

UNITY TEMPLE
Frank Lloyd Wright
1906
Oak Park, Illinois

Research Report, Wright Plus 2017



Research and Text
Mark Scott



Frank Lloyd Wright Trust

UNITY TEMPLE



The first idea was to keep a noble room for worship in mind, and let that sense of the great room shape the whole edifice. Let the room inside be the architecture outside.

Frank Lloyd Wright
An Autobiography, 1943



Acknowledgements



Most researchers for Wright Plus have the task of doing the work of locating titles, discovering the history, unearthing owner and family information and learning the architectural significance of the house assigned to them. Having done that research, I know the work involved, and also the enjoyment. In the case of doing the research for Unity Temple, my situation was the opposite. If anything, I had an embarrassment of riches. There have been so many books, papers, and articles written about Unity Temple that my problem was how to distill all that information into a workable paper that could be used as a tool for several different purposes in the Trust's ongoing work.

I am grateful, of course, to all the experts, authors, historians, and architects who have examined, studied, researched and written about this unique building. They have mined the territory and have not left a stone unturned. The most significant sources for my work are listed in the References section.

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Statement of Significance

Unity Temple stands on Lake Street in Oak Park amid other traditional churches as a monolithic structure. Its significance for modern architecture lies on so many levels and expresses Frank Lloyd Wright's developing philosophy of what modern architecture is, how a structure relates to the space enclosed, the use of new materials and the architectural expression of religious principles.

As Wright himself stated in his last television interview in October 1959, Unity Temple is the "first expression of this eternal idea which is at the center and core of all modern architecture — the sense of space, a new sense of space."¹ It is here in Unity Temple that Wright explored this concept and designed a building that embodied the notion that "the reality of the building does not consist in the roof and walls but in the space within to be lived."²

Unity Temple is also the first time that Wright displays in a building his fascination with a material that he would continue to develop and use over the next fifty-five years — concrete. It is here in this church, an unlikely candidate, that Wright introduced reinforced concrete to American architecture not only as a structural element but also as an architectural medium.

The structure of Unity Temple also exhibits a clear and concise expression of the principles of the religious congregation for which it is a home. Wright, who himself was steeped in the religious tenets of the Unitarian Universalists, offered this Oak Park congregation a building that mirrors their beliefs, goals, values, and convictions and gives physical expression to this "tradition of bold spirits"³ that is the Unitarian Universalist religion.

Unity Temple has been designated by the American Institute of Architects as one of seventeen buildings in America designed by Wright to be considered as an example of his contribution to American culture. In 1971, it was named as a United States National Historic Landmark. In 1991, *Architectural Record* chose it as one of the 100 most significant buildings of the previous 100 years and in 2015, Unity Temple was nominated along with nine other Wright buildings to be included on the Unesco World Heritage List. Unity Temple is also included in Oak Park's *Ridgeland/Oak Park Historic District* and is a Village of Oak Park Historic Landmark.

¹ Last television interview given by Frank Lloyd Wright, October 1959, <http://www.utrf.org/restoration/restoration-master-plan>.

² Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, Benedikt Taschen Verlag, GmbH, 1991, p. 94.

³ From the Unity Temple web page, <http://www.unitytemple.org/about-us/history>.

Historical, Cultural and Architectural Context

To fully understand the significance of Unity Temple, it is good to have an appreciation of the historical, cultural and architectural influences that impacted its inception, design and construction. These influences are rooted in the Unitarian Universalist religion, in the developing principles of the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, the beginning of the modern movement, and new materials in construction.

The Unitarian Universalist Religion

The present Unitarian Universalist church is a consolidation of two religious bodies. The Universalist Church began in 1793 and the American Unitarian Church began in America in 1825. Both of these religious groups trace their origins back to other religious groups who were seeking a more liberal understanding of religion and our role and purpose in a spiritual journey. The two religious groups consolidated in 1961, adopting the new name of Unitarian Universalists.

Today's Unitarian Universalists do not assert that ultimate truth has been finally revealed in scripture, but that we must together undertake a journey to seek an understanding and meaning of our lives. It can be characterized as a journey of spiritual inquiry and growth. As a result, they draw upon the knowledge, wisdom and thinking of other religions and traditions, literature, the arts and the sciences.

There are seven principles that Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote:⁴

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equality and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in its congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within its congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are all a part.

Wright was raised in this system of transcendental philosophy and also was trained as a child in the Froebel system of Kindergarten. Both these systems had a profound impact on Wright and his design of Unity Temple because these systems "had in common the belief that the material and spiritual worlds could not be separated, but were in fact one."⁵

⁴ These are taken from the web page of Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation, www.unitytemple.org/about-us/what-we-believe.

⁵ Robert McCarter, *Unity Temple, Frank Lloyd Wright*, (Phaidon Press, Ltd.), p. 4.

The Unitarian congregation that would commission and build Unity Temple began in Oak Park in July of 1871 as Unity Church. It was composed of a group of Unitarians and Universalists who would eventually build their church on the southwest corner of Marion (then Wisconsin Street) and Pleasant Streets close to the Harlem Avenue railroad stop. Its style was Gothic Revival and was dedicated on August 11, 1872.⁶

In 1886, the congregation of the young church made an important appointment. Augusta Chapin was selected as the pastor of the church and she would go on to have a significant impact on the future of the congregation. She was the first woman to receive a Doctor of Divinity degree in the United States. She was a noted speaker and educator and served as an extension lecturer for both Lombard College and the University of Chicago.⁷ Chapin was also very active in the affairs of the Universalist organization.

During her six-year pastorate, two very consequential members joined. The first was Edwin H. Ehrman who would later play a very significant role in the construction of Unity Temple. The second person was Anna Jones Wright, the mother of Frank Lloyd Wright. The Wrights and Chapin became very close; in fact, Mrs. Wright, her son Frank and younger daughter Maginel would all board with Augusta Chapin for a time.

While Chapin was the pastor and while the Wrights lived with her, Frank Lloyd Wright may have come under the influence of Chapin and her views on “the equality of the sexes, the ability of women to lead and probably about the ways church architecture and design supported the patriarchal system.”⁸

The Wright family had had strong ties with Unitarianism for many generations. “From his mother’s family, the Lloyd Joneses, Wright had gained familiarity with their specifically Welsh tradition of Unitarian beliefs. Wright’s first contact with the Unitarian tradition in the eastern United States dates from his father’s brief pastorate at the First Baptist Church in Weymouth, near Boston, from 1874-1877, when Wright was in mid-childhood.”⁹

Wright’s maternal uncle, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, had been the patron of All Souls Church in Chicago and Unity Chapel in Wisconsin. Later, when Jones commissioned the Abraham Lincoln Center (1903) in Chicago to replace All Souls Church, Wright and architect Dwight Perkins worked on the project.¹⁰ Wright would say, however, that only the interior was of his design; the

⁶ David Sokol, *The Noble Room*, (Top Five Books, LLC, Oak Park, IL, 2008), p. 6.

⁷ Sokol, p. 10.

⁸ Sokol, p. 12.

⁹ Joseph M. Siry, *Frank Lloyd Wright and Architecture for Liberal Religion*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1996), p. 12.

¹⁰ Jones had decided to move away from sectarian origins and appeal to more than just Unitarians, thus dropping the name All Souls Church in favor of Abraham Lincoln Center.

exterior “belonged to my uncle J(enkin) Ll(oyd) and Dwight Perkins”¹¹ and was furious that he was credited as architect in the dedication program. But it is there in the auditorium of the Abraham Lincoln Center that we can see a foreshadowing of the main room of Unity Temple. “Both rooms are visually and structurally anchored by four main hollow columns, which are the sole internal supports for the beams in the ceiling. Light enters both spaces from clerestories on several sides, though Unity Temple’s auditorium also had central skylights.”¹² Both also had alcoves of raised seats below galleries on three sides. “The auditorium of the center may thus be understood as Wright’s earlier essay in the kind of architectural space whose details he would further integrate in Unity Temple.”¹³ Already in the Abraham Lincoln Center, Wright’s strong Unitarian values and principles were being expressed in religious architecture.

Events Leading to the Construction of a New Church

When Augusta Chapin’s pastorate ended in 1891, she was succeeded by Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot. He came from a post at the Universalist Church in Lewistown, Maine and accepted the offer of the position in Oak Park for a yearly salary of \$1800. Almost immediately upon his arrival, Johonnot began pushing for a new church building since the congregation was experiencing rapid growth and the Sunday school was ever increasing. In 1901, a fund for a new church building was established. The 1904 Christmas letter sent to friends of Unity Church contained an article about the idea of a new church and stated that the present church is “not adequate for all our present needs nor does it represent present ideas of church architecture.”¹⁴

On May 24, 1905 the church congregation decided to indeed build a new church structure and the trustees began in earnest to study the proposal. Eleven days later, on June 4, strong thunderstorms moved through the Chicago area and on the morning of that day, lightning struck the steeple of Unity Church and set it ablaze. Water pressure was too low for the fire department of Oak Park to reach the height of the steeple fire and so it quickly spread to the roof of the church and it was only a matter of time before the entire church was engulfed in flames. The proposal of a new church had suddenly become a necessity.

“On 9 June 1905, five days after the destruction of the old Unity Church, the congregation voted unanimously to build a new edifice, and the trustees appointed four committees: a first on ways and means for raising funds; a second on site, to select a location for the new building; a third on plans, chaired by Rev. Johonnot, to engage an architect and decide on a plan; and a fourth on construction, initially chaired by Charles E. Roberts.”¹⁵

¹¹ Siry, p. 47.

¹² Siry, p. 49.

¹³ Siry, p. 50.

¹⁴ Sokol, p. 14.

¹⁵ Siry, p. 71.

The site committee selected a lot owned by Edwin O. Gale located at Lake and Kenilworth as long as it could be bought for no more than \$10,000.¹⁶ Gale was a wealthy parishioner of Unity Church and also one of the founding members so he sold the lot to the church for below market value, which was put at about \$15,000. The lot's location on Lake Street fit in with Rev. Johonnot's vision of putting Unity Church in the midst of many of the other local churches and its location "was also consistent with these neighboring churches' attempts to buy land along the village's central axis in order to control its development."¹⁷

The plans committee focused on nine architects, among them these seven:

- Henry P. Harned who was a member of the congregation but very conservative;
- Frank Lloyd Wright who had numerous connections to Unitarianism, and knew many of the members, some of which were clients;
- John Sutcliffe who had designed Grace Episcopal Church on Lake Street in 1901. Strangely, he was never given the opportunity to submit a design;¹⁸
- William G. Williamson who was the architect for First Presbyterian Church (now Calvary Memorial Church on Lake Street) and soon dropped from consideration;
- Dwight Perkins who had worked with Wright on the Abraham Lincoln Center until Wright, his uncle, and Perkins architecturally parted ways over the project. Perkins would later design Carl Schurz High School and Cafe Brauer on the South Pond in Lincoln Park, both in Chicago;
- William A. Otis; and
- Normand S. Patton.

The four that received the most serious consideration were Otis, Wright, Patton and Perkins. The pastor Dr. Johonnot had strong feelings that the new building should reflect the liberal nature of Unitarian thought and so Wright and Perkins, holding the same views, received the greatest attention.¹⁹

Charles Roberts, using his position on the building (construction) committee, seems to have been a force in favor of Wright and Wright, as suggested in his autobiography, viewed him as an ally in the process of securing the commission and perhaps the critical factor.²⁰ On September 16, 1905, "it was announced that Unity Church had chosen Frank Lloyd Wright to construct a

¹⁶ Sokol, p. 24.

¹⁷ Siry, p. 71.

¹⁸ Sokol, p. 30.

¹⁹ Patrick Cannon, *Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple: A Good Time Place*, (Pomegranate Communications, 2007), p. 15.

²⁰ Wright referred to Roberts as "enlightened" and as the "leaven enough in any lump." Wright had remodeled Roberts' house on Euclid Avenue. Later, Wright would employ Roberts' daughter Isabel in his Oak Park studio and design her home in River Forest.

church that will be dignified and devotional in aspect and also suited to the working needs of a modern church.”²¹

Edwin Gale, who had sold the land to the church, decided to donate an additional piece of land measuring 20 feet on the south side of the site making the lot deeper, thus enabling Wright to build the church further back from Lake Street which had trolley cars running down the middle, was still unpaved at the time, and noisy.

The stage was now set for designing and constructing the church, and writing an important chapter in the history of modern architecture.

The Design of Unity Temple: Space as the Reality of the Building

“The earliest known preliminary drawing for Unity Temple is a freehand plan on the end page of John Lloyd Wright’s personal copy of *The House Beautiful*, designed by his father, Frank Lloyd Wright, as one of several published versions of a sermon by Rev. William Channing Gannett.”²² The book had been printed in William Winslow’s Auvergne Press located in his stable, situated on his River Forest home property, in a room built for his printing interests. John Lloyd Wright further commented that “this pencil sketch, in the hand of Frank Lloyd Wright, is Frank Lloyd Wright’s first drawing of his original conception for the plan of Unity Temple, Oak Park, Illinois about 1903. The building was constructed about 1905 with no basic change from this concept.”²³

This sketch shows a very rough footprint of the building and doesn’t clearly show what would be Wright’s primary focus in the building, namely the space in the structure. Wright had become increasingly interested in space as the primary aspect of architecture. As Wright himself said: “The reality of the building does not consist in the roof and walls but in the space within to be lived.”²⁴ For Wright, the roof and walls became features around the space enclosed.

One can trace this development of his exploration of space in several buildings seen as stages in this process: first, in the Hillside Home School (1902) assembly room in Spring Green where the windows are seen as screens and the form of square and cruciform intersect; second, in the design of the Yahara Boathouse project (1902, never constructed) which even Wright said was seminal in his development²⁵; third, in the Larkin Building (1903) in Buffalo, New York with its offices wrapped around a large central space; and finally, Unity Temple with “no walls, only

²¹ Siry, p. 73.

²² Siry, p. 81.

²³ Siry, p. 81.

²⁴ Bruce Brook Pfeiffer, *Frank Lloyd Wright*, (Taschen GmbH, Köln), p. 94.

²⁵ McCarter, p. 7. A building was built in 2008 on the Black Rock Channel, located near Buffalo in New York State, using Wright’s design plans for the boathouse to be built in Madison, Wisconsin (see photograph in the Exhibits).

features and the features were screens grouped about interior space.”²⁶ Later, in 1950, Wright would make two significant inscriptions on the interior perspective drawings of Unity Temple. “On one he wrote: *Sense of space to be lived in the reality of the building, the big room coming through — the outside coming in.* On the other, he wrote *The unlimited overhead. Interior space enclosed by screen-features only.*”²⁷ So it is here in Unity Temple “where you will find the first real expression of the idea that the space within the building is the reality of that building.”²⁸

As a lover of Japanese art and culture, Wright may have also been influenced by oriental thought as expressed in The Book of Tea by Okakura Kakuzo which reflects the sense of space in the writings of Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu when he pens “The reality of a room was to be found in the vacant space enclosed by the roof and walls, not in the roof and walls themselves.”²⁹

Walking into Unity Temple then becomes, as Gunny Harboe³⁰ states, “a procession, moving you physically through space.” You enter the site off the street and go through a series of turns taking you on to the terrace, through the doors, turning again into the cloister area, turning again up the stairs and turning into the main room where the space opens up completely to the laylights above. All the while the wood trim is wrapping around corners “making it appear that the walls, floors, ceiling, and piers were somehow ‘folded’ from a single plane.”³¹ Otto Graf describes the Larkin Building’s spatial and ornamental programme as “a fugue on the theme of the cube.”³² The same characterization could also be said of Unity Temple.

This walk through the space of the Temple also mirrors the Unitarian Universalist notion of life as a journey with our fellow human beings seeking the eternal truths in our lives. Unity Temple at once symbolizes the life-long journey while also being a stop on the journey for the pilgrims.

As in the Larkin Building, Wright introduces light into the center of the structure and uses it as a medium of transcendence. Light from the clerestory windows also fills the space in Unity symbolizing a connection with the spiritual and natural dimensions of the world outside.

²⁶ Pfeiffer, p. 94.

²⁷ Pfeiffer, p. 94.

²⁸ William Allin Storrer, *Frank Lloyd Wright Companion*, (The University of Chicago Press, 2006, Chicago and London), p. 92.

²⁹ Pfeiffer, p. 94.

³⁰ Lead Restoration Architect for the 2015-17 restoration of Unity Temple as quoted from the Unity Temple webpage video on the restoration

³¹ McCarter, p. 12.

³² McCarter, p. 7.

The Design Plan: The Physical Structure

Unity Temple's design, in Wright's mind, "would be intended to signify both the modernity and the antiquity of liberal religious beliefs."³³ On first viewing Unity Temple, and remembering its construction date, one might only be struck by its modernity. The structure, however, has roots in historic architecture and some current architecture of the period. Wright was drawing upon ancient temple forms of religious buildings and Meso-American styles; upon Renaissance church buildings such as Sant' Eligio Deli Orefici in Rome, designed by Bramante and Raffaello, and San Biago designed by Antonio Sangello il Vecchio (with stairs towers planned for all four corners like Unity Temple)³⁴; and even the plan of the Taiyu-in Mausoleum (1653) by Chuji Hirayama at Nikko, Japan, a historic city that Wright had visited in April 1905 shortly before his return to the United States.³⁵

In the years before the design of Unity Temple, other auditorium style religious buildings were being constructed such as St. Paul's Universalist Society of 1887 in Chicago (where Edwin Gales' father had been a member), Adler's Isaiah Temple of 1898-99 at Vincennes Avenue and 45th Street in Chicago, and Adler and Sullivan's synagogue for Kehilath Anshe Ma'ariv of 1889-91 at Indiana Avenue and 33rd Street in Chicago, a building Wright participated in designing.³⁶ Wright was drawing upon all these sources in his ideas for Unity Temple and Wright's genius lies in that he was taking all these architectural styles and traditions and using them as a basis for a truly modern architectural vocabulary.

Wright respected the architecture of the past although some will point out his and Sullivan's opposition to the classical Beaux Arts style adopted for most of the architecture of the 1893 World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. What Wright was opposed to was the derivative use of the classical style. It was not authentic and he felt the fair builders did not understand the underlying elements, proportions and fundamental geometries of classical architecture and were merely copying ornamental elements to be used on modern buildings.

Although the initial footprint of Unity Temple quickly sketched by Wright may not have changed much as John Wright said, as well as the idea of a building with a large meeting room and another section for social and educational functions as needed by the congregation (Unity House), the material for the building did change.

In its first conception, Unity Temple was a brick building, "closely related to Wright's most recent major public building: the Larkin office building in Buffalo, New York."³⁷ Calculating the cost, however, may have made Wright change his idea for a brick building. The Board had

³³ Siry, 95.

³⁴ McCarter, p. 16.

³⁵ Siry, p. 87.

³⁶ Siry, p. 94-96.

³⁷ Sokol, from the Introduction by Sidney K. Robinson, p. xxi.

stipulated a budget of \$36,200 for the building excluding the \$10,000 for the lot.³⁸ A brick building would be too costly and that's when Wright turned to the idea of concrete. It doesn't seem likely that the Board even saw the brick-planned building drawings as there is no mention of them in the Board minutes.³⁹

The use of poured concrete was not entirely new. There are examples of it being used before such as in the Hotel Ponce De Leon in St. Augustine, Florida in the late 1880's "but the building was highly ornamented concealing the importance of the concrete."⁴⁰ Concrete had also been used in church architecture, such as St. David's Church in Rolland Park, outside of Baltimore, and Our Lady of Loretto Church in East New York but in these cases the concrete was formed to look like classical ornamental stone elements on the buildings.⁴¹ There were also "widely published nineteenth century French experiments with this ancient building material."⁴² Wright himself had experience with concrete in his buildings; the E-Z Polish Factory in Chicago was his first large work of reinforced concrete. Here in Unity Temple, Wright wanted the concrete for structural and architectural elements and is "the first expression of the architect's fascination with a material he would explore and develop over the following fifty-five years."⁴³ Wright introduced concrete construction to the United States on a scale and use not scene before.

The use of concrete would reduce the overall cost because the material would be cheaper than brick and the forms used in pouring the concrete could be used over and over again. Later, however, this savings would be wiped out when it was discovered the concrete would need to be reinforced with iron rods, adding once again to the total cost.

Even after Wright had decided on concrete as the medium, he was still wedded to the idea of architecture that holds that the building is made of the elements of the base, wall, and cornice, an idea similar to Louis Sullivan's idea of a building based on the tri-part concept of a Greek column. During construction, Wright pondered the idea of adding crushed red granite to the concrete on only the exterior walls to articulate the individual elements of the exterior of the building. Cost may have also caused Wright to abandon this idea. Wright decided to leave the entire exterior the natural color of the concrete and so "circumstances and economics conspired to create a modern building that broke free of 2500 years of building traditions."⁴⁴

³⁸ Published prices for Unity Temple often range from \$30,000 to \$45,000. In the minutes of the Board of Unity Church dated February 7, 1906, it states: "Resolved that the plans for the new church prepared by Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright, architect, and recommended by the Plans Committee be and the same hereby are approved and adopted ... for not exceeding thirty-six thousand two hundred dollars."

³⁹ Sokol, p.61.

⁴⁰ Storrer, p. 92.

⁴¹ Siry, p. 110.

⁴² Storrer, p. 92.

⁴³ Storrer, p. 92.

⁴⁴ Sokol, p. 83.

A church was an unlikely candidate for poured concrete construction, at least in the way Wright envisioned its use here. Whether or not this 1905 congregation, no matter how liberal in ideas, was prepared to accept this plan is something of a question and surely must have entered the conversation. "Aside from its unconventional appearance, though having roots in both ancient and early American architecture, it was the choice of materials, and particularly concrete construction, that frightened some of the members of the Board and made all of them sensitive to the need to have a detailed understanding of the design proposal."⁴⁵

Some members of the Board were reluctant to agree to the idea, especially Thomas Skillin, president of the Board. In his autobiography, Wright characterized him as "openly hostile."⁴⁶ Skillin said that the room would be dark and the acoustics, so necessary for the function of this meeting room, would be horrible.

Between the time Wright first submitted plans to the Board and when they were accepted, there were many meetings, some with Wright, others without, to go over the schemes. Wives of the members of the committees met to view the plans and plaster models of the new church. Questions of adequate seating arose, financial considerations were brought up, and design revisions were suggested. As Wright's assistant Charles White wrote: "We have all pleaded and argued with the committee, until we are well nigh worn out."⁴⁷

Finally, on February 7, 1906, after much consideration, the plans for Unity Temple were accepted. The *Oak Leaves* edition of Saturday, February 24, 1906 ran an article on the announcement of the new church: "The new Unity Church building...will be the most radical departure from traditional church architecture ever attempted. The whole structure, foundation, walls, floor and roof will be of cement, reinforced where necessary by steel; fireproof and eternal as the hills."⁴⁸

Bids for construction ran from \$32,661, submitted by Paul Mueller, to \$62,841, submitted by J. H. Johnson of Chicago. The range was so wide no doubt because contractors had a hard time understanding or grasping this structure, a church made entirely of concrete. Mueller had an advantage of not only submitting the lowest price but also in that he had worked with Wright on the construction of the Larkin Building, and his understanding of what Wright wanted was clearer; his bid was finally accepted.

The Universal Portland Cement Company was the concrete supplier. The Foster & Glidden Company was responsible for plumbing and heating, and electrical work. The glass work was to be done by The Temple Art Glass Company of Chicago. The organ was to be built and installed by the Coburn & Taylor Company.

⁴⁵ Sokol, p. 61.

⁴⁶ Frank Lloyd Wright, *An Autobiography*, (Duell, Sloan and Pearce, New York, 1943), p. 159.

⁴⁷ Siry, p. 130.

⁴⁸ Sokol, p. 55.

March 4, 1906 was a historic day in the story of Unity Temple. That day marked the end of a brief but turbulent period with three events. First, the decision to publish a brochure that would mark the Board and congregation's commitment to go forward with the plan; second, it was Thomas Skillin's last meeting as president and a member of the Board of Trustees of Unity Temple; and third, and most important, Edwin Ehrman, a business partner with Charles Roberts, became a new member of the Board of Trustees. He would assume the position that Charles Roberts held as building committee chairman and in the coming months and years, prove crucial to the construction and completion of Unity Temple, guiding its course along a route fraught with obstacles and challenges.⁴⁹

In mid March of 1906, Wright hosted what he called a "Japanese Social" at his home on Forest Avenue in Oak Park. The guests were members of Unity Club and most were members of the congregation. As part of the festivities, Wright proudly displayed his large collection of Japanese woodblock prints, most garnered on his trip to Japan. That trip was crucial for his architectural philosophy and ideas, which manifested themselves in the Yahara Boathouse project and then in Unity Temple. It seems that Wright was trying to further educate the Unity family about his ideas of architecture and space, deeply influenced by his trip to Japan. These people were going to be worshipping and socializing, and their children would be attending Sunday school in the building he was designing for them. He wanted them to understand it and was preparing them for their experience.⁵⁰

On April 28, 1906, the construction drawings were approved. Stakes were set in the lot and ground breaking took place on Saturday, May 12, 1906. The building permit was issued on June 2, 1906 with the cost of the building listed as \$33,000.⁵¹

Construction of Unity Temple

Although Wright's design for Unity Temple was produced and accepted by the Board, "the building he envisioned was in important respects not the church completed in October 1908."⁵² In some ways, Wright was moving through uncharted waters with Unity Temple, and so his constant pursuit of innovation did not cease when construction began. In Wright's architectural philosophy, "a work develops conceptually as it builds physically."⁵³ This idea may have appealed to architects and especially to Wright, but one can imagine what this type of thinking can do to a construction team.

⁴⁹ Sokol, p. 56.

⁵⁰ Sokol, p. 73.

⁵¹ Leland M. Roth, Historian, Historic American Building Survey (HABS) No. ILL-1093, 16-OAKPA, 1967. Also see a copy of the original building permit in the Exhibits section of this paper.

⁵² Siry, p.137.

⁵³ Siry, p. 137.

Throughout its construction, Wright kept rethinking major issues concerning the building, surface elements, changing some things at the last possible moment, and even replacing sections that had already been completed. Paul Mueller, the contractor whose bid for Unity Temple has been accepted, decided he could finish the entire building — Unity Temple and Unity House (the social and educational section of the structure) — in a single season, which would be from May to November 1906. Unity House would be finished first so that it could be used for worship and social activities and then the Temple would be completed. The Board and Mueller thought, of course, they would be working from the approved plans and had no idea of the changing ideas and plans Wright would have for the structure.

Some of the changes, but by no means all of them, were:

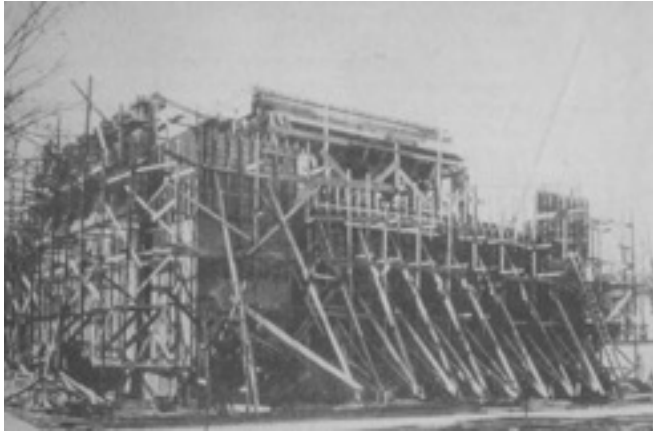
- peripheral foundation walls were increased to support changes to foundation and upper walls;
- stair blocks at the four corners of the auditorium room had to be enlarged from their designed width so that the interior steps and landings would be of an acceptable width;
- this change then forced Wright to redesign the pedestals for the flower boxes in front to the stair blocks so they would match;
- during the construction, Wright sought to create a uniform surface for the concrete, yet he changed his mind about what the aggregate and the finish of the concrete should be. Wright first wanted red granite added to the concrete but that would have given the exterior walls a rose color. As to finish, Wright changed from a “floating finish” to acidic wash. This changed then forced Wright to think about the construction of the walls.
- Core walls were changed to a lighter aggregate and therefore needed to be reinforced with steel rods, increasing their cost by \$4000.
- Wright asked Mueller to change “the main ceiling bands under the roof in the Temple from a continuous beam effect as per original detail and architect’s instructions, to a panel effect combined with column cap, faces and soffits as per final detail.”⁵⁴
- Ornamental bands for main columns in the auditorium room were revised.
- The final design for the organ screen concealing the pipes of the organ was so extensively changed that this alteration was built according to a supplemental contract.⁵⁵
- In March 1906, perspective drawings (in contrast to drawings datable to February 1906) show “instead of a central skylight descending below the ceiling, the motif overhead is now a grid of twenty-five coffered square skylights above the being plane between crisscrossed teams, almost as the interior was built.”⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Siry, p. 178.

⁵⁵ Siry, p. 182.

⁵⁶ Siry, p. 171.

The work on the building went far past the first date given by Mueller and construction continued into the second season. Delays had ensued causing the extension. Some of the delays were caused by Wright's changes. Others may have been caused by Wright's unavailability to make decisions or to answer questions. At the time of construction, Wright appears to have been overextended in his time and attention. He was involved in houses in Oak Park, Madison and in Buffalo, and the Coonley Estate in Riverside. Sometimes workmen would be pulled off the Unity site to work on another project. There also was his affair with Mamah Cheney that was ongoing at this time.



Complaints from people in Oak Park concerning the construction site were numerous because of its high profile location along Lake Street. Mr. Sam Packard lived on Kenilworth Avenue across from the site and called it an 'eye sore' and commented that the "filthy condition of everything on the street and sidewalk pertaining is enough to disgust."⁵⁷ Edwin Gale, who lived at the corner of Lake Street and Kenilworth Avenue and who had sold the land to the congregation, became increasingly

impatient with the project. He wrote a sarcastic letter to Edwin Ehrman talking about the "supposed church we were expected to have at some moderate time."⁵⁸

Throughout this tumultuous time, it is Edwin Ehrman who was the guiding hand that eventually accomplished the completion of Unity Temple, and one might say, was the unsung hero of the endeavor. Ehrman had replaced Charles Roberts as building committee chairman and assumed other duties with the church. During the time of construction, Ehrman not only had to conduct and manage the affairs of the church on a day-to-day basis, but also had to deal with the construction of a most unusual building which entailed working with Frank Lloyd Wright, the contractor Paul Mueller, and all the subcontractors on the project; took charge of approving all quality and costs of work on the project; approved payments to suppliers and subcontractors; served as mediator in all conflicts and disputes between the parties involved; and acted as liaison with the Board, congregation and project team. It was fortuitous that he joined the congregation when he did during the pastorate of Augusta Chapin and then was able to manage this unique project. The outcome of Unity may have been far different without him.

On September 17, 1907, sixteen months after the ground breaking, the first services were held in the unfinished building and were well attended by the congregation. The entire building was completed in October 1908 and the actual dedication was held on September 26, 1909. The

⁵⁷ Sokol, p. 113.

⁵⁸ Sokol, p. 113.

reason why the completion and dedication were so far apart was that the congregation had decided to wait to dedicate the building until the organ was installed, showing the importance the congregation placed on the organ and music in the life of the church.

“Unity Temple’s auditorium drew praise from the time of its opening service in October 1908.”⁵⁹ Church members seemed very pleased with the final product. According to Wright, even Thomas Skillin, former president of the Board and adversary during much of the process, phoned Wright to say “Take back all I said...Light everywhere—all pleased.” Acoustics had been a large concern for Skillin so Wright asked, “Hear well?” Skillin replied, “Yes, see and hear fine—see it all now.”⁶⁰

All this happiness, satisfaction and pride was not without its price though. Mueller’s initial estimate and budgeted amount of \$32,661⁶¹ was far exceeded due to changes, materials, labor, and other unforeseen circumstances. By the time of its completion, Unity Temple’s cost was at \$60,344.55 and that amount did not include the cost of the lot, the organ (\$3500) or the heating, plumbing and electrical systems. Wright’s fee of \$1,776 (5% of initial estimated cost) also was not part of the final number.⁶² Adding all these together, the final cost of Unity Temple would be over \$79,000 for the entire project.

Even after all the costs were figured and totaled in the final numbers, the Board and congregation seem to have been supremely delighted with their new church.⁶³ The membership rallied to creatively fund raise to increase donations and close the financial gap between cost and money in hand for the project. On March 9, 1909, a resolution was adopted and sent to Wright which read in part:

The members of the Unity Church Society, in annual meeting assembled, desire to place on record their appreciation of the new church edifice. The new building is a noble, dignified, beautiful, and inspiring example of church architecture and most admirably adopted to the various needs and activities of the church.

*We extend to the architect, Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright, our most hearty congratulations upon the wonderful achievement...he has rendered to the parish and the community. We believe the building will long endure as a monument to his artistic genius ... it will stand forth as a masterpiece in art and architecture.*⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Siry, p.192.

⁶⁰ Wright, p. 160.

⁶¹ This amount can be verified by looking at correspondence Wright had with the church which can be found in the Exhibits section of this paper. Joseph Siry also corroborates this amount in his book.

⁶² Siry, p. 193.

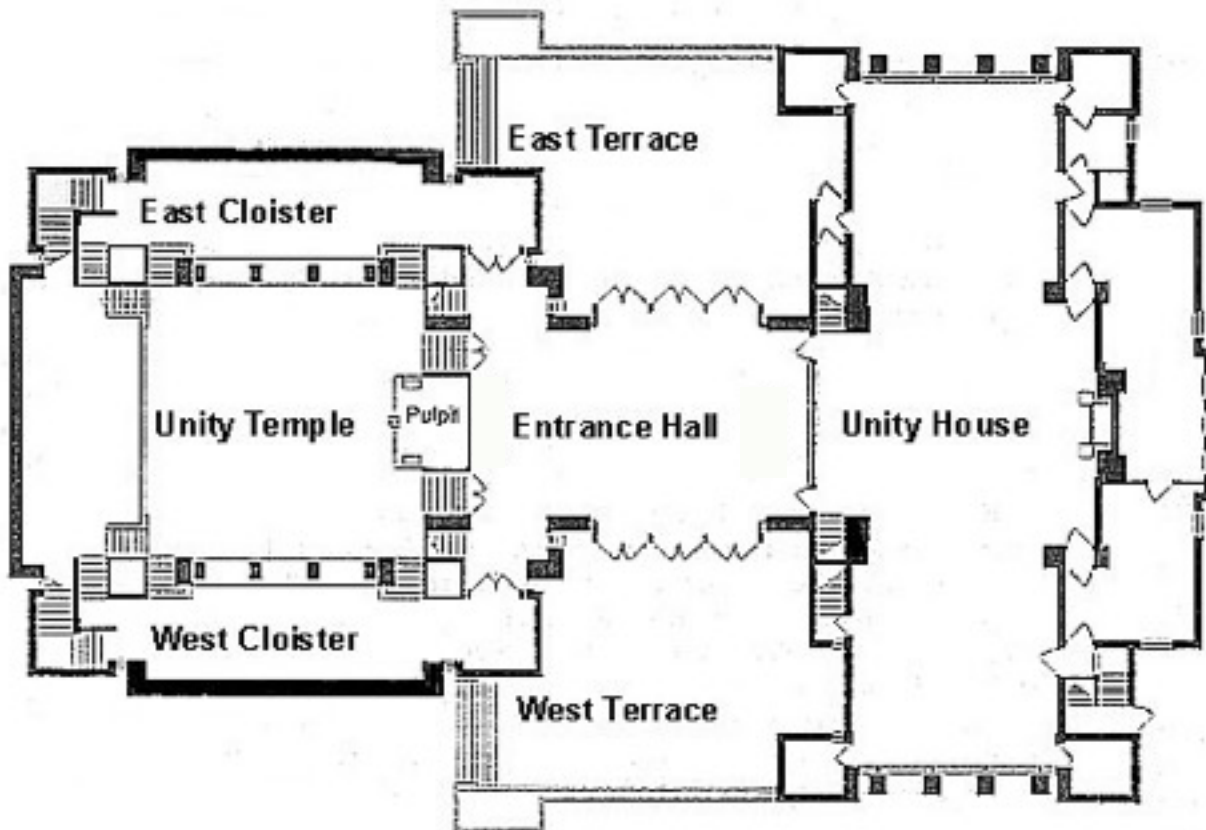
⁶³ Sometime after the dedication, due to the fact that its unique design bore little resemblance to the other churches along Lake Street, it was decided to change the name to Unity Temple. (flwright.org/research/unitytemple).

⁶⁴ Minutes of the Thirty-seventh Annual Meeting of the Unity Church Society of Oak Park, 9 March, 1909; Siry, p. 193.

Unity Temple and Unity House

The Floor Plan

The present footprint of the building is much as Wright first sketched it. The layout is similar to the layout of the major components of his studio in Oak Park which at Unity Temple is a large room, a Greek cross in a square (Unity Temple, corresponding to Wright's drafting room) at the north end of a longitudinal axis and a rectangular structure (Unity House, corresponding to the studio's library) at the south end. They are connected by a central entrance hall (corresponding to the reception area at the Studio) which separates these two shapes "giving the building three activities areas: worship, traffic, and social and educational services."⁶⁵



(The Pastor's Office is located above the Entrance Hall on the second floor. At the east and west ends of Unity House, there are classrooms on the first floor and above them on the second floor that flank the two story central hall.)

⁶⁵ Storrer, p. 92.

The entry hall is flanked outside on the east and west sides by a terrace extending out from the doors. At the corner steps leading to the terrace are large square urns for plantings. The entry hall doors are tucked into the middle of the structure off the terrace and away from Lake Street which is at the north wall of the Temple auditorium (left in the diagram). Therefore, there are no entrances facing Lake Street and thus cutting down on the noise from the busy street.

The auditorium rises three stories and culminates in a laylights in a coffered ceiling. The entry hall which is low and compressed contrasts with both Unity Temple auditorium and Unity House main room which rises two stories.

“Unity Temple is ordered on a rigorous system of proportion, determined in both exterior and interior by the measurements of the central interior sanctuary space.”⁶⁶ The auditorium room space is 33 feet square in plan, which is a 1:1 proportion. It is almost a cube in volume since the room is 30 feet high when measured from the floor to the glass of the laylights. The arms of the cruciform (entrance cloisters and balconies surrounding the auditorium room) are half-size double-squares 16.5 feet deep (a 1:2 proportion).

In exterior mass, the building is a square 66 feet in width, exactly twice the width (2:1 proportion) of its central interior volume (33 feet).

In plan, Unity House is a double square and geometrically dependent on Unity Temple, which is a square in plan (1:2 proportion).⁶⁷

In this proportional determination of the overall plan and massing by the central interior volume, Unity Temple is then similar to Renaissance centralized churches and both conceptual and geometric relations are made evident by comparing Wright’s plan and historic churches of the Renaissance⁶⁸ as mentioned before in the section of this paper on **The Design Plan: The Physical Structure**.

The Exterior

The exterior of the building is a massing of cubic shapes. The exterior walls are severely plain with no ornamentation and expansive areas of flat concrete. The walls have “an exposed pebble surface—the coarse aggregate which is mixed with cement and sand to make concrete showing

⁶⁶ McCarter, p. 15.

⁶⁷ McCarter, p. 15. McCarter outlines these geometric proportions intrinsic to Unity temple and Unity House in much more detail in his book from where these few geometric observations come.

⁶⁸ McCarter, p. 16.

through.”⁶⁹ Wright did not include expansion joints in his experimental concrete design and as a result there was extensive surface cracking in the concrete over the years.⁷⁰

The upper section of the Temple has four cantilevered roofs extending over the only exterior openings into the main room, Wright’s light screens, which in this case are four extended screens covering the large area at the upper part of each interior wall. The six columns on the exterior make the screens to appear as five separate elements from the outside but in reality they are not. These columns, which also appear as part of Unity House’s exterior on two elevations, have the only ornamentation, a complex geometric abstract design of hollyhocks.



Unity Temple Restoration Foundation Photo

Looking from the outside, the cubic shapes massed together to form the building are clearly seen. The Temple’s Greek cross shape is seen slipped into the middle of the four stair towers at each corner of the Temple. The urn⁷¹ that marks the stairs onto the terrace leading to the entrance is visible on the side of the building. The arrangement reflects Wright’s concept of a “path of discovery” as an entry into a building.

⁶⁹ Storrer, p. 92.

⁷⁰ Unity Temple Restoration Foundation web page, www.utrf.org/restoration/restoration-master-plan/.

⁷¹ Suggested plantings for the urn were Impatiens, Celosia, Begonia, Ageratum, Alyssum, and plants of woody kinds such as Cotoneaster and Pachistima (Historic Structure Report for Unity Temple Restoration Fund, July 1987, prepared by Weiss, Janney, Elstner & Associates, Chicago, IL., p. 108).

The stair towers at the corner of the auditorium had to be enlarged during construction to accommodate adequate stairs and landings. The stair towers and Greek cross of the auditorium would have then melded together, the edges of the towers approaching the edges of the cross. The long glass slits between the tower blocks and the auditorium's cross arms were added and achieve the separation which makes the towers and arms of the cross distinct architectural elements.⁷²

The building has no less than 16 separate flat roofs "which have an internal drainage system with downspouts concealed within interior columns. The system is ingenious, but inadequate and inaccessible and would lead to water infiltration and cause extensive damage."⁷³



Upon reaching the terrace, the six entrance doors are seen, designs of wood and intricate single and double-came art glass. Above the doors on the concrete façade are bronze pin set letters bordered by small squares of the same material: FOR THE WORSHIP OF GOD AND THE SERVICE OF MAN.

The Interior

The entrance doors lead into the hall that connects to Unity Temple with Unity House. As mentioned, it is a low, compressed space. Straight ahead are the east doors, which mirror the west doors. After entering you would make your fourth turn on your journey to the auditorium which leads you to the area known as the cloisters.⁷⁴ Again, it is a low compressed area meant to contrast boldly with the spaciousness of the auditorium, another example of Wright's philosophy of "compression/release" in architecture. In the interior wall of the cloisters is an opening that allows

⁷² Sokol, taken from the introduction by Sidney K. Robinson, p. xxii.

⁷³ Unity Temple Restoration Foundation web page. www.utrf.org/restoration/restoration-master-plan/.

⁷⁴ At the south end of the west cloisters, are the famous cat paw prints in the floor, left by a an inquisitive cat who was exploring the area before the floor had dried.



one to partially see into the auditorium, a kind of preview of what is to come. One continues down the cloisters and you would make your seventh turn, moving up the few stairs to the auditorium room, which explodes in generous proportions, color, and design.

As mentioned before, Otto Graf's description of the Larkin Building is apropos here. The journey into the auditorium is a "fugue on the theme of the cube". You have been walking around cubes, into and through cubes, while the oak trim work has been supplying a counterpoint, wrapping around corners, connecting planes, repeating cubic shapes in two dimensions, in a large space with very human dimensions.

To that human-scaled purpose, no congregant is more than 45 feet away from the pulpit. The 400 congregation attendees face each other for a sense of intimacy unlike traditional church seating where all congregants face the same way looking basically at the back of each other's heads. Again, the space is similar to Wright's drafting room—a room with a central open space with a balcony wrapping around the exterior walls.

When the service is over, the space is designed so that members of the congregation must leave their pews and continue their journey by moving forward toward the pulpit and the speaker, not retracing their steps, to exit through two semi-concealed doors on either side of the raised speaking platform. Wright himself said this was the idea of Dr. Johonnot: "And, important to the pastor, when the congregation rose to disperse, here was opportunity to move forward toward their pastor and swinging wide the doors beside the pulpit allow the entire flock to pass out by him and find themselves directly in the entrance loggia from where they had first come in."⁷⁵

The ceiling is punctuated with twenty-five square laylights (each in a five foot square opening) which, with the light screens, bring light in from the outside. The laylights are protected on the outside by a pyramidal glass skylight structure. Each of the 25 panels in the coffered ceiling is turned 90 degrees from its neighbor which was "a favorite device of Wright's skylights; he used it

⁷⁵ Wright, p.155.

in the Willits skylights as well.”⁷⁶ The glass is set at the top of the coffer “and integrated with the building by the extension of an oak trim which meets the wood frame at the ceiling level.”⁷⁷

The construction of these glass panels represents a technique used by Wright at this time, namely electro-glazing which was initially patented by Luxfer Prism Company. In the process, a thin ribbon of copper foil was inserted instead of lead came between the pieces of glass. “The assembled window was plunged into a zinc bath where an electric charge was applied. The zinc in the solution attached itself to the copper and built up molecule-by-molecule, sealing the space and making a very strong joint. The joint was also very thin, the feature in which Wright was most interested.”⁷⁸

The art glass (Wright used the term “pattern” glass), made by The Temple Art Glass Company of Chicago, used a technique in which Temple fused chromatic material into the molten glass rather than applying color to the glass by enameling or other techniques of painting. This technique provided a richer, more saturated coloration.

Light fixtures extend down from the ceiling and are formed by a white glass globe balanced on both sides by a white glass cube. The wood extenders of the light fixtures echo the oak trim on the walls and fronts of the balconies.

The trim in the interior is made up of long oak strips generally 1-1.5 x .375 inches and 2.5 x .725 inches. The original finish was a dark color similar to the color of wood in the Temple entrance hall. The pews are of a resinous finished wood and were not designed by Wright.

“The flooring in the entry foyer, the primary first floor spaces of Unity House, and the cloisters of the Temple are made of a material known as magnesite...the remainder of the flooring throughout Unity House and Unity Temple is sealed concrete.”⁷⁹ The floor of the auditorium is raised four feet higher than the floor of the entrance hall and the first floor of Unity House.

At the south end of the room stands the original organ pipe chamber behind the decorative screen and in front and below that are two raised areas, one for the organ console, the other in front of that, is an area for the pulpit. This area is accentuated by two pedestal light fixtures of oak each consisting of two glass cubes of white and a glass that has been back painted with green paint. This green glass “appears out of character with the other original glass throughout the building and is suspected that this glass is a replacement that does not match the original.”⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Julie L. Sloan, *Light Screens: The Leaded Glass of Frank Lloyd Wright*, (Rizzoli International Publications, 2001), p. 89. The Ward Willits House (1901) is located in Highland Park, Illinois.

⁷⁷ Thomas A. Heinz, *Frank Lloyd Wright: Glass Art*, (Academy Group, Ltd., London, 1994), p. 123.

⁷⁸ Heinz, p.50.

⁷⁹ *Unity Temple Restoration Master Plan*, McClier Preservation Group, April 19, 2006, p. 22.

⁸⁰ *Unity Temple Restoration Master Plan*, McClier Preservation Group, April 19, 2006, p. 36.

"The walls and ceilings of the Unity Temple and Unity House were plastered with a sand float finish. The Temple and entrance hall were originally painted with four different colors and Unity House had six different colors. The paints were originally a combination of both flat opaque finishes with complete coverage and thin watercolor finishes that allowed the sand aggregate plaster to show through the paint."⁸¹ According to a paint analysis by Robert Furhoff in 1984, the original colors were earth tones. Those had been changed for a time in the late 1950s to pink and chartreuse. There was no restoration movement at that time and so the decision went unchallenged.⁸² Colors close to the originals were restored later.

"The original plaster was a lime cement plaster with crushed flint or torpedo sand aggregate and hair fibers, goat hair or long cattle hair or Vanilla fibre to be well beaten, soaked and thoroughly mixed into the lime paste."⁸³

Unity House has a different purpose from the Temple and this is reflected in the design. Unity House has a strong, domestic character conveyed by the fireplace and placement of furniture and carpets. Unity House's design "may be compared with Wright's sectional perspective through the main rooms of "A Home in a Prairie Town" published in *Ladies Home Journal* in February 1901."⁸⁴ These drawings show a tall, central living room with a fireplace and flanked on either side by a library and dining room, each with a low ceiling not unlike the arrangement at Unity House with the classrooms on either side of the tall central room. Wright intended that the central room of Unity House could be used for informal religious gatherings and "the room is simultaneously like a parlor and a sanctuary."⁸⁵ Wright also intended to strengthen this double, flexible nature of Unity House by proposing screens to be used to section off areas for different functions at various times.

Unity House and Unity Temple together are the two-fold purpose of modern church architecture as seen by Wright and the Unitarian Universalist Church—a worship space and a place for social service. The main purpose of a Unitarian Universalist church is worship of God and this is accompanied by the social service dimension that is subordinate to worship. Wright carries out this notion in designing Unity House as separate and clearly smaller in plan than the Temple but, through architectural elements and design, he connects the mission of both. This is in contrast to the design of the Abraham Lincoln Center in which the auditorium (worship space) was embedded in the building which also houses classrooms and offices, and the two are not seen as clearly distinct.

To achieve what he wanted with Unity Temple and Unity House did not seem to come easy although today looking at the structure, the struggle is not evident. As Wright said, "But returning to the drawing board, here we see penciled upon a sheet of paper, the plan, section, and elevation

⁸¹ *Unity Temple Restoration Master Plan*, McClier Preservation Group, April 19, 2006, p. 24.

⁸² Storrer, p. 92.

⁸³ Unity Temple Restoration Fund web page, www.utrf.org/restoration/restoration-master-plan/.

⁸⁴ Siry, p. 158.

⁸⁵ Siry, p. 160.

in the main—all except the exterior of Unity House, as the room for secular recreation is to be called. To establish harmony between these buildings of separate function proved difficult, utterly exasperating ... thirty-four studies were necessary to arrive at this concordance as it is now seen.”⁸⁶

Heating for Unity Temple and Unity House was originally accomplished by Wright’s installing of an early version of electric forced air heating. The air was supposed to move from the plant in Unity House through ducts in the floor and ducts running up the four hollow supporting piers in Unity Temple to deliver heat. “Unlike the structure itself, the experiment was an utter failure.”⁸⁷ Instead of heating the building, warm air flowed to nearby trees, which blossomed all winter, while the congregation froze—at least according to a story handed down by church members since the building opened in 1908.”⁸⁸

Within six months after the opening, Wright supervised the installation of hot water radiators to replace the original forced air system.

Changes to the Structure

The following is a partial list of the changes made to Unity Temple and Unity House since they were built. It is not a complete listing. This summary is based on the list found in the *Unity Temple Restoration Master Plan* of 2006 by the McClier Preservation Group.

- 1908** Original heating system not working; radiator heat installed
- 1909** Completion of radiator/boiler installation
- 1915** Additional heating pipes installed; roof repaired
- 1921** Roof repaired due to leaks
- 1924** New roof on Unity Temple; Unity House’s roof recoated
- 1948** Additional heating pipes installed in original Sunday School rooms
- 1955** Unity House south classroom ceiling and walls repaired due to water damage
- 1957** New boiler and burner installed; roof repaired and new downspouts added

⁸⁶ Wright, p. 158.

⁸⁷ Although some Wright experts say that perhaps the congregation really didn’t give it enough time to really work properly.

⁸⁸ “Group aims to add green energy to Wright-designed Unity Temple”, Tara Burghart, Associated Press, *Bellingham Herald*, October 23, 2005.

- 1960** Roof and chimney repaired
- 1961** Albitol applied to exterior concrete; balconies in Unity House partitioned; interior of Unity Temple painted "earth colors"
- 1965** Roof repaired
- 1966** Basement coatrooms under Unity Temple converted to classrooms and restrooms
- 1968** Sixteen sewer grates installed on roof
- 1971** Entire building re-roofed with coal tar pitch and gravel roofing; skylights re-glazed; new lead coated copper drains and flashing installed; Unity House trim stripped and refinished, walls repainted
- 1972** Fire in Unity House and as a result: new kitchen windows, art glass at west elevation repaired; light fixtures were recreated; laylight panels restored; new roof drains, downspouts and flashing
- 1973** Entrance doors repaired; new drains installed on Unity House with concealed downspouts and scuppers
- 1973-4** Albitol removed from exterior concrete walls and resurfaced with gunite; linseed oil (water repellant coating) applied to exterior; as a consequence of the gunite process, much of the 1971 roof was destroyed necessitating emergency repairs
- 1977** Landscaping and irrigation system was repaired; new exterior flood lights; illuminated handrails were installed
- 1978** Entrance hall restored and repainted
- Late 1970s** Restoration of suspended globe light fixtures; cleaning interior woodwork; new carpeting in entrance hall
- 1980** Electrical panel and wiring upgraded
- 1981** Unity House skylight raised
- 1982** Single-ply roof membrane applied to the Temple skylight roof and parapet walls
- 1983** Unity House painted
- 1994** 75th Anniversary; Unity Temple interior was restored and painted according to Robert Furhoff's paint analysis; new boiler

Mid 1980s Kitchen remodeled

1986-7 Single-ply PVC was installed on Unity House skylight roof

1989 Unity House fireplace repaired

1991 Unity Temple stairway art glass and other art glass windows repaired; Unity Temple interior laylight ceiling was rebuilt

1992 Pews refinished; west Temple cantilevered roof was re-roofed; concrete on west cantilevered roof removed and replaced

1993 Restored east and west Unity Temple art glass clerestory windows

1994 Temporary accessible ramp installed on east terrace; exterior lighting fixtures were revamped using sodium vapor and mercury vapor light sources

1995 Building security system installed; sound system installed in Unity Temple

1997 South classrooms renovated

1998 Toilet room installed next to kitchen

1999 Polymer modified bitumen membrane system installed on roof over Unity House south classroom; original scuppers were abandoned; new roof drains installed

2000 Entrance hall exterior wood doors restored

2001 Cracked boiler tubes replaced

2002 Six cantilevered roof slabs were restored; northwest stair tower and walkway around the skylight were re-roofed; several other areas re-roofed; clerestory windows restored; 18 of the 64 cube lights were either restored or replicated by Curran Glass Studios

2003 Unity House window sash and frames restored; "Tree of Life" window in minister's office restored by Curran Art Glass; mechanical repairs to steam system

2004 Entrance hall re-roofed; east and west doors refinished; Temple and entrance hall repainted with colors based on Furhoff's 1984 analysis

2005 Art panels at east and west active entry doors replicated by Curran Art Glass

Owners⁸⁹

Unity Temple is unique among Wright's buildings in Oak Park and River Forest in that it is the only building that has been owned continuously by the same owner since it was built. The congregation that commissioned the church, the Unity Church of Oak Park, still occupies it although their name has changed to reflect the changing nature of their congregation.

Unity Temple stands on land that was first owned by J. W. Kettlestrings who sold it to Abram Gale in 1868. Gale then passed the property to Edwin O. Gale and Charles A. Welch, jointly, in 1882. Edwin Gale sold part of the property to the Unity Church of Oak Park on October 15, 1905. Gale later donated an additional portion located south of the church on April 28, 1906. Julia E. Gale, Edwin's wife, donated a third portion of the lot to Unity Church on April 8, 1915 which included the house built in 1905 by her son George W. Gale. The Unity Church of Oak Park handed over the deed to the contiguous three pieces of property to the Illinois Universalist Convention on March 31, 1933.⁹⁰

The present congregation has its roots in Union Church, which was formed in 1863 in Oak Park. A splinter group from that church which wanted a church aligned with more liberal thinking in regards to religion formed a separate church on January 25, 1871. This small group consisted of 11 people of the Unitarian and Universalist faiths. Among this group were Elijah W. Hoard, George H. Gale, Edwin O. Gale, C. L. Jenks and A. O. Butler. Also in 1871, the church opened its doors to "all sufferers (of the Chicago Fire) and the Sunday School became notably a restaurant but with the use of church cushions also a lodging house."

During the pastorate of Rev. William Taylor, which began in 1913 and who came to Unity from the same church as Dr. Johonnot, Julia E. Gale donated the house just south of the church as a parsonage. Her son George Gale had built this house in 1905 and she gave the house in memory of her husband Edwin O. Gale.

During the years 1915-1916, the church experienced a gradual decline in membership and several members resigned in opposition to Rev. William G. Taylor, the pastor, and his pro-war stance.

World War II indirectly caused a decline in attendance due to the fact that gas rationing had been imposed and that hindered people living at some distance from coming to the church.

In the late 1940s, under the leadership of then pastor Rev. John Pankhurst, the church established a planning council, rebuilt the organ, had the local chapter of Alcoholics Anonymous meet at the church, and developed a youth center called "Anchor Inn" which instituted a novel approach to working with youth which received national attention.

⁸⁹ This information is taken from *A People Moving Through Time* by Thomas A. Chulak, published by The Unitarian Universalist Church In Oak Park, 1979, and the Unity Temple web page, www.unitytemple.org.

⁹⁰ Taken from Chain of Title, "Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS)" No. ILL-1093, Leland M. Roth, Historian, 1967.

Beginning in 1952 and lasting for seventeen years, the church was embroiled in battles with Russell Firebaugh, owner of the Scoville Park Hotel just east of the church on Lake Street. During that time Firebaugh tried several times to buy the church, excavated so close to the church as to endanger the foundation, tried to rent the church for hotel activities and complained that pigeons in the church trees were damaging his property.

During the 1960s, many of the church members backed open housing in Oak Park and when the time came to decide if the church should take a stand, the congregation decided against the move, fearing that it would violate each members' freedom of conscience, a strong Unitarian Universalist principle, to choose their own position.

The church experienced hard times both financially and in terms of membership throughout the middle of the twentieth century but the church continued its hard work of re-establishing itself. By 1963, much of this hard work paid off with an increase in church attendance and visitors. By 1970, the congregation was as strong as it had been in almost 60 years.

The church today is a vibrant part of the Oak Park community under the direction of ministers Rev. Alan C. Taylor and Rev. Emily Gage. The congregation has involved itself in a variety of issues and causes not only with generous donations of volunteer time but also financial contributions.

The congregation supports advocacy for racial and economic justice, refugee settlement and mental health. The church formed Oak Park River Forest Walk-In Ministry, now known as Prevail, which helps people with health care and eviction prevention. The church donates money collected in its Sunday collections to non-profit organizations that share in Unitarian Universalist values. In 2015, the church donated over \$60,000 and in 2016 voted to fund such groups as Oak Park Housing Center, the Parkinson's Disease Foundation, Children's Clinic in Oak Park, Maywood Fine Arts Association, Oak Park Food Pantry, and Chicago Legal Advocacy for Incarcerated Mothers (CLAIM) among many others.



The Restoration⁹¹

As seen in the **Changes** section of this paper, Unity Temple has had much restorative and maintenance work done to it over the years. There are two groups that have overseen the care and restoration of Unity Temple. First, the congregation of Unity Temple has its own group (Building and Grounds Committee) that maintains the building and has completed a number of small restoration projects. Second, in 1973, the Unity Temple

⁹¹ All the information in this section is taken from the *Unity Temple Master Restoration Plan*, McCluer Preservation Group, April 19, 2006 and from the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation webpage, UTRF.org.

Restoration Foundation (UTRF) was created with the mission “to continually restore and preserve Unity Temple, Frank Lloyd Wright’s earliest masterpiece of modern architecture.”⁹² The UTRF commissioned a master plan as the 100th anniversary of Unity Temple approached as the first step in the embarkation of the full restoration of Unity Temple. The commission was given to McClier Preservation Group and in April 2006 they delivered the report which was the beginning of that full restoration begun in 2015. The 2006 report was authored by T. Gunny Harboe, AIA; Robert Score, AIA; Mark Kasprzyk; Jingjing Gao; and Phil Spagnolo. More recently, Harboe Architects, assisted by other experts, prepared a scope of work and identified associated costs which was finalized in 2014. This restoration of Unity Temple was on a scale and scope that far exceeded what came before.

The report included among other items a description of the chronology; an assessment of the physical condition of the building’s materials and systems; a code analysis of the building in its current condition and with identification of required code improvements; recommended scope of work to fully restore the building; and magnitude of cost estimates for all recommended work.

The experts and companies involved in the 2015 restoration were Gunny Harboe, AIA, lead restoration architect; Robert Score, AIA, Mark Nussbaum, mechanical engineer; Jeff Burandt, project manager; Rick Anderson, project manager; Judson Glass of Los Angeles; Heritage Restoration & Design which was responsible for wood restoration; True Point Laser Scanning; the CTLGroup, an internationally recognized expert consulting engineering and materials science firm; Berglund Construction, general contractor; J. P. Phillips, Inc., plastering contractor; and Evergreen Architectural Arts, architectural paint conservators.



Unity Temple Restoration Foundation photos



This is a partial list of the extraordinary amount of restoration work that was planned:

- **Full restoration of the exterior, which includes repair or replacement of the 1970’s shotcrete (gunite) in damaged areas.**

This will entail matching coloration and texture of the repairs to the existing shotcrete and will also entail developing a routine maintenance plan to monitor the concrete for cracks and deterioration in the future, along with a process to prevent water damage.

- **Repair/restoration of the laylights, clerestory windows**

The art glass will be removed for restoration and repair. The Judson Company of California is in charge of the project. Since the process Wright

⁹² *Unity Temple Master Restoration Plan*, McClier Preservation Group, Foreword, April 19, 2006.

used is different than the standard practice of his day, another firm had to be contracted to work on the came of the glass. A delay ensued when that company went out of business and Judson had to locate another firm capable or capable of learning how to restore the original came. Some of the windows in Unity Temple and Unity House are original and are in very fine condition. Replacement of glass will only take place when original pieces of glass are damaged beyond repair.

- **New roofing**

There are 19 different roof levels with five different roofing systems. The lower roofs on Unity House are in good condition and required only minor maintenance. The roofing of the upper level will be replaced. Roofs at the north end and southwest corner of Unity Temple are past their useful life and will be replaced. The upper roof of Unity Temple and most of the lower roof are in good condition and will require routine inspections and maintenance.

- **Repair of interior plaster surfaces and paint finishes**

Over the years, plaster repairs have covered over or damaged the original textured plaster, which will be restored, returning the interior walls to their original subtle and luminous appearance when repainted. During Wright's Prairie School Period the overall effect of the interplay between interior surfaces and color made his definition of space a powerful feature of Unity Temple and a great influence on modern architecture.

- **Cleaning and conserving the wood throughout the building**

The wood trim⁹³ will be cleaned and returned to its original tone. The balance between the tones of the wood and the earth tones of the paint applied in the original technique of lightly applied coatings will again reflect the presence and simplicity of nature in its order and calm.

- **Repair and restoring light fixtures**

All new electric service to the building will be provided and the entire building will be rewired. All of the historic light fixtures will be rewired and brought up to UL code. The lighting will be connected to a central lighting control with the capability to adjust the light in different areas of the building. The fixtures will also be fitted with LED bulbs. The bulbs will have the capacity to be set at original historic levels of brightness or increased in intensity when needed.

- **Repair and restoring floor surfaces**

This entails removing worn sealer from the concrete floors, remedial repairs and removing and replacing previous patches that do not match the original, a new sealer applied; the magnesite floors will receive the same attention.

⁹³ Terry Schaeffer, carpenter with Heritage Restoration and Design, estimates that there are about 10 miles of wood trim in the interior of Unity Temple.

- **Replacement of mechanical systems and plumbing**

In the restoration, a geothermal system will be installed for the heating and cooling of the building. In the preliminary studies of the building, it had been determined that the original system of radiator heat on the perimeter of the building should be retained and would be supplemented with forced air heating and cooling. This was primarily due to the discovery of the extent of moisture that collects in the walls of the auditorium and throughout the building.

The building will be equipped with a state-of-the-art geothermal ground source heat pump, an electrically powered system that taps stored energy from the earth using the earth's relatively constant temperature to provide heating, cooling and even hot water for the building. The system extracts heat from water pumped deep into the ground (even cold water has heat in it) for heating and uses the water to also cool. The four "wells" are located under ground in the front of the north wall of Unity Temple along Lake Street. The new system will also take advantage of the original ductwork Wright designed into the building for his heating system. The radiator heat will remain to supplement the new system. The geo-thermal system is in line with the church's goal of making the congregation not only comfortable all year but also making Unity Temple sustainable into the future in terms of its reduction of reliance on fossil fuels.

Understanding the original nature of the building, what Wright intended and how he achieved it was crucial to the restoration. Replicating past techniques Wright used can be difficult and require a large amount of finesse and an extraordinary level of skill.



One of the modern tools that the restoration team had for its use was "laser scanning or high-definition surveying which takes millions of measurements per second, picking up cracks, any visible object or surface and giving them coordinates."⁹⁴ In Unity's Temple's case, "the process provided architects and contractors an intensely detailed 3D picture of the

⁹⁴ "Restoration of Unity Temple", Caitlin Mullen, *Oak Leaves*, August 3, 2015.

building and gave them an idea of what they were working with, with the hope of getting all parties on the same page and preventing any mistakes during the process.”⁹⁵

The restoration was conducted in three phases:

- Phase One—Exterior Restoration including roofing, exterior concrete restoration, skylight restoration, exterior art glass windows and door restoration and replacement
- Phase Two—Interior Modifications and System Upgrades which includes mechanical, electrical and plumbing upgrades as well as accessibility upgrades
- Phase Three—Interior Restoration which includes restoration of the interior finishes on the flooring, plaster, paint, wood trim and millwork, doors, hardware, light fixtures and interior art glass.⁹⁶

The Alphawood Foundation⁹⁷ provided a ten million dollar grant to support the original estimated twenty-three million dollar Unity Temple restoration. This amount was augmented by 1.5 million dollars raised by the congregation, \$200,000 from federal funds, and \$1.75 million from the Getty Foundation. Dan Crimmins, President of the Board of Trustees for the Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation, stated that the restoration cost as of November 2016 would be \$24,750,000⁹⁸, up from the original estimate. Completion of the restoration was anticipated for late spring 2017 with the reopening of Unity Temple to the public by June/July 2017.

The Architect

Undoubtedly, Frank Lloyd Wright is one of the most original American architects. He lived at a time of great technological and artistic development. It was the time of the birth of the Modern Era, highlighted by such names as Picasso, the Wright Brothers, Stravinsky, Einstein, Hemingway, Macintosh, Kandinsky, Curie and others.

Wright was born in Richland Center, Wisconsin on June 8, 1867. He began his career unconventionally. He perhaps did not graduate from high school and in 1885 he became an apprentice to Allan Conover, the one and only builder in Madison, Wisconsin. Fortunately for Wright, Conover was also the Dean of Engineering at the University of Wisconsin, which gave

⁹⁵ Jonathan Rohrs, Regional Manager for TruePoint Laser Scanning, Ohio, quoted in Mullen’s footnoted article.

⁹⁶ *Unity Temple Restoration Master Plan*, McCluer Group, April 19, 2006, p. 59.

⁹⁷ The Alphawood Foundation is a Chicago-based grant making private foundation working for an equitable, just and humane society. It awards grants to more than 200 organizations annually, primarily in the areas of advocacy, architecture and preservation, the arts, domestic violence prevention, the environment, and LGBT civil rights.

⁹⁸ “Unity Temple restoration now expected to be complete in March”, *Oak Leaves*, Nov. 29, 2016, www.chicagotribune/suburbs/ct-oak-unity-temple.

Wright the opportunity to attend classes in the department. The two semesters of classes he attended before dropping out made it obvious that Wright had a great ability as a draftsman.

After a brief time studying engineering at the University of Wisconsin, Wright traveled to Chicago to make his mark in architecture. He worked first in the offices of Joseph Silsbee from 1887-1888 and then with the firm of Adler & Sullivan from 1888-1893. A parting of the ways with Louis Sullivan in 1893 pushed Wright toward starting his own practice which he continued the rest of his life. Even after their parting on rather unfriendly terms, Wright credited Louis Sullivan as one of the most profound influences on his work and often referred to him as “Leiber Meister” (dear Master).

Wright settled in Oak Park, Illinois and built his own home there in 1889 after marrying Catherine Tobin. They would raise six children there and live as a family in that house until 1909, the year Wright left his wife for Europe and for another woman.

In 1898, Wright built his studio next to his house in Oak Park and it was there that the Prairie School of Architecture developed as evidenced by such designs as the Arthur Heurtley House (Oak Park, 1902), the Larkin Building (Buffalo, 1903), the Susan Lawrence Dana House (Springfield, 1904), the Coonley House (Riverside, 1908), and the Frederick Robie House (Chicago, 1909). Associate architects in the studio included William Drummond, Barry Byrne, John Van Bergen, Charles White, Walter Burley Griffin, Marion Mahoney, and others.

In 1931, Wright founded the Taliesin Fellowship. The Fellowship was designed to train young architects in the aesthetics and principles of Wright’s philosophy of architecture. The Fellowship first found its home at Taliesin in Wisconsin and then later at Wright’s home in Arizona.

Wright continued to be an architectural force in America, developing the concept of the Usonian House and designing such significant buildings as the Edgar J. Kaufman House, better known as Fallingwater (Bear Run, Pennsylvania, 1936), the Johnson Wax Building (Racine, Wisconsin, 1936), and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum (New York, 1956).

Seventeen of Wright’s buildings have been designated by the American Institute of Architects as examples of his extraordinary and outstanding contribution to American culture. In 1949, Wright received the Gold Medal of the AIA recognizing his body of work. He died on April 9, 1959 in Phoenix, Arizona.



Exhibits



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Lot Location, Chain of Title

Lot Location

Legal description: Lot 3 in Scoville's Subdivision of Lot 17 in Kettlestrings' Subdivision of lands in the Southeast corner of the Northwest quarter of Section 7, Township 39N, Range 13E, of the third principal meridian of Cook County.

Chain of Title

From the Chicago Title and Trust Company, tract book 133-2: J.W. Kettlestrings sold Lot 3 to Abram Gale, April 3, 1868 (Document 9168).

Gale passed the property to Edwin O. Gale and Charles A. Welch, jointly, February 22, 1882 (Document 377454).

Edwin O. Gale sold part of the property to the Unity Church of Oak Park, October 14, 1905 (Document 3770993). The part of the property is described thusly:

Commencing 5 feet west of the northeast corner then south 149.1 feet then west 100 feet to a point 60 feet east of the western line of the lot, then north 150.9 feet to the northern line of the lot, then east to the point of beginning.

Edwin O. Gale sold a second portion of the lot to Unity Church, April 28, 1906 (Document 3867507). This second portion is described thusly:

Beginning at a point 60 feet east of the west line of the lot (being on the east line of Kenilworth Avenue), then south 20 feet, then east to a point 5 feet west of the east line of the lot, and 169.1 feet south of the north line of the lot, then north on said line 20 feet to a point 149.1 feet south of the north line of the lot, then west to point of beginning.

Julia E. Gale sold a third portion of the lot to Unity Church, April 8, 1915 (Document 5623453). This third portion of the lot may be described thusly:

Part of the eastern 105 feet of Lot 3, beginning on the west line of the east 105 feet of Lot 3, said point being on the east line of Kenilworth Avenue, 170.9 feet south of the north line thereof, then south on east line of said avenue 75 feet, then east on a straight line to east line of Lot 3 at a point 244.1 feet south of north line thereof, then north along east line 75 feet to a point 169.1 feet south of north line thereof, then west to point of beginning.

The Unity Church of Oak Park handed over the deed to the contiguous three pieces of property to the Illinois Universalist Convention, March 31, 1933 (Document 11253120).



Building Permit

No. 1117

Date June 2 1906

To Unity Congⁿ Owner

Paul F. P. Mueller Contractor

Lat 3 Block 17

Location 345 41 1st St.

No. 1117 1st St.

Cost \$33000

Stories high 2 Stucco Church

Size 70 x 142 Ceiling 14' 2" 10

49 50

Building permit for Unity Temple, no. 1117 dated June 2, 1906. It lists the owner as Unity Congregation. It lists Paul F. P. Mueller as contractor. Cost is placed at \$33,000 and the building is described as a 2 story stucco church.



New Church Brochure and Church Committees

In March 1906, Unity Church published a brochure concerning the proposed new church entitled “The New Edifice of Unity Church”. The descriptive and historical matter was written by Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot, the pastor at time of publication, and contained drawings of the new church as designed by Frank Lloyd Wright. The brochure outlined the rationale for building a new church, and as the first sentence states: “Every radical departure from the customary must make its appeal to reason to determine its worth and truth.”

The brochure outlined and explained the six principles that should be embodied in the religious structure, especially one of a liberal Christianity which is Unity Church. The last paragraph summarizes the argument of the brochure:

These qualities (Unity, Truth, Simplicity, Beauty, Reason and Freedom) are present in this edifice in a marked degree. Without tower or spire it expresses the spirit of the ideal. By its form it expresses the thought, inherent in the liberal faith, that God should not be sought in the sky, but on earth among the children of men. His word is not in the heavens that we should say “who shall go up for us to heaven and bring it unto us that we may hear it and do it” but his word is very high unto us in our hearts. This building conveys the sense of dignity and permanence befitting a house of religion. It has the feeling of reverence and seems to say “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth keep silence before him.” It is informed by that spirit of beauty which led the Psalmist to say, “Worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness.”⁹⁹

BOARD OF TRUSTEES 1905-1906

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W. G. Adams	Herman Fietsch
W. A. Hutchinson	James H. Heald, Jr., <i>Treasurer</i>
John Lewis	Guy Parke Conger, M.D., <i>Secretary</i>

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⁹⁹ Charles S. Woodard, R. F. Johonnot, Frank Lloyd Wright, *The New Edifice of Unity Church* (Marshall-Jackson Press, Chicago, 1906).

SPECIAL COMMITTEES ON NEW CHURCH EDIFICE

ON SITE

James H. Heald
E. R. Haase
Chris. Hafner

ON PLANS

R. F. Johonnot
E. H. Ehrman
Mrs. A. W. Bryant
Mrs. John Lewis
Jas. H. Heald, Jr.

ON WAYS AND MEANS

H. A. Taylor
W. S. Holden
C. A. Sharpe
D. G. Trench
Charles S. Woodard

ON BUILDING

E. H. Ehrman
Charles E. Roberts
C. A. Sharpe

COMMITTEE ON BROCHURE

Charles S. Woodard
R. F. Johonnot
Frank Lloyd Wright

(The brochure was originally published by the press of Marshall-Jackson Co., Chicago, Illinois)



Church Dedication Prayer



THE ACT OF DEDICATION

Unity Church

OAK PARK, ILLINOIS

SEPTEMBER 26, 1909

THE REVEREND ROBERT F. JOHNSON, PASTOR

The Pastor: In all times and places the children of God have acknowledged their dependence upon him, and have sought communion with him by ways of the holy life and the religious spirit. To this end they have builded houses of worship and have consecrated altars of prayer. In sympathy with these universal aspirations we have reared this house. Let us now dedicate it to the worship of God the Father of all souls, in whose abundant love we live and move and have our being.

The People: To prayer and thanksgiving, to all heavenward uplifts of the spirit, to the communion of the heart of man with the heart of God, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor: We cherish the life and teaching of that great prophet of the soul, Jesus Christ, whose heroic sacrifice changed the cross into a sacred symbol; we call to mind the true-hearted of other days who loved and labored and died for the truth; we hold in loving remembrance those in whose faces we have seen the revelations of the divine spirit. To the memory and services of these ascended ones, let us dedicate this house.

The People: To the memory of our beloved dead, to the gentle and true of former times, to all who have unloosed the bonds of ignorance and wrong, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor: Let us dedicate it, moreover, to the living; to those whose ways are good and those whose ways are evil, to the strong souls that stoop to share, to the weak and defenseless waiting to receive, to the darkened mind, the tempted heart, the life weary and heavy-laden. To all human need, let us dedicate this house.

The People: To the ministry of the strong to the weak, to the bringing of light in darkness, to the giving of hope, courage, and spiritual health to all human hearts, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor: Let us dedicate it also to the proclamation of the truth that set men free. To the liberty of the sons of God, to the fearless reading of every fresh revelation, to freedom from all prejudice, to reverence for all worth of the past, and to the eager acceptance of all good which the future may unfold, let us dedicate this house.

The People: To the growing truths of God, to the fellowship of all reverent seekers after knowledge, to the communion of all earnest bearers of the light, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor: Let us dedicate it to those high ideals of righteousness which lead on to salvation of this world and in all worlds. To obedience to the moral law, to spiritual honor and staunch integrity, to the dignity of faithful citizenship, to the sanctification of thought and toil by clean hands and a pure heart, let us dedicate this house.

The People: To the upbuilding of character in all things honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor: Let us also dedicate it to that love which is as wide as God's kingdom and which binds all men together in one great household of the spirit. To the brotherhood of man, to the fellowship of rich and poor, to the democracy of good will, let us dedicate this house.

The People: To that which is greater than faith or hope, to the service of love which never faileth, but hopeth all things, believeth all things, endureth all things, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor: Let us dedicate it to all the holy offices of religion. Here may words of truth and comfort be spoken, here may the incense of prayer ascend, here may the old see visions and the young dream dreams, here may the little ones be consecrated, the youths and maidens say their marriage vows, and those who weep over new-made graves learn that love can never lose its own.

The People: To all that sweetens our daily life, to the tender meanings of childhood and home, to all that sanctifies the cradle and brightens the star of hope above the grave, we dedicate this house.

The Pastor and People: O Lord, the Father eternal, who knowest the love and sacrifice built into these walls, help us to make this house holy by the holiness of our lives and the devotion of our strength to the service of the world. So, indeed, may it become to us and to our children's children a house of God, the very gate of heaven. Establish, O Lord, the work of our hands,—yea, the work of our hands, O God, establish thou it.



Photos



Dr. Rodney F. Johonnot
Pastor, Unity Church
(1892-1910)



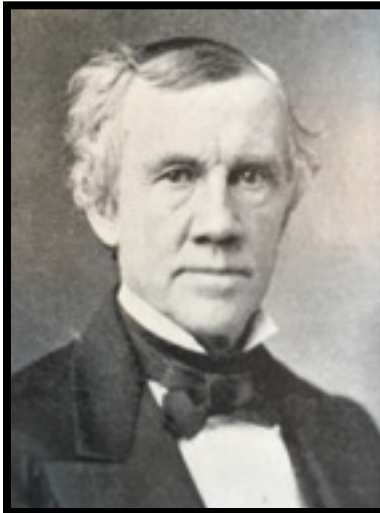
Anna Lloyd Jones Wright
Mother of Frank Lloyd Wright



Augusta Chapin
Pastor, Unity Church (1886-1891)



Edwin O. Gale
*Congregant and seller of
land on which Unity Temple
was built*
(Photo courtesy of Unity
Temple)



Elijah W. Hoard
*Member of Unity Church
and at whose house on
February 1, 1871 the meeting
took place to establish Unity
Church in Oak Park*



Frank Lloyd Wright
c. 1904-1906

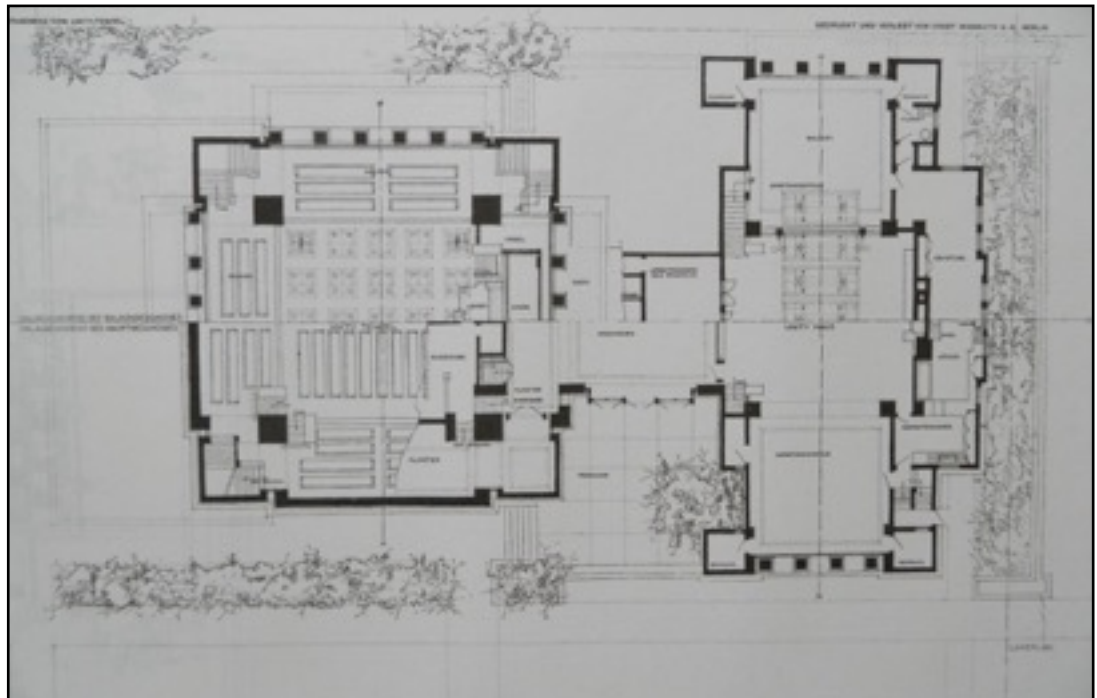


Top left: Charles Roberts, pictured in a 1897 Roberts Electric Stanhope, a car designed by Roberts, one-time president of the Chicago Screw Company and ally with Wright in the project. This is said to be the only picture the family had of him.

Top right: Thomas Skillin, characterized by Wright as an adversary in the project who finally gave his approval to the finished structure

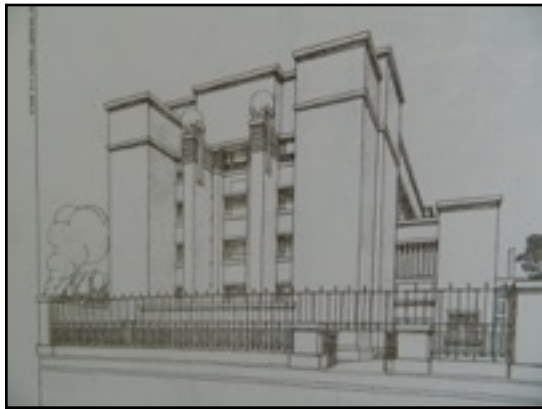
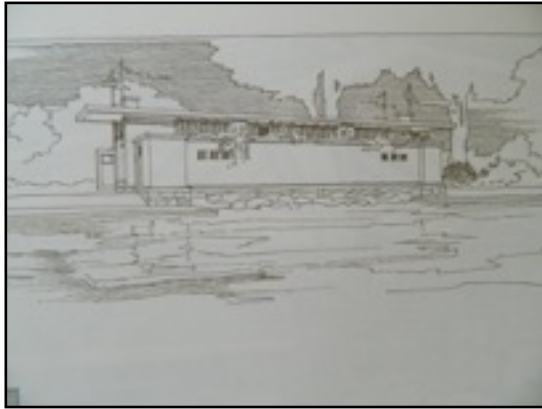
Bottom: The 1884 baseball team of Oak Park High School which pictures Edwin Erhman, standing, second from the left

(Photos courtesy of The Historical Society of Oak Park and River Forest)



Top: Drawing (plate LXIII) of Unity Temple from the Wasmuth Portfolio (1910)

Bottom: Floor plan (plate LXIV) of Unity Temple from the Wasmuth Portfolio (1910)



Top left: Drawing (plate LV) of the Yahara Boat House project, University of Wisconsin, Madison (1902), from the Wasmuth Portfolio (1910) **Top right:** Photo of boat house built by HHL Architects in 2008 from Wright's plans and working with Taliesin Architects. The boat house is located on the Black Rock Channel where Lake Erie joins the Niagara River near Buffalo, NY.

Lower left: Drawing (plate xxxiii) of the Larkin Building (1903) from the Wasmuth Portfolio (1910)

Lower right: Photo of the Larkin Building, Buffalo, New York. Stylistic roots of Unity Temple can be observed in both buildings.

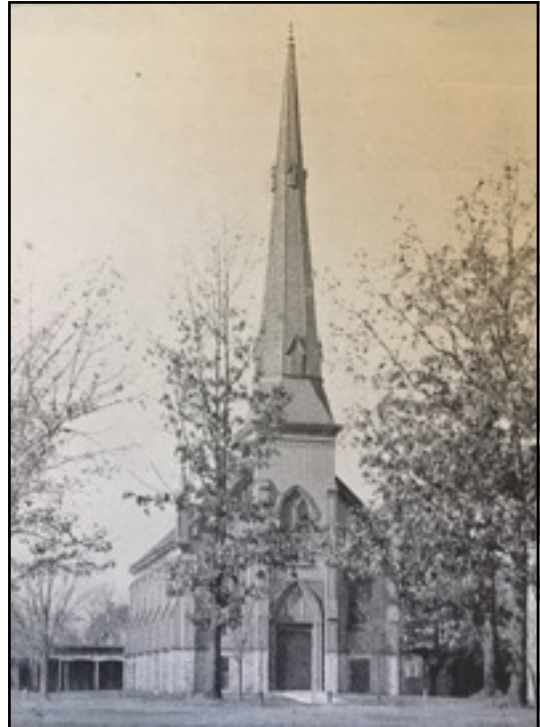


Top left: Edwin O. Gale's house on the corner of Lake Street and Kenilworth Avenue. From his house, Gale had a very good view of Unity Temple when he called it our "supposed" church to be built in "moderate time", sarcastically expressing his impatience with the amount of time the project was taking. The house was demolished in September 1961 to make way for an apartment building.

Top right: The Gothic structure of the original Unity Church whose destruction by a lightning-caused fire forced the congregation to make the decision to build a new church.

Middle right: The house donated by Julia Gale in memory of her husband Edwin located just south of Unity Temple on Kenilworth Avenue which served as the parsonage. The house was originally built by her son George W. Gale.

Bottom right: The plaque on the west façade of the Gale House honoring Edwin O. Gale.





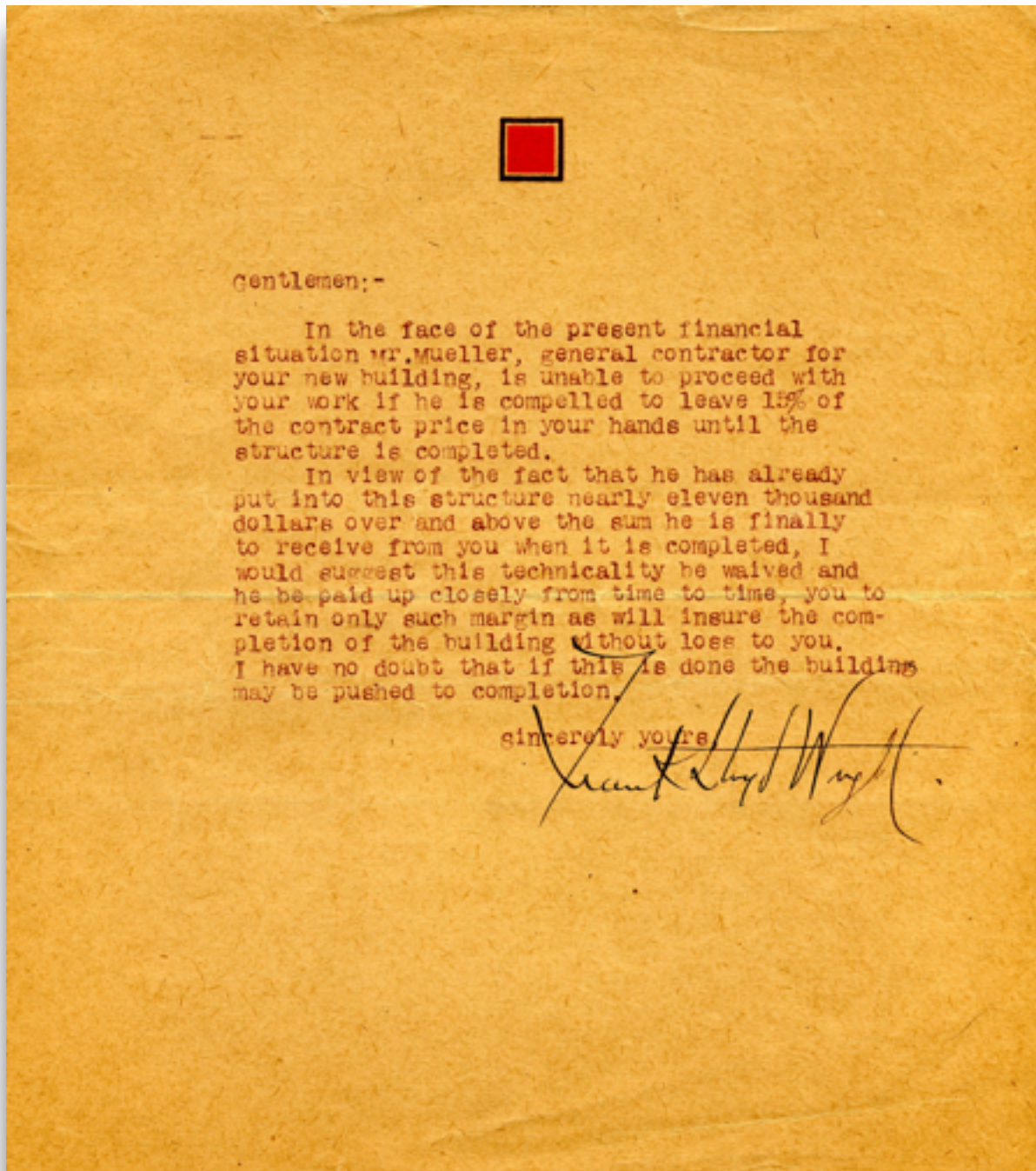
Top: Abraham Lincoln Center, Chicago (*left*, date unknown) with All Souls Church to the right. The location of the large two-story auditorium room in the Center can be observed from the outside by the placement of the second and third story windows.

Below: Abraham Lincoln Center as it currently appears.





Correspondence Concerning Unity Temple



Courtesy of Unity Temple. All Rights Reserved.

Paul Mueller had to pour so much of his own money into the project that he went bankrupt but continued to work for Wright, even going to Japan with him to work on the Imperial Hotel.



Copy.

To Foster & Glidden Co.,
Oak Park, Illinois.

Gentlemen:-

The heating of Unity Church has so far proved a failure and your attempts to remedy the same have proved abortive, leaving the building in a critical condition entirely without heat. You are hereby notified therefore, according to the provisions of your contract, that unless you undertake to remedy these defects within three days from date hereof, in a manner satisfactory to the architect, Unity Church will enter upon the work and make such additions and changes as are necessary to enable the apparatus to fulfill the terms of your guarantee. The cost of so doing shall be charged to your contract.

Yours truly,
(Signed) Frank Lloyd Wright.

January 20-1909.

Courtesy Unity Temple. All Rights Reserved.



Dear Sir:-

Following is schedule of complete cost
of light fixtures for Unity House:

Special wood fixtures, ceiling & Posts.		
Woodwork, John W. Ayers	\$68.00	
Carpentry, Wm. Baurer	56.50	46.50
Globes, sockets, etc.		
Lincoln Fixture Co.	122.50	152.50
Wiring above, Cook & Co.	20.60	21.00
Hardware for hanging above		
Rogers & Nicholas	4.52	
Bolts for hanging		
Johnson Co. (paid by F.L. Wright)	.75	
Wall fixtures.		272.97
Lincoln Fixture Co.	48.51	
Hanging above, Extra fixture & cord		
etc. - Cook & Co.	16.30	
		64.81
Total		337.78

We are enclosing reports of certificates
#24, #25, #26, #27 to cover amounts yet unpaid
on above account.

John L. Wright



Mar 8 1909

31035.57
1786.11
32821.70
150

32661.66
32726

31035.57
30957.41
78.18

Rec 26648

My dear Mr. Adams:-

Mr. Mueller is entitled to \$34476.00 on account of work on Unity Church to date:
The extras about which there can be no question are:

Contract	\$32661.00
Foundation-bill rendered-	645.00
Finish Hardware	315.00
Organ Screen	690.00
Pulpit	165.00
	<u>\$34476.00</u>

Other extra work has been done, entailed by the nature of the work and not yet listed by Mueller. As I have myself informed Mr. Roberts, I have not cared to issue a final certificate to Mueller until these are all in. I have been unable to get them owing to Mueller's condition, but deem it unfair and unwise for that reason to longer hold McNulty out of his money when there is enough to pay him. To prevent his filing a lien on your property which he was determined to do if the certificate did not issue, I gave it to him. You are welcome to hold him off longer if you can. If you have written him that there is not enough left to pay him you have probably precipitated his lien.

The orders issued to me by Mueller I still have in this office and they constitute, according to his sworn affidavit, his whole indebtedness on Unity Church. They are:

McNulty	\$1140.75
American Seating Co.	925.00 ✓
P. Rinn	62.00
T.C. Gleich	835.00
Tyler & Hippach	30.09
John Ayers	40.00 ✓
Reagan & Hildner	122.00

4

Courtesy Unity Temple. All Rights Reserved.



UNITY CHURCH.
Statement.

Monolith Floor Unity House ,

- (1) area 2290 sq ft.
- (2) price 25¢ per sq.ft.
- (3) allowance made for omitting top dressing of concrete floor 5%.

455.00

Lettering,

- (1) either side over entrance to building
72 letters and 32 squares.
- (2) cost \$227.00.

Light Fixtures,

- (1) impossible to itemize.
- (2) should have \$450.00.

Outside Lights,

- (1) Two small lanterns, terrace, \$50.00 each, \$100.00.
- (2) Two lanterns with "Unity Church" in silhouette
\$150.00 each, - \$300.00.

Cement walks,

- (1) 350 lin. feet curb @ 40¢ per ft.
- (2) 1312 sq.ft. side walks @ 14¢ per sq.ft.

Grading,

- (1) ~~earth~~ \$75.00
- (2) Planting \$75.00.

Unity House to be ready for occupancy May 15th. 1907
Temple " " " " " " Sept. 1st.

Handwritten signature: Frank Lloyd Wright



March 19, 08.

Mr. F. L. Wright,
Chicago & Forrest Aves.,
Oak Park, Ill.

Dear Sir:-

While at your office sometime ago you intimated that when we came to take up the organ matter that you had two builders you wished to figure on the job and that you hoped might install the organ. If you have any such preference will you kindly let me have their names as soon as possible that I may take the matter up with them?

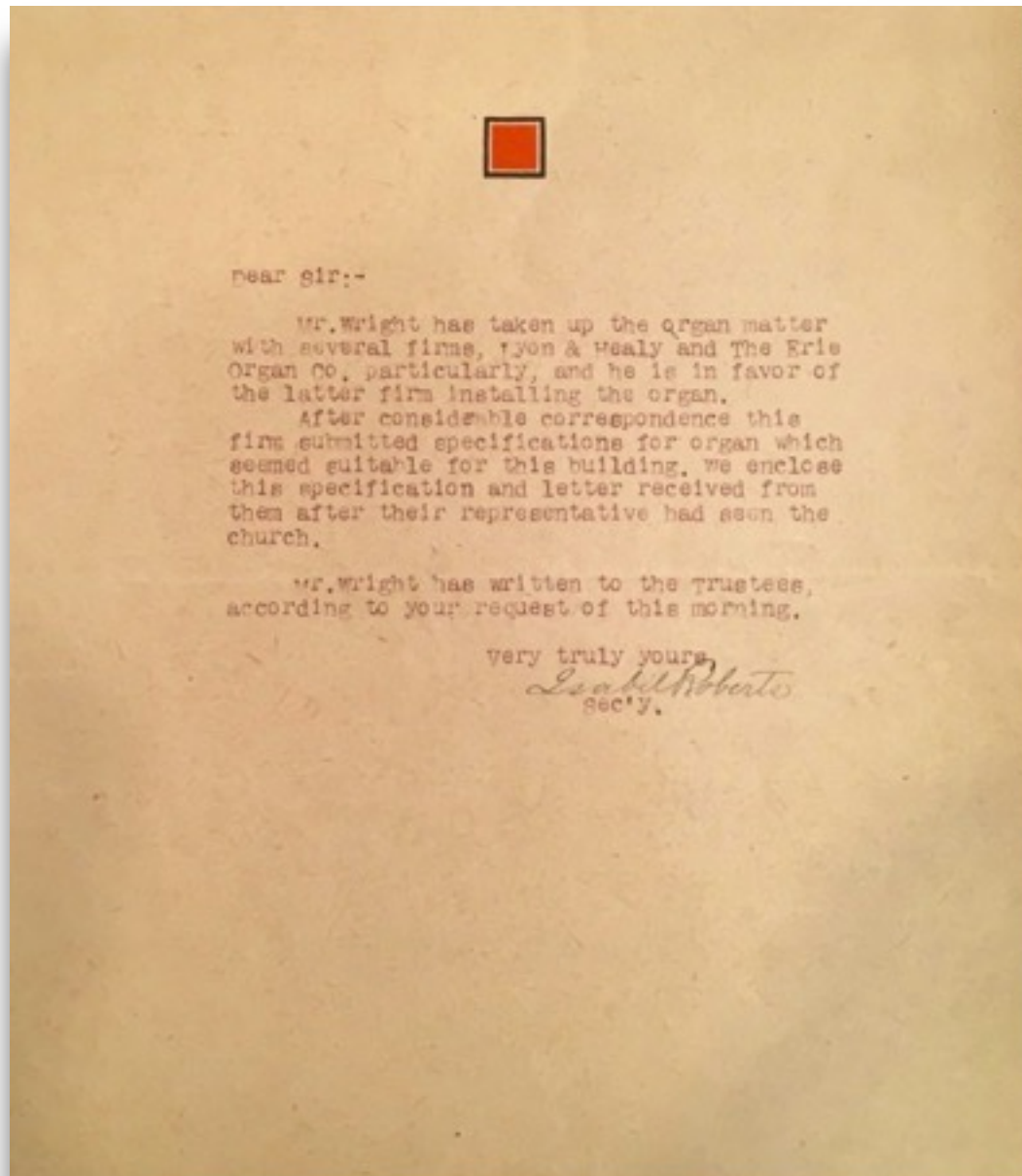
The Board is pushing me a little in regard to this matter now and it will be necessary to push it so that the organ may be ready to install upon the completion of the church.

Yours very truly,
EHE

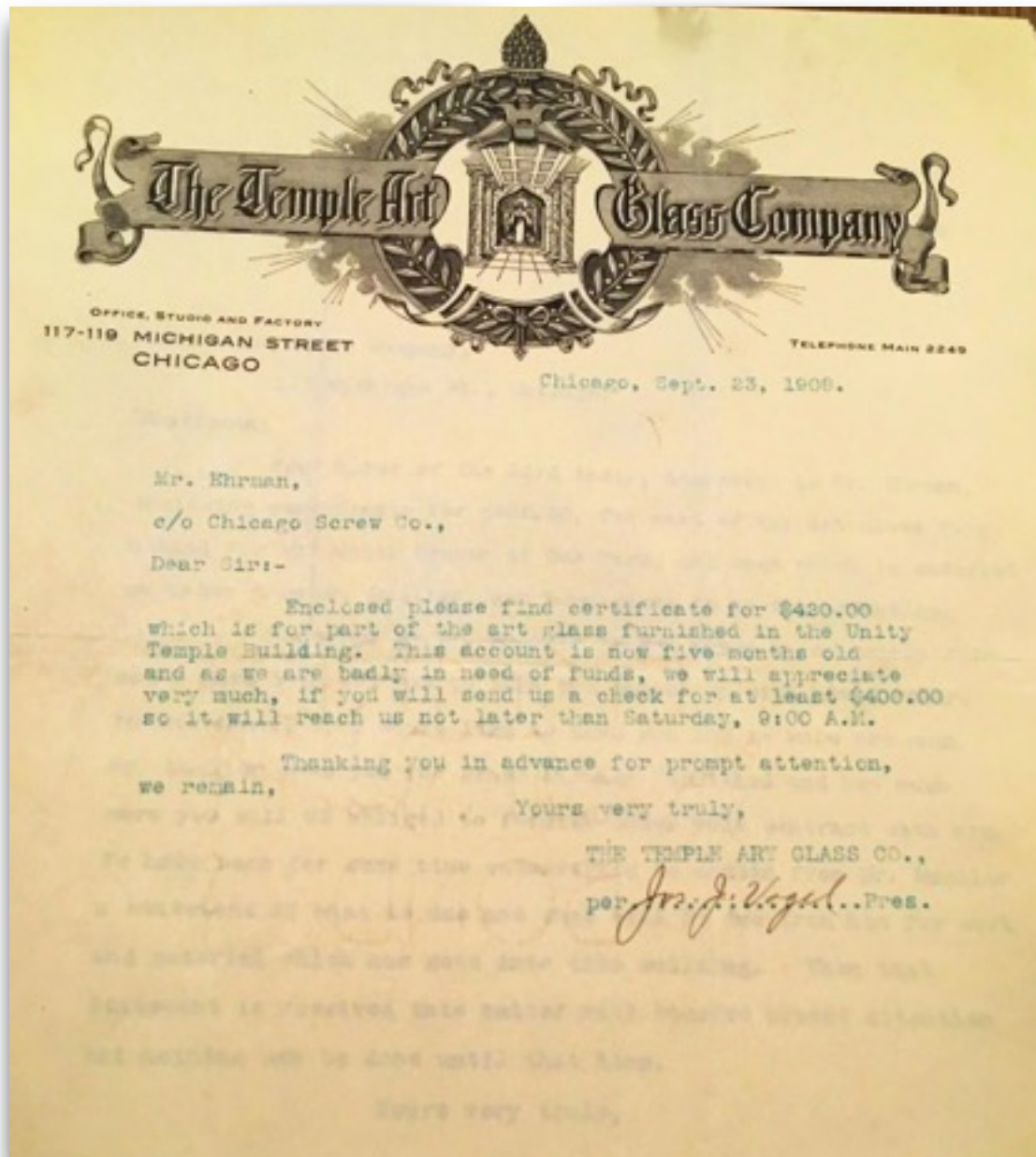
EHE, ES.

Letter to Wright from Edwin H. Ehrman requesting Wright to state his preference for the company he favored for the building and installation of the organ. The following exhibit letter from Isabel Roberts is in response to Ehrman's request.

*Courtesy Unity Temple and the Special Collections, Oak Park Public Library (OPPL),
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Letter from Wright's secretary Isabel Roberts (daughter of Charles Roberts) indicating that Wright favored the Erie Organ Company for the building and installation of the organ in Unity Temple. Other companies considered were J. W. Steere & Sons Organ Co., Springfield, Massachusetts; Estey Organ Company, Brattleboro, Vermont; Hastings Company, Kendal Green, Massachusetts; Hillgreen, Lane & Company, Alliance, Ohio, along with Lyon & Healy of Chicago as mentioned in the letter. The Estey Organ Company turned down the commission saying there wasn't enough room in the plans for an organ pipe chamber. The commission eventually went to the Coburn & Taylor Company.



Letter to Edwin Ehrman from The Temple Art Glass Company, the firm that was commissioned to manufacture the art (pattern) glass in Unity Temple, asking for swift payment of money owed. This was one of the many financial problems Ehrman had to handle.

*Courtesy Unity Temple and Special Collections Oak Park Public Library,
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On August 25, 1976, Oak Park High School student John Seminerio completed a model of Unity Temple that he had been working on for many months. The above photo shows John bringing the model to Unity Temple to be displayed in the entry hall. Unity Temple continued to be the home for the model for the next 39 years until it was removed for safekeeping and brought to the Wright Home & Studio during the restoration of Unity Temple in 2015-2017. When Unity Temple reopens in the summer of 2017, hopefully the model will return to its home to be admired once again by visitors to Unity Temple.

(Photo courtesy of the Historical Society of Oak Park & River Forest)