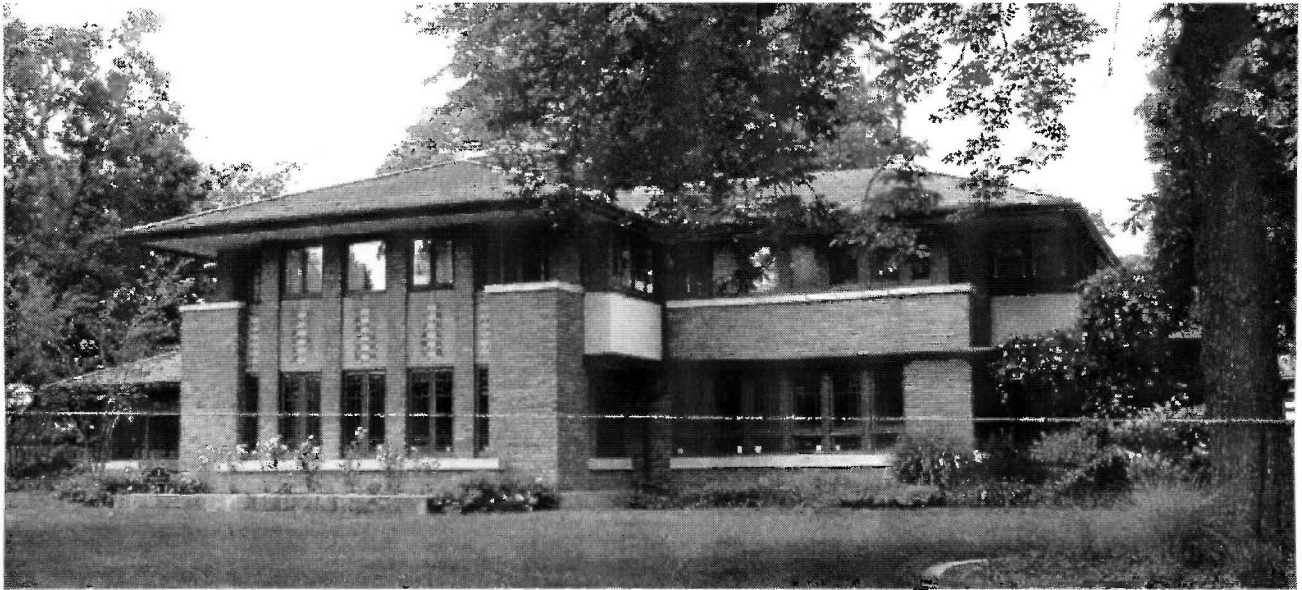




THE MUELLER RECORD

SPRING 2010 NEWSLETTER



#1 Millikin Place – Robert Mueller Residence

MILLIKIN PLACE, MUELLERS, AND MAHONY

If you enjoy architecture, a visit to Millikin Place in Decatur will bring a smile to your face. Here, on a quiet, wooded street are a number of beautiful Prairie School and Arts & Crafts design homes which date to the early 1900's and which owe their existence, in part, to the Mueller family. A small group of Decatur businessmen, which included Robert and Adolph Mueller, formed a partnership in 1908 to develop seven building lots on a parcel of land a few blocks west of downtown. This land was originally part of the property making up the Millikin Homestead which was the home of the President and founder of Millikin University. Three of the partners, Robert Mueller, Adolph Mueller, and Edward Cummings purchased lots and contracted for design services from Frank Lloyd Wright in Chicago.

Frank Lloyd Wright had achieved considerable fame as an architect by this time and many offers of projects were coming to his firm. Just as the initial work began on the Millikin Place project, Wright received and accepted a large commission taking him to Europe in 1909. A Wright associate, Herman Von Holst, was placed in charge of the Chicago firm and its existing projects. Von Holst, in turn, handed the Decatur project off to Marion Mahony.

Marion Mahony was only the second woman to receive a degree in architecture from MIT, graduating in 1894. A year later she joined Wright's fledging firm in Chicago as the first licensed female architect in Illinois and immediately became an influential force in the creative process. Although Wright put his name on nearly all the work produced in his firm, many of the concepts, drawings and details were from his subordinates and especially from Mahony. As an example, nearly all the stained glass designs for which Wright is famous were actually executed by Mahony. Additionally, Mahony is recognized, along with Wright, as the only architect to use the furnishings of a structure as an architectural element – hence the built-in furniture and distinctive furniture designs. Architectural historians have identified many of Wright's drawings as actually being the hand of Mahony and being of superior quality. The artistry of her drawings is recognized as the best in American architectural history.

It is known that Mahony took on the Millikin Place design work on the condition that she have complete control of the design. This stipulation indicates that the three homes in Decatur are, in fact, Mahony homes. Wright probably laid out initial sketches of the E. P. Cummings house at #2 Millikin Place and may have had a hand in Robert Mueller's home at #1 Millikin Place but Mahony was free to, and surely did, proceed with designs of her own creation. Plans for both of those homes were completed in 1909 with the Adolph Mueller home being done in 1910. In fact, the three Decatur homes were among the most detailed Mahony designs with her plans including furniture, carpets, draperies, silver service, and linens. The Decatur project also represents to largest group of Mahony designs in the world. The interior of the Adolf Mueller home at #4 Millikin Place is recognized as extraordinary with special recognition for the master bedroom. Adolph's home featured the latest in modern fixtures and even included a Mahony designed bat house in the back yard to help control insects.

Mahony hired Walter Burley Griffin to design the landscaping for the three homes and public areas of the Millikin Place project. Mahony and Griffin were later married and established an architectural firm of their own and continued the Prairie School architectural style for many years. Decatur is fortunate to have been left a part of this legacy and to have found a place in our national architectural heritage.



#4 Millikin Place – Adolph Mueller Residence

Note: Much of the material for this article was taken from *The Life and Work of Marion Mahony Griffin* by Janice Pregliasco appearing in the *Art Institute of Chicago Museum Studies*, Volume 21, #2 titled The Prairie School, published 1995.

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