INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.
George Maher's "Rockledge": A study in architecture, patronage, and consumption

Bahnemann, Greta L., M.A.

University of Delaware, 1994
GEORGE MAHER'S ROCKLEDGE:
A STUDY IN ARCHITECTURE, PATRONAGE, AND CONSUMPTION

by
Greta L. Bahnemann

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture

Spring 1994

Copyright 1994 Greta L. Bahnemann
All Rights Reserved
GEORGE MAHER'S ROCKLEDGE:
A STUDY IN ARCHITECTURE, PATRONAGE, AND CONSUMPTION

by
Greta L. Bahnemann

Approved: 
J. Ritchie Garrison, Ph. D.
Professor in charge of thesis on behalf of the Advisory Committee

Approved: 
James C. Curtis, Ph. D.
Director of the Winterthur Program in Early American Culture

Approved: 
Carol E. Hoffecker, Ph.D.
Associate Provost for Graduate Studies

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As with any master's thesis, I have incurred a tremendous debt to those people who have graciously lent their time, knowledge, and assistance. My research in Winona, Minnesota was greatly benefited by the kind assistance of Mark Peterson and the staff of the Winona County Historical Society. I also wish to thank Winona State University, who graciously provided me with housing. A special thanks also goes to John Scuth; his interest in my topic and enthusiastic willingness to assist me during field work made the days spent at the Rockledge site much more profitable.

I would also like to thank the staff of the Minnesota Historical Society, many of whom responded to my research project with enthusiasm and interest. Thanks goes to Cheryl Robertson, who greatly aided my research trip to Milwaukee. I also wish to extend special thanks to Nicole Teweles, who graciously offered her hospitality, time, and invaluable assistance. I am also indebted to Fred King, whose willingness to speak about Rockledge greatly added to my perspective on this project. I wish to thank Robert
Edwards for the knowledge he provided about the current locations of Rockledge objects.

Many of the staff members at the Winterthur Museum also deserve special thanks. To both Neville Thompson and Bert Denker I owe a tremendous debt; they both provided valuable suggestions and sources to investigate. In addition, I would like to thank Sandy Manno and Pat Elliot for their able assistance—none of my questions ever went unanswered.

I also wish to thank Ritchie Garrison, my advisor, for his incredible patience and his never-failing willingness to devote both his time and energy toward my project. Ritchie’s sense of humor and reassuring advice kept my project focused and his comments provided both perspective and assistance when most needed. Finally, I owe much to my friends and family for their unfailing support and encouragement during the past two years. This work is dedicated to my parents, David and Abbie, who have always believed in me—even when I did not.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES ................................................................. vi
ABSTRACT ................................................................................. ix
GEORGE MAHER’S ROCKLEDGE: A STUDY IN
ARCHITECTURE, PATRONAGE, AND CONSUMPTION .......... 1
FIGURES .................................................................................. 54
BIBLIOGRAPHY ........................................................................ 99
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1  George Washington Maher .......................................................... 54
Figure 2  Morton L. Gould House, 1892, Kenilworth, IL ........................ 55
Figure 3  George W. Maher House, 1893, Kenilworth, IL ........................ 56
Figure 4  Edgar G. Barratt House, 1896, Kenilworth, IL ....................... 57
Figure 5  John Farson House, 1897, Chicago, IL ................................. 58
Figure 6  James A. Patten House, 1901, Evanston, IL ............................ 59
Figure 7  Harry Rubens House, Date, Glencoe, IL ................................. 60
Figure 8  Maynard A. Cheney House, 1900, Kenilworth, IL .................... 61
Figure 9  Frank G. Ely House, 1910, Kenilworth, IL .............................. 62
Figure 10 Franklin N. Corbin House, 1904, Kenilworth, IL ................... 63
Figure 11 Francis Lackner House, 1905, Kenilworth, IL ....................... 64
Figure 12 Rockledge, 1912, Homer, MN .............................................. 65
Figure 13 J. R. Watkins Medical Company Administration
             Building, 1911, Winona, MN ............................................. 66
Figure 14 Rockledge Terrace, 1912 ...................................................... 67

vi
Figure 15  Rockledge Side Chair. ................................. 68
Figure 16  Maher's Sketch of Terrace and Signature Detail. ......... 69
Figure 17  Maher's Sketch of Terrace and Steps and Signature Detail ........................................ 70
Figure 18  Rockledge Carriage Porch and Balcony. ....................... 71
Figure 19  Maher's Sketch for Dining Room Fireplace. ..................... 72
Figure 20  Rockledge Driveway and Carriage Porch ......................... 73
Figure 21  Floorplan of Rockledge. ................................................. 74
Figure 22  Maher's Sketch for Billiard Room Fireplace. ...................... 75
Figure 23  Rockledge Dining Room. .................................................. 76
Figure 24  Rockledge Wicker Chair in Reception Hall. ....................... 77
Figure 25  Rockledge Reception Hall. ............................................... 78
Figure 26  Rockledge Piano in Reception Hall. ................................. 79
Figure 27  Rockledge Bed Chamber. ............................................... 80
Figure 28  Rockledge Writing Desk and Side Chair. ............................ 81
Figure 29  Rockledge Side Table and Clock. ................................... 82
Figure 30  Rockledge Rocking Chair. ............................................. 83
Figure 31  Rockledge Bureau. ......................................................... 84
Figure 32  Detail of Rockledge Drawer Pull. .................................... 85
Figure 33  Surviving Rockledge Landscaping; Bridge. ....................... 86
Figure 34  Surviving Rockledge Landscaping; Bench and Stone Monument. ....................... 87
Figure 35  Surviving Rockledge Landscaping; Bench. ....................... 88
Figure 36  Surviving Rockledge Landscaping; Steps. ......................... 89
Figure 37  Rockledge and Surrounding Landscape. ......................... 90
Figure 38  Winona National and Savings Bank, 1916, Winona, MN. ......................... 91
Figure 39  Rockledge Water Damage. ......................... 92
Figure 40  Rockledge Overgrown Vegetation. ......................... 93
Figure 41  Rockledge Site After Demolition of Structure. ................ 94
Figure 42  Rockledge Barn. ......................... 95
Figure 43  Geo. W. Maher & Son Speculative House, 1921 Kenilworth, IL. ......................... 96
Figure 44  H. W. Mons House, 1924, Kenilworth, IL. ......................... 97
Figure 45  Geo. W. Maher & Son Speculative House, 1922 Kenilworth, IL. ......................... 98
ABSTRACT

George Washington Maher was a Prairie School architect whose work has often been relegated to the sidelines of Prairie School scholarship. Although his work deviated from that of many of the other architects of this period, his work is worthy of examination and reevaluation.

This paper presents an historical summary of Maher's career; and examines one of Maher's houses, Rockledge, in detail. By using the construction of Rockledge as a case study for Maher's career, greater insight was gained regarding Maher's working relationship with his clients, Grace and E. L. King. George Maher's work for the Kings demonstrates the changing face of American architecture during the early twentieth century, and also the changing relationship between architect and clients.
During the early years of the twentieth century, Chicago and the American Midwest were the focal point for the Prairie School, a distinctively American style of architecture, that grew out of the international Arts and Crafts Movement and an earlier architectural style referred to as the Chicago School. The Arts and Crafts Movement (founded by William Morris, John Ruskin, and others) began in England as a reform movement that sought an improvement in design standards. It was an approach that rejected the products of the machine age and advocated a respect for materials. Embracing the medieval craftsmen's respect for simplicity and aesthetic harmony, the Arts and Crafts Movement rebelled against elaborate Victorian interiors. Art and Crafts proponents pleaded for a return to simplicity and emphasized the elimination of unnecessary ornamentation. This aesthetic was congruent with many of the Prairie School's goals.

The architecture of Louis Sullivan and the Chicago School also played a key role in the development of the Prairie School. Although Sullivan was never formally allied with the Prairie School architects, his ideas concerning American architecture provided the younger generation with inspiration.
"Sullivan's message was that of elimination and simplification, of accepting the building mass and transforming it by ordering and simplifying the individual forms, the mass, and the openings, and then integrating a structured ornament."¹ Louis Sullivan advocated a reduction and simplification from the eclectic mix of historical styles that had characterized much of American architecture throughout the nineteenth century. Sullivan's theories about conventionalizing and transforming nature into ornament would play a key role in the Prairie School's theories regarding organic architecture.² Much of the work of the early Prairie School architects exhibited a Sullivan influence; yet it is the work of Frank Lloyd Wright that is singled out as exhibiting the progression of Sullivan's ideas. "It remained for Sullivan's most gifted pupil, Frank Lloyd Wright, to devise new forms and to assume a master's mantle. Wright's proved ability, unquestioned genius, and aristocratic presence soon brought matters into focus."³

With these words, H. Allen Brooks voiced the sentiments of many modern architectural historians. Much of the existing scholarship on the Prairie School has placed Wright in the forefront; his designs were extolled as the ultimate aesthetic expression of the time. Critics praised Wright for setting a standard by which all other architects were measured and judged,


and Wright’s fame has obscured the work and achievements of the other Prairie School architects, including the work of George Washington Maher. Those who deviated from Wright’s design precedent have traditionally been dismissed as unenlightened architects who lacked either Wright’s ability or vision and consequently were doomed to produce buildings that illustrated their aesthetic failures.

George Maher has been a victim of this type of criticism simply because much of his residential architecture sharply deviated from the “norm” that Frank Lloyd Wright had established. Because of this deviation, Maher’s work has been designated as marginal and unimportant to the goals of the Prairie School. Scholars traditionally have evaluated Maher in terms of the formal, stylistic, and aesthetic concerns of architectural history; consequently, many scholars are now calling for a reevaluation of George Maher’s career in broader terms. The work of Mary Corbin Sies and others advocates a multiperspective approach to Maher’s work. Corbin Sies maintains that one must look beyond the formal analysis and ultimately acknowledge that buildings are more than designs. The built environment exists as an essential component of every day life; buildings reflect, embody and transmit ways of creating and maintaining meaning.

The goal of this thesis is to examine in detail one example of George Maher’s work as an architect. Rockledge, the home of E. L. and Grace King,

---


reflects Maher's design philosophy. Maher's belief that buildings should serve the needs of their occupants was tested in the working relationship that developed between Maher and the Kings. The King home challenges many of Maher's critics and forces a reevaluation of Prairie School scholarship; Frank Lloyd Wright's was not the sole vision. While the King house existed as the mature expression of Maher's beliefs and concerns regarding American architecture, part of Rockledge's importance lies in the larger relationships that resulted from its commission.

George Washington Maher was born in Mill Creek, West Virginia on Christmas Day, 1864 (Figure 1). Maher's father, a United States army recruiting officer, was unable to find employment in West Virginia following the Civil War; and moved his family to New Albany, Indiana where George attended public school. By the early 1870s, the Maher family had relocated to the Chicago area. It was in Chicago where the young George Maher received his architectural training. Maher established his own practice in downtown Chicago in 1888. At some point during 1892 or early 1893, Maher was struck with a "severe nervous disorder" and in an attempt to regain his health, he traveled for some months in Europe. Sketching the landscapes and buildings of Europe, Maher found inspiration in the past and many of his early buildings reflected this influence. After returning to Chicago in 1893, he married Elizabeth Brooks, the daughter of Alden Brooks, a respected portrait

---

painter in Chicago. Following their marriage, the couple lived at 424 Warwick Street in Kenilworth in a house that Maher had designed. The Mahers had one child, Philip Brooks Maher, who also became an architect and joined his father's firm in 1914. The last years of George Maher's life were characterized by increasingly poor health. By the early 1920s Maher was plagued with the emotional problems that he had experienced as a younger man; and in 1923 he experienced a severe nervous breakdown. The ensuing years of Maher's life were spent in and out of various sanitariums and asylums (the majority of the time at the Milwaukee County Asylum in Wauwautosa, Wisconsin). On September 12, 1926, George Maher took his own life. He was sixty-two.

George Maher received most of his training in the drafting rooms of several Chicago architects. In 1878, at the age of thirteen Maher was apprenticed under the Chicago architects August Bauer and Henry Hill. During the spring of 1887, George Maher went to work for Joseph Lyman Silsbee, a fashionable and popular architect in Chicago who primarily designed residential structures in the Shingle Style. It was while working there that Maher first became acquainted with Frank Lloyd Wright and George Grant Elmslie; both of whom worked alongside Maher as draftsmen in Silsbee's office. Many of Maher's early buildings exhibit a strong Silsbee

---

7 Brooks, The Prairie School, 34.
influence which was characterized by rock-face foundations, long overhanging roofs, and short massive chimneys.\textsuperscript{8}

In 1888, Maher left J. L. Silsbee and opened his own office in downtown Chicago. Between late 1889 and early 1890, George Maher entered into a brief partnership with Charles Corwin; the partnership did not last and does not appear to have significantly affected Maher’s designs.\textsuperscript{9} During the years 1888-1897 Maher’s personal style gradually emerged. Moving away from the influences of J. L. Silsbee, Maher’s work went through several phases before culminating in an individual and distinctly different mature expression. Although Maher utilized many of Silsbee’s design approaches, he continually sifted his stylistic influences. Even in the early years of his career, Maher only appropriated those elements that suited him and he frequently altered these elements to conform to his own taste.\textsuperscript{10}

The earliest phase of Maher’s career, the years between 1888 and 1893, was the period of the strongest Silsbee influence. Silsbee was renowned for his Shingle designs. Not surprisingly, much of Maher’s early work consisted of frame structures designed in the Shingle style. The exterior elevations were often irregular and fanciful. Interiors had an openness of plan that

\textsuperscript{8}Wendy Kaplan, "The Art that is Life": The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875-1920 (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1987), 396.

\textsuperscript{9}Brooks, The Prairie School, 34.

sharply deviated from much of the revival architecture that dominated the American landscape at this time.\textsuperscript{11} Maher's houses of this period were dominated by steeply pitched roofs that were frequently punctuated by peaked dormers and enveloped in diamond-shaped shingles. Many of the designs from this early period are highly whimsical and exhibit Maher's willingness to experiment with various design ideas. The Morton L. Gould House built in 1892, is one of Kenilworth's examples of this early Shingle influence (Figure 2).

The second phase of Maher's early career, was probably the most short lived. For less than a year, in 1889, he experimented with the Richardsonian Romanesque style. The heavy masonry style with classical details and arches was characterized by rock face construction and horizontal bands of windows and arched openings with framing voussoirs. By 1890, Maher's work had moved into its third phase of exploration, the Colonial Revival; Maher would continue to work within the Colonial Revival until approximately 1895. Typical of the larger Colonial Revival movement, these structures were characterized by gambrel roofs, interrupted by dormers, and the use of Palladian motifs and classical columns and detailing. Many of these structures exhibit an English or European influence.

Maher eventually moved away from more traditional styles towards increasingly "Exotic" and picturesque designs. His work during the years 1892-1894 is noted for this Exotic style, which typically employed the use of

\textsuperscript{11}Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, "John Rath House: 2703 West Logan Boulevard," 2.
fanciful and whimsical details. He capped high pointed roofs and gables with slender finials and framed surrounding doors and windows with flame-like projections. Decorative pointed arches combined with the use of half timbering seem to suggest a middle European influence. Also characteristic of this period is the growing verticality or horizontality in designs; Maher moved away from the simple cube and began experimenting with rectangular structures. One of the finest examples of this interest in the exotic is Maher's own home in Kenilworth, built in 1893 (Figure 3). This house has been described as a "piquant blend of Victorian, Chinese, Swiss Chalet, Gothic, and Arts and Crafts styles."12 The house is dominated by its steeply pitched roof which is covered with diamond shaped shingles and punctuated by gables. The frequent use of the diamond shape, including the shingles and diamond shaped window panes combined with the larger diamond shaped window to the left of the front door, indicate an early use of Maher's "motif rhythm theory." The motif rhythm theory was Maher's design theory that utilized a single, indigenous motif as the unifying element of a structure. The use of a single motif, in Maher's mind, integrated a building's interior and exterior.

By 1895, Maher showed an increased interest in the horizontal. Roof lines became more streamlined with less imposing shapes. He frequently combined broad, hipped roofs with wide, overhanging eaves with a simple geometric mass. The reduction in the complexities of the building's shape combined with the new roof line served to emphasize the horizontality of

---

these designs. The horizontal emphasis of many of Maher's designs at this time was combined with a continued interest in the exotic. The Edgar G. Barratt House in Kenilworth (built in 1896) is an excellent example of this aesthetic exploration (Figure 4). The rubble stone base and chimneys, asymmetrical facade and the semi-circular tower are testament to Maher's wide influences and interests.

The year 1897 signaled the development of George Maher's mature expression. With the construction of the John Farson house, Maher's search for a personal style was over (Figure 5). Although many of Maher's later designs reflected the various influences of his early career, his work after 1897 was marked by a distinctiveness that set Maher's work apart from that of many of his contemporaries. Maher's designs would retain this distinctive quality until the end of his career in 1923. The Farson House, named 'Pleasant Home' due to its location at the corner of Pleasant Street and Home Avenue, was commissioned by John Farson, a prominent banker and philanthropist in Chicago. The house has been described as "a design that is formal and symmetrical with simple wall surfaces and a dominating horizontal emphasis." 13 The massive rectilinear building was designed without reference to past architectural styles. By utilizing geometric shapes, strong horizontals, and a tripartite division of the front facade, Maher created a distinctly different building. The Farson House was also noteworthy because of its organization of internal space; it employed an interior plan that was to

---

become typical of Maher's later work. The first floor of the house was divided into three equal sections: the living room, the entry hall and staircase, and the dining room and kitchen. While the use of a tripartite division of space was not unique to Maher's work, its use by Maher was significant in that it lent a sense of organization to his mature buildings that many of his earlier structures lacked.

With the completion of the John Farson House, Maher's work began to reflect his increasingly individualistic attitudes regarding American architecture. While many of Maher's views were closely aligned with those of the Prairie School, the products of Maher's thinking did not always resemble the works of other Prairie School architects. His writings on architecture reveal many of the reasons behind this divergence; he sought a distinctly American form of architectural expression. This search for a new form of aesthetic expression signaled Maher's break with much contemporary architecture.

George Maher believed that the goals of American architecture should be closely tied to the goals of the American nation. Architecture should "express the true spirit and life that surrounds us." He frequently referred to Theodore Roosevelt's call for the development of distinctly American forms of art and architecture, and condemned the use of revivalism in architecture, referring to it as a form of "sterility in creative or imaginative ability." Maher believed that architects should not chain themselves to the past by "plagiarizing" historical designs for modern day society. "Architects, as a class, are sincere advocates of the beautiful. Their high aims and aspirations
are to harmonize all true inspiration into their work so that their artistic creations will represent an expression of the real culture of their day and generation." In creating a distinctly different form of architectural expression, Americans contributed to their own national identity.

Maher also believed that American architecture, while firmly grounded in the spirit of the past, should create an art form from its own natural environment that suggests democracy and "reflect[s] the aspirations and character of the nation." Pointing to the richness of the natural environment, Maher advocated an architecture that reflected America's natural beauty and wonder:

Nature is abundant throughout this broad land, our flowers are varied and beautiful beyond compare, suggesting color and opportunity for decoration: shrubbery and vegetation meet the eye on all sides. Here is an inspiration worthy to consider by the artist—also our native birds and wild animals that inhabit our wonderful fields and forest. These incentives should be taken full advantage of so that he who observes and is of sympathetic mind and heart, may profit thereby in his creative work—aiming to express America.

In addition to capturing the American spirit, Maher believed that American architecture should stand as a contemporary representation of

---


society. This concept extended beyond the physical placement of a building in relationship to its environment to encompass a concern with a building's location in relationship to time and historical context. Buildings existed within a time and a place—"an expression of the real culture of their day and generation."\(^{17}\) Maher firmly believed that "the architect must fearlessly interpret in his work the needs and ideals of his fellows and his generation."\(^{18}\) In order to meet these needs one must "dig deep into the currents of life around us, feel the pulse of the time and then actually execute the ideals of the present hour."\(^{19}\) Maher maintained that underlying the principle of design was the idea that the architect played an essential role in the assistance of society and humanity "towards a higher conception of life."\(^{20}\) Maher believed that architecture existed as a means through which larger community and societal goals could be represented.

What Maher demanded was the creation of a distinctly American style of architecture without reference to historical styles. This new American architectural style would embrace the natural wonders of the American landscape. George Maher paired this new architectural style with his profound respect for the concepts of truth, honesty, and simplicity. He envisioned a time when "simplicity will prevail in its purest form, and art will

\(^{17}\)George W. Maher, "A Campaign of Publicity and Education," 176.

\(^{18}\)George W. Maher, "Progress," *Inland Architect* (June, 1900), 35.


become individualistic, an exponent of the surrounding life, a symphony dealing with the grandeur of actual existence.\textsuperscript{21} The application of this aesthetic vision was through the "motif rhythm theory."

Maher's "motif rhythm theory" of design was the central aesthetic innovation in Maher's career as an architect. In his numerous writings, he outlined the basis of this theory: "This theory, completely harmonizes all portions of the work until in the end it becomes a unit in composition...since each detail is designed to harmonize with the guiding motif which in turn was inspired by the necessity of the situation and local color and conditions."\textsuperscript{22} By using indigenous plants and colors or a specific geometric shape as a building's unifying motif, Maher worked to create designs that integrated a building's interior and exterior. By combining a holistic design concept with his interest in the indigenous, Maher sought a unique aesthetic expression. This expression was grounded in his desires to create an organic architecture that derived from the structure's physical environment. The motif rhythm theory was used as a systematic and ordered approach towards unified and cohesive designs. It was an architectural tool that would guide a building's design toward artistic harmony, honesty, and sincerity. The use of the motif rhythm theory provided Maher with a principle through which he would express his architectural goals and beliefs.

\textsuperscript{21}George W. Maher, "A Plea for an Indigenous Art," \textit{The Architectural Record} (Volume 21, 1907), 429-430.

Early applications of the motif rhythm theory included the John Farson House in Oak Park, the James Patten House in Evanston, and the Harry Rubens House in Glencoe. These three commissions reflect Maher's earliest attempts at integrating his design ideas with the goals of his clients. All three men were leading figures in Chicago's commercial world and all sought homes which expressed and reinforced their social positions. The three houses reflect a similar aesthetic goal, yet each house varied in its degree of success. The Patten House has traditionally been interpreted as an early example of the successful utilization of the motif rhythm theory; while the Rubens House has stood as the ultimate failure of Maher's design idea. The Patten House with its rusticated granite exterior used the thistle as its motif (Figure 6). The thistle was applied to the wall and ceilings in addition to its integration in the house's carved woodwork, fireplace mantels, and custom designed furniture. The window treatments and table scarves also employed this motif. Although Maher's supporters hailed the house as a "gratifying example of art from the philosophical standpoint" and celebrated Maher's theory as "a system which is at once novel and enduring," his detractors quickly found much to criticize.23 The motif-rhythm theory would eventually be dismissed by critics as "decorative" and "only superficially applicable to architectural design."24 Certainly some of Maher's early efforts in applying this theory were less than successful. Just as the Patten house had attracted


international attention for its successful integration of idea and form, the Harry Rubens house was deemed a failure, criticized for its overstated decoration (Figure 7). The chosen motif, a tall inverted U-shape, appeared on almost every surface. Although the result was incoherent and overwhelming, Maher was careful not to repeat this mistake of overstatement in future designs. Later designs that incorporated the motif-rhythm theory utilized the chosen motif within more manageable parameters.

Following the completion of the John Farson House, the Maher family (which now included Philip Brooks Maher, born in October of 1894) traveled to Europe. It is this trip to Europe and a trip to the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis in 1904 that exposed to Maher to the work of his European contemporaries. It was an exposure that would play an integral role in Maher’s mature expression during the twentieth century. Like Frank Lloyd Wright and George Elmslie, Maher was devoted to the systematic integration of a building’s parts, yet Maher’s mature style reflected a profound interest in the work of the Wiener Werkstatte and some formalistic similarities to the English architect C. F. A. Voysey. These European influences help to explain how Maher’s work diverged from that of the other Prairie School architects.

An important influence on Maher’s mature style was the work of the Wiener Werkstatte, or Vienna Workshop. Based on the belief that cultural growth was spurred by a break with the past, the founders of the Werkstatte sought to create a new public culture through art. Art would prove to be a means of exploration through which the nature of modern man would be
revealed. Drawing upon the baroque traditions of the Gesamtkunstwerk, or total art, the Vienna Workshop sought the creation of an integrated environment. "A house beautiful with all its attendant-use objects, for those who aspired to a new kind of personalized life beautiful." Founded in 1903 by Josef Hoffman, Koloman Moser and Fritz Warndorfer, the group of artistic collaborators included such distinguished artists as Gustav Klimt, Oskar Kokoschka, and Egon Schiele. The members of the Workshop worked in all media, including: architecture, furniture, ceramics and glass, silver, textiles, painting and graphic arts, bookbinding, and toys.

Within the Wiener Werkstatte, the architect assumed a key role; architecture was deemed the mother art form. Under the direction of the architect, an ensemble of craftsmen created the unified interiors that the Werkstatte sought. Josef Maria Olbrich was probably the most important architect of the first phase of the Werkstatte's architecture. Olbrich worked closely with Otto Wagner to create buildings that displayed a classical tradition yet exerted more modern design elements. Classical domed structures were elaborated with modern wrought iron work and filled with contemporary furniture and carpets. Maher's exposure to the work of the Viennese workshops stemmed from his visit to St. Louis in 1904. The work of Joseph Maria Olbrich, a German designer, was displayed at the Louisiana


Purchase Exposition in St. Louis and Maher undoubtedly became familiar with it.

A second influence on Maher's mature style is more difficult to establish with any certainty. The work of C. F. A. Voysey is often looked to as an important influence on Maher's work. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that directly links Charles Voysey and George Maher. Although Maher traveled in Europe, it is not known if Maher actually saw any of Voysey structures. The evidence for this connection rests mainly on the formalistic similarities in the two architects' work and some interesting coincidences. Maher's exposure to Voysey's work could have occurred either at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago or through the publication of several of Voysey's designs in The Studio, which was called The International Studio in America. Voysey's work, including many of his decorative designs for textiles and wallpapers, was exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair in 1893. The Studio, an English journal, published many of Voysey's decorative designs in addition to his architectural plans and writings about architecture.28 Although the connection between Maher and Voysey is tenuous at best, the similarity between the two deserves attention because it demonstrates a compatibility of thinking that shows that many of Maher's ideas and formalistic details were in keeping with contemporary international aesthetics.

Charles Francis Annesley Voysey (1857-1941), a British architect, insisted upon creating a "total design" and devoted his energies towards developing an holistic approach to architecture that included custom designed interior paneling, woodwork, and furniture. By using rural and vernacular traditions, Voysey sought to create a national architectural style. The result of his efforts was the creation of a domestic vernacular style that captured widespread attention and public appeal. Voysey's architectural designs were a revolt against the rampant revivalism found in late nineteenth century England; his simple forms and his emphasis on utility echoed many of the goals of the American Prairie School. Described as an architect with an eye for geometric form and a "craftsmanlike understanding of local materials," Voysey believed that an attention to detail would ultimately render unified designs.29 Voysey's trademarks as a builder included the use of horizontal leaded windows, deeply overhanging eaves, roof guttering supported on smoothly curved metal brackets, wall with shallow buttresses, and low roof lines that swept down almost to the ground.30 The work of Charles Voysey was distinctly individualistic--a similarity that Voysey and Maher shared.

Voysey's and Maher's work shared other similarities. Both architects firmly believed that the development of contemporary forms of architectural expression was essential to the identity of a society. The traditional must be

modified continually to accurately meet contemporary needs. Voysey and Maher also shared an interest in creating unified designs; both architects struggled at times to create the physical embodiment of their ideas and some designs were obviously more successful than others. Another, more subtle, similarity that the two shared was their respective positions in relationship to the larger architectural movements of the time. Just as Maher's work deviated from that of the American Prairie School, so too did Voysey's work depart from many of the designs of his English contemporaries. Voysey's insistence on unity and simplicity had set his work apart from other Edwardian architects (such as Ashbee and Mackmurdo). Much of Maher's mature thinking as an architect reflects similar ways of thinking about buildings; his work demonstrates an interest and an awareness of his English contemporary.

Maher's later work employed such Voysey details as the segmental arch, canted buttresses, multi-story bay windows and the use of geometrical shapes. Strong geometrics were utilized by both Voysey and Maher as a decorative foundation upon which much of a structure's ornamentation would develop. Although it is difficult to establish if C. F. A. Voysey's ideas influenced George Maher; there is an observable similarity to Voysey's work in many of Maher's later designs—including many of the houses he designed in Kenilworth and in the King commissions in Winona, Minnesota. The Maynard A. Cheney House, built in 1900, illustrates Maher's gradual

---

movement into his distinctive mature style; the house reflects Maher's increased interest in rectangular massing and geometric details (Figure 8). The slender arched windows above the front entrance combined with the third story circular window creates an effect that is reminiscent of the main entrance of Norney, a home Voysey designed in 1897. The Frank G. Ely House, a Kenilworth house constructed in 1910, exhibits many of the previously mentioned Voysey influences and is an important design precedent to Rockledge (Figure 9). The segmental arch is prominently used throughout the structure. The capitals of the porch, the front door and door frame, the chimney cap, and the gable roof of the second floor window all utilized the partially flattened arch. In addition, the house's sloping form and wide over hanging eaves are also reminiscent of many of Voysey's designs.

Two houses in Kenilworth appear to combine the influences of both C. F. A. Voysey and the Wiener Werkstatte. The Franklin N. Corbin House, built in 1904, and the Francis Lackner House, constructed next door in 1905, were built shortly after Maher had returned from St. Louis (Figures 10 and 11). With their steeply pitched roofs and dramatic gables, the houses bear a resemblance to designs by both Voysey and Olbrich. The use of exposed roof beams and prominent pergolas give the two houses an appearance that is distinctly different from the other structures that Maher had designed in Kenilworth.

Maher's interests in contemporary European designs combined with the development and implementation of his "motif rhythm theory" of design, ultimately pushed Maher's work in a decidedly different direction from that
of his American colleagues. As George Maher's work increasingly departed from that of his peers, it was subjected to increased criticism. States Arthur C. David, a contemporary of Maher's, "One feels impelled to ask the question 'why' about everything one sees." By substituting ideas for traditions and striving for "originality at any price," David felt that much of Maher's architecture came "perilously near to anarchy."32

One of the strongest modern critics of Maher's designs has been H. Allen Brooks. Brooks' criticisms can be summarized in four categories: 1.) Maher's designs were derivative.33 2.) He was incapable of generating unique designs for his clients. 3.) Maher's motif rhythm theory led to excessive repetition and was "inherently a decorative concept"34 4.) Maher's abilities as an architect and designer fell short of his ambitions and aspirations to contribute to an original American architecture. These views have traditionally been the judgment of George Maher as an architect. His work has been dismissed as decorative, his accomplishments remain unacknowledged, and many of his most significant designs have been virtually ignored.

Mary Corbin Sies rejects much of H. Allen Brooks' criticism and calls for a reevaluation of Maher's career; she maintains that much of the


33Brooks, The Prairie School, 282-283. Brooks states, "Maher's work...was showing more variety which indicated lack of direction rather than richness of invention."

34Brooks, The Prairie School, 36, 67.
information used in Brooks' analysis of Maher's career is inaccurate or exaggerated. The harsh critique of Maher's architecture stems, in part, from a bias that pervades much of the current scholarship on Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School. Wright's designs have been elevated as the ultimate aesthetic expression. In calling for a reevaluation of Maher's career, it is necessary to look beyond this traditional bias. Scholars have traditionally only evaluated Maher in terms of the formal, stylistic, and aesthetic concerns of traditional architectural history, but buildings are more than designs. The built environment exists as an essential component of every day life; Maher's career should be examined with this broader context rather than within the narrow constraints of the scholarship that only seeks comparisons to Frank Lloyd Wright.

The "failure" of any of Maher's designs, as determined by modern day historians and critics, must be balanced against Maher's own sense of accomplishment. "It would be folly at this time to make a just comparison between the relative merits of the classic and a modern school of architecture. No one for a moment imagines the modern day creations yet rival in beauty these costly monuments, or that any effort yet put forth is wholly worthy to represent the architecture of America. However, the efforts evolving from heart and mind of the artist who is striving to depict his day and generation is of ultimate value to posterity. Time alone must be the arbitrator in this momentous discussion. Posterity will utter the final word either of approval
or disapproval." In his work as an architect, Maher hoped to break through into a new design frontier. Modern judgments of his career must include an acknowledgment of Maher's attempts to address highly personal aesthetic concerns. The questions that Maher asked about the role of modern American architecture are of equal importance to the answers that he presented.

By 1910 Maher had achieved a marked degree of success. He had completed the bulk of his writings, had effectively transcribed his ideas concerning contemporary American architecture, and was in the midst of designing smaller residential structures. In many respects, the first decade of the twentieth century marked the apex of his career for most of his larger commissions had been completed. In 1911, however, George Maher began a working relationship with Grace and E. L. King, a wealthy couple from Winona, Minnesota, who would ultimately commission Maher to design eight separate buildings over the course of six years. The cornerstone of these commissions was a twenty-eight-room house that served as the King family's summer residence. Located on the steep, rocky bluffs overlooking the Mississippi River, the house was named Rockledge (Figure 12).

The history of Rockledge is inextricably tied to the history of the Watkins family and company. Joseph R. Watkins was born in Cincinnati,
Ohio in 1840 and moved his family to Minnesota in 1862. After securing the rights to make and sell Dr. Richard Ward's liniment in 1868, Watkins established his company. Watkins mixed the "secret" ingredients in the kitchen of his Plainview, Minnesota, home, bottled the liniment by hand in his woodshed, and sold the mixture from his buggy as he traveled through southern Minnesota. By 1885, Watkins had moved the J. R. Watkins Medical Company to Winona--a booming lumber town located in southeastern Minnesota on the banks of the Mississippi River. The company gradually evolved from the home-based operation run by a single individual into a larger commercial venture. The product line expanded to include extracts, salves, and a variety of home remedies, and the products were sold using "wagon salesmen" who canvassed southern Minnesota. The Watkins Company's products also were transported to other points in the Midwest using steamboat and rail. A two-story factory was built and company distribution points were established throughout the United States. In 1893 a branch distribution point had been established in San Francisco. A second branch was established in Memphis by 1910.

By the turn of the century, the Watkins Man was promoting over three hundred different products, including "spices, flavoring extracts, cosmetics, perfumes, household cleaning preparations, insecticides, mineral

---


supplements for livestock feed and the like."39 Typical of this homeopathic product line was the Watkins' Female Remedy which was first marketed in 1897. "Thousands of women lose their bloom and beauty at an early age on account of the peculiar ailments of the sex. They feel a delicacy about consulting a physician and they neglect taking advice until their troubles have passed the curable stage and have BECOME CHRONIC."40 Containing more than nineteen percent alcohol, the Female Remedy was undoubtedly powerful medicine. If the power of the product was not self-evident, the Watkins Man resorted to one of the many sales ploys advocated by the company. One ploy, understandably unpopular, called for the salesman "to look for dirty dishes in the sink, sprinkle Watkins soap flakes over them and work up a great lather to show what the soap could do. As the clincher, the dealer would scoop up some suds and eat them to demonstrate their purity."41 Although the salesmen frequently complained about the difficulty of maintaining their dignity while consuming a handful of soap suds, the Watkins Company rapidly became one of the largest direct sales companies in the United States by using creative salesmanship.

In 1911, the Watkins Company commissioned George Maher to construct a new administration building (Figure 13). J. R. Watkins did not live to see the completion of the new building; he died in Jamaica on

---

39Bormann, "Whatever Happened," 47.

40Bormann, "Whatever Happened," 47.

December 21, 1911. Following Watkins' death, the company passed to his nephew Paul Watkins and to his son-in-law E. L. King. Grace Watkins, the only surviving child of J. R. Watkins had married E. L. King in 1904. Despite Grace Watkins King's obvious business abilities—she was a member of the board at both the Watkins Company and at the family-owned Winona National and Savings Bank—her husband and nephew were the designated heirs to the family company. Paul Watkins was named as J. R.'s successor and E. L. King was named vice-president. According to one story, Watkins and King could not stand each other and agreed to alternate the running of the company every six months. During the six months that King was in charge, Paul Watkins traveled in Europe and collected art work; and during Watkins' tenure as president E. L. and Grace King established new branch offices throughout the world and enjoyed big game hunting in Africa.

In 1911, the same year that the Watkins Administration Building was constructed, Grace and E. L. King commissioned George Maher to design their new summer home. Rockledge, a twenty-eight-room house located just east of Winona, was the result. Nestled beneath the river's bluffs, the house was dwarfed by the steep cliffs that rose hundreds of feet directly in back of the structure. In keeping with George Maher's mature style, the house exhibited formalistic similarities to both the Wiener Werkstatte and the work of C. F. A. Voysey. The U-shaped building was two stories in height in addition to a high basement. Rockledge was constructed of steel-reinforced poured concrete and the exterior walls were sheathed in a buff-colored stucco. The house was detailed with wooden trim, canted buttresses, banded
casement windows, and uninterrupted eaves—all characteristic of the modern English domestic style that Voysey worked in. The expansive hipped roof was covered with red ceramic tiles. The addition of sleeping porches and verandahs in combination with strong horizontal lines linked Rockledge directly to the ideals of the American Prairie School.

To follow his motif-rhythm theory which emphasized design integration and to link Rockledge to its physical environment, Maher adopted the wild lily as his decorative motif. The lily appeared in the house's stained-glass panels and on the lamps and wall sconces which were custom designed for Rockledge. The image of the lily was also incorporated into the drapery and upholstery fabrics used in the house. The colors found in the southern Minnesota landscape provided Maher with Rockledge's color scheme. The browns found in the river cliffs and the many shades of green in the foliage were combined with the coral color of the lilies that grow wild in southern Minnesota. The house's terra cotta roof blended with the colors of the lilies and the brown wooden trim echoed the earthiness of the river bluffs. The greens found in the house's rugs combined with the greenish-brown stain on the furniture faintly suggested the foliage found out of doors.

In addition to the use of the floral motif and its corresponding colors, Maher employed strong geometric shapes. He used segmental arches and trapezoidal guttae throughout the house's interior and exterior. He noted

42Kaplan, "The Art that is Life": The Arts and Crafts Movement, 397.

43Kaplan, "The Art that is Life": The Arts and Crafts Movement, 397.
that, "the segmental arch with short flanges set upon canted buttresses is the main unifying device for Rockledge." This segmental arch was used on the exterior entrance for the portico, the crest rails of furniture, lamp stems, the finials on the fireplace tools, the supporting ends of the trestle tables, and even in the layout of the terraces (Figures 14, 15, and 16). An aerial view of the terraces reveal that the exterior walls of the terraces curve slightly outwards and form flattened arches. Trapezoidal guttae served as capitals on columns or as decorative drops; the shape was repeated throughout Rockledge. On the exterior of the building, guttae were used on the eaves and oversized guttae formed the low walls of the verandahs (Figures 17 and 18). The capitals of the interior columns, the radiator grilles, and the mantle decorations also featured this decorative detail (Figure 19). The use of this element in combination with the scale of his furniture is suggestive of the work of the Viener Werkstatte and the German designer Bruno Mohring. Mohring, whose work was also on display at the St. Louis Purchase Exposition, frequently used guttae both as independent capitals and as applied decoration. The scale of Rockledge's furnishings is certainly within keeping with the massiveness of much of contemporary Viennese designs.

A visitor's first glimpse of Rockledge was obtained while on Highway 61, a state highway which paralleled the Mississippi River. The driveway,
which was accessed from Highway 61, wound its way up the wooded hillside
to the house and eventually terminated in a cul-de-sac that lay between the
house and the river bluffs. The driveway passed underneath the carriage
porch which contained the entrance into Rockledge's Reception Hall (Figure
20). The interior of Rockledge contained an open floor plan with large rooms,
wide doorways, and large windows that provided uninterrupted views of the
Mississippi River and the surrounding landscape (Figure 21). The Reception
Hall, which was located in the center of the house, effectively divided the
house into separate living areas. To the north of the hall lay the billiard room
and stair hall and to the south lay the dining room and kitchen wing. In
addition to serving as the house's entry way, the Reception Hall also doubled
as an important family living space. The Reception Hall, Dining Room, and
Billiard Room all offered exceptional views of the Mississippi River and all
contained French doors that led directly to the terrace that ran the length of
the eastern facade of the house. All three of the rooms also contained large
fireplaces which varied slightly from each other in their decorative details
and mantle friezes (Figure 22). Both the Dining Room and Billiard Room
contained side porches on the northern and southern ends of the house. The
porches were weatherized with screened windows—a feature which greatly
expanded the amount of living space on the first floor during Minnesota's hot
and buggy summers. The second floor of Rockledge was divided into a series
of bed chambers; and the basement of the house contained a bowling alley,
complete with monogrammed bowling balls and pins.
The furniture and furnishings of Rockledge are significant in terms of how they contributed aesthetically to the final product. The interior of Rockledge could be termed a unified interior—an interior in which all of the furniture and furnishings conformed to and helped establish the aesthetic mood of the structure. The individual furnishings of Rockledge embody the motif-rhythm theory in microcosm. Each individual piece of furniture addresses the same issues as the house: every chair, table, and lamp existed as individual objects, yet they also existed within the context of the house. All of the objects Maher planned for Rockledge were designed to work in concert with one another; no object completely exemplifies Maher's goals without the assistance of the contextual quality of the entire ensemble. The furniture for the house was designed in suites; each room contained an individual suite of furniture, yet the furniture from the various suites were intermixed in the rooms in order to provide variation within each room.

Rockledge's Dining Room contained a centrally placed dining table with matching arm and side chairs (Figure 23). The fireplace contained a frieze of wild tiger lilies that was capped by a segmental arch. The segmental arch was also used as a cap above the built in sideboard which was flanked by glass faced display cabinets. Small groups of coral lilies were stenciled just below the ceiling molding and complemented the room's lighting fixtures which also contained clusters of lilies. The Dining Room's carpet, with its strong grid pattern, echoed the feel of the half-timbered ceiling. Rockledge's Billiard Room also employed the use of built in furniture and heavy oak billiard chairs that were reminiscent of the Dining Room's armchairs.
The furniture of the Reception Hall repeated the shapes of much of the furniture found in the Dining Room and in the Billiard Room yet some of it was constructed of wicker rather than oak (Figure 24). Some of the solid wood chairs and tables from the Dining Room and Billiard Room suites were placed in the Reception Hall in order to afford a greater sense of solidity (Figure 25). The Reception Hall also included a piano, which expressed the same aesthetic goal as the rest of the house's furnishings. The piano's music rack was crested with an elongated segmental arch and the piano legs were tapered in the same manner as the chair and table legs (Figure 26).

By designing the furniture so that it expressed the same design idea, Maher created a sense of unity; but by creating the furniture in a variety of mediums the repetition of the design idea was balanced by a sense of innovation and distinction. The colors and shapes of the individual pieces of furniture are also directly related to the house as a single aesthetic statement. Outside the context of Rockledge the furnishing are not as successful aesthetically. Rockledge existed as a complete environment; just as the house was related and tied to its physical surroundings, so too the furnishings are tied to the house.

The furniture that George Maher designed for Rockledge displayed many of the same decorative motifs and details as the house did itself—the use of the segmental arch, moldings and guttae, wide bases, and tapered shapes. The crest rails of the chairs were formed in the shape of a segmental arch. Formalistic art history has analyzed the furniture of Rockledge only in terms of its obvious visual characteristics. This reading of Rockledge's furnishings,
while interesting, has the potential to overemphasize or distort apparent influences. An art historical approach may place too great of an importance on Maher's design affinities rather than engaging in the broader context of Maher's built environment. Rockledge's furnishings must be examined within the remembered context of the house.

Maher's armchairs have been described as "loosely reminiscent of William-and-Mary-style leather examples and Chinese chairs, the Maher pieces manifest closer ties to the Secessionist style and to the work of C. F. A. Voysey. The Austrian influence can be seen in the segmental arch and the constructivist sides in which the wide panel with flanking columns beneath the arms is decorative rather than structural. Voysey's influence is most evident in the canted stiles whose thicker dimension is oriented toward the front."46 Although the influence of the William and Mary style and the Oriental is less apparent than that of the Viennese Secessionists, it is present in several noticeable forms. The leather covered chairs with their strong verticality are certainly suggestive of the William and Mary period in which turned chairs were frequently covered with leather upholstery. The plainness of decoration and lack of ornamental carving is also characteristic of both Rockledge's furniture and the furniture from the William and Mary period. In addition, much of Maher's furniture suggests an Oriental influence. This influence was apparent in such details as caned chair seats and the very nature of the house's floor plan: Rockledge's large rooms, scattered with area

46Kaplan, "The Art that is Life": The Arts and Crafts Movement, 398.
rugs and easily connected with wide doorways, suggested the openness of an Oriental floor plan. While much of the furniture and furnishings suggested a variety of influences, perhaps the most significant characteristic of Rockledge's interior furnishings is their close aesthetic tie to the structure itself. Maher tapered the legs of the tables and chairs and the chair stiles in order to reflect the canted buttresses of Rockledge's exterior walls.

The furniture of the Reception Hall, Dining Room, and Billiard Room sharply contrasts with the furniture of the second floor. The heaviness of the oak furniture from the first floor is accentuated by the dark brown leather upholstery and the greenish-brown stain. The finish on the furniture emphasized the tremendous proportions of the house and provided the rooms with a sense of mass. The large billiard table in the Billiards Room, the table in the Dining Room, and the piano in the Reception Room provided a sense of balance and proportion to Rockledge's first floor. Although the furniture from the second floor was equally as massive and as imposing as that on the first floor, the finish was very different. The second floor furniture was painted rather than stained. Covered with smooth, creamy white enamel paint, the furniture from the bed chambers had a sleek, streamlined appearance (Figure 27). The use of the painted finish was perhaps a reference to the painted cottage furniture that was popular in contemporary Victorian bedrooms. The innovation of the creamy white enamel finish was combined with more familiar motifs. The use of the segmental arch, canted chair and table legs, caned seats, and the tapering of the sides of the case furniture was all reminiscent of the furniture found on the first floor (Figure 28, 29, 30, and
In addition, the draw pulls of the case furniture were shaped in the form of the familiar trapezoidal guttae (Figure 32). Although much of the furniture from the second floor was just as massive as its first floor counterparts, it retained a lightness in appearance due to its painted finish.

Maher also designed Rockledge's silver—both flatware and hollowware. All of the silver, which contained Grace and E. L. King's initials intertwined amongst wild coral lilies, was manufactured by the Gorham Company in Providence, Rhode Island, but the final product reflected all of Maher's ideals. Rockledge's silver was a product of Gorham's Martele program, a special branch of the company that created hand wrought silver. Martele silver, which was Gorham's solution to the shoddy workmanship of most mass produced silver, was closely aligned with the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement in America. Produced between the years 1897 and 1912, the actual number of pieces produced in the Martele workshops numbered about 4,800. Rockledge's silver, which included the only set of flatware produced by the Martele workshops, also included a matching tea and coffee service and various serving dishes. The silver not only contributed to Rockledge's total aesthetic impact; but also illustrates that the Kings spared no expense in order to achieve the physical embodiment of Maher's ideas.

The lighting fixtures also played an integral role in the construction of a unified interior. The lamp that originally sat upon a trestle table in the center of the reception room of Rockledge exhibits all of the important motifs

---

and colors of Rockledge. Fabricated from brass and bronze with inset stained glass panels, the lamp is directly linked to Rockledge's exterior. The wild lily in the stained glass panels is executed in delicate shades of oranges and greens. Both the canted buttresses and the segmental arch that runs across the top of the fixture echo the continuing motifs of the house. Maher's designs for Rockledge also included various textiles, including rugs and window treatments. The weave structure of the area rugs, which employed a heavy, segmented linear design, mirrored the ceiling's use of exposed timbering. The furniture and furnishings of Rockledge reflect Maher's desire to implement a "geometrically derived" and "graphically oriented" design plan.48

Just as Rockledge's furnishings and furniture were tied to the house as a whole, so too was Rockledge's surrounding landscape. The grounds around Rockledge were conceived of by Otsuka, a landscape architect based in Chicago. Comprised of rock gardens, sculptural plantings, stone monuments and bridges, Rockledge's gardens were designed to relate to the Oriental feel of the structure (Figure 33). Intimate seating areas and steps were crafted using native rocks stone, the result were structures that were so naturalistic and organic in appearance that they appeared to have emerged from the earth (Figures 34, 35, and 36). More importantly, the gardens that surrounded Rockledge were a link between the house and its larger, natural surroundings. Rockledge's landscaping was an intermediate step between

the house—a highly controlled environment—and the larger Minnesota landscape—a wild, overgrown forest at the base of the river bluff (Figure 37). The use of the landscaped exterior was another means of manipulating the environment. As the furnishings related to the house, the house related to the gardens, and the gardens provided a link with the rest of the world.

The process of constructing a building is one important facet of architecture; the building process is the translation of an aesthetic idea into the physical reality of a building. By examining the surviving artifacts that remain from the Rockledge commission, it is possible to reconstruct the transformation of Maher's ideas from their abstraction on paper to their physical reality. The surviving correspondence includes letters from E. L. King and George Maher in addition to letters from E. L. King to the various sub-contractors who worked on the construction of Rockledge. These contractors included the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, the manufacturers of custom designed bowling alleys, billiard tables, and other "playing equipment," and the Mosler Safe Company of Hamilton, Ohio. Also involved in Rockledge's construction was the Barrett Bindery Company, located in Chicago, and Haglin-Stahr, the house's general contractor, with their home offices in Minneapolis. Much of the metalwork found in Rockledge was executed by Willy Lau, a Chicago based metal craftsman who fashioned custom designed lighting fixtures and ornamental metalwork. Included in Lau's commissions were the house's window screens and exterior lights in addition to the andirons and fireplace tools. The andirons and
fireplace tools were fabricated by Lau based on rough sketches made by George Maher (Figures 19 and 22).

The correspondence between E. L. King and the various craftsmen illustrates that, while King was often very opinionated and adamant in his demands about the quality of the final product, he usually deferred to George Maher regarding the appearance of the house and its furnishings. Maher's opinions regarding Rockledge's final appearance were usually closely followed. Any dissatisfaction that E. L. King expresses in his letters usually concerned the slowness of the work or the quality of the finished product. According to E. L. King, Willy Lau's lamp shades were not large enough and both the linolights in the dining room sideboard and in the billiard room were each short one socket. King's letters also reveal his concerns regarding loafing workmen and the quality of the goods that were delivered to the Rockledge for installation. King also frequently voiced his irritation with the delay in the shipment of completed objects. Writing to the Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, King demanded to know "What's the matter with the billiard table you were going to ship on or before June 3rd? I have been waiting for this table for some time and would like to know definitely when I may expect it." Complaints about the slowness of the work continued throughout the summer of 1912 and Lau's response to an earlier complaint

---

49 E. L. King to Willy Lau, 14 June 1912, King Family Papers, Winona County Historical Society, Winona, Minnesota (hereafter King Family Papers, WCHS).

50 E. L. King to Brunswick-Balke-Collender Company, 6 June 1912, King Family Papers, WCHS.
was characteristically apologetic, "We are doing our best to push this work along for you."\textsuperscript{51}

Although many of the letters demonstrate King's assertiveness regarding the completion of Rockledge and its furnishings, many of the letter reveal another aspect of the Kings' relationship to the craftsmen and George Maher. The Kings' complaints regarding the progress of the house were combined with a deference to Maher's ideas regarding Rockledge's final appearance. Writing to the Barrett Bindery Company in Chicago, E. L. King stated his desire to have customized leather magazine binders "with lettering in gold" but added that he "would be pleased to receive any suggestions you have to offer."\textsuperscript{52} Although King frequently expressed his dissatisfaction with the progress of the structure, King continually referred to Maher's plans regarding the house. Writing to Willy Lau regarding the progress on two outside lamps, King asks "Did Maher say anything to you about two outside lamps for the garage, similar to the post lamps on the outside of the residence? If Maher did not mention this matter to you, please take it up with him at once."\textsuperscript{53} Although it is apparent that King felt comfortable dealing with the scheduling logistics of building a house—he chastised the workers who were behind schedule and those that delivered shoddy products—it is less obvious how confident King felt about making aesthetic judgments and

\textsuperscript{51}Willy Lau to E. L. King, 13 May 1912, King Family Papers, WCHS.

\textsuperscript{52}E. L. King to Barrett Bindery Company, 30 May 1912, King Family Papers, WCHS.

\textsuperscript{53}E. L. King to Willy Lau, 14 June 1912, King Family Papers, WCHS.
decisions. Most of these larger decisions appear to have been left for Maher's judgment. One exception to this trend was the construction of the "jardinerrs," the large ornamental vases that stood in the Reception Hall. King wrote to Willy Lau stating that he and Grace King desired the vases to be constructed from cast bronze rather than from copper, as Mrs. King "does not especially care for hammered copper." This suggestion stands in sharp contrast to much of the surviving correspondence. Willy Lau, writing to the Kings about the progress on the lighting fixtures and andirons in the fall of 1912, stated "You will recollect that you and Mrs. King came in to see these lamps, and at Mr. Maher's suggestion, we changed them."

Several patterns emerge from the correspondence. Although E. L. King took a strong role in the process of constructing his summer home, that role was essentially one of detachment. The Kings, while exceedingly interested in the quality of the final product, really had little to say about the aesthetic appearance of Rockledge. The Kings assumed the role of patrons, a role that required few decisions. The Kings, in deferring to Maher's aesthetic judgment, ultimately created a building that reflected Maher's highly ordered architectural landscape. The Kings, through their acquiescence, became subscribers to George Maher's aesthetic ideas. The extent to which the Kings were committed to Maher's ideas regarding the motif of Rockledge is demonstrated in a letter that Grace King wrote to her husband regarding the

54E. L. King to Willy Lau, 24 August 1912, King Family Papers, WCHS.

55Willy Lau to E. L. King, 31 October 1912, King Family Papers, WCHS.
silver hollow-ware produced by Gorham to match the flatware. "Gorham's sent a design for service plates which is just as stupid as the rest of them. Maybe we had better take it just to harmonize with the rest." Although Mrs. King's response to the silver presented by Gorham was less than enthusiastic, she accepted Gorham's design. Clearly, the Kings were committed to Maher's conception of Rockledge; and that commitment, at times, extended beyond their own enthusiasm for the individual objects. Grace King's letter to her husband reveals that the couple lacked a certain level of aesthetic confidence or an unwillingness or reluctance to assert their own opinions regarding the final conception of Rockledge.

Rockledge, as it existed upon its completion, was Maher's attempt to impose his aesthetic order on the Kings and that aesthetic order was precise in its dictates, from the landscaping around the house to the monogrammed bowling pins. George Maher, with the Kings' acquiescence, created a home that was a work of art and that was simultaneously a celebration of controlled surroundings. By using the motif rhythm theory, Maher rigidly controlled the aesthetic variables. While Maher's ideas created custom designed structures, there was little room for the personal expression on the part of the building's occupants. Rockledge would never comfortably accommodate the physical trappings of family history, for there was no room in this dictated interior for the untidy accumulation of ancient curiosities. The final house was unquestionably beautiful; yet that beauty was crippled by its artificial

---


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
rigidity, it is difficult to live with a work of art that does not allow much room for personal expression and change. Maher’s aesthetic organization and rationalization resulted in an interior that was just as constraining and constricting as the Victorian eclecticism and morality that Maher rebelled against. While the correspondence between the Kings, George Maher, and various craftsmen reveals a limited aesthetic give and take, the finished house was a final statement that was hard to alter without destroying the very rhythms upon which its aesthetic unity was built. The house, as an object, eventually created a tension between its existence as a work of art and its livability as a house, and the King family ultimately rejected the constraints of Rockledge’s dictated interior aesthetic.

After the completion of Rockledge, the Kings commissioned more than five additional structures from Maher, including the family owned bank (Figure 38), several warehouses for the Watkins Company, and a winter home referred to as Seabreeze in Daytona Beach, Florida. Much of the correspondence between George Maher and the Kings survives from the Florida commission. The correspondence regarding Seabreeze, which was first conceived of in early 1914, is significant in that it illustrates the changing nature of the Kings’ relationship with George Maher. Two years after Rockledge, the Kings appear to have discovered their own aesthetic voice. E. L. King’s letters to George Maher reveal that E. L. King dictated what Seabreeze would contain. King’s requests regarding the house’s appearance and arrangement of internal space were precisely stated. The Kings knew what they wanted and used Maher’s abilities as an architect to design a
building that they had conceived. E. L. King wrote to Maher in order to invite him to visit Florida and discuss the plans of the new house. "We can take the matter up with Mrs. King, as she has some very decided ideas about this house."\(^57\) King went on to elaborate in the same letter what they thought Seabreeze should include. The first floor would be comprised of a "large living room and music room combined. We haven't much use for a library, but could work in a few shelves for books magazines etc. Dining room and kitchen. Entrance hall with stairway."\(^58\) The second floor would contain a nursery wing with "four rooms, 2 baths, 1 sleeping porch" and "two guest rooms with 1 bath between, 2 dressing rooms. (Be sure the lights are right) Large closets. 1 sleeping porch in connection." The owners bedroom suite, according to King, should contain two baths, two dressing rooms, two closets, and two shoe closets "to open into hall along base board." The closets were to divided into compartments and the dressing room must "contain shampoo basin, manicure table and large enough for couch."\(^59\) These requests accompanied stipulations about the type of plumbing in the house with additional demands regarding the layout of the garage, wood shed, and servant quarters. The days of always deferring to Maher's suggestions appeared to be over.

---

\(^{57}\)E. L. King to George Maher, 8 February 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.

\(^{58}\)E. L. King to George Maher, 8 February 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.

\(^{59}\)E. L. King to George Maher, 8 February 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
On March 17, 1914 Maher wrote to the Kings with suggestions for the house's exterior finish. He suggested that the exterior be of a "light green plaster" with a roof of "Spanish tiles of grey green effect."60 Two days later Maher wrote again with an additional color scheme, pink tiles with either cream or white plaster.61 King's response to these color suggestions indicates that they chose to reject all of Maher's options. Writing on the March 24, King announced that they had decided upon a red tile roof with white plaster. The debate regarding the Seabreeze's color scheme continued throughout the spring and into the summer of 1914; in July, Maher again suggested the use of a grey green tile roof with light green plaster. He referred to a house that he had recently finished in Chicago with the same treatment and stated that it "certainly looks very satisfactory from an artistic stand-point."62 The tension between architect and client was in evidence; both the Kings and George Maher desired aesthetic control of the final product. The final choice proved to be a compromise; E. L. King wrote to Maher with their choice of colors. The Kings decided upon the grey green tile with white plaster.

This would not be the last time in which both the Kings and Maher would compromise. By the end of July, Grace King was questioning the necessity of the pergola. E. L. King wrote, that "she does not seem to favor a pergola and would like to know if the house would not look fully as well

---

60George Maher to E. L. King, 17 March 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
61George Maher to E. L. King, 19 March 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
62George Maher to E. L. King, 13 July 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
without it."63 Maher responded three days later with the comment that "I always have felt the house should have an elongation at his particular end of the building in order to counteract the height of the building." Maher adds that the pergola could made into a "very attractive feature, for instance, the floor could be of tile and appropriate vines and flowers trellaced over the open timber work."64 Although the Kings deferred to Maher's request that the pergola be included, they did add the stipulation that it would not be paved with tile.65 Work on Seabreeze progressed slowly and the pergola was one of the first elements to be dropped from the plans by the Kings. In October King wrote to Maher requesting that the pergola be dropped from the house as "it may detract from the house itself" but also added that he feared it would further slow the work on the structure.66

The arguments regarding Seabreeze's final conception continued throughout the fall of 1914. On October 10, Maher wrote to the Kings informing them that he had made sketches of various art glass designs, with the idea that these designs would be appropriate for Seabreeze. The Kings' response was unenthusiastic. E. L. King wrote, "I have submitted your sketch for the art glass for the residence to Mrs. King, and she is of the opinion the sketch is hardly suited to Spanish architecture. Perhaps you may have some

---

63E. L. King to George Maher, 25 July 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
64George Maher to E. L. King, 28 July 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
65E. L. King to George Maher, 31 July 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
66E. L. King to George Maher, 6 October 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
other suggestion to offer that will meet with the approval of Mrs. King."\textsuperscript{67} Maher's reply advocated the use of art glass; but King's handwritten notes on the same letter indicate that he was not convinced. King believed that plain glass was easier to clean and easier to replace if broken. He added that "we have had quite a number of broken windows and doors at Rockledge and have had them replaced on short notice. With special glasses broken, in Florida, we would have to send to Chicago for replacements which would necessitate considerable delay and annoyance."\textsuperscript{68} King's decisions were not only based on aesthetic considerations, but also on convenience. Sending to Chicago for replacements panes was not an easy solution to potential problems. Maher's response to the Kings' decision indicated that he still believed he could change the Kings mind, "I am sorry that you have cut out the art glass in the third story since the treatment I had in mind was gold glass in squares also white opalescent which would give a sparkling effect from a distance. I am inclined to think you do not understand the scheme I had in mind, suppose I have Giannini and Hilgart make a sample light before you decide to change this to plain glass."\textsuperscript{69} Maher appeared to believe that the Kings did not understand the plans rather than acknowledge that they had rejected them outright.

\textsuperscript{67}E. L. King to George Maher, 12 October 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.

\textsuperscript{68}George Maher to E. L. King, 13 October 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.

\textsuperscript{69}George Maher to E. L. King, 21 October 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
The conflict regarding the existence of art glass in Seabreeze appears to have been one of the last major conflicts between architect and client. E. L. closed his November 27, 1914 letter to Maher with the comment, "we are having a great time buying furniture and rugs for the Florida residence." This letter from late November is one of the last letters in the Seabreeze correspondence. Seabreeze, in its final form, was just as much a product of Grace and E. L. King's thinking as it was George Maher's. With the Kings purchasing the furniture and rugs for the house, it is clear that Maher did not have a hand in designing Seabreeze's interior. There was no room in Seabreeze's interior for Maher's rigidly dictated designs. Seabreeze embodied the King's own aesthetic choices; not the ones imposed by George Maher.

The differences between Rockledge and Seabreeze and the manner in which each was conceived and constructed ultimately leads to questions about the nature of the Kings' relationship with George Maher. The rejection of the aesthetic constraints of Rockledge also leads to questions regarding the demise of the Prairie School. The architects that built houses for clients with little aesthetic confidence ironically helped their patrons gain an architectural confidence that at times pushed the patrons beyond the architect's control. Rockledge was built for two people who had considerable means but little knowledge of American architecture. They chose Maher for the commission and he in turn supplied them with a design that answered all design

70E. L. King to George Maher, 27 November 1914, King Family Papers, WCHS.
questions. The Kings were not forced to make many aesthetic decisions. The ease in which such a house could be designed and built existed in sharp contrast to the ease in which it could be lived with. The Kings undoubtedly learned this in the three year time gap between Rockledge's commission in 1911 and Seabreeze's commission in 1914. In the interim the Kings discovered their own aesthetic voice. If they were not always certain of exactly what they wanted they knew what they did not like and they were prepared to assert their rights as patrons.

The construction of Seabreeze, then, illustrates the difficulties of conceptualizing buildings and domestic interiors as art works. Seabreeze could be described as the reassertion of the Kings' vernacular lives. They built a house which could be filled with furniture and rugs of their choice and with family photographs and mementos. There was no room in Seabreeze for art glass or Martele silver from Gorham. Simultaneously, the commission of Seabreeze raises larger interpretive issues and questions: what was the relationship between the aesthetic confidence of the Prairie School patrons and the demise of the Prairie School movement.

H. Allen Brooks attributes the decline of the Prairie School primarily to the idea that women were less sympathetic toward the Prairie School than men. "The midwesterner increasingly rejected individuality in favor of conformity, that the client rather than the architect stipulated the change, and that the housewife, sooner and more readily than her husband, renounced the work of the Prairie School."71 Women, according to Brooks, increasingly

---

looked to eastern magazines for architectural inspiration and rejected the Prairie School as passé. Brooks states that while men would accept an architectural design as "logical and apparently sound, the wife would reject them as being out of fashion." It seems unlikely that an entire school of American architecture would become obsolete based solely on the objections of the housewives of the midwest. Although Brooks states that the midwesterner rejected individuality in favor of conformity, that statement could be reversed to provide a more complex explanation of the Prairie School's demise. The clients of the Prairie School, as in the case of the Kings, could reject the conformity of the dictated Prairie School interior in favor of the individuality of expression that could be gained from alternatives to the Prairie School.

"Birds roosted in the broken walls, magazines and shards of glass littered the floor, and a jungle of weeds obscured the front door." By the spring of 1987, Rockledge's tile roof, exterior walls and foundation were in drastic need of repair (Figure 39 and 40). Mr. Otsuka's landscaping had become entangled with native self-seeding plants and had lost their original sculptural effect. Many of the original elm trees had succumbed to Dutch elm disease and the house had become a victim of neglect and vandalism. Rockledge's splendor had faded. During the summer of 1987, bulldozers and

72Brooks, The Prairie School, 338.

the wrecking ball leveled what had once been one of George Maher's architectural masterpieces (Figure 41).

The house had undergone many changes since its completion in 1912, including a substantial remodeling of the interior in 1931 by John Wentworth. During this remodeling project, Grace and E. L. King elected to remove many of the distinctive Maher touches, including the oak stair cases, fireplace mantels, and the house's custom designed furniture. A sleek marble staircase replaced the original and many of the rooms were altered to include chrome fixtures and entire walls of mirrors. The furniture that Maher had painstakingly designed to complement the interior spent the next forty five years in the estate's barn (Figure 42).

Rockledge's remodeling was described in the October, 1934 issue of the Golfer and Sportsman's Magazine, for in its newly remodeled state, the editors had selected Rockledge as the journal's home of the month. A detailed description of the house was accompanied by many photographs of Rockledge's new interior. In describing the house's new appearance, Grace King stated, "I happen to like the modern spirit of simplicity and elimination. We avoided the restless, freakish modern art and strove for restfulness. I never tire of our modernism and we've been living with it for four years." The implication of Grace King's statement is that the Kings eventually tired of

---

74 There has been some speculation that Philip Maher, George Maher's son, might have been involved in the remodeling of Rockledge. No concrete evidence has surfaced; yet the idea remains an intriguing possibility.

75 Kathryn Handy Fuller, "The Home of the Month," The Golfer and Sportsman's Magazine (October, 1934), 36.
Rockledge. The dictated environment of Rockledge eventually produced an atmosphere that was so constraining that the Kings found it unlivable; but a house filled with personal mementos, hunting trophies, and furnishings of widely varying colors and textures made for a house with enduring appeal.

Rockledge's Reception Hall now contained white walls and white marble floors. Black and white hand blocked draperies offset the deep blue davenport and the animal skins, hunting trophies from the Kings' trips to Africa, which were scattered on the floors. The living room, a newly created room, contained a "zebra striped davenport" and low tables with "interesting metal and glass lamps." Flame colored sofa and chairs flanked black marble and chromium fireplaces. The library, also a newly created room, contained yellow cork walls with green window treatments, rugs, and chairs. A "quaint" derby-shaped lamp sat on Mr. King's desk which also contained "other evidences of personality"; photographs of Mary Eleanor King (Grace's aunt), E. L. King and his son E. L. King, Jr. also rested on the desk. The glass shelves of the library contained various curios and objets d'art that the Kings had collected while in Vienna: porcelain football players and an African-American orchestra in addition to various giraffes, deer, antelopes, and lions.

The dining room was remodeled to include a mirror top table, deep blue draperies, and a chandelier that resembled crystal beads that dripped from the ceiling. The smoking room with bamboo walls and a red and black

---

76 Fuller, "The Home of the Month," 38.
77 Fuller, "The Home of the Month," 50.
color scheme adjoined the downstairs gaming room which was decorated with Mexican blankets. The second floor of Rockledge was filled with furniture from France and decorated in "ethereal pink" tones. Honey colored velvet sofas were combined with gray-green rugs and "pineapple" colored beds. Animal skins appeared in almost every room. One bedroom boasted of a lama skin coverlet. Cheetah and zebra skins were thrown over the backs of chairs and goats skins decorated bathroom floors.

Thus altered, Rockledge remained home to members of the King family through the early 1980s. In the fall of 1979, efforts were made to place Rockledge on the National Register for Historic Places. Fred King, Grace and E. L. King's grandson, proved to be Rockledge's last occupant and most steadfast supporter; and it was primarily through Fred King's efforts that Rockledge was listed on the National Register on August 26, 1982. Rockledge's placement on the National Register ultimately became a source of conflict within the King family. E. L. King, Jr., the son of Grace and E. L. King and the father of Fred King, vehemently objected to Rockledge's placement on the Register. As Rockledge fell into disrepair, E. L. King, Jr. was able to acquire a majority of ownership of the house. Through the efforts of E. L. King, Jr. demolition of Rockledge began during the summer of 1987. Maher's custom designed furnishings for the house were eventually sold at three separate auctions that took place in Milwaukee in 1987 and 1988.

Rockledge is gone and its contents are dispersed. Although the King family eventually found the house constricting, no show on the American
Arts and Crafts Movement seems complete without at least one object from Rockledge. From "The Art that is Life" to "The Ideal Home" Rockledge objects continually resurface at the most important exhibits on early twentieth century design. Rockledge continues to exist as artifacts and objects. The story of the house stands as one that is significant in terms of the changes that occurred within a time and a place. The Kings struggled to live with George Maher's conception of internal space and gave up that struggle. In commissioning additional houses and in remodeling Rockledge, the Kings sought the reassertion of their own aesthetic order on the architectural landscape. Any discussion of Rockledge eventually leads to questions of ownership. Rockledge was ultimately more George Maher's house than it was the King's; it existed in Maher's mind as the physical embodiment of his ideas and theories about American architecture. Nestled on the banks of the Mississippi River, Rockledge spoke Maher's language; but the complexities of Maher's ideas were lost in the translation from idea to object.

Epilogue

In creating Rockledge, Maher had lost sight of the people who would live in it and with it. If the end of the Prairie School can be attributed to people's desire for houses that allow for personal choices, Maher's later houses reflect his adaptability to this trend. The houses that Maher constructed after the King commissions prove that Maher listened to people's desire for the kind of houses that allowed them to express themselves. Many of the houses that Maher designed in Kenilworth between 1916 and 1924...
reflected the influences of the contemporary Revival movements; Colonial, English, and Georgian Revival styles were adopted to accommodate the changing tastes of clients. Although Maher adapted to current demands, he managed to maintain a degree of individuality and distinctiveness in these later buildings. The various Revival styles were combined with elements of the Prairie School. A house built in 1921 featured clapboard siding and shuttered windows of the Colonial Revival in combination with a typical Prairie School front entrance: a small porch projecting from the front of the house, with the doorway facing sideways (Figure 43). In addition to the Colonial Revival, the Tudor Revival was also adopted in varying forms (Figures 44 and 45). Many of these later houses were designed by George Maher in partnership with his son Philip. Many of these houses were designed on speculation—the era of commissioned buildings for a specific individuals had passed. The wealthy patrons who unquestioningly adopted Maher's most distinctive designs had given way to individuals who purchased buildings as anonymous consumers—people who demanded buildings that enabled their own aesthetic voices to be heard against a background that quietly accompanied their choices.
PLEASE NOTE

Copyrighted materials in this document have not been filmed at the request of the author. They are available for consultation, however, in the author's university library.

54-98

University Microfilms International
BIBLIOGRAPHY


99


[King Family Papers.] Winona County Historical Society, Winona, Minnesota.


