



SETH PETERSON'S SECOND ACT

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ARCHITECT REFLECTS ON PROJECT TO GIVE COTTAGE A NEW LEASE ON LIFE

Interview with Brian R. Hannan

For Chicagoland architect John Eifler, being chosen as the lead architect for the Seth Peterson Cottage rehabilitation began not with a series of bids and proposals but with a simple gesture: He raised his hand.

“I attended an early meeting as I was interested in helping out,” Eifler recalled. “After a long discussion, with many people expressing doubts as to what the cottage could be used for, I approached Audrey Laatsch (who spearheaded the project and helped to create a nonprofit to support it) and asked if she had been talking to any architects. I more or less volunteered.

“I was fairly young at the time and was in the process of starting my own firm,” he added. “I already had completed the restoration of the Herbert and Katherine Jacobs House

Above: *Rehabilitation work continues on the front facade of the Seth Peterson Cottage (1958) in this winter 1990-91 photograph.*

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WRITINGS

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

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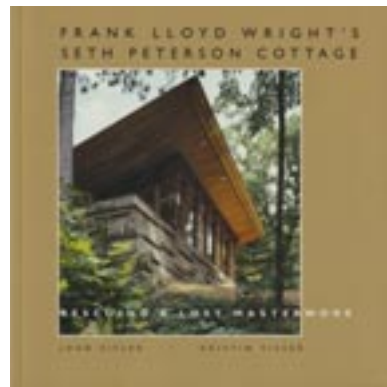
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Above: Sharon Klawitter's collection of souvenir mugs reflects how many times she's stayed at the Seth Peterson Cottage over the years: 18.

LOST ... AND FOUND



Frank Lloyd Wright's Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterwork" chronicles the story of the design and construction of the Seth Peterson Cottage—and the three-year, \$350,000 effort to rehabilitate it. The book was written by John Eifler and the late Kristin Visser and first published in 1997 by the Wisconsin Trust for Historical Preservation.

Now in its third printing, published by the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc., the book is available online at sethpeterson.org and at monthly cottage open house and guided tour events for \$15. It's also offered from internet retailers.

"Frank Lloyd Wright's Seth Peterson Cottage" features dozens of black and white and color photographs and architectural drawings and illustrations. 

FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

It's hard to believe that here we are, 30 years into the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy operating the Seth Peterson Cottage. Over the years, thousands of people from nearly every state and many foreign countries have had the opportunity to stay in a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home. In addition, we have hosted thousands more with our monthly open house events. The notes in our guestbook indicate great appreciation for the chance to stay in an architectural work of art.

The 30th anniversary celebration will be held on June 12, 2022, with the open house from 1 to 4 p.m. and the program at 2:30 p.m. Our theme for the anniversary is taken from this year's Wright quote on our guest coffee mug: "The thing always happens that you believe in and the belief makes it happen."

The people around Mirror Lake and across the state that wanted the cottage restored believed in restoring the cottage, and that belief made it happen!

The Seth Peterson Cottage was the first Wright-designed home that could be rented by the general public. Renting the cottage provides needed funds to ensure proper care and maintenance of this historic home. Today, there are nearly 20 Wright-designed homes that can be rented.

At our 25th anniversary, we recognized the first couple to have stayed at the cottage in 1992. For the 30th anniversary we will recognize those who have stayed multiple times. There are people that have stayed from 9 to 22 times. We have invited these frequent guests to be honored at the anniversary celebration.

Sand County Service Co. has handled our reservations and cleanings and will be honored for having served the entire 30 years as our rental agency.

There are several people involved with the conservancy going back to the beginning in the late 1980s, including Bill



Above: Overnight guests receive this complimentary mug.

Martinelli, Claire Barnett and myself. There are many others that have served over the years on the board of directors or as a volunteer to make operating the Seth Peterson Cottage a success.

The conservancy has come a long way in the past 30 years. We have the lease for maintaining and operating the cottage through 2035 to make it available to as many people as possible.

Please join us at the Seth Peterson Cottage on June 12 for our 30th-anniversary celebration. 

MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Becky Green, Park Manager

Hello again, everyone! Quite a few years have passed since I wrote an article for the newsletter, so I will re-introduce myself: I am Becky Green, and I have been the park manager at Mirror Lake State Park since the fall of 2006.

I get the opportunity to write another park update because, at the end of January, we said goodbye and good luck to Ryder Will, our park superintendent, as he headed to Madison to become our new capital development coordinator.


We also had another staffing change at the end of March, when Steve Rodenkirch, the property manager for Rocky Arbor State Park and the Dells of the Wisconsin River State Natural Area, retired after more than 30 years of service for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources.

With these guys gone, a lot of work has shuffled on to the plates for me and our other staff, but we are up for the challenge. I'm happy to report that Ryder's position has been selected as one of the next positions to be filled, and we may be fortunate enough to see a new superintendent before the middle of summer.

The last couple years have been a whirlwind, to say the least, and, here in our park, we have seen some incredible changes in the number of folks visiting. The increase in revenue is historic.

Looking back at our historic attendance numbers, our 2010-2019 average annual attendance was 321,172. In 2020, even with our full park closure for one month and camping closed two months, the annual attendance was 390,174 people. It's no surprise with these numbers and an increased use of state and national parks across the U.S. that Mirror Lake broke our 2020 attendance record and blew the 10-year average out of the water with 450,275 visitors in 2022.

We also are very excited because with this increased attendance also came an increase in revenue. We once again broke records by bringing in just more than \$970,000. And when we add in revenue from the rest of our team, we brought in more than \$1 million for the first time.

This is a very proud accomplishment for us as it keeps us as one of the top producing, most popular state parks in Wisconsin that makes money to help support other parks. 



SECOND ACT

continued from cover

(1936) in Madison and found that I very much enjoyed restoring Wright buildings.”

We recently spoke with Eifler about the cottage and the upcoming 30th anniversary of its rehabilitation. Eifler and his partner live in a Wright-designed home on Chicago’s North Shore.

Why did you feel the Peterson cottage was worth restoring when it was in such a state of disrepair and all but forgotten?

I visited the property, jumped the chain link fence and walked around the outside of the building. It truly was in dreadful shape, but I realized that it had great potential. Besides, I knew enough about Wright that he was incapable of doing a bad building, so I trusted his skills.

Where do you put the Peterson cottage in the Wright portfolio? Wright’s son-in-law Wes Peters described it as having “the most architecture per square foot” of any Wright project.

Historians have a variety of ways to

“classify” Wright’s work. In the case of the Seth Peterson Cottage, I feel that it’s a building that Wright already had presented to a variety of other potential clients for many years. I believe he even wrote a note to one of the apprentices when he took on the job referring to a previous project to get things moving.

Some have referred to it as a Usonian design—which I do not agree with. By this late stage in Wright’s career, the homes were quite different in concept than the Jacobs house (the first Usonian).

Also, it’s a one-bedroom, hardly a house for a family. Clearly it’s a custom home, designed specifically for Seth.

The cottage was completed after Seth’s death. Did you tackle other projects that had not been completed originally?

We had the original tables built, and we added chairs that we designed in Wright’s style of the time.

Also, in an attempt to make the chimney draw better, the masonry was extended up 5 feet above the original—which still did not solve the problem. We lowered the chimney to 2 feet above the adjacent roof as required by code,



and we then added ductwork connected to the outside and introduced at the hearth for makeup air and better draw. We also lined the chimney with a circular flue to increase the flow of smoke escaping from the fire.

What other innovations were needed?

We performed an energy study that showed, on the coldest days, any heating

for both environmental and for ongoing cost reasons. We provided for maximum insulation in the ceiling cavity and also insulated beneath the radiant floor.

I should mention that Wright’s specified radiant floor was never installed, probably due to cost, so the cottage utilized forced air with ductwork beneath the slab.

We thought the radiant slab may be a little bit of a problem with guests unfamiliar with its characteristics, as it sometimes takes hours for the place to warm up after turning up the thermostat. We therefore developed a hybrid system so that when the cottage is calling for immediate heat, a forced-air heating system provides heat quickly, until the radiant slab can come up to proper operating temperature.

How did seeing the house feel once work was completed?

It’s funny, we visited the house regularly during the construction process, so seeing the final product was, if anything, kind of a relief. Naturally we were pleased, but it was a long, long process.


Why do you think the cottage remains so popular? Thirty years later, over-

Above and left: *For many years, the cottage was boarded up before a group of volunteers led its full rehabilitation.*

night stays remain a tough ticket to get—and many people aren’t one-and-done visitors.

It’s a variety of things. Of course, staying in a Wright house is always thrilling for enthusiasts, and it gives the opportunity to experience the house—the light, the sun, shadows, etc. throughout the day. No tours, no rushing through spaces, and no tour guide to tell you what you should think or feel.

It therefore becomes very personal, and the cottage has a very strong “feel” to it of peace, relaxation and experiencing nature up close. Being in a large state park, adjacent to a beautiful Wisconsin inland lake also helps, but people who stay there seem to treasure the experience.

I remember the initial meeting in the Wisconsin Dells. Many expressed hesitation about letting “just anybody” stay at a historical building after spending hundreds of thousands to restore it, but Audrey had a vision—and the success of the project certainly proved her vision to be correct. 



Above: Ink-and-paper-napkin sketch of the cottage by Michael Pipher

UNTITLED

By Kim Bitto

It sits on the lake of mirrors
The cottage on the hill
Deep in the woods off the beaten path
So tranquil and so still.

The world around is forgotten
As if left somewhere in the past
Magical serenity encompasses
And peace descends at last.

Nature and animals surround
And you are afraid to speak aloud
The birds, squirrels, racoons and deer
Approach you under a sky without a cloud.

Land once roamed by Native Americans
Where they hunted and they fished
Their souls and their sprits still linger
As they would have wished.

It sits on the lake of mirrors
With reflections as clear as glass
The miraculous cottage on the hill
Has revealed my inner self alas. ▣

FROM THE GUESTBOOK

A most generous gift from our children and grandchild allowed us to stay the weekend in this stunning spot. A fresh blanket of snow graced the property, and all was right with the world. The wildlife activity and serene setting slowed our pace and allowed us to breathe. When it appears that time stops still, it is so much easier to really take in the beauty and anchor a memory. The cottage immediately felt like home as we settled into a comfortable rhythm. We are so grateful for the opportunity to experience this spot on Mirror Lake and that so many others have and will have the opportunity to do so.

—Dan & Michille, Cedarburg

Great stay. The weather was nice for walking. The birds and squirrels appreciated the easy meal. Perhaps the most beautiful place that I have ever stayed.

—Zona & Chris, Fitchburg, WI

Several years ago, we read the book “Frank Lloyd Wright’s Seth Peterson Cottage: Rescuing a Lost Masterwork” and were totally enchanted by the whole story. Staying here was a fulfillment for both of us. We loved everything about this cottage and thank the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy for the vision to restore it so that many can enjoy the cottage and its surroundings. Thank you!

—Norm & Lynn, Kankakee, Illinois

I have been a Wright fan since I moved to Oak Park, Illinois, after graduation from college in 1979, so being able to live in a Wright design, if only for a few days and nights, was the apex of my Wright journey. My thanks to Seth Peterson, who desired it, Wright, who designed it and the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy that was determined to save it.

—Lee Holden

Our 22nd stay at Seth. Could it be a

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MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION REPORT

By Marcus Jaeger, President

Well, it was warm today. This is one of those mid-March that signals spring is coming.

We sure are not far from one of my favorite days: ice out on Mirror Lake! Once the ice is gone, the canoe goes in the water! I enjoy the early spring days before the trees go from bud to leaves. You can really see beyond the trees this time of year. For just these first few weeks, the cottage peaks through the trees.

When it’s quiet on the water, I think about the generations before us and what it was they envisioned once they came upon this area. My own grandparents bought a small Turtleville cottage just down the road on their honeymoon in 1924. Could they have envisioned all that’s changed?

What about Seth Peterson, himself? By standing outside the cottage, we experience the same view he did. Surely he appreciated the beauty, that we know. He had a vision, and he had a plan.

The beauty of Mirror Lake echoes the beauty of the cottage. Both the cottage and the lake need assistance from time to time to maintain that beauty. That’s where concerned groups like the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy come in.

Another group stepping up is the Mirror Lake Management District. This is a group of people on and around the lake that has voluntarily opted to form a taxing body to maintain the

lake. The Mirror Lake Management District has begun a study to determine how to best repair and assist the lake by:

- Cleaning out the sediment trap at the west end of the lake.
- Developing a plan to improve navigation by dredging parts of the lake.
- Removing rapidly forming deltas in the upper narrows.

This ambitious project will require grant money that’s hopefully available from governmental bodies, tax monies from the management district and donations from concerned groups such as the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy.

While I represent the Mirror Lake Association and not the Mirror Lake Management District, I wanted to ensure that folks knew of the contribution of the conservancy. Together we can ensure that we keep Mirror Lake the same beautiful area that Seth Peterson saw those many years ago. ▣

**What about Seth Peterson, himself?
By standing outside the cottage, we
experience the same view he did.**



FROM THE GUESTBOOK

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record? I’ve written many paragraphs in this journal over the years, so no new thoughts come to mind. That special feeling we get at Seth never gets old, and when we are away in our normal lives we long to get back to the magic of the Seth Peterson Cottage.

—Tim & Trish, Georgetown, Kentucky

Spent our two-year COVID-lockdown-versary relaxing in the cottage: playing board games by the fire, reading in the sunlight and admiring the environment from every angle. What a gift from Peterson and Wright. We can’t wait to return one day and enjoy it in a different season.

—Elisa & Pat, Evanston, Illinois

When the pandemic started two years ago, we decided we were never going back to the hamster wheel (corporate America). We loved being home together every day with our cat and scheduling multiple daily walks together. Now one year post-retirement we are incredibly grateful we get to experience adventures such as this!

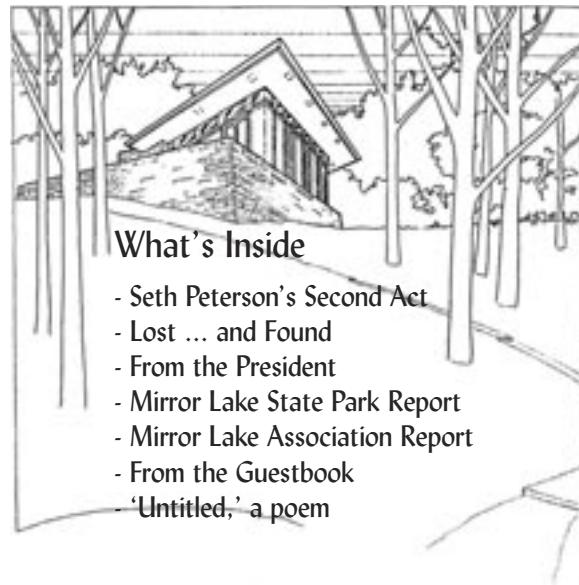
—Karla & Brad, Plymouth & Two Harbors, Minnesota ▣

WRITINGS

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.
400 Viking Drive
Reedsburg, WI 53959-1466

Note: Cottage location appears in the map below.

Address Service Requested



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- Seth Peterson's Second Act
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- Mirror Lake State Park Report
- Mirror Lake Association Report
- From the Guestbook
- 'Untitled,' a poem

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour

- | | | |
|------------|-------------|------|
| • June 5 | 1 to 4 p.m. | Free |
| • June 12 | 1 to 4 p.m. | Free |
| • July 10 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Aug. 14 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Sept. 11 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Oct. 9 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Nov. 13 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |

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

Become a Member of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy

More information is available on our website, sethpeterson.org. 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

