

March, 2007

Roger and Ruth Anderson Architecture Center

Discovering Hinsdale's Architecture

Rich Johnson has a passion. Professionally, he serves as broadcast manager for Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism. Privately, he hunts Prairie-style homes. With plans to author a book on Prairie homes in the suburbs, Johnson spends every available minute researching architects and their commissions. His field work brought him to Hinsdale, and to the Society's *Roger and Ruth Anderson Architecture Center*.

Johnson's research revealed that Charles A. Brown had commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright to design some "cottages" in Hinsdale around 1906. He felt this had to be the same Charles A. Brown who had Wright build a home for him in Evanston a year earlier. Supposedly, the Evanston home was to be a prototype for a housing development concept. So Johnson's first question to the Anderson Center's Sandy Williams was if the Wright cottages were ever built in Hinsdale. We continue to work on that question, but the mention of Charles A. Brown was startling. Williams knew that Brown was once a prominent Hinsdalean whose Prairie-style home (c.1904) still stood at **422 South Oak**.

Since Brown had a relationship with Wright, it was easy to theorize that his own home could also have been designed by him. Johnson felt that a visit to the property was required and called upon Don Aucutt of Wisconsin to join him. Aucutt is a published expert on Prairie architects, particularly George Washington Maher.

The current owners of the Brown home, John and Janet LaRocque, graciously allowed the visit. Aucutt and Johnson were visibly excited as they toured each room. This was, indeed, the commission of a significant architect – but not Wright! Aucutt found signs of George W. Maher's design in every room...the large central foyer, leaded glass window design, mosaic fireplace surrounds, wide stair treads, window sash detail, and a themed oak/acorn detail throughout. **Hinsdale's second G.W. Maher house had been discovered!***

We are sincerely grateful to Rich Johnson and Don Aucutt for their time and expertise in identifying this important home. We believe there will be additional announcements as we continue to learn about Hinsdale's significant architecture.

In his early years, George W. Maher (1864-1926) worked as a draftsman in the Chicago office of acclaimed architect Joseph Lyman Silsbee – side by side with fellow draftsman Frank Lloyd Wright. These young men, along with George Elmslie, Walter Griffin and others, shared ideas and design theory, eventually creating what became known as the "Chicago School" of architecture. As this blend of European Arts & Crafts and traditional styles swept the country, it became known as the enduringly popular "Prairie-style".

*Hinsdale's only other known Maher design is the home located at the southwest corner of Third and Garfield.