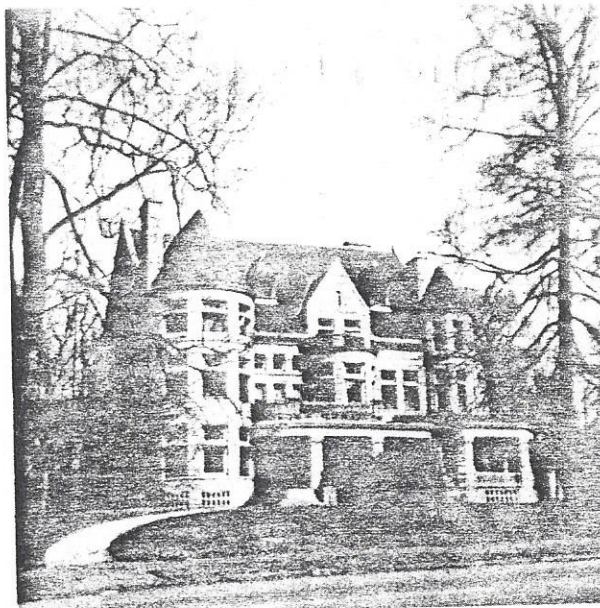


Records of Wood's career remained in the hands of surviving relatives until sometime in the 1960s when most were unfortunately lost.⁶ The remaining information on the architect owes to oral tradition, a few surviving drawings and specifications and, of course, the buildings themselves. Fortunately, most of the designs executed by Wood have survived. The remarkable commentary they provide shows that this local architect went through a progressive assimilation of the Prairie Style and that earlier stages of his development seem to have predisposed him favorably to the example of Sullivan and Wright. An unmistakable consistency in Wood's development can be traced from his earliest architectural experience to a mature mastery of a Wrightian idiom.

In 1886-87, as he approached twenty-five, Wood secured a position as draftsman for Quincy architect Harvey Chatten, with whom he remained until about 1890-91.⁷ Apparently, this was his only professional training. Records of any previous education have not survived, and there is only one reference to this earlier period in his life which attributes him as "...being especially good in painting, etching and woodcarving."⁸ Perhaps such talents were sufficient for the needs of Chatten as Wood is the only draftsman listed in his employ from 1886 to 1891.⁹

Thus, the period of work for Harvey Chatten had singular importance for the professional foundations of Ernest Wood. Contemporary biographers agreed that Chatten was one of the most respected architects in the area.¹⁰ His reputation earned him some coveted commissions, including many for the wealthier residential clientele in Quincy, and this also undoubtedly had its importance in the education of the young draftsman.

Regarding Chatten's background, one reference, useful to this discussion, has it that he "...early decided on his life work, securing his training in the office of the late Robert Bunce and in the offices of prominent Boston architects."¹¹ Enough is known



Ernest Wood participated in the design of this house for R. F. Newcomb. Harvey Chatten, architect, 1890-91. J. R. Allen photo. 1601 Main St.

about Robert Bunce to indicate that he had a respectable local practice in Quincy which Chatten inherited. Concerning Chatten's period of training in Boston, however, there are no details available, though some features of his designs seem derived from Eastern precedents.

The house for Richard F. Newcomb, a wealthy Quincy industrialist, 1890-91, is an example of Chatten's ability on a large scale.¹² Its style combines Romanesque masonry treatment with Queen Anne massing and details. While the design may not qualify as a masterful example of its type, it is nevertheless an impressive conception. A general willingness to experiment (evidenced here in the widely varied and vigorous fenestration, the projecting roof forms, and the use of a wide veranda) can be said to have been typical of Chatten. In addition, this house is a fine illustration of the high standards of craftsmanship which Chatten demanded in every aspect of construction. These traits were transmitted from the master to his draftsman, and because of the likelihood that Wood participated in its design, the Newcomb House is important in the consideration of his debt to Chatten for early indoctrination.¹³

Wood's early development as an architect may not have been entirely the result of his association with Chatten, however. During the latter half of the nineteenth century, Quincy became an industrial and commercial center of Illinois, second only to Chicago.¹⁴ The wave of building activity that re-

¹² Carl Landrum, "From Quincy's Past," *Quincy Herald Whig*, June 21, 1970, n.p.

¹³ Obituary, Ernest M. Wood, *op. cit.*

¹⁴ Henry Ashbury, *Reminiscences of Quincy, Illinois*, Quincy, 1882, p. 18, and David F. Wilcox, *Quincy and Adams County, History and Representative Men*, Chicago, 1919, Vol. 1.

⁶ Interview, Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck, *op. cit.*

⁷ *Quincy City Directory*, 1886-87.

⁸ Obituary, *op. cit.*

⁹ *Quincy City Directories*, 1892-93, 1896-1938; for the exception of the years 1894-95. After 1891, Wood is listed as being in private practice.

¹⁰ Biographical references to Chatten appear in: David B. Wilcox, *Representative Men and Homes of Quincy*, Quincy, 1899, n.p., and *Portrait and Biographical Record of Adams County, Illinois*, Chapman Bros., Chicago, 1892, n.p., and in an obituary, *Quincy Herald Whig*, May 7, 1930, n.p.

¹¹ Wilcox, *ibid.*, n.p.



This is a sketch of Silsbee's W. S. Warfield House of 1886. It is still standing today in Quincy, Illinois. Photograph from *The Building Budget*. 1624 Main

sulted from the material growth of Quincy not only contributed to Chatten's success, but also brought the work of Chicago architects to the downstate city, among whom was no less a figure as Joseph L. Silsbee. Three of Silsbee's designs for Quincy were executed.¹⁵ The first, a residence for William S. Warfield, 1886-87, is one of the architect's last works in the ~~Queen Anne~~ style, and it is located, perhaps significantly, across the street from the Newcomb house by Chatten.¹⁶

Inasmuch as the Warfield house preceded the Newcomb by several years, we can be sure that Wood, and possibly Chatten were instructed by Silsbee's example. That they may have had contact with the Chicago architect should not be overlooked. For the young Wood, this would certainly have been inspiring.

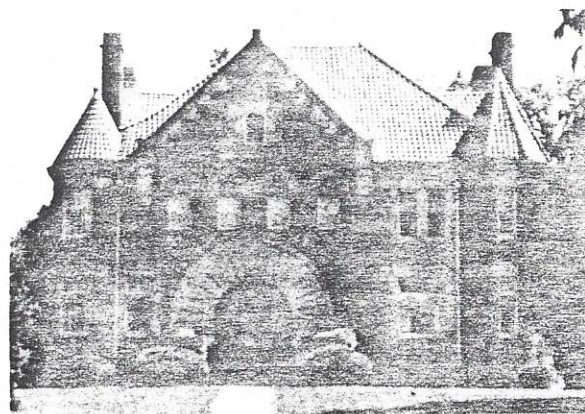
The next notable design, therefore, in the discussion of Wood's training is, not surprisingly, Romanesque: the Theodore Poling house, 1890-91.¹⁷ This work has been separately attributed to Chatten and elsewhere to Wood.¹⁸ Among the few recorded examples from this period it is virtually impossible to separate the hand of the architect from that of the draftsman. However, an oral tradition supports Wood's authorship in this de-

15 Susan Karr Sorell, "Silsbee, The Evolution of a Personal Style," and "A Catalog of Work by J. L. Silsbee," *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1970, pp. 5-13 and 17-21. The William B. Bull house is not included in Sorell's catalog of Silsbee's work. It was identified and its authorship confirmed later by Titus M. Karlowicz. Silsbee also submitted a design in competition for the Hotel Quincy. Records of this fourth plan were recently reported to be located in the Newcomb Hotel, Quincy, Illinois.

16 *The Inland Architect*, Vol. VII, No. 1, February, 1886, p. 13.

17 Obituary, Harvey Chatten, *op. cit.*

18 *Ibid.*, and Obituary, Ernest M. Wood, *op. cit.*



Theodore Poling house. Chatten and/or Wood, architect, 1890-91. T. M. Karlowicz photo. 2016 Jersey St.

sign.¹⁹ An explanation for this discrepancy is offered by the same source telling of an argument which developed between the two men over the authorship of several designs during this period. Presumably, Wood had assumed more than the usual responsibilities of a draftsman by that time. Whatever the appropriate attribution, the Theodore Poling house can be taken as another important experience for Ernest Wood.

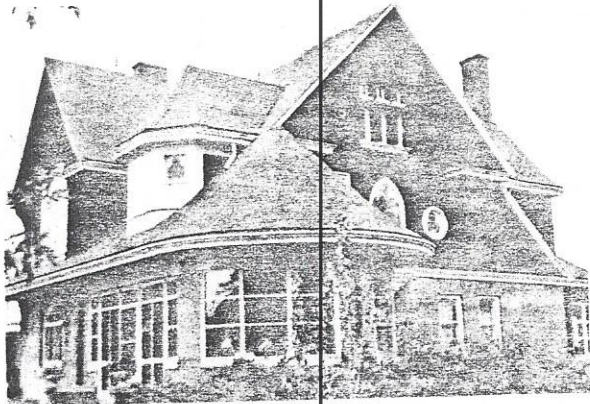
As the best example of the Romanesque in Quincy residential architecture, this house indicates that its architect(s) understood not only the refined use of stone masonry and decorative details of the style, but also the importance of harmonious incorporation of the parts into the whole for which the work of H. H. Richardson and his followers was distinguished. All of the elements of this design are integrated within the asymmetrical scheme. The beautifully conceived entrance, worthy of Richardson, corresponds on the interior to a living hall opening onto the other rooms of the house. The hall also receives the staircase, and its function is similar to the one in the Newcomb house. The interior decoration, although deriving from typical Victorian tastes, deserves mention for its painstaking attention to detail and respect for the integrity of materials.

During, or possibly following the construction of the Newcomb and Theodore Poling houses, Wood established himself in independent practice. However, lack of records has obscured a five-year period of this early independent work. Not until 1897 can a number of noteworthy designs be associated with Wood's name. Significantly, they show a relationship to the earlier work with Chatten and, more importantly, they are evidence of an interest in another aspect of Silsbee's work.

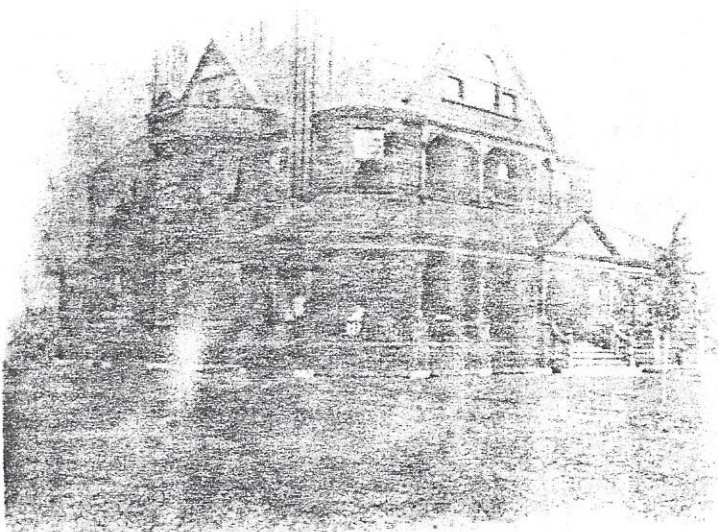
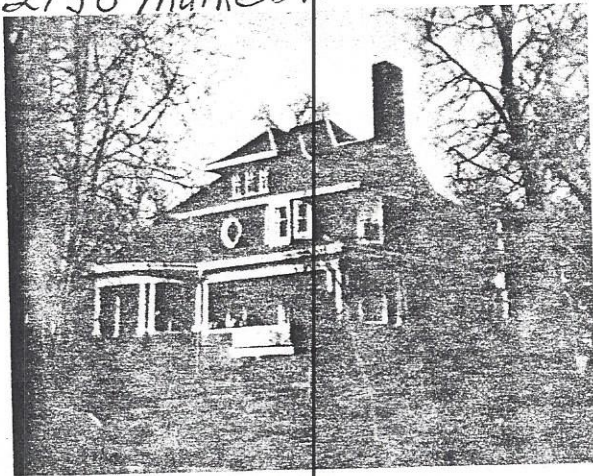
19 Interviews, *op. cit.*, and Letter from Oliver B. Williams, Quincy, April 5, 1971.

Romanesque

Newcomb



The Otho Poling house. E. M. Wood architect, 1897. The material and form of the house are original with the exception of the porch which has been enclosed. J. R. Allen photo.
2150 Maine St.



William B. Bull house, Quincy, as it appeared in the 1890's. J. L. Silsbee, architect. Silsbee's design for Bull may have encouraged Wood's later use of the Shingle Style. Photo courtesy of Helen Bull Spinola and George M. Irwin.
222 So. 16th St.

125 East Ave.
The James Neilson house, 1897. J. R. Allen photo.

The Otho Poling and James Neilson houses of 1897 are two examples of Wood's use of the Shingle Style during the late 1890s.²⁰ The architect's interest in the Shingle Style at this period seems to derive from the other example in Quincy by Silsbee: the William Bull house, built in 1887.²¹

Wood's concern in the Neilson and Otho Poling houses appears similar to that of Silsbee. In each case, the exterior surfaces were elaborated by use of shingles in the second story to complement the masonry below. The architect also realized how the sweeping movement of the roof can serve as a major unifying element in the expression of the style. It is also apparent that Wood was aware of the unifying effect created by the movements of the roof outward to include the wide verandas (the veranda of the O. Poling house has since been enclosed) thus providing for a sense of inter-relation between interior and exterior. In examining Wood's efforts in this style,

we can recall that Silsbee's influence probably had similar effects on two of his students, Frank Lloyd Wright and George W. Maher,²² for they were to influence, in their turn, the Quincy architect.

After 1900, Wood abandoned the Shingle Style in favor of more contemporary influences from Chicago architects. There remain some possible references to an on-going interest in the work of Silsbee, such as might be suggested by the J. S. Cruttenden house, 1903-04, outstanding for its repertory of Colonial detail.²³ But most of Wood's major work from this second decade of his career derives from the more direct example of Prairie School architects. This aspect of our architect's

22 H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School, Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, Toronto, 1972, pp. 29 and 34; and Wilbert R. Hasbrouck, "The Earliest Work of Frank Lloyd Wright," *The Prairie School Review*, Vol. VII, No. 4, 1970, pp. 14-16.

23 Attribution to Wood is based on oral tradition, interviews and letter from Oliver B. Williams, *op. cit.* A building permit was issued to Cruttenden for this property in May, 1904. For a discussion of Silsbee's later Colonial Revival period, see Sorell, *op. cit.*

20 Ernest M. Wood, *Architect's Account Book, 1896-1901*, p. 17.

21 *The Inland Architect*, Vol. VII, No. 1, February, 1886, p. 13. (See also footnote 15)



House for J. S. Cruttenden in the Lawndale subdivision of Quincy. J. R. Allen photo. 1903-04
2020 Maine St.

development relates to an oral tradition which states that by 1900, Wood had undertaken, on a regular basis, trips to the Chicago area. Although his professional motives for these travels may seem obvious, this tradition does not provide details of the architect's objectives, itinerary or professional associates in the Chicago area.²⁴ Nevertheless, these excursions coincide with a marked change in Wood's work during the first decade of the twentieth century.

This decade, the second of Wood's career, shows a variety of architectural styles including the Colonial Revival, Tudor and, because it was an addition, one example of the Romanesque.²⁵ It is apparent, however, that the architect's concern at this time was not simply eclectic, but rather to take advantage of opportunities for experimentation. There are suggestions that his choices during this time may have been encouraged by the example of Wright and his circle. The W. I. McKee house, ca. 1908, for example, combines a less than conventional Tudor style with a Wrightian flavor in the sharply projecting eaves, patterns of half-timber in the stucco and the horizontal emphasis given to the porch.²⁶

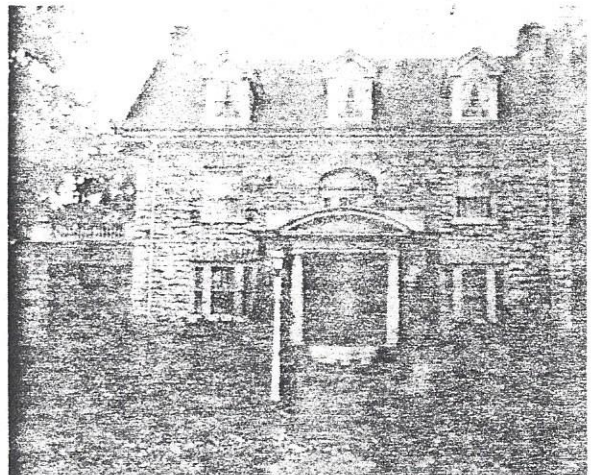
24 Interviews, *op. cit.* In this regard, we are also told that Wood accompanied a client to the Chicago area, apparently to familiarize the client with various aspects of the Prairie house. Interview, Mrs. A. White, Palmyra, Missouri, February 1972.

25 Wood's return to the Romanesque was occasioned by the commission for an addition to the State Savings and Loan and Trust Company building in 1906. The original portion was designed by the Chicago firm of Patton and Fisher, and completed in 1892. See *The Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, November 1891, p. 55, and also *Portrait and Biographical Record of Adams County, Illinois, op. cit.*, pp. 452-455. A sketch bearing Wood's signature and the date is in the building. The State Savings and Loan and Trust Company building was Patton and Fisher's second commission in Quincy, preceded by the Quincy Public Library. See *The Inland Architect and News Record*, Vol. XI, May 1888 (plate).

26 Architect's drawings, signed and undated, are in the



The W. I. McKee house, circa 1908. References to Wright in this example include decorative motifs applied to the porch posts. J. R. Allen photo. 1803 Jersey St.



The Appleton house, 1907. The Colonial Revival appears almost as a disguise for an interest in the work of George W. Maher. J. R. Allen photo. 2000 Jersey St.

The period 1900-1910 is characterized by similar experiments which can be viewed as a transition to Wood's eventual adoption of the Prairie Style in the following decade.

Wood's residential designs at this time align themselves with types by a number of Chicago architects. Interestingly, the most frequent medium represented is not the example of Wright but rather that of George W. Maher. The Appleton house, 1907, a Colonial Revival which, although possibly drawing on associations with Wright, bears the influence of Maher particularly in the columned porch and entrance.²⁷ The interior of the house is a

possession of present owners. A date of completion in 1908 is probable. Interview, Mr. and Mrs. R. W. Leavitt, Quincy, March 1971. Wright's Tudor examples are discussed in Grant Carpenter Manson, *Frank Lloyd Wright to 1910: The First Golden Age*, New York, N.Y., 1958.

27 Architect's drawings, signed and dated, last noted in the possession of Mrs. C. L. Redd, formerly of Quincy.



House for W. A. Dodge, circa 1910, Warsaw, Illinois. One of Wood's most polished products drawing upon study of Maher's work. J. R. Allen photo.

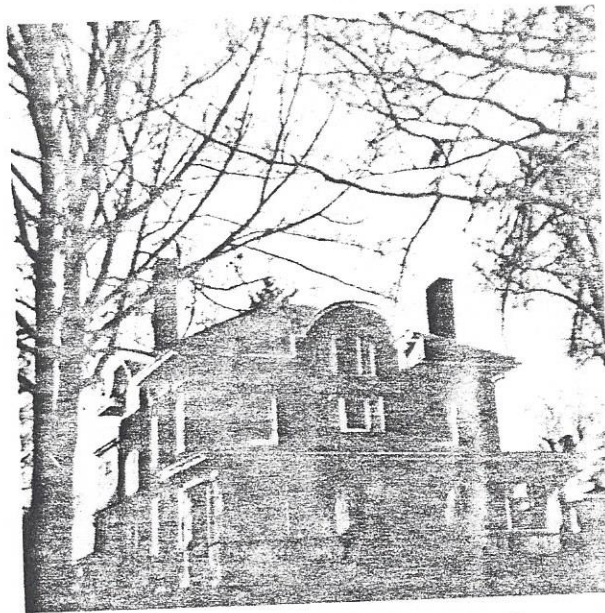
fine acknowledgement to Colonial prototypes, but details, such as horizontal bands of woodwork at eye-level around the rooms and geometric arrangements of cabinets around window seats, are indications of other interests at work.

The rusticated stone on the exterior of the Appleton house is applied to underlying brick masonry construction. The architect's experience with brick masonry design began early in the 1890s, and by 1900 this increasingly important material naturally occupied much of his attention.

Wood's designs from this period in which brick is used take the form of a rectangular block offset by horizontal lines expressed in the elements of the porch and eaves, and usually with a symmetrical balance of elements along the dominant street elevation. The form, especially in the types and balanced arrangements of windows, owes directly to examples in the work of Maher. In the Julius Kespohl house, 1908-09, the attempt at modifying the block-like form of the house includes the band of inset masonry directly beneath the eaves as well as their marked overhang.²⁸ The fenestration here represents a conspicuous reference to Maher in the shape and role given the third-story windows.

The use of brick is more confident in the later Dodge house, ca. 1910, located in the small community of Warsaw, 30 miles north of Quincy. The wide porch and the porte-cochere, supported by characteristic piers, were incorporated into this plan

28 Letter, Oliver B. Williams, *op. cit.* A building permit was issued for this property in November 1908.



The Julius Kespohl house, 1908-09. J. R. Allen photo.
1803 Jersey St.

to relieve the massive rectangularity, and to serve as functioning elements in the horizontal orientation. Fenestration is more numerous and relaxed than in previous examples and is in harmony with the expanses of wall.²⁹

The fine example of this house can be taken as an overture to Wood's work in the Prairie Style. After 1910, Wood assiduously devoted his practice to a study and assimilation of the style deriving particularly from Frank Lloyd Wright. So exclusive are his apparent interests at this time that they seem to constitute a personal answer to Wright's entreaties. Surviving relatives tell of Wood's outspoken admiration for Wright and, significantly, Louis Sullivan. They also recall, with some amusement, that this admiration surfaced so predictably in his conversation that it would frequently cause disgruntlement of friends.³⁰

An illustration of this responsive inspiration came in 1911-12 with the design for his own office building.³¹ The structure, with its straightforward references to Wright, was unlike anything in Quincy at the time with its creme-colored stucco over cypress walls. Vertical movement, enhanced by the two pedestals with their characteristic Prairie Style

29 Architect's plans for this house have not been located. A date of completion circa 1910 has been suggested. Interview, Mr. Leon Lamet, Warsaw, Illinois, September 1970.

30 Interviews, Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck and Mrs. M. Huck, *op. cit.*

31 A building permit was issued to Wood in October 1911, while a notice of completion of the construction appears in *Construction News*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 18, May 4, 1912, n.p.

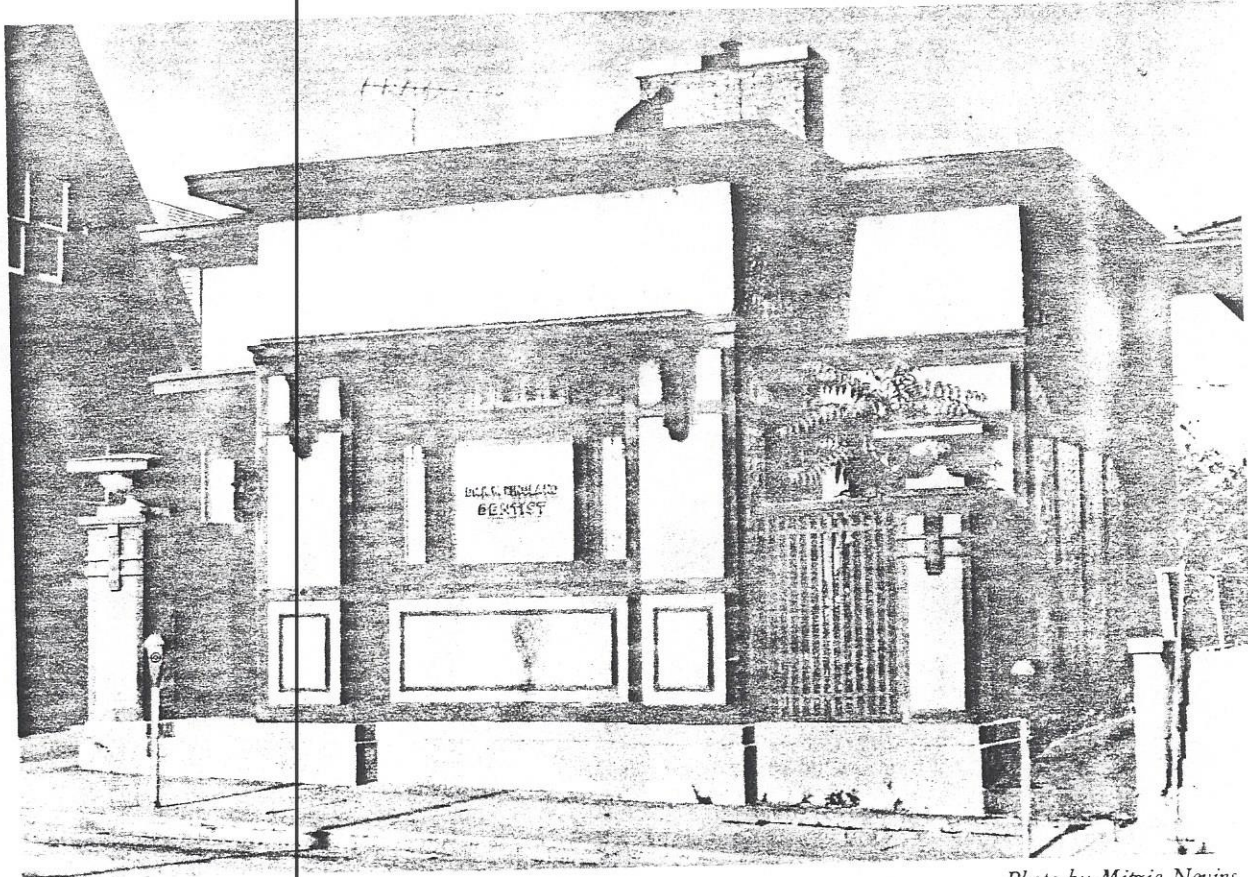


Photo by Mitzie Nevins.

Wood's office building, 1911-12. This building on Eighth Street in Quincy remains largely unchanged. 126 No. 8th

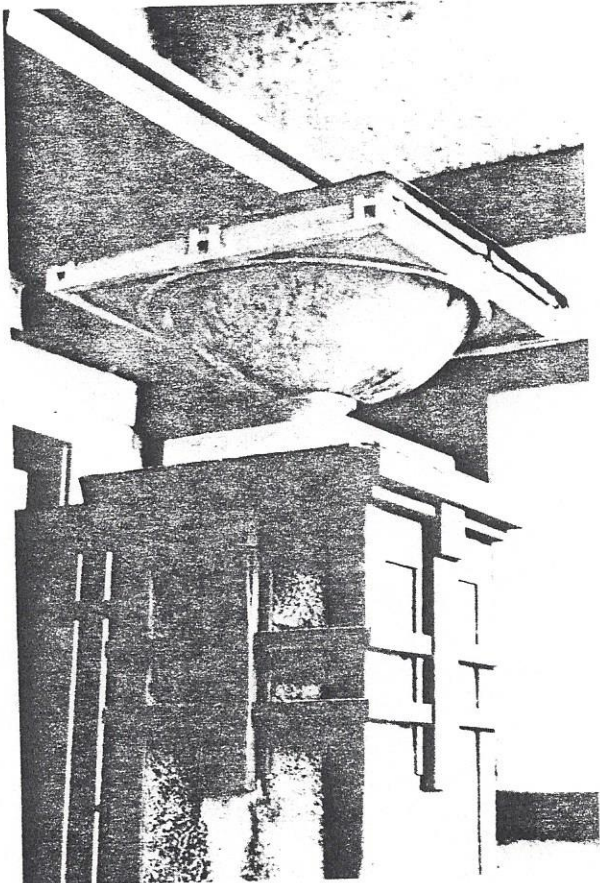
planters, is checked by the dark-colored frame elements in the stucco and along the sharp overhang of the eaves. The entrance is to the left, where a vestibule opens into a hall with low ceilings and a small hearth placed against the far wall. Actually, this hall effectively served as a reception room while working areas of the building adjoin it to the rear and side.

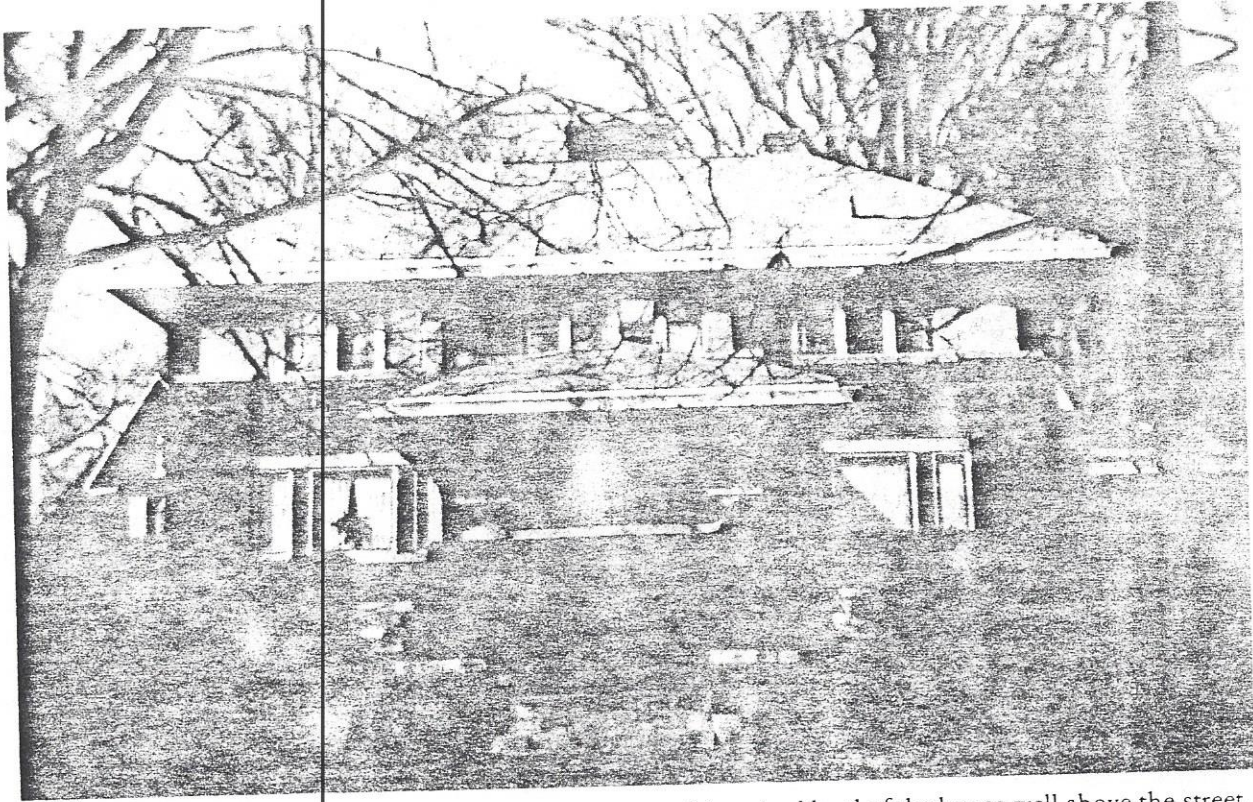
On close inspection there is evidence that the entire design scheme had come under the architect's scrutiny to assure accord with the stylistic expression. Cabinets, the low-set fireplace, leaded glass windows, and the skylights over the drafting room are all in accord with the Prairie Style.

The plan for his office was followed by the striking residence in Quincy for Mrs. F. Halbach, 1912.³² Wood continued to rely on a symmetrical approach for the street elevation. Nevertheless, the inter-relationships of elements created within this symmetrical plan can hardly be called static.

The balanced frontality recalls Wright's Winslow house. Other references may have been provided by

³² Architect's drawings, signed and dated, are in the possession of present owners.





Residence for Mrs. Frederick W. Halbach, 1912. J. R. Allen photo. 129 East Ave.

the Francis Little house, 1903, Peoria, Illinois, and the Ingalls house, 1909, River Forest, Illinois.³³ In view of his known travels, it is possible that Wood was familiar with these and other examples as well. However, the Halbach house does not appear to be derived from any specific precedent. It reveals the assimilation of the functional role of various elements of the Prairie Style. The brick piers at the corners and intermediate ones that define window space, the inset band of stucco which lends visual emphasis to the eaves, the unified fenestration, and the projecting porch are among the elements obviously derived from examples by Wright. But they combine here in a unique form. Looking back to the Dodge house, the Halbach is a convincing example of the progressive assimilation which was taking place.

The low hipped roof is noteworthy since it depends for its effectiveness on the relationship to the smaller forms of the porte-cochere and porch, key elements in the design. Its unifying effect helps integrate interior with exterior while retaining privacy. To further that purpose, Wood took advantage

33 Frank Lloyd Wright, *Ausgeführte Bauten*, Berlin, 1911, pp. 18-19. In addition to references obtained from direct contact with Wright's work, it should be noted that Wood's library included Wasmuth's 1911 edition of *Ausgeführte Bauten*. Wood may have had recourse to the Little house in the portfolio.

of the raised level of the house well above the street, as well as to enhance the approach to it. Furthermore, the porch serves as a module for the hall and the adjacent living and dining rooms. These rooms, provided with wide openings, recall the interior plan that formed a part of Wright's fifth design presented in the *Ladies Home Journal* in 1903.³⁴

Between 1912 and 1914, a significant departure from the symmetry of the Halbach house and Wood's office building is discernible. The next known residential design by him is that for Joseph Albers, 1914, in Warsaw, Illinois.

The asymmetrical arrangement of elements in this plan, together with the orientation of the narrow elevation to the street side, add to the maturing assimilation of the Prairie Style. Brick and stucco are employed here in much the same fashion as in the Halbach house, but the total effect is no longer dependent on a dominant frontality. The spacial movement of forms can only be fully realized in this example by going around the house, and a more dynamic relationship of the Prairie house to its surroundings is effected.

The prevailing appearance of horizontal movement in the Albers house is accomplished by the extended profile of the eaves, and emphasized by contrasting bands of wood set in the stucco, a string

34 Reprinted in *Architectural Essays from the Chicago School, From 1900 to 1909*, Ed. by W. R. Hasbrouck, The Prairie School Press, 1967.



Residence for Joseph Albers, 1914, Warsaw, Illinois. J. R. Allen photo.

course of stone capping the brick portion of the walls and, in the brick as well, by the raking of mortar along the horizontal.

Entrance is at the side and into a hall which, unlike previous examples, was intended as an intermediate step to the interior plan rather than a functional part of the living spaces. Broad openings, however, do provide easy access to the main areas of the house. Staggered arrangement of spaces contrasts to the frontal symmetry of the Halbach house. At the end of the hall the staircase descends to display a Prairie Style pattern in its balustrade.

Since the Albers house is in very good original condition, the importance of high standards of workmanship deserve mention here again. Deriving in part from his early association with Harvey Chatten, it distinguishes the work of Wood and certainly figured in this provincial architect's appreciation of Wright. There is first-hand evidence, for example, that Wood specified only the finest materials available and that this was followed by his own frequent supervision of the construction.³⁵ Other qualities also made him especially compatible with

³⁵ The control that Wood exercised over all phases of construction is indicated by the terms set down by the architect in his specifications, especially those examples from 1910-20. This is confirmed in first hand accounts, interviews, Mrs. F. M. Raisbeck and Mrs. M. Huck, *op. cit.*

fellow architects of the Prairie Style. Throughout his practice, Wood gave special attention to the aesthetic functions of wood, and the woodwork of the Albers house, especially the interior wall paneling, is a fine example of this interest having attained a mature expression. Other aspects of interior design were apparently included in the architect's concern, for the Albers house features free-standing furniture, built-in cabinets, and light fixtures which show the broader acceptance of Wright's expression.

As with the design for Albers, most of Wood's association with developments in Chicago is visible mainly in residential work. Whatever the reasons, there are few commercial or public works by him. One of these, the Quincy Chamber of Commerce, 1914-1915, provides some insight into his approach to a commercial project during this period.³⁶

Certain conditions for this structure were imposed by the need to fill an existing narrow corner lot in Quincy's business district while also providing sufficient office space and display area. Wood's solution took the form of a steel frame building.³⁷ The most noteworthy aspect of his design is the Sullivanesque treatment of the steel skeleton, re-

³⁶ Architect's plans, signed and dated, have survived. A few references to the construction and the architect appear in J. A. Heller, *Two Years Inside History of the So-Called Chamber of Commerce, Quincy, Illinois*, Quincy, 1917, pp. 5-9.

³⁷ Structural steel for the Commerce building was produced by the Michaelman Steel Company, Quincy, Illinois.