

And Then There was the Catalog

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In the fall of 1968, having just completed my Ph.D., I took residence in Toledo, Ohio, for the year. While there, I was asked by my brother, Bradley, who had spent a year at the two Taliesins¹, to photograph his houses in Michigan, our home state. As I was doing so, I would occasionally stop at one of Wright's designs in the state. At the Turkel house, S.388², I was queried by someone as to the location of a house in Ludington, Michigan. I told him that it wasn't built. He thanked me and drove away. How did I know that it wasn't built? To this day I cannot say why, but it got me to wondering why the only published list of Frank Lloyd Wright's built work, in *Writings and Buildings* by Ben Raeburn and Edgar Kauffman, Jr., was inaccurate. My curiosity led to a publication.

The *Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, A Complete Catalog*, was a collaborative venture between Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, archivist of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation, and me, William Allin Storrer, Ph.D. (in Comparative Arts), an independent scholar. It was intended to be "The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, The Complete Catalog," and was scheduled for publication by Ben Raeburn, Wright's official publisher after WW II.

That it instead became "The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, A Complete Catalog," namely NOT the "Official" catalog of Frank Lloyd Wright's built work, is due to a combination of factors.

1. The adamant attitude of the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation (FLIWF) that it cannot and will not authenticate anything for which there is no or little documentation in their archives, and sometimes not even then. As an independent scholar, William Allin Storrer, could make claims where sufficient documentation was available.
2. The FLIWF was under threat of legal action if it published as by Wright any building claimed by another architect. Storrer, being "unofficial," was not so threatened.

Thus, *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, A Complete Catalog* (hereafter, *Catalog*) was published by MIT Press in 1974. Work on the manuscript had been begun in 1968.

So "why" a catalog of Frank Lloyd Wright's work, and why was I the one who completed the task of producing it?

1968: The Need for a Catalog of Frank Lloyd Wright's Built Work

Ask yourself, "How many people would like to know if there were a Frank Lloyd Wright building near them that they could see, perhaps

visit?" Alternately, how many Wrightians are there and would they purchase a book that claims to identify Wright's built work?

When the *Catalog* was being considered, there was no Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy: that didn't happen until 1990! No accurate listing of the built work of Frank Lloyd Wright existed in 1968, a decade after Wright's death. The only published list at that time was in *Writings and Buildings*, provided to Kaufmann and Raeburn, its authors, by Bruce Radde, though largely the work of John Ottenheimer (both Taliesin Fellows), enumerated not only many buildings that were built, but also "as built" buildings never constructed, and failed to list many that were built.

The files kept by the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation on both the built work and unbuilt projects are identified by a file number, properly called an accession number that is a mixture of design date and alphabetical listing by client. The first two numbers are the last two numbers of the year of design, while the last two numbers are largely alphabetical by client. Further, in a computerized system, a work such as the Husser house (S.046, T.9901) would be listed after the last-built Wright design, the Lykes house (S.433, T.5908). The FLIWF's numbering precludes its use as a catalog system. The accession numbers that I was provided by Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer were later systematized and refined by Professor Anthony Alofsin of the University of Texas School of Architecture. It was Alofsin who was instrumental at having my archive of Wright gifted to the UTSOA.

1968-1971/1974; Creation of the Storrer Catalog

My curiosity having been raised concerning inaccuracies in the only published list of Wright's work led me to multiple criss-crossings of the 48 contiguous United States.

I visited Chicago, Oak Park and River Forest, then Spring Green and began making photographs. I contacted Taliesin and eventually FLIWF archivist Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer provided me his listing. I then began scouring the country for every work identified as "built." In over 50,000 miles, I gathered information from owners, many of them original clients at this decade after Wright's death. This was before clients/owners began fluffing out their stories about the house and/or Wright.

I began looking for a publisher. I met Edgar Kaufmann, Jr, on the steps leading to the dining room at the Society of Architectural Historians and College Art Association Conference in Washington, D.C. He suggested I contact Ben Raeburn, which I did, and he took my idea to Mrs. Wright. She rejected the proposal for two reasons, or so I am told.

¹There are actually three Taliesins but most Wrightians consider only two as the third no longer exists. The first Taliesin (S.218, see footnote 2) is Wright's home in Spring Green, Wisconsin. It should not be called Taliesin East, as that title goes to the third Taliesin (S.381), once in the Hotel Plaza in New York City. Some call it Taliesin North. Further, Taliesin is actually the third version of that structure, the first (S.172) was built in 1911 upon Wright's return from Europe. The second was built in 1914 after a fire destroyed living quarters. The third in 1925 followed another fire in the living quarters. To confuse matters more, the (different) second is Taliesin West (S.241) in Scottsdale, Arizona.

²The "S#" is the (largely) chronological identification assigned to Frank Lloyd Wright's built work by this author in *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, A Complete Catalog*.

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1. Several of the photographs I submitted were not acceptable. All were ones I had stated I was in the process of replacing. They had been submitted to prove I actually had been to those buildings.

2. After I published with someone other than Raeburn, the FLIWF would access my work against their records, and possibly publish their own “official” catalog.

From this rejection, I went to Praeger, who were doing books in color inexpensively. They informed me that a Wright catalog wouldn't sell 15 thousand copies, their minimum to justify publication. (Many decades ago, when sales went past 20 thousand, I dropped Praeger a “thank you” note).

MIT Press accepted the project without hesitation. As I was an unknown, it was agreed that we needed a Foreword by someone with clout in the business. Henry-Russell Hitchcock, dean of architectural historians and author of *In the Nature of Materials*³, was suggested. He agreed and opened his extensive files to me. Note; MIT offered a generous stipend, but Hitchcock asked only that I take him to dinner at a favorite seafood restaurant that could not be reached by the New York subway system, and to which a taxi fare would be prohibitive.

The text for the Catalog was sent to the MIT Press from Anchorage, Alaska, just before I continued my 1971 around-the-world flight that would take me to the Wright buildings in Japan. The photos from that trip were submitted on my return to the states two months later. The submitted text numbered each item from 1, Wright's own home, to 433, the Lykes residence, even giving separate numbers to some detached garages. Since this numbering was based upon both my country-wide search and the FLIWF's files, we felt safe in the sequential numbering.

An MIT editor designed the layout and submitted proofs for me to correct, and *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright*, a complete catalog (hereafter, “Catalog”) was published in 1974, only five and a half years after I began collecting the information necessary to its creation.

In Hitchcock's providing me, Bill Storrer, invaluable assistance, the Catalog was something of a completion of this dean of architectural historians *In the Nature of Materials*. But in our discussions of newfound work, Hitchcock revealed to Storrer the following;

³Hitchcock's book was collaboration between him and Wright. It comprised fifty-four years of Wright's built work, 1886 to 1940. Yet only 19% of Wright's work, based on my discoveries of his entire opus, was represented.

When Wright was driving me around Evanston, Oak Park and River Forest, and Hyde Park, he would point to a house and say, ‘I did that but nobody'll know.’

So the quest continues beyond the Catalog.

Founded in 2000, the “Rediscovering Wright Project” was created to search out those houses to which Wright had pointed and said, “I did that but nobody'll ever know.” Richard Johnson (deceased 1915), Daniel Dominique Watts and myself started searching the towns mentioned by Hitchcock. We found several works that seemed to fit Wright's developing style, but the biggest find was in River Forest.

Dominique Watts had read a section in the seminal book, *The Prairie School* by H. Allen Brooks and went looking in Glen Ellyn for a building described therein. When he found it, there was little doubt that it was by Wright. This was the William Heald house (S.177a), since proven a Wright design when the plan was found in Wright's son Lloyd Wright's archive. But there was another design for the family in River Forest, for Brother James. We went looking and found it. A Wright-like design, we had further research to do on its provenance. Our usual routine followed; we did a figure eight on the blocks next this house and one block west we discovered a whole block of Wright houses. Twenty-five houses previously assigned by the local historian to Harry Robinson, the low man on the totem pole in Wright's Chicago office. Clearly they were beyond Harry's design capabilities, but the plans which were in Harry's collection — we credited him with being the on-site supervisor — had been destroyed on his death. Naturally, because the designs were NOT Harry's. What we knew was that on one plan was penciled, “FLW Esq”.

A firestorm ensued by those claiming Harry Robinson was responsible, though Harry never claimed the project. No one has been able to come up with any other Wright buildings in River Forest to which Wright might have pointed a finger. Those who have championed Robinson have not been in the houses where they would find details by both Wright and son Lloyd in profusion.

So we move on with discoveries, big and small, for future revelation and publication.

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