



## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE HEARTH

*By Patrick Molzahn & Bill Martinelli*



**A**ccording to Frank Lloyd Wright, "The hearth is the heart of the home." His words emphasize the vital role fireplaces played in his designs, signifying warmth, comfort, and a gathering place for family and friends. In the Seth Peterson Cottage, the hearth is the central element of the space. Part of the cottage's sandstone core, this popular fixture has a history of its own.

Wright's drawings for the cottage show the chimney for the fireplace integrated within the stone core, the capstone of which was a level line located fourteen feet above the cottage's floor. Sometime after Owen Pritchard occupied the cottage in 1962, a six-foot chimney was added, presumably because they thought this would make the fireplace work better. During the rehabilitation, a group of volunteers decided to celebrate their progress by lighting a fire in the fireplace. The room became filled with

# WRITINGS

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

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## Seth Peterson cottage Conservancy Inc.

### Executive committee

- President: Kermit Traska
- Vice President: Bill Martinelli
- Treasurer: Catherine Sperl
- Secretary: Marc Londo

### Board members

Claire Barnett, Tim Heggland, Dr. Melissa Kincaid, Dr. Steven Kincaid, Greg Kliner, Carolyn Kotchi, Rachel Lohman, Patrick Molzahn, and Beth Zondag-Traska

### Ex-officio members

- Marcus Jaeger, President  
Mirror Lake Association
- Patrick Cieslewicz, Park Superintendent  
Mirror Lake State Park

### Conservancy staff

- Office Manager: Ron Dakter
- Marketing Coordinator: Gail Kohl

### Reservations

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

**W**elcome to 2025. We are looking forward to another year of maintaining and making the Seth Peterson Cottage available for tours and overnight stays. On January 1<sup>st</sup> we opened bookings for 2027, and many of those future nights have already been reserved. Interest in staying at the Seth Peterson Cottage remains strong. That is wonderful because it is the lodging fee that makes up the majority of the money we need to keep the Cottage looking great and making it available to the public.

Annually we track the number of volunteer hours our board members, tour guides and others devote to maintaining and operating the Seth Peterson Cottage. In 2024, our 20 volunteers tallied 1,261 volunteer hours completing a sundry of tasks supporting the Cottage. The IRS estimates the value of a volunteer hour in 2024 at \$33.49, (1,261 x \$33.49 = \$42,231) which reflects a 5.3% increase from the previous year. This figure is used to recognize the significant contribution volunteers make to the support of the Cottage. Many of these tasks would otherwise need to be hired or purchased at a cost to the Conservancy. We certainly thank our volunteers for their work for the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy. Are you interested in helping? Just let us know as we are always looking for more volunteers.

We also keep track of the number of people that tour the Cottage on Open House days. January has historically seen the lowest number of guests, ranging from zero to sixteen. We were surprised this past October when 166 people showed up, with half of them right around 1:00. The only other days with higher numbers were our 25<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> anniversaries with attendances of 208 and 291 respectively. We were well prepared for the turnouts for the anniversaries and thank our experienced tour guides for superbly handling the crowd in October.

In other news, a committee studied the potential of creating an endowment fund for the Seth Peterson Cottage. At our October Board of Directors meeting, *The Seth Peterson Cottage Preservation Endowment Fund* was created, partnering with the Community Foundation of South Central Wisconsin in Baraboo. The purpose of this fund is to provide a long-term funding source for the Cottage. There will be more information forthcoming on the endowment fund.

We also have several new developments for 2025. We are adding the ability to accept credit cards as payment on open house days for admission fees and merchandise sales. We applied for and received a grant from the Department of Natural Resources through the Knowles-Nelson Stewardship Fund for recreational improvement to blacktop our parking lot and driveway. Both great additions for advancing the operation of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy.

We want to thank all of you who stay at the Cottage, those who have come for our Open Houses, and especially to ALL of our volunteers who provide the support that is needed to preserve and operate the Seth Peterson Cottage.



## MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION REPORT

By Marcus Jaeger, President

**H**ello on behalf of the 150 plus members of the Mirror Lake Association. Spring is the start of the season and while each season is wonderful on the lake, spring and summer bring more people and more of my family, along with more grilling out and boating!

As we begin the season, there are a couple of dates I would like to share. The Mirror Lake Association's annual meeting will be held on Saturday, June 21st at Ishnala Supper Club. Registration starts at 8:30 am and the meeting begins at 9:00 am. Everyone is welcome. If you are reading this, you are invited to attend as a guest. We have some exciting news to report on our ongoing navigational dredging project as well as other news from our lake partners. We will also have some swag for sale, along with our famous Hazel Estervig Memorial Raffle. This year our speaker will be Cindy Cseri, who is in the midst of writing a book on Mirror Lake, and more specifically, the formation of the state park. I have heard Cindy speak and her presentation will be top-notch and hold your interest.

August 16th brings the Mirror Lake Association's annual picnic at the Bluewater Bay pavilion in the park. We will start at 2 pm. Again, all are welcome to join us. No need for you to bring anything as we always have plenty and, if I don't mind saying so myself, I can really handle the grill! Come on out.

Two weeks later on Saturday, August 30th, is our tenth annual flotilla. What a blast! We gather at 5 pm in the center of the lake and hook our pontoons together and, well, eat and visit. It's a lot of fun. Pizza is donated by the Keg & Patio in downtown Dells and it is really good.

Sad news came to the Seth Peterson family last month with the passing of Claire Barnett (See page 7). Claire was actively involved with the Seth Peterson Cottage since the early days of its rehabilitation. In 1998, I purchased my home on the lake. My next-door neighbor was Audrey Laatsch. It was through Audrey that I met Claire. She was serious. She was fun. She was diligent. And she was passionate about the cottage. Even as time made a burden of years, Claire would be steadfastly working around the grounds, trimming branches and taking pride in this jewel of a property that many folks just like Claire have worked tirelessly to maintain.

If you are of a mind to, next time you are out, order a brandy old-fashioned, sweet, of course, muddle the fruit and hoist it up to our friend Claire. She would not have it any other way. Thank you for your support of this great organization.



## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Patrick Cieslewicz, Park Superintendent

**I**n this article, I want to highlight one of our newer hiking trails, the Bluff Canyon and Lake View Ridge Trail, which was developed in 2022. The trail is located on the north side of Mirror Lake, with a parking lot accessible from Highway 23. Most of the trail is within the Mirror Lake Pine Oak Forest State Natural Area.

The Mirror Lake Pine Oak Forest State Natural Area is a mature, dry-mesic forest designated as a State Natural Area in 2003. The forest thrives on gently rolling sandy uplands and features a canopy of white pine, white oak, red oak, and black oak. Vernal ponds and dry ravines, some containing large sandstone cliffs, contribute to the area's natural diversity.

The Bluff Canyon Trail spans 2.1 miles, with the Lake View Ridge Trail comprising a shorter section of the Bluff Canyon. Hiking along the Bluff Canyon Trail allows visitors to walk through tall pine trees and enjoy spectacular views from sandstone cliffs along the narrows of Mirror Lake.

Make sure to take the time to hike the Bluff Canyon Trail during your stay at the cottage. This trail is open year-round and remains one of the hidden gems of Mirror Lake. Even on a busy summer day, you may have this beautiful trail all to yourself and enjoy the peaceful surroundings and stunning views!



### THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE PRESERVATION ENDOWMENT FUND

Now there is a new way for you to support the continued preservation of the Seth Peterson Cottage! The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy has established a permanent endowment fund with the Community Foundation of South Central Wisconsin located in Baraboo. Gifts to the fund are invested and will provide an annual grant to support the preservation of the Cottage forever!

Established in 1998, the Community Foundation of South Central Wisconsin provides financial support to dozens of local nonprofits. Watch for more information as we develop the plan for promoting the endowment fund.

If you would like more information now, please contact us at: [SethPetersonCottage@gmail.com](mailto:SethPetersonCottage@gmail.com)





smoke, and they quickly discovered that the fireplace did not function well. A fireplace specialist from Madison was brought in and they advised that a fresh-air intake pipe be added, and that the flue be resized to improve the performance.

The rehabilitation architect, John Eifler, included these recommendations in his plans. But he also wanted to remove the chimney to get back to Wright's original vision. However, the fire code had changed since the cottage was originally built and now required that the chimney have a minimum distance from the roof's wooden shingles. In the end, they were able to remove approximately four feet of masonry, leaving the current chimney projecting two feet above Wright's original design.

If the amount of wood burned is any indication, the fireplace continues to be well used by our guests. The woodshed is kept stocked with hardwoods, and Sand County, our rental agency, prepares the hearth with an easy to light fire starter so guests can quickly enjoy the wonderful ambiance that comes with this fireplace.

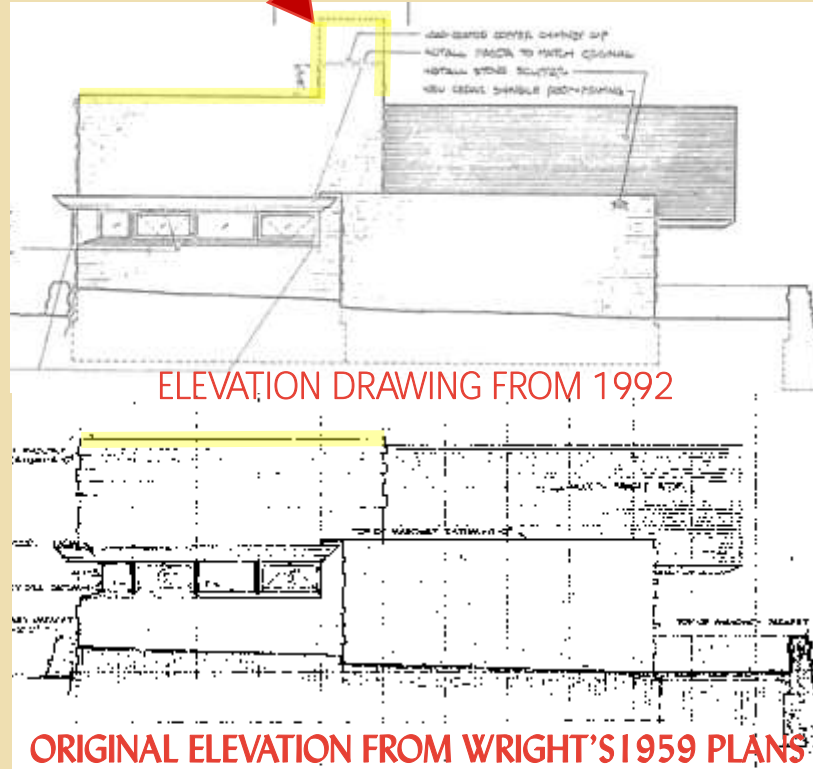


Photo Credit: Andrew Pielage





**Above Left:** The original drawings for the cottage showed a flat roofline. The rehabilitation drawings from John Eifler show the chimney with instructions to remove the top 4 feet.

**Above Center:** The color change in the masonry shows where the chimney was extended.

**Above:** Before and after photos show the difference with the extended chimney towering above the roofline before it was lowered in 1992.

**Left:** A photo of the hearth appears on our 2025 mug. To learn more about the [Seth Peterson mug tradition](#), see page 6.



## THE SETH PETERSON ANNUAL MUG TRADITION

By Patrick Molzahn

Since 1997, with the exception of one year when a wine glass was chosen instead, the SPCC has produced an annual mug for our guests. Each stay at the cottage includes two free mugs. The result is a unique array of colors and designs celebrating the aesthetic and philosophy of FLW as it relates to the Seth Peterson Cottage.

According to one member, “using my mug for my morning coffee reminds me that I am part of something different—the lasting influence that Frank Lloyd Wright has had on architecture.”

For the past decade, Bill Martinelli has spearheaded the design of our mugs. Each year our Board members vote to select their favorite quote to go along with the mug design. The mugs are produced by Top Promotions in Middleton, WI.

Are you looking to replace or acquire a mug from a past year? We have a limited supply and may be able to accommodate your request. Mugs are \$10 each, plus shipping and handling. An order form is available on our website: [www.sethpetererson.org/gift\\_shop.html](http://www.sethpetererson.org/gift_shop.html)



## SPRING 2025 WORK WEEK



This year's Work Week brought decent weather, allowing us to accomplish our usual tasks, from yard work to deep cleaning to various maintenance projects. We are also thrilled to have a newly paved parking lot and driveway! Thank you to the following individuals who participated in the Seth Peterson 2025 Work Week: Bill Martinelli, Jan Aslaksen, Patrick Molzahn, Beth and Kermit Traska, Kit Hogan, Scott and Rachel Lohman, and Marc Londo.

## FROM THE GUESTBOOK

“What an incredible experience, to be able to stay in a functional sculpture that is the FLW experience. To be able to live in art and creativity is truly a gift that my daughter and I will never forget. I wish there were many more FLW sculptures that we could rent for a short time. Thank you so much for making this one possible.”

**Jeff & Djinna**

Denver, CO

“The more we experience Wright’s designs, we find him a brilliant, uncompromising, very eccentric architectural genius. Unique buildings from a unique individual. We were so fortunate to stay in a cottage of his design and ideas. We could certainly feel his presence.”

**Ken & Barb**

Muskego, WI

“I am here because of my niece who is a lover of FLW. The story of this house is a rather sad one, but with a very happy ending – the reconstruction of this gem of a house. The beautiful simplicity of FLW designs show in this lovely cottage. So glad we waited the 6 years to make this trip happen.”

**Mel**

Portland, OR

“The most unique place we have ever stayed at in our vacation adventures. The 2-year wait was worth it. We enjoyed the solitude, the sunsets and the stunning architecture and features in this FLW gem. Thank you to all, including the conservancy and others who worked so hard to restore and preserve the history and significance of this property.”

**Leah & Brent**

Sun Prairie, WI

“I have two words . . . Visual Dessert!”

**Megan & Brent**

“We were fortunate to get this fantastic cottage due to a cancellation – To immerse ourselves in a FLW creation, in the woods, was an experience never to be forgotten. Its existence is an example of people in a community coming together with such dedication and fortitude. The history of Seth Peterson - quite tragic – yet he had a vision and carried it though. I can only think that he would be happy that so many people get to enjoy his cottage, bringing peace into all hearts who dwell here.”

**Marnell & Kris**

Bloomington, IN



## REMEMBERING CLAIRE

*By Kermit Traska*

**T**he Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy is sad to announce the passing of Claire Barnett following complications from a heart attack in late December 2024.

She was one of the original board members dating back to the start of the organization in 1989. Claire enjoyed giving tours of the Cottage, was the newsletter editor for many years, and served as Board president for eight years, from 2004-2012. She will be missed by all.





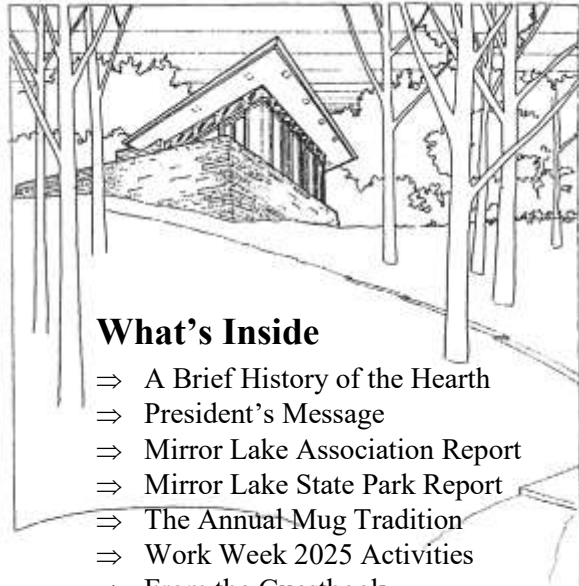
# WRITINGS

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.

P.O. Box 186

Lake Delton, WI 53940-0186

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



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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 1	1 to 4 p.m.	FREE!
• June 8	1 to 4 p.m.	\$5 *
• July 6	1 to 4 p.m.	\$5 *
• Aug. 10	1 to 4 p.m.	\$5 *
• Sep. 14	1 to 4 p.m.	\$5 *
• Oct. 12	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.

**V**isitors 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).

**Seth Peterson Cottage**  
E9982 Fern Dell Road  
Lake Delton, Wisconsin

#### GPS:

43.56178°N, 89.82432° W

