

Frank Lloyd Wright: Influences and Worldview

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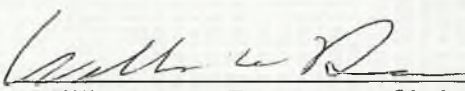
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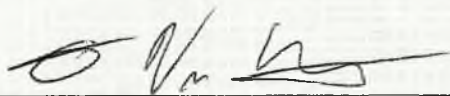
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Introduction

Philosophy is to the mind of the architect as eyesight to his steps. The term “genius” when applied to him simply means a man who understands what others only know about.

-Frank Lloyd Wright¹

Growing up near Madison, Wisconsin, Wright was told by his mother that his destiny was to become a great architect. And he did. Building hundreds of houses and structures throughout his life, Wright was as prolific as he was talented. His was a special ability to not only create beautiful buildings, but to create a philosophy that governed them. He differentiated them from previous traditions of architecture, stating his goal was to create a uniquely American architecture, one that fit the identity of a country in transition. In doing so, he helped introduce a period of architectural development known as Modernism, emphasizing simplicity, clean lines, and harmonious structure.

Wright was uniquely qualified to see the changing face of America. Born two years after the assassination of Abraham Lincoln and the end of the Civil War, Wright lived to nearly ninety-two years of age. During his lifetime, he lived through the American Industrial Revolution, both World Wars, the Wright Brothers flight, the invention of television... the list of innovations during the period are endless. Architecturally, he straddles the gap between the neo-classical period of the 19th century, marked by the admiration of Greek and Roman architecture, and the modernism of the 20th. Philosophically, he was a product of the early 19th century Romanticism, but followed his own, often conservative, views.

¹ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks, ed. “A Testament” from *Frank Lloyd Wright: Collected Writings, Vol. 5*. (Rizzoli: New York, 1995,) p. 157.

This age of innovation, discovery and turmoil was not simply relegated to the culture surrounding Wright, but in the life of the man himself. Despite the success, he lived a tumultuous life filled with loss, death, and failure. He was divorced twice, suffered the loss of a step-daughter, and was both publically and financially ruined. However, he rose above tragedy, reinventing his style and public image several times. Throughout it all, he professed a vision of America reinvented, changed by authentic buildings for the American experience.

This vision, or Wright's worldview, was affected by influences surrounding him throughout his life. Architecture, while essential to Wright's view of the world, was not fully encompassing. He was a great lover of poetry, music, and art. While he sought to create a truly American experience, he personally idealized German and Japanese society. His ideals highlighted the individual, but his goals sought to change society at the core.

The people, places, and objects he interacted with shaped concepts he later used both professionally and personally. Some were positive influences, which helped his success in design and his unique appeal. Some negatively impacted his ability to communicate and carry on positive relationships. Above all of these, he believed in a coherent reality governed by values defined by nature, God, and human mandate.

The shaping events of Wright's life and vision fall under the idea of the 'worldview'. A worldview is how an individual examines and understands the world as it exists before them. This is a religious, philosophical, or social construct, and is either personal, or shared by a group. Wright unquestionably had a unique worldview, influenced by several separate identities that he claimed as a coherent and interconnected system of beliefs. As an individual, follower of

‘natural’ concepts, an American, and a man of his times, Wright operated his life under a strict understanding of his deeply held motivations.

As we explore Wright and his impact upon the world, we must first get to know who and what developed his worldview. This will be broken into three major chapters. Chapter 1, entitled, “Interpersonal Relationships,” looks through the personal relationships of Wright, examining family, friends, and others influence on his life and work. Chapter 2, "Personal Development,” goes deeper, exploring the influences of his childhood and adulthood, including architectural, personal, religious, and philosophical topics. Chapter 3, “Public Image and Design,” explores the public influence and reaction to his work and life. Finally, the conclusion will examine the importance of each topic within the context of the whole of Wright’s life.

This is not an architectural exploration of Wright’s life. Many books written on the methodology, philosophy, and concepts entailed in his work exist, as well as a number of quality biographies. This work falls somewhere in the middle, exploring not just who Wright was, but why he was that way. Understanding these concepts allows us to look at his work and life in a fresh light, understanding the underlying drive of a maverick and genius.

Chapter 1: Interpersonal relationships

Part 1: Family Tree

When talking about the identity of Frank Lloyd Wright, family must be the first and foremost starting place. Within his family, there are two distinctive strains. The first is his heritage, made up of his parents, maternal grandparents, and maternal aunts and uncles. The second his legacy, that of his children and grandchildren, and the sometimes complex relationship he had with them. The term 'heritage' should to be clarified, because though he had a marginal relationship with his father's family, he makes it clear that his loyalties and connection is primarily to the Lloyd-Jones line and that, upon the departure of his father, he severed that connection. With this in mind, the primary focus must be on the Lloyd-Jones connection.

The Lloyd-Joneses were strangers in a strange land. During the 1840's, Richard Jones and his wife, Mary Lloyd, moved from Wales to America. It was not simply because of the promise of a new world or for a new start. The Lloyd-Jones suffered from persecution because of their rather unorthodox religion, Unitarianism. Wales, and most of England, was Anglican since Henry the 8th, and despite the years of religious warfare, had primarily remained such through the 19th century. Unitarianism, on the other hand, was not well accepted by many of the churches in Europe for their anti-Trinitarian views and animosity towards established theology.

Biographer Meryle Seacrest gives us two important facts about the family in her book, *Frank Lloyd Wright*. First, that they lived near the town of Llandysul, in Wales, until their departure, and secondly, that Richard's grandfather, Jenkin, established the first Armenian

congregation in Wales.² The untraditional Lloyd-Joneses were rebellious and free with their religion, but pressure towards orthodoxy, as well as unstable political forces, forced them across the ocean to America, and eventually to Wisconsin. The trip was not easy for the family, having seven children at the time, including Frank's mother Anna. They briefly lived near Ixonia, Wisconsin, before moving south of the Iowa River, close to nearby Spring Green. By then, the family had grown to ten, though one daughter, Nannie, died on the trip.³

Frank establishes his grandfather Richard as a stern and impassioned man, of a fervent faith and serious work ethic. He describes Richard early on in his autobiography:

His grandson would see the stalwart figure, legs straight in stirrups, of this spiritual brother of Isaiah, his dreaded and beloved Welsh Grandfather, white-bearded and hoary-headed, sitting up straight on his horse... shepherd's crook hung over the left forearm, the Bible of his faith firm against his side under his upper arm, the bridle-reigns in his other hand.⁴

Richard's wife, referred to as "Ein Mam," was the linchpin of the family. Her grandson referred to her as a "gentle spirit," both calming her husband and the family that surrounded her. It was the fierce passion of his grandfather, tempered with the gentle spirit of his grandmother, which Frank absorbed. After all, "his children, his flesh and blood were like him" but "the element... of the prayerful consideration for the lilies that was the gentle Grandmother's."⁵

The ten children all grew up with the knowledge of farming and country living. Most of the boys went into farming, but Enos also had a career in politics. Jenkin took a separate route, becoming known as one of the greatest Unitarian preachers of his day. His preaching, like his father's, was emotional and said to bring tears at almost any sermon given. For many years, he

² Seacrest, Meryle. *Frank Lloyd Wright*. (HarperCollins: New York, 1992,) p 29.

³ *Ibid*, 35.

⁴ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks. "An Autobiography" from *Frank Lloyd Wright: Collected Writings, Vol. 2*. (Rizzoli: New York, 1992,) p. 107.

⁵ *Ibid*, 108.

was a major opponent to war and became well known for his speeches promoting peace during World War I. He also became the preacher for a Unitarian church in Chicago, known as All Saints. It was through his uncle that Frank was able to establish himself in the city after quitting college, with his uncle providing social and emotional support. Despite his claims in his autobiography, it must be noted that Frank possibly was assured of a position with J. Lyman Silsbee due to the architect working for his uncle at the new church for All Saints.

The rest of the brothers were farmers, craftsmen, and men of the land. It was Frank's uncle James that he stayed with during the summers to "toughen him up." He was a self-admitted dreamer with "golden curls," but his Uncle James taught him to "add tired to tired."⁶ He woke up every morning to long and physically demanding days that left him sore. He even attempted to run away, but with some prodding from his Uncle Enos, returned and grew stronger. Frank "adored" his Uncle James, and believed he could do "everything." It was the summers spent with his rough uncles and aunts that imbued Wright with a sense of hard work, love of the land, and care of the natural beauty found in the countryside.

The girls primarily fell into teaching, with the "Aunts" (Nell and Jennie,) as well as Anna, taking up the craft. The "Aunts" later founded a school in Spring Green, designed, of course, by their nephew. Neither had children, but loved the children in their care. However, it was Anna who brought education to her own children, and especially, her beloved son.

Mother

Hanna, or Anna, was one of the seven children that left Wales when her parents sought a free religion in a new land. Her son describes her:

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 114-115.

She walked with a free stride like a man, had much dark brown hair above a good, brave brow; a fine nose and dark, dreaming brown eyes. Much fire and energy gave her temper beneath a self-possession calm and gracious.⁷

Anna Lloyd-Jones was often described as serious, temperamental, and devoted to the ideals of her family and heritage. Seacrest states in her biography that Anna was: “impulsive, erratic, headstrong, and completely at the mercy of some very uncomfortable and conflicting emotions.”⁸ Yet, she carried herself in great stature, riding a horse like a man but having the subtle gentility of a preacher’s daughter. It was her mother’s influence that showed through her love of nature, a passion that her family noted her for and that she carried on to her children. She saw the beauty and wisdom of nature espoused by the Transcendentalist writers her family deeply admired, and shared a deeply Romantic view of the natural world.

Not only was she highly intelligent, but she was also educated. After attending school to become a teacher, Anna became a countryside teacher in Lone Rock, Wisconsin. Her son recalled that she often needed to travel long distances to and from her home, always riding horseback and often alone. This all changed when she married the recently widowed William Wright. She had rented a room from the couple, but just two years after his wife died, they were married, settling near Richland Center, Wisconsin. Only a year after that, she gave birth to her first and only son, Frank Lincoln Wright, on June 8th, 1867.⁹

It was her relationship with Frank that was both idealized and immortalized in his autobiography. She believed her son was destined for greatness, and provided all of the tools for him to become a great architect. Why architecture was so important to a country schoolteacher is

⁷ Ibid, p. 109.

⁸ Seacrest, p. 46.

⁹ Debate over the Lincoln middle name is frequent, but most experts agree that William Wright, who delivered an oration on the death of Lincoln, followed the trend of naming his son after the late president. Lloyd was more than likely homage by Wright after the divorce of his parents.

still a mystery, as biographer Brendon Gill notes in his work on the life of Wright. Frank maintains that she filled his room as a child with woodcuts of great buildings from Europe, likely from William's library. Regardless, she provided her son with the literature and Froebel tools that enhanced his abilities towards higher thought and greater thinking, something she continued throughout his life.

This dedication to her son belied the struggles of her marriage. When she married William, she gave up a job as a schoolteacher, as well as the independence, to marry a man of intelligence. However, she soon became frustrated with this confined life of a preacher's wife when the family moved to Massachusetts, especially since William was Baptist and not Unitarian. His infrequency of employment was a major hindrance to the family, as financial stability waxed and waned with his career choices. It is not known why, but the family eventually moved back to Wisconsin, with William becoming a Unitarian. Needless to say, the relationship was strained throughout.

One aspect that particularly drove the couple apart was the relationship to Frank. His mother constantly doted over the boy, whereas William pushed him. Even more than her relationship to her own children was that of her relationship with her stepchildren. William's daughter from his first marriage, Elizabeth, wrote in her biography that Anna was abusive and cruel to her and her brother, and they were sent away from the house to stay with family. Rumors about the mental health of Anna are speculative, but one legend has William asking her brothers if mental illness ran in the family.

By the time Frank was around eighteen, the couple divorced. Various accounts take a glimpse into the end of the relationship. Brendan Gill, in *Many Masks*, theorizes that William

divorced Anna because Anna was resentful and no longer loved him. Frank wrote in his autobiography that his mother was disgraced by the divorce and pined for his father after he left. In either case, the relationship had deteriorated beyond the point of repair.

When Frank moved to Chicago without his mother's knowledge, she was heartbroken that he had left school, and even more because he did not tell her. However, she quickly recovered, moving to Chicago to be near her son and her brother Jenkin. We do know that Anna did not approve of Catherine Tobin as a match for Frank early in their relationship, as evidenced by a conversation that Frank had with his friend Cecil Corwin. We also know that Anna moved next to the Wrights when they built their house in Oak Park, where she was involved in the matters and lives of her son's family.

Anna never seemed to be satisfied with any of the women in Frank's life, but always supported her son in everything he did. It was her purchase of land near her family in Spring Green that allowed Frank to build Taliesin upon his return to Chicago. When she died in 1923, it contributed to his marriage to Miriam Noel, even though the couple was in a rather rocky relationship by that time. However, by this time, the relationship had crumbled between mother and son, and Anna had been sent away to live with his sister, eventually placed in a sanitarium for the aged until her death. By all accounts, Frank did not even attend his mother's funeral, as he was likely in Los Angeles that week.

Anna was the consistent support system for Frank, and while his relationship with was not as pristine as his autobiography suggests, he knew he could count on her despite what anyone else thought. Her influence pushed Frank towards architecture and success, but the toll of her single-minded focus on her son became detrimental to their relationship. The old maxim,

‘mother knows best,’ seemed to convince Frank to depend on her in his early life. Later in life, Wright began to distrust her influence and meddlesome intrusion into his relationships. Her drive helped Frank achieve her vision of her son becoming a great architect, but their relationship caused Wright to become overconfident, struggle with stable relationships, and separate himself from family.

Father

William Cary Wright was very different from his second wife, Anna. Though both were children of preachers, it was a Baptist heritage and East Coast sensibilities that William brought to the relationship. He was educated at Amherst and Madison College trained him as a physician and lawyer, but he soon spurned both to pursue careers in preaching, teaching music, and even acting as school superintendant. He married his first wife, Permelia Holcomb, in upstate New York in 1850. The couple moved to Wisconsin in 1859, and settled in Lone Rock, Wisconsin the next year. The couple had four children, with only three surviving: George, Charles, and Elizabeth. Permelia did not live through a fifth pregnancy, as both mother and child died on delivery. Only two years later, he married Anna Lloyd-Wright, having three children: Frank, Maginel, and Jane.

William was brilliant and passionate, but suffered from a restless spirit. After leaving his post as school superintendant, the new couple moved to Richland Center, WI, and then Weymouth, MA, to take calls as a Baptist minister. After several years of service in Massachusetts, (at the urging of Anna,) the family moved back to Wisconsin, settling in Madison. After returning and converting to Unitarianism, William headed a Unitarian

congregation, became an avid speaker, opened a music school, and played the organ for local congregations.

While his career shifted significantly through the years, music seemed to be his great passion in life. Musicologist David Patterson notes that he not only composed rather prolifically throughout his life, but wrote at least three books on music theory.¹⁰ His musical compositions ranged from church hymns to parlor music, moving between popular music of the day and more private pieces. He personally educated his children in music and saw to their development throughout their childhood, even teaching Frank the viola.

While William's instability in his career put pressure on him, the instability in his home life put tremendous pressure on his relationship with his children and wife. Several biographers speculated that the incompatibility of William and Anna was due to William's undying love for his first wife, Anna's jealousy of his children from that relationship, and the extreme focus of Anna's affection towards Frank. It is curious though that Frank showed William in such a poor light, despite the fact that William was described as a model figure by contemporaries. Frank walked a fine line between pity and cold dismissal of his father, seeing him as a harsh taskmaster and an overwhelming figurehead. He fondly remembered his father's music and his love of literature, but blamed him for abandoning the family, (a fact that was clearly not completely true). This is how Frank remembers William shortly before he left:

The father's earnings were small and shrinking. Music wasn't much of a livelihood in Madison. Irregular preaching there and in surrounding towns less so. And he grew irascible over crosscurrents of family feeling. The Joneses didn't much approve of Anna's privations. And he, being a proud man, resented their provisions. The lad was his mother's adoration. She lived much in him. Probably that didn't help either.¹¹

¹⁰ David Patterson, interview by author, phone interview, March 10, 2012

¹¹ Pfeiffer, "An Autobiography," from *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 138.

Frank bore an unjust resentment against his father, partially as a defense to his mother. His father, for all of his brilliance, was seen as a failure in the eyes of his wife and children.

Again, in Frank's autobiography:

The youth hardly had himself as his father's son. All had gone well enough on the surface that was now broken. The son had sympathy for his talented father as well as admiration. Something of that vain struggle of superior talents with untoward circumstance that was his father's got to him and he was touched by it- never knowing how to show Father. Something-you see- had never been established that was needed to make them father and son. Perhaps the father never loved the son at any time.¹²

William went on to live for another eighteen years away from his family, he never again enjoying another relationship with his children from his second marriage. William represented Frank's insecurities about his future: a brilliant man without success. However, his bitterness towards his father leaving was almost a precursor to his own abdication from his family, repeating the vicious cycle. In many ways, William displayed the same ambition that his son fulfilled, but they shared some of the same failings.

Part 2: Significant Others and Children

Catherine "Kitty" Tobin Wright

When Frank moved from Madison to Chicago in the mid-1880s, he did so completely alone. True, he had his well-connected Uncle Jenkin, but his desire was to strike out on his own. After a few years of establishing himself professionally with J. Lyman Silsbee and the firm of Adler and Sullivan, he desired more. Up until that time, he spent most of his time with his friend

¹² *Ibid*, p. 138.

and colleague, Cecil Corwin, or his cousin, Richard Lloyd Jones. His uncle encouraged a social life for his nephew through activities with his church and his own personal social contacts.

At one of these events, a *Les Misérables* masked ball, Wright met a beautiful girl named Catherine Tobin. He describes the meeting:

Rushing across the dance floor to join Miss Emery's group, half-way over, a tall, pretty "peasant-girl" in pink, blonde curls dancing one way while she was rushing my way looking the other way, was upon me before I could avoid her. Striking her forehead square against mine she was knocked to her hands and knees. I myself "seeing stars," managed to pick her up... The parents were Mr. and Mrs. Tobin, and this was their Catherine.¹³

The two were familiar with each other, as both attended All Saints Church. However, this moment, as well as the subsequent dinner he was invited to, acted as a catalyst to the relationship. Now, Catherine, or "Kitty" as she was often called, was nearly five years Wright's junior and a student. Yet, the couple soon began spending a good deal of time together, so much so that it became "conspicuous" to the other members of the congregation and that Catherine's studies began to "fall off." Anna Wright was concerned about Frank's sole focus on one girl, but Frank persisted. Soon enough, he was forwarded enough money to build a house for himself and Kitty so that they could get married.

Wright notes an interesting point about the marriage. In his autobiography, he notes:

The young husband found that he had his work cut out for himself. The young wife found hers cut out for her. Architecture was my profession. Motherhood became hers. Fair enough, but it was a division.¹⁴

This seemed to be the opinion he carried throughout the marriage. She became mistress of the household with Frank pursuing a career, and he rarely wanted a part in the discipline of the

¹³ *Ibid*, pp. 155-156

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 177.

children. Where Frank spent every penny for something of beauty, it was Catherine who managed finances for the family. While he had a vested interest in his children and home, his focus was his work. The freedom of his work and social life possibly contributed to his increasing separation from family life, or Wright possibly suffered from the clichéd midlife crisis. Either way, Frank grew restless with his work and life, and soon abandoned both, escaping with the wife of a client, Mamah Chaney, to Europe.

Catherine was left with the mounting debts, the house full of children without a father, and with the shame of having a husband leave his family for another woman. For the carefree, adventurous young woman that came into the marriage, a sad and hurt woman was left. For years, Frank asked her for a divorce, first in his relationship with Mamah, then with Miriam Noel. It was nearly thirteen years from Frank's abandonment of his family before a legal suit, brought forth by Wright in 1918, finally separated the marriage. It is noted by Brendan Gill that, "Catherine... was employed as a social worker... and would be paid alimony."¹⁵

Catherine again remarried, this time to a gentleman named Ben Page. The marriage did not last long. However, through all of Wright's financial difficulties, he attempted to make sure that his family and Catherine were financially taken care of. This did not stop a certain amount of resentment from his children, who, even after her death, took her side against him.

When the mother died... only a couple of weeks before Wright himself died, David waited a full day before driving over from his house in Phoenix to Taliesin, to break the news to his father. Wright's eyes filled with tears and he said to David, "Why didn't you tell me as soon as you knew?" David stared at his father... "Why should I have bothered?" he asked. "You never gave a god-damn for her when she was alive."¹⁶

¹⁵ Gill, Brendan. *Many Masks*. (Ballantine Books: New York, 1987,) p. 300.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 498-499.

While David's harsh barbs were hardly true, Catherine was a good mother who took care of her family. She was a loyal wife to Wright, and by all accounts still loved him despite his philandering. Unfortunately, Catherine represented Wright's obligations and duties, a role he detested. Like his father, he was ambitious and intelligent, seeking more than the obligations of family. Catherine and Frank shared almost nineteen years as husband and wife, but despite whatever love was between them, Wright did not want to be shackled to the family life.

Martha "Mamah" Borthwick Chaney

The relationship between Catherine and Frank was over even without Mamah. The couple was living two separate lives, and Frank was a very popular and social individual, especially with the women of Oak Park. Yet, there was something unique about Mamah that spoke to Frank, and their relationship may have been the healthiest of his life, though socially unacceptable.

Chaney was a modern woman in every sense of the word. She was college educated, attending both the University of Michigan and University of Chicago through her life. She was skilled in several languages, including "German, French, and Italian, as well as some Latin and Greek."¹⁷ Her role model was the feminist writer, Ellen Key, known for romantic and modern views of relationships. Her husband, Edwin Chaney, was an electrician and client of Wright's. Frank built them a house nearby his own in Oak Park in 1903, and was known to work with the wives of his clients closely. As a man about town, it is no doubt that Frank noticed the wife of his client as a beautiful, independent, and educated woman.

¹⁷ Friedland, Roger and Harold Zellman. *The Fellowship*. (HarperPerennial: New York, 2006,) p.29.

When the affair began is unknown, but most of the biographies agree that it was sometime in either 1906 or 1907. Many of Wright's major projects, such as Larkin Building, were completed by this point, and he would have returned to Chicago to start new projects. Meanwhile, many of his friends from Europe begged him to come over where his work was already being appreciated. It was a combination of stagnation at home, desire for new experiences, and, of course, his feelings for Mamah, that drove him to affair. By 1909, Wright and Mamah, both being parents and spouses, abandoned their duties in Chicago and headed to Europe.

The couple returned to Chicago intermittently between 1910 and 1911. For Frank, it was to return for his children, who desperately missed their father. For Mamah, it to obtain a finalized divorce from her husband, which was granted in 1912. However, Frank could not escape the stigma from the scandal, either personally or professionally. Meanwhile, Anna Wright helped her son acquire land in her name in Spring Green. Wright settled his debts in the city, all the while planning a home for himself and Mamah in the country.

Taliesin provided Frank a new chance at life, giving him the ability to build a house of his own in the valley that his family settled. It also gave him a place to get away from the controversy and to live in peace with Mamah. For two years, it was a refuge. During that time, the couple traveled to Japan, where Frank received the commission for the Imperial Hotel. During that same period, Wright also received the commission of Midway Gardens, allowing him to return to work in Chicago. Yet, amidst that success, it was the tragedy of 1914 that changed this relationship forever.

The death of Mamah Borthwick, (she had dropped the Cheney from her name after the divorce,) was one of horror, publicity and despair. According to William Drennan, author of *Death in a Prairie House*, the seven deaths that day came at the hands of a servant, Julian Carlton. Carlton had been referred to the family by a colleague of Wright's in Chicago, but Carlton was dissatisfied, the reason still a mystery. Acquiring several cans of gasoline and a hatchet, Carlton attacked and murdered Mamah, her two children, Wright's favorite craftsman and his son, and several other workers at lunch. Taliesin was set on fire, with it only being partially saved through the efforts of individuals who noticed the flames. The murderer died only a few days later, suffering from starvation after swallowing acid.

The loss devastated Frank. Not only had he lost the woman he loved, but his beloved Taliesin, his collection of Japanese prints, and his second chance. His world was shaken to the core. His son, John Lloyd, was working with his father on Midway Gardens during the murders, and accompanied his father to Taliesin in the wake of the tragedy. He comments in his book:

The box was lowered, but he neither wept nor prayed. His face bore the expression of one not on earth. It seemed to me that in that moment his soul soared up to God and besought Him to let him join her whom he loved more than all on earth... I watched him, but he made no sound.¹⁸

Later, John comments on the change in his father from that day:

Something in him died with her, a something lovable and gentle that I knew and loved in my father. As I reflect now I am convinced that the love that united them was deep, sincere and holy in spite of its illegality... Through the years they lived their life together Dad was free to express his love and attention to his children. After the tragedy it was not so. Up to that time he lived life fully.¹⁹

The relationship of Wright and Mamah is often times considered one of the best and worst times in the life of Wright. Their joining, no matter how happy, resulted in the end of his

¹⁸ Wright, John Lloyd. *My Father, Who is on Earth*. (Southern Illinois University Press: Carbondale, IL. 1994,) p. 82.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 86.

family and professional life in Chicago. The return from Europe reinforced this point, but the building of Taliesin signaled a new start. Though work was scant, two of Wright's most significant designs came from this time. However, her death resulted in a deep sense of loss for him and changed him profoundly. The following two relationships were stormy, and neither one provided the joy he found in Mamah. The violent end to Frank and Mamah's relationship caused a recession in Wright's life and work that lasted for almost twenty years.

Mamah represented intellectual freedom from his increasingly stagnant marriage and life in Oak Park. She was a romantic, like his mother. Mamah was an opportunity for Wright to start over in his 40's, getting a second chance to regain his freedom. Of all of his relationships, theirs was the most romanticized in Frank's mind, first escaping to Europe, then Taliesin. Losing her meant Wright had lost his family, his home, and his second chance with a woman he considered a soul mate. Emotionally, he was broken, and would seek to regain this relationship for the rest of his life.

Maud "Miriam" Noel Wright

After the loss of Mamah, Wright secluded himself from the world for several months. During that time, he read few letters sent to him and focused on rebuilding Taliesin. According to Frank, he received a letter from a woman who had experienced loss in her life as well. Something about what she had written spoke to him. He invited her to come visit him and he was captivated. This woman was Miriam Noel.

Noel was much like Mamah in that she was an educated woman who immediately stood out. She had sophistication, an artistic-flair, and a presence that Wright found alluring.

Biographer Meryle Seacrest states Noel was born in Tennessee in 1869 and married young to a

man Emil Noel, with whom she had three children.²⁰ According to Miriam, she was a widow who sculpted in Paris to some acclaim, (until World War I broke out,) and traveled the world after her children left home. It was probably the romanticism and interest in the world of Noel that married quite well with Wright's own. The couple began a relationship that lasted nearly ten years, but the tempestuous nature of that relationship carried on nearly five years past that.

Even in their first meeting, Wright noticed that Noel had some sort of head twitch and afflicted with an unknown ailment. Her story of tragedy and loss spoke to him after his own loss. Yet, the relationship suffered due to episodes of strange behavior by Noel. Most researchers of Noel believe she was addicted to the opiate, morphine, which also accounted for her physical ailments. Whether she took morphine for an unknown illness or had in some other way become addicted to the drug, it impacted her relationship with Wright.

The other issues came in time. Though they experienced a powerful 'honeymoon' period, (likely due to the introduction of a sexual relationship within several weeks of meeting,) the practical relationship issues were a struggle. Noel was flamboyant in dress, which Wright disliked. Wright was flirtatious and had a straying eye, which Noel despised. Stories of Noel threatening Wright with a gun and a knife are likely, as well as Frank physically rebuking her. Over the course of the relationship, Noel either left or was forced out by Frank several times, even during a trip to Tokyo. Yet, they always reconciled.

The couple was eventually married in 1923, after waiting the proscribed year following his divorce from Catherine. During that same year, his mother also died, which had some effect on the relationship being able to move forward. While Anna disliked most of the women in his

²⁰ Seacrest, p. 237-238.

life, Anna especially hated Noel for her Christian Science beliefs and general demeanor. Less than a year into the marriage, the couple had separated. Within a year from that, Olgivanna Hinzenberg was installed at Taliesin. Frank soon filed for divorce in 1925, but Noel refused give up without a fight.

Noel, enraged by the notion that she had been replaced and discarded, pursued Frank and Olgivanna over the next few years. Bringing charges as varied as the immigration status of Olgivanna, the financial capabilities of Wright to pay her a settlement for divorce, and even having the couple arrested for the Mann Act in Minnesota, Noel was relentless.²¹ She charged him with abuse, abandonment, and preventing her from returning to her ‘rightful home,’ Taliesin. Meanwhile, her pressure financially had inspired the bank to threaten Wright with his own debts to them over Taliesin, adding to the pressure. Noel’s efforts eventually backfired, gaining support for Wright over his scornful wife and eventually having her charged with several counts of harassment. Eventually, the two settled for divorce in 1927, effectively ending the relationship.

Noel only lived another three years, dying in Milwaukee in 1930. Her poor health eventually caught up with her, and her efforts to be the magnificent woman that Wright had first met were long gone. One may either villainize or pity Noel for her dogged pursuit of Wright over the end of the relationship, but the relationship seemed to be more romanticism than substance by both parties. The sad truth shows a relationship held together by passion: an imagined connection between two fundamentally incompatible people whose relationship was prolonged by world travel and dependence. The relationship that was defined by opposition to the world, divorce, and turmoil turned out to be a case of two people fighting for self-interest. Wright tried

²¹ The Mann Act made transporting a person over state lines for illicit purposes illegal.

to fill the gap in his life with someone more broken than him, and both sides clung desperately to the idea of a healthy relationship.

Olgivanna Lazovich Hinzenberg Wright

...Olgivanna represented the logical progression in Wright's love objects- from socially conscious suburbanite to liberated feminist to expatriate artist to foreign-born mystic.²²

Of all of the women with whom Frank had a relationship, Olgivanna was the strongest, both emotionally and mentally. Not only did she survive some of the most difficult years he faced both professionally and personally, but she was by his side until his death 34 years later. She was a fierce personality that challenged and complemented Wright's own, and the two were truly partners in life.

When Wright met Olgivanna, she was a divorced dancer with a young child, Svetlana. As in almost every relationship Wright had, he was immediately captivated by her beauty and intelligence. She had been raised in Montenegro, daughter of a prominent military family. She was still married for a short time when she met Frank, but it was long since over by that point. Within a year of the relationship beginning, she had successfully received a divorce from Vlademar Hinzenberg.

The divorce of Wright from Miriam became very ugly due to one fact: Wright and Olgivanna had a daughter, Iovanna, born before the divorce proceedings. Not only was this the traditional Wright method of taking up with a new woman to a great scandal, but a child was involved. Issues also rose because of the daughter, Svetlana, whose father feared that Wright and

²² Twombly, Robert C. *Frank Lloyd Wright: An Interpretive Biography*. (Harper & Row: New York, 1973,) pp. 146-147.

Olgivanna planned to take her from the country, bringing out a warrant to prevent it. Through the lawsuits, warrants, arrests, and threat of financial devastation, the couple managed to survive.

Olgivanna was the perfect partner for Frank to lean on during these hard financial times. The few projects he took on were never built, and his estate was financially in ruin. To find a supplemental income, Wright pursued the concept of starting a school at Taliesin to educate young men and women in architecture. Olgivanna was key to this effort, as her studies under Georgi Gurdjieff, a mystic in Europe with a communal following, were highly influential. She idealized Gurdjieff's teachings that emphasized self-denial and withstanding suffering, and these were traits she saw reflected in Frank's demeanor. Frank was interested in the concepts of Gurdjieff, but the two strong personalities conflicted several times in their meetings over the years. Olgivanna pursued her own interests in this respect.

The fortunes of Olgivanna and Frank turned around in the mid-1930s. With the completion of Fallingwater and the SC Johnson complex, the fortunes of the Wrights and Taliesin Fellowship seemed to be in great shape. However, an illness in 1936 changed the path of the couple. Wright came down with a severe breathing ailment, which lasted nearly a week. His doctor suggested moving to a dryer climate than the damp countryside of Wisconsin. Seacrest notes Olgivanna's desire to move the home south to Arizona: "Olgivanna did not like the bleak Wisconsin winters and was drawn to the sand, stones and desert growth of the Arizona landscape."²³ In the end, they moved the entire Fellowship and Studio twice a year; first to Arizona in the winter and then to Wisconsin in the summer.

²³ Seacrest, p. 451.

A good deal of the information on Olgivanna and Frank's relationship comes from memoirs and diaries of Apprentices. Though accounts vary, the couple seemingly ran Taliesin as a feudal estate, with themselves the lord and lady of the land. They often dined separately, they lived separately, and they held themselves above others in conversation. At Taliesin, they were the undisputed leaders. *The Fellowship* paints the couple as sometimes tyrants who involved themselves in everything from the love-lives of the Apprentices to the discipline of family and spouses.

The couple spent a great deal of time in New York in the final years of Frank's life. From 1954 until right before his death in 1959, the Wrights often took up residence at the Plaza in New York City. Not only was the move practical, as Wright was working on the Guggenheim, but social, as he and Olgivanna enjoyed the life of the city. However, Wright's deteriorating health took the couple back to Arizona, where Wright died in April of that year. His body was transferred to his family cemetery outside of Unity Chapel, where the rest of his ancestors and beloved Mamah were buried. Olgivanna, however, was not finished with either Wright or the Fellowship.

Following Frank's death, Olgivanna met with the apprentices and members of the Fellowship. She wanted the Fellowship, who had projects lined up for years following Frank's death, to continue under her purview. Some Apprentices resented her involvement and left, others stayed true to the vision of Wright. When Olgivanna died in 1985, Fellowship floundered without a strong figurehead to steer the ship. Worse still was the last wish of Olgivanna: that Frank be exhumed from Taliesin in Wisconsin and be cremated, with their ashes being combined. To both his children and several Apprentices, it was a betrayal to remove Wright from

his beloved valley. It is probable that aside from having Wright near her, it was the jealousy of Mamah and her dislike of Taliesin that precipitated the decision.

Olgivanna was, in many ways, enigmatic as a dual figurehead. Her fierce loyalty to Frank was unquestioned, even when they argued. She saw her purpose and training under Gurdjieff as falling in line with Wright's own philosophy of life and unity. Yet, her own independent and fierce personality was not always a positive influence, as her polarizing presence was a frustration to those surrounding the couple. She was the only person who had a personality to counter Wright's personal egotism, but together they could be quite imposing. Olgivanna saw herself as Wright's equal in vision and personality, but lacked the skills and experience that allowed Frank to radiate a transcendent quality. There is no doubt that the success of Wright's later years was a contribution of Olgivanna's support, but it can also be said that her influence affected several of the factors in his life negatively. Biographer Brendon Gill recalls her:

It was true that many people had found Olgivanna difficult to deal with in the long years of her proprietorship of Wright. Others had felt a sympathy for the woman who, like so many men and women living within the range of Wright's irresistible magnetism, fought hard to achieve a separate identity... She had lived under Wright's spell and had done more than anyone else to keep that spell alive...²⁴

Children

Over his nearly 92 year life, Frank sired seven children, not including an adopted daughter, Svetlana. The understanding of Wright as a father is deeply mired in the troubled relationships he had over his life. After all, it was the divorce of his parents that he saw as a betrayal in his youth, something he blamed on his father. Almost 23 years later, he absconded from Chicago and did the very thing he claimed to abhor: abandon his family. This caused bitterness from his children from Catherine and destroyed bonds that he had developed with

²⁴ Gill, p. 514.

them. Later, with Svetlana and Iovanna, Wright attempted to reconcile his attempts at fatherhood while still keeping his own independence.

Wright and Catherine together accounted for six of Wright's seven children. Lloyd, John Lloyd, David, Catherine, Frances, and Robert Llewellyn loved their father and enjoyed his presence in their lives, despite Wright's self-diagnosed inabilities as a parent. He claimed in his autobiography:

The children were their mother's children and up to her except when the two young parents themselves made eight children all together at playtime... I am afraid I never looked the part. Nor ever acted it. I didn't feel it. And I didn't know how.²⁵

John Lloyd stated this was nonsense. Even Wright's own autobiography shows his children, whether at play or in sickness, protected in a loving house. Frank provided his children with music, spoiled them constantly, and even loved them enough to return from his escape to Europe.

This is how John replies to his father:

Don't let that fool you, that's just propaganda. He was preeminently a lover of home and family. He loved fatherhood. No one could have stopped him. He just didn't like to take everything that goes with it in our complicated and restless state of society, and children become a double nuisance when a father leaves home. He tried to make himself "Big Bad Bill" to relieve the sentimental pull on his heartstrings.²⁶

John's premise is that his father put on a front about his relationship to distance himself from his feelings about his family. In a way, it is believable. Despite his claims he never had fatherly instincts, he hired two of his sons to do architecture for him, (John and Lloyd,) as well as employing several of his other children in other capacities. Frank's standards for his children were high, (firing John for requesting back pay,) but he always kept track of their success through the years. Yet, the resentment of their father existed. Gill summarizes the sentiment:

²⁵ Pfeiffer, "An Autobiography" from Vol. 2, p. 179.

²⁶ John Lloyd Wright, p. 56.

From the moment that Wright had left the house in Oak Park, Catherine had taken her mother's side and, though consenting to reestablish a family relationship with her father, had refused to forgive him. Lloyd Wright and John Lloyd Wright, being young men at the time of the separation, had silently taken their father's side; Llewellyn was too young to take in what was happening to the household, while Frances was divided in her loyalties... It was David among the boys who had to shoulder much of the mother's grief and prolonged distraction, and he retained a measure of bitterness against Wright to the very end.²⁷

Despite the strained relationship, Wright was proud of his children. Lloyd became a successful architect in California, John was an architect who assisted his father on Midway Gardens and gained fame as the creator of Lincoln Logs, and Catherine's daughter was the famous actress, Anne Baxter. Some of Wright's other grandchildren also made names for themselves in architecture and craftsmanship. It seems this success did not carry onto his other children with Olgivanna.

Svetlana Hinzenberg was very young when Wright and Olgivanna began their relationship and, unfortunately, was soon pulled into the legal battle of her mother and Frank against his wife Miriam. Complicating matters was her father, Vlademar, who feared his daughter was going to be taken out of the country. To prevent this, he had a warrant put out for the abduction of his daughter, but the matter was soon resolved after the couple came out of hiding.

Yet, Svetlana was well loved by both of her parents, as well as Frank, who adopted her later. Frank doted on her throughout her life and was extremely protective of her, especially with his apprentices. When she married apprentice Wes Peters, Frank was angered at the boldness of a trusted assistant to take away the girl he considered a daughter. When the couple moved to Peters' home town of Evansville, Indiana, (and later Evanston, Illinois,) Wright became angered

²⁷ Gill, p. 498.

with the couple leaving him. Eventually, Svetlana and her husband moved back to Taliesin, though with some reluctance. Svetlana lived at Taliesin until 1946, when a tragic car accident took her life and that of her son, Daniel. Her other son, Brandoch, survived the accident.

Iovanna, the product of Olgivanna and Frank's early relationship, took a far more tragic path. Despite growing up in and around Taliesin, she was often lost in the shuffle during the most prolific years of work for Wright. She also felt the pressure of an older sister, of whom she had to fight for attention, and the pressures to live up to her father's vision and mother's expectations:

Around the Fellowship the consensus was that her parents did not discipline her... Others believed that the trouble was that the attitude of both Iovanna's parents was unpredictable and inconsistent, so that their daughter never knew what to expect from one moment to another.²⁸

In the end, the expectations on the girl were too much, as she suffered several failed marriages, substance abuse problems, and eventually settled in a treatment facility in California after years of violent and unpredictable behavior. She is the last living member of Wright's children, and a sad legacy.

Wright's children are a mixed bag of success, failure, and tragedy. Though Wright's children by Catherine seemed to be more successful than his children by Olgivanna, the environment that his later children grew up in was much different. Catherine seemed to live for her children, Olgivanna lived for Gurdjieff and Wright. Though all grew up with their father's work, the Fellowship and level of work definitely changed the dynamic of home life for Svetlana and Iovanna. The difference of having a stable environment with separated parents saved Wright's older children from the same fate that his younger faced.

²⁸ Seacrest, p. 434.

Wright's desire to be a father, despite his claims, was legitimate. His children with Catherine were a product of Wright's desire to do what was expected of him: start a family and get married. However, his resistance to the responsibility and dedication that was needed to be a father ruined his relationship with them. His children respected him for his ability, but could not forgive leaving them and their mother. Wright tried to show his responsibility in raising Svetlana and Iovanna, but his overprotection of Svetlana and carefree parenting of Iovanna ruined the girls. Wright gave his children the world, beautiful things he could imagine, but his absence could not be replaced.

Part 3: Clients, Apprentices, and Friends

Clients

I am master-builder where I have conceived or I am nothing. But if you are not yet convinced that I am faithfully interpreting your desires where a way of life is concerned with a building- and that your way of life, as you see it, is my first and deepest concern- that I don't know how to convince you.²⁹

The interests of architect and owner are thus mutual and binding upon both.³⁰

Throughout the near seventy years that Frank Lloyd Wright designed structures, one thing remained unchanged: clients were both a help and a difficulty to his work. A common misconception is that all of Wright's clients at first came to him eagerly, but tired of his delays, increasing costs, and over-the-top behavior. Certainly, some clients had these feelings, (or worse,) but a good deal of his clients saw the end goal worth issues that arose during the process.

Early on, Wright's clients were those of his employers, (Adler & Sullivan, J. Lyman Silsbee,) or family members.³¹ Wright began his own individual work while he was working for

²⁹ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks, ed. "Wright letter to E. J. Kaufmann, August 31, 1936" from *Frank Lloyd Wright: Letters to Clients*. (The Press at California State University, Fresno: Fresno, CA, 1986,) p, 100.

³⁰ Pfeiffer, "A Testament" from *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 220.

Adler & Sullivan after office hours. These “Bootleg” houses were created by Wright because “Adler and Sullivan refused to build houses during all the time (Wright) was with them.”³²

Because of this, Frank began taking some of these commissions, both earning a name for houses and losing his job in the process.

His first few houses came through personal acquaintances. The Winslow house was built for a former Adler and Sullivan client, and the Moore House for neighbors of Wright’s. From there on out, his work spread by word of mouth through the local community of Oak Park, where his houses stood out from those of the area, both negatively and positively. While the appeal of the unorthodox houses of the local architect appealed to some, others “ridiculed” Wright for his strange designs. This required a certain type of person as a client, and come to him they did.

The early houses provided Wright with rich clients who idealized his work. Susan Lawrence Dana of Springfield, the Bradley and Hickox families of Kankakee, and the Martins of Buffalo learned of Wright through Chicago connections, bringing him out of a closed community for some of his most unique work. The Martins, especially, were what we might consider super-clients of Wright, with Darwin hearing of Wright from his brother, W.E. Martin of Chicago. Wright designed houses for both brothers, as well as well-known Larkin Building in Buffalo. Darwin convinced his employer, John Larkin, that Wright should create a magnificent building for the company, though the two had only briefly been acquainted. So thoroughly convinced of

³¹ Wright built at least two structures for the Lloyd-Jones family early in his career, (the Romeo and Juliet Tower and Hillside Home School,) and may have assisted with the interior of his family’s Unity Chapel in Spring Green, though several architectural and biographical critics are mixed to the level of involvement.

³² Pfeiffer, “An Autobiography” from *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, pp. 174-175.

the skills of Wright, Brendan Gill states that, “when (Darwin) Martin had to make a choice between his wife’s wishes and Wright’s, he favored Wright’s.”³³

Yet, Martin and Wright shared a complicated relationship through the years. Issues arose with the house design, with the price of the construction, and the pace of Wright to get things accomplished. Meanwhile, as was characteristic of Wright in his early works, he asked for more money. One letter from this period is simple and direct:

Dear Mr. Martin,

You are incorrigible, but I love you just the same. Send the money.

Wright³⁴

One wonders how Martin supported such an expensive venture.³⁵ In 1909, Martin supported Wright more than financially. As Wright left his family in Oak Park, Martin was one of the few clients that did not abandon him, despite his disapproval of the affair. The impact of Wright’s flight to Europe in such a manner did not set well with many clients who had supported him so well in his early years. When Unity Temple was to be dedicated in 1909, Wright was not even invited to the ceremony.

In many ways, this exemplifies Wright’s relationship with clients. He took for granted that his work always brought support from those interested in his work, but he tested the support of these clients. He famously claimed that he did not look for clients, they looked for him. Yet, the Chicago support he relied on in his first twenty years was gone, and despite the magnificent constructions of Midway Gardens and the Imperial Hotel in Japan, the notoriety he received

³³ Gill, p. 147.

³⁴ Pfeiffer, “May 25, 1906” from *Letters to Clients*, p. 15.

³⁵ Later in life, even after Martin sunk quite a bit of his own money into saving Wright’s property, being a founding member of Wright, Inc. The money that was owed to the Martin family was never repaid after the death of Darwin, a sad footnote to the relationship.

from both was negligible. His constructions in California led to new techniques he employed, but also led to one of his most frustrating commissions.

The Hollyhock House in California exemplified the difficulties that Wright had with clients. When Wright began building the Hollyhock House, he was in the middle of constructing the Imperial Hotel in Japan, as well as several other concrete block projects in California. The client, Aline Barnsdall, was a wealthy socialite in the Los Angeles area who was not only well travelled, but an artist. She originally contacted Wright to construct a theater for her, but plans never came together.

The process of building the house was a disaster. Barnsdall was constantly travelling but wanted consistent updates from Wright. Wright was also travelling between Taliesin and Japan, and ignored the project far more often than he should have. Barnsdall began saying Wright cared very little about the project and charged he was robbing her. Wright countered by saying the constant interference by her friends, along with the uncooperative nature of the contractor, made the project impossible. Lawyers were brought in, several harsh letters were written, but the project was completed, (though Barnsdall moved out of the house in 1925, well before legal issues were settled). The most telling of all was a letter written in 1921, after the house was completed. In it, Wright ends the letter with this:

Well- the buildings stands. Your home.

It is yours for what it has cost you. It is mine for what it has cost me.³⁶

For the successful Wright building to be completed, it required a mix of full confidence in Wright by clients, outside cooperation from contractors and building committees, and deep pockets for changes that may occur. Hib Johnson of the S.C Johnson Company in Racine,

³⁶ Pfeiffer, "June 27, 1921" from *Letters to Clients*, p. 37.

Wisconsin, was one such client. In 1936, when the notoriety of Wright was behind him, Johnson took the advice of his daughter to hire the architect for his building. Wright did not disappoint, providing “lily-pad” columns and glass-tubing skylights. He overcame skeptical engineers by testing the strength of the columns at well over the necessary strength. Even Johnson had Wright build his house, Wingspread. However, the cost of the building ended at nearly ten times the estimated cost, from \$300,000 to nearly \$3,000,000. It didn’t matter, because the S.C. Johnson building became one of the most well known buildings of its day, and with the Kaufmann house, (Fallingwater,) put Wright back on the map.

The relationship of Wright and clients is hard to measure by dollars and cents. While Wright often went well over his budget, he also cared very deeply about making his houses affordable to the everyday person. The majority of Wright’s clients were wealthy and artistic, asking Wright for extravagant houses. When he began the Usonian style houses, it was with the concept of providing an affordable house for the masses. When he constructed the Jacobs house in Madison, he did so for under \$6000. While he never again was able to price a house that low, it was typical of Wright’s vision for America.

Throughout his career he used local materials, local contractors, and cost-efficient building techniques. He toyed with pre-fabricated houses earlier in his career, but could not gain traction with technique. Before he designed houses, he interviewed the clients about what was important to them, what they planned on using the house for, and how their family lived. He then incorporated these concepts into the design of the property. While clients did not always receive all of the things they wanted, they received what Wright believed they needed. It was both a privilege and a burden to live in a Frank Lloyd Wright house: a pleasure because you were

getting a one of a kind structure, a burden because you knew the house was never truly yours, but Mr. Wright's.

Apprentices

Many people forget that Wright was himself an apprentice at one time. While at the University of Wisconsin, he studied under Allen Conover, a professor of engineering. Upon leaving for Chicago, he worked under J. Lyman Silsbee, (with whom he probably worked to complete the Lloyd-Jones family chapel). He briefly attempted to gain a raise by joining the firm of Beers, Clay and Dutton, but he was woefully underprepared for the workload.³⁷ He then returned to Silsbee for a brief time before an opportunity opened in the office of Adler and Sullivan. Sullivan was impressed by Wright and hired the young architect immediately.

Louis Sullivan became Wright's "Lieber Meister" or "Beloved Master." Sullivan proved to be the ideal mentor to Wright's ambition, as well as a life-long friend. Sullivan himself had been trained at the Academe de Beaux-Arts, the well known institution where some of the greatest architects of the 19th and 20th centuries had studied. Drawing influences from architects H.H. Richardson and Frank Furness, Sullivan was known as the innovator of the modern skyscraper. His principles of design emphasized the maxim "Form Follows Function," meaning the building should always be built with the purpose of the structure as paramount.

During his time with Sullivan, Wright became a skilled designer and chief draftsman for the firm. His connection to Sullivan allowed him to become known as "the pencil in the Master's hand." It was the experience of working with a skilled architect and established firm that gave Wright the confidence to be able to go on his own, (something Wright himself disliked in his

³⁷Silsbee was known as a designer with little drive for much else (see p. 152 from "An Autobiography"). Though he studied engineering briefly, his skills in practical design were still being developed.

own apprentices). When he was fired from Adler and Sullivan, Wright began his own practice with friend and colleague Cecil Corwin.³⁸

It was at his own Studio that Wright began bringing in skilled craftspeople. Wright brought in people who were in the field and in a specific craft, but all were under his umbrella. Colleagues like George Elmslie, Marion Mahony, and Walter Burley Griffin were successful on their own works, but the association with Wright increased the notoriety of their work. Mahoney showed promise as Wright's assistant, but it was her husband Griffin who showed the greatest later success in Australia. When Wright left Chicago, his studio and practice were abandoned.

Between Wright's return to Chicago and his founding of the Taliesin Fellowship, he did acquire quite a prolific list of apprentices. Often forgotten is the fact that two of Wright's most skilled apprentices were his sons, Lloyd and John Lloyd. The two assisted him on many of his commissions between 1911 and 1925, including Midway Gardens and the California houses. Lloyd became a prolific designer in California on his own, but assisted his father in the concrete block structures. John helped with Midway Gardens, but had a couple business differences with his father over being paid, (a common complaint). Two other apprentices during this period, Richard Neutra and Rudolph Schindler, became two of the most prolific and well-known designers of the period, but Wright was offended when the two claimed aspects of the buildings.

The founding of the Taliesin Fellowship came in a precarious time for Wright. The late 1920's followed his legal issues with Miriam Noel, and was a slow period for his work. He had many of his designs on the board, but very few reached completion. The economy was in a downward spiral with the Great Depression, and the Wrights were desperate for money. A

³⁸ Wright actually began working on additional houses because Adler and Sullivan refused to do private residences. Wright even designed a house for Sullivan.

concept for a school had been discussed for several years, but the need for income (and labor) for rebuilding Taliesin forced Wright into action.

The school opened in 1932 and is still in operation today. Rather than a curriculum, Wright emphasized learning by doing; this was accomplished by watching him design, going on-site to help with the construction of buildings, and assisting on the maintenance of Taliesin. The last aspect was particularly important, as it provided cheap labor for construction, as well as preparing meals, taking care of crops, and assisting with any other projects on the estate.

Several major apprentices took leading roles with the Fellowship during the life of Wright. Edgar Tafel, Jack Howe, Robert Mosher and William Wesley Peters were among the first class that joined the Fellowship, though later members included John DeKoven Hill, Eugene Masselink, Edgar Kaufmann Jr., and Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer.³⁹ Early on, Wright put a great deal of trust in his apprentices, giving them on-site responsibilities to oversee construction of buildings. They were not given much latitude for changes, but they often assisted in fixing issues that arose.

Early on, William Wesley Peters became an important member of the Fellowship. His greatest skill was not truly in design, but in practical application of Wright's designs. Several of Wright's designs were 'saved' at the site by Peters' knowledge of structural design. Later, he married Wright's step-daughter Svetlana Hinzenberg, both firmly connecting himself to the family and causing a major rift between himself and Frank. Frank saw the relationship as 'Wes' taking advantage of the young girl, and, when the couple fled Taliesin for a time, felt a sense of betrayal. However, the couple returned to Taliesin and Peters regained his role with the

³⁹ Kaufmann Jr. introduced his father to Wright, resulting in Wright building Fallingwater. Eugene Masselink was Wright's secretary, (as well as a talented artist,) managing Taliesin. Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer is the current Director of Archives for the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, publishing many books of Wright's designs and writings.

Fellowship, even taking a leading role in the Fellowship after Frank's death. He remained with the group until the late 1980s, surviving through the death of his wife, a failed marriage, and even well after the death of Frank and Olgivanna.⁴⁰

Edgar Tafel was another apprentice who studied under Wright. Tafel had been studying at NYU, but desperately wanted to join the Fellowship in its first year. Somehow, he was able to cover the two hundred dollar difference between tuitions and eagerly left for Taliesin. He stayed for nearly ten years, until Frank began rethinking his policies on apprentices freelancing and financial distribution, lowering the division from 50/50 to only 1/3 going to the apprentice. A meeting with Wright confirmed that he preferred that the most seasoned of the apprentices leave rather than dividing the Fellowship with outside work. Tafel quit soon after, along with six others.

Loyalty was important to Wright. However, his sense of loyalty was often focused on protecting his legacy and financial situation. Apprentices paid tuition for the right to study under him, but there was no sense of formal schooling or curriculum.⁴¹ Any sort of outside work was seen as placing oneself above the Fellowship, something that the most skilled of apprentices were apt to do. That, along with the constant demands and desires of the Wrights, was a major cause for a high turnover for the Fellowship. Yet, many found success after leaving, including Jack Howe in Minnesota, who was the closest person Wright had to a "pencil in the Master's hand."

⁴⁰ Ironically, Peters' second marriage was to another Svetlana, Svetlana Alliluyeva, (daughter of Joseph Stalin). The couple separated shortly after the birth of their daughter and divorced in 1973.

⁴¹ This was a later point of contention for the government later in the history of the Fellowship, as they did not believe Wright could call it an educational institution for tax purposes.

The role of apprentices in the life of Wright cannot be understated. Simply put, Frank, despite his claims of being able to “shake them out of his sleeves”, could not complete the sheer number of completed structures, designs, and technical issues that arose in his long career of designing. Even in his early years, he employed skilled craftsmen and women to assist him in developing his own personal style. Later in life, the Fellowship was not only a means to an end, but a practical necessity for the last thirty years of his career. Apprentices allowed Wright the freedom and longevity to succeed. He relied on their abilities and skills, but any claim to success or originality was Wright’s alone.

Friends

Throughout Wright’s life, one thing becomes perfectly clear: he was a social animal. He had a charm, intelligence and wit that everyone found fascinating. In Oak Park, he was well known and liked around the community by most who met him, especially women. Later in life as a celebrity, he was able to spend time with great minds and people of talent- a trait he saw in himself. Among the illustrious names in his company over the years included: Albert Einstein, Carl Sandburg, Charles Laughton, Arthur Miller, Georgia O’Keefe, Henry Ford, Charles Lindbergh, and Jane Addams. Guests were often invited to both Taliesins to stay for a few days or, in the case of musicians or artists, stay in residence for an extended period. Of all of the individuals Wright befriended in his career, three names stood out for their significance to Wright: Cecil Corwin, Louis Sullivan, and Lewis Mumford.

Cecil Corwin first met Wright in when he was foreman for J. Lyman Silsbee. Corwin helped Wright get a job as tracer, and the two became quick friends. This is Wright’s recollection of meeting Corwin:

Liked instantly the fine looking, cultured fellow with a fine pompadour and beard, who quietly came forward with a friendly smile. Cecil Corwin. “Hello!” he said as though he knew me. He looked the artist-musician. He had come through the gate in the outer office railing humming something from the “Messiah.” ... And I had found a kindred spirit.⁴²

Corwin and Wright began a remarkable friendship as both colleagues and like-minded individuals, with Cecil acting as a mentor to Wright. Corwin was a close confidant, and the two talked about religion, relationships, and culture. Later, after Wright had been fired from Adler and Sullivan, he and Corwin started their own architectural firm in the Schiller building. Wright began to achieve individual success, while Corwin struggled to enjoy his work. He eventually quit architecture and moved away. Again, Wright recalls the last time he saw Corwin:

“No, I’m not the man you need for a partner, Frank. I’m no business man at all. I despise ‘business,’ it’s too gabby and grabby and selly for me- and I’m no architect. I know it now. You do need me for a friend, and I’ll always be one. You are going to go far. You’ll have a kind of success; I believe the kind you want. Not everybody would pay the price in concentrated hard work and human sacrifice you’ll make for it though my boy. I’m afraid- for what will be coming to you.”⁴³

Much has already been said about Wright’s relationship to Louis Sullivan. The two shared a mentor-student relationship, but it was a close human connection that bound them. In many ways, they were very similar. Both had a large ego, perfectionist mentality, and a love for music and art. Yet, Sullivan’s fascination with ornament and detail-work was not shared by his young apprentice, who called him an “incorrigible romanticist.” Both were extremely protective of their image, and both had critical failings midway through their career. Wright’s sojourn to Europe was his, and Sullivan’s was the World’s Fair of Chicago in 1892.

Sullivan’s style was not accepted in the “White City” motif of the Fair, and commissions suffered after that period. Meanwhile, he had severed ties with Wright and his partner in the firm, Dankmar Adler. Like Wright, his skill was only afforded to a few scarce buildings during

⁴² Pfeiffer, “An Autobiography” from *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 150.

⁴³ *Ibid*, 191.

the downturn, but unlike Wright, he was beyond his prime. When Wright and he reconciled in the 1910s, he was already broke and barely able to find work. Wright cared deeply for him, and began to help support him financially when he was able. Sullivan wrote well of him publicly and even had Frank listen to parts of his own autobiography, *The Autobiography of an Idea*. He only lived a few years more, but Wright stayed by his side loyally until the day before his death. In Wright's Autobiography, he gives a touching eulogy:

I see his richest individual quality and his sense of principle more clearly articulated by him in that feature of his work that was his sensuous ornament- as I see the wondrous smile upon his face. His system of ornament was something complete in itself- unique. It had personal, appealing charm. So very like and so very much- his own. His ornament, as he did it, will be cherished long because no one in ancient or modern times has had the quality to produce out of himself such a gracious, beautiful response, so lovely a smile evoked by a love of Beauty.⁴⁴

The last of his friends, Lewis Mumford, was another individual of whom Wright was separated from for a period of time. Mumford was an architectural critic around thirty years Wright's junior, but the two soon connected on an intellectual level. According to *Frank Lloyd Wright + Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence*, the two met in New York after several articles by Mumford garnered the attention of the architect. They sent letters back and forth over the span of nearly fifteen years until they were separated by serious differences.

Mumford and Wright diverged on several points. Wright was extremely critical of the International Style as a copy of his methods with artificial means. Mumford agreed, but was an avid study of other styles of architecture. When he wrote critically of Wright's concepts, Wright took offense to the slight. The larger rift came from World War II when Wright came out fiercely against the war. Wright, like his Uncle Jenkin, had been a pacifist for many years. He wrote several articles against the support of the British, of whom he believed the United States

⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 301.

supported far too often. Mumford supported the war effort and was upset at his friend for, “defeatism, your moral callousness, or even your insufferable hypocrisy....”⁴⁵ Wright’s reply is in kind: “No honest believer in truth or beauty in his right mind could do what you say you have done.”⁴⁶

It was nearly ten years before the two reconciled. Wright was at the height of his popularity and was often in New York for his work on the Guggenheim. Meanwhile, Mumford was busy with his writings for the *New Yorker*, as well as several books. The eventual reconciliation seemed to be a relief to both men, as both missed the correspondence with the other. While they were not able to write nearly as often as they did in the early 1930s, they stayed in touch until Wright’s death in 1959.

What can be said about FLLW’s friends? Most were wealthy, artistically inclined, and intelligent. While he was attracted to celebrity, his closest friends were people who either admired him, or whom he admired. In the case of Corwin and Sullivan, they were accomplished and talented minds who had a similar passion for applied design. Mumford too shared this passion, but his was in the commentary of architecture. Each saw and recognized the talent of Wright, but was able to keep his ego in check by earning his respect. He saw himself as a great man, it made sense he surrounded himself with great minds.

⁴⁵ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks and Robert Wojtowicz, eds. “30 May 1941” from *Frank Lloyd Wright + Lewis Mumford: Thirty Years of Correspondence*. (Princeton Architectural Press: New York, 2001,) p. 182.

⁴⁶ Pfeifer and Wojtowicz, “June 3rd, 1941,” *Frank Lloyd Wright + Lewis Mumford*, p. 183.

Chapter 2: Personal Development

Part 1: Design and Theory

Understanding architecture is no simple feat. Receiving a license for architecture today requires a graduate-level degree, an internship with a licensed firm, and taking the A.R.E. (Architect Register Examination). Yet, when Wright began his career, he had no formal architecture degree or certification. He did attend the University of Wisconsin in Madison, but his studies were primarily in engineering, a fact that any architect or engineer can tell you are mutually exclusive to one another. Prior to his work in Chicago, Wright had little to no experience in the field, other than a passion for the concepts of design and architecture.⁴⁷ Conceptually, he sought to go beyond simple bricks and mortar. It can be said that the precursor to Wright's design was not practical schooling or theory, but form and function.

A European Education

Wright's earliest memories he recalls in his autobiography deal with the concepts of form and design. Across the wall of his bedroom, his mother posted pictures of the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe. Developed between the 12th and 15th centuries, the Gothic cathedral was the monolith of the late Middle Ages. Previously, the Romanesque style that had dominated the European scene had been a model of protection and strength, but was cold, damp, claustrophobic, and dark. Violent times had necessitated this style, but it was also the usage of the materials that were on hand at the time. With the aging of older buildings from the Classical and Byzantine periods, the Romanesque period used the stone from these crumbling structures to create new buildings in their place. The walls of the Romanesque were the key, as the weight of

⁴⁷ See footnote 27. Unity Chapel was built in 1886 by J. Lyman Silsbee, though Wright is listed as a Delineator. The building was completed the summer before Wright arrived in Chicago.

the building was supported by heavy exterior walls, making the interiors open up in a way that was not possible with older designs. Yet, because of the weight that the walls were forced to maintain, few windows could be placed and the buildings were forced to remain shorter and fortified.

This all changed with the development of Gothic architecture. With the stabilization of the nations of Europe following the Crusades, as well as the wealth that developed from the peace following them, the need for fortresses for kings and noblemen decreased. In their place, the Catholic Church filled the void and grew in influence for the community. As such, the need for new churches and a new architecture developed. No longer were buildings confined to the heavy and low Romanesque, as architectural developments like the flying buttress and ribbed vaults increased exterior windows.

The Gothic created height and light in structures, two elements that greatly influenced Wright in his own designs. Like the Hagia Sophia in Byzantine architecture nearly 1000 years before, the interiors of cathedrals soared to new heights, giving a sense of space and the heavenly. From his room in Richland Center, Wisconsin, Wright looked at the woodcuts of these buildings, examining and learning from the buildings of the past.

The Influence of Victor Hugo

The influence of Victor Hugo in Wright's teens carried this history of architecture to fruition. At the age of sixteen, Wright read Hugo's *Notre Dame de Paris*, better known in English as *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. In the second chapter of the fifth book, entitled "Ceci Tuera Cela," Hugo lays down a manifesto of architectural theory. At the time the book was written, the Cathedral of Notre Dame in Paris was being used as a warehouse and storage space.

Hugo bemoans this misuse of such a great structure to the decline of architecture in as the prominent expression of human will and thought. Hugo saw architecture as the indelible words and art of mankind expressing itself in physical form. The turning point, however, came in the Renaissance. With the development of the printing press supplanted architecture, (as well as the rest of the artisan crafts,) as the chief expression of the human spirit. Simply put, “The Book will destroy the Edifice.”⁴⁸

Now, this is not to say that Hugo, an author himself, distained books. However, the impermanence of such a medium as paper and ink signified a greater change in expression. It marked the decline of the physical and lasting arts to a transient form of expression. With this, Hugo also saw the architecture of the Renaissance as less of an art than a restatement of previously created styles and methods. No longer were artisans creating sculptures and art to complement structures, but sculptures and art dominated the structure. Classical Revival styles and façades, (exteriors made to look like other materials or styles,) dominated Renaissance architecture. Thus, architecture became nothing more than an exterior copy of older designs rather than original work.

Several of these concepts weighed heavily on the mind of Wright. When he discovered Hugo, he was in the developmental stages of his theory. He refers to this realization as “one of the grandest sad things of the world.”⁴⁹ After years of being raised with the images of the Romanesque and Gothic, both of which he traced in his youth, he was extremely conscious of the changing face of architecture in the 300 years proceeding his life. Early in his career, during a

⁴⁸ Hugo, Victor. “Notre Dame de Paris, Book V,” *The Harvard Classics Shelf of Fiction, Vol XII.* (www.bartleby.com). Edited by Charles W. Eliott. 1917. <http://www.bartleby.com/312/0502.html> ,) line 27.

⁴⁹ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks, ed. “The Art and Craft of the Machine” from *Frank Lloyd Wright: Collected Works, Vol. 1*, (Rizzoli: New York, 1992,) p. 60.

presentation in Chicago's Hull House in 1901, Wright delivered a speech entitled, *The Art and Craft of the Machine*. In it, he echoes the words of Hugo on architecture:

...Down to the fifteenth century the chief register of humanity is architecture. In the fifteenth century everything changes... See how architecture now withers away, how little by little it becomes lifeless and bare... the malady of architecture is visible. It becomes classic art in a miserable manner; from being indigenous, it becomes Greek and Roman; from being true and modern, it becomes pseudo-classic.⁵⁰

Wright bemoaned the lack of a contemporary architecture to express the current times. To him, the new architecture was a restatement of already established concepts, ideas, and life which neither existed in the current times nor was expressive of anything true in a modern sense. Worsening the situation was the machine, which, while simplifying mundane activities, took over what art could be found in architecture to a mere construction technique. Wright is echoing the efforts of not just Hugo in his speech, but of another 19th century movement: the Arts and Crafts movement of England.

Arts and Crafts

The Arts and Crafts movement was established in England, primarily by William Morris, during the latter half of the 19th century. The movement was in response to the Industrial Revolution in Europe, which had mechanized the work force, simplified labor, and developed the modern processes of contemporary factories. However, mechanization also served the purpose of putting many skilled laborers out of jobs. Craftsmen, artists, and skilled material workers no longer could keep up with the efficiency of the machine in constructing, refining, and utilizing materials. Lost in the machine were the concepts of fine craftsmanship, fine-detail work, and art of these professions.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 60.

The Arts and Crafts movement opposed this unilateral movement. The materials, detail, and art were considered of primary importance to the artisans, and they began meeting and displaying the efforts of their labors. Thomas James Cobden-Sanderson, a member of the movement, states:

... It may be associated with the revival, by a few artists, of hand-craft as opposed to machine-craft, and be defined to be the insistence on the worth of man's hand, a unique tool in danger of being lost in the substitution for it of highly organized and intricate machinery, or of emotional as distinguished from merely skilled and technical labour...⁵¹

Skill and artistry are paramount in this movement, as the proponents of the Arts and Crafts movement sought change the mentality of the day. The mechanization of the 19th century not only changed how products were produced, but it made jobs and people interchangeable, like cogs in a machine. Skilled workers who had made these fields their lives for generations were not content to stand by and let these changes take place. Cobden-Sanderson continues:

... Its aim is not merely to help the conscious cultivation of art pending the transformation, but itself to bring the transformation about. In fact, I submit that in the intention of the founders, or in the intention of some of them, Art is, or should be, an agent in the production of noble life, and not merely an executant dependent upon and presupposing its existence.⁵²

The movement, therefore, was a proactive one. It was not simply to hope for a change in the culture that was motivating the industrialization of England; it was a buffer and counter-force. The passionate defense of materials, textiles, and the artisans that crafted them were a major influence on Wright in his work. In many ways, Wright appreciated the movement. It showed a great appreciation to the skill and work of the artisan. It offered the individualistic and modernist touches to everything in his houses, from the tapestries to the sculptures. The

⁵¹Cobden -Sanderson, Thomas James. *The Arts and Crafts Movement*. (Kindle Edition,2011,) p.3

⁵²Ibid, p.20.

complexities of human life, so well expressed in the Arts and Crafts movement, was utterly missing in the machine.

That is not to say that Wright disagreed with the machine as a useful and beneficial tool. In fact, he championed the machine as a tool for simplicity and modernity. Where artisans overdid the materials, the machine highlighted the possibilities of the materials in themselves. Where he saw Morris as a champion of fighting the machines as opponents to the arts in his day, he sees the vision as short-sighted. The machine could be an asset to the artist, and both the machine and the artist were improved by the combination. Whereas the machine had no direction, the artist had a limited mode of expression. The two together could improve the work by making it easier, more precise, and quicker. In addition, the access to new materials, like steel and glass, made the machine a tool for creation in new mediums.

The Arts and Crafts movement for Wright was a noble expression of the artist in full. Where Hugo saw architecture and art in decline, the Arts and Crafts movement pushed back against the simplification of the machine. However, Wright, while still defending the artist and creative elements of physical arts, added the machine to the list of tools that may be used to help create. It was only the mode that was in question, never the result.

The Arts and Crafts movement respected the materials above all, a fact that inspired Wright to keep his designs true to the natural elements of wood, glass, and metal. It was honest, respected tradition and the craftsman, and always kept authenticity in mind. Wright was an expert of looking at the materials and methods as mediums that needed to be flushed out, while still being aware of how it all must fit together. He was able to look at two things at the same

time, both at what it is and what it will be. This skill came from his introduction in his youth to a series of educational techniques known as the Froebel method.

The Froebel Education

Early in life, Wright was introduced to the techniques and methods of a German educator, Friedrich Froebel, by his mother. His mother, a teacher for many years in Wisconsin, discovered the tools on a trip to Philadelphia while the family lived in Weymouth, Massachusetts. While Wright only talks briefly about them in his autobiography, the impact they had on him is evident. It is here that “form became feeling” for Wright, allowing him to physically manipulate small pieces of paper, shapes, and sticks to a meaningful whole. He remembers:

A small interior world of color and form now came within the grasp of small fingers... Here was something for invention to seize and use to create. These gifts came into the gray house... and soon made something begin to live there that had never lived there before.⁵³

The creator of these materials, Friedrich Froebel was born nearly 85 years before Wright, but his techniques both served the purpose that they were intended for and echo themselves in the life of Wright. Froebel states in his autobiography:

I soon perceived a double truth: first, that a man must be early led towards the knowledge of nature and insight into her methods—that is, he must be from the first specially trained with this object in view; and next, I saw that a man, thus led through all the due stages of a life-development should in order to be quite sure to accomplish in all steadiness, clearness, and certainty his aim, his vocation, and his destiny...⁵⁴

⁵³ Pfeiffer, “An Autobiography” from *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p 111.

⁵⁴ Fröbel, Friedrich. *Autobiography of Friedrich Froebel* translated and annotated by Emilie Michaelis ... and H.

How Froebel attempted this was two-fold: first, instituting an education for young children that helped with the processes of education and learning that helped them later in life. This attempt resulted in the kindergarten, an education before the normal curriculum that emphasizes interaction, the development of learning patterns, and the arts. Secondly, he created a series of “Gifts,” or interactive tools in which children could develop those skills. These Gifts are multi-staged, going from one to ten, and follow a progressive nature of skills. Each step has a purpose for the learner and is gradient on the abilities learned from the previous set.

The first Gift emphasizes “Unity, Activity, (and) Color,” using a set of small colored wool balls to both compare and contrast similar objects. The second Gift adds variety by offering a cube, sphere, and cylinder to emphasize differences between objects, both in shape, texture, and motion. The third focuses on putting a coherent object together with an equally divided cube, creating a divisible but unified object. The fourth takes this objective to a new level by creating brick like shapes, dissimilar to the cube, which can be combined into a cubic shape. The fifth is the same cube, but groupings of the individual pieces are cut dissimilarly, either diagonally, vertically, or horizontally. Sixth is like four and five, but the cuts are made in different ways, creating a more complicated building process but using the tried and true techniques from before.

The seventh introduces a new element, using flatter colored pieces with similar size but of various shapes, to introduce innovation in construction and a simplified organizational technique. The eighth uses evenly cut sticks to emphasize lines, angles, and separations of corners, often with small, rounded shapes to show the divide. Ninth is a set of rings of various sizes, used to explore the curve in the same way the sticks emphasized the line. The final Gift uses various objects, such as beans or pebbles, to give the child the free reign to create using the principles they learned through the first nine gifts in a free manner.

The steps are clearly a progression for the child, and for Wright, clearly emphasize the steps in his learning process. The simple three-dimensional geometric forms are concrete, tangible, and physical. The child can learn real forms and the real correspondence with the physical world, comparing and contrasting it with other shapes. Wright used these simple geometric shapes often in his career, most prominently in his designs for the Arthur Coonley Playhouse windows and later in his Usonian houses as reoccurring themes of design. Alongside these early figures, (as well as the tenth Gift,) the idea of color and materials are heavily stressed to teach differences in texture and differentiation. These natural grains were a major influence in the works of Wright as a staple of texture, natural materials, and the importance of coherency.

The middle and latter gifts emphasize the unified whole and the complexity of lines. Gifts three through six are repetition on a theme, constructing a whole based on increasingly complex divisions. It is through the unity that the seemingly unconnected shapes become coherent and are able to make sense. The architect in Wright examined form in his love of the Gothic and Romanesque pictures, but the coherency of form have never meant anything to him without this building of themes. The later concepts of lines and rings deeply resonated with Wright, transforming the Victorian vertical line to the Prairie horizontal. The transformative power of shapes never left Wright, and even late in life, he drew inspiration from the work of Froebel. In response to a question from a student in 1955, Wright stated:

... (Froebel) said that before the child is allowed to run loose and free, he should know what it is that constitutes this beauty. What it is that make these appearances beautiful to us. And so he took you into the realm of geometry and the child had to learn the basic forms and work with them until he began to see how they added up to all those various rhythms and things that you can play with after you know what is there, what they are.

That was a pretty farsighted vision for an old German, wasn't it. And we haven't caught up with it yet.⁵⁵

Part 2: Philosophical and Religious

Keeping the Faith

But not his disciples... they just got the thing twisted and mixed, and so we have what we call the church and we have what we call Christianity. Very far from the teachings and feelings of Jesus.⁵⁶

The faith of Frank Lloyd Wright is a complicated venture. One could say that he rarely went to church over the majority of his adult life, and often distained the concept of churches in general. He was called amoral on many occasions over his various relationship scandals. However, you need only look at the level of care he placed in every one of the churches he created to both enhance the religious symbolism of the building and to suit it to the needs of the congregation to understand his reverence for the sacred. The juxtaposition comes from the very faith of Wright, which was a strong mixture of philosophy and sacred thought, the roots coming from his heritage in "The God-Almighty Joneses" themselves.

Wright was born into an extremely religious family. His grandfather Richard Jones, a Welsh immigrant, was a fiery Unitarian preacher who moved his family across the ocean to settle in the valley near Spring Green, Wisconsin. The Lloyd-Joneses moved from Wales to seek religious freedom from persecution, a by-product of their Unitarian faith. Unitarianism itself was treated with distrust by the primarily Anglican Church of England, as well as many other countries in Europe, because of one major aspect: the denial of the Trinity. Similar to certain heretical sects of the early Christian church, the Unitarians denied the divinity of Christ as

⁵⁵ Pfeiffer, Bruce Brooks, ed. *Frank Lloyd Wright: His Living Voice*. (The Press at California State University, Fresno: Fresno, CA, 1987,) p 68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 102.

heresy, stating that the division of the divine was sacrilegious. Anti-Trinitarians rose again during the Reformation under Michael Servetus, a Spanish scholar, but he was burned at the stake for heresy before his message could gain widespread appeal. It was not until the rise of humanism that anti-trinitarianism rose up again, emphasizing the elements of the Scottish-Enlightenment thinkers. Author Mark A. Noll, in his book, *America's God*, recognized the mid-18th century revival of the Presbyterians shifted from traditional Calvinism to Unitarian moralistic trends.

According to Noll, Unitarians "...promoted a benevolent God, a balanced universe, and a sublime human potential."⁵⁷ It was rooted in a rational optimism, a sharp contrast to the doctrinal rootedness of traditional Calvinists. While reason was the construct, it was balanced between traditional theology and philosophy, adapting itself to humanistic tendencies perfectly. A certain amount of piety was also expected of the Unitarian faith, placing the emphasis on the moralistic uprightness of the members as a means of salvation. The closer to truth and goodness, the closer to God.

As a family, the Lloyd-Jones family had brought Unitarianism to the heart of Wisconsin.

Wright muses on his family:

The Unitarianism of the Lloyd-Joneses, a far richer thing, was an attempt to amplify in the confusion of the creeds of their day the idea of life as a gift from a divine source, one God omnipotent, all things at one with him. Unity was their watchword, the sign and symbol that thrilled them, the Unity of all things!⁵⁸

This fervent passion for religion was passed on from Richard (now Lloyd-Jones,) to his son Jenkin. The Lloyd-Jones family had even built their own church south of Spring Green, naming it appropriately, Unity Chapel. That chapel served as not only a beacon to Wright in his

⁵⁷ Noll, Mark A. *America's God*. (Oxford University Press: New York, 2002,) p. 284.

⁵⁸ Pfeiffer, "An Autobiography" from *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 113.

childhood, but as a family meeting-place. He recalled the preaching of his uncle Jenkin “always brought them to an emotional state,” followed by a picnic of songs and community.⁵⁹ That chapel still stands today and is still used by the Lloyd-Joneses as a family gathering place.

We must not neglect the faith of Wright’s father, William. William himself was a preacher, and the son of a preacher. However, he was Baptist, which was been a strain on the relationship to his wife. He served as a travelling minister to local area in Frank’s early life, eventually taking a permanent position in Weymouth, Massachusetts. As previously mentioned, William converted to Unitarianism, undoubtedly at the advice of his wife, but still preached and spoke at several congregations around Madison.

Wright, therefore, was not ignorant of religion, nor did he disdain it. For him, it was a natural expression of life, and one he treasured. Yet, his ideas were definitely unorthodox. He often spoke of Jesus in the same breath as other religious figures, but carried him in a different reverence. Like his forefathers, he believed in a good and hard-working life earned salvation. He explains:

They (Christian Science and Catholicism) both make this thing easy. You just lay your burdens on the Lord, or confess to the priest, and any transgressions you have may be washed clean. By putting your little contribution into the box, you are paying for your transgressions. You can more or less in that way either wheedle or buy your way into Heaven. But it isn’t like that, you know. I don’t believe you can get there that way.⁶⁰

The Transcendentalists

To Wright, possibly as much as he was filled with the words and philosophy of the Bible, he was filled with a love and admiration for a movement from the early 19th century. Author Philip H. Gura explains the Transcendentalists this way:

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 124.

⁶⁰ Pfeiffer, *His Living Word*, 103.

First, most Transcendentalists were indeed New Englanders, with ties to Harvard College and the Boston area. Second, at some point in their lives, almost to a person, they had been associated with Unitarianism and thus were considered “liberal Christians” whose reading of scripture made them reject Calvinism’s harsh and, to them, unreasonable tenets. . . they had a distinct philosophical bent toward German Idealism rather than British Empiricism, that is, toward the revolution wrought by Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and others who championed the inherent powers of the human mind. . .⁶¹

It quickly becomes apparent to any casual reader of Wright’s philosophy that the transcendental movement was held in high regard. By his own admission, Wright grew up on the writings of men and women in the Transcendentalist movement, especially the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. Hailing from a similar Unitarian background, a natural connection to the philosophies of the period and movement permeated themselves in the Unitarian religion as the foremost American thinkers and poets of their day spread the gospel of the mind.

The members of the Transcendental movement often saw themselves as the heirs to the German Idealist movement featuring Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, developing the concepts of perception and personal affirmation of truth. What could be found in nature was truth, and as it was created by the divine, was religiously true. Gura also notes that the early promoters of transcendentalist thought were primarily ministers, and that: “only later, as they discovered the social implications of their acknowledgment of “spontaneous reason” did they realize that they were prophets of a wholly new secular as well as spiritual order.”⁶²

As followers of the Unitarian religion in the latter half of the 19th century, the Lloyd-Joneses were great admirers of the Transcendentalist movement. Frank grew up on the writings

⁶¹ Gura, Philip F. *American Transcendentalism: A History*. (Macmillan: Kindle Edition, 2008,) pp. 5-6.

⁶² *Ibid*, 13.

and poetry of “Wittier, Lowell, Longfellow, yes, and Emerson, too.”⁶³ Henry David Thoreau was also a favored author, and combined, the family accepted the writers and poets as members of their own family. Wright comments: “This poetic transcendentalism was to unite with their own, richer, sterner sentimentality, with the results that will be seen.”⁶⁴ The family motto of “Truth Against the World” was more than symbolic, it was the very root of their religion and belief system.

The second, and possibly more important element of Transcendentalism to the life of Wright, was the respect and veneration for nature. Henry David Thoreau, in his essay entitled “Walking,” displays traces of this mentality that affected Wright:

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and culture merely civil,-to regard man as an inhabitant or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society⁶⁵.

The concept of a nature in life always seemed to grasp Wright tightly, even from his youth. In his autobiography, he talks of his experiences on his family farm and the surrounding countryside with a poetic charm, highly Romanticized tone, and with a sincere love of everything from the cows to the snowfalls. Nature was, to Wright, something sacred. Again, from his autobiography:

What did they mean when “they” used the word “nature”? Just some sentimental feeling about animals and grass and trees and out-of-doors generally- external nature? But how about the nature of wood, glass, and iron- internal nature... That was “nature,” wasn’t it? Wasn’t “nature” in this sense the “nature” of God?⁶⁶

⁶³ Pfeiffer, “An Autobiography” from *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 113.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 114.

⁶⁵ Thoreau, Henry David. “Walking” from *The Natural History Essays*. (Peregrine Smith, Inc: United States, 1980,) p. 93.

⁶⁶ Pfeiffer, “An Autobiography” from *Collected Writings*, Vol. 2, p. 163.

Distinguishing between the “nature” of Wright and nature in the common sense goes back to the Transcendentalist movement. Escaping the sense of traditional theology and religious trainings, the Unitarians sought the nature of God in different ways. Symbolism, over-wrought theology, and traditional churches were hindrances to understanding God: men speaking for the almighty. Unitarians sought God in a different way. One of these ways was seeking God’s word in action: nature. One simply can read Thoreau’s *Walden* or Emerson’s *Nature* to realize that the elements that were respected, the ones that were not man-made and thus false, were the elements in nature. Emerson states in his introduction of *Nature*:

The foregoing generations beheld God and nature face to face; we, through their eyes. Why should not we also enjoy an original relation to the universe? Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?⁶⁷

To Wright, this was a revelation. Not only was nature the clearest way to see God, it also resonated in a personal sense. When he looked at the architecture of Chicago during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, he saw people shut up in small rooms in small houses with little holes cut out. People lived inside with no relation to the outside. If nature was as revelatory as he believed, people must unify it with their everyday lives. Thoreau states in *Walden*: “Not that all architectural ornament is to be neglected even in the rudest periods; but let our houses first be lined with beauty, where they come in contact with our lives....”⁶⁸ Wright sought to bring that beauty, the beauty of nature, into everyday life.

⁶⁷ Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *Nature*. (Kindle Edition, 1849,) Kindle Locations 23-25.

⁶⁸ Thoreau, Henry David. *Walden*. (Public Domain Books, Kindle Edition. 2009,) p. 28.

Part 2: Intellectual Development

Music

Of the major influences in Wright's life, music must be ranked among the top. He wrote prolifically on the influence of Beethoven and Bach in his life experiences, and music was always a welcome presence in his homes. The much maligned William Wright offers the core of the musical heritage for Wright. His father, as aforementioned in chapter 1, was a prolific composer and musically inclined. Wright stated of his father that "(music) always consoled him, and music was his friend to the last when all else had failed."⁶⁹ Alongside composing music, he wrote for the conservatory of music he started in Madison. He could play the piano and organ, which he sometimes did for local church congregations in the lean years. More than all of that, he made sure that his children were educated to play instruments.

Music was always welcome in the Wright house. The Lloyd-Joneses always sang and played during their Sunday gatherings, Wright and his sisters played everything from Gilbert and Sullivan to Mendelssohn. With his own children, Wright paid for them to be educated and each play a different instrument. This passion for the art is prolific in the writings of Wright, and especially his reverence for Beethoven and Bach.

Frank remembered his father's musical contributions, especially of Beethoven and Bach, in his autobiography:

Father sometimes played on the piano far into the night and much of Beethoven and Bach the boy learned by heart as he lay listening. Living seemed a kind of "listening" to him-then. Sometimes it was as though a door would open, and he could get the beautiful meaning quite clear. Then it would close and the meaning would dim or far away. But

⁶⁹ Pfeiffer, "An Autobiography" from *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 109.

there was always some meaning. And it was the boy's father who taught him to see a symphony as an edifice of sound!⁷⁰

Wright truly understood music as a structure. This "edifice of sound," a building of chords, notes, and staves, had the same rhythm and meter that Wright's houses. The ordered connection between music and architecture is not as far off as it seems: mathematically ordered and balanced, forming a unique and coherent whole. Elements were affected by context, such as natural features, but essential elements, such as board and batten, were in a consistent size and height. Themes and motifs were developed, both uniquely and locally, as well as a broad and encompassing sense throughout the house, much akin to a great Beethoven symphony.

Beethoven was a revelation to Wright. The order and balance of his music were the signs of the highest genius, and Wright reveled in his concepts. An excerpt:

In Beethoven's music I sense the master mind, fully conscious of the qualities of heartfelt soaring imagination that are god-like in a man. The striving for entity, oneness in diversity, depth in design, repose in the final expression of the whole- all these are there in common pattern between architect and musician. I am going to a delightful, inspiring school when I listen to Beethoven's music- music not "classic"- soul language never to be classified. Because of soul-depth and breadth of emotional range, Beethoven's music is in itself the greatest proof I know of divine harmony alive in the human spirit. As trees and flowering things under the changing lights of a beclouded sun pervade the all out of doors, so Beethoven pervades the universe of the soul.⁷¹

The praise for Beethoven is praise for Wright. He felt that Beethoven had found the same source of inspiration that he later would. Once Wright even claimed that, had he been a musician, he could have been as good as Beethoven. Genius is genius in the mind of Wright.

Bach, too, holds a special place with Wright. It was Bach's music that Wright remembered pumping an organ for hours in the dark while his father played; a mix of pain from tired arms and rapture from the transcendent movements of the composer. He claimed that

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 111.

⁷¹ Pfeiffer, "An Autobiography" from Vol. 4, p. 147.

Beethoven should be played when it was gloomy, and Bach on sunny days. Amongst the others Wright loved were Vivaldi, Palestrina, Mozart, Brahms, and Hayden, as well as numerous other classical composers. He usually disliked jazz, as well as most other modern music. David Patterson describes Wright's tastes as: "pretty 19th century, very European...he was grounded in the 1800's."⁷² Despite this, his admiration of music never wavered through life. Yet, in the end, we knew where his loyalties lay:

Architecture is a greater art than music. If one art can be said to be "greater" than another.⁷³

Literature

Another element that Frank adopted from his father, unconsciously or not, was his voracious reading habit. A self-admitted dreamer as a youth, (and romantic, but self-effacing,) Wright fell in love with the books introduced in his youth and furthered in adulthood. We have already mentioned the influence of Victor Hugo, but a good number of other authors were read extensively throughout: Edgar Allen Poe, Mark Twain, Walt Whitman, Jules Verne, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Lao Tzu, Goethe... the list goes on and on.

Much of Wright's Transcendentalist education came from the books his mother read him as a child that he later read as an adult. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were prominent in the Lloyd-Jones pantheon, and Anna Wright read them heavily to her children. Alongside those were the works of Walt Whitman and other poets of the day, an inspiration to Anna's romantic tendencies. Whitman was Wright's favorite poet, and Whitman's beautiful imagery of nature touched Wright's particular fascination. In his late autobiographical work, *A Testament*, Wright spoke on Whitman's influence:

⁷² Patterson, Interview

⁷³ Pfeiffer, "An Autobiography" from *Collected Works*, Vol. 2, p. 267.

...Walt Whitman came to view to give needed religious inspiration in the great change: our new Place for the new Man in our Time. Walt Whitman, seer of our Democracy! He uttered primitive truths lying at the base of our new life, the inspirations we needed to go on spiritually with the brave “sovereignty of the individual.”⁷⁴

Humanists of every kind tended to be popular with Wright. He loved the writings of William Blake, Nietzsche and Thomas Jefferson, as well as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, but his favorite of all was *Arabian Nights*. It awakened a sense of adventure and imagination in Wright that the young man fed on. This same adventure led Frank to his “Nickel Library,” a collection of blood-and-guts, ‘cowboys and Indians,’ horror and adventure books. They were not at all considered reputable literature, because the material was rough and tumble, but just the kind of books young boys love. Wright himself said the books were “vivid,” but he understood them for what they were.

Later in life, his literary interests were influenced by those around him. He was friends with Carl Sandburg, whose writings Frank greatly appreciated. His brief connection to Ayn Rand was somewhat flattering considering Rand initially based her main character in *The Fountainhead* on Wright, but soured when everyone involved realized there was no truth to the comparison. Even in his later years, Wright showed no signs of losing his love of reading, and often loved reading Whitman at Taliesin.

Japanese Culture

Despite the obvious influence of Germany on Wright, Japan always held a certain mystery for him. The culture, art, buildings and people of Japan were incredibly intriguing to him, and the culture of Shintoism seemed to align itself very clearly with his own beliefs of the world. He made many visits to the country throughout his life and became the foremost collector

⁷⁴ Pfeiffer, “A Testament” from *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 169.

of Japanese prints in the United States for years. The pinnacle of this relationship was his journey to Japan to design the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, a beautiful structure that not only was influential, but solid enough to survive an earthquake.

He first became fascinated with Japan through Japanese prints at the age of twenty-three, a passion that caused him both great financial success and failure. Wright states:

From time to time I had collected superb Actor prints... “Wrieto San” was already on the map of Tokio as the most extensive buyer of the fine antique print. Already described to you is what an avocation the pursuit of the rare print made in ancient Yedo had become to me in Tokio. The prints, extremely rare and expensive, were still going up in price at this time.⁷⁵

He often bought great numbers of these prints at one time in Japan and bring them back to the United States, selling a few of them while keeping the rest. This turned out to be wonderful at times, especially when he needed to gather money quickly, (as he did when Taliesin was at risk during his divorce with Miriam Noel or when debt collectors came calling.) At other times, his willingness to hold onto the art also proved disastrous, as both fires at Taliesin destroyed hundreds of pieces and many others were sold in bad financial markets trying to gather money. Eventually, Wright was taken for a great deal of money by a forger in Japan, causing him to lose over \$30,000 in prints to make good with his American clients. His reputation survived, and Taliesin still owns a fantastic collection of Asian art today.

The culture of Shintoism appealed to Wright quite profoundly. He was astonished at the complete infusion of a religion and lifestyle into one seamless application of life. Cleanliness is a watchword of the Shinto beliefs, as the concept of ritual purity is essential for rituals, ceremonies, and even the alters in their homes. Dr. Sokyō Ono of Kokugakuin Daigaku in

⁷⁵ Pfeiffer, “An Autobiography” from *Collected Works*, Vol. 4, p. 214.

Tokyo, a Shinto university, explains the importance of the ceremonial rites, even in everyday life:

Therefore, the ceremonies are performed on the assumption that a profession of faith in the Kami (spirits or gods) has been made, offerings good and beautiful have been presented, the mind and body have been purified, sincerity has been fulfilled, conduct has been courteous and proper, the evil heart, selfish desire, strife, dispute, hatred and the like have been dissolved, conciliation has been practiced, and a feeling of goodwill, cooperation and affection had been realized among the people.⁷⁶

Shintoism is connected to Wright for several reasons. It was, in many ways, a easy connection between Unitarianism and Shintoism, as both emphasized a religion with low reliance on a formal doctrine, concepts of a manifestation of God or the kami in everyday life, and a humanistic tendency of bringing the heavenly to earth. The flexibility of both religions allowed them to thrive amongst other religions, while still owning their identity. The concept of shrines is even similar to Wright's concept of the building fitting in with nature, as the site was chosen specifically for the structure.

Yet, Wright still felt like a foreigner in Japan. His love of collecting prints had made him well known in Japan, but had also lowered his standing in society as a merchant. He admired the delicate and simple society, but still brought his own very American methodology when he built the Imperial Hotel. He even admitted that Japanese culture was "too severe" for American culture to completely accept, because their religion thoroughly pervades their lives and actions. Wright, for all of his admiration of Japanese art, architecture, culture, society, and life, admitted defeat and sought to imitate, but not give himself to, Japan in his work and personal life.

The highly stylized tea ceremony was adapted into his Sunday lectures at Taliesin, gathering around a "sacred tree" to pay homage to both his Lloyd-Jones Sunday gatherings and

⁷⁶ Ono, Sokyo. *Shinto: The Kami Way*. (Tuttle Publishing: Boston, 1962,) pp. 50-51

the Japanese ceremonial tradition. Elements of the Japanese shrine architecture seemingly appear in the hipped-roofs with extending eaves, as well as the simplicity of some of his later Usonian houses. The concept of cleanliness, to Wright, emphasized simplicity, lack of waste, and the organic elements found in the structure. By no means was Wright a believer in Shintoism as a religion, but like his discovery of Lao Tzu, the Tao philosopher, they “confirmed” many of his already held beliefs.

Chapter 3: Public image and design

Part 1: Public and Professional Work

The life of design was constantly changing over the life of Wright. He routinely went through periods, much in the same way as an artist. The techniques, style, and emphasis of his work was ever shifting, varied by the influences and periods of his life, as well as that of the world around him. From beginning to end, his works also influenced the culture of architecture and pushed boundaries. Exceptional buildings created exceptional influence.

The early years of Wright were already mentioned in part, but it was exceptionally influential in developing his own style. Studying under J. Lyman Silsbee and the firm of Adler and Sullivan, Wright gained skills that he used later. Silsbee allowed him to improve on his sketches while gaining practical experience, as Silsbee preferred creating the intricate drawings and floor plan, but often left the completed designs to his apprentices. Adler and Sullivan had confidence in the abilities of Wright, bringing him in immediately to help with one of their most important buildings, the Auditorium Building in Chicago. Wright helped with interior elements and gained the trust of the firm. Eventually, he became chief draftsman for his experience and skill in completing Sullivan's designs.

Working on public buildings was the main focus of Wright's work in the firm, and he was given a fair amount of leeway through working with a skilled designer like Sullivan. However, his concepts were limited by the constraints within only working on public structures rather than homes. It also is the reason that Wright took on houses during his contract with Adler and Sullivan, as well as the constant changes to his own house. His home was a great contrast to his early houses, as his home was an ever expanding adventure that was only limited to his

budget and imagination.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, his early work were rather stereotypical houses for the period, only risking his own personal touches on the interior. He was still developing his own vision for the structure.

When he did venture out on his own, after he was forced out of Adler and Sullivan, his work began to take on more of the familiar characteristics of his design. The Winslow House may be the exemplary example of his pre-1900 work, as the roof and interior elements hint at greater work to come, but still are not fully his own. 1900 and 1901 brought out his concepts of a house inspired by the prairie. The well known Willits House may receive the accolades of the early Prairie style, but the B. Harley Bradley and Hickox houses of Kankakee, as well as the Fricke, Henderson, and Thomas houses of Oak Park, deserve equal respect in innovation.

Wright was convinced that what people needed were houses that were nearly converse to the standard Victorian: tall, with small rooms and closely built. Wright pictured houses that lay close to the ground and opened up on inside, using space and light to bring nature in. The Japanese influence became less prevalent in later Prairie houses, but was rather clear in the earliest versions. The Prairie style dominated the period between 1900 and 1909, with the finest example being the Robie House of Chicago. During this same period, Wright designed the Larkin Building, a return to the monumental public building style that was influenced by Sullivan, and the Unity Temple, Wright's first attempt at the poured concrete building. Both were dynamic departures from his houses of the time, but held the intricacies of design and open interiors of his other works. This was a rather prolific period for Wright, but personal issues were compounded with a strenuous work load, burning Wright out on the Prairie design.

⁷⁷ In the nearly twenty years Wright lived in Oak Park, his simple house was expanded to include a children's playroom, extra bedrooms, a studio and a carriage house.

The next decade included four major designs, and a scattering of attempts at other styles, but reflected the uncertainty of Wright's own life during the period. Wright's initial return to Chicago displayed that very few were willing to take a chance on him, despite his talent. Avery Coonley commissioned an expansion on the original property Wright designed, later to be known as the Coonley Playhouse. This design resulted in the geometric window design that may be one of the defining characteristics of his work. Taliesin was designed soon after, developing the Prairie style into a far more complex work that was designed and redesigned due to the fires that followed. Wright also worked on both the Midway Gardens of Chicago and began work on the Imperial Hotel, two major commissions that employed unorthodox styles. A mix of Aztec and Japanese concepts were employed, as well as methods Wright had not worked with, such as acoustic work for Midway Gardens and a flexible foundation for the Imperial Hotel.

Something Wright dabbled in during this period was the concept of the American System houses and other neighborhood systems. The American Style houses were pre-cut lumber and made to order. The experiment failed to yield results, and only one set were built in Milwaukee in 1916. Despite the failure of this model, other sets of houses were built in Milwaukee and Glencoe, IL, emphasizing the desire for communities and neighborhoods which later appeared in his concepts for Broadacre City and Usonian models

Wright began work in California during the early 1920s during his commutes between Japan and Wisconsin. Earlier, the Hollyhock House and Wright's debate with the owner, Aline Barnsdall were discussed at length. What was not mentioned was that while the Hollyhock House follows a poured concrete model, the majority of his work was experiments in concrete blocks. He constructed several beautiful buildings in this style, including the Alice Millard, John Storer, Samuel Freeman and Charles Ennis Houses. It offered a great deal of light, ease of

construction, and simple construction methods, but was significantly difficult to get support for amongst building commissions.

No one can say where that technique could have gone were it not for the troubles of the second half of the 1920s. Wright received many proposed projects, but the Depression and turmoil surrounding him only allowed a few choice projects. One of these projects was assisting on the Arizona Biltmore Hotel, for which Wright developed some of the ornamental details used on the interior and gardens. He also designed a camp in the desert, known as Ocotillo, during this period. Buildings were fabric and light, allowing for protection from the sun and sand during the day while still allowing air to circulate at night. The desert provided a new palette for Wright to work with over the next few years.

The combination of S.C. Johnson Building and Kaufmann Houses allowed for a resurgence of popularity, as well as redemption for Wright. S.C. Johnson created space where none was present, through the lily-pad supports, glass tubing skylights, and a research tower, added on eight years later. The Kaufman House, often known as Fallingwater, embraces the concept of a house being part of the ground it was built for. The house itself sits over a waterfall, with cantilevered balconies providing a view of the water as it flows, creating a true fusion with nature.

The conceptual idea of the Jacobs house has been explained previously, but the Usonian concept goes well beyond affordable housing for the greatest number of people. It was the synthesis of elimination of waste, developing a de-centralized America (as in Broadacre City,) and small but practical. This style was used prolifically for the last twenty or so years of Wright's life, varying in geometric shapes and wood cut-outs that acted as the reference point for

the entire structure. Communities of Usonian houses were rare, but that of Pleasantville, New York was a prolific example.

Success in the mid 1930's was the saving grace for Wright. Despite the start to his Taliesin Fellowship, he was deeply in debt from repairing Taliesin. Creatively, the Johnson Building and Kaufmann House allowed him the recognition and freedom which he had been denied for the previous decade. It was as if Wright had been waiting for the return to prominence, and he made the most out of the opportunity. It was his most successful and prolific period of his life.

The last twenty years of Wright's life held many eclectic projects, both in public buildings and private residences. Several churches were designed during this time, including the Beth Shalom Synagogue in Philadelphia, Annunciation Greek Orthodox in Milwaukee, and a Meeting House for the Unitarian Church near Madison, which he sometimes attended. He built several medical clinics, a college campus (Florida Southern,) gift shops, and even a gas station. Three buildings of the late period reach another level: Price Tower in Bartlesville, OK, Marin County Civic Center in San Rafael, CA, and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City.

Price Tower was built for Harold Price Sr. as both a living space and office building. A rare expression of Wright building a tower, the design was based on both his unbuilt design for St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery in New York City, and the taproot system for the Research Tower of the S.C. Johnson building. The Marin County Civic center was not realized in the life of Wright, but was completed in the decade after his death. It was the largest of Wright's designs, and like the Kaufmann house, hugs the natural terrain rather than destroying it. The Guggenheim

Museum was one of Wright's most unusual and defiant pieces, making a statement on art and how it was presented at the same time. It stands in great contrast to the vertical skyscrapers of New York with horizontal, circular lines while standing prominently on Park Avenue. It was a bold contrast to the popular New York culture he denounced.

Several buildings of Wright's design were built following his death, including Monona Terrace in Madison, WI and the aforementioned Marin Civic Center. An even greater number of designs for houses and structures were that were never completed still exists. Of these were Wright's models for his Mile High building for Chicago and Broadacre City. The Mile High building is exactly what it sounds like: a skyscraper built one mile in height, supported by a taproot system. Presented in 1956, the building pushed the very limits of imagination for construction and methodology, incorporating concepts like nuclear powered elevators. The Mile High skyscraper follows Wright's thought of consolidating urban centers and decentralizing America. This concept is the foundation for his theory behind Broadacre City.

Broadacre City was meant to be a radical view of America, where cities and congestion was a thing of the past. Wright disliked the city life because it separated the individual from nature and created an artificial view of the world. Broadacre City was the answer; it made cities obsolete by integrating smaller town centers that took care of the needs of the area. Individual houses were self-sustaining, allowing families to stay integrated but autonomous. Attempts at this appeared in his Usonian and American Style buildings, but Wright realized the only way to accomplish this was to radically change the culture of America. His career followed that trend.

Part 2: Public Image

The value of Frank Lloyd Wright as a figure hinges on one final aspect: how he was perceived by the world. The image of Wright is almost as important as his architectural legacy, and is essential to the discussion of his worldview. Wright was a charismatic and personable individual, but his passionate and principled stands against established society, architecture, and individuals often was a polarizing and divisive influence on his public image. His personal life often shocked the public, as did quite a few of his designs when they were introduced. Yet, Wright was a master at controlling his image with the public and clients, and constantly worked at refining his characteristics and perception to optimize social interest in his work.

The early years of Wright were an interesting mix of salesmanship and hard work. Wright was a teenager when he headed to Chicago, looking for work. He characterizes himself as an unknown, probably true based on his limited experience and relatively recent arrival to the area. However, it is extremely likely that he assisted Silsbee on the family chapel, and more likely that his well-known and connected uncle, Jenkin Lloyd-Jones, assured his transition and staying power in the hands of Silsbee. Jenkin was well-spoken and had several major connections in Chicago, including Daniel Burnham of the major architectural firm Burnham and Root, as well as leaders in politics and religion. Wright was well-established as the young handsome nephew of the beloved preacher.

Working with Adler and Sullivan was a great opportunity for Wright, but created several challenges. While Sullivan was greatly admired, he could be a dividing and temperamental influence on clients, just as Wright was later. The firm was also in the years of waning popularity, which didn't help Wright after the Chicago World's Fair neglected the style of

Sullivan in favor of the “White City” theme. In reality, Wright was at the perfect point for starting his own firm, as he had the clients who desired his work, connections and a home in the area. Oak Park was also the perfect environment for a young and well-connected architect with wealthy and artistic individuals.

However, Wright had to fight for popular support. His early career contained several remodeling jobs of already built houses or building more conventional structures. As elements of his work came together, he began to see more work. That work was often tempered with the sentiment that he not go too far in his unorthodox style, as the extremely orthodox Oak Park has always resisted vulgarity in their structures. Throughout his career, Wright faced the fact that even the most adventurous clients had to face ridicule when his style produced houses that stuck out like a sore thumb. This fact also led to the concept that Wright claimed he never looked for clients, they sought him out. While this may be true to a point, it also is conversely true that it took a client who enjoyed Wright’s unique style to be able to work.

There were also many clients who were very grateful to Wright for his work with them. Aline Barnsdall and Wright’s relationship soured the beautiful Hollyhock House, but the Alice Millard House was an exhibition of loyalty and care. Wright not only helped fix the house when it was damaged by a storm, but contributed money towards the construction of the house when the contractor ran off with supplies.⁷⁸ Later clients were pleased with the care and correspondence over the projects, despite the fact that Wright was rarely around due to the large number of structures that were constructed during that period. He asked clients what they wanted, and used many of their ideas in the final product.

⁷⁸ Gill, pp. 270-271.

However, we cannot ignore that many clients did not enjoy working with him. His flippant manner of requesting money while lengthening processes were more characteristic of his early career, when perfection and high-brow tastes dictated his design style. Some were more compliant with his delays because of faith in his work, but their faith was sometimes let down by the results. Darwin Martin's wife was not a fan of the layout of their house and Herbert Johnson's wife actually refused to let Wright visit after a stay in which he rearranged the house to his original vision in the middle of the night.⁷⁹

Wright's vision often obscured his ability to work with others. In the last section, we discussed how Wright's vision of America required great change to the country to be executed. His often single-minded vision of structures and goals made him inflexible and difficult, but was exacerbated when his passions were not shared. He broke off a friendship with Lewis Mumford over his political leanings in World War II, when Wright joined Charles Lindberg in supporting American isolationism.⁸⁰ He shared a joint admiration with Mies van der Rohe, but despised other followers of the International School of architecture, namely Le Corbusier and Walter Gropius. Many of the International School were great fans of Wright, but several incidents in which Wright was excluded from exhibitions in favor of the International Style had caused a great deal of bitterness, especially the 1932 Museum of Modern Art exhibition in New York City. Perhaps he saw the snub as a precursor, akin to the failure of his mentor, Louis Sullivan.

Wright had a great deal of difficulty with the concept of imitation. He saw himself as an original, and desired that everyone else see him as the same. He rejected apprentices that

⁷⁹ In fairness, Wingspread had been built with Johnson's previous wife in mind shortly before her death.

⁸⁰ Wright wrote several very public articles in American papers opposing the war, even encouraging apprentices to dodge draft orders.

wanted to branch off as trying to divide and claim credit for his works. In his late autobiography, *A Testament*, he speaks of his “originality”:

Resemblances are mistaken for influences. Comparisons have been made odious where comparison should, except as insult, hardly exist... To cut ambiguity short: there never was exterior influence upon my work, either foreign or native, other than that of Lieber Meister, Dankmar Adler and John Roebling, Whitman and Emerson, and the great poets worldwide. My work is original not only in fact but in spiritual fiber. No practice by any European architect to this day has influenced mine in the least. As for the Incas, the Mayans, even the Japanese- all were to me but splendid confirmation.⁸¹

Yet, countless architectural critics and experts agree that Wright borrowed techniques, styles, and concepts for his own buildings. The need for such claims is confusing. Wright did not want to “restate” architecture, but comparison can hardly be ignored. Wright had plenty of claims to originality, and even if some of his techniques were borrowed, they were taken to lengths that had not been achieved by others.

The statement is also a curious case in light of his social reputation. We know Wright was virtually blackballed from Chicago for his affair with Mamah Cheney, appearing in both the newspapers and gossip circles for years. The same critics appeared when the relationship with Miriam Noel soured, the extramarital affair with Olgivanna began, and the birth of Iovanna. Financially, he was also not regarded with high honors, as his history of non-payment or late payment followed him from Oak Park to Taliesin. The low point of his career came in the late 1920's when his difficulties were played up by a vengeful Noel to a ready press. Wright's reputation was ruined over the span of twenty years, and he was seemingly bitter towards the media for the rest of his life.

Or was he? Public perception seemingly played a huge role in the career of Wright, and probably contributed to his frequent comebacks from the depths of failure. Wright stressed

⁸¹ Pfeiffer, “A Testament” from *Collected Works*, Vol. 5, p. 211.

originality in designs, and rarely gave up power in decisions. Yet, he understood that clients held the power to hire or fire him, and held a precarious balance between forcing his ideas and keeping the client satiated. Developing a system in which his clients gave him a wish list for their new house allowed Wright to gain the client's faith while still having final say in the structure.

The media held particular venom for Wright, first for breaking the social code in the morally upright Oak Park by allowing an affair to become public and messy, and then by continuing to live outside social guidelines. His controversial work was one thing, but a controversial life is another. More than that, Wright made 'good copy' for the media, as stories of his immoral behavior and outlandish buildings constantly sold papers. At times, the coverage was callous, such as the death of Mamah Cheney when the media swarmed over a grieving man. During the divorce from Miriam, the financial difficulties, ugly details, and constant accusations by Noel were all made an ugly divorce extremely public.

Despite all of this, Wright understood that the media held a great deal of power over the perception of events. He suffered a great deal through early losses, but when Miriam Noel began to use the media against him, he turned the tables. Wright went on the offensive, getting a restraining order against Noel, forcing her into divorce, and not giving an inch. Her reactions began to look less like a woman scorned and more like a bitter ex-wife. When he later moved into the Plaza Hotel in New York City, he made himself widely available for interviews, both shocking and enthralling audiences. His television interview with Mike Wallace was so popular, he was invited back to share even more of his unique brand of philosophy.

Wright, at times, seemed to be an extremely calculating individual. His autobiography is noted to contain several errors in fact and perception, but it was extremely effective in reinvigorating public interest in his work, as well as creating an air of mystery around him. One such error is Wright's claim of being born in 1869, the year his sister Jane was born. While it does not seem to make sense to make himself younger, it also lent credence to his claim he was at the University of Wisconsin for two extra years. His writing style was highly poetic and romantic, despite the claim he hated romanticism in writing.

He argued against competitions and awards, but eventually accepted many institutional architecture awards, even the AIA Gold Medal.⁸² He appeared on the cover of *Time* multiple times. He often took his work around the world, even organizing several exhibitions to take some of his work and designs on tour. Throughout his life, he gave speaking engagements and lectures, sometimes verbally assaulting the audience, though they often enjoyed his outlandish displays. The intrigue of Wright can often be attributed to the fact that he could engage an audience, whether it was a single client or room full of architectural critics. He just as easily made friends as he made enemies with his sharp tongue and quick wit, but his lack of a filter often converted close friends to enemies.

The public was intrigued by such a colorful character. His strange and wonderful designs had gathered a following, but his personality made him a cult figure. His morally unorthodox lifestyle often appalled casual observers, but kept Wright in the public eye. Without public support for his architecture, Wright suffered. However, once he regained prominence in the eyes

⁸² Wright was especially against the A.I.A., as he refused to accept that an architect should be licensed. Many internally fought against presenting the award, but were outvoted.

of the public in the mid 1930's, he kept a firm grasp of his popularity with tireless work. For the last thirty years of life, Wright finally realized the public opinion is a powerful weapon.

Conclusion

The length of his life was a major factor in Wright's success. Other individuals of high aptitude struggled with substance abuse and depression, burning out after short, troubled lives. Wright struggled in lasting relationships, either separating himself from long-term connections or seeking troubled personalities. His single-minded personality pushed him towards goals, but ignored repercussions for his actions. These traits nearly ended his career prematurely. Yet, he managed to resurrect his career from the ashes, rising to new heights. A long life allowed him to get a second chance.

We saw in Chapter 1 that Wright had many pressures from his family life that he struggled to balance. He never was able to live up to the heritage of the Lloyd-Joneses, a family entrenched in piety and religious fervor. He lived in admiration and fear of them, and his deep loyalty to the land where he later built Taliesin came from the investment of his aunts and uncles to settle it. His mother Anna instilled in him a love for nature, but her heavy-handed romanticism created an overwhelming confidence in Frank that both drove and hindered him. His father William attempted to instill a love of music and a sense of discipline in his son, but Frank held the effort against him later in life, preventing him from acknowledging the positive efforts of his father.

His own efforts as a father were negligible. While some of his children from his relationship with Catherine loved his playful and spoiling nature, others never got over the fact that he abandoned them. Despite his claims that he didn't know how to be a father, when he applied himself, he was more than capable. Yet it seems he simply selfishly sought his own desires in a midlife crisis, and was never able to regain the relationships he destroyed. With

Svetlana and Iovanna, Wright's overprotection of them pushed them away. Svetlana ran away with Wes, and Iovanna sought refuge in unhealthy relationships and substance abuse.

As a husband, Wright sought relationships in a very short-sighted and romantic sense. His mother's idealistic sense of romance ruined Frank's perceptions of healthy relationships, and he seemed to fall in love quickly. His relationship with Catherine seemed to be furthered by social pressure and defiance against authority, but ended because they were too different personally. Wright was about his career, Kitty was about her family. Mamah Cheney was the closest person to Wright's romantic ideal, but the relationship was doomed by the scandal that surrounded the couple and the unseen tragedy of her death. Miriam Noel was unstable, and her relationship with Wright was unhealthy for both and destroyed their lives. Olgivanna seemed to be the great calming force, as well as an equal in drive and ambition.

Wright struggled with clients, as they always seemed to be an obstacle to his vision but allowed him to perform it. They were sometimes his benefactors and supported him both personally and professionally, but a few bitterly argued at his delays, costs, and their own lack of input. Friends were often the same way, with Wright seeking individuals that recognized his ability, but also those whom he could admire as well. Relationships ran hot and cold, but loyalty was always important to Wright, especially with apprentices. Apprentices were trusted, but only as long as they stayed within Wright's vision and did not seek any glory of their own. In all of his relationships, Wright sought pleasure or enlightenment, but was too emotionally immature in handling conflict.

His personal life was driven by a romantic vision of the world. Nature, beautiful buildings, music, Japanese art, and poetry colored his world with beauty. He appreciated the

world around him, simply as it was. The arts were a means of highlighting already existing beauty, and architecture was the natural expression of what was seen in human forms. The simplicity of the Froebel education gave him the structure and music gave him the form. The Nature his mother loved was brought to life by the Transcendentalists of America, whose vision of America was nature and the love of the natural world. Unitarianism highlighted his love of God in the world and was brought to him by his beloved Lloyd-Joneses.

When you look at the processes that led up to his styles, you could tell his individual flair was developing throughout. The learning process of the first few years exploded into the Prairie Style, a prolific period where he paid homage to nature against the city. His exhibitions in grandeur in the Larkin Building, Unity Temple, Midway Gardens, and the Imperial Hotel were Wright showing his pure ability and variety in style, but were a separate expression of individual thoughts, rather than a particular style. Wright continued this trend of dramatic one-offs with his S.C. Johnson building, Kaufmann house, Price Tower, and Guggenheim Museum, but his Usonian style recalled the expression of Wright's American idea.

Finally, we see that Wright, despite the years of 'persecution', was able to wield the media in his own favor. He loved the limelight and seeing himself as a genius, desired that his brilliant ideas be shared with the world. The public both reviled and were enthralled by him, and he loved to pull the strings on the public view. Like a talented actor, Wright played his roles to a tee; first as a dandy, then a young-upstart, a scoundrel, a washed-up failure, a returning conqueror, and finally, the wise sage.

Discovering a worldview for Wright is a difficult proposition. Brendan Gill used the analogy of masks to describe Wright's shifting perceptions both by the public and privately. I

disagree with the sentiment. Frank possessed a perception about himself that did not always correspond with reality, but he doggedly pursued his goals without abandon. Often times, it was met with mixed results by those around him. His ability to create and innovate drove him, but it took losing major things in his life to reform his methods and styles for the positive. His tremendous ego and confidence were often off-putting to the vast number of people who had to deal with him every day, but it pushed him through difficult times and drove him to push further than others were willing to risk.

Wright was transfixed by a vision of the world he held in his own mind. In this world, beauty was honored; people were happy and healthy; buildings served the purpose they were built for; the materials were shown off and enjoyed for their own beauty. Wright sought comfort and simplicity for America and American life, away from cities and congestion. An architect learned by doing and genius was appreciated.

Early in his life, Wright was sent away by his mother to move from the life of the mind and see the practical value of hard work with her family in the Valley. Nearly eighty years later, his life of the mind was not dampened by age, but was refined by years of hard work in that same valley. He was laid to rest with his family near Unity Chapel in 1959, but was moved upon the death of his wife Olgivanna. Even in death, it seems Wright's soul remains with the valley of his family, while his body resides in the world.

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