



Newsletter

Stickley at the Palace

by Frank Morigi

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he spring ACSCNY meeting was held jointly with PACNY, the Preservation Association of Central New York, at the Palace Theatre in Eastwood. The Mayor of Syracuse opened the program thanking us for our support of historic preservation projects in the city and outlining new financing and tax incentive packages. Jonathan Massey, then, gave a presentation on Charles Bragdon, a Rochester architect who began his career in the Arts and Crafts style, later adding the restraint and discipline of the Georgian and Federal Revival and finally designing buildings in a simplified Modernist mode as he came under the influence of Oriental aesthetic systems and yoga. Lunch was a yummy variety of wraps and salads in the lobby café.

Following lunch, Ray Stubblebine, a photojournalist and author of the new book *Stickley's Craftsman Homes* took the stage. His hobby is going around the country finding extant houses based on the 254 house designs featured in issues of *The Craftsman* magazine from 1904 through 1916. Construction plans were available by mail from the architectural department at Stickley's Eastwood headquarters. Ray's presentation included a selection of these houses as they were rendered in the magazine and as they look today, inside and out. Exteriors were generally non-descript or simplified stylistically. Interiors featured wood detailing associated with fine furniture craftsmanship, stained glass and deep colors. Stickley's version of Arts and Crafts was considered "a way of life" – your values are reflected in your home and your home reinforces these values. It was interesting to see how building materials changed for the same design in different parts of the country – an Arts and Crafts axiom: use materials that are natural to the site.

Participants in the event included members of Gustav's family and the Audi family, the current owners of Stickley-Audi & Company. Special thanks go to Mike Heagerty for generously sharing his theatre with us.



Historic Preservation Month in Syracuse

by Bruce A. Austin

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wo not-for-profit organizations located in Syracuse, NY kicked off Historic Preservation Month with a day-long event featuring two instructive speakers, each discussing timely and timeless subjects.

Jonathan Massey, an assistant professor of architecture at Syracuse University, offered an interesting lecture entitled "Modernism and Preservation: Claude Bragdon, 1866-1946." Following a catered

luncheon, Ray Stubblebine, a photojournalist with Reuters news service, discussed Gustav Stickley's Craftsman Homes.

The Saturday, 5 May event was sponsored by the Preservation Association of Central New York (PACNY) and the Central New

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Historic Preservation Month.....continued from cover

York Arts and Crafts Society. The event was held at the Palace Theater, 2384 James Street.

Owned by Mike Heagerty, the Palace is a classical neighborhood picture palace built in the 1920s. Two years ago, the Palace won a PACNY preservation award for its renovation. Some information about the theater can be found at www.palacetheatresyracuse.com

Neighborhood picture palaces served local communities during the heyday of Hollywood movie-making. Whereas downtown theaters were typically owned by the major movie studios (e.g., Paramount, Fox, MGM, Universal, Columbia) and seated high-hundreds to thousands of patrons, the neighborhood theaters were more likely to be locally-owned (or regionally managed by smaller "chains"), served fewer customers and drew their patrons from those living in surrounding residential districts, especially those served by mass transit such as streetcars and trolleys.

The downtown venues were "first-run" locations; the theaters at which major movies premiered. Later in a movie's "run" the picture would travel in roughly co-centric circles out from the downtown locations to second- and third-run locations. Admission prices were at premium levels downtown and diminished progressively the farther out in the film's run it traveled.

Massey's thesis focused on Rochester, NY architect Claude Bragdon. A contemporary of Harvey Ellis (who worked briefly but influentially for Stickley) and M. Louise Stowell, Bragdon helped found the Rochester Arts and Crafts Society. Bragdon is well known for his Rochester-area designs including the Country Club of Rochester (in the modern English country style; it was furnished with Gustav Stickley's products), the Bevier Memorial Building for Rochester's Mechanic's Institute (now Rochester Institute of Technology) and the New York Central Railroad station in downtown Rochester (sadly, one preservation "failure" as it was torn down years ago).

Bragdon held a certain fondness for eastern mysticism, yoga and vegetarianism. Eschewing tobacco and (mostly) alcohol, Bragdon's oeuvre hews closely to a geometric regularity that he asserted governed architecture as it does life: the square, the circle and the triangle are, he believed, nature's geometry and provide proportional control for that which we humans build.

Stubblebine's talk served a dual purpose: to educate listeners as well as to promote his recently published book, *Stickley's Craftsman Homes: Plans, Drawings, Photographs* (Gibbs Smith publishers, 2006). A hefty tome, the full-sized hardcover book runs more than 500 pages and must weigh close to five pounds.

Some 250 Craftsman homes are discussed in the book. He signed copies of the book following his presentation (Copies are still available at Dalton's, 1931 James Street, www.daltons.com).

The author has spent years on the road searching out extant examples of houses built from plans first published through Gustav Stickley's Craftsman Workshops. His professional background as a photographer enhances reader understanding of the structures by his careful eye for detail and crisp images. In addition to his book and professional life, Stubblebine is also a trustee at Craftsman Farms, the historic Morris Plains, NJ home of Gustav Stickley's empire (see www.stickleymuseum.org).

Significant – and somewhat ironic – among the Syracuse-area properties requiring restoration is Gustav Stickley's own home on Columbus Avenue in Syracuse. Now owned by the E.J. Audi Company, present owners of the L. & J.G. Stickley furniture firm, the house features a number of unique Craftsman architectural elements.

Among those in attendance were members of the Audi family. Edward Audi reported that the Stickley (www.Stickley.com) firm's museum had opened in April, one month previous. Located on the top floor of the old L. & J.G. Stickley factory in Fayetteville, the Museum affords insight to the 100-year old company (see www.stickleymuseum.com).

Syracuse Mayor Matt Driscoll initiated the day's events with a brief talk italicizing the significance of historical preservation. Though a little like preaching to the choir, Driscoll noted significant advances in municipal, regional and state-level support for preservation. The inspirational and congratulatory talk concluded with Driscoll urging his audience to make their agenda for preservation known to NY Governor Spitzer, whom he characterized as a friend of preservation.

The successful day-long event concluded with closing remarks offered by Dr. Samuel Gruber, president of PACNY. The two groups attract an enthusiastic membership; about 100 people are members of the Arts & Crafts organization and more than 250 belong to the Preservation Association. For more information on Arts and Crafts Society (www.acscny.org) and the Preservation Association (www.pacny.net), visit their web sites.

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THE ARTS & CRAFTS SOCIETY OF CENTRAL NEW YORK, founded in 1994, is a not-for-profit educational organization dedicated to the study of the Arts and Crafts Movement through a schedule of lectures, symposia, tours, and other educational programs. Its mission is to help increase public awareness and to promote preservation of the rich cultural heritage in Upstate New York. This legacy includes the work of important architects and craftspersons and holdings in historical collections and libraries.

The Arts & Crafts are Alive and Well in Central New York

From Frank Morigi

The ACSCNY trip to Aurora, New York in June, offered the participant a contrast in Arts and Crafts styles. At the Wells College Book Arts Center, we learned nineteenth century hand printing and binding techniques, while at MacKenzie-Childs, just up the road, we saw the Arts and Crafts ideal of handcrafted production goods for the home (unfortunately at unreasonable prices - the same problem they had in nineteenth century England) reach into the twenty-first century for inspiration.

Wells Collage was founded in the 1870's by Henry Wells, who was also the force behind Wells-Fargo and American Express. The BAC is located in Morgan Hall, a comfortable red brick Victorian built in 1879. Terry Chouinard, the director, reviewed the history of the BAC begun in the 1930's by J.J. Lankes, a woodcut artist, and Victor Hammer, a type designer and printer. The Center holds classes for Wells students and workshops for the public. Books and broadsides are produced using a variety of antique presses and binding techniques. We became familiar with the BAC's signature typeface, American Uncial, and looked at a collection of hand printed artist signed books including a beautiful quarto series of Shakespeare's plays spanning the past 150 years, each hand done by a different artistic team.

Each participant completed the printing of an octavo size page on both sides. The text was set in Monotype Dante and the layouts included a woodcut and a photo polymer plate. This printed page was folded four times. A photo plate frontispiece and heavy paper cover were added. The pages were hand sewn and the top, bottom and right side were trimmed to create a twenty page booklet, A History of Book Arts at Wells College. A dust cover was printed with the booklet's title and we each had our own copy of the booklet "right off the press."

The group also toured Wells Main Building, an eclectic 1870 building with hints of Germanic Gothic on the exterior and a combination of Arts and Crafts and Queen Anne detail in the interior. The attached cafeteria is a beautiful example of a Gothic great hall with carved hammer beam ceiling and walk-in stone fireplaces. The public rooms were pleasantly restored by the Pleasant Rowland Foundation. Rowland was a Wells grad, famous for creating the American Girl doll series.

A gourmet lunch was served at the newly renovated Aurora Inn, which dates back to 1833. In fact, the whole of Aurora-on-Cayuga, a very small college town, is on the National Register with over 1000 eighteenth and nineteenth century buildings listed. A stop at Dorie's, a well known old fashion ice cream parlor cooled our taste buds for the next design extravaganza – a tour of the Victorian farmhouse at the MacKenzie-Childs complex. Victoria MacKenzie-Childs used the house as her home and her idea laboratory for her

over-the-top pattern-on-pattern home furnishing ideas. The interiors of the three storey wood structure are whimsical and artistic and very much hand made and hand decorated – furniture, ceramics, glassware, enamel-ware. The house affords a beautiful view of Cayuga Lake and the surrounding farm land. A group of contemporary horse barns have been built to house



Demonstration of the art of the book at Wells College Book Arts Center

the craft workshops and decorator studios. At the retail shop, Victoria's dollhouse, about six feet high and furnished with miniatures of her original designs, is exhibited.

The group stopped in Auburn on the return to tour the 1894 Willard Memorial Chapel. The complete interior was designed, furnished and decorated by the Tiffany Glass and Decorating Co. and is intact except for original wall finishes. Beautiful stained glass windows in patterns that combine Celtic knot and Moorish motifs compliment gold chandeliers with hanging turtle back glass panels. The ceiling is Gothic inspired open beam, carved oak with gold stenciling. The jeweled and glass mosaic inlaid furnishings and pulpit sparkle with light and float on a Celtic knot mosaic floor. A large gilded bas-relief with figures personifying faith, hope and charity commands the back of the chapel. The Romanesque Revival Exterior is of gray limestone with red sandstone striping and framing elements.



A Visit to Pleasant Home

The John Farson House, Oak Park, Illinois, 1897

George Washington Maher, Architect

By Bill Bowen

For the admirer of American residential design who regards The Home as the ultimate expression of romantic utopian ideals, Oak Park, Illinois is without question an architectural mecca. Internationally known as the location of the greatest concentration of master architect Frank Lloyd Wright's early work, this Chicago suburb boasts as well numerous houses by such Prairie School contemporaries as Charles White, Robert Spencer, John Van Bergen, and the firm of Tallmadge and Watson. Oak Park is indeed a wonderland of the American house.

This past May, my wife Joanne Capella and I journeyed west to Chicagoland to participate in the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust's annual major fund raising event, Wright Plus. Each year organizers of this housewalk usually include at least three houses by Wright himself, a handful of prairie and arts & crafts domiciles by other architects, and a grand Victorian structure thrown in for comparison purposes. The opportunity to see interiors of privately owned Wright prairie houses, especially the recently restored landmark Arthur Heurtley House of 1902, was the fulfillment of a long held dream for us.

One day during the planning phase of our trip, Joanne asked me, "What do you know about the architect George Washington Maher?" I replied that his name was familiar to me, that I had taken note of photographs of his work published in books on Prairie School architecture, and that his houses, judging from those photographs, had always struck me as idiosyncratic, to put it kindly, even flat-out odd. Indeed, images of Maher's residential designs, while fascinating, conveyed an exotic, almost tropical design aesthetic to these eyes, and I never quite knew what to make of them, nor could I see what made them "prairie" at first glance.

In her research on Oak Park, Joanne had found a site about "Pleasant Home," Maher's John Farson House of 1897, now operated as a house museum. I immediately recognized the

Farson House as the most often published example of Maher's work. "Let's check it out if we can fit it in our schedule," Joanne said.

We did manage to fit in a visit to the Farson house, and what we found at the end of our leisurely stroll to the corner of the intersection of Pleasant Street and Home Avenue in Oak Park was a revelation of great American domestic architecture. Our visit to Pleasant Home ended up being the surprise

highlight of our entire trip.

Space here does not allow a detailed architectural analysis of the Farson House. It must be said, however, that the front elevation immediately expresses prairie elements in the sweeping horizontals of the open porch and its roofline, the extreme rectilinear treatment of the second floor fenestration, and the sophisticated overall



Archival photograph of the John Farson House (1897) taken shortly after completion

massing of the structure. To say that the design appears "transitional" may sound unintentionally disparaging. Yet one perhaps senses Maher looking over his shoulder at the Victorian period in his profusion of decoration, while at the same time moving toward modernism in his achievement of open, flowing spatial dynamics. One steps onto the open porch as if attaining an airy plateau. The experience of walking through the impressive wood and leaded glass door into the oak-beamed entrance hall, at once spacious and cave-like, is magical. Multiple exposed electric bulbs cast light patterns off the polished millwork, imparting a welcoming, festive, even carnival-like ambiance. Open space flows out around and beyond the entrance hall, interrupted only by screens, art glass, and other architectural features. As architectural historian Vincent Scully notes of Frank Lloyd Wright's Dana House, space in a prairie house doesn't seem to end, rather it appears to go on forever. One gets this sense of never-ending space in the layout of Pleasant Home.

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From Our President

This newsletter should reach you just prior to our 2007 annual meeting. Thanks to everyone who was involved with and / or attended our events this past year.

We started the year off with a members' winter party at Debbie's and my new home. Even though the weather did not cooperate, we had a large crowd and lots of great food and conversation. I believe everyone enjoyed themselves.

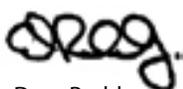
Our educational events included a lecture I gave on American Arts and Crafts Furniture and a demonstration and talk on woodblock prints with our friend Nancy Green from the Johnson Museum. Nancy has always been very generous with her time. We held a mini symposium at the newly restored Palace Theater in Eastwood in conjunction with PACNY. We had two great speakers, Ray Stubblebine, author of the new book "Stickley's Craftsman Homes" and Jonathan Massey, Syracuse University professor of architecture who spoke on Claude Bragdon. Mayor Driscoll opened the event kicking off Preservation Month and participants also enjoyed lunch at the Palace. Mike Heagerty, owner of the Palace, has been very generous with our group.

Frank Morigi together with a few other board members planned a wonderful trip to Wells College for a look at the book arts which ended with a surprise visit to Willard Chapel in Auburn; thanks Frank!

I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Audi family on the opening the new Stickley Museum. The Stickley Company has been a major part of our community for over 100 years. Finally our community can show off this heritage to our out-of-town guests and the important role Stickley has played. The new curator Greg Vadney, a graduate of the Cooperstown Graduate Program (CGP), and Mike Danial, the company historian, have worked very hard with staff at Stickley, Audi & Co. to create this great local resource.

I am looking forward to the annual meeting with Heather Stivinson's update on Craftsman Farms and Alex Vertikoff's talk on the covers of American Bungalow. I hope to see everyone there.

Sincerely,



Dave Rudd

A Visit to Pleasant Home

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Of the many decorative elements--carved stone medallions, geometric, stylized leaded glass, wood carvings, and lion heads on the exterior detailing and also appearing on furniture--the art glass in particular recalled to these eyes the work of another prairie architect, George Grant Elmslie. Interestingly, there is an oblique Syracuse connection to the Prairie School. Former Syracuse architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee--whose spectacular Syracuse Savings Bank Building of 1876 still asserts its imposing presence on the Syracuse skyline--after relocating to Chicago, became employer of Wright, Elmslie, and Maher together early in their careers. Looking at the glass in Pleasant Home one may wonder where Elmslie's influence on Maher begins and ends, and vice versa.

Joanne and I had the privilege and pleasure of having as our guide Laura Thompson, executive director of the Pleasant Home Foundation. As we were the only visitors who happened to show up at that particular time, we were given a true "chef's tour." Moreover, our visit included a walk-through of the Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest located on the second level of Pleasant Home. Frank Lipo, executive director, treated us to a very informative tour of the Society's exhibits that include, among many others, holdings on such noted Oak Parkers as Edgar Rice Burroughs, creator of the Tarzan serial. Indeed, one could easily dedicate the better part of a day exploring this meticulously archived historical resource.

But the surprises didn't end there. Ms. Thompson invited us to attend a lecture scheduled to take place that evening by Vincent Michael, director of the historic preservation program at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Mr. Michael's PowerPoint talk, "Preserving the Prairie School: A Future Orientation," identified current preservation trends and issues, and offered visionary suggestions for future preservation efforts. The lecture took place at George Maher's Taylor House, now Unity Church in Oak Park. Afterwards, participants strolled a couple of blocks to Maher's Caldwell House, a private residence, where the homeowners graciously hosted an elegant cocktail reception. Oak Parkers, it must be said, are active and proud guardians of their rich historical and architectural legacy. They really point the way toward what can and should be done about preservation in America today.

Joanne and I went to Oak park in search of Wright, of course, but came away with George Washington Maher and so much more.



The Arts & Crafts Society of Central New York Annual Luncheon



September, 30 2007 - 11:00am to 3:00pm

Upstairs at the Palace Theater - Eastwood, New York

Mark your calendars!

Registration will be sent soon

\$35 for members & \$45 for guests

Questions contact Dave Rudd at (315) 463-1568

From the Covers of The American Bungalow

Feature presentation by Alexander Vertikoff

Alexander Vertikoff is one of the leading photographers in the United States specializing in architectural interiors and exteriors. His award winning images have been on the cover of every issue of *The American Bungalow* magazine as well as dozens of covers and hundreds of articles in many other magazines including *Architectural Digest*.



Craftsman Farms Update

from our special guest Heather Stivison

Heather Stivison is Executive Director of the Stickley Museum at Craftsman Farms. Prior to coming to the farms, she spent ten years at Montclair Art Museum, most recently as Deputy Director for Institutional Advancement.

www.acscny.org

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