



UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS

a walk through a turn of the century suburb

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“Splendid location for a home. No marshes, no malaria. Ask any agent to show you. Price of lots from \$400-\$500.”

—advertisement for University Heights lots, Wisconsin State Journal, 1897.

University Heights: A Walk Through a Turn of the Century Suburb

University Heights is analogous to Bascom Hill in its origin and pre-history. The retreating glaciers left giant piles of sand, possibly covering outcrops of bedrock along the margins of the Yahara Valley.

When white settlers stopped the Indians' prairie fires, and livestock ate down the prairie grasses, oaks sprang up on these steep, infertile slopes where intensive farming was impossible. By the time of the Civil War, the Heights was a wooded knoll, and in 1862-63, it was partially logged over by the soldiers at Camp Randall.

The Heights was a popular pasture and wood lot for hikers until 1893. In that year, it became the property of the University Heights Company, which had it laid out as a suburb. The developers took advantage of the rolling and sometimes precipitous topography, platting many streets in curvilinear plan. The plan had some of the elements of the romantic suburbs of Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux without, unfortunately, the planned open spaces.

The success of the suburb scheme, however, was not fully assured even in 1894-95 when Charles E. Buell, Amos Knowlton, and H.W. Hillyer built their homes.

Hillyer, who was an early booster of the area, wrote in the fifty-year memorial edition of the *Wisconsin State Journal, Madison Past and Present*, the following description of the Heights in 1902:

"The beauty of University Heights is very noteworthy even to the citizens of beautiful Madison. It looks out on a scene not only most beautiful by nature, but full of things which suggest men's thoughts and doings. In plain view is a busy thoroughfare; then a railway reaching to the east and west; the University on its hills; the white dome of the State Capitol standing for the State; the city with its many friends; a pleasure drive with passing carriages; the blue lakes with hurrying steamers or leisurely white sails; and beyond the everchanging waters of Lake Mendota can be seen the beautiful but sad white towers of the hospital; church spires, long plumes of steam from trains running north and south; gay summer cottages and prosperous farms."

When the University Heights plat was finally annexed to the City of Madison a year later, its success was assured. During the next three decades, building would occur at an accelerated

rate and the subdivision's skyrocketing growth would attract the design expertise of not only this city's most fashionable residential architectural firms, but also two giants of architectural history and several other notable firms from Chicago. While the designs of Frank Lloyd Wright and his mentor, Louis Sullivan, are the architectural highlights of the area, a substantial number of the city's most elegant residences designed by local firms contribute to the overall aesthetic appeal of the Heights.

Indeed, here would be played out a kind of architectural contest, similar to other contests occurring in many small cities and suburbs in the Midwest. In 1893, the Chicago World Columbia Exposition displayed a panoply of classically derived buildings in its "Great White City." The vogue for such elegance had appeal here as well as on the eastern seaboard from where it had originated. However, a movement grew out of the rejection of these forms and in the positive acceptance of the work and ideas of Louis Sullivan. This movement was to center on his most important pupil, Frank Lloyd Wright, and it was to be called "Prairie School."

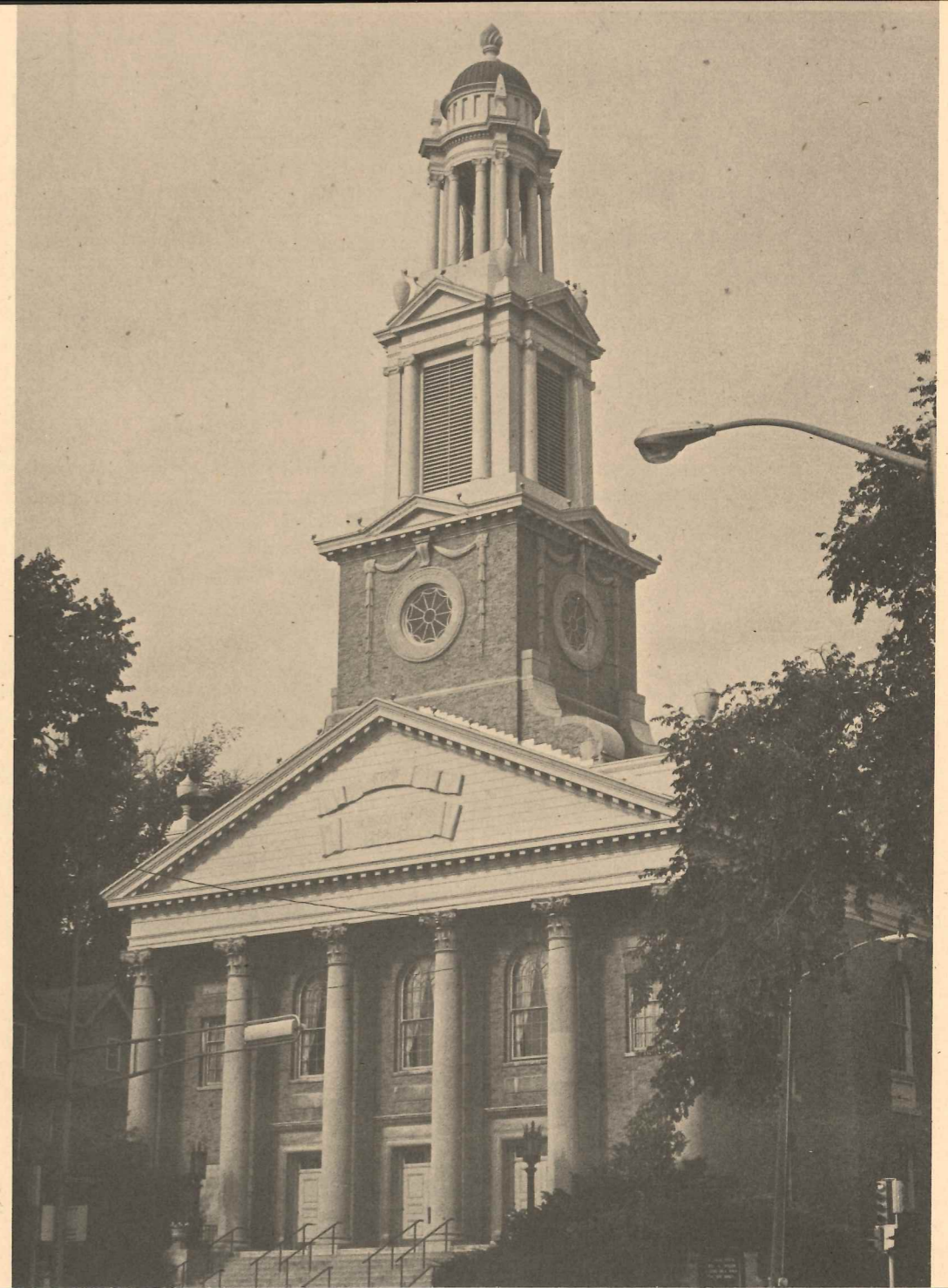
Prairie architecture is generally characterized by a horizontal emphasis that reflects the broad reaches of the midwestern prairies. This feeling may be expressed by a building that in itself is long and low, or by elements within the design that give it this appearance. The roof will have generous overhangs that cast deep shadows; the windows may be grouped together so that they appear as a longer element; horizontal trim members may encircle the building, sometimes tying window sills or heads together; or, if the house is a two story, several materials may be used that separate one floor from another. The materials used are generally natural — wood is stained or waxed, bricks are deep reds, or browns, often laid with deeply raked horizontal joints. Frequently the materials are ones that express shelter, but not mass, such as wood siding, shingles, or stucco.

While Prairie architecture is a matter of consuming interest to most visitors to University Heights, an attempt has been made in this booklet to include a number of traditionally designed dwellings as well. The lively competition between local innovative architects, Claude and Starck and Alvan Small, and their more traditional friendly rivals, Frank Riley and Law, Law and Potter, is documented in a number of fine houses included on this tour. And the roots of the twentieth century architectural competition can be seen in a number of excellent early dwellings in the area. Taken as a whole, University Heights is a laboratory of American architectural history at the turn of the century and on into the first three decades of the twentieth century.

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH — 1609 University Ave.

This imposing Georgian Revival style building was dedicated in January, 1930. It was designed by Kilham, Hopkins and Greeley of Boston, specialists in church, town hall and school architecture (see Randall School, pp. 45-46 for comparison). Supervision of the design and construction was by Law, Law, and Potter of Madison.

A visual landmark of the Heights, the First Congregational Church was only the fourth church to be constructed on the west side. During the University of Wisconsin enrollment bulge following World War II, the 1,300 seat sanctuary was used as a lecture hall for the sociology and political science departments.



LOUIS KAHLENBERG HOUSE — 234 Lathrop Street

Louis Kahlenberg, born in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, in 1870, completed his undergraduate work at the University in 1892. He later did graduate work here and at the University of Leipzig, where he received his Ph.D. in physical chemistry. He married Lillian Heald in 1896 and moved to the University Heights about six years later. Kahlenberg was widely known at the University for his wit and extraordinary character.

The house, built in 1902-3, is a very late example of a tempered Queen Anne style home. Its shingled exterior surfaces give a skintight appearance to the house that belies its real mass.



CHARLES FORSTER SMITH/OGG HOUSE — 1711 Kendall Avenue

Charles Forster Smith (1852-1931) was a professor of Greek and Classical Philology at the University from 1894 to 1914. After work at Wofford College, South Carolina, Harvard University, the Universities of Leipzig and Berlin, and Vanderbilt University he came to Madison and subsequently commissioned the design and construction of this large dwelling in the Georgian Revival mode.

Smith was one of the founders of the Poetry Club, originally a University Heights-based cultural society. Eventually the club was expanded to include other members, among them the *grande dame* of Madison society, Mrs. Sarah Fairchild Dean Conover.

A later resident of the house was political scientist Frederick A. Ogg, a member of the University faculty from 1914 to 1948. It is said that Ogg kept five desks in his study in the house, one for each phase of his work.



AMOS KNOWLTON HOUSE — 1717 Kendall Avenue

Amos A. Knowlton (1859-1906), a graduate of Bowdoin College in Maine, came to Madison in the spring of 1890 after two years of advanced study in Leipzig. He was married in 1886 to the former Jennie Sinclair Neil, and they had five children.

The Knowlton House, built in 1895, was the second dwelling to be constructed in the University Heights suburb. Since the Claudes were family friends, it is possible that the house was one of the first commissions given to the young architect, Louis Claude, who had just returned to Madison from Chicago where he had worked in the office of Louis Sullivan. Somewhat in the feeling of both the Queen Anne and the Shingle style, the house represents a pivotal expression of late nineteenth century architectural design concepts.

At one time this house, like many of the early houses in the Heights, had a windmill to pump water. In those days the address of the house was 1717 Adams (for University President C. Kendall Adams), but the name of the street was changed in later years to prevent confusion with the street in the Vilas-Wingra Park area.



HOWARD MOORES HOUSE — 220 N. Prospect

Commissioned by John M. Olin shortly before his death for his nephew Howard Moores, this dwelling was designed by Madison architect Frank Riley in 1923 and constructed in 1925. Riley's reputation in Madison was based on his ability to create a handsome traditional design that would bespeak the well-being of a building's inhabitants. Riley designed many other dwellings not only in the Heights but all around Madison. His department store for Yost-Kessenich remains an important architectural landmark on State Street.



HOMER WINTHROP HILLYER HOUSE — 1811 Kendall Avenue

H.W. Hillyer became a professor of organic chemistry at the University of Wisconsin in 1885 after completing his undergraduate work at Madison and advanced work at Johns Hopkins.

Hillyer is known to us today as one of the great boosters of the Heights. In 1902, one year before annexation, he wrote of progress in the Heights:

"Some years ago when the Wild West show gave an exhibition at Camp Randall, the Indians who were a part of it took their first leisure time to climb to the brow of the great hill at University Heights, and in their old-time dress sat long and thoughtfully out on the prospect about them. Their personality, dress, and attitude brought clearly to mind the changes which have come since their like heaped up the mound in the woods nearby."

Built in 1895, the Hillyer House was one of the first houses to be constructed in the Heights. Several of the early houses were sheathed in shingles. The apparent attempt to design this house in the Shingle style points to the architectural revolution that was brewing in this area. Soon architects in the Wrightian mode would pick up some of the design concepts of the Shingle style and employ them in totally new ways.

As was the case with other early University Heights houses, the Hillyer house had a windmill.



RICHARD T. ELY HOUSE — 205 N. Prospect

The first purchaser of land in the new subdivision was Richard T. Ely, distinguished professor of economics at the University of Wisconsin. Three years later, in 1896, he commissioned Chicago architect Charles Sumner Frost of Cobb (Henry Ives) and Frost to design this elegant Georgian Revival dwelling. Curiously, Ely was critical of the traditional design of buildings on the University campus, but that criticism did not carry over to the matter of his own house. His eminence at the University may have accounted for the luxury of a powered pump and no windmill.

During his career at the University, Ely was criticized for his teaching of Marxian economics. One result of the Board of Regents inquiry which ended in Ely's exoneration was the famous statement of academic freedom which is emblazoned on Main (Bascom) Hall: "Whatsoever may be the limitations which trammel the freedom of inquiry elsewhere, we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found."

This dwelling was designated a Madison Landmark on January 7, 1974.



WILLIAM PENCE HOUSE — 168 N. Prospect

The William Pence House reminds one of the English country estates, as it reflects a design interest in the Tudor forms. It was designed by Claude (Louis) and Starck (Edward) in 1909. Claude's own home at 831 Prospect Place on the east side (c. 1902) has a similar design expression and so does the Unitarian Parsonage, 504 N. Carroll Street (1915). The firm was not completely committed to the Prairie form, nor were they ever swayed to a fully traditional stance. Indeed some Prairie and proto-Prairie architecture has employed half-timbering in following English arts and crafts models.

Pence was a professor in the College of Engineering.



J. T. W. JENNINGS HOUSE — 1902 Arlington Place

While holding the position of campus architect, J.T.W. Jennings built this eclectically styled dwelling in tan brick with a tile roof in 1903-04. In 1906 he formed the partnership of Jennings and Kronenberg (Ferd) which was located in the Wisconsin Building.

Jennings' training was at New York University. From there he moved to Chicago where he became architect for the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway Company from 1885 to 1893. He practiced privately in Chicago from 1893 until his arrival in Madison in 1899. During his tenure as campus architect, he designed Agricultural Hall, the dairy barns, the stable, the agricultural power house, the engineering building (now Education), the horticulture building (now King Hall) and the old chemistry building. Many of these buildings indicate the generally traditional approach his practice took.



ANDREW WHITSON HOUSE — 1920 Arlington Place

Andrew Whitson was a professor in the College of Agriculture at the University of Wisconsin when this house was built in 1906, and he remained there until about 1910. The house, designed by Claude and Starck, has changed hands several times, but its proximity to the University seems to have made it a favorite with faculty. This house shares at least one feature in common with several other Claude and Starck buildings in Madison: the bay window, tight against the front entrance, can be seen in the Christ Presbyterian Office (Carl Genske House) at 1004 Sherman Avenue (c. 1916) and the Ira Griswold House at 1158 Sherman Avenue (1915). Several windows are grouped, the house is simple in its massing, and a horizontal emphasis is achieved with the wood trim encircling the house at the height of the first floor window heads.



CHARLES E. ALLEN HOUSE — 2014 Chamberlain Avenue

Charles E. and Genevieve S. Allen built this house about 1911 while he was a professor of botany at the University of Wisconsin. A more complex residential design than Alvan Small usually produced, the house has attic dormers which almost rest on the second floor windows, and give an unusually interesting facade to the house. A horizontal effect is achieved through the use of two different materials — shingles on the first floor and stucco on the second. This same design technique was used on the house for Clarence S. Haen, the librarian for the College of Agriculture, whose Alvan Small-designed home almost abuts the rear lot line of the Allen House.

Small, like his contemporary Louis Claude, had studied with Allen D. Conover (see the Buell House pp. 37-38) while an undergraduate at Madison, and had then gone to Chicago to work with Louis Sullivan. His commitment to the forms and concepts of the Prairie School remained true to the last days of the design school's pre-eminence.



EDWARD A. ROSS HOUSE — 2021 Chamberlain Avenue

In 1914, Edward A. Ross, a professor of sociology at the University of Wisconsin, and his wife, Rosamund, built this home on a steeply wooded site facing toward Lake Mendota, which could then be viewed from the porch. The house, designed by Claude and Starck, is imposing and features several characteristics that stress its affinity for the Prairie School. Horizontality is achieved through wood trim that encircles the house at the first floor window head height and again at the height of the second floor windows' meeting rail. The roof's generous overhang hugs the house into the hillside. The large front porch further emphasizes a linear design.



JOHN M. OLIN HOUSE — 130 N. Prospect

Constructed in 1912 and attributed to the Milwaukee architectural firm of Ferry (George B.) and Clas (Alfred C.), this house, designed in traditional Gothic mode was commissioned by John M. Olin, a well-known Madison lawyer who was the driving force of the Madison Parks and Pleasure Drive Association. The Parks and Pleasure Drive Association, founded in 1894, was responsible for the acquisition of lands and the creation of many of the city parks around the turn of the century. Olin worked very closely with D.K. Tenney, Thomas Brittingham, and William F. Vilas to secure donations of lands for parks which now bear the donors' names. Monona Park was re-named in honor of Olin's work just prior to the lawyer's death.

Today, the Olin House is the home for the presidents of the University of Wisconsin.



HAROLD C. BRADLEY HOUSE — 106 N. Prospect

Designed in 1909 by Louis Sullivan and his chief assistant, George Elmslie, the Bradley House stands at an architectural historical crossroads. While it is not representative of the major corpus of Sullivan's practice, it is an important example of how Sullivan's ideas affected his contemporaries. It is one of only a handful of dwellings in the Prairie mode to come out of Sullivan's office in the years following "*Der Meister's*" break with his partner, Dankmar Adler. In this later period, Elmslie took an increasingly more responsible role, perhaps accounting in part for the nature of the Bradley House design.

The dominating characteristic of the exterior of the house is the arrangement of two large cantilevered sleeping porches at either end of the cross piece of the T-shaped plan. The design of the interior of the massive house was left to Elmslie, who carried a series of Prairie and arts and crafts design motifs throughout the entire scheme.

In 1914, the Bradleys sold this dwelling to the Sigma Phi fraternity, its residents ever since, and moved to an Elmslie-designed dwelling in Shorewood Hills. (Purcell, Feick, and Elmslie)

Harold Bradley was a chemistry professor at the University of Wisconsin, and his wife Josephine was related to the Crane family of Chicago.

The Bradley House was the first designated Madison Landmark (May 18, 1971) and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



HARRY D. TIEMANN HOUSE — 135 N. Prospect*

Harry D. Tiemann, who was associated with the Forest Products Laboratory, built this house in 1911. The Tiemanns had come to Madison from New Haven, Connecticut. One reason for its appearance as a rather older design than would be appropriate for 1911 (see the house next door, 137 N. Prospect, built a year earlier) is that the Tiemanns wanted to build a house that looked exactly like the one they had left in New Haven. Tiemann designed the lovely Art Nouveau stained glass windows that light the stair landing on the west side of the house.

**Photo Not
Available**

EDWARD C. ELLIOTT HOUSE — 137 N. Prospect

Professor of education, Edward C. Elliott, interested in a progressively designed dwelling, entered into an extraordinary, and not fully understood, arrangement with Chicago architect George W. Maher and the local firm of Claude and Starck. Perhaps one may be safe in assuming a rather standard procedure, namely that Maher did the original design to be supervised by Claude and Starck (who had executed similar contracts with other Chicago architects, notably Robert Spencer). Built in 1910, the house illustrates the effect that the Prairie style had on standard residential design. While in plan and elevation the house appears to be not immediately arresting, attention to detail has distinguished it from its fellows. For example, the horizontal board-and-batten treatment in the second story and the side lights with leaded floral designs do much to lend the house distinction. Wide overhanging eaves and projecting rafters on the side porch give horizontality to a potentially boxy design.

Edward Elliott was instrumental in the establishment of the University of Wisconsin High School, a demonstration school that was in operation until recently. In 1916 Elliott was named chancellor of the University of Montana, and in 1922 president of Purdue University.

This dwelling was designated a Madison Landmark on July 15, 1974.

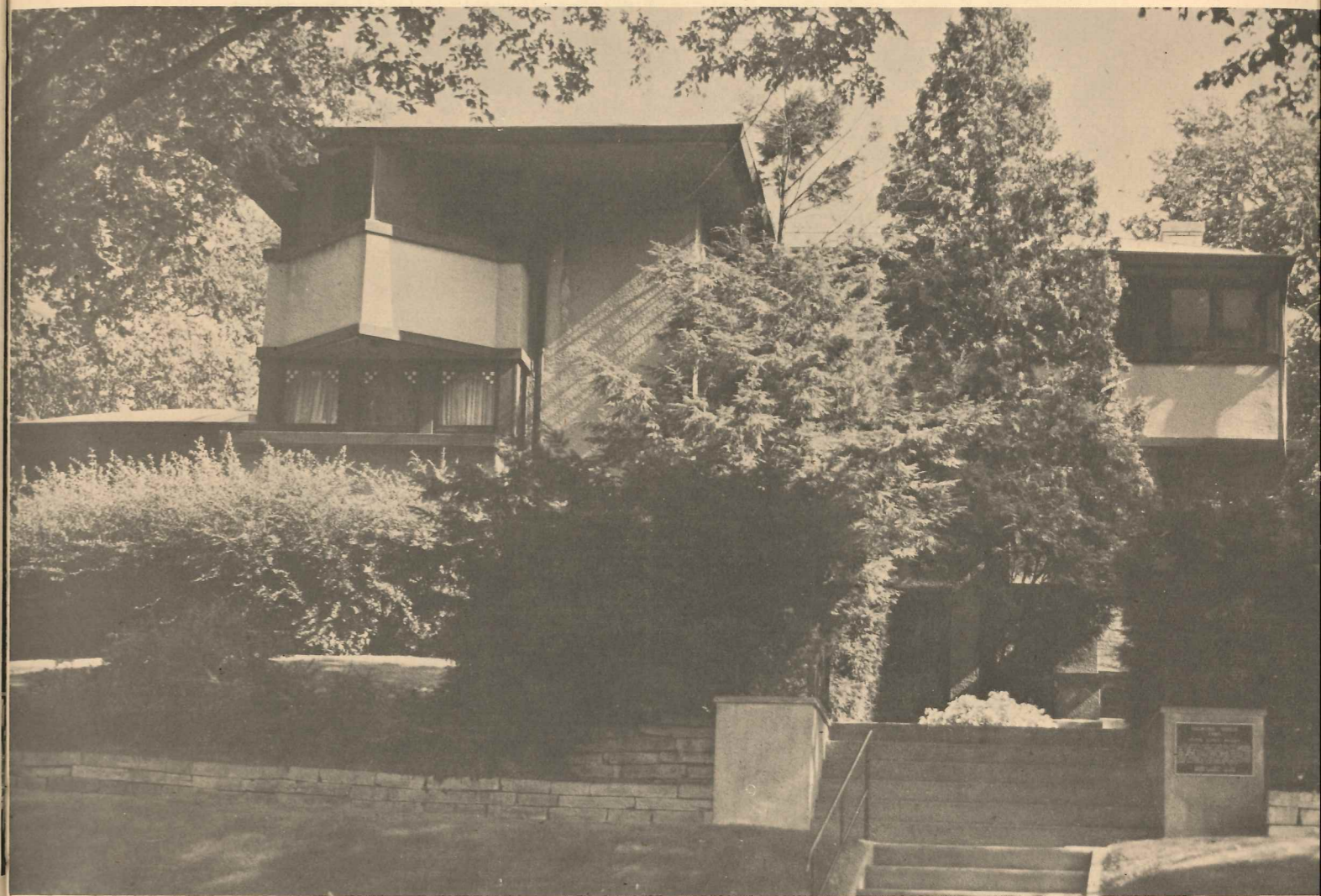


EUGENE A. GILMORE HOUSE — 120 Ely Place

In the spring of 1908, Professor Joseph Jastrow of the University's psychology department showed his colleague Eugene Gilmore of the law faculty the recent issue of *Architectural Record*, which featured the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, a talented young designer from Chicago. Gilmore was sufficiently impressed by Wright's work to commission him to design his house. At this point in Wright's career he strongly espoused a style which he called "New American" and which we today call Prairie. An archetypal Prairie house, the Gilmore residence illustrates many of the design school's significant characteristics: wide overhanging eaves, stucco treatment with horizontal wood banding, banded leaded casement windows which create ribbons of interior light, and a site-hugging composition which emphasizes the buildings horizontal expression. Dubbed the 'Airplane House' because of its pointed facade, wing-like roof overhangs, and cruciform plan, the dwelling originally had Wright-designed furniture.

Professor Gilmore was a member of the law faculty at the University of Wisconsin, later to become a vice-governor of the Phillipines, Dean of the Law School at the University of Iowa, and later its president.

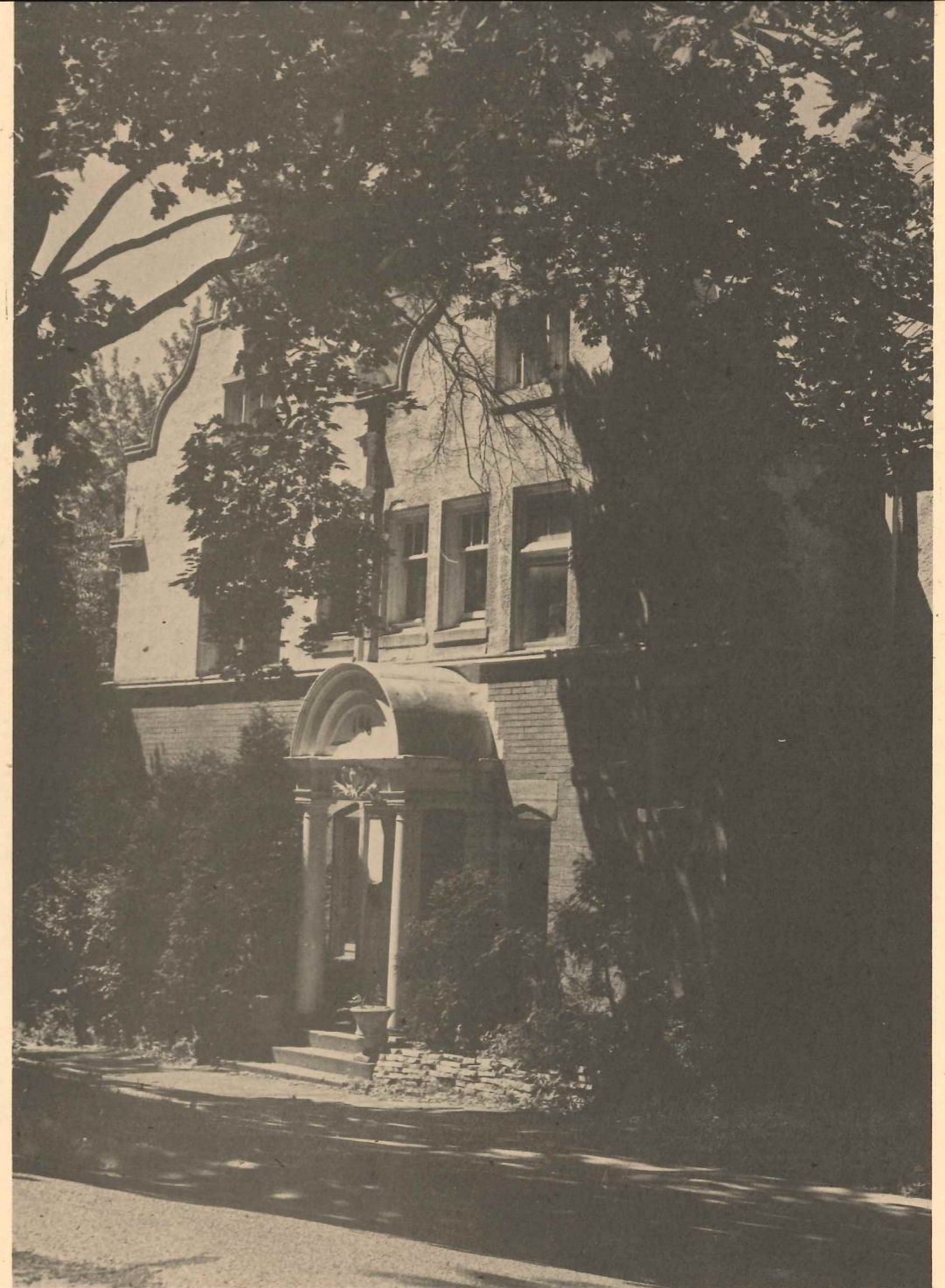
The Gilmore House was designated a Madison Landmark on January 17, 1972, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.



FREDERICK TURNEAURE HOUSE — 166 N. Prospect

Built in 1905-06 by Frederick Turneaure, the design of this dwelling owes much to Europe. The brick and stucco walls seem to look primarily to Belgium for their inspiration. A number of interesting stained glass windows add elegance to the house.

Turneaure, a native of Freeport, Illinois, graduated from Cornell University and joined the University faculty in 1892. He became dean of the College of Engineering, was at one time city surveyor, and also served several terms as alderman.



CHARLES E. BUELL HOUSE — 115 Ely Place

Though not the first person to purchase a lot in the new University Heights area, lawyer and educator Charles Buell was the first person to erect a dwelling. In 1893-94, he commissioned the architectural firm of Conover (Allen Darst) and Porter (Lew F.) to design a house appropriate to this rather steep site. The architects chose Lake Superior brownstone for the exposed foundation and shingles for the wall treatment. Although not a pure Shingle style house in the Richardsonian tradition, the residence does differ from the standard Queen Anne treatment in some ways, notably the choice of deep colors for the exterior, the minimal use of classicizing ornament, and the banded effect created by the horizontal breaks in the shingle lines just above the foundation.

Coincidentally, Allen D. Conover was the Madison employer of Frank Lloyd Wright who designed the Gilmore House built across the street fifteen years later.

The Buell House was designated a Madison Landmark on January 7, 1974.



EDWARD MOREHOUSE HOUSE — 101 Ely Place

One of the last lots to be built, ironically almost adjacent to the first, was owned by Public Service Commission official Edward Morehouse. Morehouse commissioned a successful young Chicago architect, George Fred Keck, to design a dwelling for him and his wife, Anna Ely Morehouse (the daughter of Richard T. Ely, 205 N. Prospect). Keck had begun his career in the arts as a watercolorist, but he also had a degree in engineering. Befriended in Chicago by Bauhaus giants, Mies van der Rohe and Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, the young painter was steered toward architecture. He designed a number of houses for the Century of Progress Fair in Chicago in 1933-34 and turned more and more to the simple linear forms of the "International Style" in the years following the fair. This particular residence is a personal statement in the International style. It originally was to have exterior mechanical louvred shutters, but these were never executed.

The Morehouse House was designated a Madison Landmark on January 7, 1974.



THOMAS MORRIS HOUSE — 1815 Summit Street

Thomas and Josephine Morris commissioned the design of this dwelling in the Prairie mode to Alvan Small in 1910-11. A simple rectangular mass sheltered by a roof with generous overhangs, the Morris house exhibits some of the typical details specified by Small in many of his designs: stucco and brick are used as exterior materials, wood trim is inset in the stucco, and windows are grouped to continue a horizontal expression. A leaded glass window on the street facade adds a handsome decorative detail to the elevation. When the house was constructed it afforded magnificent views to the south and the east. The view to the south remains today because of a precipitous site.

A comparable house designed by Small in 1912 for John and Gertrude Sanborn is located at 2115 Van Hise Avenue.



W.F. SLOAN HOUSE — 1712 Summit Avenue

Designed in a traditional style that owes much to English architecture, the Sloan House has been preliminarily attributed to the architectural firm of Law, Law and Potter. James Law, the principal of the firm and a long-time mayor of the city, designed the Edward Birge House, 2011 Van Hise, and other dwellings in the city before going into partnership with his brother Edward and later with Ellis Potter.

What is perhaps most interesting about the dwelling is its grandiosity. It was built so that all of the Madison lakes could be seen from its windows. In 1940, long after the Sloans had sold the house, it was rented briefly to Sinclair Lewis who described the dwelling in a letter to a friend: "Already today I have found a house — nearly as good as our Beverly Hills castle minus patio and pool and just as large at one-third the rent. It's on a curving hillside road, very near the sprawling giant beehive of the University ..." Lewis, who was teaching a course in creative writing, soon tired of the novelty of academic life and decamped for New York.

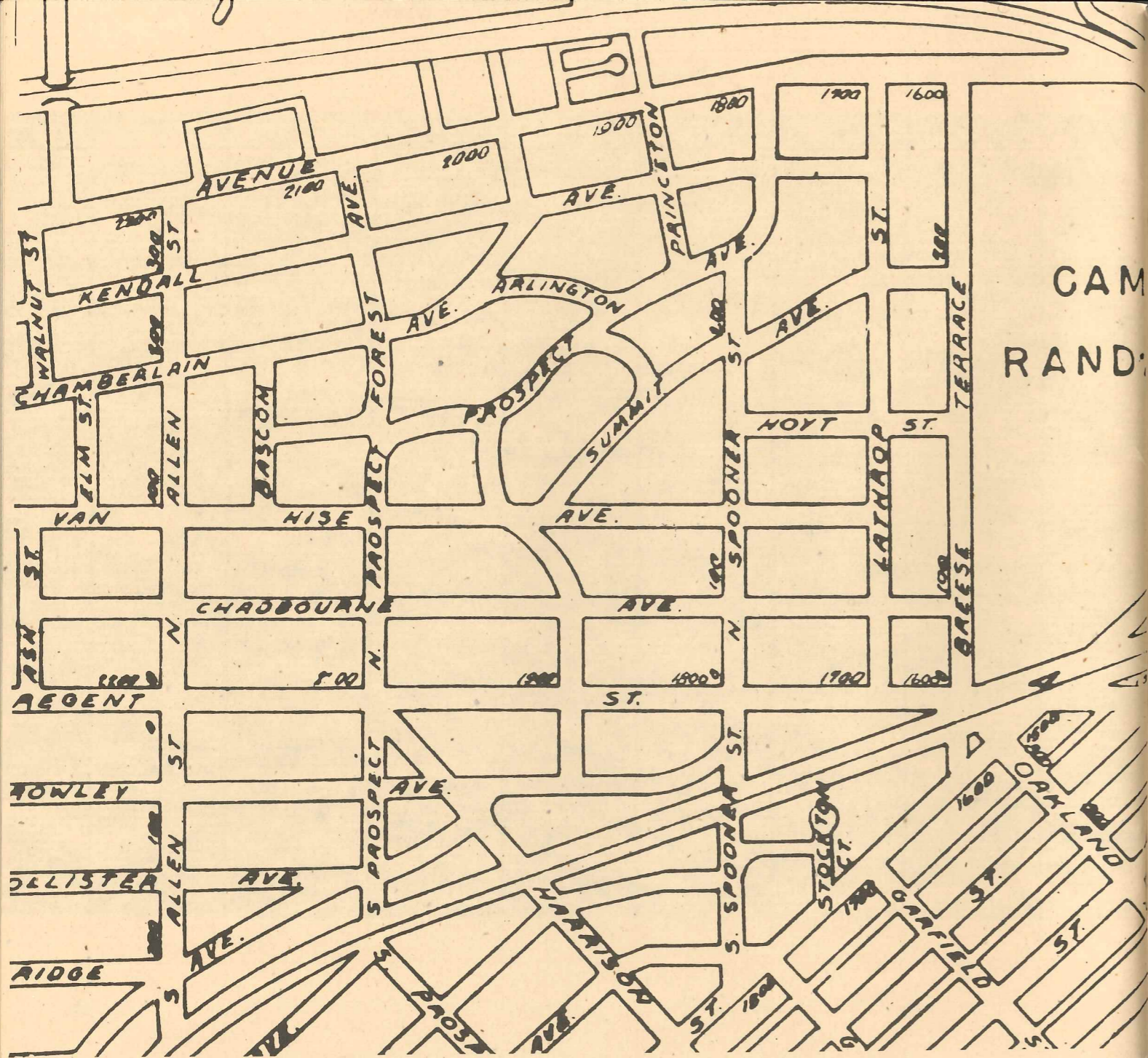
Sloan was a consulting engineer who maintained a business in Madison and Chicago. His wife was a semi-invalid and it was for her that the house's elevator was installed.



RANDALL SCHOOL — 1802 Regent Street

Commissioned in 1906 to the firm of Lew F. Porter whose partner, Alvan Small, was presumably the principal designer of this project, the Randall School is a departure from the typical school of the time, which boasted either Renaissance or Classical details. Instead, this design exhibited new tendencies with the grouped windows, the very sharp roof lines with the planes covered with clay roofing tiles, the effect of half-timbering in the high gable ends, and details above the window heads of moulded brick stretching in a linear manner. The Carl Schurz High School in Chicago, designed by Dwight Perkins, is similar and often considered a landmark in educational architecture, yet the Randall School was built two years earlier and remains the oldest city school still used as a school. The school has had several architecturally sympathetic additions.





CAM
BRIDGE

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