

## Prairie School Architecture in Mason City: A Pioneer Venture in City Planning

text and photographs by Gerald Mansheim

Mason City, Iowa, has a preserve of nationally known Prairie School houses: the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. An early example of urban planning, it began in 1912 as a contract between a group of Mason City businessmen and Walter Burley Griffin, a Chicago architect, landscape artist, and urban planner. They agreed to improve an 18-acre area that the growing city had bypassed as unbuildable because of its rough and uneven terrain. Willow Creek cuts its way through the center of the area leaving a rugged, limestone cliff on the side known as Rock Crest. The other side, known as Rock Glen, gradually slopes up from the creek.

The agreement between Griffin and the businessmen stipulated that a design should be developed which would preserve the natural

beauty of the area. The land would be used only for residential purposes. Houses designed to blend into the natural setting would rim the perimeter of the development and form a protective border between the street and the center area. The center area would remain as a common park for Rock Crest-Rock Glen residents, visible from all of the many-windowed living areas of the houses. The area that had been used as a dump site at one time would be cleared of debris. An old mill would be

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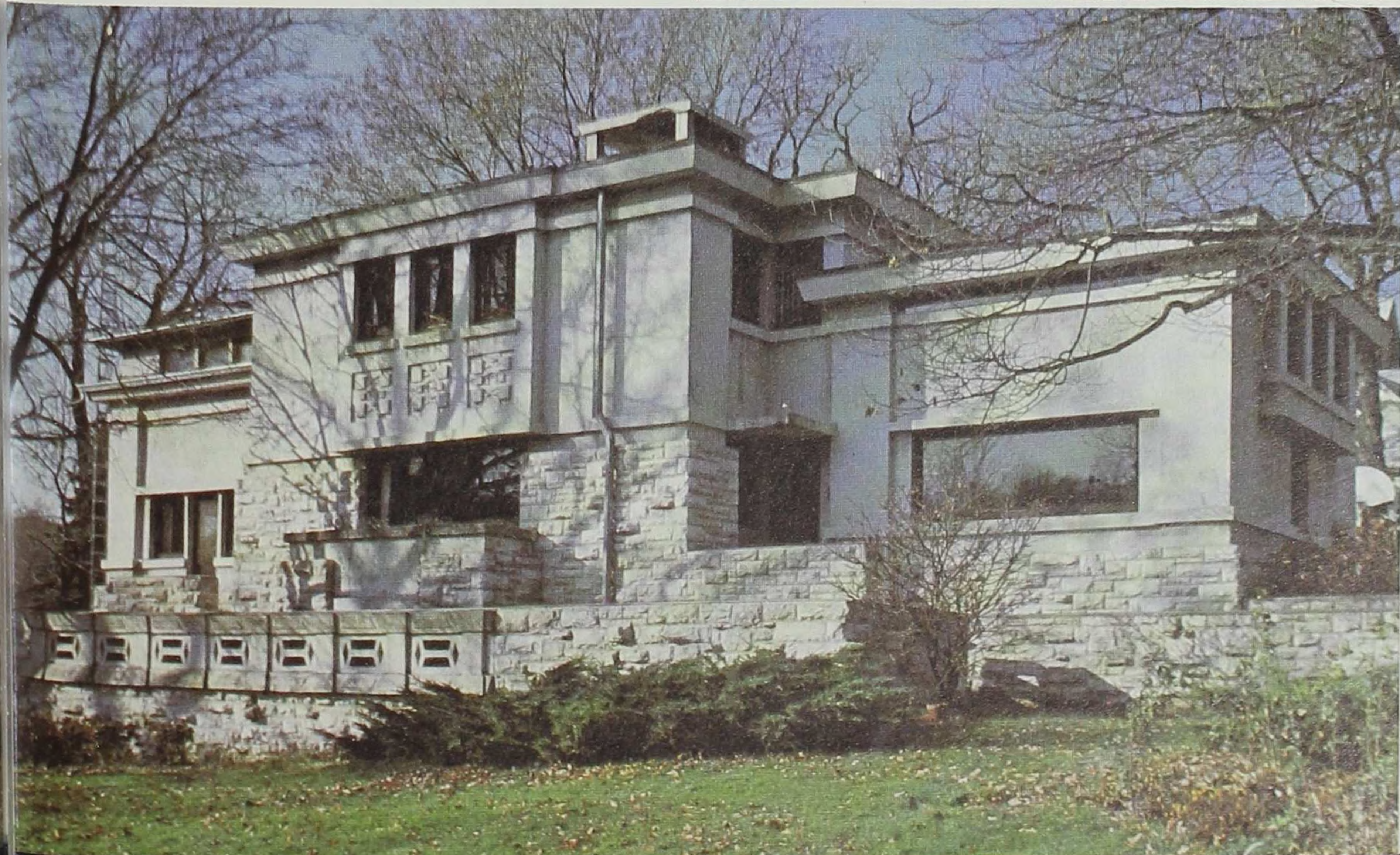
*(Above) "The Castle" (1912) appears to grow from the limestone cliffs of Rock Crest. It is the most unusual house in the residential development in terms of Griffin's utilization of the rugged natural setting and new materials. Also, it offers a clear example of the Prairie School attempt to break away from the imitation of earlier architectural styles in favor of creating a native American architecture.*

removed, except for its dam on the creek, and the area near the creek would be graded and filled.

Interest in Prairie School architecture in Mason City can be traced to 1908, when Frank Lloyd Wright received a commission for a downtown commercial project to consist of a bank, offices, and a hotel. James E. Blythe, a successful lawyer with a keen sense for business opportunities, and his law partner, J. E. E. Markley, gave Wright the commission for the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel. Wright also obtained commissions for two Mason City houses: the Dr. George C. Stockman house

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*Considered among the finest of Griffin's works, the smooth-surfaced Blythe house (1913) provides exceptional contrast to the rugged quality of the Melson house. Symmetrical in original design, the foundation is characterized by the rough limestone that unifies the houses of the Mason City development. The fireplace is distinguished by an Italian tile facing in an intricate, geometric pattern designed by Marion Mahony Griffin. Cove lighting, in combination with a defining oak trim, further distinguishes the large, open living space.*



and the Joshua Melson house. The Stockman house was based on Wright's 1906 design plans for a fireproof house for \$5000, and remains standing in good condition today. The Wright-designed Melson house was never built in Mason City.

Wright must have become familiar with the Willow Creek area, where the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development would be built, during his preparation of the Melson house design. His perspective drawing for the projected house shows Willow Creek below the house. It is probable that Wright would have been chosen to design houses for the Mason City businessmen who eventually commissioned houses in the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. But before the bank was finished, Wright gave up his practice, left his wife and children, and eloped to Europe with a neighbor's wife. This was distinctly scandalous behavior at the time. The scandal may have kept Wright from designing the houses, but on the other hand, he made no attempt to contact any of his former Mason City clients after his return from Europe.

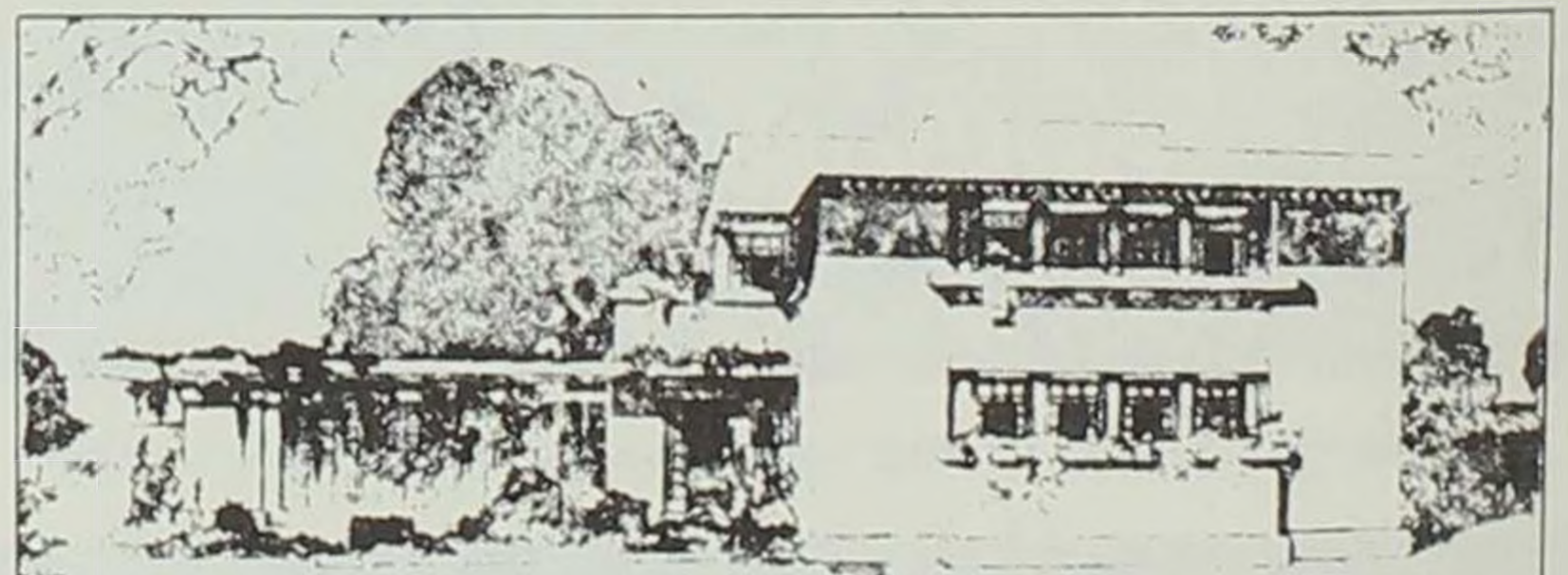
Joshua Melson asked Marion Mahony Griffin, who had been a draftsman in Wright's office for ten years and who had taken over some of the projects Wright left behind, for advice about selecting an architect to draft new plans for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. She recommended Walter Burley Griffin, who had worked in Wright's office between 1901 and 1905. Mahony and Griffin had just been married and she was now working in his office. Wright was severely critical of the Griffins for taking on the development. Never one to mince words, he accused them, in his best country boy manner, of sucking eggs.

Of the many houses that Griffin planned for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development, only eight were eventually built. Only five of the eight were Griffin's designs. These five include the Melson, Blythe, Page, Rule, and

Schneider houses.

The house on the cliff is difficult to see from the street because it is set at the rear of the lot. Its park side is the preferred one and can be seen even at a distance from the other side of Willow Creek. Historians consider it one of the first modern houses of the twentieth century. To them it is known as the Melson house, but residents of Mason City are more apt to call it "The Castle," because of its fortress-like stone walls and the way it is set into the rim of the rocky cliff.

Joshua Melson, a contractor and land speculator, had sought designs from many architects, including Wright, but none had satisfied him until he saw Griffin's work. The Melson house was designed and the building supervised, even to the laying of the stone, by Griffin. The house stands out because of its dramatic site, its rough stone surface, and its



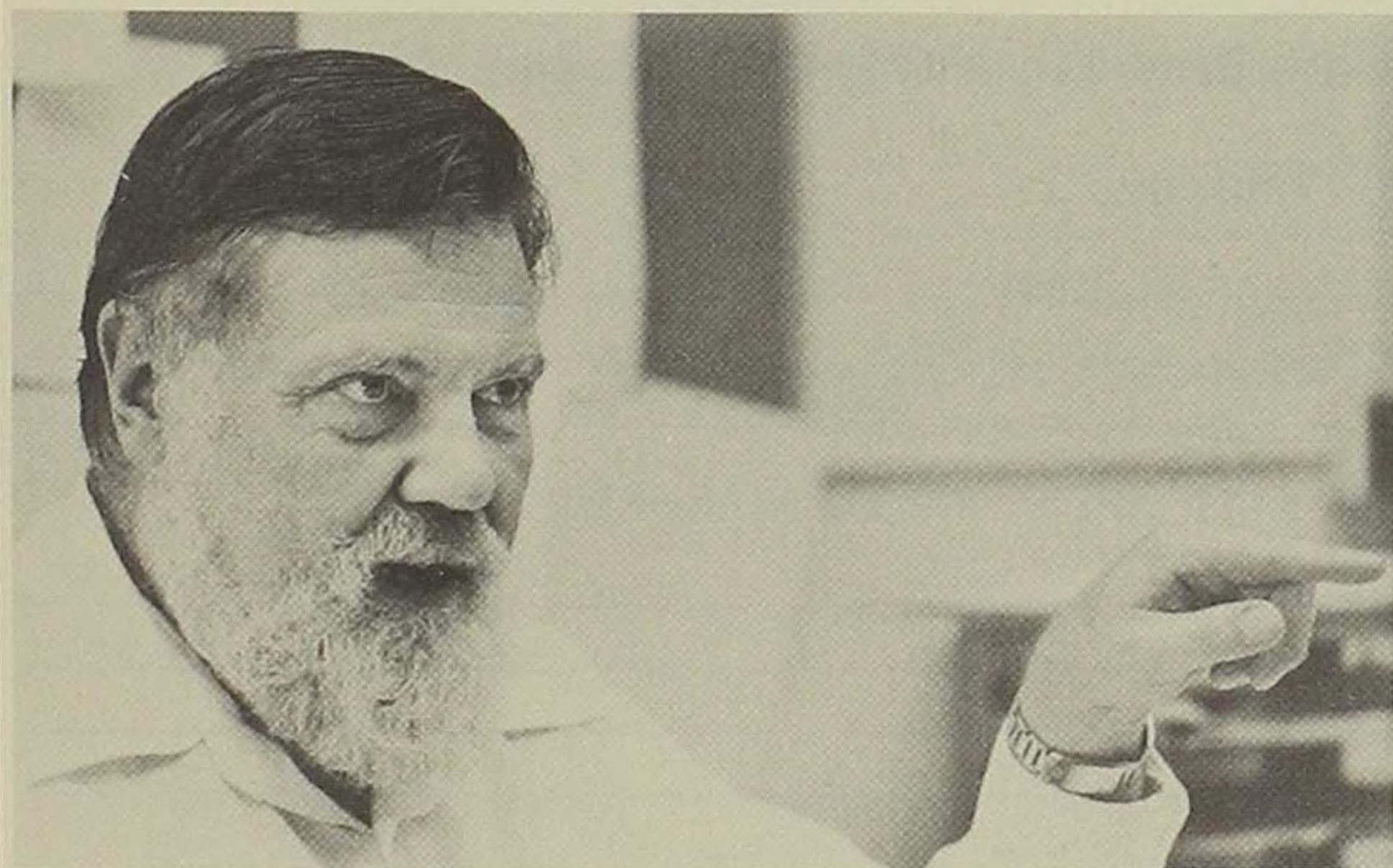
*Wright's design for a fireproof house for \$5,000.*

*The Prairie School style of architecture, as developed by Frank Lloyd Wright and his followers, was characterized by several features: "low proportions; outstretching form; wide eaves; walls treated as flat thin membranes; structure delineated by trim; the free flow of space on the interior between the dining, living, and entry areas and a focus on the fireplace." Other characteristic features included: "a rectilinear geometrical form, banded windows, light-colored stucco walls, and a thin, low, gable roof." The houses of Mason City's Rock Crest-Rock Glen development can be seen to exemplify these features to varying degrees.*

Source: Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, *The Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977).

Office of the State Historical Society

## Society Banquet — June 16 — Make Your Reservations Now



All members of the State Historical Society of Iowa are invited to attend the Society's 1984 annual meeting and banquet, to be held Saturday, June 16th, at 6:30 P.M. at the Regency Royale Room of The Holiday, Burlington.

It is with great pride that the Board of Trustees of the State Historical Society announces that Dr. Laurence Lafore, professor of history at the University of Iowa and author of *American Classic*, one of the

most popular books ever published by the Society, will be the banquet speaker. Dr. Lafore has earned an unusually fine reputation as a writer and public speaker, and his banquet address, "People, Streets and Civilizations," will be on the subject of historic architecture.

The banquet program will also include the presentation of awards to individuals and organizations for achievement in local history, and the presentation of the 1984 Trustees' Award.

Many special events have been scheduled in Burlington and the surrounding southeast Iowa area for Saturday the 16th — banquet day — and Sunday the 17th for the enjoyment of Society members and guests. Members of the Board of Trustees hope that banquet-goers will find a way to spend some time in the Burlington area and take advantage of the special tours and slide shows being planned.

At 10 A.M. on both Saturday and Sunday mornings Steve Brower, a landscape architect and preservationist, will conduct walking tours of Burlington's Heritage Hill. The tours will start at the top of "Snake Alley," at Sixth and Columbia Streets, and last about one hour.

The Des Moines County Historical Society's three museums — "Phelps House," "Hawkeye Log Cabin," and the "Apple Trees Museum" — will be open for special tours between 1:00 and 4:30 P.M. Saturday and Sunday. Phelps House was built in 1851 and is located at the top of Snake Alley. Hawkeye Log Cabin overlooks the Mississippi River in Crapo Park. The Apple Trees Museum is located in the remaining wing of the Charles Perkins home in Perkins Park. A bus tour of Burlington and the museums has been arranged for each day at 12:50 P.M., the bus to leave from the riverfront by the auditorium, where parking is available. There will be a nominal charge for the bus tour. (Please check the box on the banquet reservation form for more detailed information about the museums and bus tours.)

The Southeast Regional Workshop of the Iowa Local Historical and Museum Association will be held in Wapello during the morning and early afternoon of Saturday the 16th. Society members are encouraged to attend this ILHMA workshop on their way to the SHSI banquet. Workshop plans include tours of the Toolesboro Indian Mounds and the County Historical Society Museum in Wapello, a slide show about historic Wapello County, and a talk by Loren N. Horton about the importance of local historical societies and ILHMA as their organization. For more information about the Southeast Iowa ILHMA workshop, contact Barbara Gearhart, President, Box 157, Hopkinton, Iowa 52237.

The members of the Iowa Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks are also planning to hold a meeting in Burlington in conjunction with the annual meeting of the State Historical Society. State Historical Society members are invited to participate in the landmark society's activities during Saturday and Sunday. For more information about the landmark society's plans, contact Elizabeth Crow, President, 1226 North 24th Place, Fort Dodge, Iowa 50501.

A social hour for the SHSI banquet will begin at 5:30 P.M. in the Regency Royale Room of The Holiday. Steve Brower will present a narrated slide show about the Burlington area during the social

hour, and there will be several displays and exhibits for the enjoyment of Society members.

Advance reservations for the banquet are required. The cost is \$12.50 per person. Please pencil June 16th in on your calendar as a special date and make your banquet reservations soon. A reservation form has been provided for your use in this issue of *News for Members*. Checks or money orders should be made payable to the State Historical Society of Iowa.

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1984 SHSI BANQUET RESERVATION  
Regency Royale Room, The Holiday, Burlington  
Saturday, June 16, 1984, 6:30 P.M.

Yes, I plan to attend the 1984 banquet:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Please list the names of any others that you are enclosing payment for:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

\$12.50 PER PERSON       Send me a list of Burlington area motels

Send this form, accompanied by payment to:

Banquet Reservations  
Office of the State Historical Society  
402 Iowa Avenue  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

RESERVATIONS AND PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY JUNE 8

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MEMBERSHIP DUES TO BE RAISED JULY 1 — SPECIAL OFFER TO SHSI MEMBERS

Annual membership dues have been a vital source of financial support for the State Historical Society since its foundation in 1857. In the century and a quarter since that time, annual dues have been increased only twice — in 1902 and 1968. During the past sixteen years, however, the costs of producing publications benefits for Society members have increased dramatically. To meet these rising costs, Society membership dues will be increased on July 1, 1984. The membership dues structure also has been expanded to offer interested Society members greater options, or new levels of membership which will include additional publications benefits.

After July 1, individual dues will be \$12.50 a year. Members joining the State Historical Society at this level will receive the *Palimpsest*, Iowa's popular history magazine, six times a year; *News for Members*, the Society's newsletter, four times a year; and a 20% discount on book publications.

Two additional levels of membership will be offered for the first time: Family Memberships at \$17.50 a year and Benefiting Memberships at \$22.50 a year. Family members will receive the *Palimpsest*, *News for Members*, a 20% discount on book publications, and the *Goldfinch*, Iowa's history magazine for upper elementary students, published four times each school year. Benefiting members will receive all the benefits of a family membership plus the *Annals of Iowa*, a scholarly journal of Iowa history, published quarterly.

Current life members of the Society will not be affected by the change in dues. Life members will continue to receive their current membership benefits: the *Palimpsest*, *News for Members*, and the 20% discount on book publications. With the revised dues structure to be implemented on July 1, new life memberships will no longer be available.

A special offer is now being extended to current Society members in gratitude for their continued

support. Now, before the new fees become effective on July 1, you may renew your membership for one year at the current annual dues rate of \$5.00. This announcement is being made to Society members only. Renew your membership in the State Historical Society of Iowa now and continue to receive your current membership benefits for an additional year for only \$5.00. Don't delay. The form below has been included for your convenience. — Christie Dailey

IOWA STATE HISTORICAL DEPARTMENT  
STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA

**Renew My Annual Membership For Only \$5.00**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

**Renew My Gift Memberships For Only \$5.00 Each Too**

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send your membership renewal to:

Iowa State Historical Department  
Office of the State Historical Society  
402 Iowa Avenue  
Iowa City, Iowa 52240

**CALENDAR OF COMING EVENTS, 1984**

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|-----------------|---|
| May 11          | Cedar Falls Historical Society Annual Banquet, Cedar Falls                            |
| May 20          | Iowa Chapter, Victorian Society in America, Des Moines                                |
| May 23-26       | National Genealogical Society National Conference, San Francisco, California          |
| May 23-26       | Symposium on the History of Soil and Water Conservation, Columbia, Missouri           |
| June 2          | Northwest Regional ILHMA Workshop, Boone  |
| June 9          | Southwest Regional ILHMA Workshop, Red Oak  |
| June 15-16      | Midwest Urban Waterfront Conference, Davenport  |
| June 16         | Southeast Regional ILHMA Workshop, Wapello  |
| <b>June 16</b>  | <b>Annual Meeting and Banquet of the State Historical Society of Iowa, Burlington</b> |
| June 23         | Northeast Regional ILHMA Workshop, Hopkinton  |
| August 16-19    | Oregon-California Trails Association, Oregon City, Oregon                             |
| Aug. 30-Sept. 2 | Society of American Archivists, Washington, D.C.                                      |
| Sept. 18-21     | American Association for State and Local History, Louisville, Kentucky                |
| Sept. 19-22     | Association for Preservation Technology, Toronto, Ontario, Canada                     |
| Sept. 20-23     | Oral History Association, Lexington, Kentucky   |
| Sept. 25-28     | Midwest Museums Conference, Green Bay, Wisconsin                                      |
| Oct. 5-7        | National Historic Communal Societies Association, Amana, Iowa                         |
| Oct. 10-13      | Western History Association, St. Paul, Minnesota                                      |

**SHSI Board of Trustees Election Time**

All members of the State Historical Society of Iowa are eligible to participate in the elections for Board of Trustees of the Society. These elections are to fill vacancies that will open on June 30, 1984, in the Second and Third Congressional District seats and in two At Large seats. The people elected will serve three-year terms and work to achieve the board's purposes, namely, to further an understanding of Iowa history, to promote activities and endeavors that will help Iowans better understand their own heritage, and to provide general support services to the Iowa State Historical Department.

To cast your vote, mark the ballot provided in this issue of *News for Members* with your choice for one candidate for each congressional district seat and with your two choices for at large seats. You should vote for a total of four (4) candidates.

Do not sign your ballot, as this will invalidate it. Clip out the marked ballot and mail it to: Election Committee, Office of the State Historical Society, 402 Iowa Avenue, Iowa City, Iowa 52240. Make sure that your name and address are on the envelope in which you mail your ballot since your name will be checked against Society membership records for voting eligibility. *Your ballot will be invalid if you do not record your name and address on the envelope in which it is mailed.*

### Second Congressional District

*Michael D. Gibson* (Dubuque) is active in the Dubuque County Historical Society as editor of its newsletter, member of its board of directors, and chairman of its building and sites committee. He is also the assistant archivist of the Research Center for Dubuque Area History, Loras College. He has published articles in the *Palimpsest*, the *Annals of Iowa*, and the *Journal of Popular Culture*.

### Third Congressional District

*Lynn Nielsen* (Cedar Falls) has been an elementary teacher at Price Laboratory School at the University of Northern Iowa for more than ten years. Actively involved in several major projects devoted to gathering materials for use in teaching Iowa history in elementary schools, Nielsen recently initiated a publication titled *Iowa History Teacher*, sponsored jointly by the Department of Public Instruction and the University of Northern Iowa.

### At Large

*Patrice Kay Beam* (Indianola) is president of the Iowa Chapter, Victorian Society in America, editor of *Victorian News*, and a member of the national Victorian Society in America board of directors. Her memberships include the Warren County Historical Society, ILHMA, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Beam is currently completing her master's thesis at Iowa State University where she has specialized in late 19th century American social history.

*William Cochran* (Red Oak) is director of the Red Oak Public Library and has recently been elected a curator of the Montgomery County Historical Society. He received his master of arts (library science) degree from the University of Iowa in December 1983. He worked as administrator of the State Historical Society between July 1982 and October 1983. His memberships include the American Library Association and the Iowa Library Association.

*George McDaniel* (Davenport) is on the faculty of St. Ambrose College in Davenport. Father McDaniel holds graduate degrees from the Aquinas Institute of Theology, Dubuque, and the University of Iowa, and is currently a doctoral candidate in American history at the University of Iowa. He has published articles on Smith W. Brookhart in the *Annals of Iowa* and the *Palimpsest* and is working on a biography of Brookhart.

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## 1984 BOARD OF TRUSTEES ELECTION BALLOT

Vote For One Candidate in Each District:

Second Congressional District

- Michael D. Gibson  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Third Congressional District

- Lynn Nielsen  
 \_\_\_\_\_

Vote For Two At Large Candidates:

- Patrice Kay Beam  
 William Cochran  
 George McDaniel

Do **not** sign this ballot. Your name and address **must** be on the envelope.

The ballot must be received **by June 8, 1984**. Send it to:

Election Committee  
 Office of the State Historical Society  
 402 Iowa Avenue  
 Iowa City, Iowa 52240

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*The Page house (1912) is characterized by a high, tight design, with walls built of an exposed reinforced concrete framework that adds to the ornamental effect of the house. The roof is gabled, with projecting flared eaves, and rough ashlar distinguishes the ground level.*

daring design.

The comparatively smooth-surfaced Blythe house was built on a sloping Rock Glen site, across Willow Creek from the Melson house. Unfortunately, the house was not built as first designed. As built it has a stone ground floor that, with the addition of a walled terrace garden, gives it a feeling of being on a platform. The sculptural railing set into the walls of the terrace would seem to be an attempt to compensate for the loss of the elaborate upper cornice and the elimination of the Prairie School urns from the roof line of the wings, both features of Griffin's original plans. The design's drive-through garage in one wing was closed in on the Willow Creek side and a large window put in, giving the garage a picture window before most houses had one. Later, the balcony above the solarium on the other wing was roofed and closed in, destroying the symmetry of the front elevation. The wings of the Blythe house are connected to the principal part of the

house by narrow areas that allow them to seem freestanding instead of stuck up against, or leaning on, the main house.

One of the most unusual features of the Blythe house is the tent-like ceiling of the billiard room above the garage. This kind of ceiling was used by many Prairie School architects to eliminate the boxiness of a room. There is also an extraordinarily long and narrow window, 10 inches high by 13 feet long, placed near the ceiling. This window adds light to the room as clerestory windows do, yet is hardly noticeable from the outside.

The walls, floors, and roofs of the Melson and Blythe houses were constructed entirely of reinforced concrete in an experiment with new materials that sets them apart from ordinary houses of the period, and houses of the present period. The cost of similar construction materials would be prohibitive today. The limestone ashlar that characterizes the Melson house may appear like stone laid in the usual way, but the stones were set into the concrete as the forms went up.

The Page house, northeast of the Blythe house, is also a tribute to experimentation. Chronologically, this was the first of Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses to be built. In keeping with his plan to make each house unique, Griffin exposed the reinforced con-





*The exterior of the Rule house (1912) is characterized most by its massive stucco corner piers which, combined with its low, overhanging hip roof, give the house its squarish, symmetrical quality.*



crete structural frame, which at first glance seems like added ornamentation even though it functions as support. To fit the house into the overall pattern of the development, he used a stone first floor and window patterns similar to those of the Blythe house. The roof differs in that it is not a low, flat, hip roof like those of the Melson and Blythe houses, but is gabled and overhung, with slightly turned up ends that give the house an oriental feeling. It seems remarkable that Page, who was in the lumber business and was not one of the signers of the original agreement, would have a concrete

house built. Yet Page's intrigue in Griffin's overall concept for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development led him to prefer the concrete house design.

James Blythe also commissioned the building of the Rule house. Blythe was to occupy this house while his own was under construction and then sell it to his law partner, Arthur Rule, whose name it bears. The Rule house provides a good example of a typical Prairie School house based on Wright's much-used 1906 design of a fireproof house for \$5000. Widely imitated by Wright's followers, this compact

*The Franke house (1915) was designed and built by Barry Byrne and, other than its rough limestone base, it bears little resemblance to Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses. The upper walls are of smooth stucco and it has a low-rising roof with little attempt at ornamentation.*



design, somewhat like that of the Melson house, was basically a square form with similar yet varied sides. Variations might include bands of windows or sometimes a door and porch. In the Rule house, variations included projecting trellises over the windows and veranda. The veranda was later closed in and two bedrooms added above, which altered the original effect. The massive corner piers, more noticeable on this house than on the Melson house, end at the second floor, where corner windows are set far enough back to allow for window boxes for plants. The overhanging, hipped roof emphasizes this set-back. The interior plan is an open square, except for the kitchen, with a centered fireplace and cove or

Neighborhood. In 1912 Griffin won an international design competition for a city plan of Canberra, the new Australian capital. As the official architect for the new city, Griffin spent considerable time outside the United States between 1912 and 1914, when he moved to Australia permanently. The plans for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development were taken over and continued by Barry Byrne, who, like Griffin, had received training and worked in Wright's office.

James Blythe had commissioned Griffin to design a row of three houses to the north side of the glen, leaving enough room behind them for the park. In Griffin's 1913 design the three houses would be connected by a walled court.



*The Einar Broaten-designed Drake house (1914) was constructed on the Rock Crest side of the development, overlooking the old mill dam. The design was somewhat akin to that of the Rule house, with its squarish quality, and with a projecting solarium and garage.*

indirect lighting. The additional space provided by the piers allows built-in cabinets at the outside corner of each ground floor room to stand flush with the interior walls. H. Allen Brooks, in his book *The Prairie School*, called this house, "The most modest, yet one of the best," of Griffin's Mason City houses.

Griffin had finished his plans for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development by 1912. Most of the houses were built during the next four years, which was also a very productive period for Griffin, who was working on the Trier Center Neighborhood (Chicago), the Clark Memorial Fountain (Grinnell), and his own home, which would have been in the Trier Center

Of the three, only the Sam Schneider house was built. Well below street level, and near the bridge that crosses Willow Creek, the Schneider house stands much as Griffin designed it. It shared many features of the other houses of the development, and differed mainly in a small bridge at the entrance and a two-level living and dining area. The house was later altered for its second owner by Barry Byrne, who had supervised original construction.

Barry Byrne designed the mausoleum at Elmwood Cemetery in Mason City that Joshua Melson commissioned after Mrs. Melson's death. Byrne also designed the house that

*The Schneider house (1913) was originally designed by Griffin but finished by Byrne after Griffin's departure for Australia. It is characterized by a heavy stone foundation, a low-pitched roof, and window-topped corner piers. Griffin utilized space somewhat differently in designing this house, including a bridge off the street to a small entry hall, which led to a distinctively divided-level interior plan.*

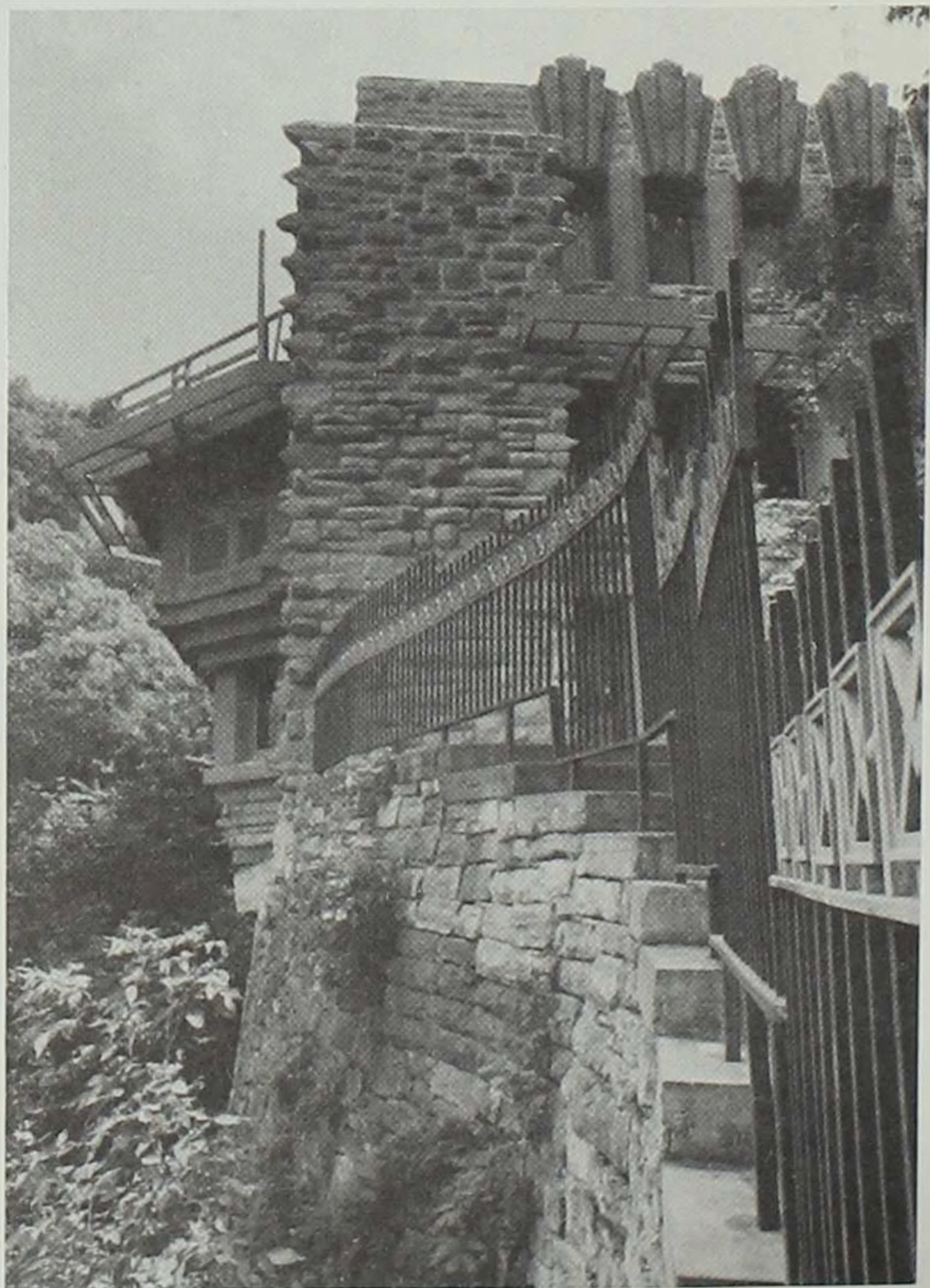


James Blythe commissioned a wedding present for his daughter. The Gilmore house, west of the Schneider house, was the first house in the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development not built to a Griffin design. It does not fit as well into the overall plan of the development, except for the stone first floor. This was also true of the Franke house, built next door. In these houses Byrne's style can be seen to have been influenced by modernist architecture. They are not as successful as Byrne's design for a small summer house to cover the foundation of the old mill on Willow Creek. The summer house was never built.

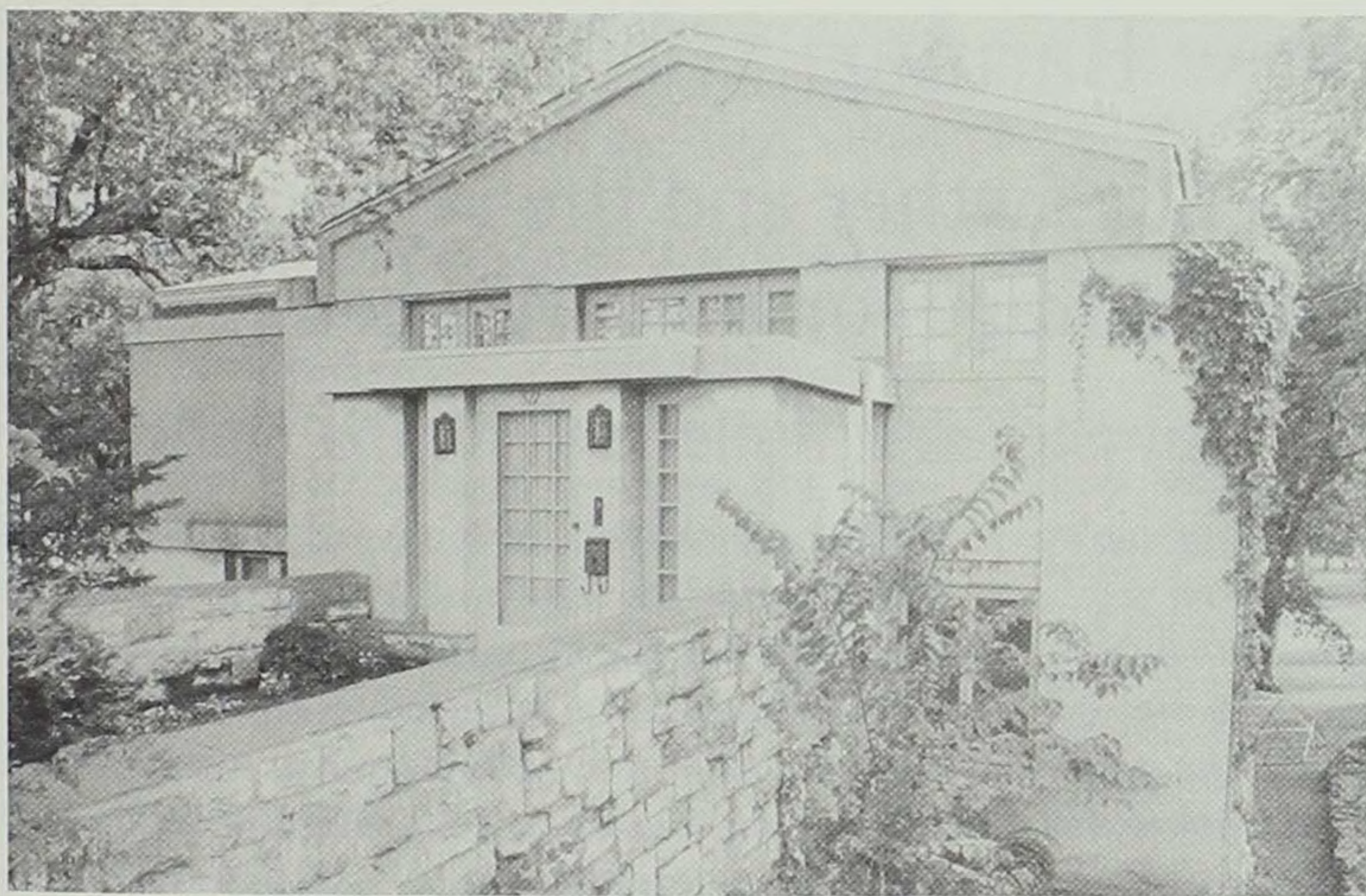
Many houses built in Mason City during the next few years had Prairie School characteristics. One of these, the Samuel Drake house on the Rock Crest side of Willow Creek, was designed by a local architect, Einar

Broaten, although the design may have been based on an earlier one by Barry Byrne.

In 1959 Curtis Besinger designed the Tom MacNider house, which was built between the Page and Rule houses on the last unoccupied



*(Right) The rough limestone, obtained from the old quarry in the Rock Crest area, was set into the reinforced concrete framework of the Melson house as the forms went up. The stone disguised somewhat the house's architectural lines, as did the elaborately stylized keystones above the windows, but its design is quite similar to Wright's design for a fireproof house for \$5,000 and the Rule house. Massive corner piers added to the interior openness of the house.*



*The Gilmore house (1915) was designed and built by Byrne. It is a somewhat awkward, simplified design relative to Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses, yet has the rough ashlar base and stucco walls that identify several of the development's houses.*

lot in the Rock Glen area. In order to utilize the narrow lot, Besinger projected the living area and prow-shaped terrace of the house toward the park, and based the interior on Wright's open plan. Besinger worked to blend the house into the overall plan of Griffin's development, although the cost of construction materials forced the use of concrete block rather than the limestone and stucco which characterizes the early Rock Crest-Rock Glen houses.

It is difficult to discern how much Marion Mahony Griffin contributed to the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. Because of her devotion to her husband she took a back seat in his practice and gave him full honors, except that her monogram appears on the drawings she did for him. After Wright's departure for Europe she finished several of his houses. During a ten-year period she had done some of Wright's most successful perspective drawings. She had also designed decorative features for his buildings and furnishings. After her marriage to Griffin she performed similar functions for him. Her fine drawings of the Melson, Blythe, and Holahan houses (the Holahan was never built) surely must have contributed to Griffin's getting the commission for the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development, just as her drawings of his Canberra plan must have helped him in

the competition for the Australian capital.

Other midwestern cities have Prairie School buildings but few have so many buildings by so many architects within a similarly small urban area. Fewer still have a planned Prairie School residential development on the scale of Griffin's Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. Mason City has a particularly rich Prairie School heritage in that at least thirteen buildings exemplifying Prairie School architecture were completed in the period after Wright's 1908 commission for the downtown commercial project. Many of these buildings have been added to, and some of them have suffered peculiar alterations. Still, Iowans and others can thank Mason City residents for giving Prairie School architects the opportunity to realize some of their finest work. □

#### Note on Sources

Information for this article was drawn from a variety of published materials about Wright, Griffin, and the Rock Crest-Rock Glen development. Dr. Robert E. McCoy's article, "Rock Crest/Rock Glen: Prairie School Planning in Iowa," *Prairie School Review* 5 (1968), was particularly helpful, as were H. Allen Brooks' *The Prairie School* (University of Toronto Press, 1972) and *Prairie School Architecture* (University of Toronto Press, 1975), and Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson's *The Prairie School in Iowa* (Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1977). Information was also drawn from the author's article in the Winter 1975 issue of *The Iowan*.