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GRIFFIN, MARION LUCY MAHONY

February 14, 1871–August 10, 1961

ARCHITECT, COMMUNITY PLANNER, DELINEATOR

Born and raised in Chicago, Marion Mahony Griffin worked as an architect in the United States, Australia, and India. Her active professional career spanned fifty years (1894–1944) in three distinct periods: the early years as a young architect in turn-of-the-century Chicago (1894–1914), the middle years in Australia and India (1914–38), and her later life in Chicago (1938–61).

As a progressive young architect in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park studio, Marion Mahony Griffin contributed, through her drawings, to the development of the Prairie School that revolutionized American architecture and to the worldwide dissemination of its ideas. Marion Mahony, the second of five children born to Jeremiah and Clara Hamilton (Perkins) Mahony, grew up in a female-headed household from the age of eleven. Her father, who migrated from Ireland to Illinois as a child, was a school principal, a journalist, and a poet. He died in 1882, and Marion Mahony's aunt Myra and her grandmother moved in with the family. Her mother and aunt were members of a Unitarian

congregation, and Marion was steeped in the ideas of liberal Protestantism. Two of the congregation's "covenants of faith" — that we ought to work for the good of humanity, to make the world better, and that we hold fast to the freedom of the spirit for ourselves and for all people — appear to have been principles by which Marion Mahony lived her life. Her mother, a respected educator, was for many years principal of the Komensky school, so named for Jan Amos Komensky (known also as Johann Amos Comenius), the seventeenth-century educational reformer and theologian. Through her mother's circle, Mahony came in contact with a network of influential women that included educational reformer ELLA FLAGG YOUNG and MARY WILMARTH, an active suffragist and Hull-House trustee, who would support Mahony's studies at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Boston. Mary Wilmarth's daughter, progressive reformer ANNA ICKES, was a lifelong friend. In this environment, Mahony developed a rebellious, inquiring, and passionate spirit, which in her adult professional and personal life also became a commitment to democracy.

Marion Mahony graduated from Chicago West Division High School and passed the MIT entrance exam in 1890. The architecture course was modeled on the École des Beaux Arts school in Paris and her design thesis, "A House and Studio for a Painter," was supervised by the French architect Constant Despradelle. She also studied languages, literature, political history, political economy, and anthropology. In 1893 Mahony visited the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. There she likely saw the printmaking and timber construction of the Japanese Pavilion, prints and screens in the Japanese Parlor in the Woman's Building, and Mayan and Aztec geometric design forms. All were significant to her artistic and professional development. In 1894 she graduated from MIT, the second woman architect to graduate after Sophia Hayden, architect of the Woman's Building for the 1893 exposition. As the first registered woman architect in Illinois, Mahony helped pioneer women's professional participation in architecture in the United States.

On graduation her first job was with her architect cousin, Dwight Perkins, a reform-minded architect and environmentalist, who saw the potential of architecture to address social issues. At the time the recently founded Hull-House provided an important practical and intellectual focus for many reform-oriented professionals, including architects. The Chicago Arts and Crafts Society (founded 1897), of which Mahony, Perkins, the brothers Allen and Irving Pond, and Frank Lloyd Wright were charter members, met at Hull-House. There Wright gave his 1901 address, "The Art and Craft of the Machine." It was at Hull-House that Mahony met and made a lifelong friend of Australian feminist writer Miles Franklin, who would later introduce her and Walter Griffin (her future husband) to the progressive community in Sydney, Australia.

With Perkins, Mahony worked on the twelve-story Steinway Hall (now demolished) in downtown Chicago. From 1895, the loft space in Steinway Hall was home to progressive architects Perkins, Wright, Mahony, Griffin, Allen and Irving Pond, Myron Hunt, and others. The Steinway Hall group debated ideas, reading the work of Henry George, the advocate of the single tax, and Herbert Spencer, the English sociologist and philosopher. They encountered Louis Sullivan, the spiritual father of

the Prairie School of architecture, and the transcendental ideas of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. Like others of her generation whose encounter with the ills of industrialism initiated efforts to reestablish humanistic connections with the environment and work, Mahony was intrigued with progressive as well as religious ideas as they came together in a coherent personal and professional philosophy. Theosophy, for example, appealed to a broad artistic community that included Chicago architect and acquaintance Claude Bragdon. His book on sacred geometry, *The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture*, was published in 1910. For Marion Mahony, involvement in the search for alternatives to materialism was part of her lifelong personal and professional development, most evidently so from the 1930s.

In 1895 Mahony began a long, if intermittent, employment with Frank Lloyd Wright. From 1900 to 1909, Wright, the principal architect of the Prairie School, completed about 120 commissions in the Midwest. Marion Mahony, who worked for Wright for more than thirteen years by her account and eleven according to his calculations, was the longest serving staff person engaged with these designs. Wright's studio, located in the Oak Park suburb on Chicago's western border, was run unconventionally. Historian Grant Carpenter Manson in *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910* (1958) observed that if the studio had been more conventional Mahony would have had the position of head designer. Wright held "informal competitions" for parts of projects, for example, murals, fireplaces, windows, furniture, even complete interiors. Mahony often "won" these competitions, and for more than eleven years she worked on many projects, including the moon children fountain in the Susan Dana Lawrence house (1902) in Springfield, Illinois. From these years she is best known for her Japanese-inspired renderings of Wright's designs, many of which were first exhibited at the Chicago Architectural Club in 1907. In 1910 *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (Studies and executed buildings by Frank Lloyd Wright, known as the Wasmuth Portfolio) was published by Wasmuth in Germany. It became one of the most influential architectural publications of the twentieth century. Of the one hundred plates in the Wasmuth Folio, Mahony prepared more than half the underlays. Drawings of well-known buildings included Unity Temple and the Cheney house in Oak Park. The Como Orchard perspective and others carried her characteristic MLM (Marion Lucy Mahony) monogram. Her intellectual contribution was described by studio member Barry Byrne: "I can well remember welcoming her advent because it promised an amusing day. Her dialogues with Frank Lloyd Wright, who as we all know is no indifferent opponent in repartee, made such days particularly notable" (quoted in Rubbo, "Marion Mahony Griffin: A Portrait," 18). Her best-known private commission in the Wright years was her 1902 All Souls Church in Evanston, Illinois, which was demolished in 1961.

Mahony met Walter Burley Griffin professionally in 1901. Their personal relationship developed in 1910 while they were exploring the lakes and rivers of Illinois by canoe. Walter Griffin worked for Dwight Perkins upon graduation; from 1901 to 1906 he was a member of Wright's Oak Park studio. After a disagreement with Wright, he started his own practice. In 1909, when

Wright left his studio and family, Mahony refused his offer to direct the studio. She joined Herman von Holst as head designer when he took over the practice and established an office in Steinway Hall. She is credited with the David Amberg house, Grand Rapids, Michigan (1909–11); the Adolph Mueller house, Decatur, Illinois (1910); and drawings for the Henry Ford house in Detroit. Walter Burley Griffin worked with von Holst and Mahony as a landscape consultant. Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin were married on June 29, 1911, in Michigan City, Indiana. Years later, in "Magic of America," she wrote, "With that man of mine I was possessed. . . . I was devoted to my work . . . but when I encountered W.B.G. I was first swept off my feet by my delight in his achievements in my profession, then through the common bond of interest in nature and intellectual pursuits and then with the man himself" (quoted in Rubbo, "Marion Mahony Griffin: A Portrait," 16). They had no children.

The Griffins had a long and productive artistic partnership until his death in 1937. Working with her husband, but always as second fiddle by her choice, Marion Mahony Griffin prepared drawings for a number of Griffin commissions in Chicago, including the Hurd Comstock house no. 1, Evanston (1912); the Mess house, Winnetka (1912), with fireplace mural design by Marion Mahony Griffin; Trier Center, Winnetka (1912); their own house in Winnetka (1913, unbuilt); the Stinson Memorial Library, Anna, Illinois (1914); and the virtuoso aerial perspective in colored inks on satin of Rock Glen, Mason City, Iowa (1912), held by the Art Institute of Chicago.

In 1911 the Griffins collaborated on a competition entry for the design of Australia's new Federal Capital, Canberra, and Marion Mahony Griffin prepared the exquisitely rendered satin drawings in the loft in Steinway Hall. In 1912 it was announced that Walter Burley Griffin had been awarded first prize. The design is generally seen as an embodiment of democratic principles employing popular nineteenth-century city beautiful and garden city ideas; a more recent, but somewhat doubtful interpretation, suggests the presence of an esoteric spiritual schema.

In 1914 Marion and Walter Griffin moved to Australia, where they lived for more than twenty years. They were accompanied by Roy Lippincott, who had assisted with the Canberra project, and his wife, Walter Griffin's sister. Shortly after arriving in Sydney, Marion Mahony Griffin published two articles on "Democratic Architecture" in Sydney's foremost architectural magazine, *Building* (June and August 1914). In 1915 she spoke to the National Council of Women in Sydney on women as architects. The Griffins moved to Melbourne in 1916, where they had some major commissions: Newman College at Melbourne University (1915–17), the Cafe Australia (1915, now demolished), Capitol House (1921), and the Eaglemont community plan (1916–23). In 1919, working weekends, they built themselves a small house in Eaglemont using the prefabricated "knitlock" building system designed and patented by Griffin in 1918.

The development of the Canberra plan was plagued by political problems, and Walter Griffin resigned as federal director of Design and Construction in 1920. In 1921 the Griffins purchased 650 acres of land in Castlecrag, Sydney, and Walter Griffin formed the Greater Sydney Development Association (GSDA) to purchase and develop the site. He had a controlling

share. The aim was to develop this spectacular peninsula with its four miles of water frontage as a model community. In its development, road layouts followed contours, site planning and building location enhanced the natural landscape, natural materials were used, and native species were planted. The GSDA placed covenants on building heights protecting views for all residents and providing pedestrian right-of-ways between building lots, allowing easy access to the water. The Griffins created an outdoor amphitheater (the Haven Scenic Theatre) to promote community life. As in Canberra, they had constant battles with planning authorities.

Like many other artists of the period, the Griffins were drawn to syncretic spiritual movements. From 1930 on, she was influenced by the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, who developed the spiritual school of Anthroposophy, an offshoot of Theosophy. Mahony Griffin joined the Sydney Anthroposophical Society in 1930, Griffin in 1931. In 1935, through theosophical connections, Walter Griffin was invited to India to design a library for Lucknow University. Marion Mahony Griffin followed in 1936 to help with this and other projects, leaving their Australian partner Eric Nicholls in charge in Sydney. Their architectural practice was as busy as it had been in the early days in Chicago and Melbourne—residences, university buildings, a building for the Pioneer Press, and the entire United Provinces Exhibition of Industry and Agriculture. When Griffin died suddenly in 1937, his widow returned to Australia.

In 1938, Marion Mahony Griffin returned to Chicago. Two years later she lectured to the Illinois Society of Architects on her Australian experience and on Anthroposophy. Billed as an architect and community planner, she spoke on India at a World Federation Round Table in 1942. LOLA MAVERICK LLOYD, peace activist and founder of the Campaign for World Government, gave Griffin two commissions, a World Fellowship Center in Conway, New Hampshire (1942), and the Hills and Rosary Crystals subdivision near Boerne, Texas, for the Maverick Lloyd family (1943). The Texas plan for the Hills and Rosary Crystals subdivision revived earlier approaches to community planning. The 388-acre site for the World Fellowship Center offered Mahony Griffin the opportunity to once again explore ideas about community planning and democracy. Neither proceeded following Lloyd's death. A third project, a plan for South Chicago (1944), also stalled.

In addition to her professional architectural work, Marion Mahony Griffin was involved in horticulture, painting, and theater. Her artwork included portrait miniatures; a large mural with an avowedly pedagogical and anthroposophical purpose, *Fairies Feeding the Herons*, in a Rogers Park school in Chicago (1931); and paintings of Australian trees on silk. In Castlecrag, Sydney, she had revived her interest in theater (begun at MIT in 1893) and had been involved in production, set, and costume design for more than twelve plays in the Haven Scenic Theater.

Until her death, she lived in Rogers Park with her niece Clamyra Hayes and helped care for her niece's children. In 1949, she completed "The Magic of America," a memorial to her life with Griffin and his life's work. The manuscript is organized into four sections or "battles": the Empirical Battle (India), the Federal Battle (Canberra), the Municipal Battle (Castlecrag), and the Individual Battle (the Griffins' relation-

ship). She died in 1961 at Cook County Hospital, and her ashes were placed at Graceland Cemetery. In 1997 her ashes were re-interred at Graceland Cemetery with a new memorial plaque.

Separating out Marion Mahony Griffin's individual contribution to architecture is a difficult task, working as she did in a collaborative way and with extraordinary men in a male-dominated profession. The work the Griffins completed together was greater than either of them achieved independently. In the late 1940s, however, she carefully inked Walter Burley Griffin's name from a significant number of drawings, and she never lost her bitterness toward Wright. This bitterness arose, in part, over his alleged treatment of Walter Griffin and conflict over attribution for ideas. The joint professional work of Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin amounts to some 280 architectural, planning, and landscape projects, of which approximately 180 were built. In the United States, 76 of 114 projects were realized; in Australia, 95 of 130, and in India 7 of 37. Houses and planned communities made up the bulk of the American commissions. In their twenty-one years in Australia (1914–35) the range of their work was greater and included Canberra, five new towns, several suburban communities, three campus plans, houses, industrial buildings (primarily incinerators), and some commercial buildings.

Sources. In the United States, Marion Mahony Griffin's drawings are available at the Avery Library, Columbia Univ.; Mary and Leigh Block Museum, Northwestern Univ.; Burnham Library, Art Institute of Chicago (AIC); Massachusetts Institute of Technology Museum (thesis drawings and statement). In Australia, her work is found at the Australian Archives, Canberra (competition drawings); Willoughby Council, New South Wales; State Library of Victoria; Art Gallery of Victoria (furniture); and Newman College (furniture). Copies of her unpublished manuscript, "Magic of America," 1949, are available at the Burnham Library, AIC, and New York Hist. Soc. Other useful archival sources are the Frank Lloyd Wright Home and Studio, Oak Park, Illinois; Mark Peisch Papers, Avery Library, Columbia Univ.; Willoughby Public Library, New South Wales, Australia; Peter Harrison and D. L. Johnson Papers, Australian National Library, Canberra. Mark Peisch, *The Chicago School of Architecture: Early Followers of Sullivan and Wright* (1964), is an important general source, as is H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries* (1972). Studies of her life and/or work are in H. Allen Brooks, "Frank Lloyd Wright and the Wasmuth Drawings," *Art Bulletin*, vol. 47, 1966; David Van Zanten, "The Early Work of Marion Mahony Griffin," *Prairie School Review*, vol. 3, 1966; Susan Fondiler Berkon and Jane Holtz Kay, "Marion Mahony Griffin, Architect," *Feminist Art Journal*, Spring 1975; Susana Torre, ed., *Women in American Architecture: A Historic and Contemporary Perspective* (1977); NAW (1980); P. Larson, "Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin: The Marriage of Drawings and Architecture," *Print Collector's Newsletter*, vol. 13, 1982; Anna Rubbo, "Marion Mahony Griffin: A Portrait," in *Walter Burley Griffin: A Review*, ed. J. Duncan and M. Gates (1988); James Weirick, "Marion Mahony at M.I.T.," *Transition*, Winter 1988; and Janice Pregliasco, "The Life and Work of Marion Mahony Griffin," in *The Prairie School: Design Vision for the Midwest* (1995). Additional studies are Jill Roe, "The Magical World of Marion Mahony Griffin: Culture and Community in Castlecrag in the Interwar Years," in *Minorities in Cultural Diversity in Sydney*, ed. Shirley Fitzgerald and Garry Wotherspoon (1995); Anna Rubbo, "Marion and Walter Burley Griffin: A Creative Partnership," *Architectural Theory Review*, vol. 1, 1966; Anna Rubbo, "The Numinous World of Marion Mahony Griffin," in Ross Mellick and Peter Waterhouse,

Spirit and Place: Art in Australia 1861–1966 (1996); Anne Watson, ed., *Beyond Architecture, Marion Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin: America, Australia, India* (1998). Jeffrey Turnbull and Peter Navaretti, *The Griffins in Australia and India: The Complete Works and Projects of Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahony Griffin* (1998). Useful information about Theosophy and Anthroposophy are in Jill Roe, *Beyond Belief: Theosophy in Australia, 1879–1939* (1994), and Claude Bragdon, *The Beautiful Necessity: Seven Essays on Theosophy and Architecture* (1910).

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