

# WRITINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE CONSERVANCY, INC.  
FOR THE COTTAGE BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT IN MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK

Volume XVIII

Issue 1

## Have You Heard? *By Claire Barnett*

You haven't heard from the Conservancy for some time. I mentioned in the last newsletter that we were looking for someone new to design and produce the newsletter. That process took much longer than expected, and then personal workloads delayed it further, so you won't see the "new" newsletter for a while longer. In the meantime, Alice Seeliger of AJS Creative, who has graciously been producing the newsletter for some years, kindly offered to produce one more issue, so that you will have some news until the new newsletter debuts in early fall. While discussing this interim issue, we reached an agreement so that Alice will be doing the re-design and will continue to produce our newsletter. There is lots of news, too. There have been two workweeks since the last newsletter, both with some major accomplishments. This time, there will be an article on the 2005 workweek, and then one on our recent workweek in the next issue.

The cottage has been a work in progress ever since we started planning the building's rescue, back in 1988, and formed the Conservancy. Over time, we have discovered minor changes necessary to make the cottage more durable. Sometimes, change is imposed by outside circumstances. A good example of that was the decision to air-condition the cottage, to insure the comfort of our guests. Another example is our ongoing

search to find a way to protect our plywood furniture from our flagstone floors. Flagstone is beautiful, but when people slid furniture across it as if it were smooth, the plywood starts to splinter and separate along the bottom edges. We may finally have found a solution.

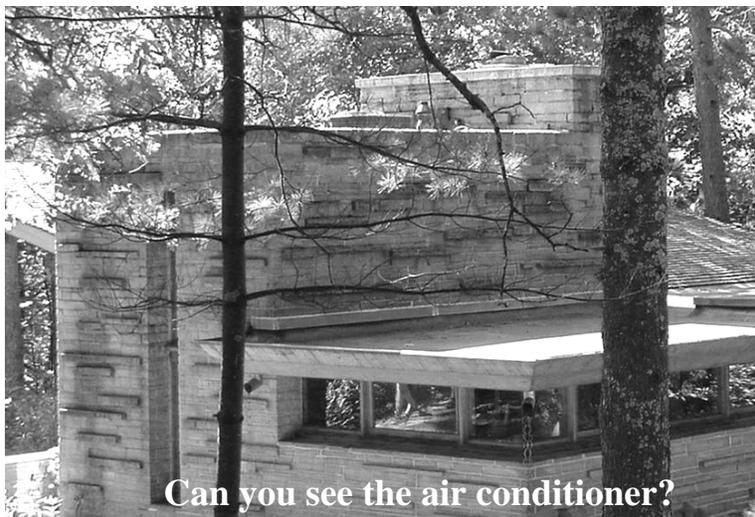
The cottage storage building was designed to provide protection for the cottage well and water tank, and to give us a place to store tools, bird feed, and equipment for our open house tours. It is a board-and-batten style, very much like

we will need to construct a short wall to conceal it once again. We also discovered a design problem with the planters, as you will read inside this issue.

There was also sad news last fall with the death of Tom Casey, who was the supervising Taliesin apprentice when the cottage was originally built. I attended his memorial service at the Taliesin Visitors Center in Spring Green, adjacent to Taliesin. The former Spring Green Restaurant was filled to capacity in honor of his accomplishments as an architect, Senior Fellowship member, and friend.

Cottage guests reported seeing a pileated woodpecker, sandhill cranes (nearby), and turkeys, in addition to the usual birds, squirrels, deer, and raccoons. Pileated woodpeckers are quite rare, but we have been seeing them in the cottage area since we began work in 1988. They are quite startling to see, since they are normal woodpecker colors, but are the size of a crow! If you see one, you will never forget it.

The cottage will have been in rental operation for fourteen years this July, ever since the summer of 1992. It is difficult to believe that so much time has passed, but it has, and parts of the cottage were starting to show their age. So it was time for another renovation this spring. But you will have to wait to hear about that until our next issue.



Can you see the air conditioner?

Mr. Wright used throughout his career, and even has planters extending out from it as part of the design. The shorter planter concealed the entrance, and the longer one hid the big LP gas tank that supplied the cottage heat and hot water. Now a new building code has required us to move the tank further away from the shed. It is presently behind the shed, and

### Cottage Construction Overseer Dies

**E**. Thomas Casey died on November 11, 2005, at his home on the Taliesin estate. He began his Taliesin career as an apprentice in 1950, became an architect with Taliesin Architects, and later led the effort to have the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture accredited. He went on to become the school's first Dean, a member of the Taliesin Senior Fellowship, and served as a Trustee of the Foundation. His best known work is perhaps the Rocky Mountain Visitors Center in Estes Park Colorado, a National Historic Landmark.

Tom was the supervising apprentice during the original construction of the Seth Peterson Cottage in 1959-60. He visited the cottage with our fledgling SPCC group in 1988, offering encouragement and serving on our Board of Advisors. He also designed a never-built addition for the second owners that would have turned the cottage into one room of a large Usonian house, complete with studio, swimming pool, and lookout.

### Cooling the Cottage, Part 2

**I**n our last issue, I told you how we decided to air-condition the cottage. This time I will explain how a cottage whose primary heating system is a radiant floor, *can* be air-conditioned.

The story starts back in the late 1950s when a young Seth Peterson had finally convinced Mr. Wright to design the cottage. The cottage was supposed to have a Usonian-style radiant heat floor, but such systems were not very well-known in those days, especially in smaller towns. One can imagine Seth speaking to a local heating contractor who exclaimed, "You want *what*? Let me give you a nice forced air system instead." And that is what he got.

The radiant floor heating system was never installed until the SPCC did it as part of the cottage rehabilitation. But back in the early days of the Conservan-

cy, we had no way of knowing how popular renting the cottage would be. We thought that perhaps it would be empty part of the winter. With the big glass windows, it would be hard to heat, so probably if it were vacant for a while, we would turn the heat down to save fuel costs. But then it would take time to get the floor back up to operating temperature and the cottage warm inside. What to do?

The solution was a combination heating system. Plastic ductwork was installed under the floor, with registers around the outside walls next to the windows. There is a heat exchanger in the utility closet, with air entering through the decorative wooden grille in the bedroom. The air is drawn through a hot water radiator, and then blown under the floor to the registers. In effect, we re-installed the forced air system, in addition to the radiant floor.

The extended vacancies never materialized, but there can be icy northwest winds coming across the lake in winter, causing wind chills of minus forty degrees Fahrenheit! On days like that, the forced air system also comes on and the cottage stays warm, despite the heat loss through the big windows and the open fireplace chimney.

As of last spring, the forced air auxiliary heating system is also used as the air conditioning system, with air circulated through a condenser located within the heat exchanger. Little did Seth and the unknown heating contractor realize that their heating substitution would one day make it possible for the cottage to be made comfortable year round.

### Protecting the Planters

by Claire Barnett

**W**orkweek 2005 was a good time to investigate the planters on the front wall of the storage building to determine why we had been getting water seepage inside.

I had discovered part of the problem last year when I took over the task of watering the flowers in the planters. I was filling them and suddenly heard splashing water *inside* the walls! Even worse, water started to run out of the bottom of the wall near the entrance door. Apparently the planters had no drains, and with the long planter extending at least four feet beyond the protecting roof overhang, rain could overwhelm the planters, too.

The top of the wall holding the planters consisted of four separate cedar boards that had warped, shrunk, and sagged, thereby directing rain-water inside. The inside of the long planter was wet and mildewed with mud covering the bottom. There were mushrooms growing, too! We covered the now open planters with plastic, "tenting" it in a similar fashion to a boat cover, to allow ventilation and drying.

New one-piece wooden tops were made for the planters, following the restoration rule of thumb that says that if it can't be seen, then use whatever material is best for the task. The new treated plywood tops are edged with cedar so that they match the old design when seen from the side.

I used a shop vacuum hose attached to a rake handle to get down inside the narrow planter walls and get all the debris out. There was construction debris too, including fast



food wrappers and cups, making the planter a sort of time capsule!

I found that clear plastic tubing could be wedged into the planter overflow holes and then silicone glued in place. The separate tubes were then combined into a larger one. The combined planter hoses are simply inserted into an inch and a quarter rigid plastic drainpipe attached to the inner wall, with a screened one-inch drain through the bottom of the wall.

The new system works quite well. In fact, now the watering can be done by watching the drains until water comes out. And rain, no matter how torrential, no longer is a problem.

Eventually, we will need to reopen the long planter to check its internal condition. If there is dry rot from the earlier saturation, we will need to rebuild the entire wooden planter.

## Fall Boat Trip

The annual Fall color boat trip took place in early October. In fact, our second Sunday tour date was so early in the month, that there was very little fall



color to see around the lake. Our guests enjoyed the trip anyway, and returned to hors d'oeuvres and wine in front of the fireplace afterward.

Pontoon boats for the tour were kindly provided by former Mirror Lake Association President Waldo Peterson, and present MLA president Mark Blakeslee. Thank you!

We consulted a calendar for this year, and sadly, there is another early tour date in October, so we will not be holding the boat trip this fall. However, it will return again the following year.

## Cottage Cancellations Offer Opportunity

Readers who have booked nights at the cottage know how far ahead reservations are made, and how difficult it can be to get exactly the nights you want, especially during the warmer months. In 2005, for example, the cottage had been booked for every single night, April through October, until the party who had reserved the nights of October 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> was forced to cancel. This opened a window of opportunity for anyone looking to spend two glorious autumn days at the cottage.

If you want to rent the cottage on short notice, be sure to call the rental office, and ask whether there is an opening around the time you would like to visit. There's always a chance that a cancellation has opened a window of opportunity for you!

Also, consider visiting the cottage during the winter months. From December through March, Mirror Lake State Park and the cottage take on a different personality, especially when snow covers the ground. Then the woods are hushed, everything seems clear and sharp, and visitors to the bird feeder are much more appreciative of your generosity. Meanwhile, you can snuggle by the fireplace after a brisk walk or ski through the woods. The cottage is beautiful at all times of year, and winter certainly has charms of its very own. In addition, a winter rental rate is in effect Sunday through Thursday.

To ask about cottage availability, contact the Sand County Service Company, 116 W. Munroe St., P.O. Box 409, Lake Delton, WI 53940; Tel. 608 254-6551, or 800 822-7768; FAX 608 924-1443; E-mail [sandcnty@midplains.net](mailto:sandcnty@midplains.net).

## Loving the Cottage

by Gail Kohl

Marketing Director of the  
Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy

After more than fifteen years, there is more interest than ever in the Seth Peterson Cottage! Magazines and newspapers love to "Wright" about our special jewel in the Wisconsin woods. Here are some of the articles that have appeared recently, and there is still more to come.

*Wall Street Journal*, "Spending the Night With Frank Lloyd Wright," by Terry Teachout. "The Peterson Cottage is so tranquil and serene that I felt as though I could sit in meditative silence by its great sandstone hearth for hours on end. To turn the key of a Wright house is to step into a parallel universe."

*National Geographic Adventure*, "Frank Lloyd Wright designed this earthy yet elegant gem in 1958 as one of his last commissions."

*Midwest Express Airlines*, "Outside In," by Barbara Sanford. "We walked through a short, angled door into a simple dining and kitchen area and are suddenly embraced by a magnificent window-lined great room with soaring roofline reaching for the sky. We throw open the bank of ceiling-height windows and doors on three sides and listen to a Beethoven concerto. It's hard to separate the outside from the inside, which I suspect was exactly Wright's intent. Dappled sunlight streams in as the crickets and birds sing. I look out at the golden wildflower meadow and watch a woodpecker feed at the cottage-shaped bird feeder."

Other features to appear in books and magazines in the months ahead: *Small Hotels*, published by Taschen Books, 2006 *Getaways*, by Trails Books, *Sidetracked in Wisconsin: A Guide for Thoughtful Travelers*, and *Wish*, a magazine published by *The Australian* (Australia's only national newspaper).

# Writings

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, Inc.  
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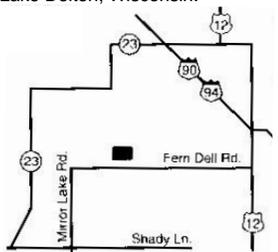
Office Manager: Sheila Bentley  
Marketing Coordinator: Gail Kohl

## UPCOMING EVENTS



Taking a guided tour of the Cottage is a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon.

The **Seth Peterson Cottage** is located at E9982 Fern Dell Rd., Lake Delton, Wisconsin.



### Sunday, June 4, 1-4 pm

Annual Mirror Lake State Park Open House  
Guided Tours, FREE Admission

### Sunday, June 11, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00

### Sunday, July 9, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00  
Guest Speaker to be Announced

### Sunday, August 13, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00

### Sunday, September 10, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00

### Sunday, October 8, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00  
No Fall Color Boat Tour this year

### Sunday, November 12, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00

### Sunday, December 10, 1-4 pm

Monthly Open House, Guided Tours, \$2.00  
Directors/Members Annual Meeting, 4-5 pm

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### From the Guest Book...

"We pull up—ooh and ahh like most everyone else, I imagine. Jump out of the car and run through and around like 2 teenagers on a treasure hunt. Open a bottle of wine and light candles. Make a fire—unpack the car—get settled. Oh my gosh! This is wonderful!"

----*Theo and Paul Debnar*

"Our third visit to Paradise and my dear husband's 50<sup>th</sup>! Peace to all who enter and peace to all who leave!"

----*Jayne and Jeff Imse*

"Both my parents are architects – that should tell you something. I've seen more architecture than several old people put together. I just want to go canoeing, can we go now?"

----*Jane Bader – age 9*