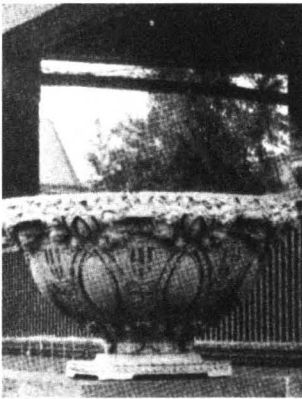


# PRAIRIE SCHOOL ARCHITECTURE IN PITTSBURGH

by Martin Aurand



**1◀ George Grant Elmslie,  
Millar house, Bellevue, Pa.,  
front elevation.**

**2▲ Millar house, planter.**

**P**ITTSBURGH, A CITY neither East Coast nor Midwest, has received architectural inspiration from all sides. Mostly it has come from the East, with architects and influences from Philadelphia, Boston, and New York taking the lead.<sup>1</sup> The influence of the Midwest, too, however, has been long-standing but less well-acknowledged.<sup>2</sup> This stew of influences had a particularly profound effect upon the city's built environment at the turn of the century, as Pittsburgh sought to grow into its new identity as a major industrial city.

The general populace remained substantially ill-served by architects and architecture throughout this period. But the burgeoning city demanded new or expanded public facilities and institutions. Business and industry required new species of commercial and industrial buildings. And nouveau-riche industrialists, upper-level managers, and a growing middle class eagerly sought the degree of architectural display and comfort that their respective economic status afforded them in their homes, and increasingly, in their apartments. These new-found needs signaled new-found opportunities for architects.

The architecture of turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh had moments of clarity and invention; but mostly it was a rather ponderous and conservative affair, based on the proliferation of established manners and revival styles. H.H. Richardson (of Boston), the preeminent figure in late nineteenth-century American architecture, had the genius to bring all of these qualities together in his "Richardsonian Romanesque" Allegheny County

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**3▲ Kiehnel and Elliott,  
Stengel house, 4136 Bigelow  
Blvd.**

**4▶ Kiehnel and Elliott, First  
National Bank of Pitcairn,  
Second Street and Center  
Avenue, Pitcairn.**

**5▼ Frank Lloyd Wright, Heller  
House (Chicago).**



Courthouse and Jail, completed in 1888. This building set the tone for much subsequent work in Pittsburgh, designed after Richardson's manner, though not all of it was equally inspired. In time, Richardson's work here and elsewhere, including two seminal projects in Chicago, gave rise to a new American architecture by laying a foundation for the progressive architectural movements that emerged in Chicago in the early years of the new century.<sup>3</sup>

The progressive American architectural movements appeared as part of an international reaction against the prevailing revival styles of nineteenth-century architecture and in quest of contemporary architectural expression. They offered the opportunity to develop free and ahistorical approaches to design. What was commonly disciplined by cultural associations and stylistic canons could become more neutral in content, more freely composed, and a field for personal expression. Most of the progressive movements attained a degree of success and notoriety; but all remained apart from the architectural mainstream and were ultimately short-lived. Still, their impact on the contemporary art world was extraordinary: by challenging the establishment and unleashing pent-up creativity, they set the stage for the more radical Modernism that followed.

The progressive movements included the English Arts and Crafts Movement in the British Isles; Art Nouveau, the Viennese Secession, and Jugendstil on the European continent; and the Shingle Style, the Chicago School, and the Prairie School in the United States. The last two were centered in Chicago, where there were two key progressive figures: Louis Sullivan (1856-1924) and Frank Lloyd Wright (1867-1959). Sullivan was the leader of the Chicago School, which focused on tall commercial buildings. He was the spiritual leader of the Prairie School as well, and after 1900, can be counted as one of its practitioners. Wright, who received most of his training in Sullivan's office, was the progenitor of the Prairie School.

Prairie School architecture was largely an architecture of horizontal lines, as applied to the disposition of a mass or masses, long and low overhanging roofs, bands of windows, the continuity of lines and materials, the integration of outdoor and transitional spaces with indoor spaces, and the open planning of interior environments in order to maximize the flow of space. Short vertical elements appeared throughout to connect and accent the prevailing horizontal lines and spaces. Ornamentation appeared as abstract geometric detailing, often inspired by plants or other naturalistic sources. Irving K. Pond, a figure at the periphery of both the Chicago School and the Prairie School, described the latter: "In imitation of a certain broad and horizontal disposition of lines individually employed, a school of design has sprung up, for which the authors claim the title 'American.' The horizontal lines of the new expression appeal to the disciples of this school as echoing the spirit of the prairies of the great Middle West, which to them embodies the essence of democracy."<sup>4</sup>

This architectural genre was variously called "American," or the "New Movement," or was considered to be a subset of the Chicago School until the term Prairie School, probably coined by Wright himself, caught on. In practice, this term has commonly been used to refer to a broader range of progressive work than the



above definitions might suggest, encompassing certain work by Wright and others that did not strictly follow their own new rules, and by other figures, such as George W. Maher, who readily incorporated influences from various progressive European movements into their midwestern architecture.<sup>5</sup> The Prairie School flourished from about 1900 to World War I, peaking in about 1914. Subsequently, it has assumed enormous national and international significance. Sullivan and Wright are now esteemed to be among the most important architects of all time — witness the hoopla over the Frank Lloyd Wright exhibition in 1994 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Their buildings, and those of lesser Prairie School architects, are widely studied and highly prized.

Born in the Midwest, the Prairie School focused initially on the suburbs of Chicago, then spread throughout Illinois, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa — and even to Pittsburgh. A generation after

Richardson, the Prairie School made an impact here, albeit one less widely felt than Richardson's. Pittsburgh, then as now, provided only limited incentive for new architectural thinking. Nevertheless, one Prairie School architect from Chicago designed for Pittsburgh.<sup>6</sup> Others exhibited their work here. And a couple of early twentieth-century Pittsburgh architects emulated their progressive midwestern brethren in selected projects. That Pittsburgh received some of the fruits of Prairie School influence was and is salubrious. The buildings that resulted were out of the ordinary, and most of them remain as intriguing elements in our streetscapes today.

### George Grant Elmslie and the Millar House

**T**he one key Prairie School architect who built in Pittsburgh was George Grant Elmslie (1871-1952). Elmslie worked for Sullivan from 1898 to 1909, designing much of Sullivan's





residential work, and later partnered with William Gray Purcell to design Prairie School work throughout the Midwest. It has been said of Purcell and Elmslie that, "except for Wright, no Prairie School architect could compete with the quality and variety of their work."<sup>7</sup> In 1907, while still serving as chief draftsman in Sullivan's office, Elmslie designed the W. G. A. Millar house near Pittsburgh.<sup>8</sup>

The Millar house (see photograph 1) was commissioned by Elmslie's sister Louise and his brother-in-law, an executive for the American Bridge Co. The Millars clearly chose Elmslie more by reason of familial relationship than design philosophy. In his dissertation on Purcell and Elmslie, David Gebhard says that the personality and desires of the client prevented the full expression of Elmslie's Prairie School design sensibilities in this project, specifically noting the house's lack of integration with its site.<sup>9</sup> It was a squarish high-shouldered brick house, generally of a sort common to its time and place, raised awkwardly on a narrow elevated lot on Orchard Avenue, just outside of Bellevue. Now demolished, the house is known primarily from details pictured in the January 1913 *Western Architect*, and from two drawings — a front elevation and a first-floor plan.<sup>10</sup> A comparison of the drawings and the *Western Architect* photographs reveals that the form of the porch was changed during construction. As built, Elmslie's distinctive contributions to the exterior encompassed terra-cotta urns and porch-column capitals, all with the Sullivan-esque ornamentation (photo 2) that was characteristic of Elmslie's mentor, and the geometric art glass typical of the Prairie School.

Elmslie and the Prairie School held somewhat greater sway in the interior. There are similarities in the disposition of the major spaces to the plan of the Charnley house (1891), which Wright largely designed while both he and Elmslie worked in the Sullivan office. At the Charnley house the long side of the plan corresponds to the front of the house. At the Millar house, however, Elmslie

was constrained by the nature of the building lot and aligned the long side of the plan with the side of the lot. The main entrance, then, was placed on the side of the house, and the plan was unexpectedly oriented perpendicular to the axis established by the front elevation. The large rectangular living room, wide openings between spaces, and the general openness of the plan belied the compressed expression of the facade. Elmslie also designed some furniture for the Millar house, as well as window drapes stenciled with polychrome Sullivan-esque ornamentation. But ultimately, the house's realization of progressive ideals was limited and compromised.<sup>11</sup>

## Richard Kiehnel and the Pittsburgh Architectural Club Exhibitions

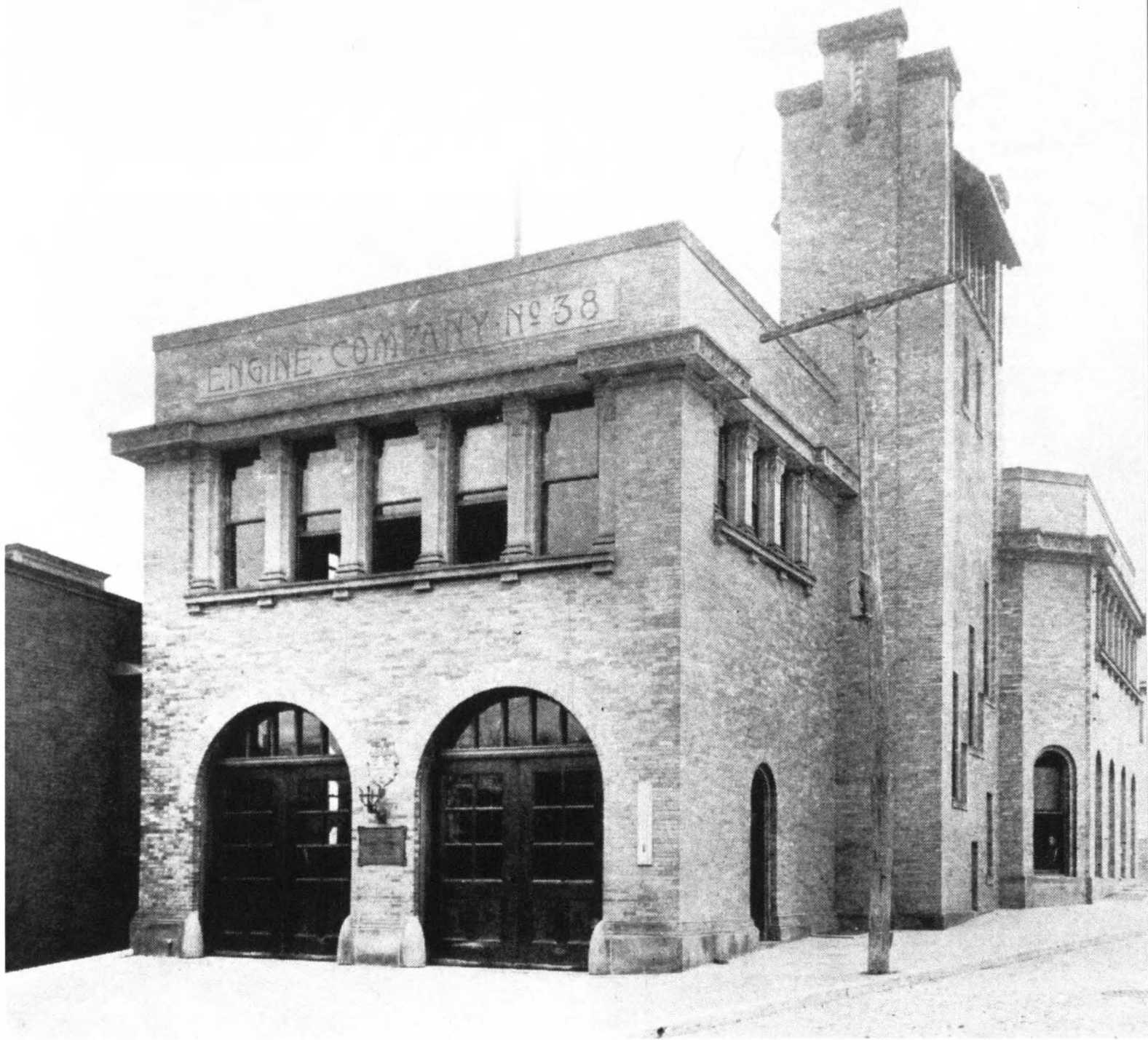
One Pittsburgh firm, Kiehnel and Elliott, completed a substantial body of early twentieth century work in a Prairie School manner. Richard Kiehnel (1870-1944) was the dominant partner. Born in Germany, Kiehnel received architectural training at the University of Breslau, emigrated to America, worked in the midwestern offices of the Egan & Prindle firm in Chicago and Milton Dyer in Cleveland, and then for Frederick J. Osterling and John M. Elliott in Pittsburgh, before becoming Elliott's partner in 1906. The partnership continued until 1928, but in 1917 Kiehnel received the commission for "El Jardin," the winter home of John Bindely, president of the Pittsburgh Steel Co., and thereafter Kiehnel's efforts were focused in southern Florida. There he achieved renown as a designer in the Mediterranean Revival and Art Deco styles, and served as president and editor of the journal *Florida Architecture and Allied Arts* from 1935 to 1942.<sup>12</sup>

In Pittsburgh, Kiehnel was a key figure in the Pittsburgh Chapter of the American Institute of Architects and the Pittsburgh Architectural Club. That club, like those in other American cities, was formed to encourage the interchange of ideas among architects and to foster the development of their design skills. One vehicle for furthering this agenda was the public exhibition, which also served to bring public attention to the architects and their work. The Pittsburgh Architectural Club sponsored public exhibitions starting in 1900, and published 11 exhibition catalogs between 1900 and 1916. These exhibitions often included work obtained from other architectural clubs and sometimes from international sources as well. The introduction to the inaugural 1900 catalog notes that the exhibition "gives us an opportunity to compare the work of our locality with that of others; to note our tendencies, whether for good or bad, as compared with theirs, and to gain inspiration for new and better endeavor..."<sup>13</sup>

Kiehnel played a key role in organizing the club's exhibitions, and in 1907 he was chairman of the exhibition committee for a major international exhibition, the largest architectural exhibition held in the United States up to that time. The exhibition included an abundance of progressive work and was likely the first exhibition in Pittsburgh to feature work by Louis Sullivan and Frank Lloyd Wright, the latter exhibiting 12 items. Also featured were works by Dwight Perkins and George W. Maher of Chicago, as well as Englishman C. R. Ashbee, Charles Rennie Mackintosh of Scotland, and a group of German progressives.<sup>14</sup>



6► Kiehnel and Elliott, Engine House No. 38, Lemington Avenue and Missouri Street.  
7▲ George W. Maher, Rubens House (Glencoe, Ill.), perspective rendering.



Reviewing the exhibition for the *American Architect*, G. B. Ford wrote:

The section that distinguishes this exhibition from all previous architectural exhibitions in America [is] a section devoted to the so-called "Modern Movement" or "New Movement." For the first time we have a real opportunity to study and compare side by side the various attempts of American architecture to assert itself as something virile, forceful, with a power to think and act for itself, not as a servile adaptor of the heritage of previous civilizations, as a mind which has something to say and says it, and not as a mere mimic of the ideas of others.

Ford conjectured about a new American architecture developed from work by Sullivan, the father of the movement; Wright, whom he highly praised and extensively illustrated; and Perkins and Maher, among others, and added, "And so as we walk about

this exhibit we feel a certain responsibility devolving on us to choose wisely and to endeavor to profit by this study in our own design..."<sup>15</sup>

For the next exhibit in 1910, Kiehnel was chairman of the "selection and hanging committee." This time, exhibitors from Chicago included Perkins, Maher, Walter Burley Griffin, and the firms of Tallmadge and Watson, and Pond and Pond. Thereafter, Kiehnel served on various committees and edited the exhibition catalogs until the last major exhibition in 1916. In 1911, Chicago's Sullivan, Maher, and Robert Spencer exhibited; in 1912, it was Sullivan, Perkins, Maher, Griffin, Tallmadge and Watson, and H. V. Von Holst; and in 1913, Pittsburghers again saw works by Perkins, Griffin, Spencer, Tallmadge and Watson, and Frank Lloyd Wright.

The 1913 exhibition was also reviewed in the *American*





*Architect*, this time by Pittsburgh architect Edward B. Lee, then president of the Pittsburgh Architectural Club. Lee wrote, from the perspective of a Pittsburgher:

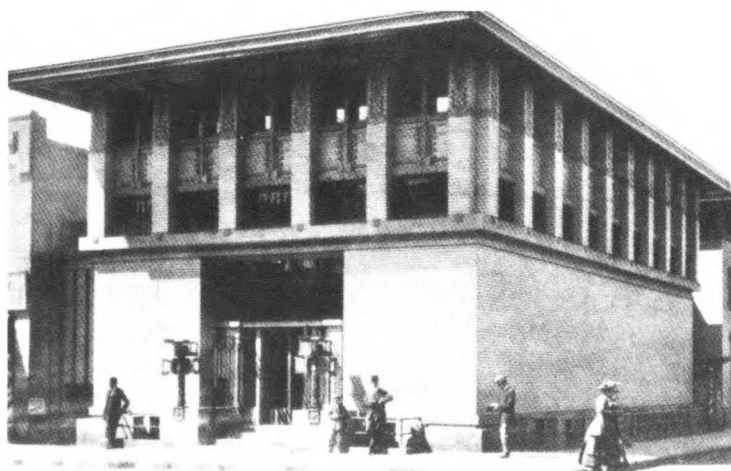
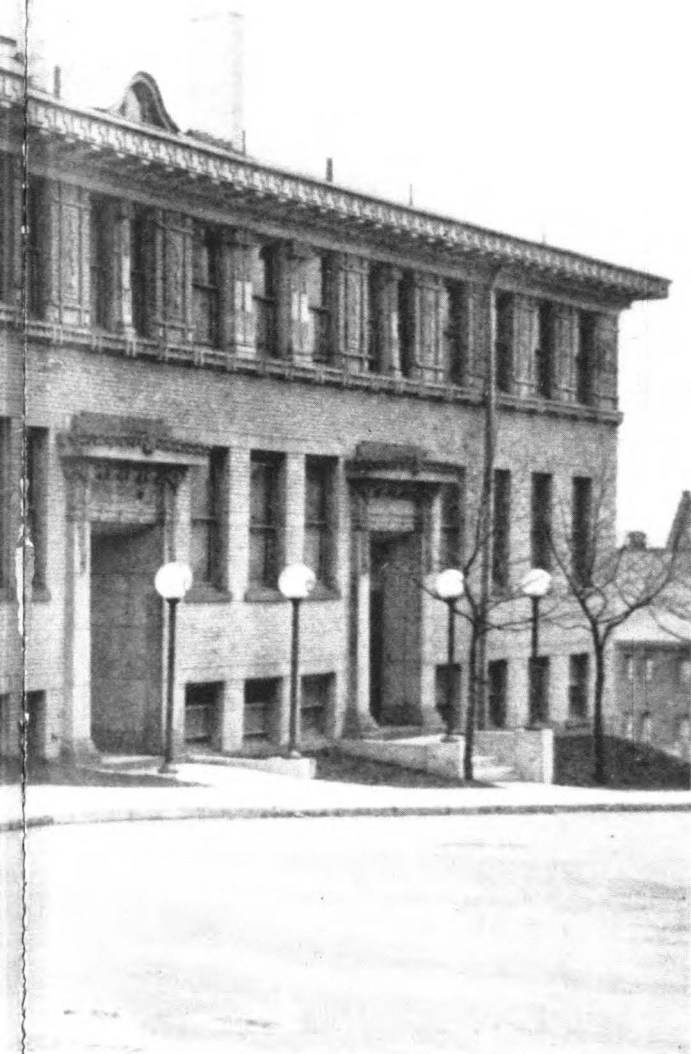
It would appear that the Western men, and particularly a group of architects from Chicago, are showing the greatest amount of originality and invention in the introduction of new motives and original features of design. These examples, together with a considerable contribution of works along the lines of the so-called "new movement" from a group of Pittsburgh men, are strong features of the exhibition.<sup>16</sup>

Lee's remarks suggest that Pittsburgh architects were taking notice of the new work from the Midwest. His mention of Pittsburgh men was clearly meant to refer to Kiehnel and Elliott, whose Central Turnverein (8) project was prominently illustrated

on the following page of the *American Architect*. Richard Kiehnel had in fact realized the significance of the new progressive work, and was in turn influenced by it, taking the club's intent and Ford's advice to heart, gaining "inspiration for new and better endeavor" and profiting in his own design from the exhibition that he had himself assembled.

Shortly after the 1907 exhibition, Kiehnel and Elliott's previously eclectic manner turned to one in step with the "new movement."<sup>17</sup> The firm's clients may have openly supported what they perceived to be modern or up-to-date, or may have inadvertently abetted the architect by commissioning work based on the firm's previous track record in other styles. For the public projects in general, and public school projects in particular, however, it seems probable that Kiehnel and Elliott were chosen largely because their number came up. This sort of work was rather broadly distributed among established and capable Pittsburgh architects, and the choice of Kiehnel and Elliott likely rested more on it being "their turn" than on the particular stylistic character of their current work. In part for this reason, these projects provided good opportunities for experimentation.

Whatever the level of outside encouragement, Kiehnel found sufficient impetus in his own new principles of design to complete a series of projects influenced by the Prairie School. This work was itself exhibited at Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibitions between 1910 and 1916, as noted by Lee, and was often illustrated in the exhibition catalogs. Here appeared all of the firm's known Pittsburgh-area projects completed in a Prairie School manner.<sup>18</sup>



8◀ Kiehnel and Elliott, Central Turnverein, O'Hara and Thackeray streets.

9▲ Frank Lloyd Wright, City National Bank Building and Hotel (Mason City, Iowa).



## The Prairie School Work of Kiehnel and Elliott

**K**iehnel and Elliott's Stengel house (1913; exhibited 1915), in Oakland's Schenley Farms neighborhood (3), was designed for George H. Stengel, a trust officer with the Commonwealth Trust Co. of Pittsburgh and a former Register of Wills and Clerk of the Orphans' Court of Allegheny County. The Stengel house is in some respects comparable with Elmslie's Millar house since both houses are essentially reworkings of standard Pittsburgh house types, and both are simple and box-like masses devoid of traditional historical references. The Stengel house, however, edges closer to Prairie School sensibility in both composition and detailing. Here there is a raised third story under a shallow hip roof, instead of the steep roof with dormers at the Millar house. This upper story is demarcated by a band, or belt course, of Art Nouveau ornamentation around the building. Many details throughout recall Wright, especially the art-glass windows, an elaborated surround of a central second-story window, and ornamental panels between paired second-story windows. These panels, comprised of chevrons and other geometric details, are reminiscent of panels on the exterior of Wright's Larkin Building (1903) in Buffalo.

The Stengel house interior is a rich mixture of Arts and Crafts, Prairie School, and specifically Wrightian flavors. The living room has an inglenook and fireplace with a tile surround, while the dining room has a fireplace with a brass hood. There is extensive woodwork throughout these two rooms and the adjoining stair hall, including pier-like columns with caps composed of complicated patterns of built-up squares and rectangles. The layout of rooms is similar to that of the Millar house, and the central stair hall has spacious openings to the adjacent rooms. The plan is compressed, however, by the house's squarish footprint, and lacks the full extent of open planning as practiced by the Prairie School.

Kiehnel and Elliott designed their First National Bank of Pitcairn (c. 1910; exhibited 1913) in the Pittsburgh suburb of Pitcairn (4) shortly after Louis Sullivan began his famous series of Prairie School banks. Sullivan's banks were designed for eight small towns in Minnesota, Iowa, Indiana, Ohio, and Wisconsin between 1907 and 1919. Two of them were exhibited at the 1910 and 1911 Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibitions. Wright, and Purcell and Elmslie also designed banks, and the small-town bank became the most common Prairie School building type aside from the house.<sup>19</sup>

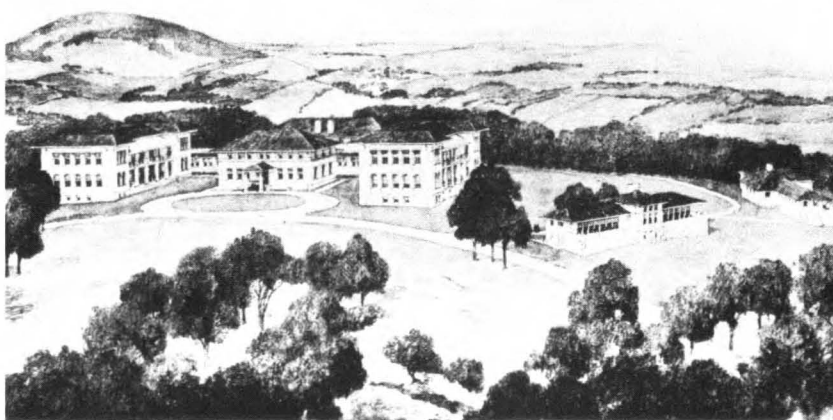
Kiehnel and Elliott's bank has a first-floor banking room and apartments on the upper floors. Its buff-brick form is simultaneously horizontal and upright. A broad horizontal mass composed of layers stacked one atop the other is articulated and elongated by belt courses and overhanging eaves. The main facade, however, is composed of a vertical sequence of fenestration: a group of three round-arched openings linked by columns on the first story, a grouping of three windows on the second story, a band of windows separated by squat piers at the third story, and a dormer at the roof. The building's layered massing and the fenestration of this facade loosely recall Wright's early-Prairie School Heller house (1896) in Chicago (5). It is almost as if Wright's facade has been turned upside-down. The fenestration

sequence of the bank's facade is repeated and played out over the building's longer side elevation, where intricate metalwork balconies add to the building's compositional complexity and its domestic feeling.<sup>20</sup>

The bank also has unconventional detailing. Geometric woodwork trim and art-glass windows are Wrightian. Exterior piers and columns are capped with flat but blocky assemblages of squares and rectangles. Some of this detailing may be derived from a "detail of [an] entrance" to the Home for Self-Supporting Women in Chicago, which was exhibited by Pond and Pond in the 1910 Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibition.<sup>21</sup> Interior columns have more ornate capitals. Inside and out, roses are unexpectedly centered on each column: roses that are closely related to the decorative motifs of the progressive Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh.<sup>22</sup>

Engine House #38 (1908-09; exhibited 1913) in the Lemington section of the city (6) is related to the Pitcairn bank in its upright forms and fenestration patterns. Its crisp massing, planar brown-brick surfaces, insistent bands of windows, and flat roof give it an especially progressive appearance. More tentative, however, are the numerous round-arched openings of the first story, and the unabridged floral ornamentation of a belt course that doubles as a cornice. The massing is broken by a canted bay that broadens the rear portion of the building and an unusual hose-drying tower that marks the juncture of the building's front and rear sections.

The tower has a stucco surface above the lowest level, a band of windows at the top, and a steep gabled roof sandwiched between two higher parapet walls. This arrangement of gable and parapet walls was replicated in part as the chimney tower that marks the living room inglenook and fireplace at the Stengel



10◀ Central Turnverein, entrance detail.  
11▲ Kiehnel and Elliott, City of  
Pittsburgh Tuberculosis Hospital, Leech  
Farm Road.

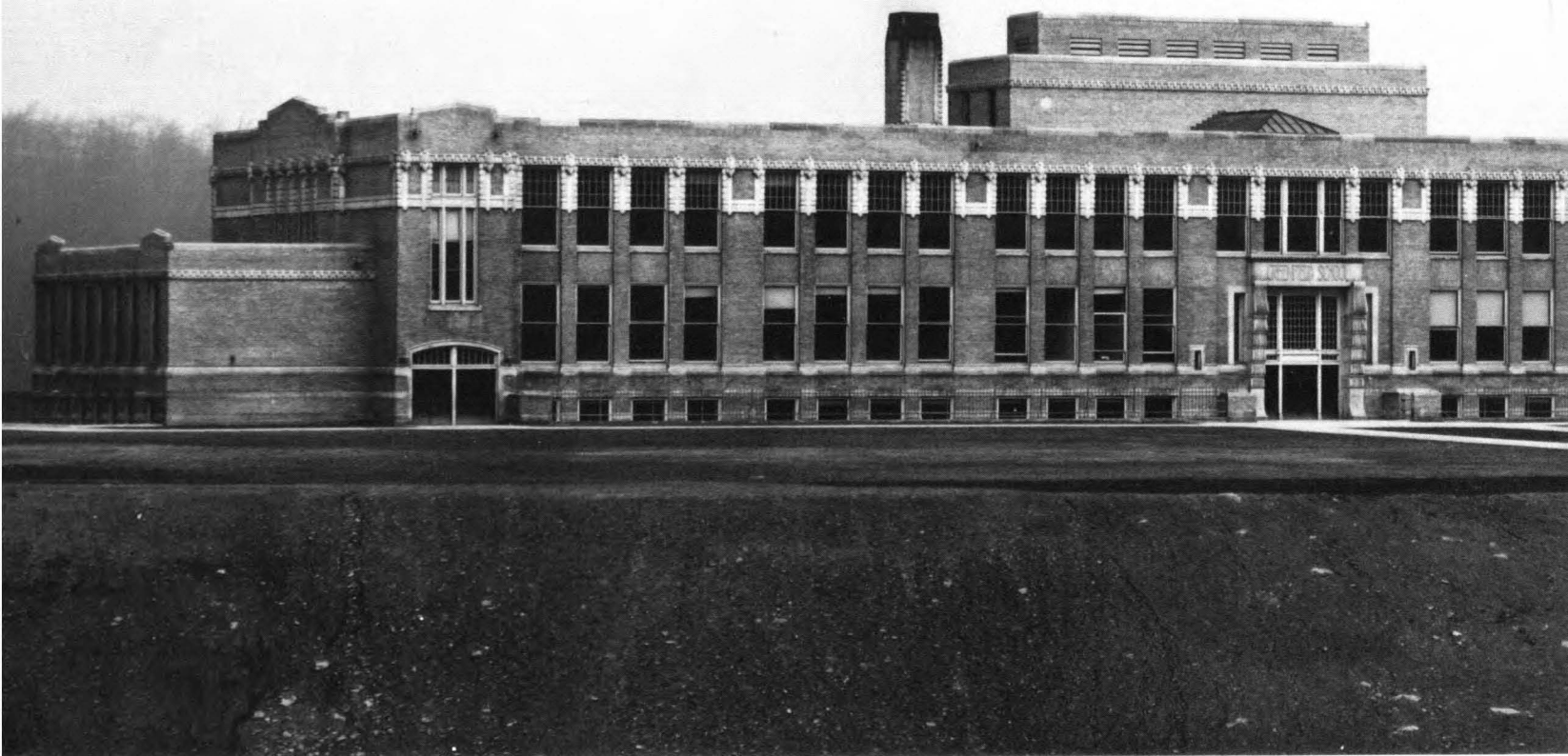


house. This gable with parapets motif may have European sources, but similar configurations can be found in work by George W. Maher, specifically the bizarre and not-very-Prairie-School Rubens house in Glencoe, Ill. (c. 1903) where the motif is repeated *ad infinitum* (7). A rendering and photographs of this house were exhibited at the 1907 Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibition.<sup>23</sup>

The commission for the Central Turnverein of Pittsburgh (1911; exhibited 1911 and 1913) in the Oakland district may have been linked to Kiehnel's German heritage (8). There is nothing Germanic about the building, however, as it fully embraces the horizontality of the Prairie School. It is a low two-story buff-brick mass under a nearly flat hip roof. The upper story, again set off by a horizontal division, is composed as a frieze and elaborately detailed with an ornamental grid of blocky geometric fragments. A similar pattern originally lined the face of the eaves but has since been removed. Ornament is also focused in the elaborated surround of the main entry, which has Wrightian art-glass panels (10). The building's horizontal massing, delineation of a tall lower

story and compressed upper story, and blocky ornamentation loosely recall Wright's City National Bank Building and Hotel (9) in Mason City, Iowa (1909). It now serves as the University of Pittsburgh's faculty club.

The City of Pittsburgh Tuberculosis Hospital (11) at Leech Farm (1913-14; exhibited 1914), now part of the Pittsburgh Job Corps Center on the hill above Washington and Allegheny River boulevards, is a complex of multiple hipped-roof wings and buildings deployed in a manner that was common in large institutional complexes of the time, such as the Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University). Men's and women's wards in mirror-image wings flank a central core of administration and service pavilions, and there are two free-standing structures — the so-called men's and women's lean-to buildings — that overlook the Allegheny River. Built wholly of buff brick, the buildings have extensive terra-cotta ornamentation that echoes the Pond and Pond-inspired detailing used at the Pitcairn Bank. This detailing is focused on the caps of the piers



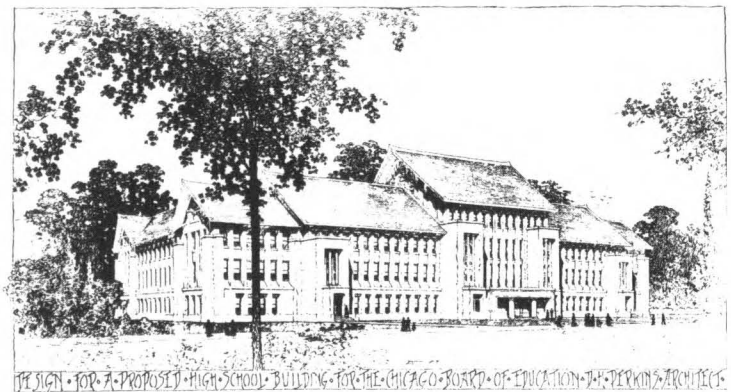
that divide walls into bays, define groups of windows, and support porches.

Purposefully located on a hilltop site above the smoky city, these facilities were designed for maximum exposure to fresh air, then favored as a treatment for tuberculosis. The wards have open two-story porches on each side, topped with glass roofs. The lean-to buildings have open porches on stone podiums and large internal sleeping porches. All porches front on broad expanses of triple-hung windows that can be opened to expose the buildings' interiors to the open air. The lean-to buildings are particularly Prairie School in aspect due to the horizontality of their overhanging roofs and broad bands of openings. Here the Prairie School principle of the integration of architecture and environment coincided with the program requirements of the institutional client.<sup>24</sup>

The Greenfield School (1916-1922, exhibited 1916), just off of Greenfield Avenue, was designed shortly before Richard Kiehnel departed for Florida, and was Kiehnel and Elliott's last and most

assured work in a Prairie School manner (12). Drawings of Greenfield School were completed in time to be shown at the 1916 Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibition, where there was a special emphasis on school architecture; but the building was not actually built until a few years later. Horizontality dominates the composition despite a persistent rhythm of broad and narrow vertical piers. In this, Greenfield School is reminiscent of Carl Schurz High School (13) in Chicago (1909), exhibited in Pittsburgh in both 1907 and 1912 by Dwight Perkins, an architect who was noted for adapting Prairie School sensibilities for progressive educational buildings.<sup>25</sup> Greenfield School's exterior is constructed of brown tapestry brick highlighted by extensive terra-cotta detailing. Tapestry brick was praised and promoted by Louis Sullivan late in his career when he used the brick in nearly all of his small mid-western bank buildings.<sup>26</sup> Its multiple hues and richly textured surface achieve an effect not unlike a tapestry, though the brickwork at Greenfield School has been damaged, diminishing the effect. Terra-cotta ornamentation on the exterior piers is very similar to that on the piers of Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Ill. (1904): complex geometric configurations of rectangles arranged in tiers and projecting from either side of a central spine — like the edges of a square-punched sheet of paper ripped from a spiral-bound notebook. Inside, in the central stair hall, piers are capped with a species of more naturalistic ornamentation with leaves branching to either side of a thin central spine.<sup>27</sup> This latter motif may have been derived from Wright's preliminary design for Unity Temple in which the pier detailing differed from that which was finally executed. A rendering of this early version of Unity Temple had been displayed in the Pittsburgh Architectural Club Exhibition of 1907.<sup>28</sup>

As Prairie School architects, Kiehnel and Elliott divided their buildings horizontally and banded together groups of windows



**12 ◀ Kiehnel and Elliott,  
Greenfield School, Alger  
Street near Greenfield  
Avenue.**

**13 ▲ Dwight Perkins, Carl  
Schurz High School  
(Chicago), perspective  
rendering.**

broken only by squarish piers; they also used numerous round-arched openings, which are more common to turn-of-the-century Pittsburgh than to the Prairie School. They used Wrightian detailing extensively, but also turned to peripheral Prairie School figures like Pond and Pond, and introduced additional elements — some individualistic, and some from progressive European sources. In sum, they formulated their own distinct Prairie School manner.

When Richard Kiehnel was called away to other locales and architectural styles, the local office failed to follow through with progressive work, and its Prairie School period came to a sudden halt. Meanwhile, another Pittsburgh architect had been giving the Prairie School a look.

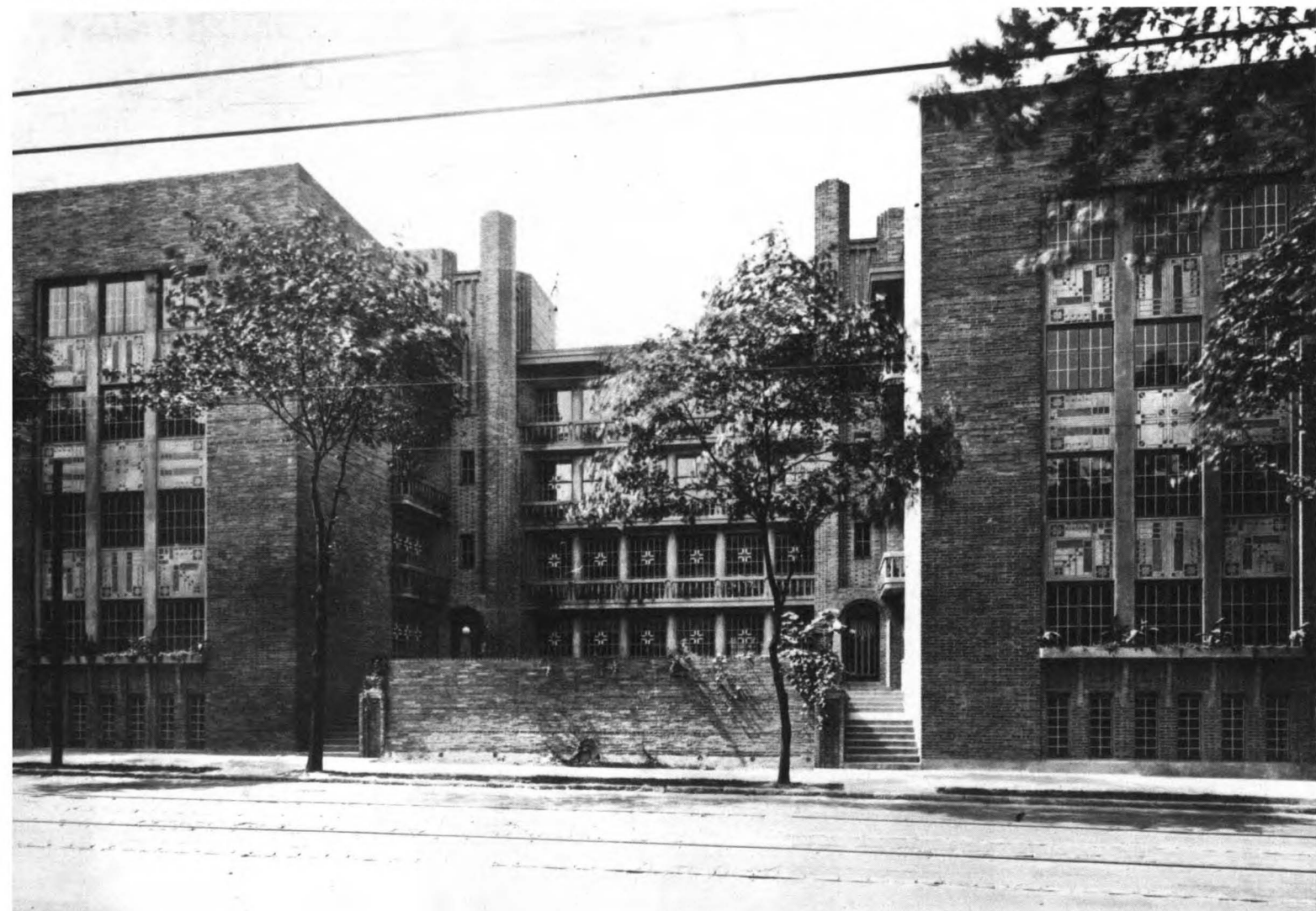
### Frederick G. Scheibler, Jr. and Highland Towers

Frederick G. Scheibler, Jr. (1872-1958) was the only Pittsburgh architect to make a career of progressive work.<sup>29</sup> He was largely inspired by the progressive European movements of the new century, which he learned about through foreign books and magazines. His Old Heidelberg apartment building (1905) on Braddock Avenue in the city's Park Place neighborhood, for instance, was modeled after a house design by Secessionist

architect Joseph Maria Olbrich that was published in a portfolio of Olbrich's work.<sup>30</sup> Scheibler seemed to understand the significance of the progressive American activity as well, however. The Old Heidelberg, for instance, was published for both European and middle-American audiences — in the Viennese journal *Der Architekt* and in the American journal *The Western Architect*, published in Minneapolis. Only rarely, however, was Scheibler's work influenced by the Prairie School or other American movements.

Scheibler's Matthews store building (1902) was the first indication that Scheibler was aware of progressive architectural currents in the United States, and was one of the earliest indicators of new ideas in his work. Here, the open treatment of the facade directly reflected the achievements of the Chicago School with commercial architecture and specifically recalled Louis Sullivan's Gage Building facade (1898-1899) in Chicago. Later, Scheibler's McLaughlin house (1915) and a series of subsequent houses appear to have been influenced in part by the Schultz house (1907) in Kenilworth, Ill., by Chicago architect George W. Maher.<sup>31</sup> The Schultz house had been exhibited at the Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibition in 1910, and Scheibler, like Kiehnel, profited from his opportunity to view progressive work.<sup>32</sup>

In 1913, with a commission for a medium-sized apartment



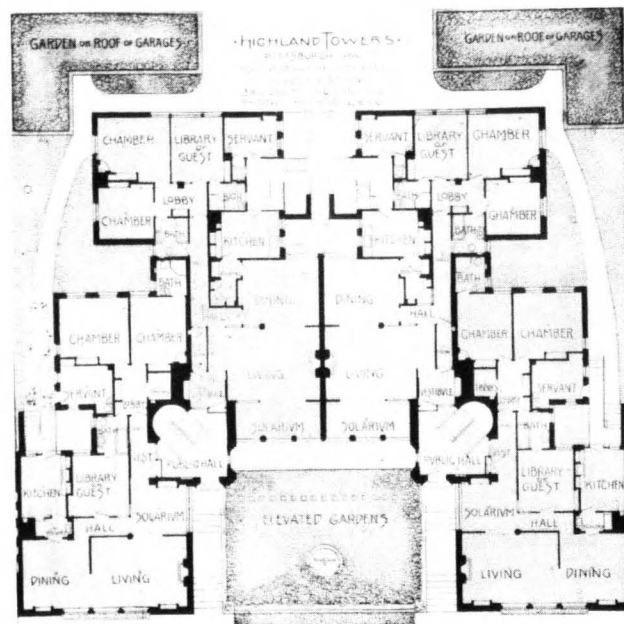


building — his forte — in hand, Scheibler again looked to the American Midwest for inspiration. Unlike his previous work in this genre, the Highland Towers apartment building (14) dispensed with wooden porches, overhanging eaves, high roofs, and prominent chimneys, traditional symbols of domesticity. Highland Towers utilizes its full lot out to the sidewalk, and its raised basement and four stories of apartments literally tower over South Highland Avenue in Shadyside. The building's footprint is U-shaped (15). Forward portions of the wings are upended brick boxes that appear as elemental geometric forms, and the virtually faceless side and rear elevations and the flat roof are severe. The otherwise blank faces of the wings are broken, however, by large rectangular cutouts filled with alternating bands of casement windows and decorative tile panels. A three-sided court opens up the building at its center. Here the architectural elevations are quite open and animated. The building's reinforced concrete structure is exposed as a stacked series of rounded concrete columns that frame the glazed outer walls of solaria. Narrow concrete balconies ring the court in tiers. At the rear corners of the court, squarish stair towers act as hinges between the wings and the base of the U. The towers' strongly vertical brick masses project outward from the adjacent walls and extend above the prevailing roofline, anchoring the building at points where the walls have become mostly glass, and providing counter-weights to the heavy forward masses of the wings.

Scheibler may have become acquainted with the work of Frank Lloyd Wright through *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright*, the portfolio of Wright's work published in Germany in 1910, a copy of which could be found in Pittsburgh's Carnegie Library.<sup>33</sup> Clearly, Wright's work provided considerable inspiration for Highland Towers. A plate of Wright's Larkin Building (16), taken from the July 1907 issue of *Inland Architect and News Record*, was found among Scheibler's office ephemera years later and very possibly provided the starting point. Highland Towers and the Larkin Building share an abrupt siting, a forceful integration of vertical and horizontal elements, and more specifically, large and elemental corner masses, a central void fronted by a low wall, and tall thin verticals within the void.

A second likely and more characteristically Prairie School source for Highland Towers was Wright's McArthur apartment building (1906) in Chicago (17). Both buildings share a U-shaped arrangement of base and wings framing an open court. Wright's court is much deeper and his wings much longer, but the dimensions of the two plans are proportionally quite similar; the rear portion of Wright's court is simply transformed into interior space in Scheibler's plan. Both projects also feature an elevated garden fronted by a low wall, window groups in the wings, shallow projecting elements along the sides of the court, and an elevation at the rear of the court with horizontal bands of windows broken only by thin supports.

Wright's Francis apartment building (1895) may have been the source for the disposition of Highland Towers' dual entries at the rear of its central court. The art glass of Scheibler's solarium doors has an affinity with the detailing of Wright's Coonley house (1908). Scheibler's decorative tilework, which was actually adapted from a



14◀ Frederick G. Scheibler, Jr.,  
Highland Towers apartment  
building, 340 S. Highland Ave.  
15▲ Highland Towers, plan.

fabric design by German architect Peter Behrens, *looks* Wrightian. Highland Towers also incorporates generic Wrightian features like stone window sills, window boxes, and urn planters.

Despite his dependency on Wright, Scheibler successfully manipulated his models considerably. He simplified many of Wright's compositional elements, and conversely, added a richness of external detail that Wright did not demonstrate in any of the relevant sources (though it is present elsewhere in Wright's and in Sullivan's work). Various shades of tapestry brick provide a rich but neutral backdrop for a variety of materials, forms, and colors that are carefully manipulated for aesthetic effect. The brick work acts as a foil for expanses of glass, projecting concrete elements, grids of blue, pink, and green art glass, and geometric grids of blue tilework.

The apartment interiors at Highland Towers are not particularly Prairie School in detailing but share the open planning of Prairie School work. Many rooms are divided one from the other only by partitions, some with translucent art-glass panels, and some of three-quarter height.<sup>34</sup> Colorful murals are painted in bands along the tops of some of these partitions and on other interior surfaces. The murals' iconography encompasses dragons, butterflies, peacocks and other birds, and a variety of flowers and foliage including water lilies and bamboo. Both the murals and the art-glass room dividers are Oriental in feeling. Scheibler was much taken with the Orient, and, of course, Wright's fascination with things Oriental is well-known.<sup>35</sup>

With its ample affinities to both Wright and Sullivan, Highland Towers would fit in quite comfortably a few hundred miles west. A promotional brochure for Highland Towers does not specifically address the building's stylistic origins, but does strongly assert its modern virtues:

In this splendid apartment, owner, architect and builder have worked together to give not only the utmost of modern comfort but also that beauty which adds so much to the enjoyment of a Home. Highland Towers comprise a few select Homes as attractive in appearance, as satisfying in arrangement and as perfect in construction and equipment as modern art and science could make them.<sup>36</sup>

The client for Highland Towers, Daniel L. Dillinger, was a longtime Scheibler client who clearly endorsed Scheibler's progressive manner and its modern expression. The building's Prairie School sensibility, however, was a bit of a new wrinkle for both of them. But Highland Towers was also shaped by progressive European influences in both its massing and detailing. For Scheibler, even more than for Kiehnel, the Prairie School was a momentary, if salutary, inspiration.

### Pittsburgh's Prairie School Legacy

**A**s the Prairie School gained a foothold in the Midwest, it claimed a toehold in Pittsburgh, beginning with Elmslie's Millar house of 1904, an early solo work in the career of an important American architect. Prairie School influence on the Pittsburgh architectural scene devolved from Richard Kiehnel's efforts to propagate progressive ideas through the exhibitions of the Pittsburgh Architectural Club, beginning with the international

exhibition of 1907. This influence was reflected in work by the firm of Kiehnel and Elliott, as displayed at the same exhibitions. This work constitutes a significant oeuvre of Prairie School work outside of the true Midwest, and the Pitcairn bank and the Greenfield School are interesting additions to the ranks of Prairie School banks and schools. Altogether, Kiehnel and his firm played a notable role in the diaspora of Prairie School architecture. Additionally, Scheibler's Highland Towers must be counted as an important Prairie School work by an important regional architect.

Prairie School activity in Pittsburgh lasted a scant 10 years; the activity peaked, at about the same time as it peaked nationally, with Kiehnel and Elliott's latter Prairie School projects and Scheibler's Highland Towers — cut short, it seems, by Kiehnel's relocation to Florida in 1917. Nevertheless, two significant Pittsburgh architects, though they did not exclusively adopt Prairie School precepts, amply benefited from their exposure to progressive Prairie School ideas. In so doing they made their own contribution to a progressive American architecture, and they left a legacy of buildings that comprise an important chapter in Pittsburgh's architectural heritage — a chapter deeply rooted in the American Midwest. ☼

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> For the Philadelphia connection, see James D. Van Trump, "Mirror in the West: The Work of Some Philadelphia Architects in Pittsburgh," *Charette* 44:1 (Jan. 1964), 34-39, reprinted in Van Trump, *Life and Architecture in Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh, 1983), 31-35. For



**16▲ Frank Lloyd Wright, Larkin Building (Buffalo).**

**17► Frank Lloyd Wright, McArthur apartment building (Chicago), perspective rendering and plans.**

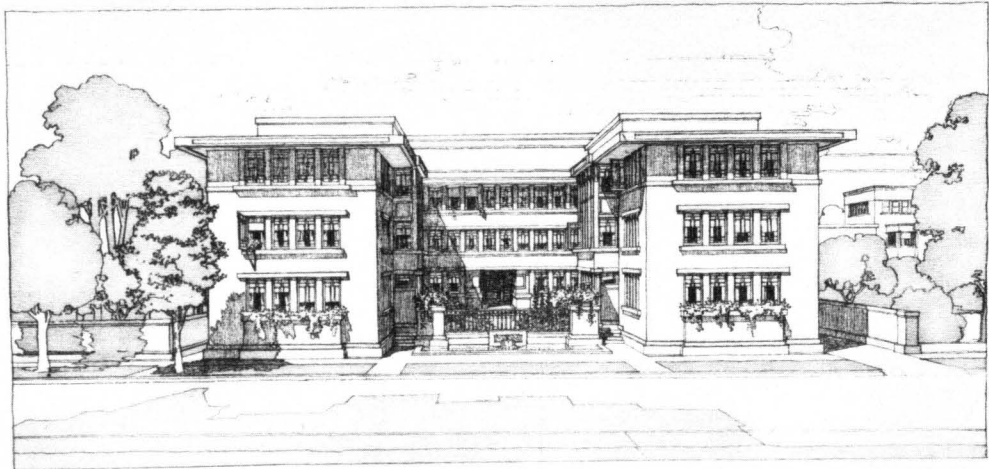
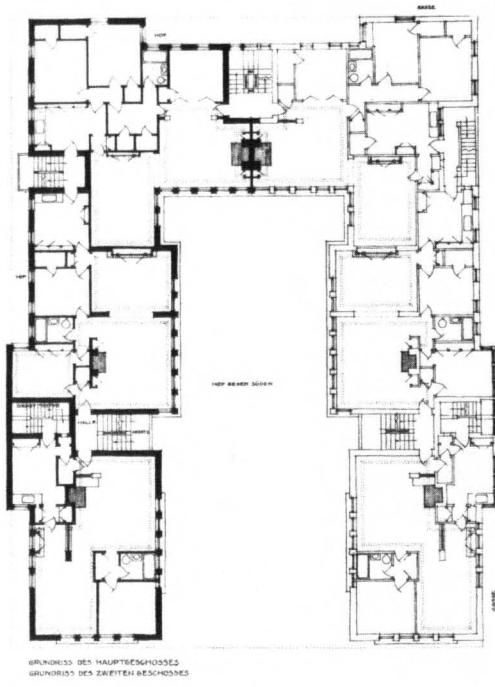
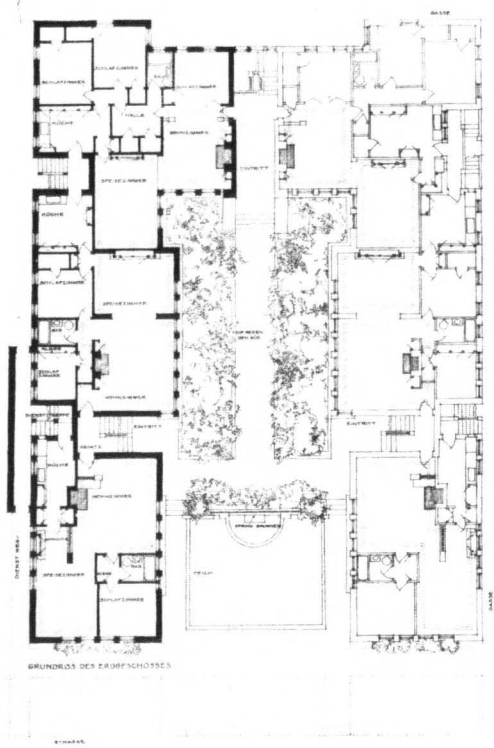


PLATE 36. PROJECT CONCRETE APARTMENT HOUSE FOR WARREN MANNING, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.





the Boston connection, see Margaret Henderson Floyd, *Architecture After Richardson, Regionalism Before Modernism; Longfellow Alden, and Harlow in Boston and Pittsburgh* (Chicago, 1994). No one has yet studied the New York connection, which is largely a phenomenon of the last 50 years, when regional variations have less meaning.

<sup>2</sup> The prominent Chicago firm of Daniel Burnham & Co. received numerous Pittsburgh commissions for projects such as the Frick Building, the Oliver Building, and Union Station (now the Pennsylvanian apartments). Burnham's successor firm Graham Anderson Probst and White, S. S. Beman, Rapp & Rapp, Schmidt Garden & Erikson, and Mies van der Rohe, all of Chicago, also built in Pittsburgh, as did Walker & Weeks of Cleveland, Gordon W. Lloyd of Detroit, Theodore C. Link of St. Louis, Vrydaugh & Shepherd of Kansas City, and other architects with "Western" credentials.

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, James F. O'Gorman, *Three American Architects: Richardson, Sullivan, and Wright, 1865-1915* (Chicago, 1991). Another important figure in the development of progressive American architecture was the Philadelphian Frank Furness, who designed a handful of Pittsburgh buildings, all now demolished save for a modest (former) railroad station in Edgewood.

<sup>4</sup> Irving K. Pond, *The Meaning of Architecture: An Essay in Constructive Criticism* (Boston, 1918), 174.

<sup>5</sup> The term "Prairie School" is used in this article in the expanded sense that has been outlined here. This usage was popularized in the landmark studies of Harold Allen Brooks and by the editors of the *Prairie School Review*, a journal treating Prairie School designers and buildings that was published from 1964 to 1976. For a more complete definition of the Prairie School and a discussion of the usage of the terms Chicago School and Prairie School, see Harold Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries* (Toronto, 1972), 4-13. There was much interchange of new ideas among the progressives of this time. Even Frank Lloyd Wright, for instance, was influenced by the Europeans, though he was loath to admit it.

<sup>6</sup> Frank Lloyd Wright's Pittsburgh-area work came much later, post-dating his Prairie School period.

<sup>7</sup> Harold Allen Brooks, *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School* (New York, 1984), 24.

<sup>8</sup> Factual information on the Millar house is largely derived from William Gray Purcell, *Parabiography* (1907), William Gray Purcell Papers, Northwest Architectural Archives, Univ. of Minn. Libraries, St. Paul, Minn.

<sup>9</sup> David Gebhard, "William Gray Purcell and George Grant Elmslie and the Early Progressive Movement in American Architecture from 1900 to 1920" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Minn., 1957), 83-84.

<sup>10</sup> *Western Architect* 19:1 (Jan. 1913), 1, 3. Photographic reproductions of the drawings can be found at the Northwest Architectural Archives.

<sup>11</sup> Apparently there was nearly a Purcell and Elmslie house in the Pittsburgh area as well. A letter addressed to William Gray Purcell from W. G. A. Millar, dated March 21, 1910, accompanied the return of a set of drawings for a small house. These plans had been prepared by Purcell and Elmslie for a friend of Millar who had subsequently failed to find a suitable building site for the projected house. Northwest Architectural Archives.

<sup>12</sup> [Obituary], *New York Times* (Nov. 4, 1944), 15.

<sup>13</sup> Pittsburgh Architectural Club, *Catalog of the First Exhibition* (Pittsburgh, 1900), 13. For a survey of architectural exhibitions in Pittsburgh, especially the 1907 exhibition, see Christopher Monkhouse, "A Century of Architectural Exhibitions at The Carnegie: 1893-1993," *Carnegie Magazine* 61:12 (Nov./Dec. 1993), 28-32, 37-43.

<sup>14</sup> See Pittsburgh Architectural Club, *Catalog of the Fourth Exhibition* (Pittsburgh, 1907).

<sup>15</sup> G. B. Ford, "A Great Exhibition," *American Architect* 92:1666 (Nov. 30, 1907), 179-181. Ford's concept of American architecture highlighted the contributions of the Prairie School, but was inclusive of other architectural genres. He also cited, for example, the contribution of "the most individual adaptation of modern école tendencies of [Henry] Hornbostel" — an architect then active in Pittsburgh — toward the new American architecture. But that's another story.

<sup>16</sup> Edward B. Lee, "The Pittsburgh Architectural Club Exhibition," *American Architect* 103:1945 (April 2, 1913), 174.

<sup>17</sup> At the 1907 exhibition, Kiehnel and Elliott had exhibited drawings of their New Castle High School, in the Collegiate Gothic style.

<sup>18</sup> Many of the Kiehnel and Elliott projects that were published in Pittsburgh Architec-

tural Club exhibition catalogs were subsequently published in the *Builder*, a Pittsburgh architecture magazine.

<sup>19</sup> See Lauren S. Weingarden, *Louis H. Sullivan: The Banks* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987), 10-12; and Craig Zabel, "The Prairie School Banks of Frank Lloyd Wright, Louis H. Sullivan, and Purcell and Elmslie" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Ill. at Urbana-Champaign, 1984).

<sup>20</sup> Purcell and Elmslie's Prairie School banks were rooted in domestic architecture. (Sullivan's and Wright's were not.) See Craig Zabel, "George Grant Elmslie: Turning the Jewel Box into a Bank Home," in Craig Zabel and Susan Scott Munshower, eds., *American Public Architecture: European Roots and Native Expressions* (papers in art history from The Pennsylvania State University, vol. 5 [University Park, Pa., 1989]), 228-270.

<sup>21</sup> See Pittsburgh Architectural Club, *Catalog of the Fifth Exhibition* (Pittsburgh, 1910), n.p. Kiehnel and Elliott's borrowings from Pond and Pond may have seemed propitious, since Irving K. Pond was elected president of the American Institute of Architects early in 1910.

<sup>22</sup> Pittsburgh architect Frederick G. Scheibler, Jr. also used the Mackintosh rose motif in art-glass windows at his Minnetonka Building (1908) and in later projects.

<sup>23</sup> The Rubens house was listed among the exhibits but not pictured in the 1907 exhibition catalog. The items that were likely exhibited can be found in *Inland Architect and News Record* 44:8 (Aug. 1904), plate, and *Architectural Record* 15 (April 1904), 371, 381-382.

<sup>24</sup> Kiehnel and Elliott also designed a second large public project during this period: the City of Pittsburgh Hospital at Marshalsea (c. 1909; exhibited 1910), now the former Medical Center building at Mayview State Hospital. This building stretches the definition of Prairie School design a bit too far, but it has some very individualistic detailing. The entry configuration is rooted in Secessionist design, probably by way of the likes of George W. Maher and Pond and Pond.

<sup>25</sup> See Donna Rae Nelson, "School Architecture in Chicago During the Progressive Era: The Career of Dwight H. Perkins" (Ph.D. diss., Loyola Univ. of Chicago, 1988).

<sup>26</sup> See Louis H. Sullivan, "Suggestions in Artistic Brickwork," (1910); reprinted as Louis H. Sullivan, "Artistic Brick," *The Prairie School Review* IV:2 (second quarter 1967), 26.

<sup>27</sup> Similar configurations of ornamentation are found on piers and pier-like columns in a number of Kiehnel and Elliott's other Prairie School projects, including their addition to the Brushton (or Baxter) School (1909; exhibited 1910), now the Pittsburgh High School for the Creative and Performing Arts on Brushton Avenue. The entry configuration at the Brushton School is similar to that at the Marshalsea hospital.

<sup>28</sup> Wright's decision to change the ornamentation at Unity Temple likely derived from the greater ease of casting the final geometric scheme in concrete.

<sup>29</sup> For Scheibler and a lengthier discussion of his Highland Towers apartment building, see Martin Aurand, *The Progressive Architecture of Frederick G. Scheibler, Jr.* (Pittsburgh, 1994). Highland Towers was never formally published or exhibited, but a photograph of the building was included in Aymer Embury, "Impressions of Three Cities: Ill Pittsburgh," *Architecture* 31:4 (April 1915), 106.

<sup>30</sup> Scheibler also commonly borrowed architectural vocabulary from the English Arts and Crafts architects C. F. A. Voysey and M. H. Baillie Scott, and from Scotsman Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

<sup>31</sup> The Schultz house and Scheibler's related houses were all additionally influenced by progressive European ideas and incorporate both Voyseyesque and Secessionist elements.

<sup>32</sup> Scheibler, like Kiehnel and Elliott, also showed his own work at the Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibitions. Altogether, he exhibited 12 projects at four different exhibitions between 1905 and 1912.

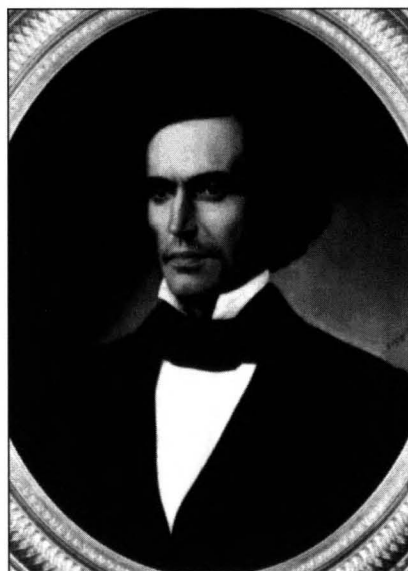
<sup>33</sup> *Ausgeführte Bauten und Entwürfe von Frank Lloyd Wright* (Berlin, 1911). All of Scheibler's Wrightian sources were represented in this portfolio.

<sup>34</sup> One of the art-glass panels was displayed at the 1914 Pittsburgh Architectural Club exhibition by its maker, the Rudy Bros. Co. Pittsburgh Architectural Club, *Catalogue of the Ninth Exhibition* (Pittsburgh: 1914), n.p.

<sup>35</sup> Scheibler's friend, Japanese designer Kantero Kato, may have played a role in these designs.

<sup>36</sup> Text taken from "Highland Towers, 340-342 South Highland Avenue" (advertising brochure), n.d., n.p.

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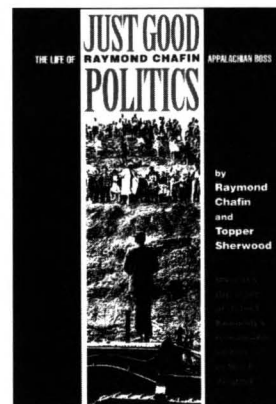
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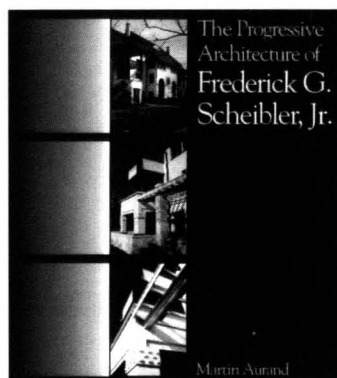
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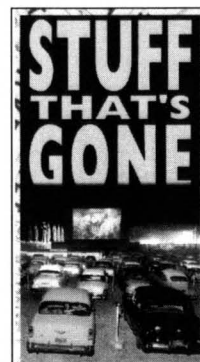
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