

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED NOV 14 1979

DATE ENTERED

JAN 29 1980

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Prairie School Architecture in Mason City, Iowa

AND/OR COMMON

Thematic Resources

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

CITY, TOWN

Mason City

VICINITY OF

Third

STATE

Iowa

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Cerro Gordo

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP
DISTRICT	PUBLIC
BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE
STRUCTURE	BOTH
SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION
OBJECT	IN PROCESS
X thematic group	BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED
<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED
<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ACCESSIBLE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED
<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED
<input type="checkbox"/> NO

PRESENT USE	
<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

multiple ownership, see inventory sheets

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

VICINITY OF

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTIONCOURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Cerro Gordo County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Mason City

Iowa

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Mason City, Iowa: A Historic Heritage

DATE

1977

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCALDEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Dept. Community Development

CITY, TOWN

Mason City

STATE

Iowa

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION	CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
X EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED
X GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED
FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE <input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

This thematic group nomination is for 15 houses in Mason City, built between 1908 and 1922, which represent the influence of the Prairie School outside the Rock Crest/Rock Glen development. One, the Stockman house, was designed by Frank Lloyd Wright, and another, the Yelland house, is attributed to William Drummond. The rest are works by various local builders and architects.

The houses may be roughly divided into two groups, based upon their general configuration. The first group (9 houses) is characterized by strong horizontality, while the second (6 structures) display more compact, vertical forms. Houses of the first group are built with two-story, nearly square main blocks, with various one-story projections. They have very shallow hipped roofs, with noticeably broad, overhanging eaves. Windows grouped in bands, and narrow strips of applied trim, further emphasize the horizontal. The second group, which includes 4 U-shaped duplexes, features decidedly rectangular main blocks. The pitch of the roof is more noticeable in these houses, and the width of the eaves rather less so. All but one of this group have one-story projections on their front facades, but these do not achieve the low, spreading qualities found in the first group.

All 15 houses do have in common certain features broadly characteristic of the Prairie School. Exterior wall materials are brick, stucco, or a combination of these. Windows are often grouped in horizontal bands. Decorative elements are strongly geometric. Second story windows are generally shorter than those of the first story, and are set close beneath the eaves. Corners of main blocks are often emphasized through decoration or the actual construction of corner piers. The treatment of these elements varies considerably in sophistication, ranging from Wright's own work to the rather simplistic duplexes, which are of interest more for the rhythm created by their twin facades than for any creative application of the Prairie School style.

The Mason City architectural survey of 1977 identified a rather large number of houses exhibiting Prairie School characteristics. The 15 houses in this nomination have been selected because they show to best advantage the variety of Prairie School architecture and influence in the city.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

IN THIS SECTION CITE SIGNIFICANT FEATURES OR ASPECTS OF SIGNIFICANCE

SPECIFIC DATES 1908-1922 BUILDER/ARCHITECT see inventory sheets

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

These 15 houses represent a cross-section of Prairie School, and Prairie School influenced, residential architecture in Mason City, outside the immediate Rock Crest/Rock Glen area. In their varied forms and levels of sophistication, the houses illustrate the significant impact that Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School had on the vernacular building traditions of the city, an impact that resulted in the highest concentration of Prairie School architecture in Iowa. With the exception of Wright's Stockman house and Drummond's Yelland house, these houses are the work of local architects and builders who embraced the Prairie School idiom and adapted it to their own abilities and inclinations. In this sense, theirs is a collective significance, presenting as they do a range of interpretation from the meticulous and imaginative to the use of only the most obvious features of the style.

The chronology of the houses parallels that of Rock Crest/Rock Glen, showing that the Prairie School aroused immediate interest beyond that of mere curiosity. Setting the stage were Wright's own works, the City National Bank and Park Inn Hotel, designed for Mason City businessmen J.E.E. Markeley and James Blythe, and the Stockman house, all designed in 1908. The Stockman house was a variation on Wright's 1906 "A Fireproof House for \$5,000," but was executed in wood and stucco, rather than in concrete. The Bank and Hotel were completed by William Drummond, who had worked for both Sullivan and Wright. Drummond received the commission for the Yelland house, which was built in 1910. It also derived from Wright's "\$5,000 house", with Drummond's own signature features (double batten siding, distinctive trim) (Wilson, p. 12).

Work on the Rock Crest/Rock Glen development began in 1912, and the influence of its architects, Walter Burley Griffin, Francis Barry Byrne, and Marion Mahoney, was reflected almost immediately in the work of local architects and builders.

Martin (1978) has divided Mason City's indigenous Prairie School architecture into three groups: (1) those which pay close attention to the Prairie School idiom; (2) those which borrow somewhat randomly from the examples set by Rock Crest/Rock Glen; (3) a decidedly vernacular form which lacked the attention to detail and composition characteristic of the best of Mason City's Prairie School houses.

Of the 13 locally-designed houses in this nomination, four are clearly in the first category. The Shipley house (1913) is distinguished by the "sculptural" quality derived from the singular treatment of the corners, and the articulation of the walls with narrow strips of wood. In the Norris/Patton house (1913), the most notable features are the projections at each front corner of the main block, each articulated by thick corner piers with their distinctive Prairie School capitals. The Franke house (1916)

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is suggestive of the Blythe house in Rock Crest/Rock Glen, although the distinctive roof of the former is the result of cutting back the original broadly overhanging eaves. The Meir Wolf house (variously dated 1909 and 1920) is decidedly unusual. Its form is dominated by the stylised column "screen" of the front facade, and the large sculpted ornamentation which curls around the broad facsia at the corners like pincers. This house is attributed to Einar Broaten, a local architect who also designed the Drake house in Rock Crest/Rock Glen.

Martin included the Rye (1912) and Romey (1920) houses in this first category of indigenous Prairie School architecture in Mason City. However, these are rather more conservative than the four houses noted above. Both used brick extensively (indeed, the Romey house uses it exclusively), and they have a strongly rectangular, even vertical, quality. In the Rye house, this quality is so strong as to nearly overwhelm the vestigial application of Prairie School elements to the facade. As noted by Martin (p. 154), the Romey house has a curious dual character. The elevation that faces Rock Crest/Rock Glen is similar in composition and scale to the Blythe house across the street, while the actual front elevation repeats the porch, recessed entrance, and hipped roof which characterize houses along First Street (which are not in any sense Prairie School).

In Martin's second category is the Seney house (1913). (Another, the Lippert house, was to have been included, but problems in notification of the property owner prevented its inclusion here. The house will be added at a later date, pending owner notification.) The Seney house is attributed variously to Einar Broaten and to Seney himself. The house utilizes the "sculpted box" form, with prominent corner details, but its one-story appendages are curiously topped with gable roofs ending in wide, horizontal eaves. This form, which "re-combined" elements from Rock Crest/Rock Glen, was rather popularly applied to low-cost Prairie style housing in Mason City (Martin, p. 161).

The last 6 houses in this nomination are more "vernacular" than Prairie School, but deserve recognition because they present good illustrations of an almost pro forma use of the Prairie School idiom. Most closely modelled on the Prairie School is the Youngblood house (1922), which features the two-story central mass with appendages, broad overhanging eaves, and ribbon windows. This, however, is all: no attempt has been made to articulate either the corners of the main block or the wall surfaces, or, indeed, to offer decoration of any kind. The Gibson house (1915) may be read simply as a variation on the "hipped box", but is

see continuation sheet

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rescued from anonymity by certain details. On the enclosed front porch, the heavy square piers are moved in slightly from the corners, and are set slightly in advance of the porch wall plane. The main entrance, which is in a projection to the right of the main block, is set beneath an overhanging second story, and between plain, engaged piers that separate the sidelights from the doorframe, to give a screen effect (perhaps modelled on the Gilmore house in Rock Crest/Rock Glen). The four duplexes are attributed to local architect/builder Fred Lippert, and were built just after World War I. They are U-shaped in plan, the arms facing the street and ending in mirror-image facades. These offer the most cursory attention to Prairie School characteristics, but the rhythm of their paired facades and their utilitarian approach to the Prairie School idiom, lend them a certain interest.