WRITINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE CONSERVANCY

FALL 2026



THE STORY OF THE STONE

By Patrick Molzahn



Five hundred million years ago, Wisconsin was located south of the equator. At the time, it was part of the ancient supercontinent of Laurentia, which comprised most of what is now North America. Due to its tropical position and low-lying elevation, much of the state was submerged under a shallow sea. Erosion from nearby landmasses deposited layers of sand and mud, which later became the layers of sandstone and shale we see today.

Fast forward to more recent times (geologically speaking) when Wisconsin was shaped by multiple glacial events over the last 2.5 million years. The last glacier began to retreat approximately 15,000 years ago. Though Mirror Lake State Park is part of the *Driftless Area,* an area located primarily in southwest Wisconsin which was never covered by ice, it experienced the effects of glaciation as meltwater scoured the cliffs, resulting in the unique formations we see today.

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WRITINGS

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

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RESERVATIONS

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FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

Welcome to fall 2026! The days are getting shorter, the temperature is cooler, and the leaves are beginning to change colors. This is a wonderful time to enjoy Wisconsin's natural beauty. As the season changes, you may be aware that we had to make a significant change in the way that the Conservancy operates the reservation program for overnight stays at the Cottage. The same property management firm has handled reservations and cleaning duties since 1992. Over the years, there have been times when that firm has delayed required payments to the Conservancy, which ultimately resulted in SPCC not receiving any payments from July to December 2026. The Board of Directors put out a request for proposals seeking a new property management firm to take over the reservation and cleaning program. Two firms were invited to make presentations to the Board of Directors. Based on the information presented, the Board chose locally owned and operated **Destination Dells** as the new property management firm. This firm manages close to 100 vacation properties in the Wisconsin Dells area. Approximately 300 reservations through December 2028 were seamlessly transferred to the new firm when they took over our account on June 8, 2026. This transition was managed well with only a few minor glitches along the way. The good news is that for the first three months of operation, payments from Destination Dells to the Conservancy were received on time.

One significant change to the reservation process is that Destination Dells will take reservations only thirteen months in advance, instead of two years as was done previously. However, now no deposit is required when reservations are made, and full payment is due only two weeks in advance of your stay.

With the new system, communication with guests is done via email. This includes sharing the code to access the key for the Cottage. The key is kept in a Wi-Fi enabled lock box next to the entry. Lacking internet at the Cottage, we needed to have service available. Our only option available was to install a Starlink satellite system. The network is working well and now it is also available for anyone staying at the Cottage.

Recent guests who have stayed at the Cottage report the facility is well cared for and have had positive interactions with the management company. We look forward to continuing to work closely with Destination Dells to provide the best experience for guests staying at the Seth Peterson Cottage.

***Save the date – **June 6, 2027** – the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy will be celebrating our **35th Anniversary**. It is hard to believe that the Conservancy has been making the Cottage available for tours and overnight stays for nearly 35 years! This is testimony to the Conservancy for its dedication to protect and preserve this living work of art designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.

ANNUAL MEETING NOTICE

The SPCC annual meeting will be held on Sunday, December 13th at 4:15 PM at the Cottage following our Open House. Agenda items include reports on 2026 Conservancy activities, the 2026 financial report, and review of the 2027 proposed budget. All conservancy members are welcome to attend.

APPLICANTS SOUGHT FOR 2027 VISSER HISTORICAL PRESERVATION AWARD

By Bill Martinelli

March 15, 2027, is the deadline for applications for the 2027 Kristin Visser Historical Preservation Award. The award, given by the directors of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, is presented every other year to an individual or organization in recognition of past work in historical preservation of a Frank Lloyd Wright or Prairie School building in Wisconsin or a contiguous state. In general, buildings constructed between 1900 and 1959 are given preference, and the restoration work shall have been completed within the two calendar years prior to the year of application. The 2027 award will be given for work done between 2024 and 2026. The award is in the amount of $10,000.

Applicants are asked to support their applications with a statement fully describing the restoration project, including its state of completion, a supporting statement from the building contractor and/or architect, a letter or letters of support from scholars and/or working professionals familiar with the project, photographic evidence of work completed, and any other supporting materials. Applications will be judged by a panel of members of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, along with several outside experts/scholars. The award recipient will be announced on April 15, 2027, and the award presented at the Seth Peterson Cottage on June 13, 2027.

The award is named in honor of Kristin Visser, who was instrumental in the restoration of the Seth Peterson Cottage and a tireless worker on its behalf. She is the author of *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School in Wisconsin,* and, with John Eifler, A.I.A., *Frank Lloyd Wright's Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterwork*. Visser, who was a planner for the Wisconsin State Department of Natural Resources, died in 1998 at the age of 48.

The Seth Peterson Cottage, located in Mirror Lake State Park, near Wisconsin Dells, is Frank Lloyd Wright's final Wisconsin commission (1958) and, at only 880 square feet, one of his smallest. It was rescued from ruin by the concerted efforts of a local group of lakeshore property owners, spearheaded by Audrey Laatsch, and restored through a public/private partnership effort. Dedicated in 1992, it serves today as a unique rental cottage, managed by the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy.

Past Kristin Visser Award Winners

- 2007 Steve Sikora and Lynette Erickson-Sikora, Willey House, Minneapolis, MN
- 2009 Paul Harding and Cheryl Harding, Davenport House, River Forest, IL
- 2011 Mary Arnold and Henry St. Maurice, E. Clarke Arnold House, Columbus, WI
- 2013 Frank Lloyd Wright Wisconsin, B-1 ASBH, Milwaukee, WI
- 2015 John Eifler and Bonnie Phoenix, Ross House, Glencoe, IL
- 2017 Gene Szymczak posthumously, Thomas P. Hardy House, Racine, WI
- 2019 Doug LaBrecque, Curtis and Lillian Meyer House, Galesburg, MI
- 2021 Nicholas and Lauren Witkowski, Brookfield Kindergarten, Brookfield, IL
- 2023 Ellen Bendel-Stenzel and late husband Michael, Jack and Gloria Grabow House, Rochester, MN
- 2025 Taliesin Preservation Incorporated, Hillside Theater Restoration, Taliesin, WI

Send applications to: Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, PO Box 186, Lake Delton, WI 53940. Hard copy or digital applications sent via email are accepted. Questions? SethPetersonCottage@gmail.com.

THE CLEANING LADY RETURNS TO THE COTTAGE

By Rhianna Higgins

I first had the privilege of caring for The Seth Peterson Cottage as a cleaner from 2002 through 2018, a place that has always held a special space in my heart. After several years away, I was thrilled to connect with my dear friend Elizabeth Cowin, owner of **Class-E-Clean**, and learn that, through Destination Dells, an opportunity had become available for me to return to the Cottage once again in 2026.

My connection to the Seth Peterson Cottage has always gone beyond the work itself. I have a deep appreciation for its history, character, and this peaceful setting within Mirror Lake State Park, a place that I have loved exploring through hiking, kayaking, and simply enjoying the beauty of nature. It is a joy and an honor to once again help care for such a special place.



Elizabeth Cowin - Rhianna Higgins

Anyone who has ever visited the Grand Canyon has seen first-hand the power of water when it comes to moving and shaping layers of rock. Water was also responsible for sculpting the Wisconsin Dells, including the area of Mirror Lake referred to as the narrows which the cottage overlooks. The surrounding landscape is part of the Dell Creek basin, which rapidly emptied out when Glacial Lake Wisconsin drained over a series of days.

The sandstone used to build the cottage is called Potsdam sandstone, which can be found in several locations around the world. The formation in southern Wisconsin is made of medium-grained, somewhat rounded, siliceous sand. The stone was quarried from less than 12 miles away, near the village of Rock Springs. Due to the varying density of its many layers, the sandstone erodes unevenly when exposed to weather. At Mirror Lake, the harder sandstone layers project outward as the softer layers are more prone to erosion.

While nature produced this stone, it took the vision of an artist and the hands of skilled masons to create the desired appearance of the finished product. Installed by master mason Chuck Volkey and his team, the sandstone projections mimic the natural formations of the surrounding area.



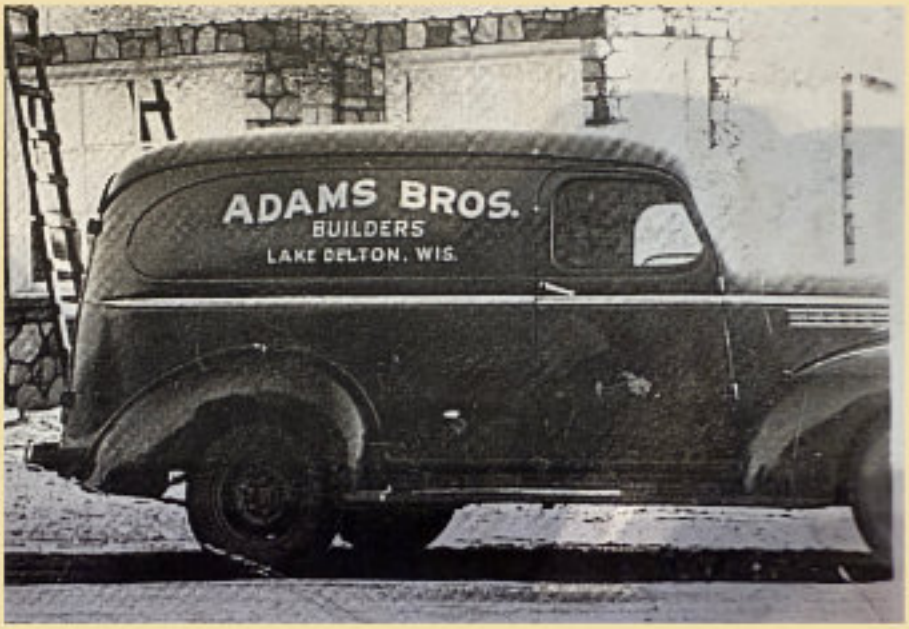


Wright wanted his architecture to look natural, as if it was growing out of the ground.

Nowhere is this more apparent than when looking up at the cottage from the lake. What is amazing is that Wright never visited the building site. His ability to visualize and integrate the cottage into the land with only a topographic drawing and a few photos is truly a mark of his genius!



Left: Seth Peterson sitting on the terrace wall.
Above Right: The cottage viewed from the lake. (Photo Credit: Brian R. Hannan)



"Driving a fully loaded truck down what was then a rough and curvy Fern Dell Road is a memory I'll never forget."



Adams Bros. Builders - the crew who built the Cottage

Front row (left to right): Tom Moon, Mackey Adams, Ember Adams
Back row: Tim Murry, Sega Vis, Harold Retzlaff, Earl Warren, Paul Waltman, and Dan Cloyd

ADAMS BROTHERS BUILDERS

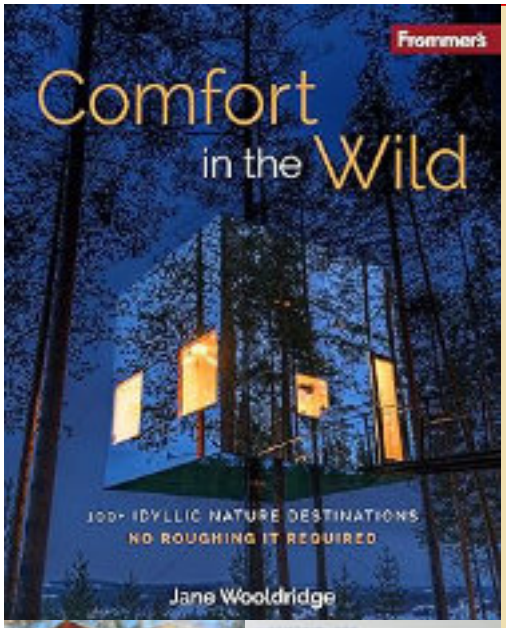
Mackey Adams and his brother Ember were partners in Adams Bros. Builders, the firm that built the cottage. Mackey's daughter Lois, sixteen years old at the time, remembers having to deliver a load of cement and other building materials to the cottage during its construction. "Driving a fully loaded truck down what was then a rough and curvy Fern Dell Road is a memory I'll never forget."

Lois also recalls going with her father to a pre-construction meeting at Taliesin. Though she wasn't in the same room, she overheard a raucous discussion between her father and Frank Lloyd Wright on the cottage's design, especially regarding the roof: "It's going to leak, and the wood will rot!", her father exclaimed to Wright. "I've never seen my dad get so angry in all my life."



MYSTERY SOLVED!

Mackey Adams had a tradition of including a penny in his projects to remember the year it was built. The penny was often installed in the floor next to a fireplace. And now we know the rest of the story!





COMFORT IN THE WILD: 100+ NATURE DESTINATIONS

One really never knows what or who to expect on a given Sunday when the Cottage has an Open House. Back in 2023, a couple came riding up on their bicycles. As it turns out, it was travel writer Jane Wooldridge from the Miami Herald. She, along with her husband and two dogs, were travelling around the U.S. in a vintage Airstream trailer in search of unique places where one could rest their head in comfort and commune with nature.

The result of a lifetime of travel to more than 120 countries is a book featuring over 100 places around the world to stay. And there, on page 4 of her book is the Seth Peterson Cottage! Her book highlights experiences where nature meets creature comforts. She narrowed her list from thousands of options, consulting her notebooks and speaking with dozens of experts.

When Jane sat down and looked around, she exclaimed, "I could live here!"

Whether you're looking for a place to stay while on safari in Africa, an adventure in Antarctica, or a quiet place on a little lake in Wisconsin, this book provides plenty of ideas. Filled with beautiful photos and interesting anecdotes, it makes for fun reading.

MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Patrick Cieslewicz, Park Superintendent

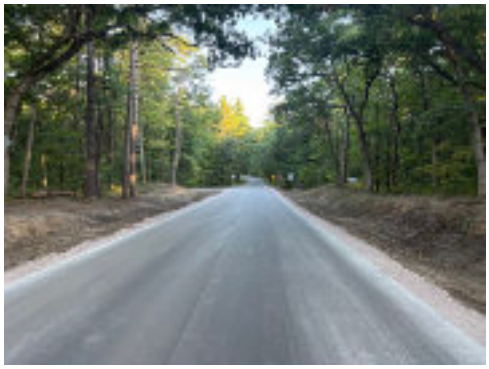
Summer at Mirror Lake State Park began with orange cones and construction as crews worked on several improvement projects on the property. Two campgrounds and the boat landing parking lot were temporarily closed during the project. Still, by summer's end, the park was fully operational again, with all campgrounds and the boat landing open to visitors.

This summer's construction included rebuilding a portion of the park's main road and repaving two campgrounds. Crews completed ditch improvements, replaced sections of the road base, and installed new asphalt to improve the park's roads and campground areas for years to come. One major improvement took place at the boat landing, which included installing a new vault toilet, expanding the parking area, and adding a new boardwalk and pier.

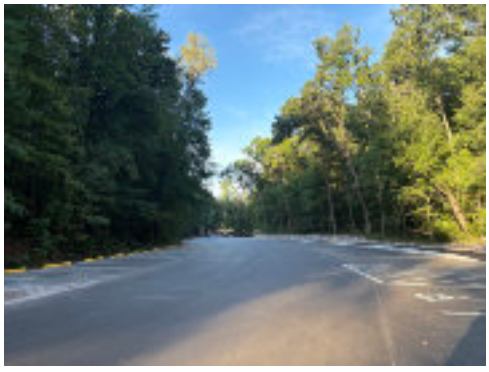
The additional parking will help us serve visitors as paddle sports and other outdoor recreation continue to grow in popularity. In previous years, the parking lot often filled by early afternoon on busy summer days.

If you are staying at the cottage this fall, I encourage you to take a drive through the park and see the improvements for yourself. Be sure to stop at the boat landing, where you can enjoy a walk along the boardwalk or launch a canoe and take in the fall scenery.

After a busy summer of construction, we are excited to be back to normal operations and ready to enjoy the season ahead. We hope you will visit the park this fall, take in the beautiful colors, and experience these improvements for yourself.



Above: Newly paved access road
Below: Expanded parking area



FROM THE GUESTBOOK

"This has been a magical stay for my wife and I. Enjoying the finished product of the long-desired dream of Seth Peterson and the vision, and genius of FLW was inspiring. The beauty of the architecture balances well with the beauty of the surroundings. We loved being a part of this home and felt the need to go outside and enjoy the splendor of the blanket and canopy of green. . . The closeness of the quarters brought us closer together."

Gary & Jan
Mesa, AZ

"We are here celebrating our 40th anniversary. We also stayed here for our 20th and 30th, so a decennial ritual of sorts.

Richard & Robert
Urbana, IL

"Thanks to Mr. Wright, the Conservancy, Seth and Audrey. Eighth stay and the magic continues…"

Kenneth & Philip
New Orleans, LA

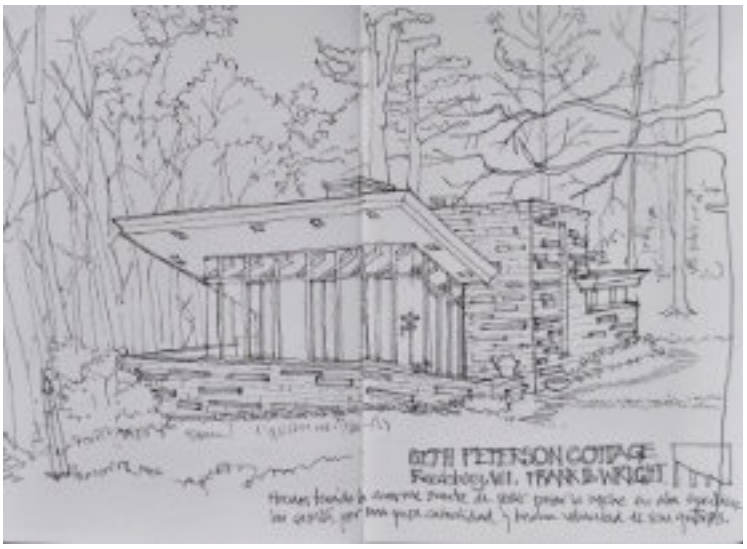
"Incredible power of Organic Architecture to fuse human architecture with nature."

Martin & Marilyn
Albuquerque, NM

"The quiet and peaceful setting helps render the soul for much needed rest. . . to call it 'home' for the night is truly magnificent. Seth Peterson, though a tragic story, has left a legacy for the rest of us to enjoy. Thank you to all those who have labored to restore and allow the public to feel the spirit of living in a FLW home, if only for a short time."

Debi & Renee

"Incredible place! Touches the soul more than we expected. We're so inspired by the beauty and efficient use of space. We're planning to build our next house with similar design features. Thanks to the conservancy for maintaining this gem."
Ray & Sally
Minnetonka, MN



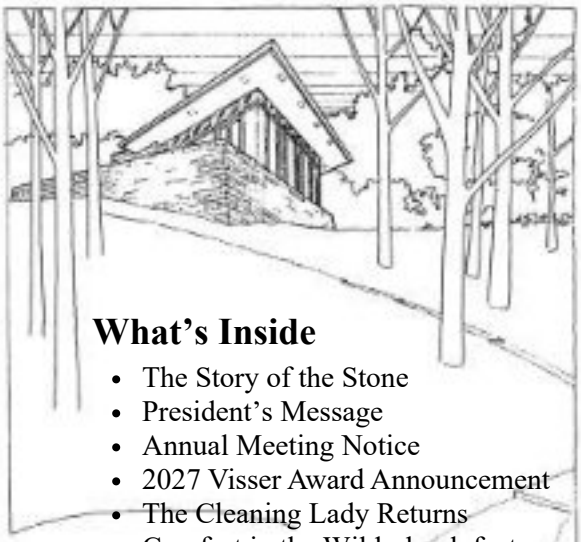


It is always interesting to learn about the people are visiting and touring the Cottage. We have had many architects from around the world. Last year, Benito Sanchez-Montanes and his wife Ivet Compano visited from Spain. Benito is a professor of Architectural Composition and Environmental Projects at the School of Architecture of Seville. His specialization ranges from Heritage to Environmental Sciences. He lectures and teaches worldwide and has published papers, essays, books, and articles on his specialization. They were touring Frank Lloyd Wright sites including the Seth Peterson Cottage. We offered them the opportunity to stay overnight - an invitation they excitedly accepted. With his extra time at the Cottage, Benito created this beautiful line drawing and watercolor of the Cottage.

WRITINGS

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.
P.O. Box 186 Lake Delton, WI 53940-0186

Note: Cottage location appears in the map below.



What's Inside

- The Story of the Stone
- President's Message
- Annual Meeting Notice
- 2027 Visser Award Announcement
- The Cleaning Lady Returns
- Comfort in the Wild - book feature
- Mirror Lake State Park Report
- From the Guestbook

Want to learn more about Frank Lloyd Wright's work in Wisconsin? Visit WrightInWisconsin.org

Reservations: www.destinationdells.club

UPCOMING EVENTS

Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour Schedule:

• Nov. 8	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *
• Dec. 13	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *
• Jan. 10	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *
• Feb. 14	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *
• Mar. 14	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *
• Apr. 11	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *
• May 9	1 to 4 p.m.	$5 *

***June 6th, 2027: 35th Anniversary!!!

*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. 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.

Seth Peterson Cottage
E9982 Fern Dell Road
Lake Delton, Wisconsin

GPS:
43.56178°N, 89.82432° W

