

## ELMHURST HISTORY HIGHLIGHT: WALTER BURLEY GRIFFIN IN ELMHURST

Although famous for his architectural designs in Australia and India, the career beginnings of international architect **Walter Burley Griffin** are firmly rooted in suburban Chicago. Born in Maywood to George and Estelle Griffin in 1876, the family moved to 223 S. Kenilworth in Elmhurst when Walter was a teenager. Walter's father was heavily involved in the Elmhurst community, serving on the village board, and his mother was the first president of the Elmhurst Woman's Club. These Elmhurst roots kept Walter coming back to the village well into his storied career.

Inspired by visits to the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago, young Walter decided to pursue architecture as a career. He obtained a degree in architecture from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1899 and moved to Chicago to work as a draftsman in the studios of several progressive Prairie School architects, eventually landing a job at Frank Lloyd Wright's studio in Oak Park. It was there that Walter met fellow architect and artist Marion Mahoney, launching a personal and professional partnership between the two that would last the rest of his life. The pair were married in 1911.

While working at Wright's firm, Griffin undertook several independent residential commissions. One of which was the Emery House at 281 Arlington in Elmhurst. A wedding gift from William Emery, Sr., to his son upon marrying the daughter of Thomas Wilder in 1903, it was the first of three houses that Walter designed in Elmhurst. After leaving Wright's firm in 1906, he later designed the Sloane house at 248 Arlington in 1910 and the Beggs house at 296 Elm in 1911, the latter of which was demolished in 2002. In addition to residential projects, Griffin also designed the clubhouse for the Elmhurst Golf Club and the stables for the Wilder estate. He made drawings for a new plant for the Elmhurst Electric Light & Power Company while his father was on their board of directors, though it was never built. Outside of Elmhurst, more than one hundred homes across the Midwest are attributed to Walter Burley Griffin's practice.



*Walter Burley Griffin, photograph,  
EHM Collection, M2014.1.345*

Walter and Marion's careers reached new heights in 1912 when they were awarded the opportunity to design the new Australian capital of Canberra after submitting a proposal to an international contest the previous year. They left America for Australia in 1914 to oversee the

implementation of the plan, and they closed their stateside practice in 1917 when it became apparent that their business in Australia would be more than enough to keep them busy. The Griffins would go on to a successful career in both the “land down under” as well as in India before Walter’s untimely death in 1937.



Walter Burley Griffin left his signature architectural footprint on several continents, and although several of his local buildings are no longer standing, his ties to Elmhurst stand as an important facet of the Griffin legacy.

*Clubhouse at the Elmhurst Golf Club, designed by Walter Burley Griffin, EHM Collection, M2014.1.403*

*By Daniel Lund, Elmhurst History Museum, Curator of Collections, July 2020*