

OTHER PRAIRIE SCHOOL ARCHITECTS

George Washington Maher (1864–1926)

Maher, at the age of 18, began working for the architectural firm of Bauer & Hill in Chicago before entering Silsbee's office with Wright and Elmslie. Between late 1889 and early 1890, Maher formed a brief partnership with Charles Corwin. He then practiced independently until his son Philip joined him in the early 1920s.

Maher developed his "motif-rhythm" design theory, which involved using a decorative symbol throughout a building. In Pleasant Home, the Farson-Mills House (Oak Park, 1897), he used a lion and a circle and tray motif.

Maher enjoyed considerable social success, designing many houses on Chicago's North Shore and several buildings for Northwestern University, including the gymnasium (1908–1909) and the Swift Hall of Engineering. In Winona, Minnesota, Maher designed the J. R. Watkins Administration Building (1911–1913), and the Winona Savings Bank (1913). Like Wright, Maher hoped to create an American style, but as his career progressed his designs became less original and relied more on past foreign styles. Maher's frustration with his career may have led to his suicide in 1926.

Dwight Heald Perkins (1867–1941)

Perkins moved to Chicago from Memphis at age 12. He worked in the Stockyards and then in the architectural firm of Wheelock & Clay. A family friend financed sending Perkins to the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, where he studied architecture for two years and then taught for a year. He returned to Chicago in 1888 after working briefly for Henry Hobson Richardson. Between 1888 and 1894 Perkins worked for Burnham & Root. He was placed in charge of their Chicago office during the preparation for the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893. After the untimely death of John Wellborn Root, he completed several of Root's commissions, including the Monadnock building.

On January 1, 1894, Perkins opened his own office and was commissioned to design a building for the Steinway Piano Company. He rented the loft and shared the space with many of the architects who became involved in the creation of the Prairie school, including Wright, Spencer, Garden, Tomlinson, Griffin and Long. In 1896, Frank Lloyd Wright and Dwight Heald Perkins, Associated Architects, were awarded the commission to design the Abraham Lincoln Center. The pastor, Wright's uncle Jenkins Lloyd Jones, added his design suggestions. He eventually fired Wright, and Perkins completed the project in protest of Jones' changes.

Throughout his career, Perkins was involved with social issues and promoted and designed settlement houses, parks and schools. During 1902-1903, Perkins collaborated with prairie landscape architect Jens Jensen to assemble a citywide park district and create the Cook County Forest Preserve. He spent five years as architect of the Chicago Board of Education (1905-1910), and his name appears on the designs of more than 40 schools, including Carl Schurz High School (1909) and Grover Cleveland Elementary School (1910).

Perkins went on to design many schools in the Chicago suburbs and cities throughout the Midwest. He designed both the lion house and the refectory (Café Brauer) at the Lincoln Park Zoo, both of which illustrate his strong and distinctive brickwork. In 1930 he became a consultant on the housing exhibit for the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago before retiring to Pasadena, California.

William Gray Purcell (1880–1965)

Purcell was raised by his grandparents at 330 Forest Avenue, Oak Park. He graduated from the local

high school in 1889 and studied architecture at Cornell University, graduating in 1903. Purcell returned to Chicago and worked for Louis Sullivan during the last five months of 1903, where he established a lasting friendship with George Grant Elmslie. When work slackened in Sullivan's office, Purcell moved first to San Francisco, where he worked for John Galen Howard, and then to Seattle, where he joined the firms of Charles H. Bebb and Leonard L. Mendel.

In 1906, Purcell traveled to Europe with Cornell colleague George Feick, Jr. On their return, they established the firm of Purcell and Feick in Minneapolis. Elmslie joined the office in 1909, four years before Feick's departure. Wright approached the firm to take over the Oak Park studio during his visit to Europe. Purcell declined the offer, "knowing Wright's characteristics in human relationships as I had from boyhood." Purcell & Elmslie had a large and diversified practice with more than 70 commissions and numerous unrealized designs in ten years. In 1920, Purcell moved to Oregon because of his failing health, and the firm was dissolved two years later.

While in Oregon, Purcell became involved with low-cost and speculative housing for Portland and Minneapolis. He advocated the designing of bungalow courts and garden apartments as solutions to the problems of low-cost housing. During this period his houses became more picturesque and less Prairie style in design. Purcell served as the North Pacific director of the Architects' Small House Service Bureau and as the editorial assistant for *Northwest Architect* magazine. After a serious illness in the late 1920s, Purcell moved to Pasadena, California, where he devoted most of his time to writing.

Noted works by Purcell & Elmslie include the Charles A. Purcell House in River Forest (1909), the Edna Purcell house in Minneapolis (1913), and banks in the rural Minnesota towns of Winona (1911–1912), Grand Meadows (1910), Madison (1913), LeRoy (1914), Hector (1916), and Adams (1917–1924).

Eben Ezra Roberts (1866–1943)

Born in Boston, Roberts was trained by his father in mechanical and free-hand drawing. He studied architecture at Tilton Seminary in New Hampshire. Roberts moved to Chicago in 1890 and worked as a job superintendent for S. S. Beman in Pullman until 1892 or 1893. In 1893, he moved to Oak Park and opened what was to become the largest architectural practice in the village. Roberts specialized in residential work and designed approximately 200 houses, including his own house at 1019 Superior Street, Oak Park (1896). He designed with ease in a variety of styles. In 1912, Roberts moved his office to Chicago to concentrate on commercial building. After a successful independent practice, Roberts' son Elmer joined him in a partnership in 1922 or 1923, which lasted until the father semi-retired in 1926. Roberts lived in Oak Park until his death in 1943. He designed many homes and commercial buildings in Oak Park, including the old Municipal Building (1903), the Second Scoville Block (1908), and an addition to the Oak Park-River Forest High School (1912).

Robert Clossen Spencer, Jr. (1865–1953)

Born in Milwaukee, Spencer earned a degree in Mechanical Engineering from the University of Wisconsin in 1886 and briefly attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. He worked for Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge in Boston before traveling to Europe on a Rotch Traveling Scholarship. On his return, Spencer moved to Chicago and opened his own office, next to Wright in the Schiller Building in 1895. The following year, both men joined Dwight Perkins in the Steinway hall loft. Spencer was a prolific writer and wrote the first major article on Wright's work in *Architectural Review* in 1900. Between 1905 and 1909, he wrote more than 20 articles for *The House Beautiful* promoting Prairie school designs and ideas.

Spencer formed a partnership with Horace S. Powers in 1905 that lasted until 1923. The following year he invented and manufactured window hardware. In 1930, Spencer was on the faculties of Oklahoma A&M College and the University of Florida. He painted murals for the United States government before retiring in 1938. Spencer is best known locally for the E. W. McCready House at 231 N. Euclid in Oak

Park, the J. W. Broughton House at 530 Keystone, River Forest, and his own house at 923 Park Avenue in River Forest.

Thomas Eddy Tallmadge (1876–1940)

Born in Washington, DC, Tallmadge moved with his family to Chicago in 1880. He graduated from Evanston High School in 1894 and went on to study architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Tallmadge graduated in 1898 and spent the following summer abroad. He returned to begin his career as a draftsman with D. H. Burnham & Company. Tallmadge won the Victor Falkeman Traveling Scholarship and sketched European architectural scenes during the summer of 1904.

When Tallmadge returned to Chicago, he left Burnham's office along with Vernon S. Watson, and the firm of Tallmadge & Watson opened in October, 1905. The firm quickly gained a reputation for designing fine suburban dwellings. Their designs emphasized horizontality, natural materials, and freedom in interior planning. Two stylistic motifs emerged. The first was an arch motif in the third story that broke the heavy horizontal line of the roof, as at the John C. Linthicum House in Evanston (1907). The second, more popular motif was the use of engaged piers which rose from the ground or water table to the end gables. This can be seen on the H. H. Rockwell House at 629 North Oak Park Avenue (1910).

After 1914, the designs of Tallmadge and Watson grew more medieval in flavor and, by the 1920s, there was an even stronger influence of revival styles. Examples of their later work include a Tudor house at 730 Linden Avenue (1915) and the Dole Branch Library, (1926), both in Oak Park. In the early 1930s ecclesiastical commissions filled much of their time. The firm of Tallmadge & Watson dissolved in 1936 after Watson retired to Michigan. Tallmadge then formed a partnership with William Alderman, who had graduated from the Armour Institute (now IIT) in 1930.

An Evanston resident, Tallmadge became an instructor of architectural design and history at the Armour Institute in 1906, and taught for two decades. By 1913, he was lecturing on architectural history at the Art Institute of Chicago. Tallmadge is probably best known for coining the term *The Chicago School* in a 1908 *Architectural Review* article of that title. The Chicago School presented an understanding of the unique movement created by the Midwest architects who shared the aesthetic philosophy derived by Sullivan. Tallmadge wrote, taught, and designed until his death in a 1940 train accident.

Vernon Spencer Watson (1878-1950)

Born in England, Watson arrived in the United States at age eight. He studied architecture in a combined program offered by the Art Institute of Chicago and the Armour Institute of Technology during the late 1890s and traveled to Europe soon after graduation. On his return he worked for D. H. Burnham and formed a partnership with Thomas E. Tallmadge in 1905. One of their most published houses was the Torrie S. Estabrook House (1909) at 200 North Scoville Avenue.

Watson married and settled in Oak Park, building his own modest home at 643 Fair Oaks Avenue in 1906. He collaborated with Wright and Charles E. White, Jr., on the River Forest Tennis Club in 1906, and supervised its move from the corner of Quick and Harlem to its present location in 1920. Watson's designs illustrated originality in planning and use of materials. In the 1920s, following the general trend, his designs became influenced by historical revivals. Watson was one of six designers of the Diversey Housing project during the 1930s. The partnership of Tallmadge & Watson was dissolved in 1936, and Watson retired to Berrien Springs, Michigan.

[RETURN TO SYLLABUS]