

THE ARTS & CRAFTS MESSENGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE
COLORADO ARTS & CRAFTS SOCIETY

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Parts of the Riordan Mansion: in the foreground, the West house, constructed of local ponderosa pine – 2nd story: shingles, in the shade, planks, in the sun; 1st story, applied slabs (right), eaves protruding, local basalt rock. In the distance, far right, is the East house.

FINDING ARTS AND CRAFTS IN ARIZONA

By Dennis Barrett with photo help from Diana Elder.

In 2019, eight sites were together designated as a World Heritage Site entitled “The 20th-century Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright.” I was disappointed to find that after decades of hunting down Wright sites, I’d seen only five of them. Of the remaining three, the First Jacob house in Madison, WI, was chosen because it was the very first of Wright’s 140 ‘Usonian’ houses. And it’s currently inhabited and can’t be toured.

The other two, Taliesin West and Los Angeles’ Hollyhock House, are more inviting.

The idea of visiting Taliesin West in Scottsdale, AZ, reminded me that a good friend Buck had moved to Flagstaff, AZ, and extended an open invitation, noting that the Riordan Mansion in Flagstaff is of some A&C interest and specially decorated at Christmas time. So last December I decided to fly into Phoenix, drive to Flagstaff for a few days, and see Taliesin West on my way back to the airport. I was not disappointed!

RIORDAN MANSION

Flagstaff took me by surprise. I ignorantly lumped Arizona with Phoenix, as low desert area. Actually, a two-hour drive to the north, Flagstaff is at 7000 ft., with December weather a lot more like Denver’s. Indeed, after two sunny days there I fled south a half-day early to avoid a predicted snowstorm (a wise choice as the storm left Flagstaff under 6” of snow.)

Flagstaff is also a tight-knit community of fewer than 80,000 with considerable indigenous and Hispanic populations, very friendly and artistic. Everyone seems to be involved in community singing, or theatre, or other activity, and the artistry seems to be

at a pretty high level.

The Riordan Mansion is a gem! The Riordan brothers, Mike and Tim, came to Flagstaff from Chicago to work for their brother’s lumber company, and then bought it from him. They married sisters from Chicago, became pillars of the fledgling community, and lived for several years in neighboring houses by the lumber mill. Then as the business prospered and the offspring grew, they built the 13,000 sq. ft. mansion, with a West wing for Michael’s family, an East wing for Timothy’s family, a large room shared in the middle for relaxation, entertainment, and space for the children to play.

(continued on next page)

ARIZONA (cont.)

The Riordan Mansion reminded me of both the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, NC (because of the wings extending from a central space) and the Boettcher Mansion in Golden, CO (because it is rustically constructed of the local timber.)

I sought in vain for any hint that proximity led to discontent. According to the docents and printed accounts (and against any general impressions of families that I harbor) --- there was never a cross word spoken between the brotherly husbands, their sisterly wives, or their numerous children. Believe it if you will.

The East wing of the Mansion was deeded to the state parks and opened to the public by 1983, and is maintained as if the Riordans had just stepped out for a moment. The West wing followed in 2002, and is more of a museum.

The tour made much of the everyday implements that equipped the house as state-of-the-art when it opened in 1904 (and seemed quaint to observers

120 years later.) But in every room there was A&C influence, and plenty of original Gustav Stickley furniture and Harvey Ellis inlays to admire.

The Riordans built the Mansion in 1903-4, when the A&C Movement was only a few years old in the United States. But they employed as their architect Charles Whittlesey, who was retained by the Atchison Topeka and Santa Fe railroad and responsible for many hotels along their routes. Whittlesey was clearly well aware of the tenets of the Movement. He utilizes local materials, here ponderosa pine and volcanic basalt rock, often lichen-covered. He blurs the line between inside and out with balconies and sleeping porches, and skylights to admit natural light. His floor plans are more open than those of the preceding Victorians. The stained glass windows attest that the architect was genuinely attuned to nature: he uses tulips in the East wing (tulips open in the morning) and poppies in the West wing (poppies open in the afternoon).

Despite the altitude, Flagstaff can be hot in the summer, and Whittlesey took advantage of natural air-conditioning: he put a skylight above the East reception hall open to the second floor, where hot air can rise and light penetrate.



Fig. 2. The kitchen of the East wing. Remember having a toaster like that?



Fig. 3. Skylight looking down from the second story to the piano in the first-floor Reception Hall

EL TOVAR HOTEL

On the morning after our tour of the Riordan, I drove north with my hosts, destination unspecified. To my surprise, after a few hours' drive, we arrived at Grand Canyon Village. A few steps from the parking lot we were at the South rim, with a view down through thousands of feet of stratigraphy, to the river that runs through and created it.

We turned then to the El Tovar hotel, which was just as typically A&C as the Riordan Mansion!

ARIZONA (cont.)



Fig. 4. The Grand Canyon, a few steps from El Tovar hotel.

The ready explanation? It was also designed by Charles Whittlesey. We had lunch in the dining room, that had all the hallmarks of A&C style from the lighting to the fireplace in its inglenook, from the rustic log walls to the sturdy simple furniture. I was delighted (and the food was excellent.)



Fig. 5. Dining room at the El Tovar.

TALIESEN WEST

I fled the approaching snowstorm, spent the night in Scottsdale (a suburb of Phoenix), and drove in the morning to Taliesen West. The address is 12621 N. Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd. This is where the boulevard intersects E. Cactus Road, which appears to dead-end there. But in fact Cactus Road continues as N. Taliesin Drive, and if you look carefully, a small sign points you toward the complex. The view is of nothing but scrub desert, and I wondered where the imposing World Heritage site, competing with the pyramids of Gizeh and the Taj Mahal, could be. But in less than a mile, there was a parking lot and a jumble of low-lying buildings, and I had arrived. Part of what makes it a World Heritage site is that it fits so tightly into its surroundings, seeming to grow up organically out of the desert.

By 1938 Frank Lloyd Wright was 71 years old, and tired of paying to heat Taliesin, in Spring Green, WI, through the long cold Wisconsin winters. Ten years earlier he had married Olgivanna, who with him had established the Taliesin Fellowship, to train the next generation -- in architecture, and in how to live a full life.

Wright had spent much time in the Phoenix area during the 1920s, on commissions that didn't pan out, but he had gained a healthy admiration for the desert area and the people.



Fig. 6. A small part of Taliesin West, with sloping roof and a bank of windows.

Thus it was that on another visit to the desert in 1938, he bought a parcel of "worthless" arid land in Scottsdale, and wired the Fellowship back in Taliesin, WI, to come and help him to build Taliesin West. For the next two decades, until Wright's death in 1959, the Fellowship migrated between summers in Wisconsin and winters in Arizona, and Taliesin West was gradually built, and rebuilt. The land that he bought was "worthless" because it had no water. But

ARIZONA (cont.)

the ever-perceptive Wright had noticed an alluvial fan on the hill above it, so he drilled until, at 400 ft., he found water, and the land ceased to be worthless.



Fig. 7. Construction of Taliesin West walls: desert rocks and sand, held together by cement.

Here were no trees, but desert rocks and sand were abundant, so that building with local materials meant constructing walls in wooden forms from desert rocks, desert sand, and cement. At first Wright experimented with canvas windows and ceilings to filter the bright sunlight, but the canvas was soon replaced by more durable glass in steel frames, sometimes with canvas shades.

The buildings were low, generally one story, with sloping roofs echoing the pitch of surrounding mountains. And he used banks of parallel windows to admit plenty of light.

Wright showed great respect for the indigenous population. Petroglyphs are placed conspicuously at the entrance to the complex, including the one Wright called the Whirling Arrow, adapted for the brand and logo of Taliesin West.

At Taliesin West, I couldn't shake a feeling of unease: I never quite oriented myself, never knew where the

tour was going or where we had been. I enjoyed the individual parts of the complex, but couldn't quite see how they fit together. I may have to visit again.

Because of this problem of mine with Taliesin West, I was particularly glad that my Arizona adventure had included the safer A&C joys of the Riordan Mansion and the El Tovar hotel!



Fig. 8. Petroglyph displayed at the entrance to Taliesin West.



Fig. 9. Whirling arrow derived from the petroglyph, at the fountain that welcomes visitors. Behind, the saguaro ever present in the Arizona desert.

THE VICTORIAN HOUSE OF ARTS AND CRAFTS

By Beth Bradford



Abby turning a chair leg at the pole-lathe while playing his harmonica

This is Part 2 in a series of 4 articles

Each episode begins with the assignment of the tasks. The artisans then use the house library's extensive resources including books and manuals of Arts and Crafts related subjects for technical information and additional design inspiration. Since the time is far too limited for the crafter to become proficient in until-then unknown-to-them techniques and, in some instances, materials they have never used there are often experts to help them with the processes required.

The first week's room is the parlor with Niamh serving as project manager. Abdollah "Abby" is assigned the creation of a chair inspired by the William Morris Sussex Chair, Bryony is assigned creation of an object inspired by a Charles Robert Ashbee silver porringer (a small shallow bowl), and Ilsa is assigned the creation and installation of wallpaper inspired by a William Morris design. As the show introduces each of these original items, there is an educational exposition on the origin of the object and its original creator.

There is one thing that becomes immediately apparent at the first morning's breakfast meeting; there are some strong personalities among the artisans that are not accustomed to working cooperatively. It is not a surprise as each are used to working independently and may not need to communicate with anyone other than their clients. It is an understandable situation since this is one of the problems that plagued the original Arts and Crafts communes, prompting William Morris to state "Fellowship is heaven and lack of fellowship is hell".

Ilsa explains her reasons for joining the group: "I think I wanted to take part in this experience mainly to have a collaborative project because it's been a long time since I've done that. Sometimes I'm quite solitary in how I work, and my best ideas come when I bounce off other creative people. I want to experience joy in creativity which is something I feel I've lost."

Abby constructs the Sussex-inspired chair in the woodshed, a large open barn-like structure. He starts with a tree trunk which he splits with wedges and a hammer; a process that takes five hours. He is surprised to find his measuring tools marked in inches as he is only used to working with millimeters. The lathe he uses is a foot-pedal driven pole-lathe. Steam infiltration is produced with a cauldron set over a woodburning fire at the end of the steam bending box with some help from Rod in the woodshed. Niamh is able to produce the rush-woven chair seat with direction from an expert. Even with help, the production of his chair requires Abby to work all available hours.

Stay tuned for the highlights of the next episode in the fall issue of the CACS Newsletter.



Please join us for our first Collaborative Event with the **Center for Colorado Women's History** (formerly known as the Byers-Evans House)!

Saturday, June 17th | 11:30 AM to 3:30 PM
1310 Bannock St. in Denver

Our board member, talented artisan Jeff Icenhower, will present two back-to-back lectures on the history of the original Arts and Crafts Movement (c. 1880-1920).

Each of the 2-hour long duplicate presentations will be followed by a docent-led tour of the 1883 house museum, which includes original family furnishings and handicrafts (plus some exquisite leatherwork on several pieces of furniture designed by Josephine Evans).

11:30 or 1:30 Overview of A&C
Emphasis on women's roles

12:30 or 2:30 Overview of A&C leatherwork
connections to the works in the CCWH

Tickets are \$10 for CACS members and \$20 for non-members and can be purchased at the door for the 11:30 AM and 1:30 PM tours (RSVP by June 13th and arrive 15 minutes ahead of time). Tickets can also be purchased via PayPal or Venmo (for online payment please contact Beth at bbradford6@gmail.com).



COUNTRY CLUB WALKING TOUR

Fig. 1. We found this plaque on many of the houses. The neighborhood was designated a Historic District in 1990. It includes about 375 homes.

Text by Dennis Barrett
Photos by Beth Bradford

At the dawn of the 20th century, Denver had seen two decades of record population growth. The city limits extended south just to current 6th Avenue. Further south, current Cherry Creek North to the east, and 'South Denver', south of Alameda to the west, were inhabited townships. But the land between 6th and Alameda Avenues, bordering Cherry Creek, was wheat fields.

Golf had been introduced, and wealthy enthusiasts hoped to add golf to harness racing as their sport. In 1901 they incorporated as the Denver Country Club, with the intent to build their own golf course. And in 1903 they succeeded in buying a considerable parcel of land, with a portion south of 1st avenue intended for the golf course, and a portion north of 1st avenue, the four blocks from Franklin to High, for residential development as 'Country Club Place.'

William Fisher, first of the Fisher brothers, was retained to plan the development of Country Club Place. To assure the luxurious nature of the small neighborhood, there were covenants dictating how many lots each house must occupy, and how expensive the construction must be. Existing streets to the north were extended through the subdivision, but Williams Street was deleted. Thus the sequence Race-High-Williams-Gilpin-Franklin north of 4th Avenue became Race-High-Gilpin-Franklin-Humboldt south of 4th Avenue, so that lots were deeper and each street, Race, High and Gilpin, could be a parkway with a landscaped median. (Likewise, at 90 degrees, 2nd Avenue was deleted; one block runs from 1st to 3rd Avenue.)

Immediately west of Country Club Place was Park Club Place, extending from Humboldt west to Downing. It was also bought in 1903 from a wheat farmer, by a group including future mayor Robert Speer. Similar covenants assured that the houses south of 4th Avenue would be luxurious; and Park Club Place, like Country Club Place, looked across 1st avenue to the site of the Country Club.

On a sunny cool spring morning, on May 20, 2023, Robert Rust led a tour for CACS around some of the houses of the two subdivisions, Country Club Place and Park Club Place. In 2 hours we could see only a part of the area, so Robert promised to explore further in tours to come.

We gathered on 4th Avenue, between High and Gilpin, where we could look to the north, where relatively modest houses are built on one or two lots; and look to the south, where mansions are built on up to 12 lots. Our walk took us south.

Robert cautioned that while we would see many houses built between 1905-20 (the heyday of the A&C Movement), the architects of the time seldom stuck to a single style, usually selecting from more than one. Thus "eclectic" and "revival" are the norm. We did find, and treasure, a few mainly A&C houses on our walk.



Fig. 2. 330 Humboldt St. A bungalow that has been little modified since 1910.

At 330 Humboldt Street, we admired a bungalow with a low-pitched roof and wide overhanging eaves. Though many of the houses of the area have suffered extensive remodeling, this one, at least from the outside, looks just as it did when new, in 1910. (We follow the Denver custom where houses north are unspecified: 330 N. Humboldt is written as 330 Humboldt. If the address doesn't contain south, then it's assumed to be north.)



Fig. 3. 300 Humboldt St., the house built for Robert Speer, the mayor who changed Denver to conform to his "City Beautiful" ideals.

At 300 Humboldt St., we found the mansion built by Speer. He bought the land in 1904, when he had just started his first term as mayor. As secretary of Park Club Place company, he had his pick of the lots, and this one had an unobstructed view of the Country Club to the south. When the architects Marean and Norton produced a plan that was perfect except that it was just a *little* too large for the lot... the alley between Humboldt and Franklin somehow moved a *little* to the east; still today that alley is 164 ft. from Humboldt, but 133 ft. from Franklin. After Speer, forever identified with the "City Beautiful" movement, died in office, his wife Kate inherited

the plaster model that Mable Landrum Torrey had used to make the famous statue of Wynken, Blynken and Nod, now in Washington Park (which we of CACS had admired on an earlier tour led by Robert Rust.)

While Robert pointed out, but did not judge, the Greek-revival touches on various homes, we on the tour were less restrained, and often disapproved of the inappropriately large Greek columns (350 Humboldt was an especially egregious example). The slender paired columns on the Speer house, supporting a wrap-around porch, generally met with our approval.



Fig. 4. 100 Franklin St. Partly of rustic brick, this Craftsman house was built in 1906. Later, when 1st Avenue was widened, a wall was built to the south to muffle traffic noise.

At 100 and 103 Franklin St. we found 1906 Craftsman houses credited to William E. Fisher, though by that year his brother Arthur had joined him in Fisher & Fisher, the firm with most commissions in the area during several decades. Whereas the Speer house was cut off from the Country Club by houses later built in the block to the south, 100 and 103 Franklin were right on 1st Avenue, so they continued to look over at the Country Club and the polo games played there. But then when Cherry Creek shopping center was built and 1st avenue widened into a major thoroughfare, a wall was built at 100 Franklin to abate traffic noise.

Another Craftsman house was built at 171 Franklin c. 1905. The wide full-length front porch is supported by paired small square columns on a low brick wall. Robert pointed out the unique ornamental Flemish brick work, which alternates headers and stretchers in each course, horizontal and vertical.

After sauntering up Humboldt and back on Franklin and Gilpin, we found our cars. We drove past the house where Hugh Grant (of the Kirkland Museum) grew up, and stopped briefly at the "castle" at 475 Circle Drive, just north of 4th Avenue. Here Mary Dean Reed in the late 1920s built, in the style of an English manor house, the largest structure in the Country Club area and one of the most elegant.

And then we dispersed, looking forward to the next chapter of the Country Club saga.



Fig. 5 The Craftsman house at 171 Franklin. Dramatic shadows cast are by the porch beams. The Flemish brick work of the walls is seen to advantage in the column in the foreground.

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Annual membership fees are below.

You can make your membership payment through PayPal to:
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Checks can also be made out to the Colorado Arts & Crafts Society and mailed to: Beth Bradford at 413 S. Humboldt St. Denver, CO 80209.

Please contact our membership chair, Helene Arendt at CACSmembership@gmail.com with any questions.

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