicago's economy and population boomed, wealthy families seeking to escape urban vice, thus, favored Oak Park.

Oak Park's rail connection and the Chicago Fire of 1871 would both have a major impact on its history. As one Chicago historian noted, "At the very moment that Chicago's markets and railroad networks were bringing a metropolitan economy to the Great West, wealthy Chicagoans

³ Jean Guarino, *Yesterday: A Historical View of Oak Park, Illinois, Volume One Prairie Days to World War I*. (Oak Park, IL: Oak Ridge Press, 2000), 13-15.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 5, 8, 15.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 31-32.

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were seeking to recover (or, more accurately, create) an ideal landscape that combined urban comforts with a carefully selected subset of rural amenities.”⁶ Following the tenets of Andrew Jackson Downing, designers Calvert Vaux and Frederick Law Olmstead created in Chicago’s suburbs planned communities with large lots, houses set back thirty feet, commons, curbed roads, randomly planted trees, playgrounds, immaculate gardens, specific lanes for horseback and carriage users. The design intended to imitate nature, but a tamed one. Amid the lawns and trees were commuter rails, paved streets, sewer lines and other urban advantages.

The Chicago Fire of 1871 served as a catalyst of re-growth and vigor. It cleared away older, wood frame buildings, allowing for their replacement with buildings of steel that came to dominate and characterize the Chicago skyline. Chicago’s downtown was re-born architecturally and socio-economically. Its high-rises made Chicago real estate too expensive for residential property, pushing the working class to the city’s fringes where villages of wood frame cottages encircled the lumberyards, grain elevators, and stockyards where their inhabitants were employed. While the working class remained in the city, increasingly the middle and upper classes in Chicago moved west and north to suburban communities such as Oak Park and Evanston.

In 1870 Oak Park had approximately 500 residents; by 1872, following the fire, that number doubled. During the next two decades, both city and suburb continued to flourish. Land values rose with the skyscrapers in Chicago, as well as in Oak Park. Whereas an acre sold for \$1,000 in Oak Park in 1871, the price tripled within three years. Oak Park established a high school, whose first graduating class in 1877 consisted of three students. The following year, Oak Park resident James Scoville developed a town reservoir, ensuring its own supply of fresh water. The town’s first bank opened in 1886.⁷

In the late 19th century Chicago ascended as one of America’s greatest cities. Via railroads, the city converted incoming grain, lumber, and livestock of the mid-west into outgoing consumer products. Cities to the west expanded industry under corporate control from Chicago. The mid-western metropolis became New York’s peer as a financial exchange center, as well as culturally, with theaters, libraries, and arts.⁸ In 1889 Chicago annexed the comparatively sparse neighborhoods south of the city, including the villages of Hyde Park, Kenwood, and Woodlawn. The 133-square-mile addition, with 225,000 people, boosted Chicago’s ranking to second place among United States metropolitan populations. There were predictions around the turn of the

⁶ William Cronon, *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (NY, NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1991), 347.

⁷ Guarino, *Yesterday: A Historical View of Oak Park, Illinois*, 49, 61, 64, 67.

⁸ Cronon, 281, 307-311.

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century that Oak Park would become absorbed by Chicago. However, "Middle- and upper-class suburbs like Oak Park had a much better chance of preserving their independence than did lower-status peripheral communities of the nineteenth century because of changes in incorporation and annexation laws."⁹

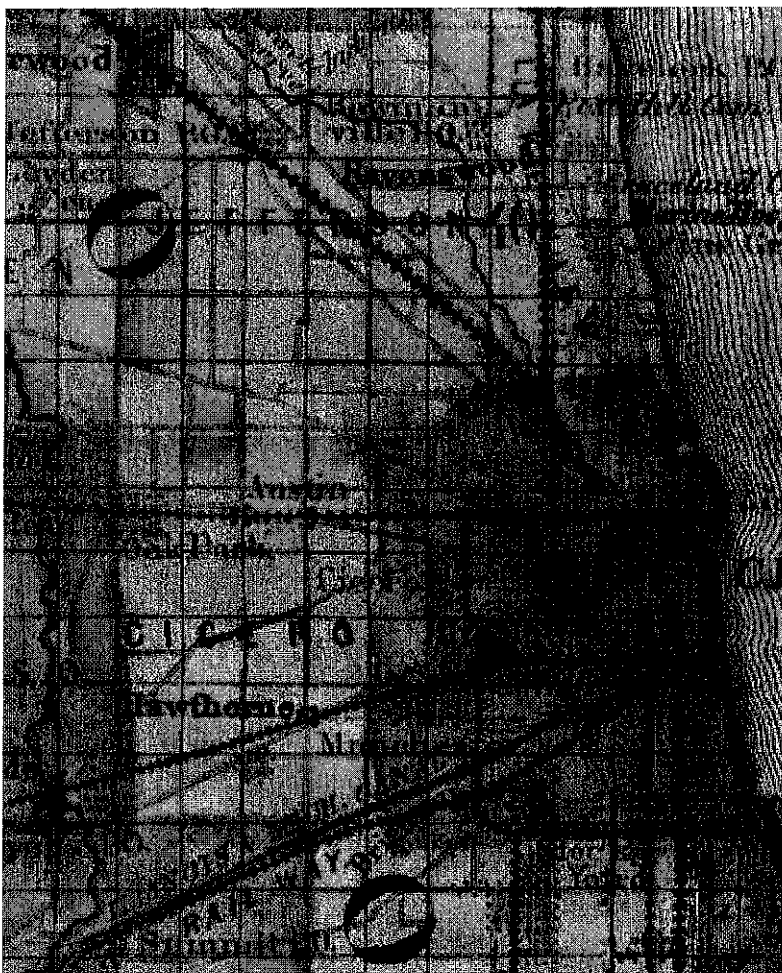


Figure 1: In 1870, Oak Park is shown on the railroad line just west of Austin and Cicero (*Campbell's New Atlas of the State of Illinois, 1870*, David Rumsey Map Collection).

⁹ Kenneth T. Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 142, 144, 147, 151.

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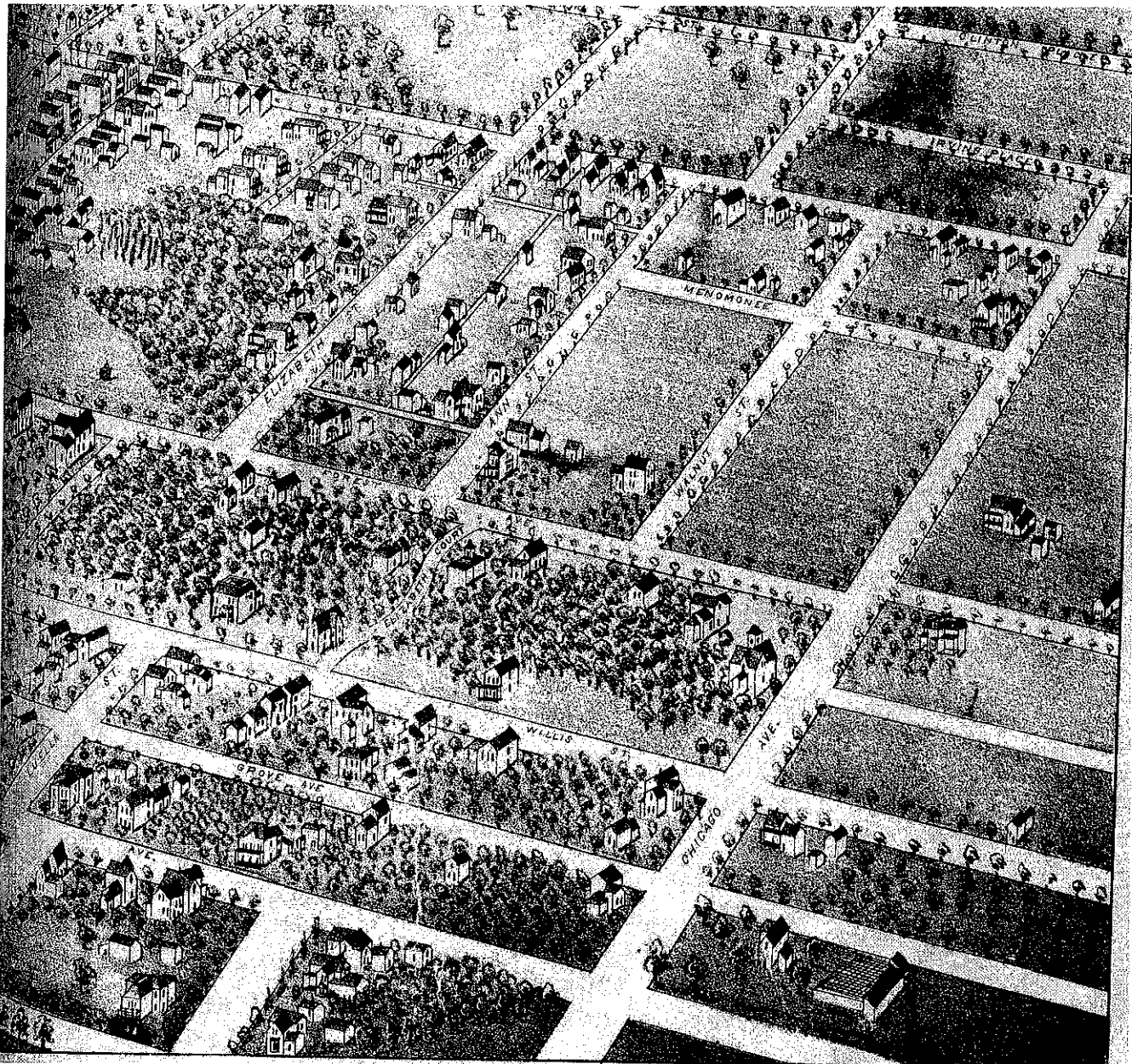


Figure 2: This birds' eye view of Oak Park in 1873 shows a mixture of houses, forest, and open land in the area from Forest to N. Oak Park Avenues (Guarino, *Yesterday: A Historical View of Oak Park, Illinois*, 29)

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Since 1880 Oak Park had been struggling for independence from its multi-member township that included less affluent Cicero and Austin. By law, a single town could not vote itself out of a joint township; such a vote required the participation of all members. Austin, lacking Oak Park's influence and wealth, defeated Oak Park's attempt in an 1895 election to separate. In 1899, Austin was annexed by Chicago, and new legislation in 1901 allowed Oak Park to vote itself out of Cicero's township. By this time, Oak Park had established itself as a model suburban town. During the late 19th century, American philosophies of nature, landscape, gender roles, and domesticity became intertwined, as influential design and education professionals expounded on the virtues of suburban life. In his study *Crabgrass Frontier: The Suburbanization of the United States*, Kenneth T. Jackson illuminates the converging ideologies that influenced the gravitation of "fashionable and respectable addresses" from "close to the center of town" to the suburbs. He writes that designer Andrew Jackson Downing advocated private homes in park-like settings for nuclear families. Downing instructed that a love of one's home equated with domestic happiness, which affected in a man integrity, patriotism, and good citizenship. This sentiment of suburban virtue echoed the widespread belief that cities undermined morality and vigor.¹⁰ Downing was supported by Catharine Beecher, called the "principal architect of the ideology of domesticity." Beecher believed that a solid family, managed by the woman, was the foundation of a safe and healthy home, ideally a microcosm of society. She came to mirror Downing's belief that the nuclear family required a specific physical and psychological space, "the then embryonic suburb."¹¹

Edwin Gale was representative of the wealthy suburban businessman of Oak Park who had businesses in both the Village and Chicago. His 1865 Gothic Revival home was a block from one of his numerous stores of an expanding drug store chain, owned with business partners. Gale was also one of thirteen businessmen who commuted daily on one of the two trains that ran to and from Chicago. Gale and his wife Julia had six sons. Their son Walter was one of three students in the Oak Park High School's first graduating class of 1877. Another son Abram, lived with his wife Maude in a Victorian home across the street from his parents; the couple later built a large Queen Anne, a popular style in Oak Park during the waning years of the 19th century.¹²

As the population in Oak Park increased, a large area was subdivided for building lots in 1880 bounded by Harlem Avenue on the west, East Avenue on the east, Augusta Street on the north and Madison Street on the south. As these lots began to fill, another large area to the east was subdivided. Known as the Fair Oaks Subdivision, it required all new owners to build residences

¹⁰ Ibid., 15, 19, 63-5, 68.

¹¹ Margaret Marsh, *Suburban Lives* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 16-17.

¹² Ibid., 67-9.

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costing no less than \$5,000 to ensure its standing as a middle-class neighborhood.¹³ As hundreds of new homes were built, civic improvements followed such as stone sidewalks and the introduction of street lighting in 1891. Powered by electricity, these street lights proved to be too dim for many residents and in 1897 a new contract for stronger electric lights was awarded.¹⁴ A gas works was opened in the village in 1893 and supplied gas to consumers for illumination and cooking.¹⁵ Electricity for street and home lighting was also introduced into the village in the 1890s and continued improvements in these utilities continued on into the early 20th century. The first village phone was installed in 1895 and by 1901 there were nearly 1,000 phones in use in Oak Park.¹⁶

The maturation of the village resulted in its incorporation in 1902. By 1900 the population of Oak Park reached almost 10,000 and the need for a separate municipal government became a major issue for residents. Elections were held to vote on incorporation and elect municipal officers and on January 25, 1902, Oak Park was duly organized as a village. At this time about half of Oak Park was developed with residences mixed with apartment buildings and commercial buildings along Lake Street.

The village's first school rapidly became obsolete as the population soared in the 1880s. To meet this need a new \$60,000 school building was constructed at the corner of Lake Street and East Avenue in 1891.¹⁷ Even this new building soon became overcrowded with students as the population continued to increase during the decade. By 1902, the need for a new building was widely discussed and a large parcel between East and Scoville Avenues was purchased in 1904. The new school building was constructed in 1906 and opened for students the following year. This original building still serves as the main high school for Oak Park and neighboring River Forest and it has been expanded numerous times in its history.

¹³ Elizabeth Helsing Dull, *The Domestic Architecture of Oak Park, Illinois: 1900-1930*, (PhD. Dissertation, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, 1973), 145.

¹⁴ Gertrude Fox Hoagland, *Historical Survey of Oak Park, Illinois*. (FWPA Project 9516, on file at the Oak Park Public Library, 1937), 47.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 99.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 109.

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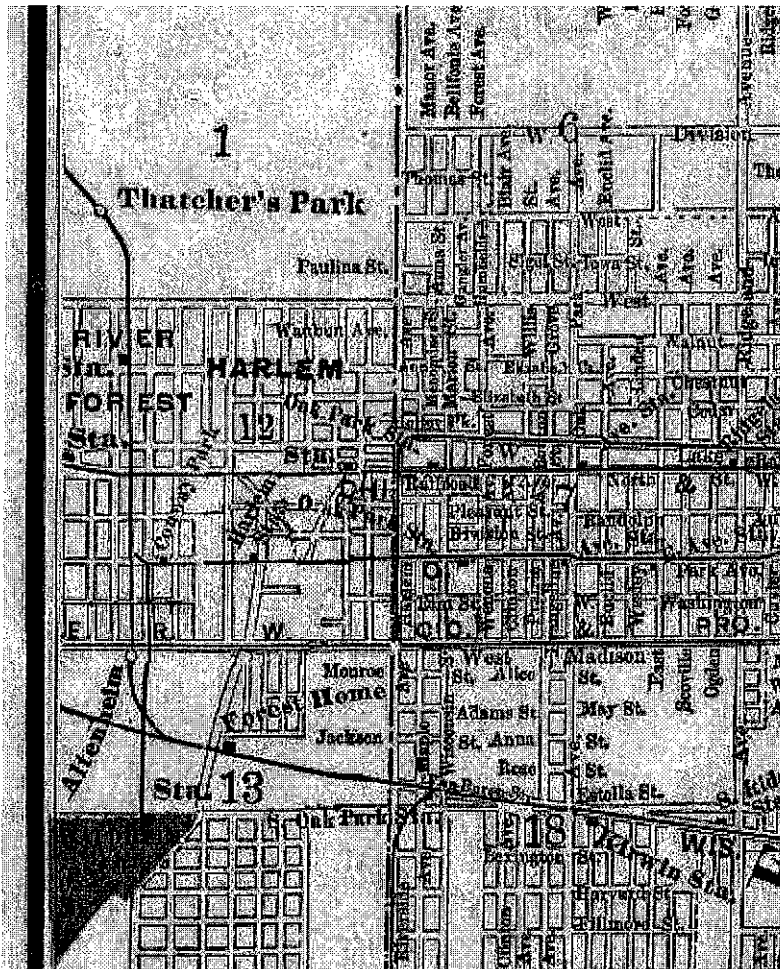


Figure 3: Much of Oak Park was subdivided by 1897 and several commuter rail lines connected with the village and downtown Chicago (*Rand McNally Map of Chicago, 1897, David Rumsey map Collection*).

Oak Park reinforced the image of a suburban countryside, as George Mayo built the Plaza Hotel at 123 S. Marion Street specifically for visitors to Chicago's Columbian Exposition who wished to escape the "dirt and congestion of the city" in favor of accommodations "in the countryside." Built in 1892, the hotel originally was four stories with a lobby and twenty rooms. The following year, Mayo added another thirty-three rooms as his business boomed. Through the 1890s, wealthy owners of racehorses stayed at the hotel during the racing season at the Harlem Race Track in Forest Park. Oak Park residents, too, enjoyed the hotel, which became a fashionable

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social spot for dining out. As Oak Park's first "skyscraper," the hotel afforded residents refined dining without having to go into the city.¹⁸

As the new century dawned, Oak Park was thriving with culture and refinement. The well-to-do middle class experienced increased leisure time as a result of growing prosperity. Their suburban environs afforded them opportunities of outdoor recreation not available in the city. Oak Park was rich with organized clubs of social, philanthropic, religious, and community purposes. Some clubs even had their own buildings, such as that of the Prairie Cycling Club, which had 150 members around 1890. Members joined as stockholders in a corporation, allowing for the building of a clubhouse in 1891. The building contained rooms for a variety of indoor social activities, including a bowling alley, gymnasium, and handball courts to a ballroom, banquet hall, and billiard rooms.¹⁹ Social clubs were not limited to male-oriented sports. Some clubs catered to family socializing, such as the Colonial Club with such amenities as a bowling alley, parlors, and a ballroom. Architect Eben E. Roberts designed the three-story, Colonial Revival building in 1902. In the same year, Roberts also designed the Phoenix Club, a three-and-one-half-story, Craftsman style building located at the corner of Scoville and Jackson Boulevard. The Phoenix club building also had a bowling alley and ballroom for family socializing, as well as a banquet hall and library.²⁰

Leisure activities in Oak Park also included performing arts for families and children. In 1902 Roberts designed the Warrington Opera House at South Boulevard and Marion Street. On October 16 of that year, the 40-piece Theodore Thomas Orchestra performed Rossini's *Stabat Mater* with a 200-member choir. Saturday matinees at the Warrington Opera House provided children with age-appropriate performances by the Hayward Stock Company and the Chester Wallace Players. Oak Park mothers appreciated the reliably wholesome entertainment, such as *Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm* and *Polly of the Circus*.²¹

Oak Park also enjoyed the cultural and civic center known as the Scoville Institute. In 1883 James Scoville donated \$75,000 for the structure and asked residents to fund the purchase of books via paid membership. The cornerstone was laid in September of 1886, and Scoville Institute, a three-story, Richardsonian Romanesque structure, opened two years later. Within two years of opening, the Institute had issued over 1000 library cards. By 1891, the board initiated another funding drive, as the town was growing so rapidly, and the Institute needed to expand its collection and ensure its ability to offer meeting rooms and lectures, as well. The

¹⁸ Guarino, *Yesterday: A Historical View of Oak Park, Illinois*, 125-26.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 118-19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 117-18.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 122.

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drive raised enough funds for the purchase of 800 new books. Still, with a growing population, Oak Park recognized the need to provide tax revenue for such a valued public institution as the library, and the year following the town's break from Cicero Township (1902), the referendum vote passed.²²

As Oak Park grew in the late 19th century, the large tract of land south of Madison Street became eyed for development. Weekly reports in the newspaper detailed the sale of lots and the completion of new homes. Builders Thomas Hulbert and Seward Gunderson collectively built 800 middle class homes between 1906 and 1920, ranging in price from \$4,000 to \$12,000. Gunderson's spacious, quality homes came in forty-two models with fifteen different floor plans. His homes featured such details as stained glass windows, bay windows, large porches, solid oak cabinetry, and oak floors. He was innovative in the use of concrete block foundations, steel beam supports, and ergonomic kitchen designs, specifically, raising the standard height of the kitchen sink to prevent back pain in the user.²³

In 1900, Oak Park was a thriving suburb of Chicago boasting over 10,000 residents. This population would double during the next decade and also witness the rise of a new form of architecture. Oak Park resident and architect Frank Lloyd Wright as well as other architects such as George W. Maher sought to produce building forms that turned away from the Victorian styles of the period. During the 1890s, Wright transitioned from designing homes in the popular Queen Anne style to houses that were much more horizontal in form, had restrained decoration and emphasized an honest use of materials. His designs reached fruition in Oak Park by 1900 and would be known as the "Prairie School" or "Prairie Style." From 1900 until 1909, Wright would design over twenty buildings in this style in Oak Park and he influenced other architects to also work extensively in the Prairie School. This period also witnessed the increased interest in the revival architectural styles such as Colonial and Tudor Revival. In Oak Park, buildings in these contrasting approaches to architecture would often be built on the same block during the decade.

Oak Park's building boom slowed considerably due to America's entry into World War I. In 1916 the number of building permits in Oak Park was 349 but these declined to just 44 in 1918.²⁴ By the time construction began in earnest again in 1920, there was little interest remaining in the Prairie style and most buildings constructed in Oak Park during the decade reflected the various revival styles of the period. In addition to the construction of hundreds of dwellings in the 1920s, several large apartment buildings were built to accommodate the Village's rapid growth. One of

²² Ibid., 127-28.

²³ Ibid., 53-4.

²⁴ Dull, "The Domestic Architecture of Oak Park, Illinois: 1900-1930," 19.

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the most notable of these was the Santa Maria Apartments built on N. Oak Park Avenue in 1924 in the Tudor Revival style. As the density of the Village's population increased north of Lake Street, several multi-story commercial buildings were constructed along Chicago Avenue providing services and shopping for the growing neighborhood.

The decade of the 1920s witnessed the development of most building lots between Lake Street on the south and Division Street on the north. As these blocks were developed, new subdivisions arose north of Division Street and many of these blocks were characterized by large lots and the construction of moderately expensive homes. Almost all of the dwellings built north of Division Street in the Village were designed in revival styles and few allusions to the Prairie style are extant in these areas.²⁵ Architects who had previously worked in the Prairie style abandoned these forms and shifted their designs to the revival styles. A new wave of architects who practiced in Oak Park in the 1920s such as Lyman Allison, Arthur Maiwurm and George Pearson, also designed almost exclusively in these styles. As the village grew in the 1920s various civic projects were also completed. One of the most expensive projects was the dedication of the villages' new one million dollar lighting plant and 4,000 street lights installed in 1927.²⁶ During this decade much of the village's streets were paved with asphalt over the original brick and crushed gravel was also used on some streets.

Like the rest of the country, Oak Park residents struggled during the Depression. Following the stock market crash in 1929, Oak Park was unable to collect almost half of its municipal taxes the following year.²⁷ Schools were forced to sell bonds to stay open and the village was behind in payments to its employees at various times. The Works Progress Administration provided a number of jobs during this decade for projects such as tree planting, repaving and other public works. Despite the economic difficulties of the Depression, the village's population continued to grow during the 1930s and in 1940 Oak Park recorded its largest number of residents at 66,014.

Since 1940, there has been a slow decline in density as some residents moved elsewhere or to suburbs further west developed after World War II. In 1952, a Village Manager form of government was approved by voters. In the 1960s, Village residents were proactive in fighting housing discrimination and creating one of the more racially integrated suburbs in the Chicago area. Civic improvements in the 1970s included not only the construction of a downtown mall but also the recognition of the city's historic and architectural heritage through the creation of the Historical Landmark Commission and Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture

²⁵ Ibid., 109.

²⁶ Hoagland, "Historical Survey of Oak Park, Illinois." 49.

²⁷ Jean Guarino, *Oak Park: A Pictorial History*, (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing Company, 1988),

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Historic District. Today, Oak Park continues to be recognized as one of the most diverse and livable communities in the region and in 2000 the population stood at 52,524 residents.

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OAK PARK'S ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT, CA. 1865 – CA. 1900

The National Register nomination for the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District had its major emphasis on the works of Wright and the other Prairie School architects. However, the nomination also says that district contained other "excellent specimens of architectural styles from Italianate residences of the 1860s to revived classical and medieval types of the 1920s."²⁸ Concurrent with the design and construction of the Prairie style dwellings in Oak Park was also the building of hundreds of other homes, apartment buildings, and churches in the area which now comprises the historic district. Many of these were built in the revival styles of the period and designed by noted Oak Park and Chicago area architects. These properties also contribute strongly to the rich architectural legacy of the historic district and provide an important context in which to place the Prairie School and its influence.

The oldest dwellings in the district were built in the 1860s and 1870s when Oak Park was emerging from a small railroad town into a suburb of nearby Chicago. These early dwellings were generally of frame construction and reflected the popular styles of the period such as Italianate, Greek Revival and Gothic Revival. As Oak Park prospered in the early 20th century, many of these original dwellings were demolished or moved to make way for later houses, apartments and commercial buildings. A few of these mid-19th century homes survive in the district such as the Gothic Revival Rev. Joseph Edwin Roy House at 8 Elizabeth Court and the Italianate George G. Mayo House at 5 Elizabeth Court built ca. 1875 (Figure 4-5). The Rev. Joseph Edwin Roy House features a high pitched roof and quatrefoil panels in the gable fields. The George Mayo House has a rebuilt porch but still displays its arched windows and detailed cornice. Another fine example of the Italianate style is the ca. 1870 dwelling moved to 511 N. Grove Avenue (Figure 6). The house features a hipped roof, bracketed cornice and arched windows.

²⁸ "Frank Lloyd Wright-Prairie School of Architecture Historic District National Register Nomination."

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Figure 4: Rev. Joseph Edwin Roy House (1871), 8 Elizabeth Court.



Figure 6: 511 N. Grove Avenue (ca. 1870).



Figure 5: George G. Mayo House, (ca. 1875)
5 Elizabeth Court.



Figure 7: Robert J. Adamson House (1887),
175 N. Euclid Avenue.

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The great fire of Chicago in 1871 and the resulting growth and development of the city led to a dramatic increase in Oak Park's population in the late 19th century. Between 1870 and 1890 the Village's residents grew from 500 to 4,500 and numerous subdivisions were platted and developed to accommodate this growth. These years coincided with the popularity of Victorian styles such as Queen Anne, Shingle, Stick and Chateausque. Oak Park boasts hundreds of dwellings built in this style throughout the Village.

The Queen Anne style in Oak Park is generally expressed as a two-story frame dwelling built in an asymmetrical plan with large porches, projecting bays and towers, and exteriors of wood siding and shingles. This style is one of the dominant house forms in the historic district in the blocks just north of Lake Street. An example of this style is the Robert J. Adamson House at 175 N. Euclid Avenue (Figure 7). Several notable architects who worked in Oak Park during these years include Henry Fiddelke, Eben E. Roberts and the firm of Patton & Fisher.

The firm of Patton & Fisher was one of the most active firms designing Queen Anne style dwellings in Oak Park in the late 19th century. Founded in Chicago in 1883 by Normand Patton and Reynolds Fisher, this firm designed a number of homes in the Village. Examples of their Queen Anne designs include the David Kennedy House at 309 N. Kenilworth Avenue built in 1888, the John Rankin House built in 1891 at 245 N. Kenilworth Avenue, and the Edwin Osgood House at 205 N. Euclid Avenue built in 1888 (Figures 8-9). Patton went on to design a number of schools and libraries in the Chicago area and the firm worked in many other architectural styles in the early 20th century.



Figure 8: John Rankin House at 245 N. Kenilworth Avenue (1891) designed by Patton & Fisher.



Figure 9: Edwin Osgood House, 205 N. Euclid Avenue designed by Patton & Fisher (1888).

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Henry Fiddelke was also an active architect in the 1890s in the Queen Anne style. Born in 1865 and apprenticed in the offices of Joseph Silsbee and Adler and Sullivan, Fiddelke opened his own practice in Oak Park in 1896 and designed numerous houses in the historic district. An example of his Queen Anne style dwellings is the W.G. Adams House at 517 N. Euclid Avenue (Figure 10). Fiddelke had his office in Oak Park and continued to design dwellings primarily in revival styles into the early 20th century.



Figure 10: W.G. Adams House (1898), designed by Henry Fiddelke, 517 N. Euclid Avenue.

Another prolific architect was Eben E. Roberts who moved to Illinois in the 1880s and established his practice in Oak Park in 1893. Roberts is credited with designing over 200 buildings in Oak Park and worked in a variety of styles during his practice which lasted from the 1890s to the 1920s. Examples of his Queen Anne style designs include the Sampson Rogers House at 537 N. Euclid Avenue built in 1895 and the F.E. Hoover House at 521 N. Euclid Avenue built in 1896 (Figures 11-12). The Sampson Rogers House is distinguished by its large projecting bays on the main façade while the F.E. Hoover House features a prominent corner tower and wraparound porch.

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Figure 11: Sampson Rogers House, (1895)
at 537 N. Euclid Avenue.



Figure 12: F.E. Hoover House, (1896) at 521
N. Euclid Avenue.

Other designs constructed in Oak Park in the late 19th century also included examples of the Stick, Shingle and Chateausque styles. Both the Stick and Shingles styles are related to the asymmetrical Queen Anne form but differ in their expression of materials. The Stick style is distinguished by the exuberant use of milled wood on the exterior in its porch columns and railing, gable fields, and mixture of shingles, siding, and applied decoration. The Gordon Ripley House built ca. 1885 at 305 Forest Avenue is a fine example of this style and also features a bay window on the main façade (Figure 13). The William M. Luff House at 520 N. Oak Park Avenue is a particularly intricate example of this style with a two-story projecting bay on the main façade, large milled support brackets and porch with diagonal bracing (Figure 14).

By contrast, the Shingle style was generally more restrained and expressed its materials through a sheathing of wood shingles. Sometimes these shingles were used to wrap corners as well provide a smooth and consistent surface. The Corydon T. Purdy House at 503 N. Grove Avenue is a representative example of this style with its exterior of wood shingles and wraparound front porch (Figure 15). The Chateausque style was based on medieval forms and utilized elements such as cross gables, corbels and stepped parapet walls at the roofline. Examples of this style in the district include the stone veneer houses in the 200 block of N. Marion Street and most notably the Burton F. Hales House at 509 N. Oak Park designed by Henry Fiddelke in 1904 (Figures 16-17).

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Figure 13: Gordon Ripley House (ca. 1885),
350 Forest Avenue.



Figure 15: Corydon T. Purdy House (1893),
503 N. Grove Avenue.



Figure 14: William M. Luff House (ca. 1888),
520 N. Oak Park Avenue.



Figure 16: 208 N. Marion Street (ca. 1890).

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Figure 17: Burton F. Hales House designed in 1904 by Henry Fiddelke in the Chateausque style at 509 N. Oak Park Avenue.

By the mid-1890s, architecture in Oak Park was also influenced by the renewed emphasis on designs derived from Colonial America. The Colonial Revival style was a return back to symmetrical building forms based on the Georgian and Federal designs of America from the 18th and early 19th centuries. The Columbian Exposition of 1893 heralded this return to classicism and throughout the 1890s the style gained popular acceptance across the country. An early example of this return to classicism is the George C. Page House designed by Harvey Page in 1896 (Figure 18). This two-story dwelling was built with a full height pedimented portico with Ionic columns on the main façade and corner pilasters. The popularity of the Colonial Revival style and related revival styles such as Tudor would have a major impact on the architecture of Oak Park in the early 20th century.

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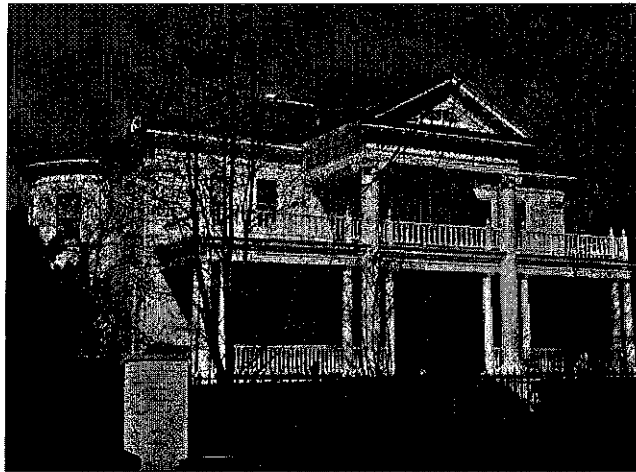


Figure 18: George C. Page House (1896) 637 N. Euclid Avenue.

In addition to the high style dwellings of the period, a number of smaller homes were also built in the Village, especially in the blocks near Harlem Avenue. Commonly known as "Worker's Cottages," these dwellings were generally built in gable front plans, with porches on the main façade. These one- and two-story houses were built primarily of frame construction and were decorated with milled or classical porch columns and railings on the main façade. These dwellings were built throughout the Chicago area and became a dominant housing form for the city's working class residents because they were well suited for narrow city lots.²⁹ Lot widths of 25' and 30' were common in the blocks between N. Marion Street and Harlem Avenue and dozens of examples of this house form are located in these blocks.

One- and one-half story examples of Worker's Cottages include the dwellings at 1114 Paulina Street and 831 Forest Avenue (Figures 19-20). Both houses were built in gable front plans with dormers providing additional living space in the half-story. Both retain their original, full-width porches on the main façade. A two-story example of a Worker's Cottage is the house at 821 Belleforte Avenue which also features an original porch on the main façade (Figure 21). Worker's Cottages are an important vernacular house form throughout the Chicago area and those in Oak Park are representative of the variety of residents who moved to the Village at the turn of the century.

²⁹ Joseph Bigott, "Historical Significance of Worker's Cottages (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 44.

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Figure 19: 1114 Paulina Street, (ca. 1900).



Figure 21: 821 Belleforte Avenue, (ca. 1895).



Figure 20: 831 Forest Avenue, (ca. 1900).

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OAK PARK'S ARCHITECTURAL DEVELOPMENT, CA. 1900 – CA. 1941: FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE PRAIRIE SCHOOL

The Village of Oak Park's architectural development in the 19th century mirrored those of many American communities across the country. Popular styles such as Italianate, Queen Anne, and Shingle dominated the designs built by America's middle-class, professionals, and upper-class citizens into the 1890s. However, during this decade Oak Park became the center for two competing architectural trends; the emergence of the Prairie School led by Frank Lloyd Wright and the movement away from the styles of the Victorian era into the revival styles such as Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival. From the late 1890s to World War I, Prairie style houses and revival style houses were constructed adjacent to one another in the Village, sometimes by the same architect.

Oak Park became the center of the Prairie School due to a number of factors. Of primary importance was the presence of Frank Lloyd Wright, the architect who became the most closely associated with this style. Other Chicago area architects such as George W. Maher and Eben E. Roberts also began designing dwellings with a particular emphasis on horizontality and restrained ornamentation concurrent with Wright. Another factor was Chicago and Oak Park's prominence in social advances at the turn of the century. Chicago was a center in discussing new approaches to domestic space and household life. Chicago's Hull House, established in 1889, was one of the first to pioneer new approaches to social work in America. In 1893, the National Household Economics Association was founded by the Women's Congress at the Chicago Exposition of 1893 in order to promote scientific principles for home economics. The University of Chicago also had prominent schools of educational and social reform.³⁰ As one of the wealthier suburbs of Chicago, the Village's residents included men and women who were open to new ideas and experimentation including new architectural forms. Civic organizations such as the Nineteenth Century Woman's Club and the Suburban Civics and Equal Suffrage Organization provided forums to discuss progressive ideas for social and domestic life.³¹ In particular there was an increased emphasis on simplicity, cleanliness, and utilization of new technology for household improvements.

These new trends in domestic space assisted in accepting and embracing the Prairie School. One of these trends was the "democratization" of the house which did away with ornate entrance halls and parlors and instead replaced these spaces with a large living room.³² The highly

³⁰ Terence Riley, ed. *Frank Lloyd Wright, Architect*, (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1994), 60.

³¹ Guarino, *Yesterday: A Historical View of Oak Park, Illinois*, 98.

³² Alan Gowans, *The Comfortable House*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1986), 28.

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decorated and sumptuous interiors popularized during the Victorian era began to fade in popularity in favor of interiors which were "...simple, efficient, neat and natural."³³ The stiffness and formality of the Victorian era was also gradually replaced by a more informal and relaxed lifestyle. Popular magazines of the turn of the century such as the *Ladies Home Journal* described middle-class families as placing a premium on naturalness and conviviality, openness and informality.³⁴ This increased emphasis on relaxation and informality was made possible by new technology which created more leisure time, especially for women. The availability and widespread use of gas hot water heaters, indoor plumbing, sewing machines, and mechanical washing machines reduced the housekeeping burden for the middle class. Smaller family sizes and a wider variety of goods on grocery shelves also helped defray the traditional 19th century chores of housekeeping.³⁵

This simplicity and honesty was also expressed through the popularity of furniture and interior design during the early 1900s. Popularized by furniture maker and designer Gustav Stickley, his *Craftsman* magazine rejected the busy and ornate interiors of Victorian homes and stressed instead straightforward and practical furniture, integrated bookcases and fireplaces, and plain plaster walls. Known as the Arts and Crafts movement, this philosophical approach to living emerged out of England by William Morris in the mid-19th century but did not gain widespread acceptance in America until the 1890s. In 1897, the Chicago Arts and Crafts Society was founded to promote this movement and the Arts and Crafts movement dovetailed with the emerging approach to architectural design in Chicago.³⁶

The Prairie School and the Arts and Crafts movement were further popularized by the magazine *House Beautiful* which was first published in 1896. This magazine was published in Chicago and reflected and influenced Midwest tastes. The first two articles published about Frank Lloyd Wright appeared in this magazine in 1897 and 1899 and in the early 1900s the Prairie School was given extensive publicity through articles by architect Robert C. Spencer Jr.³⁷ He wrote more than 20 articles between 1905 and 1909 extolling the virtues of the simple and practical Prairie style home.

The Prairie House was also ideally suited to the new suburban residential development and lifestyle of the Midwest. The expanse of available land in developing suburbs provided large lot

³³ Clifford Edward Clark Jr., *The American Family Home*, (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 132.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 135.

³⁶ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, (New York, W.W. Norton, 1972), 17.

³⁷ Ibid., 24.

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sizes capable of accommodating the large, horizontal dwellings, and the growing middle class favored their design and size. As one architectural historian noted "The Prairie House appealed to a progressive segment of Chicago's middle class because it represented a practical, new way of life – full of "light air and prospect" – in contrast to the claustrophobic, cluttered rooms of the Victorian House."³⁸ The Prairie style appealed to women as representing "... a model environment in which important social values would be instilled."³⁹ The Prairie style appealed to the Midwest's wealthy businessmen who were willing to embrace this new architecture for its newness and lack of historic references. Wright said of his early clients that "I found them chiefly among American men of business with unspoiled instincts and ideals...He has rather liked the "idea" and much of the encouragement this work receives comes straight from him because the "common sense" of the thing appeals to him."⁴⁰ In 1904, one author noted that of the Prairie School "their clients, the well-to-do western gentlemen for whom the houses are built, do not seem to demand the use of European styles and remnants to the same extent as do the eastern owners of expensive buildings."⁴¹ The Prairie School's emphasis on simplicity, common sense and honesty found a ready client base in the bustling economy of Oak Park and the Midwest.

The wealth of Oak Park, new approaches to house design and function and the presence and influence of Frank Lloyd Wright all converged to make Oak Park the center of the Prairie School of Architecture in the early 1900s. The most important of these factors was Wright himself who emerged as the most successful and influential architect of the Prairie School. Wright moved to Oak Park in 1889 and over the next twenty years he practiced architecture in the Village at his studio on Chicago Avenue. Wright's commissions in Oak Park and elsewhere inspired many other architects in the Chicago area to follow him and this legacy remains evident in the built environment of the Village.

Much of Frank Lloyd Wright's creativity, concepts, and approaches to architecture stem from his background and early experiences in life. Both his family and his surroundings were extremely strong and important components of his life that had a lasting influence on him. Wright grew up in the rolling farmland of Wisconsin. His maternal grandparents, Welsh immigrants Richard and Mary Lloyd-Jones, settled along the Wisconsin River near Spring Green in 1844. Like much of the surrounding Welsh community, the Lloyd-Joneses were industrious farmers and held the land in high regard. They were a large, close-knit family that was deeply religious, revered education

³⁸ Kathryn Smith, *Frank Lloyd Wright, America's Master Architect*, (New York: Abbeville Press, 1998), 29

³⁹ Dennis P. Doorman, *Twentieth Century Architecture*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams Publishers, 2002), 51.

⁴⁰ H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School*, (New York, W.W. Norton, 1972), 16.

⁴¹ Ibid.

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and had a strong interest in music, art, and literature. Anna, one of Richard and Mary's ten children, married William Russell Cary Wright in 1866. Anna, a tall, dark-haired woman in her mid twenties, was confident, erudite, and strong-willed. Prior to her marriage she had been earning a living as a school teacher, traveling around to various communities on horseback and boarding with area families. William Wright was a widower eleven years Anna's senior. A handsome, charming man of slight build, he was a strong orator and gifted musician, and was socially and politically active in the community. Originally from Hartford, Connecticut, William had left his first career as a lawyer to become a preacher. He traveled often and in 1859 settled in Wisconsin, where his first wife died soon after giving birth to their third child.⁴²

Frank Lloyd Wright, Anna and William's first child, was born June 8, 1867.⁴³ Two sisters, Jane and Maginel, soon followed. William had a difficult time making a living and the family, which now consisted of six children, moved frequently. Money and food were often scarce and the family was repeatedly dependent upon the charity of William's parishioners. Moving every few years the family lived in various locations throughout New England and the Midwest before returning to Wisconsin in 1877 where they established a home in Madison. Anna and William's relationship was tumultuous and increasingly rife with conflict. The marriage ended in divorce in 1885. William left Wisconsin, and Frank, who was eighteen at the time, never saw his father again.

Despite what was most likely a difficult and turbulent household during his childhood, young Frank received a rich and diverse, if not formal, education. Wright's mother was exceedingly dedicated to her son and throughout her life made tremendous efforts and sacrifices to ensure his intellectual development and future success. Another major influence on Wright in his youth was his tenure at his uncle's farm. Wright began spending his summers working on his Uncle James' farm near Spring Green, Wisconsin when he was eleven years old. At the time, young Frank detested the rigorous work which "piled tired on tired" and he even ran away on more than one occasion. But those summers established strong work habits and stamina that persisted throughout his life. More importantly, his time on the farm also generated a great love and respect for nature's beauty, from which he later drew inspiration for his architectural designs. He also gained a strong sense of family solidarity as a large gathering of aunts and uncles came together for Sunday worship followed by a massive family picnic in the picturesque

⁴² Alexander O. Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect. An Illustrated Biography* (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1993), 17-18; Ada Louise Huxtable, *Frank Lloyd Wright* (New York: The Penguin Group, 2004), 1-3.

⁴³ Wright erroneously claimed that his birth date was 1869, perhaps to make his early success appear even more impressive and/or to give a more youthful impression in later life. Huxtable, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 1-2.

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countryside with wagons brimming with rich, homemade foods – a practice he later tried to replicate with his Taliesin Fellowship.⁴⁴

Following his father's departure Wright needed to assume more responsibility for providing for the family. In 1885 he took a part-time job as an assistant to Allan Conover, a practicing civil engineer and professor at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Here he gained his first experience in engineering. Records indicate that Wright never completed high school, yet he was able to enroll in some classes at the University of Wisconsin while working for Conover. But Wright was too impatient, independent, and nonconforming to stick with a traditional line of study. Anxious to enter the "real" world, he set his sights on Chicago. He persuaded his reluctant mother to contact his Uncle, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, who was a prominent preacher at a Chicago Unitarian church about the move. The uncle replied with a firm "No!" and stated that under no circumstances should Anna allow her boy to come to Chicago, where he was sure to spend his earnings on girls and fine clothes. He recommended that the young man remain in Wisconsin and finish his education at the university. Determined to go, Wright went anyway. He secretly sold his most valuable possessions, and purchased a train ticket.⁴⁵

Twenty-year-old Frank Lloyd Wright arrived in Chicago in the spring of 1887. Chicago at this time was one of the fastest growing cities in the United States and was the center of new and emerging ideas. Chicago embodied a renewed American spirit and brought new vision to many fields including architecture and construction. The city was being rebuilt and reinvented following the devastating fire of 1871 and around this same time advancing technology allowed for construction of taller buildings. Elevators and steel frame construction assisted the development of these new skyscrapers. Chicago architects were openly critical of the Eastern cities with their traditional European styles and sought new and innovative designs.⁴⁶ It was an exciting and opportunistic time and place for an up-and-coming young architect to begin his career.

Wright soon secured a job as a tracer for Joseph L. Silsbee, a leading residential architect in the city. Silsbee had designed the Lloyd-Jones family chapel back in Wisconsin, and he was also designing the new All Souls Unitarian Church in Chicago for Wright's Uncle Jenkin. Under Silsbee, Wright had room to grow and develop and he gained a respect for and interest in residential architecture.⁴⁷ His first project was to design a building for Hillside Home School, which his Aunts

⁴⁴ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 30; Huxtable, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 13-19.

⁴⁵ Huxtable, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 38-41.

⁴⁶ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 25.

⁴⁷ Yona Zeldis McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*. (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1992), 32-

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had founded on the Lloyd-Jones farm in Wisconsin. Constructed in 1887, the shingle style building housed living quarters for students and a library.⁴⁸

After working for Silsbee for several months, Wright joined the firm of Adler and Sullivan, which was the cutting-edge leader of Chicago's progressive architectural field. Partners Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan were innovators of the Chicago School of architecture and its ground-breaking skyscrapers. With opposite personalities Adler, a serious, businesslike, practical engineer, and Sullivan, a brilliant but egocentric and often petulant designer, made a remarkable team that was one of the city's most successful architectural firms. In Sullivan, Wright found a mentor, and the young architect quickly became Sullivan's protégé. Sullivan opposed traditional classicism and sought a radical change in architecture to create a new, purely American style. Wright referred to Sullivan as his *Leiber Meister* or beloved master and he would listen to Sullivan for hours at night expounding on his architectural philosophies. He soon became Sullivan's chief assistant and gained a private office near his mentor.⁴⁹

Wright's personal life was also quickly moving forward. At a dance at his uncle's church Wright met Catherine Lee Tobin, the daughter of a prominent Chicago businessman. A romance blossomed between the two in spite of family objections on both sides, and the two married in June of 1889. As his marriage was approaching, Wright signed a five-year contract with Adler and Sullivan at the highest salary of any draftsman in Chicago. Sullivan also gave Wright a \$5,000 loan in order to build a house, which would be repaid out of his paycheck.⁵⁰ The newlyweds built a house at the corner of Forest Street and Chicago Avenue in the new suburb of Oak Park just thirty minutes by rail from downtown Chicago. Their first child, Lloyd, was born in 1890. Another five children followed by 1903.

In his early years in Oak Park, Wright commuted to the city where he was employed with Adler and Sullivan. While employed there, Wright indulged his penchant for domestic architectural design via so-called bootleg houses, done as moonlight jobs on the side of his employment. His own home reflects the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. The shingle style dwelling featured artisanship throughout: high-back dining-room chairs, built-in furniture, a prominent fireplace with inspirational carvings, leaded glass windows with natural motifs.

Wright, however, was not good at handling finances. He never thought about costs and refused to let money stand in the way of what he wanted to do. He never referred to his accounts before purchasing furniture or expensive works of art, or building a new addition to his home. As a result, the family was consistently in debt and creditors were often at the door. When forced into

⁴⁸ Boulton, Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect, 26-27; Kristin Visser, *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School in Wisconsin* (Madison, WI: Prairie Oak Press, 1994), 167.

⁴⁹ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 34-35; Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 29-30.

⁵⁰ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 26-27, 36.

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a corner, Wright would quickly sell a valuable piece of art to pay off his creditors, and then immediately embark on a shopping spree that left him even further in debt.⁵¹

He became an indispensable figure at Adler and Sullivan and was involved in many of their high-profile projects. The firm, however, primarily focused on commercial buildings and only rarely designed residential properties for special clients. Sullivan began to hand these residential projects to Wright, who was eager to take on new challenges. Wright's first residential project was the James Charnley House in downtown Chicago. Charnley was a Chicago lumberman and wanted something different. Wright's design featuring "stark simplicity of massing and interior complexity" was a melding of his and Sullivan's architectural ideas. The three-story, brick house was situated on Astor Street, a new corridor that soon became the site of some of Chicago's finest homes (Figure 22). The location was a very visible one for Wright's work and he designed around ten more residences over the next two years.⁵²

Wright's reputation grew and soon he was taking on private commissions for residential architecture on his own time. This "moonlighting" was a breach of his contract with Adler and Sullivan, and once the partners found out about it they confronted Wright. Sullivan was furious and an explosive argument took place. Different versions exist as to whether Wright walked out or was fired, but the end result was the same – Wright no longer worked for the firm, and he and Sullivan did not speak again for years.⁵³

Wright then struck out independently and established his own firm. The business got off to a slightly shaky start, but he soon acquired a substantial number of commissions for residential construction, many from his friends and acquaintances in his own neighborhood of Oak Park. His first project after Adler and Sullivan was the Winslow House located in River Forest just beyond Oak Park. The house was the home of William H. Winslow, president of Winslow Ornamental Iron Works (Figure 23). In addition to being a businessman, Winslow was a musician and inventor with modern tastes and interests. Wright's design for Winslow's house was a radical change from the traditional Victorian, European-based homes commonly constructed in the early 1890s. Wide eaves and bands of leaded glass windows along with a tall, angled stair tower gave the house an air of formality and elegance with well proportioned symmetry. The main entrance was emphasized with an ornamental door of carved wood that reflected Sullivan's modern style. The design provoked much discussion and interest in the surrounding neighborhoods and became the subject of local debates on style and taste. Many heavily criticized the design, but the shapes and forms that Wright later perfected – the low-pitched roof and horizontal emphasis – were

⁵¹ Ibid., 38.

⁵² Ibid., 36-39; McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 41-42.

⁵³ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 41; Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 52.

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beginning to emerge. The Winslow House was a “forerunner of the strong, sophisticated Oak Park homes” that Wright designed in the coming decades.⁵⁴



Figure 22: James Charnley House, 1365 N. Astor Street, Chicago.

⁵⁴ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 55-57.

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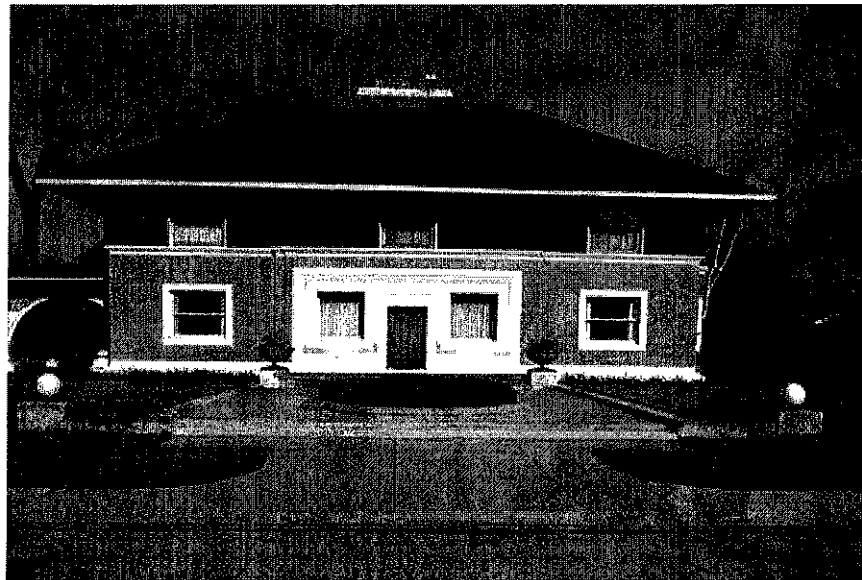


Figure 23: William H. Winslow House, River Forest, Illinois, 1894.

The ideals and approach to architecture that would become the Prairie School began to form through the cross pollination of meetings, exhibits and luncheons in Chicago in the early 1900s. In 1900, Wright was 33 years old and he helped organize a group to discuss and reflect on architecture at Steinway Hall, an eleven story office building downtown where several architects rented space. Helping to form the group were three other architects in their 30s: Dwight Perkins, Robert Spencer Jr. and Myron Hunt. Other architects who worked in the building or nearby and joined the group included Henry Tomlinson and Walter Burley Griffin. Eventually a lunch group of between sixteen and eighteen architects met for several years and discussed the merits of the new forms of architecture versus the historical styles.⁵⁵ Other venues for these architects to discuss their designs included local exhibitions and lectures at the Chicago Architectural Club and the nationwide forum offered by the Architectural League of America founded in 1899. The Architectural League's first convention was held in Cleveland but then moved to Chicago for its second convention in 1900.

The meeting of the Architectural League in Chicago was held over three days and included Louis Sullivan as a guest speaker and papers from Wright and other Steinway Hall architects. The meeting highlighted the differences among the architectural community as they debated the merits of "pure design and form" versus adherence to the historical styles of the day. This

⁵⁵ Ibid., 31.

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convention brought into the mainstream the philosophies of the Chicago architects but their influence waned at Architectural League conventions held over the next several years when this approach to architecture failed to win many new adherents.

In the years both before and after the Architectural League convention of 1900, several architects experimented with new building forms which would mature and emerge into the Prairie style. Although not a member of the group meeting at Steinway Hall, George W. Maher was one of the first Chicago architects to move towards large horizontal forms for dwellings while still retaining traditional historical elements. His designs for the Edgar G. Barrett House in Kenilworth in 1896 and the John Farson House in Oak Park in 1897 both stressed large hipped roofs with prominent horizontal lines and broad porches. Hugh Garden was another architect in Chicago who designed buildings with strong massing, simplified forms and horizontal lines. His Albert F. Madlener House built in 1902 at 4 W. Burton Place in Chicago features strong horizontal belt courses of stone interspersed on the brick façade and window surrounds with minimal ornamentation. Other architects who designed in a similar fashion included George Elmslie, George R. Dean, William Drummond, Walter Burley Griffin and Robert Spencer Jr.

The decade of the 1890s was a period of experimentation for Wright as he moved towards the designs which would become known as the Prairie style. Wright resided in Oak Park from 1889 to 1909 while he was in his twenties and thirties. It was here that his vision for American architecture unfolded and gained international attention. As author Patrick Cannon notes, "Frank Lloyd Wright and Oak Park, Illinois, are inextricably entwined. If Madison, Wisconsin, held an emotional place in Wright's heart as his point of departure, Oak Park was where he actually lived during the crucial decades when he first envisioned a new architecture that was both American and modern."⁵⁶ In Oak Park, one can trace his first experiments with developing a new vocabulary of architecture to its full fruition in the mature Prairie form. Altogether Wright designed or remodeled 26 dwellings in Oak Park during these years.

⁵⁶ Patrick F. Cannon. *Hometown Architect, The Complete Buildings of Frank Lloyd Wright in Oak Park and River Forest, Illinois*, (Petaluma, California: Pomegranate Communications, 2006), 9.

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Figure 24: Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, 951 Chicago Ave.

The first house that Frank Lloyd Wright designed was his own Oak Park home at 428 Forest Avenue. Built in 1889, this dwelling began as a modest example of the Shingle style then widely built in New England. As his family grew, Wright enlarged the house in 1895, and in 1898 he built his own studio adjacent to the house with an entrance at 951 Chicago Avenue (Figure 24). His studio was designed with a central lobby space serving two flanking spaces containing drafting rooms, an office and library. The lobby was designed with Wright's distinctive art glass skylights creating a dramatic and impressive space for his clients.

Wright designed and built his studio after he left the firm of Adler & Sullivan. Wright resigned (or was fired depending on whose account you believe) after Sullivan discovered that Wright was designing houses on his own after hours which was a violation of company policy. Four of the "bootleg" houses were built near Wright's own home and were completed in 1892 and 1893. The Thomas H. Gale House at 1027 Chicago Avenue (Figure 25) and the Robert F. Parker House at 1019 Chicago Avenue were both built in the popular Queen Anne style of the period but vary somewhat from the style in their angularity and large window treatments. The Walter H. Gale House at 1031 Chicago Avenue and the Francis J. Wooley House at 1030 Superior Street are more conventional Queen Anne houses in their design.

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Figure 25: Thomas H. Gale House, 1027 Chicago Avenue.

The house considered to be the precursor to the Prairie style, the William H. Winslow House, was completed in 1894 in the adjacent suburb of River Forest (Figure 23). This house was designed with a broad hipped roof, wide eaves, low chimney and a conspicuous limestone water table dividing the two floors. Of particular note was Wright's design for the rear façade which featured a circular bay and octagonal staircase. Wright himself considered this house to be a turning point. As he wrote in his *Autobiography*, "The Winslow House had burst on the view of that provincial suburb like the Prima Vera in full bloom. It was a new world to Oak Park and River Forest. That house became an attraction far and near. Incessantly, it was courted and admired. Ridiculed too of course."⁵⁷

Wright's next major work was back in Oak Park when he designed a house for Nathan G. Moore at 333 N. Forest Avenue. At the request of the client, Wright designed a traditional Tudor Revival style house although he made distinctive variations through the addition of a one-story porch on the main façade. The house was modified into its present appearance by Wright in 1923 following a major fire. These modifications included more subtle half-timbering in the gables and the addition of large prominent chimneys at the roofline. Other houses designed or remodeled by Wright from 1895 to 1897 in Oak Park included the Harrison P. Young House at 334 N. Kenilworth Avenue, the Harry C. Goodrich House at 534 N. East Avenue and the George W. Smith House at 404 Home Avenue. All three of these dwellings were designed in variations of the Queen Anne, Tudor Revival and Shingle styles.

Wright's next departures from traditional architecture were his designs for the Oak Park dwellings of George Furbeck and his brother Rollin in 1897. The house designed for George

⁵⁷ Ibid., 32.

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Furbeck at 223 N. Euclid Avenue shows Wright experimenting with angularity with the house composed of a long rectangle with octagonal turrets on the main façade flanking a covered porch and entrance (Figure 24). The spandrels in the turrets are decorated with flared stuccoed panels. The Rollin Furbeck House at 515 Fair Oaks Avenue incorporates both traditional elements such as loggias with decorative columns and eave dentil molding while also featuring interplay between a central vertical tower and flanking low, hipped roof wings.

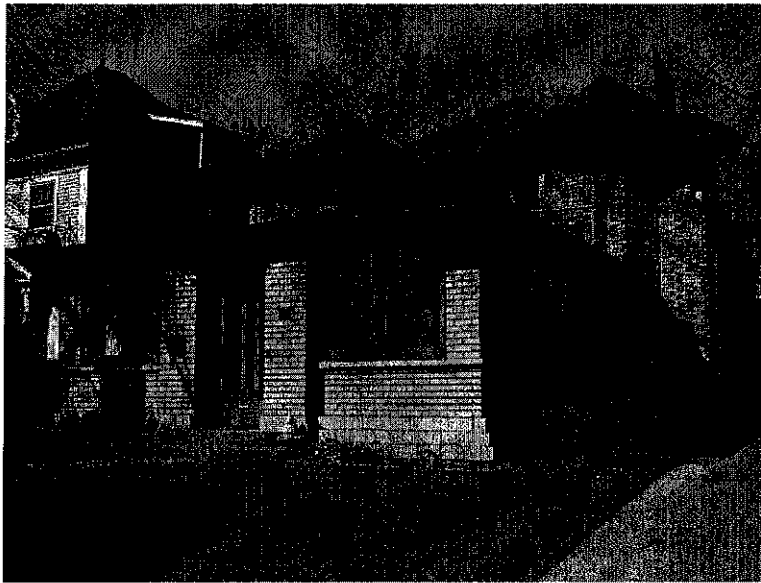


Figure 24: George Furbeck House at 223 N. Euclid Avenue.

The Hills-DeCaro House at 313 Forest Avenue designed by Wright in 1900 displayed elements of the coming Prairie style in its stucco exterior broad porch with flared eaves and stepped hipped roofs. This house burned in 1976 and was extensively rebuilt in keeping with the original design. In 1900, Wright designed the first of what became known as his "Prairie" houses; the B. Harley Bradley and Warren Hickox Houses in Kankakee, Illinois. Both of these dwellings were designed with stucco exteriors, wide eaves and horizontal gable roofs. These designs were refined further when Wright was hired as the architect for the Frank W. Thomas House in 1901 (Figure 25).

The Frank W. Thomas House was the first commission to give Wright an opportunity to design a Prairie style house in Oak Park.⁵⁸ The dwelling, built at 210 Forest Avenue, is one of Wright's first and best Prairie style houses. It features a stucco exterior, low-pitched hipped roof, casement windows of art glass, and a façade with horizontal lines accentuated by wood belt

⁵⁸ Ibid., 67.

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courses. The entrance to the dwelling is reached via an arched opening in a front wall and then through a glassed-in veranda which in turn opens onto a door with art glass.



Figure 25: Frank W. Thomas House at 210 Forest Avenue.

The Frank W. Thomas House was the maturation of Wright's vision that became known as the Prairie School. This school of architecture was characterized as

"In imitation of a certain broad and horizontal disposition of lines individually employed, a school of design has sprung up, for which its authors claim the title "American." The horizontal lines of the new expression appeal to the disciples of this school as echoing the spirit of the prairies of the great Middle West, which to them embodies the essence of democracy."⁵⁹

Prairie school buildings designed by Wright and other architects were characterized by horizontal lines accented by short vertical accents such as inlaid wood, piers and mullions. Ornamentation was limited and the exteriors were generally expressed through surface textures in various combinations and forms. What ornamentation existed found its expression in decorative art glass or stained glass windows or geometric designs on porch piers and columns. Exteriors were generally of brick, wood or stucco with stucco being the material of choice for many Prairie

⁵⁹ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 4.

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School architects. Concrete was also used, most notably in Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park. However, this material was never widely used in residential construction.

The early years of the movement was typified by a low rectangular building shape against which were placed asymmetrical opposing features such as projecting wings, a lateral extended porch or an articulated entrance opening.⁶⁰ As equally important to the exterior design were the interiors. Prairie houses were often designed to maximize the sense of space and create a feeling of spaciousness to enrich the living experience. Designs were employed to open the house to the outside world through large windows and courtyards. Some architects also sought to enhance livability through the employment of various levels in the house to create variety and zones of use.

The treatment of interiors was of particular importance to Wright and his approach influenced other architects. Wright was inspired by Japanese houses which were built with as few rooms as possible, used movable screens instead of walls, and opened the interior to nature.⁶¹ Wright admired Japanese prints because they abstracted life with a form of simplification that he also followed in his geometric patterns for window glass, light fixtures and other furnishings. Wright studied Japanese architecture and he is thought to have been influenced by the Japanese exhibit at Chicago's Columbian World Exposition in 1893. Wright visited the Japanese temple at the exposition on several occasions and admired its spatial arrangement centered on a particular focal point. As one author noted, "His subsequent focus on the masonry mass of the hearth in the Prairie house is highly suggestive of that prototype."⁶² Japanese houses also utilized flat-planed and unpainted wood which influenced Wright in his interior designs.

The term "Prairie School" was not a generally accepted name for this movement until the mid-20th century. In 1908, Wright described his work and the works of fellow architects as the "New School of the Middle West."⁶³ During the same year, architect Thomas E. Tallmadge described the movement as the "Chicago School" because of the prevalence of the architects working in this style in the Chicago area. The Chicago School became the most widely used term to describe this architecture while it flourished before World War I. The first use of "Prairie School" was by architect Wilhelm Miller in 1915; he used this name because of the dominant horizontality of the houses and their placement on the prairie.⁶⁴ It took several decades for this

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6.

⁶¹ Diane Maddex, *Frank Lloyd Wright's House Beautiful*, (New York: Hearst Books, 2000), 54.

⁶² Jeffery W. Howe, ed., *American House, Domestic Architecture in the USA*, (London: Batsford Publishing, 2002), 334.

⁶³ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 11.

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term to take the place of the "Chicago School" By the 1950s the term Chicago School became increasingly associated with the movement of skyscraper building in Chicago at the turn of the century, and the Prairie School gradually became the most widely accepted name for Wright's designs and those of his contemporaries in the Midwest.

The designs of these architects and Frank Lloyd Wright began to reach a wider audience beyond the architectural community after 1900. Two of Wright's designs were published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* in 1901, one of which strongly resembled his design for the Frank W. Thomas House. Designs by architect Robert Spencer Jr. also appeared in the same publication the same year. The magazine *House Beautiful* in 1902 featured a Spencer design that had broad eaves, a stucco exterior, strong horizontality and a wide porch on the main façade.⁶⁵ Other designs by the Chicago architects were published in the *Architectural Record* and other associated professional journals. Architects such as William Drummond and Walter Griffin worked for awhile under the tutelage of Wright and were clearly influenced by his designs. Griffin's William H. Emery House in Elmhurst, Illinois completed in 1902 and widely discussed at the time is considered one of the first mature examples of the Prairie style.⁶⁶ However, the most intense exploration and development of the style took place in Frank Lloyd Wright's studio in Oak Park from 1901 to 1908.

During his time at Oak Park, Wright honed his independent style and unique philosophy of architecture. Between 1895 and 1909 his fame and influence grew steadily. Over these years, he designed a "series of houses in Oak Park and neighboring communities that would revolutionize American architecture."⁶⁷ In addition he published numerous articles and house plans in both architectural journals and ladies' magazines. He became the most prominent designer of the Prairie style, which brought fundamental changes to both the exterior and interior of houses.

In his autobiography, Wright describes his creation of the Prairie house style:

My first feeling therefore had been a yearning for simplicity. A new sense of simplicity as 'organic' . . . I loved the prairie by instinct as a great simplicity. . . I saw that a little sight on the prairie was enough to look like much more . . . I had an idea that the horizontal planes in buildings, those planes parallel to earth, identify themselves with the ground—make the building belong to the ground . . .⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ibid., 60.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 74.

⁶⁷ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 43-45.

⁶⁸ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), as quoted in Visser, *Prairie School in Wisconsin*, 11.

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Where his mentor Louis Sullivan insisted that "form follow function," Wright surmised that "form and function are one."⁶⁹ Like Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright believed that America needed an indigenous, authentic architecture of its own. His mission, also the principle idea behind the Prairie School, was "to create and help sustain a genuinely American architecture and style of living, wholly personal and original."⁷⁰ As his career progressed Wright continuously deepened and perfected his developing philosophy of "organic" architecture. This approach emphasizes harmony between the natural environment and the built environment. Its key principle is that a house should be truthful to its site, its purpose, and its materials. Wright espoused that a house should appear as if it had grown naturally out of the soil, and he used horizontal lines and earth tones to blend dwellings into their surroundings. Lines between the outside and the inside were to be blurred, combining the domains of man and nature.⁷¹

Wright also revolutionized residential interior space. He viewed traditional housing styles as consisting of confining boxes that were antithetical to domestic life. He claimed "The American house lies," stating that it had no sense of unity or space.⁷² Wright worked toward "the destruction of the box" not only by employing an open floor plan, but also by eliminating traditional corner supporting posts and using lots of windows to open the house to the outside. Wright explained:

My sense of 'wall' was no longer the side of a box. It was enclosure of space affording protection against storm or heat only when needed. But it was also to bring the outside world into the house and let the inside of the house go outside. In this sense, I was working away at the wall as a wall and bringing it towards the function of a screen, a means of opening up space.⁷³

Wright envisioned the entire lower floor as one room and then screened portions of the room for specific purposes such as dining, reading, or entertaining. This lack of rigid boundaries gave the home a feeling of continuous space. The Prairie design featured a single, wide central chimney and did not include basements or attics, which Wright declared "useless dead space."⁷⁴

Architectural historian Leland Roth lists nine principles articulated by Wright which found union in his Prairie houses:

⁶⁹ Visser, *Prairie School in Wisconsin*, 4, 9.

⁷⁰ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 31.

⁷¹ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 45; Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 129.

⁷² Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 44.

⁷³ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography* (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1943), as quoted in Visser, *Prairie School in Wisconsin*, 11.

⁷⁴ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 47.

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"First the number of parts of the house were reduced to a minimum to achieve greatest unity. Second, the house was integrated with its site by extending the horizontal planes. Third, the room as a box was eliminated in favor of spaces defined by screen and panels, with little space wasted on structure. Fourth, the damp basement was eliminated by raising the house up off the ground, placing the major living quarters up one flight with a better view of the landscape. Fifth, windows became banks of "light screens" rather than holes cut in walls. Sixth, the number of materials was reduced to a minimum with ornamentation expressive of the materials and designed for machine production – hence the propensity for straight lines. Seventh, all heating, lighting, plumbing, and mechanical fixtures were incorporated into the fabric of the building and made architectural features. Eighth, all furnishings were made one with the building. And ninth, the "fashionable decorator" was eliminated."⁷⁵

As his career progressed Wright continuously deepened and perfected his developing philosophy of "organic" architecture. This approach emphasizes harmony between the natural environment and the built environment. Its key principle is that a house should be truthful to its site, its purpose, and its materials. Wright espoused that a house should appear as if it had grown naturally out of the soil, and he used horizontal lines and earth tones to blend dwellings into their surroundings. Lines between the outside and the inside were to be blurred, combining the domains of man and nature.⁷⁶ These characteristics of the Prairie School of Architecture revolutionized American residential architecture with horizontal, open floor plans spreading from a central nucleus of family life. The design supplanted Victorian compartmentalization and opened the interior to the outdoors with banks of windows, often depicting botanicals in their stained glass design. The distinctly organic style of the home as a whole was integrated into its outdoor setting and evoked the natural landscape of the region, the vast, flat Prairies from which the style took its name.

In addition to the Frank W. Thomas House, two significant early examples of Wright's Prairie design are the Ward Willits House and the Darwin D. Martin House, built in 1902 and 1904 respectively (Figures 26-27). The Willits House built in Highland Park, Illinois was innovative in its spatial arrangement. The large house had four wings arranged in a pinwheel formation with

⁷⁵ Leland Roth, *A Concise History of American Architecture*, New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 208

⁷⁶ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 45; Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 129.

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each mass spreading from a central core. Long, clean rooflines and a projecting wall gave it a horizontal character.⁷⁷

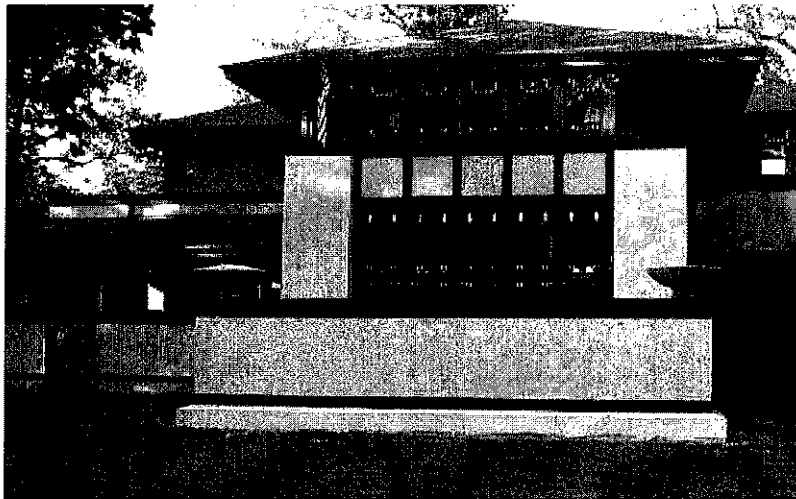


Figure 26. Ward Willits House, 1445 Sheridan Road, Highland Park, IL.

The Darwin D. Martin House constructed in Buffalo, New York was based on the 1901 design Wright published in the *Ladies' Home Journal* only on a much grander scale. A long porte cochere and huge side porch lengthen the building which consists of interlocking spaces that emerge in a shifting directional pattern around a central core.⁷⁸ The house also is illustrative for its furniture designed by Wright. In the Darwin D. Martin House, Wright designed barrel chairs, and windows with a tree-of-life motif. As his later apprentice Edgar Tafel explained, Wright chose a "grammar" for each building that was to be used throughout and in every detail. "He insisted that to create a house that is a work of art, the architect, as artist, needs to express a 'consistent thought-language in his design.'" The result was the "total feeling of the house was of one stripe, from the overall plan down to the furniture, the door jambs, and the window frames."⁷⁹ Wright, however, never mastered a chair design to his own satisfaction. While always attractive, they were rarely comfortable. Wright himself commented that "I have been black and

⁷⁷ Trewin Copplestone, *Frank Lloyd Wright A Retrospective View* (New York: TODTRI Book Publishers, 1997), 29-31; Maria Costantino, *Frank Lloyd Wright Design* (New York: Barnes & Noble, Inc., 1995), 34.

⁷⁸ Copplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 36.

⁷⁹ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 91.

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blue in some spot somewhere almost all my life from too intimate contact with my own furniture."⁸⁰

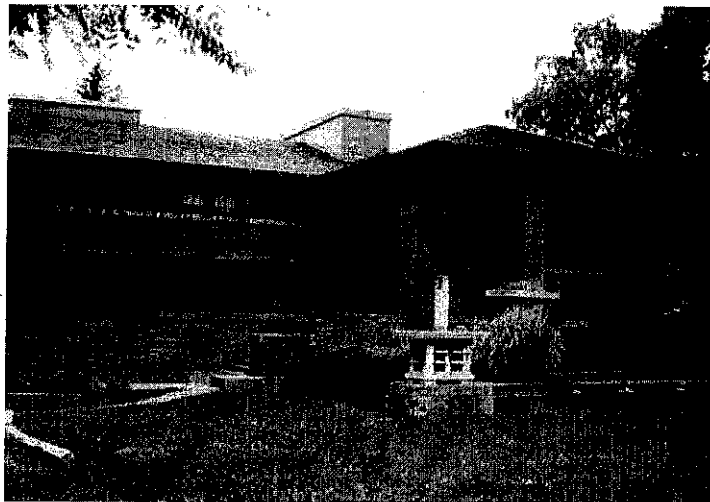


Figure 27: Darwin D. Martin House, Buffalo, 1904.



Figure 28: William G. Fricke House, 540 N. Fair Oaks Avenue.

⁸⁰ Copplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 36.

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In Oak Park, Wright followed the Thomas House with a design for William G. Fricke at 540 Fair Oaks Avenue also in 1901 (Figure 28). Although more vertical in form, this house features hipped roofs emerging in a series of stepped down wings from a central three-story main block. The house has a stucco exterior with little ornamentation, horizontal bands above and beneath the casement windows, and wide eaves at the second and third story levels.

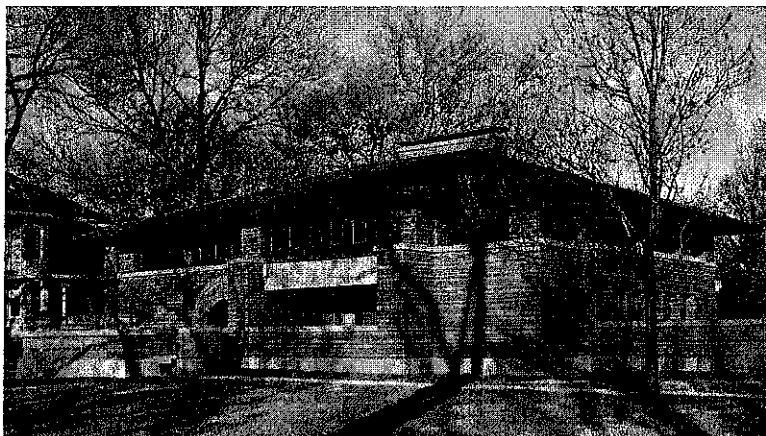


Figure 29: Arthur B. Huertley House, 318 Forest Avenue.

Advances in Wright's designs continued with the Ward Willits House in Highland Park, Illinois and the Arthur B. Huertley House in Oak Park, both designed in 1902. The Ward Willits House achieved more symmetry in its vertical and horizontal balance while using the now familiar forms of stucco for the exterior finish, low pitched hipped roofs and art glass casement windows. The Arthur B. Huertley House at 318 Forest Avenue differs in its use of concrete and brick as exterior materials and has one wide, low pitched hipped roof (Figure 29). The horizontality of the dwelling is accentuated by alternating courses of different shades of brick. The entrance is located within a large brick arch on the main façade. Wright considered the design to be "one of my best" and is it widely considered to be one of his more fully realized works.⁸¹

⁸¹ Cannon, *Hometown Architect*, 81.

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Figure 30: William E. Martin House, 636 N. East Avenue.

In 1903, Wright designed the William E. Martin house at 636 N. East Avenue (Figure 30). This design is similar to the William G. Fricke House in its "stepped" progression of rooflines from three- to one-stories. The main façade has a projecting wall, a stucco exterior and continuous sills beneath the windows. Wright also designed a dwelling for Martin's brother Darwin in Buffalo, New York as well as a factory in Chicago for the two brothers. During the same year as his design for the William E. Martin House, Wright designed a residence for Edwin H. Cheney at 520 N. East Avenue. The main façade of the dwelling makes it appear that it is a one-story home but at the rear another story emerges. The dwelling has a brick exterior with wide eaves, a prominent concrete belt course, and art glass casement windows. The interior was designed with large open spaces flowing into one another from the living room, dining room and library.

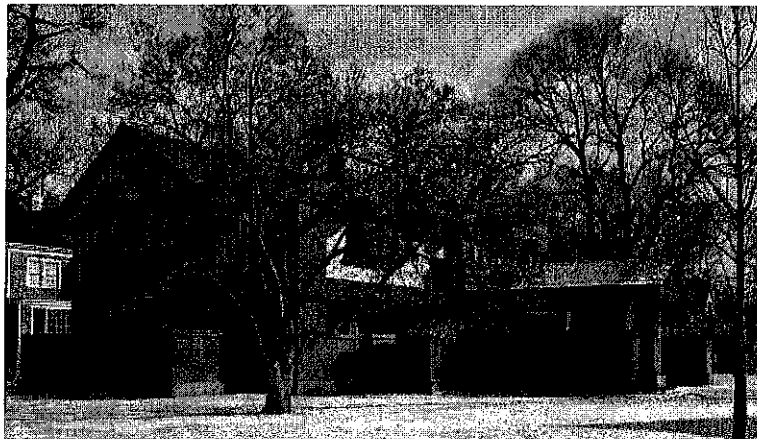


Figure 31: Peter A. Beachy House, 238 Forest Avenue.

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Wright's designs in Oak Park and other communities resulted in his becoming one of the most famous architects in America by 1903. This resulted in an immense level of work both in Oak Park and throughout the Midwest. Between 1902 and 1906, Wright designed over seventy-five buildings primarily in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan and Wisconsin.⁸² In Oak Park, Wright completed designs for the Peter A. Beachy House at 238 Forest Avenue (Figure 31) and Unity Temple at 875 W. Lake Street, both in 1906. The Beachy House is distinguished by its prominent corner brick piers and gabled entry bay on the main facade. Despite the dormers, the house maintains a strong degree of horizontality in the flat roof over the entrance and the projecting one-story porch on the south façade.

The Unity Temple is considered one of Wright's most important designs. Designed for the local Unitarian congregation, its construction followed the loss of the original church by fire in 1905. A member of the congregation, Wright was hired to design the church with an anticipated date of completion in 1906. Due to cost overruns and delays the church was not finally completed until October of 1908. The design for the church called for the use of concrete in its construction and exterior finish and a central lobby serving both the sanctuary and social hall. The building was designed with a flat roof, wide eaves, and windows divided by concrete columns. Light was provided by skylights and clerestory windows of art glass. (Located two blocks south of the Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District, this building was listed individually as a National Historic Landmark in 1970).



Figure 32: Laura Gale House, 6 Elizabeth Court.

⁸² Ibid., 88.

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In 1907, Wright received the commission to design a new house for Laura Gale, widow of Thomas Gale, whose house Wright designed in 1892 (Figure 32). The design for the Laura Gale House was a precursor of Falling Water with its cantilevered roof forms and porches. Historian Henry Russell Hitchcock called the house "a small masterpiece...closer to what the Europeans who were most inspired by Wright were to come to in the early twenties."⁸³ Located at 6 Elizabeth Court, the dwelling had typical Wright features including an exterior of stucco, bold horizontal lines, and low pitched roofs but differed in its use of cantilevered roofs and balconies to create outdoor space.

In his last years in Oak Park, Wright was commissioned to remodel a dwelling at 400 Forest Avenue for William H. Copeland and designed two new dwellings for Oscar B. Balch and Harry S. Adams. The remodeling for Copeland in 1908 primarily consisted of interior updates as well as new porch columns on the main façade. Toward the end of his Oak Park years, Wright designed two of his most notable Prairie designs; the Frederick Robie House, built in Chicago in 1909, and the Avery Coonley House in Riverside Illinois, completed in 1908. The Robie House is best known for its revolutionary interior design in which the main areas of the ground- and first-floors are unwallled, thus creating a continuous flow and openness of space (Figure 33).⁸⁴ The Coonley House features a sloping glass ceiling over the large living room, and a banded decorative frieze. In addition to the house, Wright also designed a pool, sunken garden, stable, and gardener's cottage. The Robie and Coonley Houses are often regarded as the best examples of the Prairie Style, particularly for their innovative use of space. "Here, clearly and forcefully, is Mr. Wright's revolution in architectural space—free-flowing yet interpenetrating interiors, the play of interlocking horizontal forms with their vertical counterpoint reflected on the exterior, the dissolution of indoors to outdoors, outdoors to indoors."⁸⁵

Wright received two more important commissions in Oak Park after 1910. The Oscar B. Balch House at 611 N. Kenilworth Avenue was commissioned in 1911 and was another classic Prairie style dwelling with wide eaves, bold horizontality and bands of art glass casement windows (Figure 34). Wright's final design in Oak Park was a dwelling commissioned in 1911 for Harry S. Adams at 710 W. Augusta Street. Completed in 1913, the house has a hipped roof, exterior of brick, and a one-story porte cochere on the west façade. The sheltered entrance has an ornate door of art glass and a concrete urn accents the entry bay off the front porch.

⁸³ Ibid., 113.

⁸⁴ Copplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 40-43.

⁸⁵ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 59.

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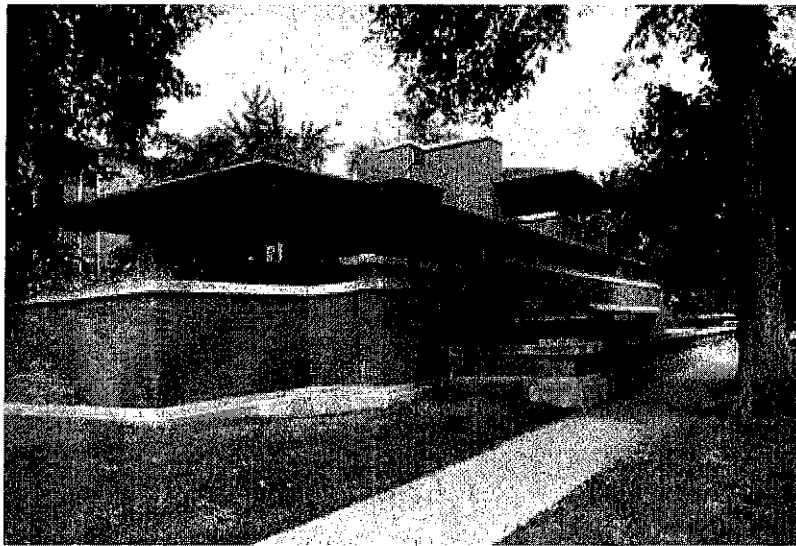


Figure 33: Frederick Robie House, Chicago, Illinois.

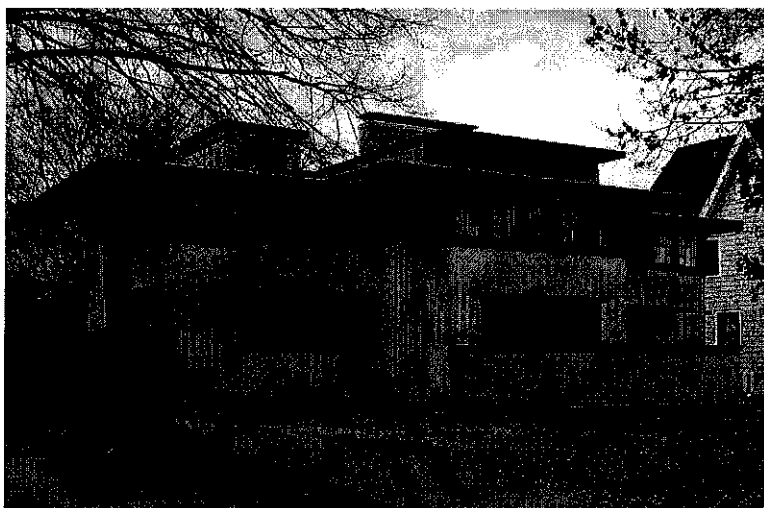


Figure 34: Oscar B. Balch House, 611 N. Kenilworth Avenue.

In addition to Wright's personal success and prominence in the 1900s, his Oak Park studio also nurtured and fostered the careers of architects who would gain fame in their own right and design numerous buildings in Oak Park and the Chicago area. The best known of these were Charles White Jr., Walter Burley Griffin, Marion Mahony, Barry Byrne, William Drummond and

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John S. Van Bergen. These individuals generally came to Wright to work as draftsman on his projects and eventually were given more responsibility as their talents improved.⁸⁶

While Wright was the architect most prominently identified with the Prairie School in the 1900s, other firms also became associated with the movement at the same time. Writing for the *Architectural Record* in 1904, Arthur C. David observed that:

"It is true, nevertheless, that there is a group of western architects, resident chiefly in Chicago, who are...departing from the allegiance to the strict European tradition which prevails in the East. The number of the protestants is not as yet very great; several of the architects whose work shows the influence of the different ideal are by no means consistent with their devotion thereto; and the different members of the group differ considerably in the extent to which they push their search for an original vehicle of expression."⁸⁷

In addition to Wright, the Prairie School produced a number of architects who would have a significant effect on building design in Oak Park in the early 1900s. Two of these, Charles E. White Jr. and John S. Van Bergen, worked with Wright in his studio and after forming their own businesses designed dozens of buildings in the Chicago area. Other architects and firms such as Robert C. Spencer Jr., Tallmadge and Watson, George W. Maher, and Eben E. Roberts were influenced by Wright but had their own approach and interpretations of the Prairie School. Along with these formal Prairie style buildings, hundreds of American Foursquare dwellings were also built in the Village with direct influences of the Prairie style such as stucco exteriors, broad roof eaves, and inset horizontal and vertical wood inlay strips. These designs also reflect the Prairie style in their use of materials, simple square porch columns, and emphasis on the horizontal than the more common American Foursquare dwellings with classical or milled columns and shallow eaves. Many of these were built north of Lake Street in the historic district but hundreds more were built south of Lake Street in subdivisions developed by S. T. Gunderson, Thomas H. Hulbert and T.A. Holm. These contractors borrowed elements from the Prairie style to create houses which have "...a sense of solidity and bulk which keep them earth bound and relate them to the Prairie House."⁸⁸

From 1900 to 1909, architects and builders working in the Prairie School had a major impact on the appearance of Oak Park. However, after 1909 Wright was no longer among them. At what

⁸⁶ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 86.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁸⁸ Dull, *The Domestic Architecture of Oak Park, Illinois: 1900-1930*, 14.

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appeared to be the height of his career, Wright abandoned his Oak Park home and business. He had fallen in love with the wife of a client, Mamah Cheney, and left with her to go to Europe, leaving his wife and six children behind. Wright's motives behind this move were not only personal, they were also professional. While he had achieved great success in his career, he felt he was becoming stagnated and needed new inspirations and challenges. As he later put it, "Weary, I was losing my grip on my work and even interest in it."⁸⁹

Wright left the United States because he realized the scandal that would surface due to his abandonment of his family and the impact such an action would have on his professional life. However, he also had a specific purpose in heading to Germany. Berlin publisher Ernst Wasmuth required Wright's help in publishing a major monograph on Wright's work. *Ausgefuehrte Bauten und Entwuerfe* was published in 1911. The volume featured one hundred plates of Wright's architectural plans and details of his designs.⁹⁰ The publication declared a new spirit of architecture in Frank Lloyd Wright's work. What the authors found especially intriguing about Wright's designs was:

The absence in these works of any reflection of the European forms to which we have long been accustomed. This turning away from tradition plus the particular manner of arrangement presuppose a unique style, a style that derives from the artist's pleasure in new material forms and in the liberal use of machine technology.⁹¹

The publication praised Wright's work as "the very epitome of innovative, original architectural design," and noted the "beautifully proportioned measures as can be seen in the Oak Park houses," as well as Wright's "delicately developed sense for the effect of mass and colors."⁹² The German publication, as well as his time in Europe, gave Wright international attention and exposure. As biographer Alexander Boulton stated, "In leaving Chicago and Oak Park, he had entered a far larger stage. Over the years he would become the best known and most influential architect in the world, and the publication of his work in Germany was the first step in that direction."⁹³

⁸⁹ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 49-52.

⁹⁰ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 62-63.

⁹¹ C.R. Ashbee, "Frank Lloyd Wright: A Study of His Work," in *Frank Lloyd Wright Early Visions, The Great Achievements of the Oak Park Years* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1995. An unabridged reproduction of the *Ausgefuehrte Bauten*, Berlin: Ernst Wasmuth, 1911), 3-4.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹³ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 53; Copplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 48.

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Outside of Wright, the Prairie School architects who had the greatest impact on Oak Park were Charles E. White Jr., John S. Van Bergen, Eben E. Roberts, Tallmadge and Watson and Robert C. Spencer, Jr. Other architects who also designed several Prairie style dwellings in the Village include George W. Maher, Lawrence Buck and Henry Fiddelke. These architects and their major works in Oak Park follow.

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Charles E. White Jr.

Chicago architect Charles E. White Jr. worked in various offices before joining Frank Lloyd Wright's studio in 1903 and opened his own practice in 1905.⁹⁴ After seven years with his own practice, White partnered with Louis S. Christie in 1912 and they worked together as White & Christie until 1922. White then partnered with Bertram Weber as the firm of White & Weber. In his early career White designed a number of low cost stucco houses and he tended towards the use of Tudor Revival elements applied within overall Prairie massing. Examples of his Prairie style houses in Oak Park include the Simmons House built in 1905 and the Burt L. Wallace House built in 1908 (Figures 35-36). Both have stucco exteriors, hipped roofs and restrained decorative elements.

White also designed larger homes such as the J.F. Skinner House at 605 Linden Avenue which was completed in 1909 (Figure 37). Its exterior is embellished with brick and stucco accents while the interior is arranged around a large central hallway.⁹⁵ Between 1910 and 1914, White published almost two dozen articles in *House Beautiful* and illustrated a wide variety of designs including the Prairie School. He also published *Successful Homes and How to Build Them*, another collection that illustrated numerous Prairie style houses, in 1912. After 1912, White and his partners primarily worked in the Colonial and Tudor Revival styles and several of these homes are also in Oak Park. In 1921, White served as the Commissioner of the Oak Park Public Works Department and led the Zoning Commission to adopt Oak Park's first zoning ordinance (1921).

⁹⁴ Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, "A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District," 144.

⁹⁵ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 115.

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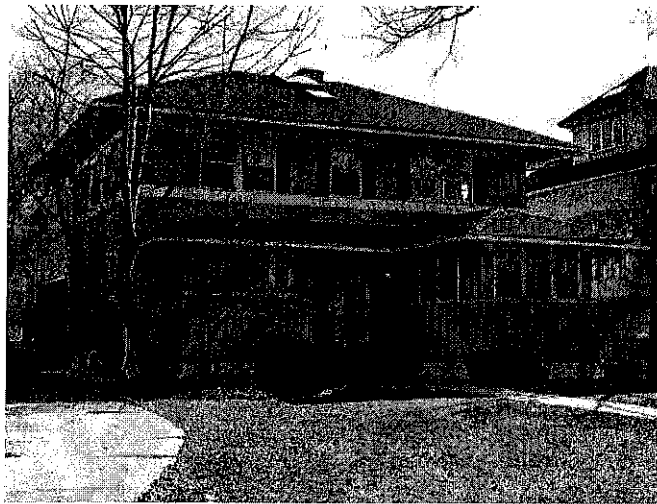


Figure 35: Simmons House (1905), 622 N. Kenilworth Avenue.

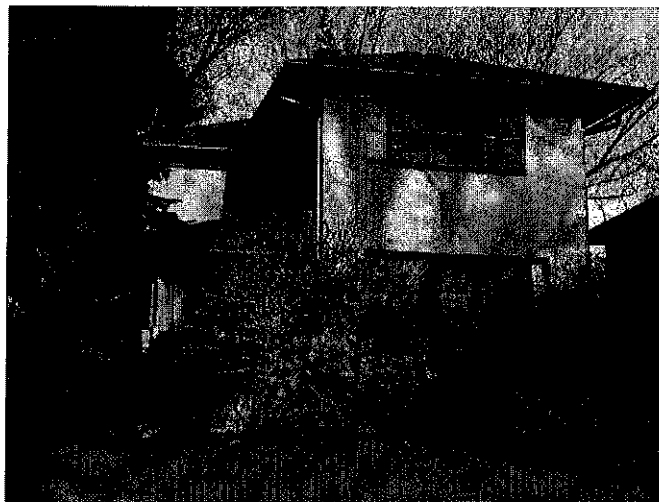


Figure 36: Burt L. Wallace House (1908), 309 N. Elmwood Avenue.

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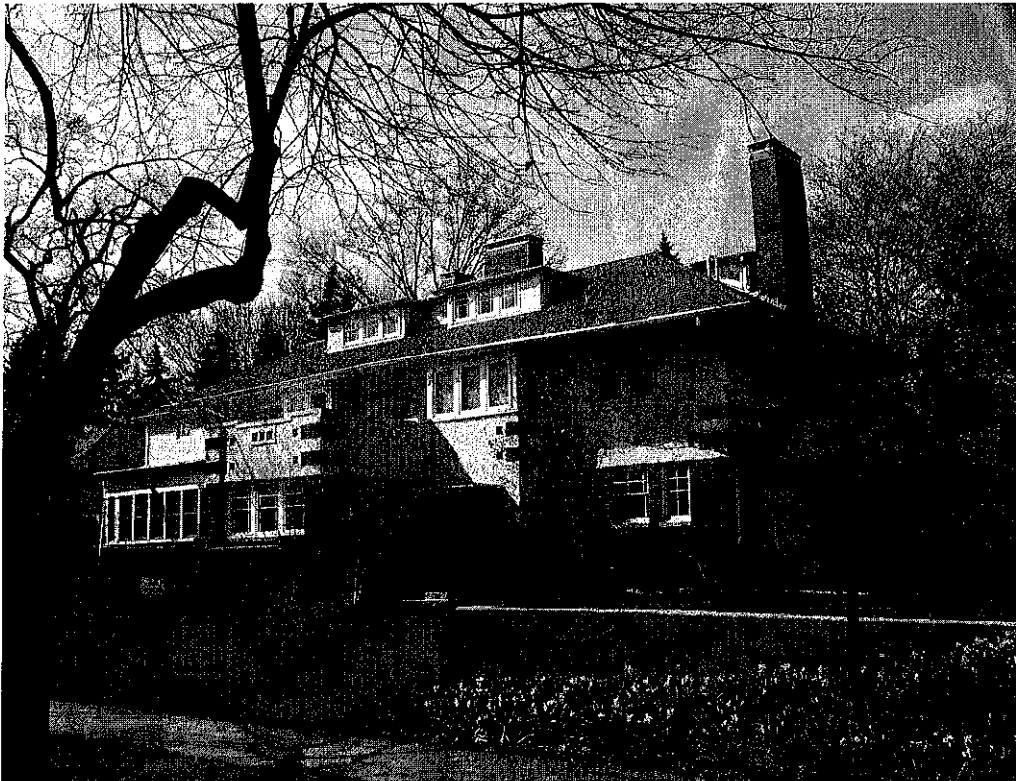


Figure 37: J.F. Skinner House (1909), 605 Linden Avenue.

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John S. Van Bergen

John S. Van Bergen was a Wright Studio architect who worked extensively in Oak Park and the Chicago area. Van Bergen was a native of Oak Park and graduated from the Oak Park and River Forest High School. After working as a draftsman for Walter Burley Griffin, Van Bergen joined Wright's Studio in 1909 and completed several of Wright's commissions after Wright left for Europe.⁹⁶ Van Bergen opened his own firm in 1911 and is considered to have imitated Wright's designs closer than any other Prairie School architect.⁹⁷ Some of his best known works include the three houses he designed in 1914 for Flori Blondeel at 426, 432 and 436 Elmwood Avenue in Oak Park (Figure 38). Similar in design, these three dwellings have broad hipped roofs, stucco exteriors and rows of windows directly below the roof eaves.

Van Bergen has been praised for his sense of proportion and finesse in his designs and many of his designs in Oak Park share similarities such as low pitched hipped roofs, exteriors of stucco, rows of casement windows, and the use of wood strips to create horizontal or vertical patterns on the primary facades.⁹⁸ Van Bergen often placed his primary entrances at side bays, or in extended wings on the dwelling. Representative examples of Van Bergen's Oak Park dwellings include the Robert N. Erskine House (1913), the Albert H. Manson House (1914), and the Phillip Greisse House (1915). The Mrs. Charles S. Yerkes House built in 1912 is a rare example of the use of wood siding as an exterior material for a Prairie style house in Oak Park (Figure 40). Its wide clapboard siding accentuates the horizontality of the house. In 1916, Van Bergen also designed the Linden Apartments at 175-181 Linden Avenue in Oak Park which is the only example of a Prairie style apartment building in the Village (Figure 45).

At least two dozen buildings were designed by Van Bergen in Oak Park and most were completed between 1911 and 1918. In 1918, Van Bergen served in the armed forces in World War I and then relocated his practice to Ravinia, Illinois. Van Bergen practiced architecture in Ravinia until 1955 when he moved to Santa Barbara, California.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, "A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District," 143.

⁹⁷ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 279.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, *The Prairie School*, 329.

⁹⁹ Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, "A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District," 143.

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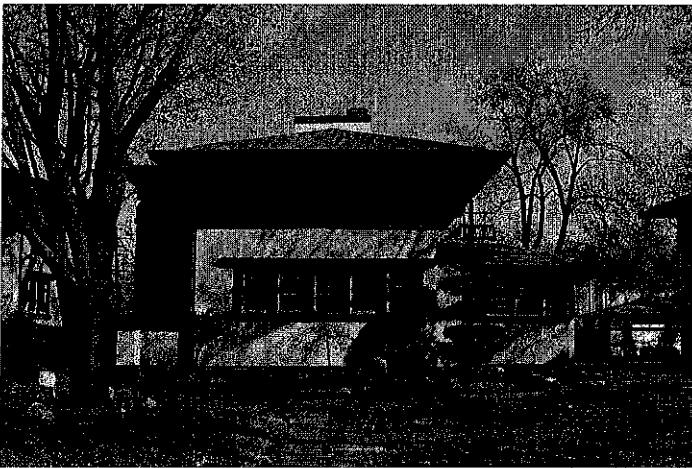


Figure 38: Flori Blondeel House II (1914),
432 N. Elmwood Avenue.

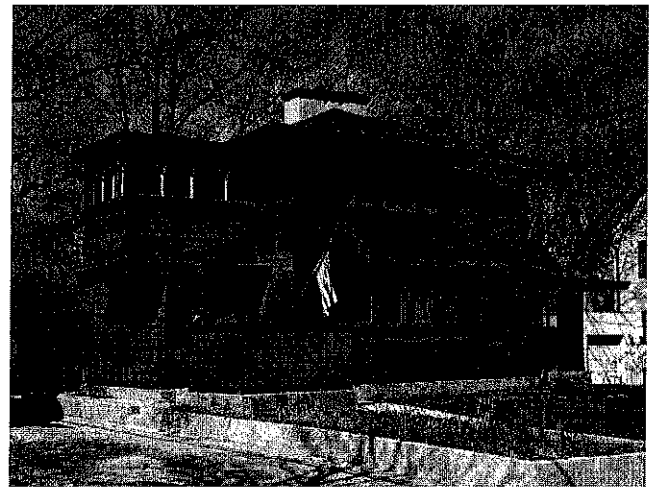


Figure 40: Mrs. Charles S. Yerkes House
(1912), 450 Iowa Street.



Figure 39: Robert N. Erskine House (1913),
714 Columbian Avenue.



Figure 41: Albert H. Manson House (1914),
619 N. Elmwood Avenue.

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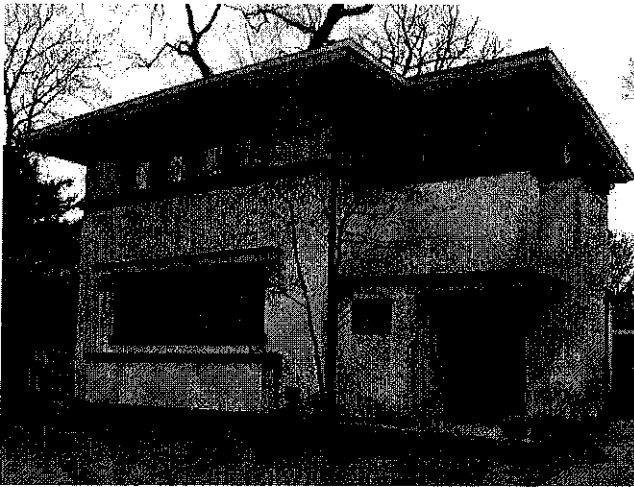


Figure 42: Charles Flitcraft House (1918),
845 Chicago Avenue.



Figure 44: Philip Greiss House (1915), 716
Columbian Avenue.

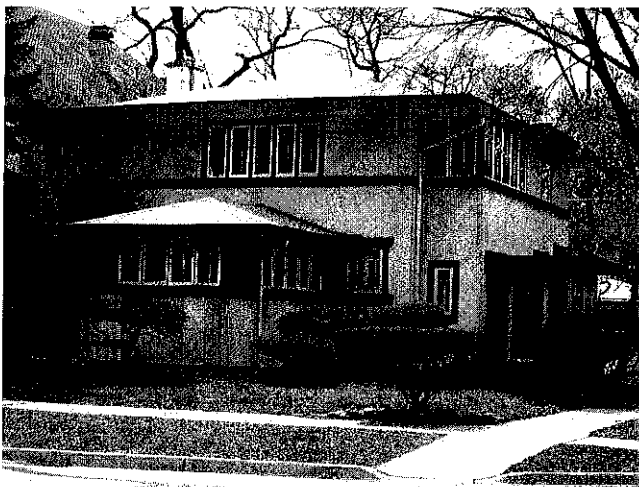


Figure 43: G.L. Smith House (1914), 743
Columbian Avenue.



Figure 45: Linden Apartments (1916), 175-
181 Linden Avenue.

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Eben E. Roberts

A prolific architect in the Prairie School in Oak Park was Eben E. Roberts. Roberts moved to Illinois in the 1880s and established his practice in Oak Park in 1893. Roberts employed numerous drafters and is credited with designing over 200 buildings in Oak Park alone.¹⁰⁰ Roberts worked in a variety of styles and in Oak Park he designed dwellings in the Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, and Tudor Revival styles as well as Prairie. In 1900, Roberts work underwent a distinct shift with the design of the A.J. Redmond House at 422 Forest Avenue which shows the influence of George W. Maher as well as Wright (Figure 46). This dwelling reflected his adaptation to a more horizontal emphasis, featuring broad windows, hip roofs, wide eaves and large brick, stone or stuccoed porch columns. The Henry P. McGill House continued this trend and featured a wide hipped dormer at the roofline (Figure 47).

Many of Roberts' early 20th century residential projects commonly followed the American Foursquare plan with wood-trimmed stucco exteriors and full-width porches. The homes varied in decorative details such as dormers and other exterior features. Roberts developed a number of stock house plans which he varied with decorative elements. In the early 1900s many of these were essentially American Foursquare plans but given Prairie treatments with wide eaves, stucco finishes, and horizontality emphasized by wood strips and belt courses. An example of this type of dwelling is the Burt S. Davis House built in 1912 which is distinguished by its interlocking wood strips to create geometric patterns on the façade (Figures 52-53).

Roberts worked as an architect in Oak Park until 1912 when he moved his office to Chicago to concentrate on commercial architecture.¹⁰¹ He formed a partnership with his son, Elmer in the early 1920s and together they designed numerous buildings in Oak Park. These buildings include one of the Village's few examples of the Art Deco style, the Grove Apartments at 300-304 N. Grove completed in 1926. Roberts continued to work in Chicago until 1926 when he retired. He died in Muskegon, Michigan in 1943 and is buried in Forest Home Cemetery west of Oak Park.

¹⁰⁰ Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, "A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District," 142.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

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Figure 46: A.J. Redmond House (1900), 422 Forest Avenue.



Figure 48: H. Benton Howard House (1904) 911 Chicago Avenue.



Figure 47: Henry P. McGill House (1903), 164 N. Euclid Avenue.



Figure 49: Americus B. Melville House (1904), 437 N. Kenilworth Avenue.

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Figure 50: E.E. Roberts House (remodeled 1912), 1019 Superior Street.



Figure 52: Burt S. Davis House (1912), 232 N. Ridgeland Avenue.



Figure 51: Louis H. Brink House (1909), 533 N. Grove Avenue.



Figure 53: Burt S. Davis House (1912), 232 N. Ridgeland Avenue.

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Tallmadge and Watson

Another prominent firm of the period was Tallmadge and Watson which was founded in 1905. Both Thomas Tallmadge and Vernon S. Watson met while working for architect Daniel H. Burnham. Tallmadge coined the term "Chicago School" in 1908 to describe the Prairie style and the firm eventually became well known for their ecclesiastical architecture.¹⁰² However, in the firm's early years they designed numerous Prairie style dwellings in Evanston, where Tallmadge lived, and Oak Park, where Watson lived. Watson designed and built his home at 643 Fair Oaks Avenue in 1906 and the firm also designed the T.S. Estabrook House at 200 N. Scoville Avenue in 1908 (Figures 54-55). Designed in a cross plan, the Estabrook House was illustrated repeatedly in books and magazines and described as a one-story dwelling that "typifies the "Chicago School".¹⁰³

Like most architects working in the Prairie style, the firm's buildings had an emphasis on open floor plans and the use of natural materials. While some dwellings were built with side gable plans, a design frequently employed by the firm featured a prominent facing gabled bay on the main façade with stucco and wood strips used to outline windows and create geometric patterns. The massing used by the firm often employed more verticality than typical Prairie houses of the period. This design approach can be seen in the Harold H. Rockwell House built in 1910 and the William V. Carroll House built in 1913 (Figures 59 and 61). The firm also employed Tudor Revival detailing such as stucco and half-timbering in gables as seen in the Henry D. Golbeck House completed in 1915 (Figure 60).

As the popularity of the Prairie style waned in the 1910s, the firm returned to designing buildings in historical styles such as Colonial and Tudor Revival. Tallmadge and Watson designed at least 70 dwellings and institutional buildings in Oak Park and River Forest in the early 20th century.¹⁰⁴ Tallmadge gained additional fame in 1927 when he published a well regarded book, *The Story of Architecture in America*. The firm remained in business in Chicago until Watson retired in 1936. Tallmadge continued to practice architecture until 1940 when he was killed in a train accident.

¹⁰² Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 102.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰⁴ Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, "A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District," 144.

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Figure 54: Vernon S. Watson House (1904),
643 Fair Oaks Avenue.



Figure 56: E.P. Ward House (1915), 724
Linden Avenue.



Figure 55: Torrie S. Estabrook House (1909),
200 N. Scoville Avenue.



Figure 57: Barrett Andrews House (1906),
623 N. East Avenue.

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Figure 58: Joseph S. Guy House I (1913),
411 N. Scoville Avenue.

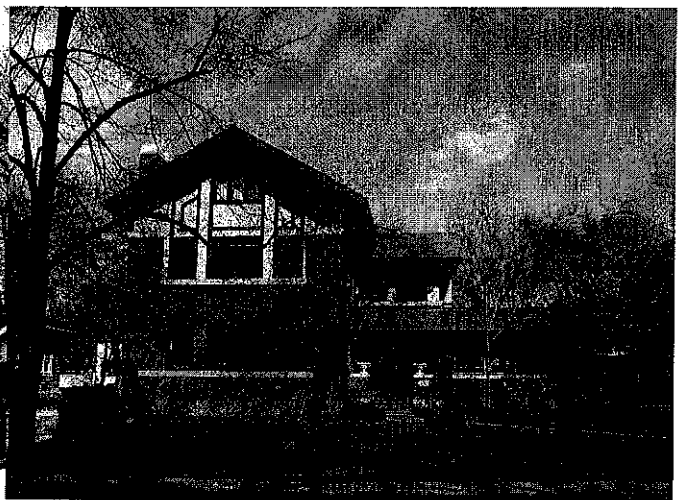


Figure 60: Henry D. Golbeck House (1914),
636 Linden Avenue.



Figure 59: Harold H. Rockwell House (1910),
629 N. Oak Park Avenue.



Figure 61: William V. Carroll House (1913),
611 Fair Oaks Avenue.

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Robert C. Spencer Jr.

Robert C. Spencer Jr. graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1886 and then worked for the Boston architectural firm of Shepley, Rutan and Coolidge. By 1893, he had moved to Chicago and was working for a branch office of the firm.¹⁰⁵ In 1895, Spencer opened his own practice next door to Frank Lloyd Wright in Steinway Hall before forming a partnership with Horace S. Powers in 1905. The firm of Spencer and Powers designed many buildings until they closed in 1923. The firm's designs in the Prairie style often included simple rectangular forms and half-timbering in the gable fields.¹⁰⁶ An example of this use of stucco and half-timbering is the William C. Stephens House at 167 N. Ridgeland Avenue built in 1909 (Figure 62).

A more representative example of their designs in the Prairie style is the Edward W. McCready House at 231 N. Euclid Avenue in Oak Park built in 1908 (Figure 63). This house was designed with a broad hipped roof, banks of casement windows, an exterior of Roman brick, prominent belt courses and an articulated entrance in a projecting bay. Another notable house designed by the firm included the John W. Broughton House in River Forest in 1908 which was designed in an L-plan and had grouped casement windows and a prominent belt course between the two floors.

Spencer also wrote for both professional and popular magazines such as *Architectural Review* and *House Beautiful*. For *House Beautiful* he wrote more than 20 articles by 1909 with many of the illustrations depicting Prairie style houses implying that these were the most appropriate designs for American homes.¹⁰⁷ After closing his architectural firm in 1923, Spencer taught at several colleges including the University of Florida and Texas A&M. He also worked as a painter, designing murals for various federal agencies in the 1930s. Spencer retired to Arizona in 1938 where he died in 1953.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 142.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 97.

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Figure 62: William C. Stephens House (1909), 167 N. Ridgeland Avenue.

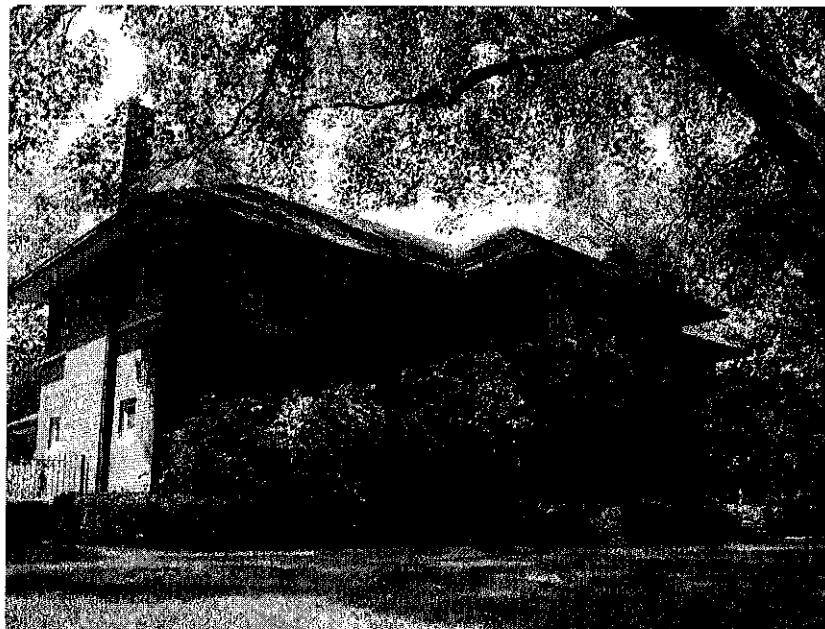


Figure 63: Edward W. McCready House (1907), 231 N. Euclid Avenue.

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George W. Maher

Originally from Indiana, George W. Maher received his architectural training in the office of Joseph L. Silsbee where he worked along side Frank Lloyd Wright in the 1880s. In 1888, Maher opened his own practice and he experimented around the edges of the Prairie style in the 1890s while he refined his approach. Maher developed his "motif-rhythm" theory of design that involved repeating several different design elements through the exterior and interior of a building to create a harmonious whole. This was exemplified in the John Farson House (Pleasant Home) at 217 Home Avenue in Oak Park (NHL). This immense dwelling was built in 1897 with a low pitched hipped roof and features a broad front porch supported by large square brick columns (Figure 64).

Maher refined his approach and designed several notable dwellings in the 1900s in Oak Park and throughout the Midwest. Maher had a particular emphasis on open living plans on first floors and his exteriors were generally designed with low and rectangular hipped roofs and central projecting entrances.¹⁰⁸ The Charles R. Erwin House at 530 N. Euclid Avenue was completed in 1905 and features a broad hipped roof with wide eaves and a curved pediment over the entrance (Figure 65). The interior was centered on a large living hall off which was a study, dining room and living room. Another notable design was the James Hall Taylor House built in 1912 which features a central entrance with an elliptical portico and two-story bay window on the south façade (Figure 66). Maher resided in the Chicago suburb of Kenilworth and many of his commissions came from this community. However, he designed many other dwellings in Oak Park and Evanston. Maher practiced alone until 1921 when he was joined by his son, Philip. Maher died in Michigan in 1926.

¹⁰⁸ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 107.

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Figure 64: John Farson House, (1897) 217 Home Avenue.



Figure 65: Charles R. Erwin House (1906), 530 N. Euclid Avenue.

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Figure 66: James Hall Taylor House (1912), 405 N. Euclid Avenue.

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Lawrence Buck

Lawrence Buck worked as an architect in Alabama before moving to Chicago by 1894. From 1903 to 1905 he had a practice in Rockford, Illinois before moving back to Chicago and opening his firm in 1906.¹⁰⁹ Buck partnered with Vernon Watson in 1905 in the design of the Charles Reeves House at 454 Iowa Street (Figure 67). This dwelling featured a gable roof and drew on Tudor influences in its overall Prairie massing. In 1908, Buck designed the Edwin H. Ehrman House on Kenilworth Avenue which has a stucco exterior and casement windows (Figure 68). Buck drew inspiration from English Arts and Crafts architects and used medieval elements in his designs.¹¹⁰

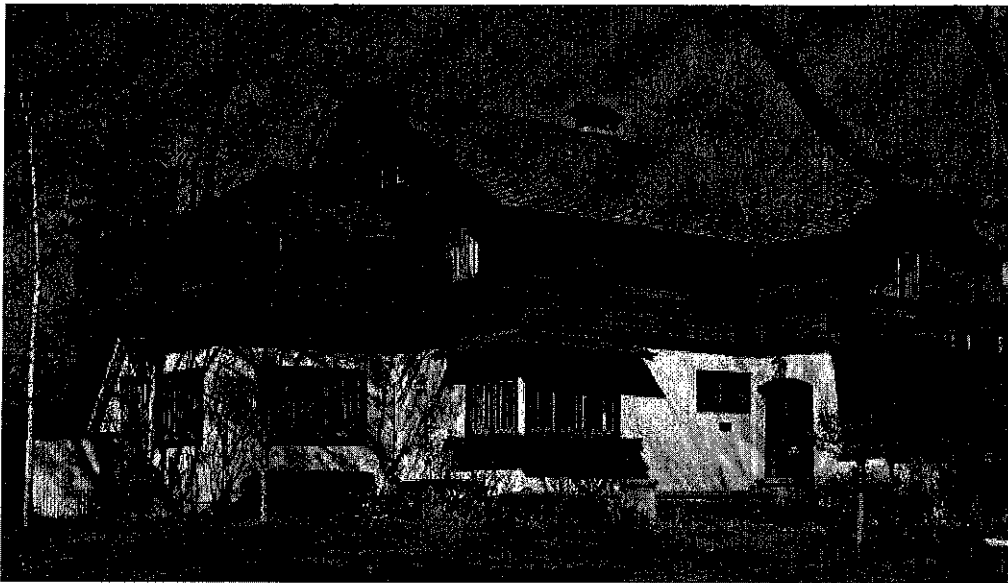


Figure 67: Charles Reeves House (1905), 454 Iowa Street.

¹⁰⁹ Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission, "A Guide to Oak Park's Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School Historic District," 140.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

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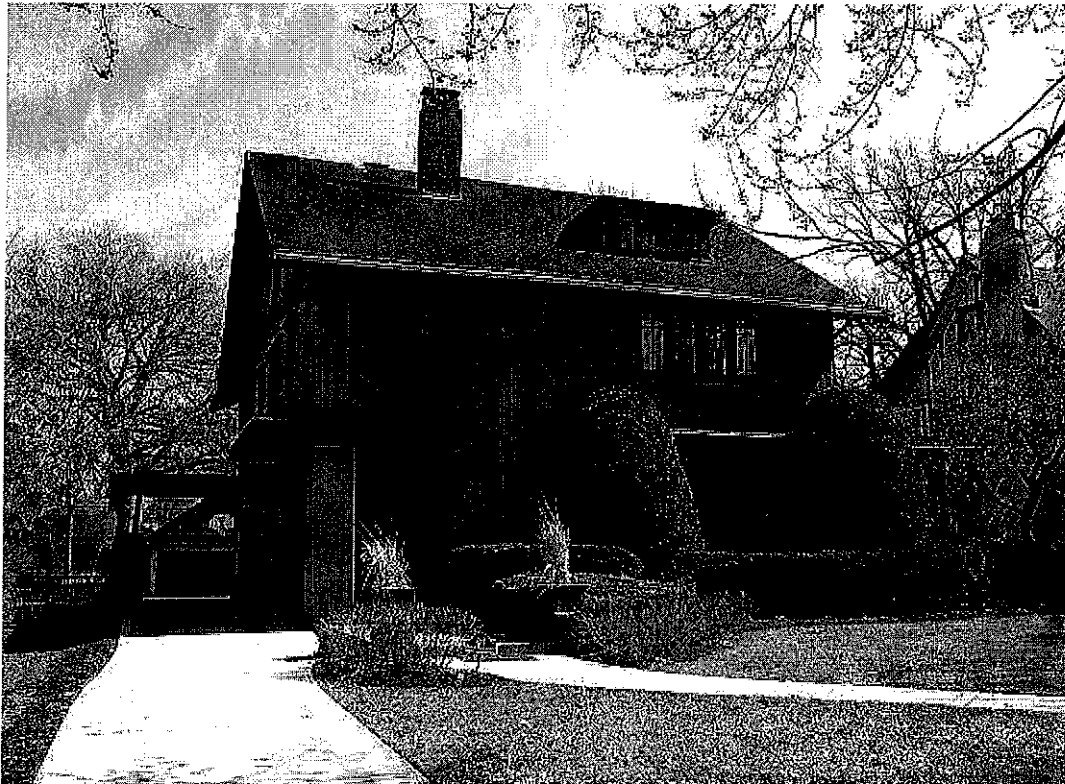


Figure 68: Edwin H. Ehrman House (1908), 410 N. Kenilworth Avenue.

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Henry Fiddelke was born in 1865 and apprenticed in the offices of Joseph Silsbee and Adler and Sullivan. He opened his own practice in Oak Park in 1896 and designed numerous houses in the historic district in the early 20th century. Fiddelke's work was more in the Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival styles and his Prairie style designs were limited. His most representative work in the Prairie style is the house at 518 N. Grove Avenue which has a stucco exterior, prominent belt course and a hipped roof porch with stuccoed columns (Figure 69). Another design was the Clarence and Grace Hemingway House at 600 N. Kenilworth Avenue which features a broad front porch and well defined belt course (Figure 70).



Figure 69: Dwelling at 518 N. Grove Avenue designed in 1910.



Figure 70: Clarence and Grace Hemingway House (1906), 600 N. Kenilworth Avenue.

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Other architects designing Prairie style houses in Oak Park included Henry K. Holsman who designed the George D. Webb House in 1910 at 600 N. Euclid Avenue and Thornton Herr who designed the M.A. Richardson House at 515 N. East Avenue in 1908.

In addition to these architects who designed buildings in Oak Park and throughout the region, several other notable architects who either worked with Wright or were influenced by him practiced in the early 20th century in Chicago and other cities in the Midwest. Although their best known designs are not in Oak Park, these architects produced significant examples of the Prairie style throughout the region. The best known of these architects include Walter Burley Griffin, his wife, Marion Mahony, William Purcell and William Drummond.

Walter Burley Griffin emerged from Wright's studio to become a prolific and influential designer in the Prairie style. Griffin studied architecture at the University of Illinois and then moved to Chicago where he worked for several architects in Steinway Hall. After receiving his architecture license he worked under Wright from 1901 to 1905 and then formed his own business. Between 1901 and 1913, Griffin designed some 130 houses, landscapes and buildings. He is now credited with developing the L-shaped floor plan, the carport, and has been noted for his innovative use of reinforced concrete in building construction.¹¹¹

Marion Mahony received her architecture degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1894 and was the second woman to graduate from the program. A native of Winnetka, Mahony moved back to Chicago and worked with architect Dwight Perkins before being hired by Frank Lloyd Wright. She worked for Wright for 14 years but felt that he took undue credit for her work.¹¹² When Wright left for Europe in 1909 he asked her to continue designing for his clients but she refused. Wright then hired Herman von Holst who asked Mahony to reconsider her decision. Mahony agreed to work with von Holst on the condition that she controlled most of the design work. Mahony is credited with designing the Robert and Adolph Mueller Houses in Decatur, Illinois although when Wright returned from Europe he took credit for them and exhibited them under his name.¹¹³

In 1911, Mahony and Griffin were married and the two collaborated on a number of projects in the following years. Of particular note in these years were the designs for the Harry D. Page House in 1912 and the J.E. Blythe House in 1913, both in Mason City, Iowa. The Page House features a broad gable roof form, stucco exterior and one-story porch. In contrast, the Blythe House has a flat roof and has a stone veneer skirt wall and stucco façade with wide expanses of

¹¹¹ www.pbs.org/wbgriffin.

¹¹² Sarah Downey, "The Invisible Architect," The Chicago Reader, September 23, 2005.

¹¹³ Ibid.

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windows. Griffin also designed the Stinson Memorial Library in Anna, Illinois in 1913 which is considered one of his finest works. It has a random course stone base, large piers, and horizontal rows of window set just below the eaves.

Many of his homes carry the familiar design elements of the Prairie School. Yet Griffin, true to the urging of his mentor Louis Sullivan, developed his own style of architecture free from the constraints of historical precedent. His designs echoed many of Wright's with an emphasis on hipped roofs, rows of windows located just below the soffits, and wide eaves. Griffin and Mahony also worked with a variety of levels on the interiors with steps up and down to various living spaces.¹¹⁴ Griffin and Mahony also worked with landscapes and urban plans and prepared landscape plans for dwellings as well as plans for campuses and cities. In 1912 Griffin won a design competition from the city of Canberra, Australia to create a new city plan and the couple divided their time during the rest of their careers between America and Australia. Griffin's influence was so great that he was called the "father of modern architecture in Australia."¹¹⁵

Oak Park native William Purcell grew up near Frank Lloyd Wright and after studying architecture at Cornell University returned back to Chicago and formed a partnership first with George Feick Jr. and later moved to Minneapolis where he partnered with George Elmslie. The firm of Purcell and Elmslie was prolific, executing over 70 commissions in ten years and designed residences, churches, banks and courthouses. The majority of their work was in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin and Illinois. No major works were designed in Oak Park although the firm was responsible for several homes in nearby Riverside and River Forest.

William Drummond, who also studied at Wright's studio, designed the First Congregational Church in Chicago in 1908. This church reflected elements of Wright's Unity Temple through its flat roof, narrow windows, and horizontal form. Drummond then designed his own Prairie School home in 1910 in River Forest with an exterior of wood and stucco and a decorative wood trim. His interior was designed in an L-shape with a large living room and fireplace and the use of a slatted screen to provide a sense of openness to the dining room beyond.¹¹⁶ Drummond partnered with Louis Guenzel from 1912 to 1915. Drummond was the primary designer of the firm and one of the firm's most notable designs was the Ralph S. Baker House in Wilmette, Illinois completed in 1914.¹¹⁷ This house was designed with a stucco exterior accentuated with wooden inlaid strips, flat roof, and rows of casement windows. The interior has a large open floor plan with a balcony above three sides of the living room.

¹¹⁴ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 122.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 262.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 272.

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When Frank Lloyd Wright returned from Europe in 1911 he began a new career in Wisconsin and designed few new projects in Illinois. However, the Prairie School overall gained momentum as Wright's former studio employees continued to gain commissions in the Midwest. Between 1912 and 1914, some fifteen architects in the Chicago area designed buildings in the Prairie style and the influence of the Prairie School increased throughout the Midwest.¹¹⁸ Commissions came to the Prairie School architects from Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin as well as other parts of America. Notable works from this period include Purcell, Fieck and Elmslie's Merchants Bank of Winona in 1912, the Bradley Bungalow in Woods Hole, Massachusetts in 1912 and the Edward W. Decker House in Minnetonka, Minnesota built in 1913. The Merchants Bank of Winona was distinguished by its large enframed walls of glass containing abstract patterns and its corner piers with terra cotta ornamentation. The Bradley and Decker Houses were designed with low broad hipped roofs with cantilevered second floors and projecting elliptical one-story wings with glass walls. The Bradley Bungalow was a particularly innovative building and is recognized as a landmark of the Prairie style.¹¹⁹ Fieck left the firm in 1913 and continued on as Purcell and Elmslie. The firm continued to execute numerous commissions throughout the Midwest and other well known works during this period included the Harold C. Bradley House completed in 1915 in Madison, Wisconsin and the First State Bank in Le Roy, Minnesota.

The early 1910s also saw resurgence in the works by Louis Sullivan, which combined Prairie style massing interspersed with abstract ornamentation. Sullivan's sometimes difficult personality kept him from achieving the financial success of many of his contemporaries but his National Farmer's Bank in Owatonna, Minnesota completed in 1908 gained him national recognition. The building's severe massing and bulk was offset by an enframed wall with terra cotta decoration and large arched windows on the primary facades. In 1913, Sullivan was commissioned to design the Henry C. Adams Building in Algoma, Iowa and the Merchants' National Bank in Grinnell, Iowa. The Adams Building was distinguished by its enframed wall around the entrance on the main façade while the Merchant's National Bank featured a large terra cotta panel above the door.

The Prairie School peaked in terms of the number and quality of buildings designed between 1912 and 1914. After 1914, there were increasingly fewer commissions for the Prairie School architects and resurgence in interest in more traditional and historical styles. In 1915, an author writing in the *Architectural Record* noted that "...I have learned that a large part of the "Colonial" buildings recently erected [in the Midwest] are the result of instructions of clients rather than the

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 200-201.

¹¹⁹ Carter Wiseman, *Twentieth Century American Architecture, The Buildings and Their Makers*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 102.

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recommendation of the architects.¹²⁰ The taste of American builders and homeowners shifted in the 1910s and the Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival and other historical styles predominated for residential construction. In particular, women seemed to prefer the historical styles and this was noted by several Prairie School architects of the period. Wright Studio architect Barry Byrne opened his own practice in 1914 and noted that if the design decision were left to the husband then he felt sure of getting the commission. If the wife made the decision then the job was "as good as lost."¹²¹ While the husband would accept the Prairie style design as practical, straightforward and logical, the wife would reject it as being out of fashion. Architect Thomas Tallmadge made the same observation when he noted that "Clients, the wives of whom at least, [having] received their architectural education in magazines edited in Boston and New York, now have turned back to pretty Colonial or the fashionable Italian."¹²²

Architectural historian Carter Wiseman points to the fate of Wright's design for the Harold McCormick House as a harbinger of what was to come. In 1907, Wright designed an elaborate series of pavilions with terraces and gardens at the request of McCormick for a site in Lake Forest on Lake Michigan. After reviewing the plans, Mrs. McCormick rejected the design and persuaded her husband to hire New England architect Charles Platt who provided an Italian Renaissance plan instead. Wiseman asserts that "The loss of the McCormick commission was a severe blow to Wright personally and professionally, and it can be argued that the death sentence of the Prairie School was pronounced at that moment."¹²³ After Wright left Chicago in 1909, his influence waned and no one else emerged as a forceful spokesperson for the style among the Prairie School architects.

This waning of interest in the Prairie School was also seen in the periodicals of the day. The magazine *House Beautiful* regularly promoted the style during the early 1900s but in 1910 the magazine moved its offices to New York and the Prairie style was no longer mentioned after 1914.¹²⁴ Instead, the revival styles took center stage and remained there for the next two decades. In 1916, Gustav Stickley's *Craftsman* magazine stopped publication "because it was no longer attuned to public taste (the readers were discontented with Stickley's designs and demanded more examples of colonial work)."¹²⁵

¹²⁰ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 337.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 338.

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ Wiseman, *Twentieth Century American Architecture*, 103.

¹²⁴ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 339.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

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Other theories for the abrupt loss of popularity of the Prairie style were cost and practicality. In their study of popular mail order homes of the early 20th century, authors Robert Schweitzer and Michael Davis suggest that the large houses designed by the Prairie School architects proved impractical for most urban homeowners and state:

"These designs were non-traditional and the materials non-standard resulting in costs far above those for the modest dwellings most Americans could afford. Moreover, the floor plans and room arrangements were enough out of the ordinary to render them unpleasing to the ordinary home-buyer. Another possible reason for their unpopularity may have been the Prairie plan itself. This long, low house just did not fit a 30-foot lot."¹²⁶

Mail order companies offered the Prairie style only sparingly in the early 1900s and those they offered did not stay long. The Radford Company offered a Prairie style house in its catalog of 100 houses in 1903.¹²⁷ This design reflected the style in its hipped roof and lack of ornamentation. By 1909, Radford offered several more designs including a two-story version that had wide eaves, stucco exterior, and windows below the roofline. A Prairie influenced house was first offered by Sears in 1913 and featured a gable roof, large porch with square columns and a stucco exterior. In 1918, Sears offered Prairie style houses in two designs, the "Aurora" and the "Carlton" but evidently the orders for these houses were not sufficient to continue them and they disappeared from the catalog the next year.¹²⁸

In 1917, the annual architectural exhibition at the Art Institute in Chicago was bereft of any major Prairie School influences. Architect Thomas Tallmadge stated that

"What is... to be regretted is the absence of any evidence that the [Prairie School] as a potent style of architecture any longer exists... Where are Sullivan, Wright, Griffin and the others? The absence of the work of these men has removed from the show the last vestige of local color."¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Robert Schweitzer and Michael W.R. Davis, *America's Favorite Homes, Mail Order Catalogues as a Guide to Popular Early 20th-Century Homes*, (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990), 138.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 139.

¹²⁸ Daniel D. Reiff, *Houses From Books, Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide*, (University Park, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000), 204.

¹²⁹ Brooks, *The Prairie School*, 295.

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As residential commissions fell away, some of the Prairie School architects managed to keep the style alive through other building designs. Barry Byrne remained active by designing ecclesiastical and educational buildings while George Elmslie designed schools, banks, and churches. However, it became clear by the late 1910s that the Prairie style was simply not fashionable anymore. As Tallmadge wrote in 1927, "...not enough people of consequence adopted it to give it authority with the general herd – it challenged, attacked, and locked horns with the Beaux Arts which was at the height of its influence in America...The progressive movement had the message, it had the enthusiasm, it had the leaders, but the 'breaks' were all against it."¹³⁰ Architectural historian Carter Wiseman suggests that Wright and his fellow architects were just ahead of their time and that "Wright and his fellow domestic innovators on the West Coast had simply appeared a bit early for all but a small segment of the American architectural clientele, and a period of time would have to pass before a new generation, having tired itself of the neoclassical message, would again turn to Europe for guidance."¹³¹

During the late 1910s and 1920s only a few residential clients actively sought a Prairie style house and even their influences were difficult to discern. These were peak years of mail order houses designed and shipped to customers by companies such as Sears, Montgomery Ward and Aladdin. The catalogs mailed out each year by these companies both reflected and helped form residential architecture design for the country's rising middle class. Later catalogs such as the *Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses* in 1926 are full of Bungalows, Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival style dwellings but Prairie style dwellings are absent.¹³²

Although formal Prairie style houses fell out of favor with the general public by the early 1920s, the influence of the style continued to resonate in overall house design and form for the rest of the decade. A few Prairie style houses continued to be built in Oak Park such as the John Barlow House at 717 N. East Avenue designed by John S. Van Bergen in 1923. Although this was one of the last "pure" Prairie style houses built in Oak Park, the influences of the style were evident in building construction throughout the Village during the 1910s and 1920s. Throughout Oak Park hundreds of dwellings were built in the decade in American Foursquare plans common of the period. Across America these designs are generally considered to be derivative of the Colonial Revival style. In their seminal work on American houses, Virginia and Lee McAlester reference this house type as part of the Colonial Revival tradition and also describe it as a "Classic Box

¹³⁰ Dull, *The Domestic Architecture of Oak Park, Illinois: 1900-1930*, 134.

¹³¹ Wiseman, *Twentieth-Century American Architecture*, 104.

¹³² Sears, Roebuck and Company, *Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926*. (New York: Dover Publications, reprint edition, 1991).

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(Figure 71).¹³³ These designs typically display a stronger emphasis on the vertical than the horizontal, have shallow eaves, and display classically derived porch columns on the main façade.



Figure 71: The typical Colonial Revival influenced American Foursquare is characterized by an emphasis on verticality and the use of classical porch columns on the main façade (719 N. Kenilworth Avenue).

However, American Foursquare designs in Oak Park owe a greater debt to the Prairie style through their use of particularly wide eaves, stucco exteriors, geometric wood banding, art glass windows, square frame, brick or stuccoed columns, and an overall emphasis on horizontal rather than vertical massing. Oak Park's American Foursquares more strongly resemble the examples cited by the McAlesters in their discussion of the Prairie style.¹³⁴

A representative example of an early Prairie influenced American Foursquare is the Rall House built in 1904 which has a full-width hipped roof porch with square Doric porch columns and a stuccoed railing (Figure 73). The Fanny Parmlee House built in 1911 also has wide eaves, a stucco exterior and inlaid geometric wood strips in the porch columns (Figure 74). Another example is the dwelling at 623 N. Ridgeland Avenue, which has broad eaves, stucco exterior and simple stuccoed porch columns (Figure 75). A common variation of this house form is a one-

¹³³ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1984), 321.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 439-445.

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story sun porch instead of an open porch on the main façade. An example of this type of variation is the F.C. Pilgrim House built in 1919 (Figure 76).

Nationally, even though the Prairie style fell out of fashion by the early 1920s, its influence on American architecture was still felt. Many houses, including those offered by Sears and the other companies offered houses with simple plans, few historical details and lack of ornate decoration. Architect Elkin Wallick asserted that "the dominant characteristic of what we may term the American style is simplicity of design."¹³⁵ The natural use of materials was expressed through the use of materials such as stained wood shingles, rock faced concrete block, and stucco. Variety in exterior surfaces was achieved through contrasting several materials together rather than manipulating materials into decorative forms.

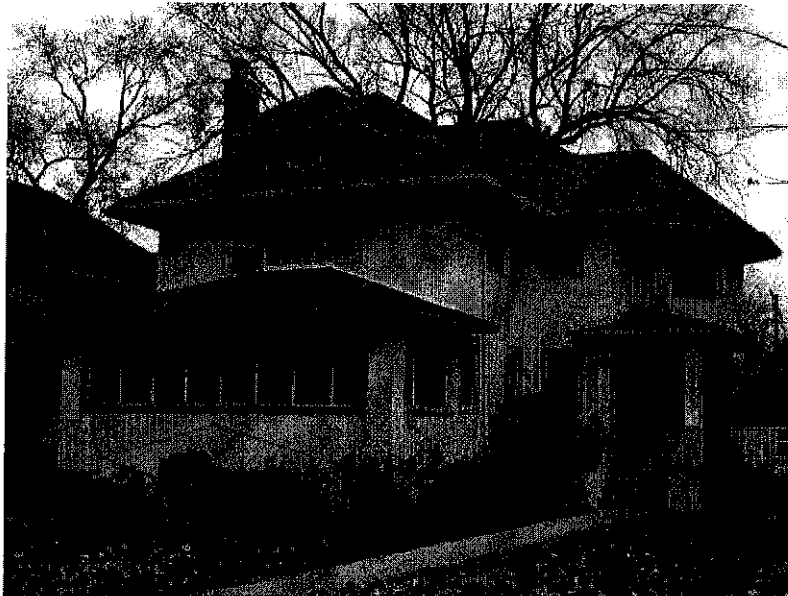


Figure 72: This American Foursquare's wide eaves, stucco exterior and broad roof lines reflect the Prairie influence more strongly than that of the Colonial Revival style (830 N. Kenilworth Avenue).

¹³⁵ Clifford Edward Clark Jr., *The American Home, 1800-1960*. (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 149.

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Figure 73: Rall House (1904), 206 N. Elmwood Avenue.



Figure 75: 623 N. Ridgeland Avenue (ca. 1910).



Figure 74: Fanny Parmlee House (1911), 743 N. East Avenue.



Figure 76: F.C. Pilgrim House (1919), 823 N. East Avenue

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In Oak Park, almost ninety buildings were designed in the Prairie style in the early 20th century and hundreds of dwellings were built with Prairie influences. Concurrent with this architectural movement was the design and construction of the popular revival styles of the period which came to dominate the Village's built environment in the 1920s. The Colonial and Tudor Revival styles were most commonly built in the Village with examples of Italian Renaissance, Mission, and Spanish Colonial also constructed on occasion. On many of the blocks in Oak Park are notable examples of the revival styles built side by side with Prairie dwellings.

Many of the architects who were proficient with the Prairie style also designed notable examples of revival styles. Architects such as Charles E. White Jr., Eben E. Roberts, and Tallmadge and Watson were adept in designing within a wide variety of styles and influences. The Colonial Revival style and its variations were widely built in the historic district throughout the early 20th century. Representative examples in the district include the McGill House built in 1919 and designed by Tallmadge and Watson, and the Charles H. Schumann House built in 1922 (Figures 77-78). The McGill House is based on Georgian architecture and has an elliptical portico on the main façade, an elaborate cornice with modillion blocks and corner brick quoins. The Charles H. Schumann House designed by architect William Harlev, Jr. is more typical of those built in the district with its symmetrical façade, central pedimented entry bay and eight-over-one wood sash windows. A Dutch Colonial variation utilized similar overall designs and detailing but was distinguished by its use of the gambrel roof form as seen in the J.C. Burrell House built in 1925 (Figure 79).

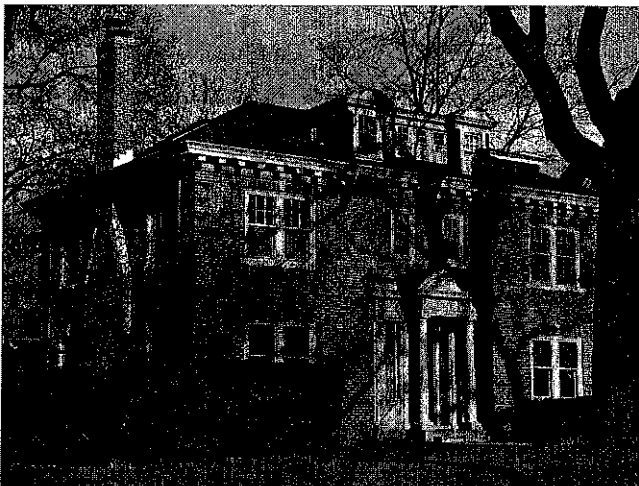


Figure 77: McGill House (1919) 525 Fair Oaks Avenue.

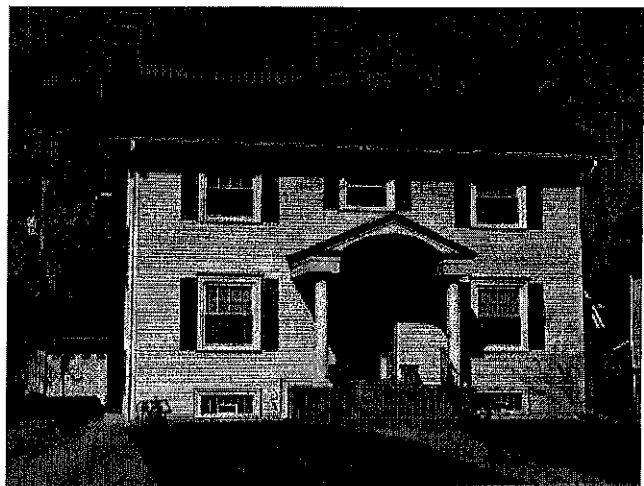


Figure 78: Charles H. Schumann House (1922), 841 N. Euclid Avenue.

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Figure 79: J.C. Burell House (1925), 603 N. Grove Avenue.

In addition to the Colonial Revival style another primary house style from this time period was the Tudor Revival. The Tudor Revival style was based on designs of medieval Europe and featured high pitched roofs, arched or Tudor arched entrances, and stucco and half-timbering in the gables. An early example of this style is the George W. Hayden House built in 1904 which has a prominent brick chimney on the main façade, stucco and half-timbering in the gables and a one-story porch with brick columns (Figure 80). The dwelling at 502 N. Oak Park Avenue built in 1910 is a more modest version but retains the basic characteristics of the Tudor Revival style in its high pitched roofline and stucco and half-timbered exterior (Figure 81). The Tudor Revival style is widely represented throughout the district.

Other revival styles of the period such as Italian Renaissance Revival and Spanish Colonial Revival were built in district during these years. Architect Frederick Schock designed the C.S. Castle House in 1924 at 647 Linden Avenue (Figure 82). This house was designed with a large arched opening on the main façade, a hipped tile roof and a corner tower with a crenellated parapet wall. A notable Spanish Colonial Revival style house in the Village is the Querin H. Cook House designed by architects Meyer and Cook in 1924. Located at 501 Linden Avenue, this three-story dwelling features arched windows, a stucco exterior and an arcaded loggia on the first floor (Figure 83).

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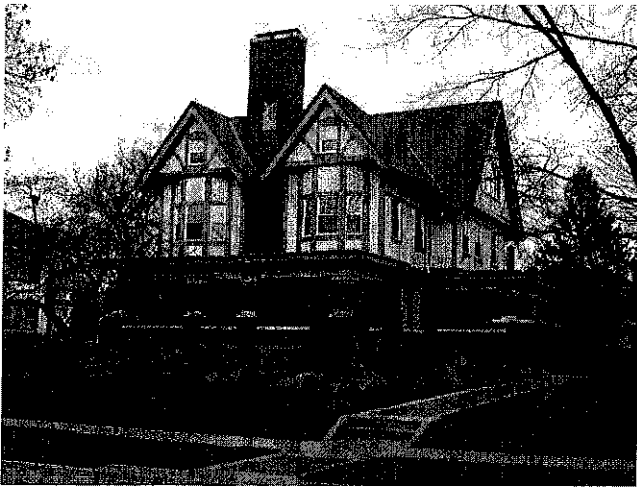


Figure 80: George W. Hayden House (1905),
538 N. Euclid Avenue.



Figure 81: 502 N. Grove Avenue (1910).



Figure 82: The Querin H. Cook House was
designed in the Spanish Colonial Revival
style in 1922 at 501 Linden Avenue.



Figure 83: The C.S. Castle House was built in
1924 in the Italian Renaissance Revival
style at 647 Linden Avenue.

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Between 1900 and 1910, Oak Park's population doubled to over 20,000 residents and many of the lots in the district had been developed. Those that remained vacant were gradually filled in over the next three decades with dwellings largely exhibiting the Prairie style, revival styles and the popular Bungalow. The Bungalow (also called the Craftsman style) in America was first introduced in California and by the 1910s was one of the most popular house types in the country. It was characterized by its horizontal proportions, heights of one- and one-half stories, large porches, wide eaves and the use of simple decorative elements such as wood elements called knee brace brackets and purlins. Examples of the Bungalow style in the district include the dwellings at 716 and 720 N. Ridgeland Avenue both built in 1913 (Figure 84-85). Both are one- and one-half stories, of frame construction and have knee brace brackets at the eaves. Both were built with square frame columns and with enclosed sun porches on the main facades.

By 1941, the majority of the lots in the district and Village had been developed and relatively few new dwellings were constructed in the district after this time. Not only was the district largely built out by this time, but World War II slowed construction during the 1940s. After the war construction resumed, and during the 1940s and 1950s several lots were developed with dwellings designed in the Ranch style. Houses in this style were also built to replace earlier homes destroyed by fire or razed to accommodate the modern homes. Since the mid-1950s, few new buildings have been constructed in the historic district and more than 95% of the properties date from before 1941, the end date of the district's period of significance.



Figure 84: 716 N. Ridgeland Avenue (1913).



Figure 85: 720 N. Ridgeland Avenue (1913).

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Figure 86: Bungalow at 823 N. Marion Street built ca. 1920.

Although single family dwellings make up the majority of the buildings constructed in the historic district, other property types include apartment buildings, churches, commercial buildings and social buildings. As the population of Oak Park increased dramatically in the early 20th century, numerous developers sought to address the rising demand for housing by building apartment buildings within a few blocks of the railroad line and the train stations connecting with downtown Chicago. The largest of these is the Santa Maria Apartments constructed on N. Oak Park Avenue in 1924 (Figure 87). This three-story apartment building was designed with elaborate Tudor Revival decoration and has several inset courtyards. Another example is the four-story apartment building also built in the Tudor Revival style ca. 1920 and designed by architect A.J. Buerger, Jr. (Figure 88). A later example is the four-story apartment building designed in the Art Deco style in 1928 at 225-227 N. Grove Avenue (Figure 89). Designed by the firm of Dubin and Isenberg, this building features ornate terra cotta surrounds at the entrances.

Within the district are a number of churches built from the 1890s to the 1920s to serve the Village's congregations. Most of these churches were designed in the Gothic Revival style and include the First Methodist Church on N. Oak Park Avenue built in 1923 and the Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church on N. Fair Oaks Avenue built in 1926 (Figures 90-91). Both of these churches were designed with stone and concrete exteriors and have details such as wall buttresses and Gothic arched stained glass windows. The Prairie style Trinity Lutheran Chapel and Church at 300 N. Ridgeland Avenue was designed by Eben E. Roberts and completed 1909-1916 (Figure 92).

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Figure 87: Santa Maria Apartments (1924),
208-232 N. Oak Park Avenue.



Figure 89: Apartments at 225-227 N. Grove
built in 1928.



Figure 88: Apartments built ca. 1920 at
1035-1037 Superior Street.

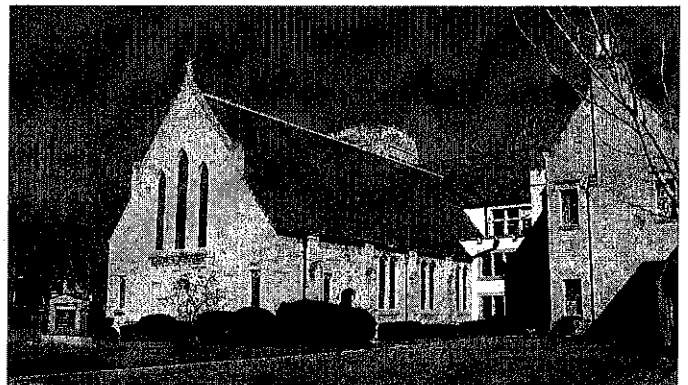


Figure 90: Fair Oaks Presbyterian Church
(1926), 744 Fair Oaks Avenue.

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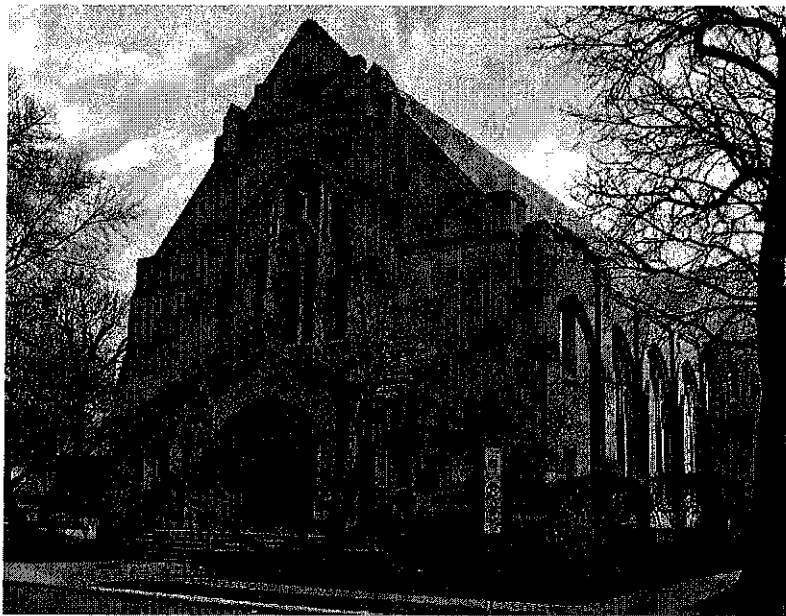


Figure 91: First Methodist Church (1923), 324 N. Oak Park Avenue.

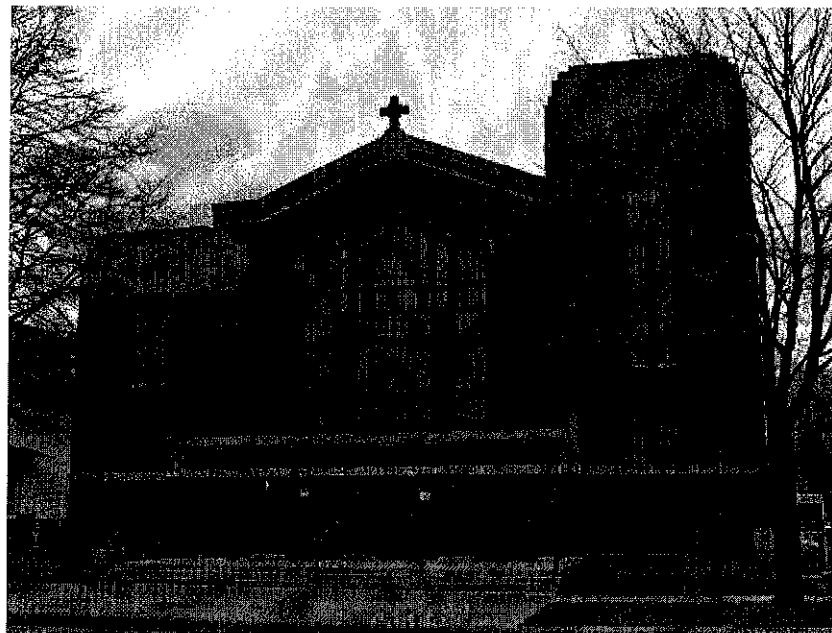


Figure 92: Prairie style Trinity Lutheran Church and Chapel at 300 N. Ridgeland Avenue.

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Commercial buildings in the district are largely confined to a small cluster at the corner of Chicago and Ridgeland Avenues and a larger area centered on Chicago Avenue and Marion Street. On Chicago Avenue are several multi-story brick and terra cotta buildings that were designed to have apartments in the upper floors and retail establishments on the first floor. These were built primarily in the 1920s and include the Nicholas Building completed in 1925 and designed by Eben E. Roberts (Figure 93). The building was designed with a curved corner bay and with classical detailing on the first-story. Other commercial buildings along this section of Chicago Avenue were built primarily in the 1910s and 1920s and contained businesses such as hardware stores, beauty shops, grocery stores and other neighborhood services.

In addition to the commercial buildings, the district also contains several early 20th century social buildings and the Oak Park – River Forest High School. Buildings constructed for social purposes include the YMCA on N. Oak Park Avenue, the Nineteenth Century Club at 178 Forest Avenue, and the Oak Park Club built in 1923 on Ontario Street (Figure 94). This club was built to serve as a social hall for the Village's upper class and contained a swimming pool, bowling alley and dining room. The building was designed in the Italian Renaissance Revival style and has been converted into condominiums. The Oak Park – River Forest High School was originally built in 1906 and was continually expanded and redesigned throughout the 20th century (Figure 95). The building continues to serve as the primary high school for Village students.



Figure 93: Nicholas Building (1925) 1100-06
Chicago Avenue.



Figure 94: Oak Park Club (1923), 721
Ontario Street.

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Figure 95: Oak Park and River Forest High School (1906 with additions) 201 N. Scoville Avenue.

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FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S CAREER AFTER OAK PARK

The Frank Lloyd Wright – Prairie School of Architecture Historic District is significant under criterion B for its association with architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Although Wright left Oak Park in 1909, his influence continued to shape architecture throughout his long life. Wright left Oak Park at the height of his influence on the Prairie style but even then he felt a need to explore new avenues for his talent. Leaving behind his architectural practice coincided with his highly publicized affair and abandonment of his family. Wright left Oak Park with Mamah Cheney and upon his return to the United States he began to build a home for them on a portion of the Wright family farm in Spring Green, Wisconsin. Named Taliesin, a Welsh term meaning "shining brow," Wright's new home was a perfect example of his philosophy of organic architecture and is still considered one of his masterpieces. The low, one-story dwelling subtly merged into the Wisconsin hillside on which it was built, wrapping around the earth in such a manner that it appeared to be a natural outcropping. Building and site are fused in a manner that complements rather than dominates the setting. Its stone terraces and floors, large expanses of glass, and overhanging eaves merge the outdoors and indoors. Rooms are loosely defined and flow into one another and create interplay of light and shadow as the sun crosses over the valley.¹³⁶



Figure 96: Taliesin, Spring Green, Wisconsin.

¹³⁶ Visser, *Prairie School in Wisconsin*, 166; Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 60.

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Taliesin became Wright's passion. Over the years he continuously reinvented it through moving furniture, adding on, or other alterations. In his autobiography, Wright fondly refers to the spirit of Taliesin: "I knew well that no house should ever be on a hill or on anything. It should be of the hill. Belonging to it. Hill and house should live together each the happier for the other."¹³⁷ Wright brought Mamah to Taliesin in 1911 after her divorce was final. He established a studio there and maintained his Chicago office. Over time the locals began to accept Mamah, and she and Wright lived a relatively quiet existence in their Wisconsin hillside home.

In 1913, Wright was commissioned to design Midway Gardens in Chicago, a large collection of restaurants, clubrooms and bars gathered around a central outdoor bandstand. This was a significant commission for Wright and served as a new turn in his career. Not only did it provide needed income for him, but it also brought him considerable recognition, a key step in putting the bad publicity of the past behind him and moving forward.¹³⁸

It was during the Midway Gardens project that a tragic event occurred to alter Wright's life deeply. In 1914, a crazed servant at Taliesin set the home on fire and then brutally murdered Mamah, and six others, including her two young children who were visiting at the time, as they tried to escape the burning building. Wright was at the Midway Gardens worksite when he received the call, which only informed him of the fire. As he rushed back to Wisconsin, he learned of the horrific murders. The culprit was caught but committed suicide, thus leaving his actions a mystery.

The tragedy at Taliesin devastated Wright and marked a turning point in his life. For nearly the following two decades, he experienced a difficult period of personal and professional struggles and hardship. The loss of Mamah was deep, and Wright withdrew from life emotionally. "The gaping black hole left by the fire in the beautiful hillside seemed a charred and ugly scar upon my own life—on all life," he later wrote in his autobiography.¹³⁹ Only the rebuilding of Taliesin gradually pulled him out of the depths of despair. "In action there is release from anguish, he wrote, "Work only was bearable."¹⁴⁰ He redesigned the portion of the house where the tragedy occurred in order to erase its memory, and built a new wing.

The events at Taliesin made headlines and the public, which had previously passed harsh judgment upon Wright, now poured out its heartfelt sympathy. Wright received a number of letters of condolences and support. One letter especially struck a cord with him and he arranged

¹³⁷ Wright, *An Autobiography*, as quoted in Visser, *Prairie School in Wisconsin*, 163.

¹³⁸ Copplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 49; McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 63.

¹³⁹ Huxtable, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 140.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

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to meet its author, Miriam Noel, a wealthy divorcee. Miriam was an intelligent and worldly woman, had lived abroad, and exuded an air of sophistication. A sculptor, she, like Wright, enjoyed projecting an artistic self-image through dress and behavior. Wright found her intriguing and the two became an item. Over time, however, Miriam began to display erratic behavior. Her emotional instability was worsened by drug use and escalated over time. Prone to fierce mood swings, fits of unreasonable anger, and destructive, irrational actions, Miriam would likely be diagnosed a schizophrenic today.¹⁴¹

In the spring of 1915, Miriam moved to Taliesin with Wright, who still remained legally married to Catherine. Unlike Mamah, who had kept a low profile, Miriam sought the spotlight and was quick to make statements to the press regarding Wright, his work, or their relationship. Wright designed several houses between 1914 and 1930 but his main project from this period was the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, Japan. Wright worked on this massive project for eight years with design and construction stretching from 1914 to 1922. Wright immersed himself in his work on the Imperial Hotel and it became an escape for him from many of his troubles. Wright had always been an admirer and collector of Japanese art and appreciated Japanese concepts of beauty. The Imperial Hotel presented him with a refreshing new challenge from his residential work. Japan was free of European architectural traditions and gave him free reign to explore new forms, designs, and materials. The work would also increase his international fame and renown.¹⁴²

The size and magnitude of the Imperial Hotel made it a lengthy and difficult commission. Wright left for Tokyo in December 1916 and spent most of the following seven years there, returning to the United States only for brief periods. Wright worked tirelessly on the project and was involved in every detail including designing furniture for the hotel and selecting the dinnerware to be used in the dining room. Earthquake prevention was a major obstacle to overcome in the design process. Wright devised a method of shock absorption for the building by placing the central supports into soft earth, thus allowing the floor slabs to be held up "as a waiter balances a tray on his fingers."¹⁴³ The completed building was a unique blend of Eastern aesthetics and Western construction techniques, and Wright's earthquake prevention system proved successful. Soon after completion of the structure, Tokyo experienced one of the worst earthquakes in Japan's history. The quake left most of the buildings in Tokyo destroyed or damaged, but the Imperial Hotel remained intact. Wright, by this time back in the United States, received a telegram stating, "hotel stands undamaged as monument of your genius."¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 141-142.

¹⁴² Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 63-66; Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 97-98.

¹⁴³ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 70.

¹⁴⁴ Huxtable, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 147.

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The intense work on the Imperial Hotel left Wright exhausted. Toward the end of the project his health was suffering and he left Japan in 1922 before construction was completed. His success in Tokyo was followed by several lean years. During Wright's absence, the Prairie School designs dropped from favor in the U.S. and architectural trends turned back toward classicism. Few commissions came forth and only two of Wright's projects were actually constructed between 1923 and 1933. These two projects were the D.D. Martin House in Buffalo, New York, and the house of Richard Lloyd Jones, Wright's cousin, in Tulsa, Oklahoma, neither of which were considered exceptional examples of Wright's work.¹⁴⁵ By the late 1920s, Wright's career seemed to be over. At age sixty he was regarded as "the grand old man of architecture," a man whose zenith had passed, "a voice from a past era."¹⁴⁶

Personal difficulties continued to plague him as well. Soon after he returned from Japan Catherine granted Wright a divorce (after a separation of over twelve years), and in 1924 he married Miriam Noel, even though their relationship remained turbulent. Within five months of their marriage, Miriam left him. She sued for divorce with a claim that Wright was abusive. During this same year, Wright's mother and his former mentor, Louis Sullivan, died. Another fire took place at Taliesin in 1925, this time caused by faulty electrical wiring. Strapped for cash, Wright sold his Oak Park home to raise money. The bank began to foreclose on Taliesin and Wright was forced to leave. Much of his furniture, art and other belongings were auctioned off, and finally a group of Wright's friends and family came to his aid by organizing Wright, Incorporated. This corporation took control of Wright's finances and estate and sold shares of stock, thus selling interest against his future earning power.¹⁴⁷

During this emotionally stressful period, Wright met twenty-six year old Olga Ivanova Milanoff Hizenburg from Yugoslavia. Olgivanna, as she was called, was in the process of getting a divorce at the time and had one daughter, Svetlana, who was four years old. She and Wright developed a strong bond and in February of 1925 she and her daughter moved in with him at Taliesin. By the end of the year, Olgivanna had given birth to their child, Iovanna. Olgivanna was a smart, sensible, and strong woman and they married on August 25, 1928. The marriage thrived, and Olgivanna continued to be Wright's partner throughout the remainder of his life. The marriage was "a tremendous stabilizing element for him – her devotion and strength brought his genius forward again."¹⁴⁸ The marriage also renewed a family life for Wright. He doted on his young daughter, Iovanna, and Olgivanna's daughter, Svetlana, adored him and called him "Daddy

¹⁴⁵ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 114.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁴⁷ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 72-75, 81; Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 75-76.

¹⁴⁸ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 128.

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Frank." This stability helped to reinvigorate Wright's creativity, and Wright entered a new period of productivity and vision.

Just as things were settling down for Frank and Olgivanna, the stock market crashed in 1929 and plunged the U.S. economy into a severe depression. Although Wright had few designs constructed during the 1930s, he continued to develop new ideas, experimenting with new building systems, and exploring new forms and new concepts of space that became prototypes for his later buildings. He devised designs for apartment complexes, a ranch development in Southern California, a Chicago skyscraper, and designs for low- and mid-income housing. Wright also devised plans for rural areas and created his model town – Broadacre City.¹⁴⁹ These emerging ideas were "innovative, strong, and predictive of styles and techniques that would become standard within thirty years."¹⁵⁰ He also lectured at universities, wrote numerous articles, and in 1932 published the first version of his autobiography.

Wright was constantly evolving and changing his designs even once they were under construction, and sometimes even after construction was completed. Never wholly satisfied once a design was drawn, his ideas continued to develop and he never hesitated to rework or rebuild. He is often quoted as saying, "The architect's most effective tools are the eraser in the drafting room and the wrecking bar on the job."¹⁵¹ Wright's constant reworking of concepts and designs led to developing new styles. Whereas other architects often focused on one style throughout their whole career, Wright never fastened himself to one particular style. "What we did yesterday, we won't do today," he would say. "And what we don't do tomorrow will not be what we'll be doing the day after."¹⁵²

Wright's relationships with and opinions of other architects was notoriously well-known. He particularly disliked most European architects, whom he thought were trying to take over the profession in America. Of French architect Le Corbusier, Wright would say, "Well, now that he's finished one building, he'll go write four books about it."¹⁵³ Wright especially detested the Bauhaus school of architecture. When Walter Gropius, German leader of the Bauhaus school was in the region and wanted to come and meet the leading American architect, Wright refused. "What he stands for and what I stand for are poles apart," Wright declared. "Our ideas could

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 116-119.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 119.

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 64.

¹⁵² Ibid., 70.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 65.

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never merge. In a sense, we're professional enemies—but he's an outside enemy. At least I'm staying in my own country."¹⁵⁴

Also in the 1930s, Wright became increasingly interested in social issues and designed what he termed the Usonian house, an affordable dwelling for the average family. The house featured an attached cantilevered carport and its interior space had an open plan designed to enhance family interaction. This was largely done by moving the kitchen to an area where public and private spaces intersected.¹⁵⁵ Usonian houses were single-story structures and typically featured a glass-faced patio and generous window space.

Economical features of the house included a concrete slab foundation with built-in hot-water pipes that produced heat that rose through the floors, and an insulated slab roof that housed the ventilation system while the roof's wide overhang protected the exterior. There was also extensive use of glass, stained wood, and brick walls so the need for paint, plaster, and wallpaper were eliminated. Wright's first Usonian house was built in 1937 and the style became increasingly popular over the next several years. It eventually became a prototype of the modern ranch house, which was one of the most widely constructed styles in the United States during the 1950s and 1960s.¹⁵⁶

Encouraged by his wife Olgivanna, Wright established the Taliesin Fellowship at his Wisconsin home in 1932. Wright took his aunts' old Hillside Home School, which had closed soon after the 1914 fire at Taliesin, and turned it into a living, working, and learning facility for architectural apprentices. The young apprentices built a drafting room, added dormitories, and converted the gym into a theater. Participants in the Fellowship learned by doing and they became involved in every aspect of the complex. In addition to drafting architectural designs, they excavated land and constructed buildings. In the carpentry shop they built furniture and cabinets, as well as windows, doors, trim and other details.¹⁵⁷

Some apprentices came and went, but many relished the life at Taliesin and especially thrived on being in the presence of Frank Lloyd Wright. Many stayed for long periods of time. Edgar Tafel, one of Wright's first apprentices at Taliesin stayed for nine years. Like many of the apprentices, he was a young architecture student and saw Wright as "a giant to look up to, the creative source to draw from."¹⁵⁸ Taliesin was not limited to architecture students, but also

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 66.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 119, 190-191; Upton, *Architecture in the United States*, 43.

¹⁵⁶ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 90-93.

¹⁵⁷ Boulton, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Architect*, 77- 79, 84. Visser, *Prairie School in Wisconsin*, 168-169.

¹⁵⁸ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 10.

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included painters, sculptors, and musicians. Both Wright and Olgivanna nurtured a creative atmosphere at Taliesin and encouraged all to participate in a variety of activities. In addition to learning organic design, apprentices could take up painting, philosophy, or drama. They could also study molding, casting or woodworking.¹⁵⁹

Taliesin was something of a self-sufficient communal operation with apprentices fully involved in every aspect of life. Work and responsibilities did not end with building design and construction, but extended to household chores, farm duties, and any other tasks that needed to be accomplished. Apprentices worked in the fields, orchards, and gardens that made up the small farm at Taliesin. They plowed fields, planted and tended crops, raised chickens, milked cows, and slopped the pigs. They husked corn and made cider from the farms apple orchard crop. They grew most of their own food and prepared and served the meals. Any vegetables left over were taken to a nearby market to sell. They logged timber for wood, worked the limestone and sandstone quarries for stone, and cut ice from the river. Apprentices also worked on the complex's plumbing and electricity after learning as much as they could from hired workmen.¹⁶⁰

Many of Wright's critics charged him with using his apprentices to do hard labor and sustain his property while paying for the "privilege" of being in his presence. Later biographers have also criticized Wright for placing himself in the role of grand master, with no room for criticism or challenges to his work or ideas. But applications to join the Fellowship poured in from around the world and those who sought to join were eager to be involved with Wright on any level.¹⁶¹ His dynamic personality "swept everyone in, conquering by charm as much as by strength," . . . "people who worked for him were absorbed into all the facets of his life."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 86.

¹⁶⁰ Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 146-162.

¹⁶¹ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 86-87.

¹⁶² Tafel, *Apprentice to Genius*, 63.

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Figure 97: Fallingwater, Bear Run, Pennsylvania.

With the renewed creative energy of Taliesin and a stable personal life, Wright entered a new productive stage in his life in which he gained substantial new success and recognition. Much of the impetus behind Wright's newfound popularity came from his design of Fallingwater, a vacation home for Pittsburgh department store owner Edgar Kaufmann, Sr. built in 1936. Kaufmann's son was an apprentice for Wright and encouraged his father to employ the architect for the project. The elder Kaufmann took Wright to the wooded property on which he wanted to build, and, upon Wright's request, pointed out his favorite spots to sit and reflect. The most favored location was on a boulder atop a rock ledge overlooking a small waterfall and stream. Wright designed the house to sit right over the waterfall with large cantilevered terrace slabs extending out in all four directions. Built largely of reinforced concrete and stone, the resulting tri-level home was a dramatic blend of modern technology and a natural setting. The numerous terraces, deeply projecting balconies, and trellises combined with bands of glass walls expertly blur the line between outside and inside – the perfect example of Wright's philosophy of organic architecture.¹⁶³ Fallingwater was immediately recognized as a masterpiece and has continued to be recognized as a "landmark of modern architecture and a work of genius."¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Coplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 74; Upton, *Architecture in the United States*, 83-84; McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 88-89.

¹⁶⁴ Coplestone, *A Retrospective View*, 74.

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Fallingwater once again put Frank Lloyd Wright, then at age seventy, in the forefront of American architecture, and subsequent commissions proved that he was far from past his prime. Around the time construction on Fallingwater finished, Wright received a commission to design a corporate building for the Johnson Wax Company. Completed in 1939, the building employs rounded corners and streamlined surfaces to produce a modern appearance. The building reflected company president Herbert Johnson's attitude toward the workplace and its employees. Johnson had a strong personal involvement with his workers and wanted to instill a family feeling to the workplace. Unlike Fallingwater, the Johnson Wax Building did not strive to blend exterior and interior, but instead purposely separated the two. Situated in an industrial area, the building was designed without conventional windows in order to shut out the harsh exterior setting. In an effort to bring light to the building and give it a pleasant interior atmosphere, Wright designed the main office as a large open room ringed by balconies. Tall light pillars with lily-pad-like crowns extend to the ceiling, and skylights allow ample natural light.¹⁶⁵



Figure 98: Wingspread with its four wings extending from a central core, Wind Point, Wisconsin.

Herbert Johnson also commissioned Wright to design a home for him in Wind Point, Wisconsin. Named Wingspread, the home consisted of a central core with four wings extending to create a pinwheel effect. The house features a large curved chimney and long rows of windows.

¹⁶⁵ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 95-98.

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Completed in the late 1930s, it is considered Wright's last Prairie School design.¹⁶⁶ Also in the late 1930s, Wright built Taliesin West in Scottsdale, Arizona. This second home for Wright and his family was much like its Wisconsin counterpart and served as a winter learning and working complex for the continuing Taliesin Fellowship.

The Johnson Wax Building reinvigorated Wright and his optimism and confidence reached new heights. The building was a huge success and Wright's reputation continued to rise. In 1938, the magazine *Architectural Forum* devoted an entire issue to Frank Lloyd Wright, and Time printed a major piece on him and called him "the nation's greatest architect."¹⁶⁷ He continued to receive a number of accolades, and awards, both nationally and internationally. In 1940, the Museum of Modern Art in New York City held a retrospective of Wright's work. Other important works of Wright's that occurred in this late period of his career include the tower of St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery in New York and the Beth Shalom Synagogue in Elkins Park, Pennsylvania.

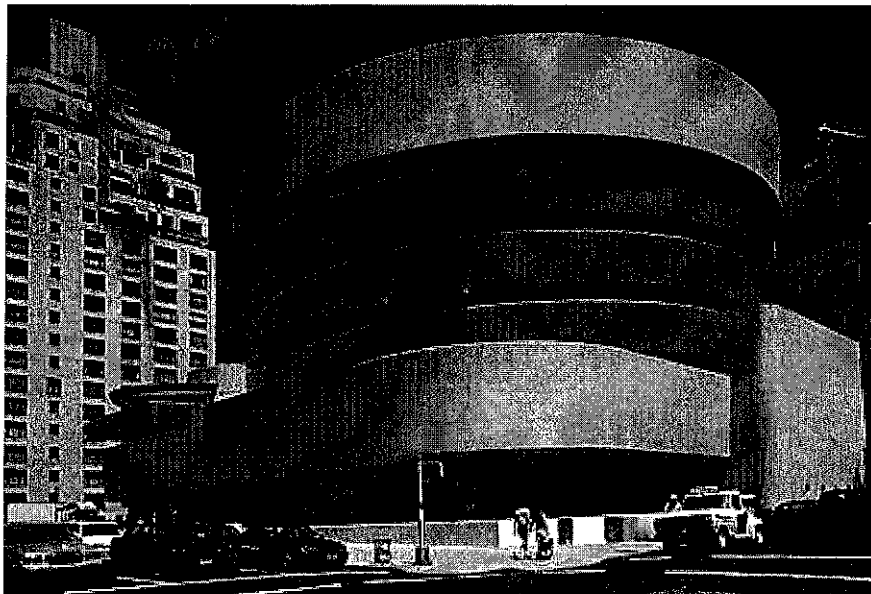


Figure 99: Guggenheim Museum, New York City.

By the 1950s Wright was aging but remained vigorous. In his late eighties, Wright designed one of his most famous works, the Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Construction began on the building in 1957 when Wright was ninety years old. The building's spiral-shaped plan and

¹⁶⁶ Costantino, *Frank Lloyd Wright Design*, 93-94.

¹⁶⁷ McDonough, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, 99.

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sloped floors provided a unique layout and a feeling of continuous movement. Visitors moved down spiral ramps to trace an artist's career and could gain a perspective on the whole collection without retracing their steps. The building lacked posts, beams, and confining rooms. Likened to a sculpture, the building sought to unite form and function – a work of art to house other works of art. Many criticized the Guggenheim stating that its curved walls are not conducive to hanging paintings and the sloped ramps are awkward and uncomfortable for patrons. However, others have claimed it to be one of Wright's finest achievements arguing that in the Guggenheim Wright "accomplished the contradictory goals of fluidity and permanence, of stability and change."¹⁶⁸

Unfortunately, Wright did not live to see the Guggenheim completed. He died just shy of his 92nd birthday on April 9, 1959 in a Phoenix hospital following a minor surgery. The Guggenheim museum opened the following fall. Wright's apprentices carried his body back home to Spring Green, Wisconsin. Following a Unitarian funeral service attended by family and friends, his coffin was carried by a horse-drawn farm wagon to the small family cemetery near Taliesin, where he was buried near his mother and his beloved Mamah (Wright was later disinterred and buried near Olgivanna). Wright was mourned the world over and left a large void in the lives of many of his friends, family, and colleagues.¹⁶⁹ Wright's influence has endured and his innovative ideas and concepts continue to inspire the world of architecture. Wright's legacy of creative design makes him one of the most important architects of the 20th century.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 102-103.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 105-106.

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LIST OF KNOWN ARCHITECTS

The following list includes all known architects and companies that designed buildings in Oak Park between ca. 1865 and 1929.

Allison, Lyman
Allison, Robert
Arnold, Wesley
Ashby, G.W.
Barfield, William G.
Beaudry, R.L.
Bernhard, William
Bialles, Theodore P.
Bird, Samuel E.
Brand, Herbert A.
Braucher, Ernest
Brom, Lawrence
Bruns, B.J.
Buck, Lawrence
Buerger, Albert, Jr.
Burnham & Root
Burrell, J.C.
Burtar, A.G.
Cable, M.L.
Carson, G.B.
Cerny, Jerry
Chiaro, John A.
Dahlquist, Clarence
DeButts, E.E.
DeMoney, F.D.
Druski, William
Dubin & Isenberg
Dunning, Max
Ellis, Frank
Fiddelke, Henry
Fifield, William
Foltz & Brand
Fortin, J.T.

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Fox & Fox
France, Roy
Frank, D.W., Jr.
Fyfe, James L.
Gamsey, George O.
Gibb, William
Gilbert, C.W.
Graham, Anderson, Probst and White
Harlev, William Jr.
Hansen, H.M.
Harper, William
Herr, Thornton A.
Hine, Cicero
Holmes & Flinn
Holsman, Henry K.
Hotchkiss, Roy
Howe, Stanley W.
Hyde, Robert M.
Jacobs, Arthur
Johnson, H.E.
Johnston, W.K.
Koster, John
Kramer, William
Kristen, Charles
Lagal, J.G.
Landsea, Gilbert
Lewis, Jacob
Loewenberg & Loewenberg
Lundstand, J.A.
Maiwurm, Arthur
Maher, George W.
Malina, John
Meyer & Cook
McNett, Leon
Moody, A.L.
Mueller, H.F.
Nimmons & Fellows
Ohrenstein & Hild & Ostergau, R.C.

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Page, Harvey L.
Pagels, William
Patton, Normand S.
Patton & Fisher
Patton & Miller
Pearson, George
Perkins, C.A.
Perkins, Fellows & Hamilton
Pond & Pond
Presto, William C.
Reff, George W.
Roberts, Eben E.
Roberts Eben E. and Roberts, Elmer
Rocher, J.B. & Son
Rosenberg & Pierce
Ross, Frank P.
Rowland, William
Runde, Otto
Rynerston, F.J.
Sanders, L.M.
Scheidt, Louis A.
Schock, Frederick
Seator, Sinclair M.
Seyfarth, Robert
Shaw, Howard Van Doren
Skiff, Frank V.
Spencer, N.S. and Son
Spencer and Powers
Stauber, Carl
Stanhope, Lawrence E.
Steinbach, John C.
Stevens, Harry
Tallmadge and Watson
Tunk, Frank F., and Company
Van Bergen, John S.
Van Kueren, William J.
Von Holst & Fyfe
Wadikind, A.

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Wadskier, Theodore Vigo
Wahlstrom, C.G.
Watson, Vernon
White & Christie
White & Weber
White, Charles E., Jr.
Whitney & Williams
William, E.B.
Wilson, Marble & Lamson
Wolf, Peter J.
Wolf, Sexton, Morgan & Trueax
Wolf, Sexton, Harper & Trueax
Worthmann & Steinbach
Wright, Frank Lloyd
Wright, Harvey
Wyeth, Walter H.
Zwik, Frank F., Company

BUILDERS

Over 400 individuals or companies are known to have constructed buildings in the district from ca. 1865 to 1929. A complete list of known builders is on file with the Village of Oak Park Planning Department.