



## A WRIGHT LEGACY: ROOFS THAT LEAK!

YES, THE ROOF AT THE COTTAGE  
LEAKS TOO...

By Bill Martinelli and Patrick Molzahn

**M**any of Frank Lloyd Wright's buildings share something in common – leaky roofs. The Seth Peterson Cottage is no exception. As a young student of architecture, I remember hearing this anecdote many years ago:

*In 1939 in Racine, Wisconsin, Herbert "Hib" Johnson threw a housewarming party at Wingspread, his new residence designed by Wright. As dinner was being served in the great hall, a thunderstorm erupted, and water began dripping steadily into the room. Johnson, CEO of the S.C. Johnson Wax Company, phoned Wright, who was working at Taliesin West. Johnson said in a rage, "I'm sitting here with some friends and distinguished guests, and the roof is leaking right on top of my head!"*

*"Well Hib," Wright replied, "why don't you move your chair?"*

The truth is, Wright often pushed his designs to the limit. He frequently experimented with new materials and regularly extended his cantilevers beyond accepted tolerances. The roof on the Seth Peterson Cottage consists of a large sloping shed roof and two levels of flat roofs, the upper one above the kitchen/bath and storage areas, and a second flat area that extends over the bedroom and living room areas.

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# WRITINGS

WRITINGS is a semi-annual publication of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

**P**ease. Quiet. Nature. These are feelings people have while staying at the Seth Peterson Cottage. As intended by Frank Lloyd Wright, the setting creates a peaceful and relaxing opportunity to put everyday issues and stress aside. It is quiet without common urban disturbances of traffic on nearby roads or high-speed power boats on Mirror Lake. The Cottage is set in nature with opportunities to see and hear birds and observe wildlife such as deer and raccoons. To help visitors remove distractions in the Cottage we do not provide a television or Wi-Fi.

The Guest Comment Book records impressions people have from their stay in the Cottage. Check out samples of these comments included in this issue of our newsletter on page 7.

Volunteers are an integral resource that keeps the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy operating smoothly. Members of the Board of Directors and all of the tour guides are volunteers. Annually we track the number of volunteers hours in order to see the hours it takes to keep the operation going. The hours for 2023 totals 1,331. In 2023, the IRS placed a value of volunteer hours at \$31.80 per hour amounting to a total of \$42,300 for the year! We thank all of our volunteers for overseeing the Cottage over the past 31 years and keeping it ready for more visitors now and into the future.

Interested in volunteering for the Seth Peterson Cottage: stop in on any Open House day the second Sunday of each month, or email us at [SethPetersonCottage@gmail.com](mailto:SethPetersonCottage@gmail.com)



## MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION REPORT

By Marcus Jaeger, President

**G**reetings from the center of Mirror Lake! I am writing this during the first week of April and, true to form this winter, I have both shoveled snow and have had my pontoon boat placed in the water in the very same week. The snow is mostly gone, and I hope to get out on the boat this week!

Some of us were having a discussion recently about the state park and we were speculating on what the lake would look like if the state park hadn't been created over fifty years ago. I was just a kid when the state began the process of planning and acquiring land for the park. Back in those days, the state had the right to condemn a home and property of an individual and pay the owner what they considered to be a fair price. I do not recall the specifics, but I certainly remember my grandparents and their neighbors on the lake feeling very uncomfortable and angry with this in regard to losing their beloved property on Mirror Lake.

I seem to recall that after a period of time, the state could only acquire the desired property after the deedholder died. (There is a famous story on the lake about the infamous Bunny Page property once Mr. Page passed away, but perhaps I shouldn't share it here, though should you ask me in person...) Some families placed the name of one of their children on the deed to delay losing their property, albeit with mixed results. I believe my grandparents did exactly that, though the state never came calling. This is written not as a condemnation of the methods used by the state, nor is it written as an endorsement, but simply a look back at how things were done back then during the era of the creation of the park. While the procedures seem harsh, the result is that we have an unspoiled gem here at Mirror Lake. This area would most certainly have been developed (and by "developed" I mean overdeveloped!), as opposed to having the beauty that tens of thousands of visitors and residents continue to enjoy each year.

Those of you reading this are invited to attend the annual meeting of the Mirror Lake Association on June 15<sup>th</sup>, at the world-renown Ishnala Supper Club. Registration begins at 8:30 am, with the meeting scheduled to start at 9:00 am. Among the topics to be discussed will be the long-awaited navigational dredging of the lake, including the cleaning out of the sediment trap that was created in 2008. This trap was designed to prevent phosphorus from entering the body of the lake. Also in the plan this year is the removal of five deltas that have formed at the opposite end of the lake that impede boat traffic. There are other interesting and important items on the agenda, and we hope to see you there. As you visit the Seth Peterson Cottage, do not forget to visit the lake and enjoy the same beauty that Seth himself saw when he selected the site to build his dream cottage.



## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Patrick Cieslewicz, Park Superintendent

**A**s we transition into spring here at Mirror Lake, the winter season did not hold on very long, but we were still able to offer cross-country skiing on our beautiful trails for a few weeks.

The Friends of Mirror Lake held two fantastic candlelight hikes, one in January, and a hike-and-ski event in February. Over 800 people attended between the two events. Candles illuminated the trails, creating a magical atmosphere for all attendees. These events have become a winter tradition at Mirror Lake State Park, with hot chocolate and pastries being offered for a goodwill donation.

The construction of the new toilet and shower building in Cliffwood is ongoing, and we are excited about the upcoming facilities. Thanks to the mild winter weather, the contractors could work uninterrupted.



**Above:** The new toilet and shower building is currently under construction.

Another exciting project that began in late March is renovating the road to the beach and parking lots. The road to the beach and beach parking lots will remain closed until late May, but visitors can still access the beach on foot from the footpath near Bluewater Bay or the boat landing.

Mirror Lake State Park, a haven for outdoor enthusiasts and families, offers a diverse range of recreational activities. From hiking and biking to boating and fishing at our ADA fishing pier, there's something for everyone. Our park also provides a serene camping experience, making it a popular destination for those seeking a nature-filled getaway.

We look forward to seeing you at Mirror Lake State Park this summer and hope you enjoy its many attractions.

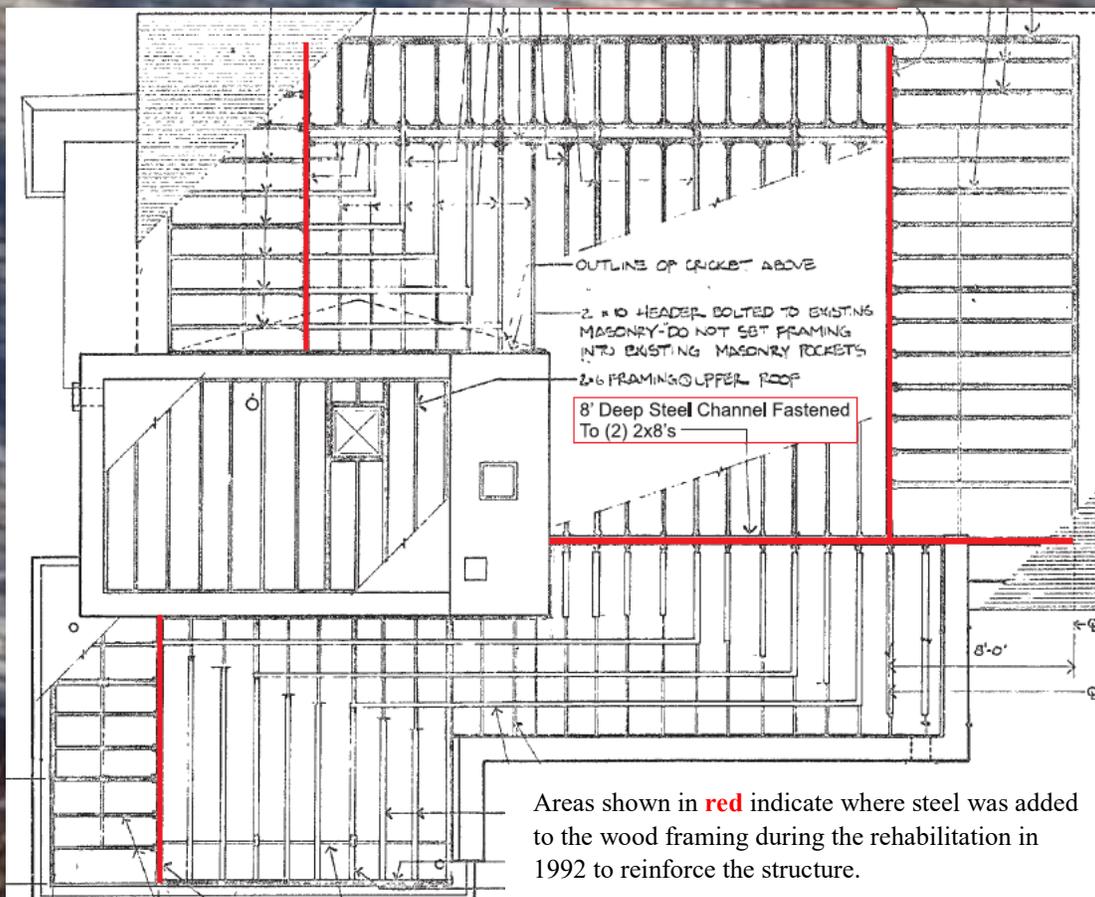


During the rehabilitation, it was discovered that the flat roofs had been built perfectly level. To complicate matters, the structure had deflected over time, creating depressions in which water pooled, eventually resulting in leaks. The plan called for several improvements to correct this problem. First, steel was included to make the roof stronger to prevent sagging. Second, a scupper was added at the living room parapet wall to provide a direct path for water to flow off the roof. Finally, the plywood sheathing for the flat roof areas was placed on a series of tapered furring strips to ensure a slight pitch to facilitate drainage as the Wright's plans indicated.

The flat roofs were originally composed of layers of asphalt roofing, which is durable but requires considerable maintenance and has a relatively short lifespan. After considerable discussion with State Historical Society staff who wanted to use asphalt roofing as was done originally, an EPDM roofing membrane was installed instead. In the early 1990's, EPDM was a relatively new material, but it has proven to have superior performance and durability for buildings with minimal slope roofs.

The area where most leaks occur at the cottage is where the sloped roof intersects with the stone core. A common solution for this situation is to add a cricket, which is a sloped structure designed to divert water. The original drawings show that a cricket was specified. However, for some reason it was never built. A cricket was added during the 1992 rehabilitation of the cottage. However, this area of the roof continues to be a challenge. Significant flow occurs at this juncture, and water manages to find its way in during heavy rain events.

Case in point, last August during a heavy downpour, my sister-in-law was at the cottage and called to tell me that water was dripping from the ceiling in the kitchen. In true Wright fashion, I told her to put a pan under it to catch the drips. Then I promptly relayed the news to Bill Martinelli, knowing that this wasn't the first time he had heard this... and I'm pretty sure it won't be the last.

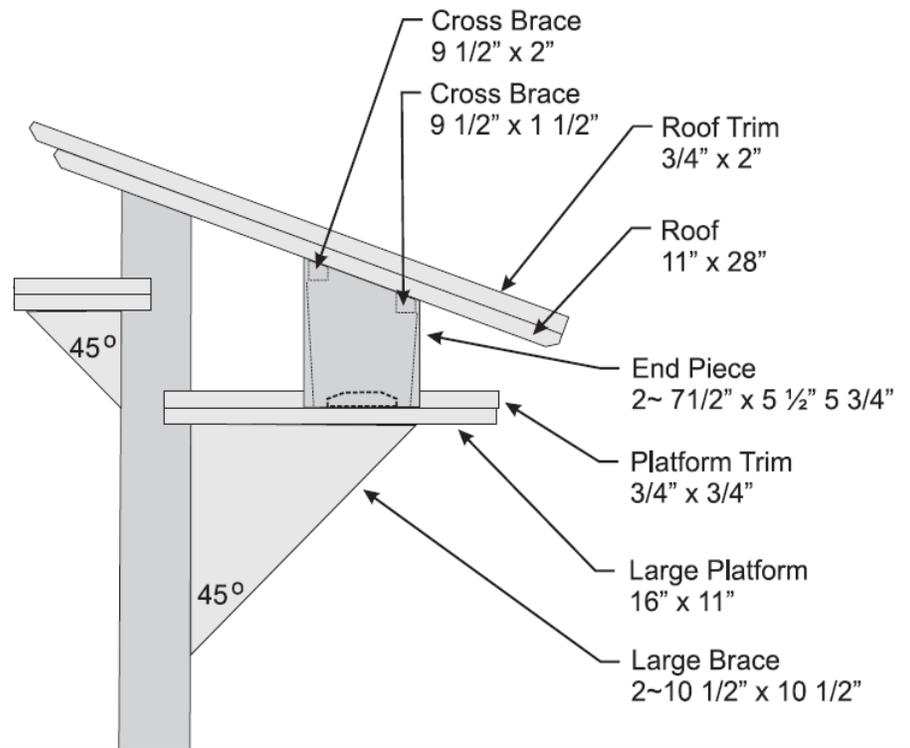




The original plans for the cottage show that a cricket was specified. However, it was not added until 1992.



Jan Aslaksen and Bill Martinelli installed the new birdfeeder during our March open house. Within minutes of completing the install, the birds were enjoying the new feeder.



### A New Birdfeeder

Thanks to the handywork of **Bill Martinelli**, our feathered friends have a new place to gather and feed. Bill made an exact duplicate of the existing feeder, which was last replaced in 2008. The original birdfeeder from 1994, and it's 2008 replacement, were built and donated by the **Wild Bird Barn** in Baraboo.

Bill drew up plans in CAD so we now have actual documentation for when the feeder needs to be replaced in the future. Since the feeders appear to have a lifespan of about 15 years, the next generation of SPCC caretakers will have an easier task recreating this popular feature.

### SPRING 2024 WORK WEEK

Our annual Cottage work week occurred in mid-April. Activities involved landscaping, power washing the exterior, deep cleaning of the interior including steam cleaning of the upholstery and flagstone floor, window washing, refinishing the interior jambs and sills of the windows, and touchup and repair of the furniture. Finally, in preparation for the arrival of a new Subzero refrigerator in May, the kitchen sink base and upper cabinets had to be moved to provide clearance for the new unit.

Special thanks to all who participated in this year's work week, including: Pat Cieslewicz, Kit Hogan, Dr. Melissa Kincaid, Rachel & Scott Lohman, Marc Londo, Bill Martinelli, Tom Martinelli, Patrick Molzahn, Beth & Kermit Traska, and our numerous local contractors who help service the SPCC annually.



(Left) Marc Londo power-washing the exterior. (Center) Patrick Molzahn refinishing the windows. (Right) Brothers Bill & Tom Martinelli landscaping around the cottage.



## PENNIES IN THE FLOOR

By Claire Barnett (Originally published in the Fall 2009 Newsletter)

There are three pennies in the floor of the cottage, two of them placed one on either side of the fireplace and the third hidden away in the back left corner of the closet in the bedroom hallway. Steve and Ann from Minnesota inquired in the guest book, “Nobody has mentioned the pennies in the floor. What is the purpose? Whose are they? Why are they there?”

We found the first one in the early days of our tenure, when the cottage was being dismantled to begin reconstruction. At that time, the crew found a penny dated 1959, prominently placed to the right of the fireplace. We asked Seth Peterson’s lifelong friend Bert Goderstat about it, and he replied that Seth had it placed there to commemorate the construction year of the cottage. I liked that idea, because I was raised in a similar tradition—my mom was always putting initials or marbles or pennies in new concrete work. So I gave the masons a 1992 penny to put in a similar place to the left of the fireplace, to commemorate the year the cottage rehabilitation was finished.

The third penny came later and was placed in secret! In February of 2006, the flagstone floor needed to be taken up to replace the cottage radiant floor heating system. Careful instructions were given to the masonry crew to be sure to save the pennies, particularly the 1992 one, since it was laid in a masonry joint between stones and not in a stone like the original one. They wanted to know why, and then decided to continue the tradition, placing a 2006 penny in the back of the closet, without telling us about it! Look for it under the folding chairs. 

## FROM THE GUESTBOOK

“Despite the gray and dreary weather, we enjoyed this cozy cottage as a short get-away from our hectic lives. As an architect, I have a great appreciation for the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and loved to ‘Live’ in one of his creations for a few days. The setting is spectacular! Hope to be back some time to enjoy it in the summer.”

**Pam & Greg**  
Minneapolis, MN

“This was our 1<sup>st</sup> visit to the cottage and will not be our last. Beautiful in every way! When we decided to ‘take the leap’ we decided on leap day and the Seth Peterson Cottage. The ceremony was small, short but beautiful – and definitely memorable. We look forward to spending many anniversaries back at the cottage!”

**Andrea & Matt**  
Wausau, WI

“We’ve been coming here for fifteen years, and this place has not lost its magic. Thanks to Seth, Mr. Wright, and the Conservancy for this wonderful respite from reality.”

**Kenneth & Philis**  
New Orleans, LA

“Mere words cannot adequately convey how special and meaningful being so blessed to be in this cottage. We will be bringing back to our slice of heaven this place and how it has become a shared language for Martha and me to articulate our future together.”

**Martha & Michael**  
Julian, CA

“This weekend was worth the wait! A chance to unplug and enjoy the symphony of birds and frogs instead . . . We especially liked canoeing up the lake. The perspective from the water was ideal to see how seamlessly the cottage merged with the rest of the forest. Thank you to all the people dedicated to preserving this gem!”

**Jennifer & Patrick**  
Duluth, MN

“First read about Seth Peterson Cottage in Midwest Living Magazine several years ago. Our trip was planned around our stay at this amazing getaway. What a wonderful experience!”

**Mary & Joe**  
Nashville, TN



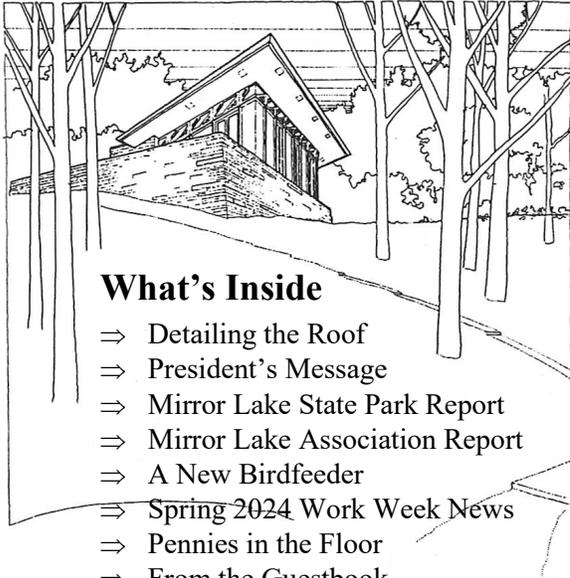
# WRITINGS

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.

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**Note:** Cottage location appears in the map below.



Want to learn more about Frank Lloyd Wright's work in Wisconsin? Visit [WrightInWisconsin.org](http://WrightInWisconsin.org)

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour Schedule:

- June 2 1 to 4 p.m. FREE!
- June 9 1 to 4 p.m. \$5 \*
- July 14 1 to 4 p.m. \$5 \*
- Aug. 11 1 to 4 p.m. \$5 \*
- Sept. 8 1 to 4 p.m. \$5 \*
- Oct. 13 1 to 4 p.m. \$5 \*

\*Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy members receive free admission and a discount of 10% off cottage merchandise.

### Become a Member of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy

More information is available on our website, [sethpeterson.org](http://sethpeterson.org). Click "Membership," under "The Conservancy" on the top menu.

✓ visitors find touring the cottage a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Take a scenic drive and experience firsthand this restored Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home during the open house tours held on the second Sunday of each month. For more information about the cottage, visit us online at [SethPeterson.org](http://SethPeterson.org).

