



# WRITINGS

NEWSLETTER OF THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE CONSERVANCY

Vol. XV, Issue 2

## COTTAGE COMMENTS BY CLAIRE

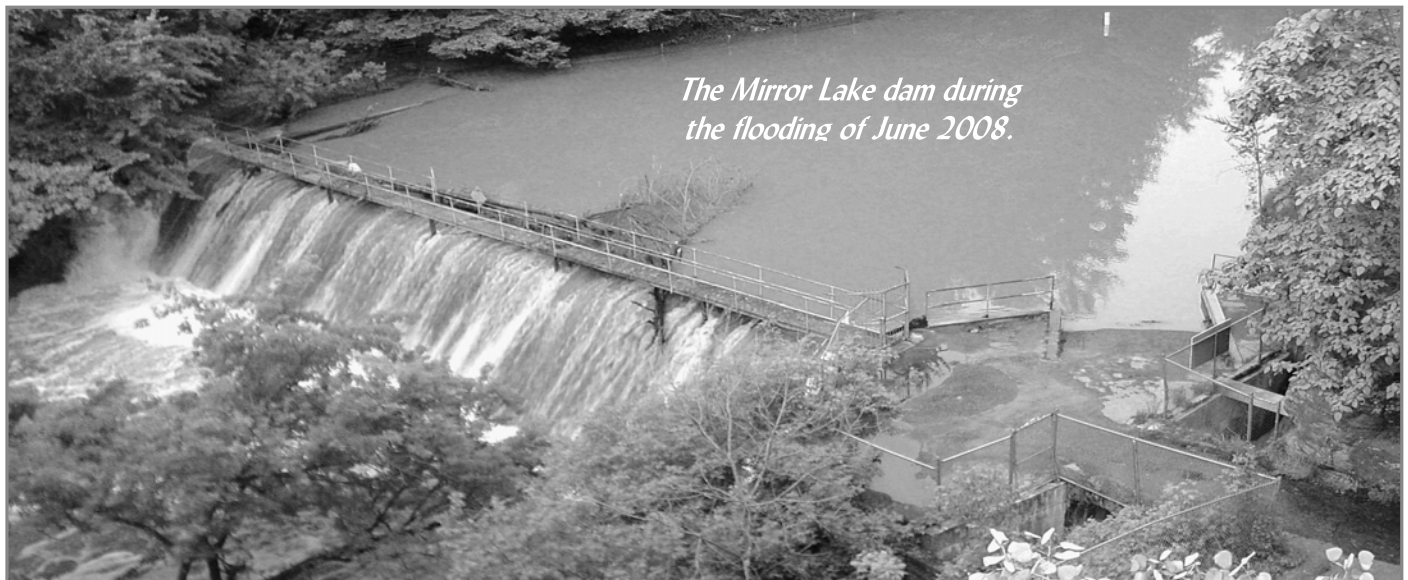
**T**here was too much excitement in the vicinity of the cottage this summer, beginning shortly after publication of our spring newsletter. Record rainfall over a period of several days in early June caused our downstream neighbor, Lake Delton, to overflow its banks and cut a large new channel to the Wisconsin River, destroying five homes in the process. The Lake Delton dam did not fail, but it couldn't release water entering it quickly enough, having been built in the days before much of its drainage area was paved over for water parks and hotels.

Mirror Lake rose about five feet, causing minor damage and threatening the Mirror Lake dam, featured in this column in our last issue. Here again is a picture of it, this time during the flooding. The hidden damage to the lake will only be apparent later, since the floodwaters will have further weakened some of the shoreline banks and there will be more trees

Mark Blakeslee found it at the far end of the narrows and towed it back, and Bill Martinelli got it properly moored again during the July open house.

There was also considerable flood damage in the surrounding communities. The house of one of our SPCC board members in nearby Reedsburg was flooded by the Baraboo River, and further downstream I watched the river rise an unbelievable 12 feet, covering my yard and reaching the foot of the bank where my own house is located.

In more cheerful news, Mirror Lake received a visit from Wisconsin's Governor Jim Doyle and other officials to view the nearly complete dredging project. Taliesin students again visited the cottage in July and we welcomed a recipient of the Jill Vladick Award. See the articles inside about these events. We also have an account of a day and night spent at the cottage from a Fulbright Scholar who stayed there in the fall of 2007.



*The Mirror Lake dam during the flooding of June 2008.*

falling into the lake. Actually, for once it was a good thing that one did, because it blocked most of the loose floating piers, boats, and debris from reaching the dam. Such a "logjam", as well as the additional weight of water that would have backed up behind such a debris dam, might well have caused its failure.

The cottage was not affected by the high waters since it sits on a very high bluff above the lake. However, its floating dock is held in place by steel posts that are about four feet above the usual water level. Along with many other piers, canoes, and pontoon boats, it floated right off its mooring posts and headed downstream. Neighbor and SPCC board member

Although the Seth Peterson cottage was the first Wright house made available for rent, there are now others, and some of our guests have made it a point to stay at those, also. Two couples reported in our guest book that they have also stayed at the Schwartz House, the Louis Penfield House and the Haynes House. (You can purchase the 2007 *FLLW Quarterly Magazine* that features these houses and the cottage from our website at [www.sethpeterson.org](http://www.sethpeterson.org), or from the order form in this newsletter.) I wish every success to our companion providers of the Wright experience.

*Claire Barnett*

*President, Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy*

## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

Paul Zajackowski, Park Superintendent

The aerial spray to help control the rising gypsy moth population was completed in late spring. The gypsy moth is an invasive tree pest which, in high numbers, can defoliate entire forest areas. The aerial spray, along with the cool, wet spring, helped keep gypsy moth numbers low and very little defoliation occurred. Recently, park staff surveyed the entire park for gypsy moth egg masses and found numbers to be much lower than in 2007.

The record rainfall in early June caused Mirror Lake to rise approximately five feet higher than normal. This caused a few trails and campsites to be closed until water levels receded and park staff could clear downed trees. Fortunately, the park's infrastructure received very little damage and only a few trees were lost.

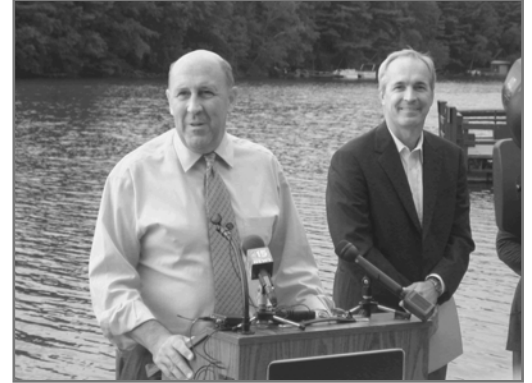
In project news, the 155-foot Ishnala Bridge has been open for hikers since Labor Day. Currently, there is a quarter of a mile of the new trail open and we are hoping to finish the remaining two miles in 2009. We recently replaced 160 feet of boardwalk located at the boat landing, adding two new fishing areas and some native plantings. And we are glad to say that the lake dredging project is close to completion.

Throughout the summer, some great programs were held at the park which included topics on wolves, bats,

geology, raptors, astronomy, and local history. Candlelight hikes and skis are scheduled for October 25, January 3 and February 7. ■

## GOVERNOR VISITS MIRROR LAKE

Wisconsin's Governor Jim Doyle, accompanied by Matthew Frank, Secretary of the Department of Natural Resources, State Tourism Secretary Kelli Trumble, State



*Governor Doyle and Matthew Frank, DNR*

Representative J.A. "Doc" Hines, and Senator Luther Olsen, visited the lake on September 10<sup>th</sup> to view the progress of the lake dredging project. The governor addressed representatives from the Mirror Lake Association, the Mirror Lake Management District Board, Friends of Mirror Lake State Park, the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, and area residents.



*Kurt Muchow, Vierbicher Associates*

The group then boarded four pontoon boats (including one for news media), to go up the lake to view the dredging and sediment trap sites. Kurt Muchow of Vierbicher Associates was along to explain the dredging process. The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy contributed to the cost of the dredging and sediment trap studies. Funding for the actual dredging came from the State Stewardship fund. ■

## ANNUAL MEETING

The Annual Meeting of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy will be held on Sunday December 14<sup>th</sup> at 4:30 pm. It will include annual and financial reports and the election of board members and officers. Any members of the Conservancy whose annual dues have been paid may attend and vote on any motions made at the meeting.

The meeting will be approximately an hour and will be followed by a private party for the cottage tour guide volunteers. Anyone wishing to attend the meeting should send an email to [crmrogan@yahoo.com](mailto:crmrogan@yahoo.com) with *Annual Meeting* as the subject. ■

## WRITINGS

is a publication of The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, Inc. for the Cottage by Frank Lloyd Wright in Mirror Lake State Park.  
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### **The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, Inc. Board of Directors Executive Committee**

President: Claire Barnett  
First Vice President: Bill Martinelli  
Second Vice President: Peter Rott  
Treasurer: Paul Wagner  
Secretary: Kermit Traska

### **Members**

James Booth, Jim Draeger, Bill Dupuy, Tim Heggland,  
Carolyne Kotchi, Raymond Matlosz, Jerry Minnich,  
John Muchow, Chris Wontor

### **Ex-officio members**

Mark Blakeslee, President, Mirror Lake Association  
Paul Zajackowski, Superintendent, Mirror Lake State Park

### **Conservancy Staff**

Office Manager: Sheila Bentley  
Marketing Coordinator: Gail Kohl

**For cottage reservations call the Sand County Service  
Company, Lake Delton, Wisconsin: 608 254-6551.**



*Gita Sundaresh captures an image of a misty Mirror Lake.*

## A DAY AT THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE

Gita Sundaresh

I am an architect and professor in Pune, India, participating last fall as a Fulbright Scholar at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in the Department of Design Studies. While walking through the grounds on a visit to nearby Taliesin, I had a sudden desire to be alone, just by myself, in the space beyond. I do not think that I have ever come closer to a sense of peace than I did that day at Taliesin, during those few moments that I snatched in solitude. The relationship of Taliesin with its landscape setting was immediate; boundaries between the building and the surroundings hardly distinguishable. I wondered if it was Wright who laid the setting for Taliesin or the landscape had made Taliesin a part of itself. The Taliesin visit inspired me to experience Wright's other works, in particular houses he had designed.

An autumn open house at the Seth Peterson cottage, with its panoramic view of the woods and the lake, just gave a taste of "Wright" space amidst fifteen other visitors, but was inadequate to satisfy the senses. I returned to Madison with a desire to return some day, to feel and experience the space at leisure and by myself. It was, therefore, very rare and special when I got the opportunity to "live" in the Seth Peterson cottage soon afterwards, if only for a day.

Driving from Madison in the afternoon on a cold, snowy day, the expectations of the stay were palpable. Almost completely hidden by the forest of pine and oak trees, the cottage comes upon one suddenly with its sharp angular lines and solid compact form. It seemed to orchestrate the visual compositions with the changing elements in the landscape.

Once inside, the flow of spaces provided an intimate setting for varied functions. Whether sitting in the partially enclosed and sheltered living area, or by the expanse of the tall glass windows, the textures, colors and abstracted forms of the structure subtly created new and varied sensations as the day passed. Gently flickering soft diffused shadows of the window frame played hide and seek with the flagstone flooring, much the same way as the nuthatches, cardinals and blue jays outside. Like in a kaleidoscope, new formations seemed to appear and change when viewed from a new vantage point or at different times of the day.

While inside, I felt both the security and comfort of the built form while being awed by the view of the vast expanse of snow-covered grounds, the misty lake and the forested terrain. A sense of calm prevailed, enhanced by the playful chirping of the birds in the snow flurries, blending with the music of Bach and Beethoven gently filling the room. The space beyond appeared translucent while watching the beautiful Wisconsin snowfall.

As I woke up at the magical dawn, lying in bed, I gazed at the woodland views, the leaves of the trees dense and drooping with the fallen snow. This cottage extended to me all realms of human experience—spiritual and sensual, affirming the unity of life and art, Nature and her inhabitants.

Wright's architecture had a larger purpose—play of sculptural forms, Nature in all her glory and the fourth dimension—the seasons, the soft symphony of falling snow, and the chirping of winged creatures, all integrated so seamlessly.

My memories of last fall now seem surreal. ■



*Gently flickering soft diffused shadows of the window frame played hide and seek with the flagstone flooring.*

**From the Guest Book:** "Our favorite memories of our stay (in the area) were all here at the cottage. We loved watching the goldfinch and woodpeckers at the feeder and especially the family of raccoons (5) at the feeder each night. We loved playing board games, reading books, and admiring the architecture." The Nelson family, Minnesota

## NEWS FROM THE MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION

Mark Blakeslee, President

**A**s historic as the weather was in the Dells area this summer, there was another event that happened that is just as significant—the Mirror Lake dredging project. Throughout the summer we have been monitoring the project and the growing amount of sediment in the spoil storage site and are very happy with the progress that has been made. This project will benefit the lake for many years to come.



*The Mirror Lake dredging project will benefit the lake for many years.*

In September, Governor Jim Doyle came to Mirror Lake to view the dredging project. (See article on page 2.) We were very proud that the governor and other officials took the time to visit us. Having them here is a real tribute to all the people and organizations that work to make Mirror Lake the special place it is. I'm proud to work with all these dedicated people—The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy, the Friends of Mirror Lake State Park, and especially the staff of the state park—they all work hard to keep the lake and the park the best it can be. ■

## JILL VLADICK SCHOLARSHIP WINNER

**T**he 2008 recipient of the Jill Vladick Award was Christian Butler, a third-year student in the Master's Degree program at Taliesin. Christian worked in construction in high school and college and later earned an undergraduate degree in business. Working as a construction supervisor, his close contact with architects showed



him a way to combine his artistic hobbies with his construction experience and business background, leading to his graduation last September from the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture.

An added feature to the Award this year was dinner at the historic Ishnala Restaurant, on Mirror Lake. (We hope to do a feature on Ishnala soon.) Christian and a visiting friend used the cottage's canoe to paddle down the Narrows into the other end of the lake, had dinner, and made their way back. He did not use his car the entire visit, which, he says in his guest book entry, enhanced the sense of place. ■

*Christian's entry in the Cottage Guest Book....*

*"Thanks for an amazing place to stay. The restoration of the Seth Peterson Cottage is a gift to us all. As an apprentice of the Frank Lloyd Wright School of Architecture, I've had a lot of time inside Wright's buildings. Yet there are still many things this cottage can teach me."*

*—Christian Butler, Taliesin*

## FALL COLOR BOAT TRIP

**T**he 2008 Fall Color Boat Tour took place on October 12, with beautiful colors and unusually warm weather. Three pontoon boats, generously provided by members of the Mirror Lake Association, took our 24 guests on a trip around the lake.



*24 Guests enjoyed the 2008 Fall Color Boat Tour*

They returned to the cozily lit cottage for hors d'oeuvres, wine, and apple cider. (Special thanks to Beth Traska for preparing the food).

The fire in the fireplace was less of a necessity this year and about half of the participants ate and conversed out on the terrace. The event lasted a half an hour longer than scheduled because of questions about the cottage rehabilitation.

The Fall Color Boat Tour experience is nicely summed up in the words of Gita Sundaresh, who attended last year's event: "A day I will remember always. The colors on the trees were beautiful, the twin bridge a sight to behold, and the boat ride most memorable." ■

## TOUR GUIDES WANTED

Claire Barnett

If you live within driving distance and would like to become more involved with the cottage’s mission, the Conservancy wants you! We are in need of additional tour guides for the open house tours held the second Sunday of each month. Training will be provided—the only requirement is enthusiasm!

If you are interested, please send an email to [crmrogan@yahoo.com](mailto:crmrogan@yahoo.com) or write to our mailing address at SPCC, Box 334, Lake Delton, WI 53940. ■

## AN UNUSUAL VISIT

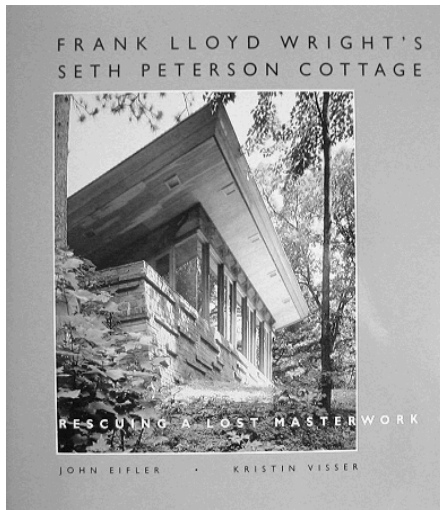
Claire Barnett

Last summer the cottage was visited by 20 architects from France. Their tour coordinator and I divided them into two groups and he translated. Those of you who have heard a cottage tour know that there are lots of facts to present and it was difficult to maintain any pace when I could only say a short paragraph or so before pausing. Fortunately, the man translating was very knowledgeable and was able to explain to the group. Once he spoke about three times as long as I had, and I wondered out loud, “*Did I really say all that?*” When half of the group laughed, I realized that many of them did speak English, too.

They enjoyed their visit and the Canadian group that organized the tour hopes to do it again. I also had a call from New York wanting to arrange a tour for Japanese architects but we were unable to find an open date. Perhaps next year . . . ■

## RESCUING A LOST MASTERPIECE

*This is the fifth in a series of excerpts from the book, Frank Lloyd Wright’s Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterpiece, by John Eifler and Kristin Visser. It is the definitive story of the cottage. The last excerpt described how a group of citizens, led by Audrey Laatsch, banded together to restore the cottage, and how they enlisted the services of noted Chicago architect John Eifler in the ambitious project.*



The Seth Peterson Cottage experience has shown that a preliminary study, accomplished at minimal cost, is an extremely effective tool for creating excitement, and ultimately

funding, to get a project underway. The preliminary study allowed all of the parties involved in the project enough time to become familiar with the building as well as plan for how improvements might be phased and funded. Ultimately, John conducted a more detailed HSR prior to completing the working drawings, but even then, the scope and cost of the study were kept to a minimum. In this way, unanticipated conditions and additional historical information could be incorporated into the final restoration construction drawings without needing to review the overall direction of the project. This approach allowed the conservancy board, the Department of Natural Resources, Department of Administration (which must approve all building and restoration projects of state agencies), and the State Historical Society time to digest the proposed improvements and costs associated with conserving the cottage.

The preliminary study concluded that the cottage was severely deteriorated and would need the following restoration work:

- Abandonment of the structure and subsequent lack of maintenance had allowed the roof to rot through in several areas. The extensive rot and improper original installation of framing members led to the conclusion that virtually all of the framing, as well as the entire roof, needed to be replaced.
- Water infiltration had essentially destroyed all the original cabinetry and the plywood ceilings, wood trim, and interior doors, requiring replacement of virtually all the interior wood finishes.
- The original window sash and fixed glazing were severely decayed and needed extensive replacement.
- All mechanical, electrical, and plumbing systems (including the well and the septic tank) were either missing or destroyed.

The report concluded that the only salvageable material consisted of the masonry walls and chimney, the vertical wooden supports, and the ornamental clerestory panels. Repairs were estimated to cost approximately \$250,000.

A comparison of the size of the cottage (880 square feet) and the projected cost showed that the restoration project would cost roughly \$300 per square foot! It is easy to see why restoration budgets based on average per square foot costs can be misleading.

John and Audrey met with officials from the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), Department of Administration (DOA), and the State Historical Society (SHS) to review John’s preliminary recommendations. (Early discussions with state preservation agencies is imperative, as it allows all parties to establish a set of goals and objectives and discuss the merits and potential shortcomings of a preservation plan.) The first order of business was a discussion of how the project would be carried out and the planned use of the cottage. In an innovative spirit of public and private cooperation, the DNR was willing to lease the cottage to the Conservancy on a long-term basis so that it could be operated as a vacation rental (although the lease also stipulates that the cottage be open at least once a year for public tours). ■

*Next time: The fundraising challenge*

# WRITINGS



Can you imagine the beautiful fall colors surrounding the cottage?



Clockwise from Top:  
Boarding for the Fall  
Color Boat Tour;  
The "AfterParty";  
A snapping turtle in  
the parking lot was  
the most unusual  
visitor of the summer



Mirror Lake dam during the flooding of June 2008.

The "Media Boat" follows the  
governor's tour boat to view the  
progress of the Mirror Lake  
dredging project on September 10.



Dredging near the cottage.



What a photo opportunity!



Sediment storage area.

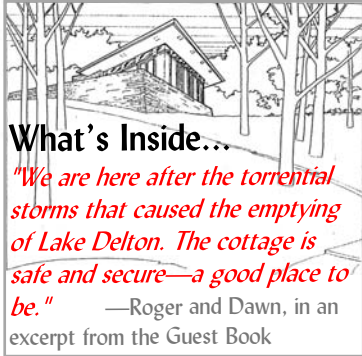


...back on the dock after the tour.

# WRITINGS

THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE CONSERVANCY, INC.  
P. O. Box 334  
LAKE DELTON, WISCONSIN 53940

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

### 2008

Sunday, **November 9**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

Sunday, **December 14**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission  
*Directors/Members Annual Meeting 4-5 pm*

### 2009

Sunday, **January 11**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

Sunday, **February 8**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

Sunday, **March 8**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

Sunday, **April 12**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

Sunday, **May 10**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

Sunday, **June 7**, 1-4 pm, Annual Mirror Lake State Park  
Open House Day, Guided Tours, **FREE Admission**

Sunday, **June 14**, 1-4 pm, Open House, Guided Tours, Admission

**Join us at one of our monthly open houses.**



Visitors find touring the cottage to be a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Take a scenic drive and experience first hand this restored Frank Lloyd Wright-designed cottage during the cottage open house tours. (See schedule at left).

The Seth Peterson Cottage is located at E9982 Fern Dell Road, Lake Delton, WI

