

The Oak Park Historic Preservation Commission
1 Village Hall Plaza
Oak Park, IL 60302
(708)383-6400 x280

FOR OFFICE USE ONLY
Received
Date Entered

OAK PARK LANDMARK
NOMINATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating individual buildings, sites, structures, or improvements, as Oak Park Landmarks. Please see instructions in Guide to Completing the Oak Park Landmark Nomination Form. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items. Items marked with a * must be completed for a preapplication determination of eligibility.

- * 1. **Name of Property**
1a. Historic name Edward R. Hills House
1b. Common Name(s) Hills-DeCaro House
- * 2. **Location**
Street Address 313 Forest Avenue
Zip Code 60302
- * 3. **Classification**
3a. Ownership of property
 private ___ public (___ federal ___ state ___ local) ___ other
3b. Category of property
 building ___ site ___ structure ___ object
3c. Type of Designation
 exterior ___ interior ___ both
4. **Function or Use**
4a. Historic function(s): (Enter category(ies) from instructions)
Domestic: single dwelling
4b. Current function(s): (Enter category(ies) from instructions)
Private residence
5. **Description**
5a. Architectural style(s): (Enter category(ies) from instructions)
Prairie School

Name of Property Hills-DeCaro House Address 313 Forest Avenue

5b. Materials: (Enter category(ies) from instructions)

Foundation: Stone

Roof: Cedar shingles

Walls: Stucco

Significant decorative: redwood

Windows: Wood

Other:

trim and leaded glass windows

5c. Narrative Description:

(Describe the historic and current appearance of the property. Use continuation sheets.)

* 6. **Statement of Significance**

Mark an X on one or more lines for the Historic Preservation Ordinance criteria qualifying the property for Oak Park Landmark designation.

* 6a. Historic Preservation Ordinance Criteria

X

A. Significance as an example of:

X architectural;

___ cultural;

___ economic;

___ historic;

___ social; or

___ other aspect

of the heritage of

X the Village of Oak Park;

X the State of Illinois; or

X the United States.

B. Location as a site of a significant event in:

___ the Village of Oak Park;

___ the State of Illinois; or

___ the United States.

C. Identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to:

___ architectural heritage;

___ cultural heritage;

___ economic heritage;

___ historic heritage;

___ social heritage; or

___ other aspect

of

___ the Village of Oak Park;

___ the State of Illinois; or

___ the United States.

X

D. Exemplification of:

___ architectural type or

X style

distinguished by:

___ innovation;

___ rarity;

___ purity;

___ uniqueness; or

___ overall quality of:

X design;

X materials; or

X craftsmanship.

Name of Property Hills-DeCaro House Address 313 Forest Avenue

E. Identification as the work of a:
— builder;
— designer;
 architect;
— craftsperson;
— engineer; or
— landscape architect
whose individual work is significant in the development of
 the Village of Oak Park;
 the State of Illinois; or
 the United States.

— F. Representation of:
— architectural;
— cultural;
— economic;
— historic;
— social; or
— other theme
expressed in distinctive:
— areas;
— districts;
— places;
— buildings;
— structures;
— works of art; or
— other objects

G. Embodiment of design elements that make the property or building
 structurally or
 architecturally
innovative.

* 6b. Period of Significance: 1906; 1976-1977

* 6c. Significant dates:
Date of construction: 1906
Alteration date(s) and description(s):
1976-1977: Structure was reconstructed following a fire on January 3, 1976

Original site if moved: _____ Date Moved: _____
Other: _____

* 6d. Significant Person(s):

* 6e. Architect/Builder(s): Frank Lloyd Wright designed the original 1906 structure. Tom DeCaro and John Tilton served as builder and architect, respectively, for the 1976-1977 reconstruction.

* 6f. Narrative statement of significance: (Explain the significance of the property. Use continuation sheet(s).)

Name of Property Hills-DeCaro House Address 313 Forest Avenue

7. Major Bibliographical Reference (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form. Use continuation sheet(s) as necessary.)

See continuation sheets

8. Representation in Existing Survey(ies)

- Hasbrouck/Sprague Survey of Historic Architecture in Oak Park
- Illinois Historic/Architectural Resources Survey
- Oak Park Historic Resources Survey
- Ridgeland/Oak Park Historic District Nomination
- Other

Other Landmark Designation/Documentation

- National Historic Landmark
- National Register: individual in district
Name of district Frank Lloyd Wright and Prairie School of Architecture Historic District
- Historic American Building Survey (HABS)
- Historic American Engineering Record (HAER)

9. Geographical Data

9a. Legal Description:
Kettlestrings Addition to Harlem, Timme subdivision 3 to 5 and part Cath Gauglers Resubdivision, Resub L1 to 3 and E 1/2 SL4 and L15 SL

9b. Lot dimensions:

* 10. Form Prepared By

Name/Title: Jean Louise Guarino
Organization: Historical Consultant
Street Address: 3548 N. Racine Avenue
City: Chicago State: IL

Date: February 8, 2001
Telephone: 773.529.1774
Zip Code: 60657

11. Additional Documentation (Submit the following items with the completed form.)

Photos: Total number _____
(Include representational BLACK AND WHITE photos of the property. List the date and view of each photo.)

Map(s): (Complete appendix)

Additional Items: see attached Appendices:
Appendix A: Maps and Plans
Appendix B: Historic and Contemporary Photographs

Name of Property Hills-DeCaro House Address 313 Forest Avenue

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12. Property Owner or Property Tax Payer

Name: Sallie G. Smylie

Organization:

Street Address: 313 Forest Avenue

City: Oak Park

State: IL

Telephone: 708.524.0280

Zip Code: 60302

13. Locator Map - Attach

14. Official Action

Date(s) Owner(s) Notified:

Date of Public Hearing: August 8, 2001

Result: Recommended for approval by the Historic Preservation Commission

Date for Village Board Action: October 15, 2001

Result:

Date of Designation: January 7, 2002

15. Alterations to Property Subsequent to Designation

16. Other

CONTINUATION SHEETS FOR THE HILLS-DECARO HOUSE NOMINATION

5c. Narrative Description

The Hills-DeCaro House is a Prairie-style residence located at 313 Forest Avenue in Oak Park, Illinois. It was constructed in 1906 as a "remodelling" of a mid-1880s Stick Style residence, which removed all traces of the earlier structure. On January 3, 1976, a devastating fire gutted the first floor and destroyed the second and third floors of the structure. Over the next eighteen months, owners Tom and Irene DeCaro completely rebuilt their home according to Frank Lloyd Wright's original specifications and eliminated later alterations made by the Hills. As a result of the DeCaro's meticulous attention to detail, the exterior of the home today is identical to its 1906 appearance. (See Appendix B for historic and reconstruction photographs.)

A two-and-a-half-story frame structure covered with stucco, the Hills-DeCaro House features leaded glass casement windows arranged in horizontal strips. All of the structure's windows were custom-made after the fire, based upon their original Frank Lloyd Wright design. Redwood banding runs continuously beneath the first and second story windows, unifying all four elevations of the structure. Redwood banding arranged in geometric patterns is also situated between the second story window groupings of all four elevations. The home's steeply pitched roof flares out pagoda-style, creating deep, overhanging eaves. The roof is covered with cedar shingles arranged in a tiered pattern, in which every fifth row of shingles protrudes. A tall, brick chimney faced with stucco is situated along the north slope of the roof and is topped with concrete coping. Although historic photographs show that the chimney's brickwork was originally exposed, DeCaro covered it with stucco, as shown on Wright's plans.

The front elevation of the Hills-DeCaro House is set back about 100 feet from Forest Avenue and faces east. The front porch wraps around the northeast corner of the structure and has stucco-covered piers flanking the stairs, along with stucco covered porch supports. The porch is topped by a flaring, pagoda-style roof that is covered with cedar shingles arranged in a tiered pattern. The front door features the same leaded glass pattern used in all of the home's casement windows, and is situated at the northeast corner of the structure.

The first floor of the east elevation has one pair of casement windows flanked by single casements on its southern end and a continuous strip of three casements in the center. The second floor has one pair of casements topped by a single, horizontal pane along its south end. The center features a rectangular bay featuring four pairs of casements, each of which is topped by a single horizontal pane of glass. The east elevation also features a dormer that has casement windows and is topped by a flaring, pagoda-style roof with cedar shingles arranged in a tiered pattern.

The first floor of the north elevation has a pair of leaded glass French doors flanked by single casements along its eastern end and four pairs of casements arranged in a continuous strip along its western end. The second story of the north elevation features five pairs of casements, each of which is topped by a single, horizontal pane. Three of these pairs of casements are situated in a central octagonal bay, which has a built-in planter.

The first floor of the west (rear) elevation has a porch along its northern end and a projecting one-story kitchen wing with two pairs of casements along its southern end. Both the porch and kitchen wing are topped by flaring, pagoda-style roofs with cedar shingles arranged in a tiered pattern. The first floor of the west elevation also has a strip of four casements directly south of the porch, as well as a large, fixed-pane picture window flanked by single casements in the center of the elevation. The second floor of the west elevation features a strip of five casements above the porch, one pair of casements topped by a horizontal pane in the center, and a single casement topped by a horizontal pane at the northern end.

The first floor of the south elevation has four pairs of casements. The easternmost pair is flanked by single casements. A side entry door is situated along the western end of this elevation. The second floor of the south elevation features three pairs of casements, each of which is topped by a horizontal pane. The south elevation also features a dormer that has casement windows and is topped by a flaring, pagoda-style roof with cedar shingles arranged in a tiered pattern.

The major exterior alterations made by the Hills and reversed by the DeCaros during reconstruction consisted of dividing the front (east) elevation's second floor bay window into two separate windows and adding a maid's room behind the kitchen. According to John Moore Hills, these changes were made by 1915 under the supervision of Henry Fiddelke, an architect who lived around the corner on Superior Street. Over the years, the rear veranda became an enclosed room when its screens were replaced by windows. In the Hills' old age they widened the front porch along the north side to provide a larger outdoor sitting space for use during the summer. In addition, they also replaced the deteriorated piers flanking the front steps with iron hand railings.¹ The Hills had also replaced the roof's original cedar shingles arranged in a tiered design with asphalt shingles arranged in a straight slope. (See Appendix B:6 for a photo of the altered east elevation before the DeCaro's reconstruction).

The Hills-DeCaro House is bordered to the east, north and south by a low, ornamental iron fence that rests upon a concrete base. Two brick piers with circular globe lights flank the walkway that leads to the front porch. The structure's north property line was originally situated right up against the north side of the Hills house. Its current expanse of lawn to the north was annexed to the Hills property 1946, following the death of Mary Hills' father Nathan Moore, who owned the home to the north. The north lawn features a wood ticket booth from the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition. The square booth has maple floors, hinged windows that open inward from the bottom and hook overhead, exterior wood paneling and a hipped roof. The DeCaros also restored this structure in the 1970s. They retrieved the window grates and the little cupola vent from the basement, sanded and cleaned the wood, installed a new roof and placed the structure on a cement base.

¹ Information on alterations made by the Hills family was obtained from: John Moore Hills, "The Hills Family and Mr. Frank Lloyd Wright," January 17, 1985, p. 2. Building permits, historic photographs, Wright's original blueprints and pre-fire plans by John Tilton were also reviewed in an attempt to confirm Hills' statements in this account.

6f. Statement of Significance

The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Hills-DeCaro House is nationally significant for its architecture, as it combines elements from both the architect's transitional period of the 1890s and his mature Prairie Style. Severing all visual ties to past, the Prairie Style introduced a new modern architecture in residential design. Nathan Moore, a neighbor and important early client of Wright's, commissioned the residence at 313 Forest Avenue in 1906 as a future wedding present for his daughter Mary and her husband Edward Rowland Hills. Although the structure was largely consumed by fire in January 1976, its meticulous reconstruction by Thomas and Irene DeCaro according to Wright's original plans led the Village of Oak Park to rename the structure the Hills-DeCaro house in 1977.

The Prairie Style of Architecture and the Hills-DeCaro House

Universally recognized as one of the greatest architects of the twentieth century, Frank Lloyd Wright was born on June 8, 1867, in Richland Center, Wisconsin. Wright moved to Chicago in 1887 and initially worked for Joseph Lyman Silsbee, a prominent architect known for Eastern-inspired architecture. Silsbee introduced Wright to the Shingle Style of residential design, with its bold geometric forms, large overhanging roofs, sheltering porches and emphasis on natural materials.

Wright was profoundly influenced by the work of his next employers, Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Adler. Sullivan, famous for his ornament inspired by nature, crusaded for an authentic American Architecture based on the principle that a building's form should follow its function. Hired originally to develop detailed sketches for the Auditorium Building in Chicago, Wright was soon promoted to head draftsman and developed remarkable skill in residential architecture.

Wright's residential commissions were a small part of his duties at Adler and Sullivan's office, however, and were usually done at home after hours. He mainly worked on the firm's numerous commercial commissions. Wright also contributed to the firm's design for the Transportation Building for the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago. In this capacity, he would have made a number of trips to the fair grounds in Jackson Park and likely saw the Ho-o-den, a replica temple that comprised the official exhibit of the Imperial Japanese government. This encounter would have spurred his already dawning fascination with Japanese art.

In 1889, Sullivan loaned Wright the money to buy a lot and build a home in Oak Park at Forest and Chicago Avenues, for himself and his bride-to-be, Catherine Tobin. Wright's family life grew quickly and eventually comprised six children: Lloyd was born in 1890; John in 1892, Catherine in 1894, David in 1895, Frances in 1898, and Robert Llewellyn in 1903. In order to supplement his income, Wright began to design houses in the evenings outside Adler and Sullivan's practice. These homes included three on Chicago Avenue, just down the block from his own home: the Robert P. Parker House (1892), Thomas H. Gale House (1893), and the Walter Gale House (1893). The design of these and other "bootlegged" houses violated Wright's contract with Sullivan and brought about this dismissal from the firm in 1893. Wright set up his own practice in Chicago's Loop and constructed a studio connected to his home in 1898.

It was during the 1890s that Wright was working out his own style of architecture. These included great strides, such as the 1894 Winslow House in River Forest. A rectangular structure of great simplicity with a hip roof and overhanging eaves, the Winslow House was a true forerunner of the Prairie House. An interesting contrast to the Winslow House is the 1895 Nathan Moore House, designed for a lawyer who lived across Forest Avenue from the Wrights. According to Wright's account in his *Autobiography*, the client insisted on an English Tudor Style and Wright agreed because he needed the money. To Wright's chagrin, the Moore house was considered as successful as the Winslow House.² Many of Wright's homes during his transitional period of the 1890s featured polygonal bays, steeply pitched roofs and dormers, such as the Chauncey Williams house in River Forest.

The first decade of the twentieth-century represented the end of Wright's transitional period and the start of what Grant Manson calls his "First Golden Age." After ten years of experimentation, Wright officially unveiled the Prairie House in 1900 with the design of two model houses published in the *Ladies Home Journal*. A number of Oak Parkers commissioned homes in the new style, including Frank Thomas (1901), William Fricke (1901), Arthur Heurtley (1902), William Martin (1903), Edwin Cheney (1904) and Peter Beachy (1906). These homes were generally well received by both architecture critics and the general public.

A radical break from the popular Queen Anne and assorted revivalist styles of the day, the Prairie Style homes featured low, horizontal lines inspired by the Midwestern prairie. They typically had hipped roofs, overhanging eaves and broad chimneys. The use of natural colors and materials, such as Roman brick or stucco with wood trim, were another feature of the Prairie Style, as these homes were meant to blend in with their settings. Some Prairie homes are situated upon raised basements, such as those designed for Arthur Heurtley and Frank Thomas, allowing for maximum privacy of the homeowners. Wright also discarded the double-hung window in favor of the casement and arranged his fenestration in strips. This change allowed for the continuous treatment of sills and bases. Some Prairie homes were contained as rectangular blocks while others had projections.

Inside the Prairie home, plans were loose and flowing, with interior partitions reduced to a minimum and often replaced by screens that merely served to indicate the type of use. Whenever possible, Wright preferred to design all the furnishings of the house: carpets, draperies, lighting fixtures, furniture, as he strongly believed that these elements should be integral features of the building.

In the midst of this busy decade, Wright traveled to Japan in 1905 with his wife and clients, the Ward Willits. Wright love for the Japanese arts, and especially Japanese prints of which he was a great collector, influenced his architecture during his long and productive lifetime. In May of 1906, the Wrights gave a Japanese party in their Forest Avenue home as a function for the Unity Club of Unity Temple. A stereopticon lecture of Japan, a musical program and tea served by kimono-clad ladies provided the exotic atmosphere that was then sweeping the county.³

² Wright, Frank Lloyd. *An Autobiography: Frank Lloyd Wright*. New York: Horizon Press. 1977 reprint. (original published 1932). p. 152-153.

³ Fields, Jeanette. "His designs show Wright loved things Oriental." *Wednesday Journal*, March 2, 1983.

When Nathan Moore commissioned Wright to remodel the Stick Style Gray House next to his own residence in 1906, two of the architect's Prairie homes were already located across the street—the Heurtley (318 N. Forest Ave.) and Frank Thomas houses (210 N. Forest Ave.). The Peter Beachy house (238 N. Forest Ave.) was in the process of being remodeled into a Prairie style structure in 1906. In addition to his designs for the Beachy and Edward Hills houses, Wright did just one other remodeling in Oak Park—the Copeland House (400 N. Forest Ave.)—in 1909.

The Hills-DeCaro House is noteworthy for combining elements from both Wright's transitional period of the 1890s and his mature Prairie Style. The structure's high pitched roof, dormers and simple, leaded glass window designs recall some of his earlier Oak Park residential structures, such as the Robert Parker (1019 W. Chicago Ave.), Thomas Gale (1027 W. Chicago Ave.), Francis J. Woolley (1030 W. Superior St.) and the Harry C. Goodrich (534 N. East Ave.) houses. In addition, the flared roof above the entry porch of the Hills-DeCaro House is similar to those designed earlier for the Rollin Furbeck (515 Fair Oaks) and the George W. Smith (404 S. Home Ave.) houses.

However, the Hills-DeCaro House also variety of mature Prairie Style elements, such as the contrast of stucco walls with strips of horizontal wood banding, and the use of cedar shingles to cover the roof. The roof's original design, which has been reconstructed, is noteworthy for its tiered affect, in which every fifth row protrudes. Other Prairie Style features include the use of leaded casement windows arranged in horizontal strips. This is most notably seen in the front façade, which features a strip of casements in the second story bay. Other hallmarks of the Prairie Style include the built-in planter beneath the north elevation's octagonal bay and use of a hidden entry, tucked away at the northeast corner of the house. Inside, the home features such Prairie elements as an open floor plan, built-in furniture, including bookcases in the library and living rooms; and a massive Roman brick hearth in the living room and master bedroom above.

Wright's Oak Park period ended in 1909 when he left his family and traveled to Berlin to publish a large drawing portfolio of his work—the Wasmuth portfolio—in 1910. A year later, Wright returned to the United States and set up a new home and studio, "Taliesin" at Spring Green, Wisconsin, on the land of his mother's family. However, his rich legacy of 24 buildings designed between 1889 and 1913, make Oak Park an outdoor museum of Wright's changing ideas that culminated in the prolific Prairie Style of Architecture.

Chronology of the Hills-DeCaro House

The Nathan G. Moore Family

Nathan Grier Moore was born in Cherry Tree, Pennsylvania on January 26, 1853. He attended Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania, graduating in the class of 1873.⁴ Soon afterward, Moore moved west to LaCrosse, Wisconsin, to join his father and sister Kate. He initially worked as an organ salesman for a local music store, but turned to the study of law at the encouragement of a local attorney.⁵

After completing his law studies in LaCrosse, Moore moved to Peoria, Illinois, in November 1877, in search of greater employment opportunities. He immediately began to attend the Second Presbyterian Church, where he met George H. McIlvaine, the vice-president of a local bank. McIlvaine invited Moore to his home, where he met Anna Walker, a daughter of the leading hardware merchant in the city, and the cousin of McIlvaine.⁶ In 1878, Moore began work for the Peoria law firm of James, Jack & Moore.⁷ He married Anna Walker on July 28, 1881,⁸ and their first child Mary was born on January 25, 1883.⁹

In 1885, Moore was offered a position in the office of Chicago attorney John Wilson, a cousin of Anna (Walker) Moore. Moore decided to live in Oak Park rather than Chicago because he had been advised to keep away from the lake due to a persistent throat problem. The family initially rented a house on North Grove Avenue for \$35 a month, where they lived for just a year. In 1886, Nathan Moore bought small but new house at the southwest corner of Forest Avenue and Superior (then called Waubun) Street in Oak Park. The family's second daughter Marjorie was born on February 13, 1889.¹⁰ Moore expanded his Forest Avenue property in 1891 with the purchase of an adjacent parcel to the south, after fire had destroyed its existing building.¹¹

After the close of Chicago's 1893 World's Columbian Exposition, Moore purchased one of the ticket booths and placed it on his expansive front lawn as a playhouse for children of the neighborhood.¹² This booth was originally located alongside the Jackson Park Lagoon, where gondola rides were offered during the fair.¹³ Aside from the Museum of Science and Industry, this ticket booth may be the only surviving structure from that famous World's Fair.

In 1894, Moore commissioned his neighbor Frank Lloyd Wright to design a new Tudor Revival house for his site at Superior and Forest Avenue, which was completed in 1895. Nathan Moore continued to expand his frontage along Forest Avenue in 1900 with the purchase of an additional

⁴ Albert Nelson Marquis, ed. *The Book of Chicagoans: A Biographical Dictionary of Leading Men and Women of the City of Chicago*. (Chicago: A.N. Marquis & Company, 1911, p. 489).

⁵ Mary Moore Hills. "An Old Story. Retold." Oak Park, 1965, pp. 13, 15.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Marquis. 1911, p. 489.

⁸ Mary Moore Hills, p. 19.

⁹ "Mary Hills rites held." *Oak Leaves*. February 2, 1972.

¹⁰ Biographical information on the Moore family in this paragraph was obtained from Nathan Moore's unpublished autobiography titled, "The Story of a Simple Life," undated, pp. 73-74.

¹¹ This 1891 purchase consisted of Lot 12 and the north half of Lot 13. Cook County Tract Book 110, p. 179. Also, Nathan G. Moore mentions the destruction by fire of the house on this parcel on page 73 of his autobiography.

¹² Mary Moore Hills, p. 23.

¹³ Interview with Tom and Irene DeCaro. January 12, 2001.

parcel to the south,¹⁴ which included the Gray family house. This large, Stick Style residence had been built in the mid-1880s for Frank S. Gray, and was designed by architect Charles C. Miller.¹⁵ (See Appendix B:1). According to Moore's autobiography, this purchase was made with the intention of having the Gray House remodeled as a future wedding present for his daughter Mary.¹⁶

In 1905, Moore purchased the lot directly south of the Gray House, which had been owned by Mr. and Mrs. D.L. McDaniels.¹⁷ On May 3, 1906, Moore applied for a building permit for "alterations" to the Gray House for a cost of \$3,000,¹⁸ and hired Frank Lloyd Wright to perform the work. The McDaniels House was demolished and the Gray House was moved onto its site to the south and rotated it ninety degrees, so that it faced the Nathan Moore House to the north.¹⁹

At the time of this commission, Nathan Moore was a prominent attorney working for the Chicago firm of Wilson, Moore & McIlvaine. Moore was one of the founders of Oak Park's First Presbyterian Church and spearheaded fundraising efforts for construction of their first church building on Lake Street. When the congregation outgrew this structure in 1900, Moore again became Chairman of the Building Committee. Moore was the author of two published religious books, one of which, the "Theory of Evolution—An Inquiry," was widely used in seminaries. Moore was also an early member of the Oak Park School Board and was President of the High School Board from 1906-07.²⁰

Wright assigned one of his Studio employees, Barry Byrne, to carry out the alteration of the Gray House. According to Byrne, "During the last few years of my stay I executed the working drawings of the Beachy house, the complete remodeling for N.G. Moore of an old house adjoining his own... for most of these I wrote specifications, supervised construction, and dealt directly with the clients during construction."²¹ By the time this "remodeling" was completed by late 1906 or 1907, the former Gray House had been completely hidden within a new Prairie-style residence, which was faced with stucco and featured strips of casement windows, horizontal wood banding and a flaring, pagoda-like roof.

¹⁴ This 1900 purchase consisted of the south half of Lot 13 and Lot 14. Tract Book 110, p. 180. The footprint of the Gray family house is shown on the attached 1895 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*. Its address was 519 Forest Avenue.

¹⁵ William Gray Purcell. "That Haunted House." In: *Northwest Architect*. Volume XVI, Number 6. November-December 1952, pp. 16 and 18.

¹⁶ Nathan G. Moore, p. 73.

¹⁷ This 1905 purchase consisted of Lot 1. Tract Book 110, p. 185. The footprint of the McDaniel house is shown on the attached 1895 *Sanborn Fire Insurance Map*. Its address was 513 Forest Avenue.

¹⁸ William Allin Storrer and Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer both assert that this commission was actually given to Wright as early as 1900. See: Bruce Brooks Pfeiffer, Ed. *Frank Lloyd Wright Monograph 1887-1901, Volume No. 1*. A.D.A. EDITA Tokyo. 1987, pp. 144-47 and William Allin Storrer. *The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright: A Complete Catalog*, second edition. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press. 1979. pp. 46-47. However, the 1900 date for this commission cannot be verified: neither author provides evidence for the 1900 date, and the original drawings for the building are not dated.

¹⁹ The Gray House was moved further south to rest on the present site of the Hills-DeCaro House: Lot 1 and the south ten feet of Lot 14.

²⁰ Mary Moore Hills, p. 21.

²¹ October 10, 1962 letter from Barry Byrne to H. Allen Brooks quoted in: H. Allen Brooks. *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*. (NY: W.W. Norton & Co., 1976, p. 82).

The Mary and Edward R. Hills Family

Edward Hills met Mary Moore at the First Presbyterian Church of Oak Park after his 1906 arrival in the Village, and the couple was married on January 1, 1908.²² Although the newly remodeled Gray House was meant as their wedding present from Mary's father Nathan Moore, for unknown reasons the Hills did not move into it immediately after their marriage. Instead, they initially lived in a nearby house that Moore had purchased on Superior Street, which was nearly opposite his own house.²³ The delay in their occupancy may have been due to Mary Moore Hill's feeling that the house was "too stern and austere," and that "she insisted before occupying the gift of the house that some changes be made."²⁴ Nathan Moore deeded the house at 313 Forest Avenue to Mary (Moore) Hills in 1910,²⁵ and Hills were residing in the house by 1912.²⁶ During the intervening years, the future Hills House was rented out to two different couples.²⁷

The son of a Presbyterian minister, Edward Rowland Hills was born in Cincinnati on October 29, 1874, and grew up in Wooster, Ohio. He graduated from the Cincinnati Law School in 1900, and was admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1902. After his marriage, Edward Hills practiced law in Chicago with an office at 1 North LaSalle Street, and his memberships included the Chicago and Illinois Bar Associations, the Chicago Law Institute, the Union League Club and the Oak Park Country Club.²⁸

Mary Moore Hills attended the Mary Baldwin School at Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, prior to her marriage. Both she and her husband were actively involved in the First Presbyterian Church of Oak Park. Mary eventually became President of the Women's Society of the Church and helped establish the first missionary library. She was also a charter member of The Historical Society of Oak Park and an active member of the Nineteenth Century Club.²⁹

Mary and Edward Hills had five sons--John Moore (b. 1910), Edward Freer (b. 1912), Nathan Grier (b. 1915), Sidney Oscar (b. 1917), and Thomas McDougal (b. 1920)—all of whom attended Holmes Elementary School and Oak Park River Forest High School.³⁰

Regarding the Hills' view of Wright's architecture, John Moore Hills noted that, "My parents idea on the Wright houses was that some of them were pleasing, many of them were queer, and

²² "Wed on New Year's." *Oak Leaves*. January 4, 1908.

²³ Nathan G. Moore, p. 74. John Moore Hills, p. 1. John Moore Hills identifies the address of this residence as 355 Superior. However, *Oak Park Directories* show that the address was actually 335 Superior (now 1024 Superior).

²⁴ "Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Nathan Grier Hills." Interview by Sandra Bottoms and Jane Kenamore. November 13, 1988.

²⁵ Cook County Tract Book 110, p. 180.

²⁶ *Directory of Oak Park: Including River Forest and Harlem and Street Directory*. (Oak Park, IL: Delos Hull, Publisher, 1908, 1910-11, 1912).

²⁷ *Directory of Oak Park: Including River Forest and Harlem and Street Directory*. Oak Park, Illinois: Delos Hull, Publisher, 1906, 1908, 1910-11, 1912.

²⁸ Biographical information on Edward R. Hills in this paragraph was obtained from Marquis, 1945, p. 630, and in: "Services Today for E.R. Hills, 78." *Oak Leaves*. Sept. 17, 1953.

²⁹ All biographical information on Mary Hills in this paragraph was obtained from: "Mary Hills rites held." *Oak Leaves*. February 2, 1972.

³⁰ John Moore Hills, pp. 1-2.

all of them were inconvenient and needed alteration.” He added that, “They had no patience with Wright’s contention that he should design the decoration and the furniture. It was their house and they would furnish it for their own taste and comfort.”³¹ The Hills never commissioned Wright to design furniture for their home.

John Moore Hills also remembers his parents’ reaction to Wright’s lifestyle after the architect left Oak Park: “At about the time that my parents were moving into one of his houses Mr. Wright was leaving town under somewhat questionable circumstances... my parents recognized that Frank Lloyd Wright was a genius, but they did not believe that excused him from obeying the moral law. This seemed to be the attitude of much of the neighborhood as judged by what I heard from my playmates and overheard from their elders. When the tragedy at Taliesin struck there seemed to be a feeling that it was as much a judgement as an accident.”³²

After Nathan Moore died on August 16, 1946,³³ his property was left to his children.³⁴ The Hills sold Lots 11-13 of the Moore Estate to Milton G. Summerville & his wife Mary in June of 1947.³⁵ However, they retained the balance of Lot 14 for themselves, increasing their lot to its present size along Forest Avenue. As a result of this annexation by the Hills, the 1893 ticket booth from the 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition that originally rested on Lot 14 of Moore’s parcel became part of the Hill’s property.

Edward Hills died in 1953 at age 78.³⁶ Mary Moore Hills continued to reside at 313 Forest Avenue until 1965, when she sold the house and moved to an apartment at 151 N. Kenilworth, where she lived until her death in 1972.³⁷

Tom and Irene DeCaro Family

Tom and Irene DeCaro purchased the Hills House in May 1975 and spent the next six months on restoration work. They replaced the incompatible asphalt shingle roof with a cedar shingle roof to match the original, and improved the home’s electrical wiring and interior plastering. The DeCaros also restored the natural beauty of the interior woodwork and removed coats of varnish and paint that had been applied to the windows.

In the early morning hours of January 3, 1976, chemicals used for removing the paint on the last of the 136 windows exploded. The balloon frame construction of the original Stick Style house contributed to the ferocity of the fire, which gutted the first floor and destroyed the second and third floors, including the newly installed cedar shingle roof. Efforts to fight the blaze left over three feet of water frozen in the basement. However, some of the original built-in furniture was spared, including the bookcase along the south wall of the library; the four bookcases in each corner of the living room; the dining room buffet/china cabinet; and two Roman brick fireplaces

³¹ Ibid. pp. 1-2.

³² Ibid, p. 2.

³³ Mary Moore Hills, p. 25.

³⁴ The Moore property consisted of Lots 11, 12, 13 and 14, except for the south 10 feet of Lot 14.

³⁵ Cook County Tract Book 110, p. 180.

³⁶ “Services Today for E.R. Hills, 78.” *Oak Leaves*, September 17, 1953.

³⁷ “Mary Hills rites held.” *Oak Leaves*, February 2, 1972.

with oak mantles. Remarkably, Wright's original blueprints for the house, which were resting on the dining room buffet, had also survived the fire.

The DeCaros immediately decided to rebuild the Hills House according to Wright's original intention, using the original blueprints as their primary resource. In May 1976, twelve of the DeCaro's neighbors on the 200, 300 and 400 blocks of Forest Avenue opened their homes for a housewalk called "Neighbors Walk Together." This impressive demonstration of community support raised \$15,000, which was contributed to the DeCaro's restoration effort. Aside from this contribution, the DeCaros financed the entire rebuilding themselves.

Over the next two years, Irene DeCaro and their then teenage children, Tom Jr. and Diane, took over management of the family business, Lakeshore Typographers in Chicago, so that Tom could supervise the reconstruction. DeCaro started his own construction company and worked with a small crew, following the Wright plans almost to the letter. He also received assistance from architect John Tilton, a neighbor who owned the Wright-designed Beachy House across Forest Avenue.

The exterior was reconstructed according to its 1906 appearance. (See physical description for details.) All lumber was purchased oversized and milled down to specifications of the original size lumber. A total of 136 new leaded glass windows were custom made by a local artisan exactly as Wright had designed them.

Inside, the rooms were arranged according to their 1906 configuration, although some changes were made from the original plans to make the house adaptable to a modern lifestyle. The formerly separate breakfast and pantry areas were opened up to create a single, long kitchen with modern amenities. Upstairs, two bedrooms were combined to create a master suite with bathroom and walk-in closet. The existing bath in the upstairs hall was removed to widen the hall and allow more space and light. The third floor, formerly used as the servant's area with two bedrooms and a bath, was rebuilt as a single bedroom suite.

Tom DeCaro had all surviving built-in furniture restored and placed in their original locations. He also designed the home's dining room table and chairs, which reflect the appearance of the Wright-designed china cabinet in the same room. New oak flooring was installed throughout the home, along with two miles of additional oak trim.

The DeCaros moved back into their home in August 1977. In the same year, the DeCaros were awarded the Orchid Award from the American Institute of Architects and the Cavalcade of Pride Award from Oak Park and Pioneer Press selected their "significant home" to plant an oak tree in the parkway.³⁸ In addition, the Oak Park Landmarks Commission voted to rename the structure the "Hills-DeCaro House," in recognition of the DeCaro's tremendous effort to reconstruct the home according to its original appearance and plan, as designed by Frank Lloyd Wright.³⁹ Perhaps the greatest compliment to the DeCaro's restoration efforts was given by Wright's

³⁸ DeCaro, Thomas and Irene. "Welcome to the Hills-Decaro House." Undated fact sheet.
³⁹ "House renamed to cite DeCaros." *Oak Park World*. October 2, 1977.

grandson, Eric Lloyd Wright, who wrote in their guest during a 1977 visit to the home, "My grandfather would have been proud of your work."

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Maps and Plans

Architectural drawings by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. First Floor Plan; Second Floor Plan; Sheet 5-East Elevation; Sheet 6-North Elevation; Sheet 7-South Elevation; Sheet 8-West Elevation. (Full-size copies of the original Wright drawings for the Hills-DeCaro House are on file at the Frank Lloyd Wright Preservation Trust Research Center. Copies of these drawings are reproduced in the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

Architectural drawings by John Tilton, dated September 30, 1976. Sheet A3-First Floor Plan-Existing; Sheet A4-Second Floor Plan-Existing; Sheet A5-Third Floor Plan-Existing; Sheet A7-First Floor Plan Remodelling; Sheet A8-Second Floor Plan Remodelling; Sheet A9-Third Floor Plan Remodelling; Sheet A10-East Building Elevation; Sheet A11-North Building Elevation; Sheet A12-West Building Elevation; Sheet A13-South Building Elevation.

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- Permit no. 963, dated May 3, 1906 (alterations, cost: \$3,000; size: 40'x45')
- Permit no. 3703, dated August 24, 1912 (12x10 addition)
- Permit no. 4893, dated March 23, 1913 (1 front bay window)
- Permit no. 7924, dated September 15, 1917 (concrete alteration, 24'x12', play room, \$600)

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"Wright landmark burns; 1 hurt." *Chicago Tribune*, January 4, 1976.

Appendix A:
Maps and Plans

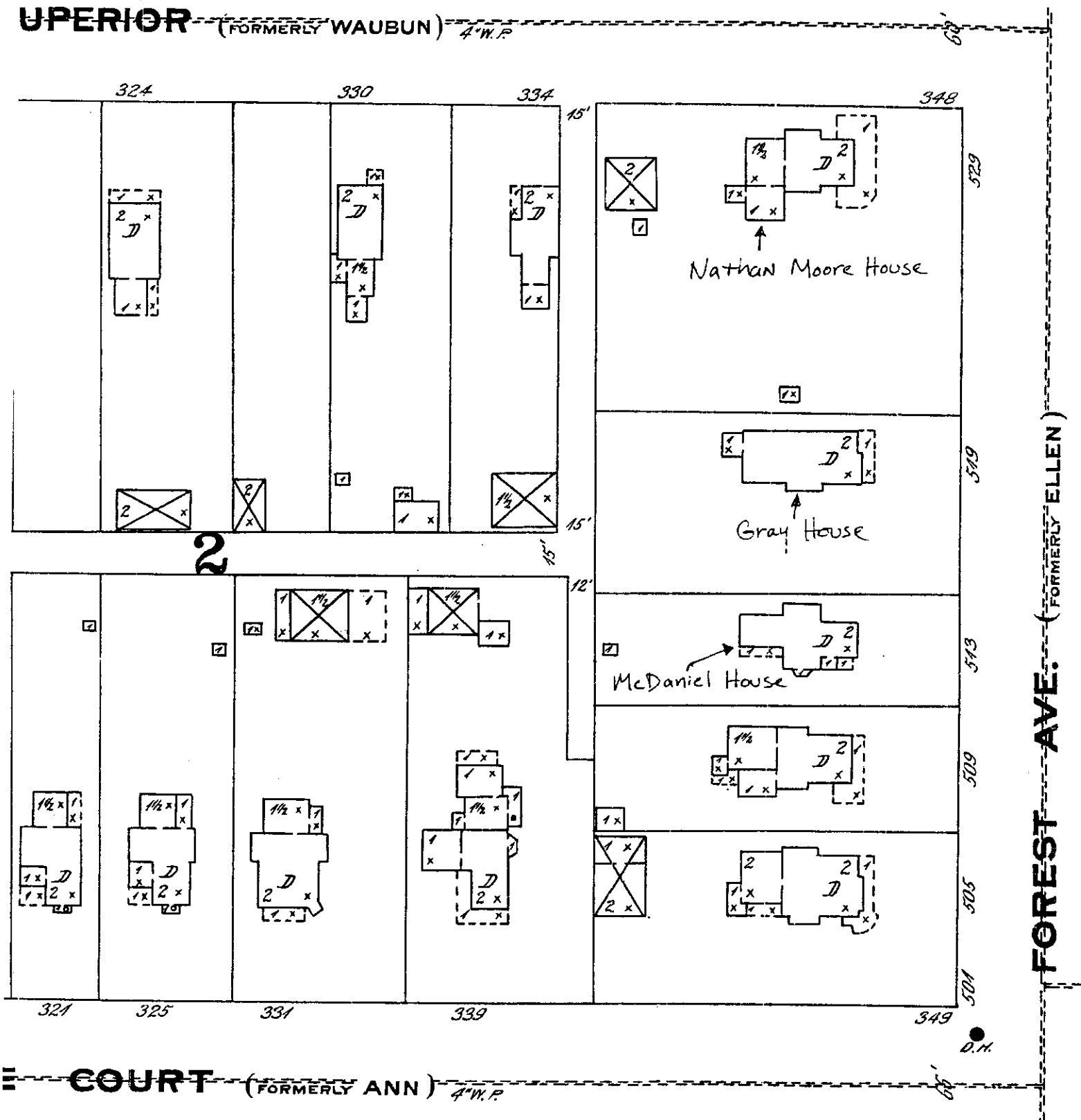


Figure 1: Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company. Map of Chicago, Cook Co., Illinois. Volume C, Sections of Oak Park, Ridgeland, Austin, 1895.

W. 1/2 N.W. 1/4 Sec. 7 - 39 - 13 OAK PARK TWP.

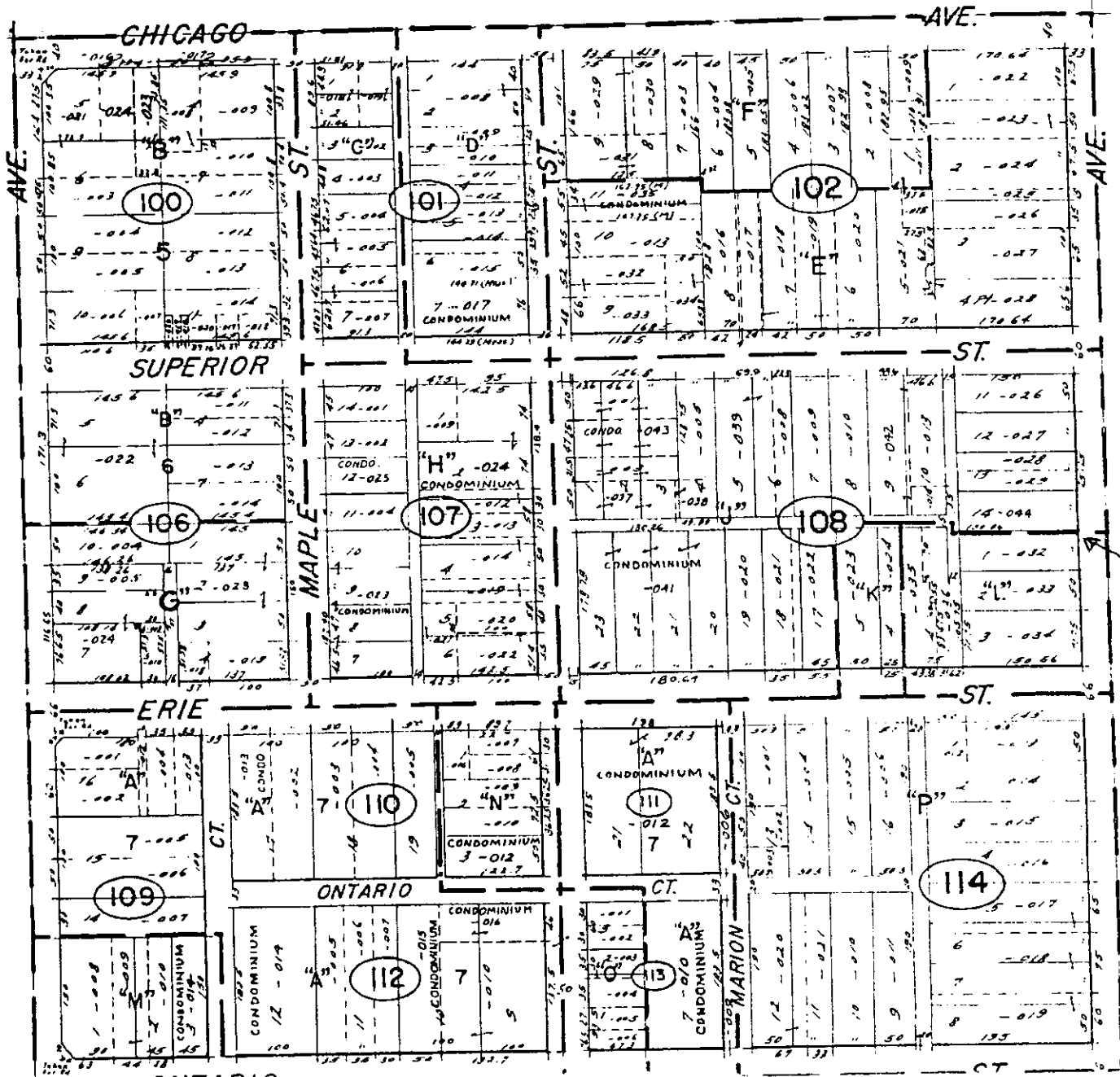


Figure 2: 1994 Sidwell Map showing the site of the Hills-DeCaro House

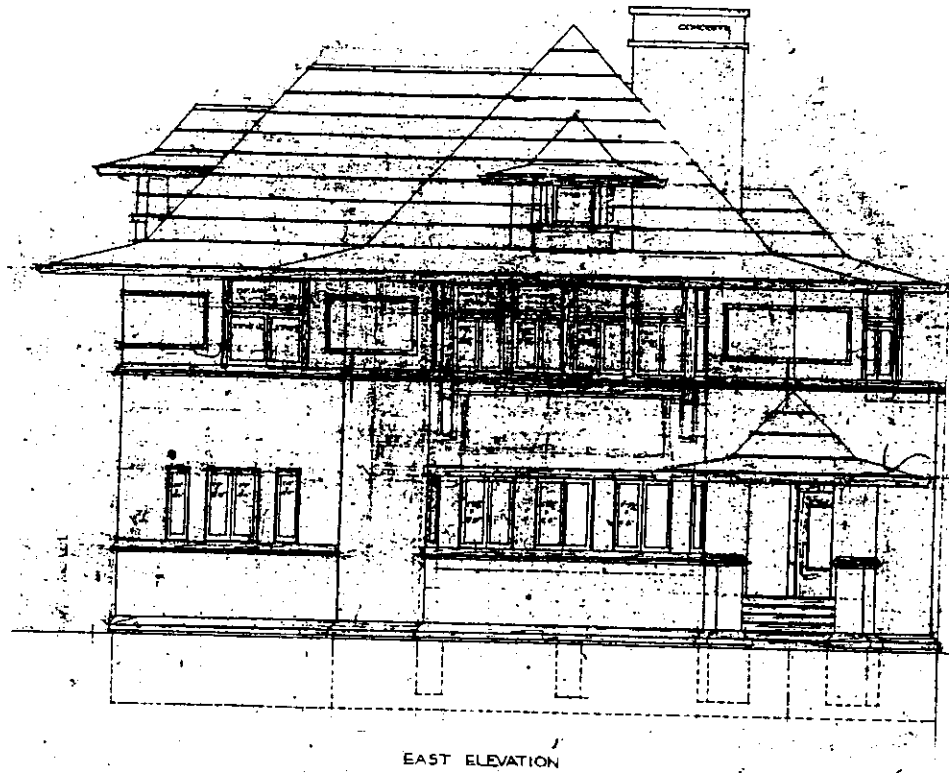


Figure 3: Hills-DeCaro House: East Elevation. Architectural drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)



Figure 4: Hills-DeCaro House: West elevation. Architectural drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

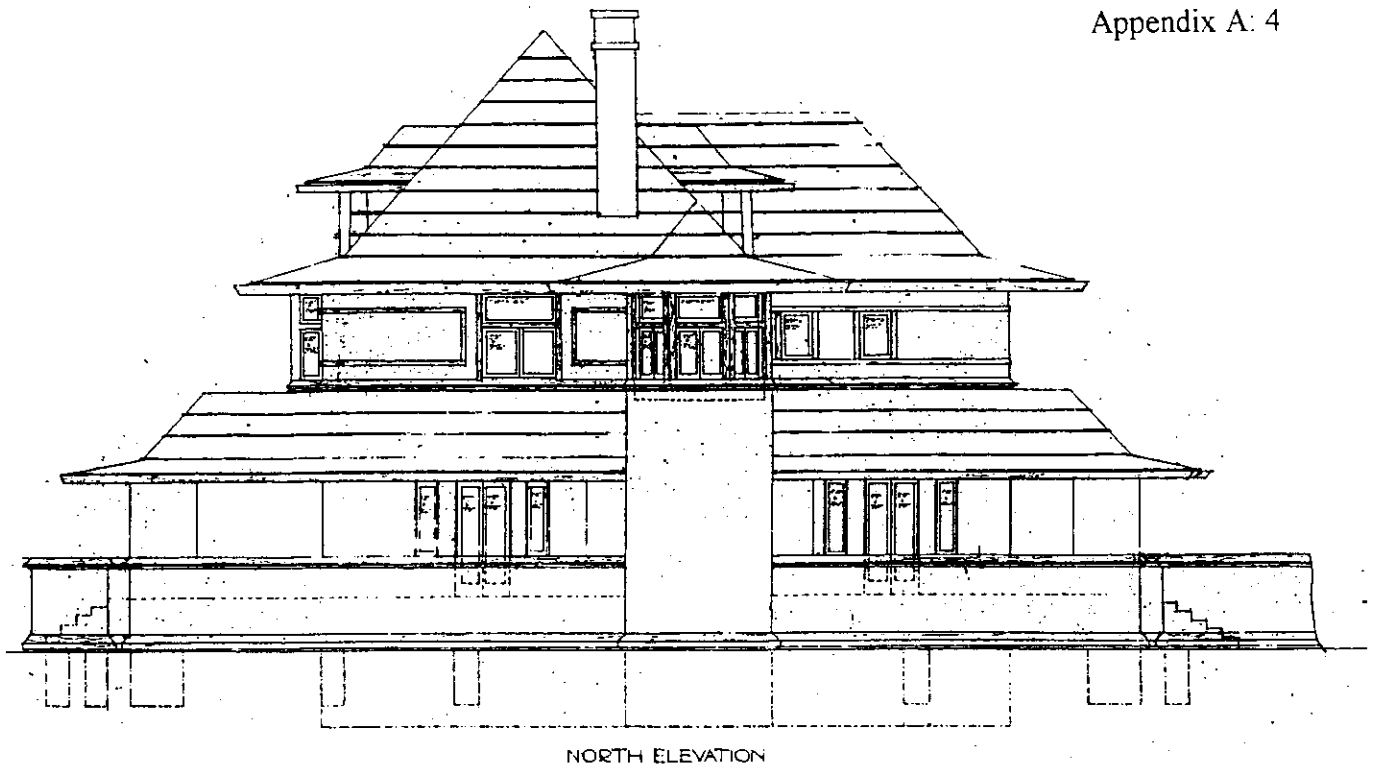


Figure 5: Hills-DeCaro House: North Elevation. Architectural drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

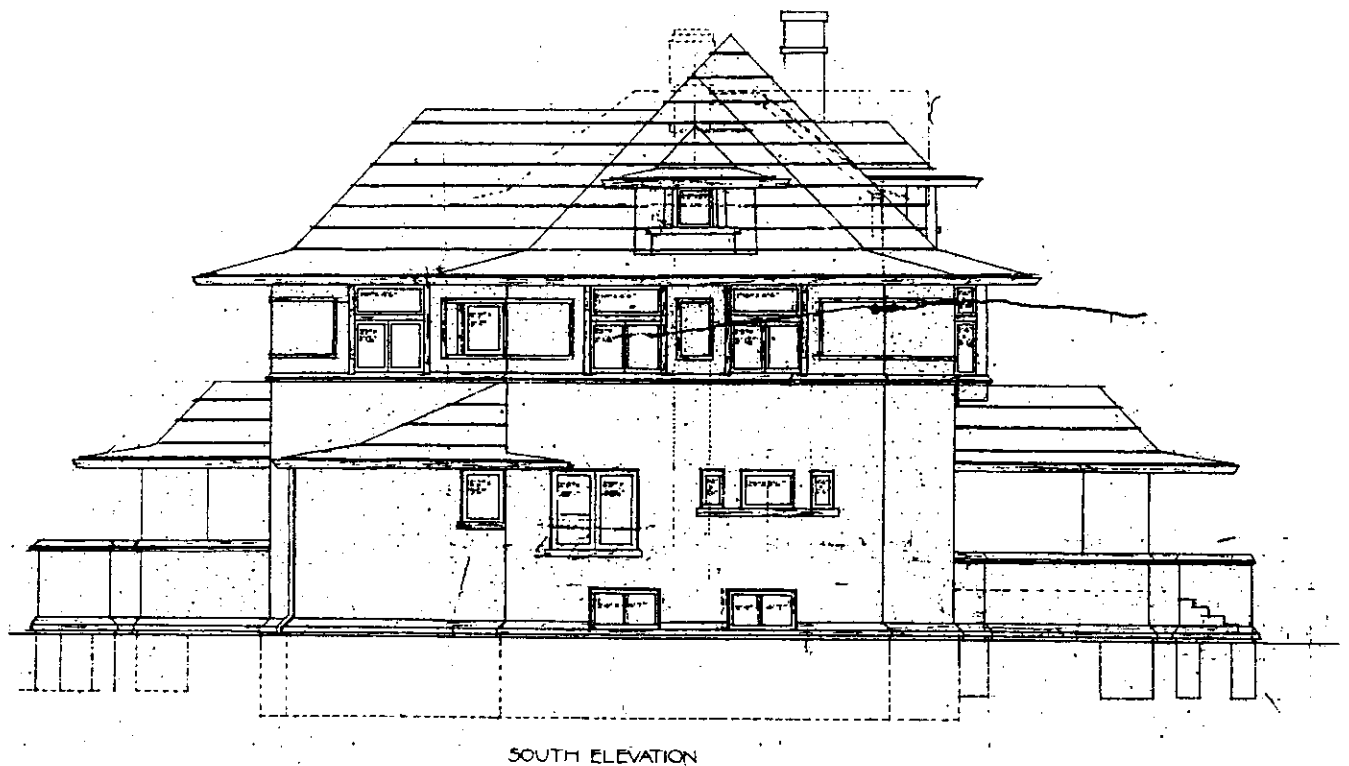


Figure 6: Hills-DeCaro House: South Elevation. Architectural drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

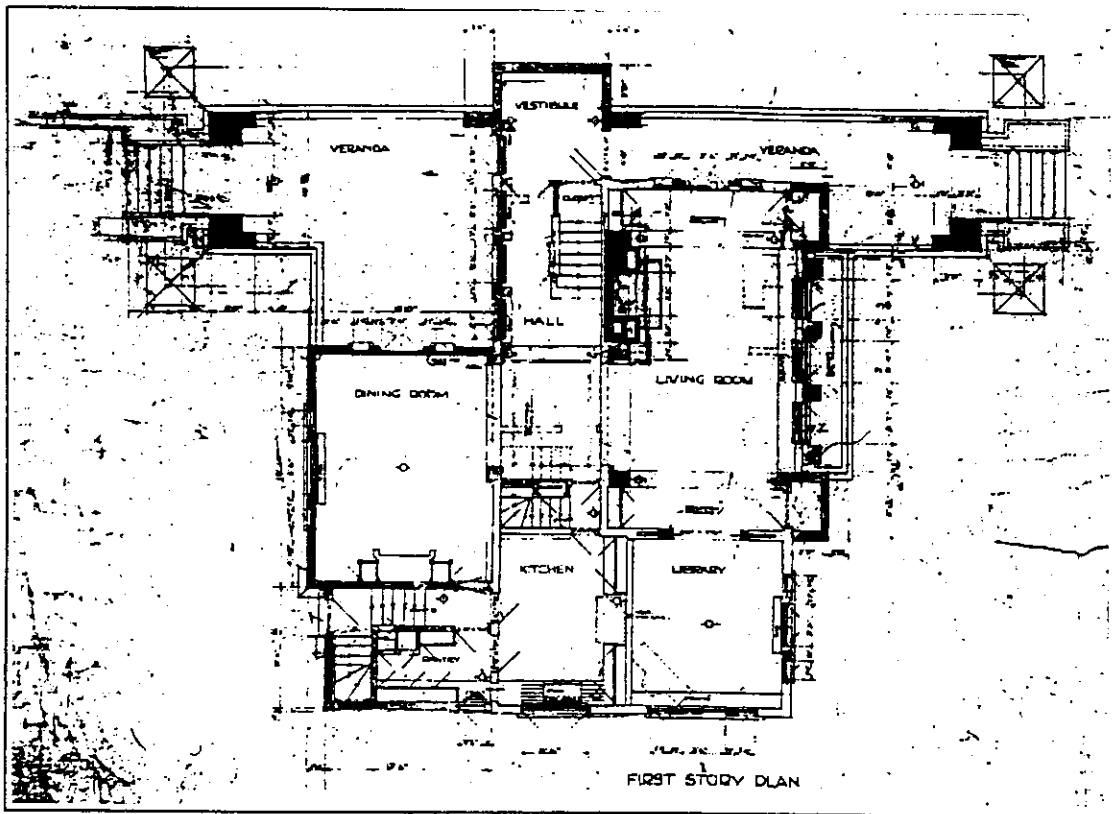


Figure 7: Hills-DeCaro House: First Floor Plan. Architectural drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

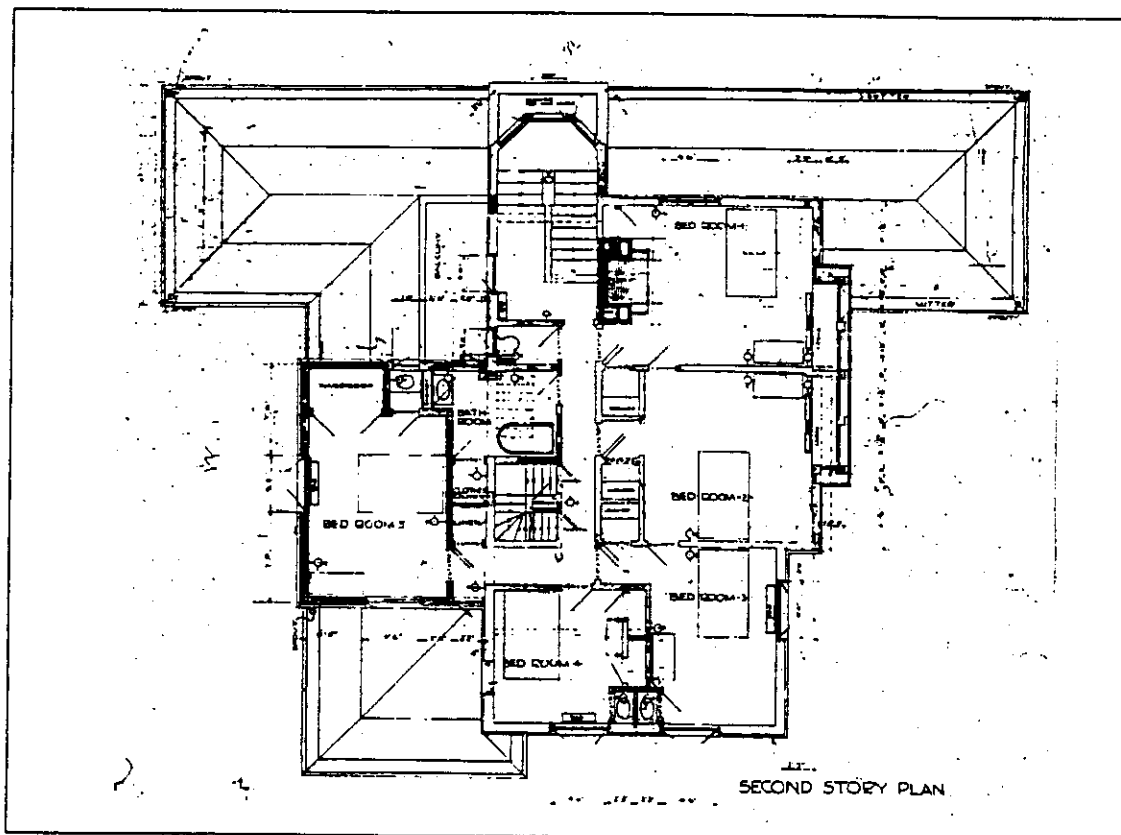


Figure 8: Hills-DeCaro House: Second Floor Plan. Architectural drawing by Frank Lloyd Wright, undated. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

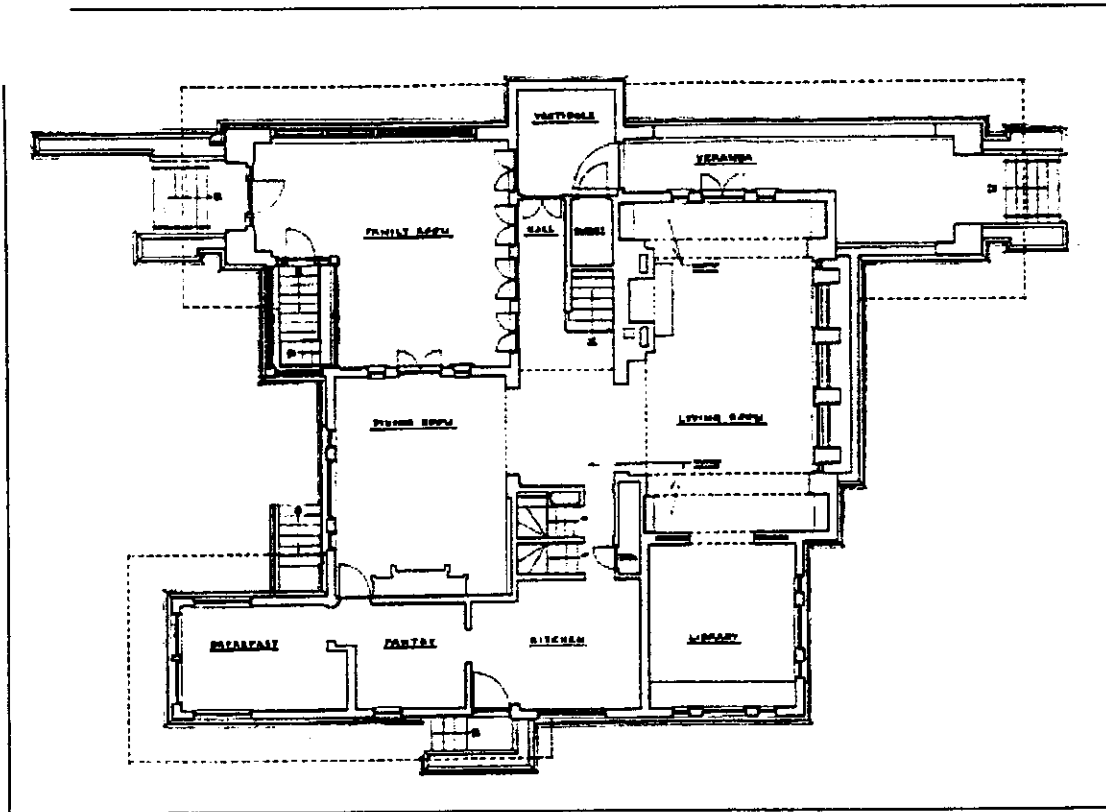


Figure 9: Hills-DeCaro House: Pre-Fire First Floor Plan. Architectural drawing by John Tilton, Sept. 30, 1976. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

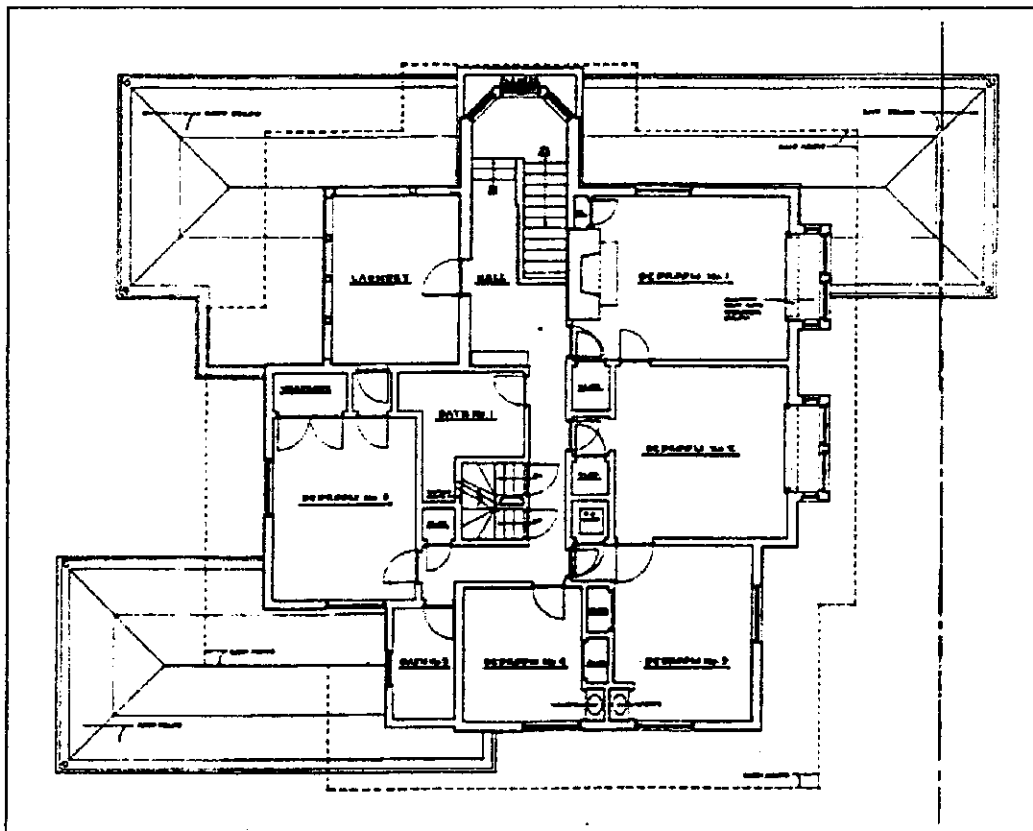


Figure 10: Hills-DeCaro House: Pre-Fire Second Floor Plan. Architectural drawing by John Tilton, Sept. 30, 1976. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

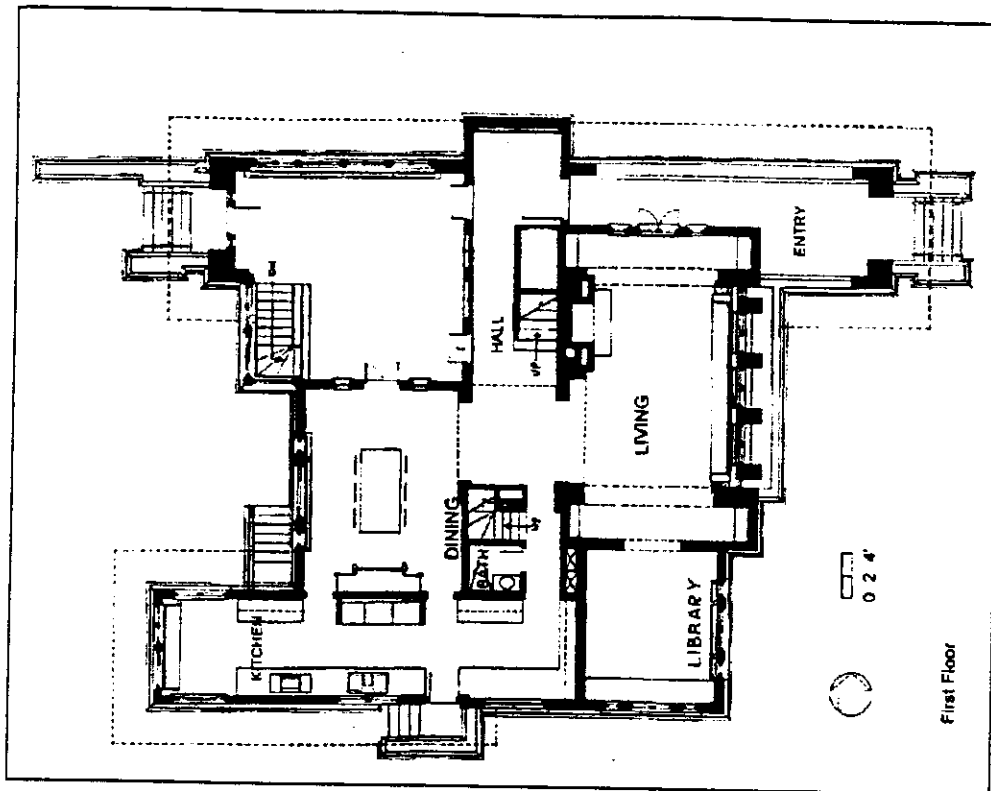


Figure 11: Hills-DeCaro House: Post-Fire First Floor Plan. Architectural drawing by Jack Lesniak, May 15, 1999. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

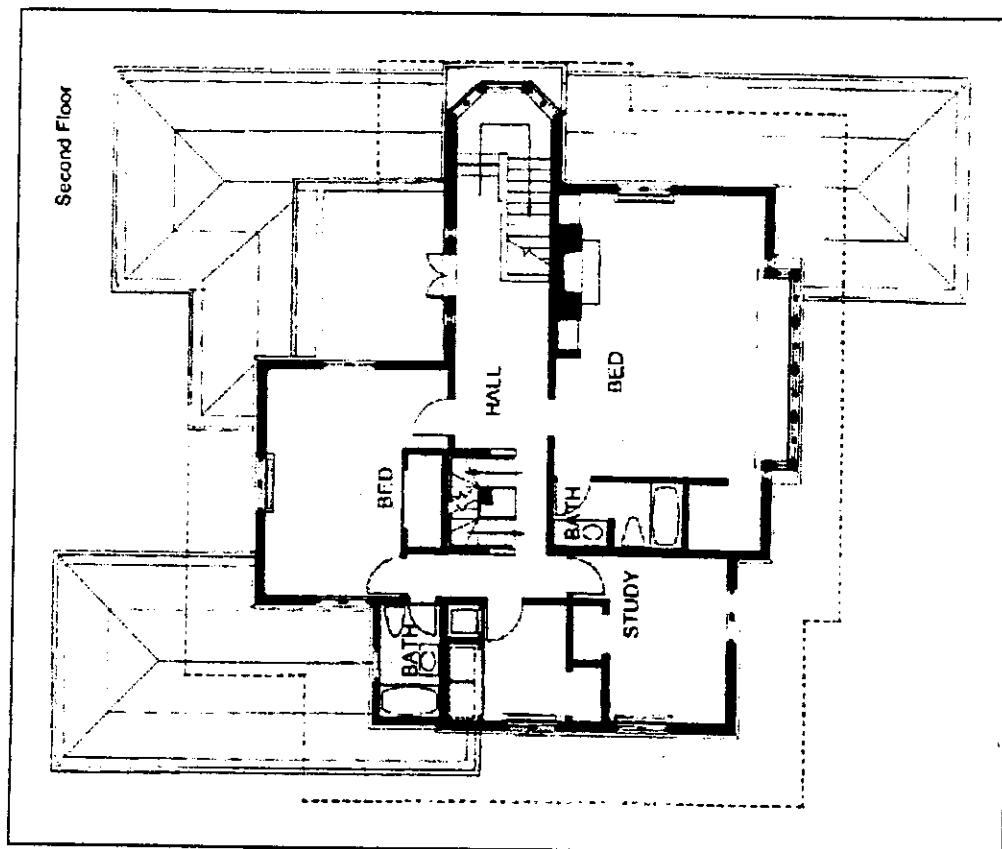


Figure 12: Hills-DeCaro House: Post-Fire Second Floor Plan. Architectural drawing by Jack Lesniak, May 15, 1999. (This drawing was copied from the *Wright Plus 1999 Research Report* by Jack Lesniak.)

Appendix B:

Historic and Reconstruction Photographs

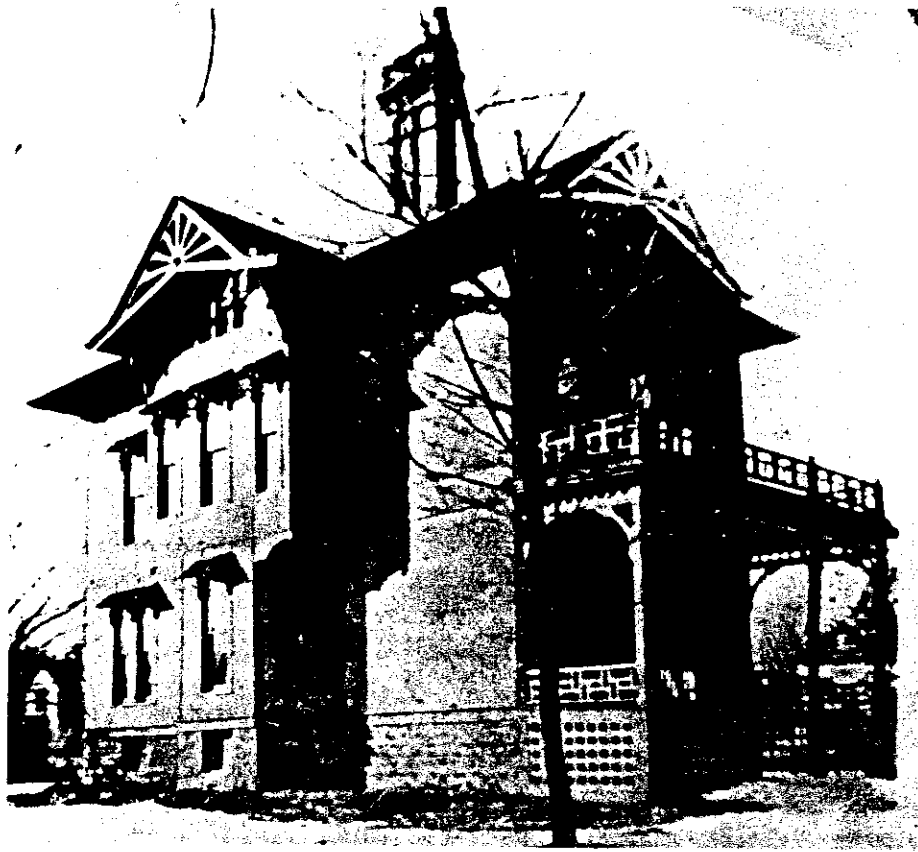


Figure 1: Undated photograph of the ca. 1885 Gray House, which was remodeled into the Hills House in 1906. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro. This historic photo was published in an article by William Gray Purcell titled, "That Haunted House." In: *Northwest Architect*. Volume XVI, Number 6. November-December 1952, p. 16.



Figure 2: Historic photograph of the Hills-Decaro House, dated 1906. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro. This photograph was published on the cover of *Northwest Architect*, Volume XVI, Number 6, November-December 1952.



Figure 3: Undated photograph of Nathan Grier Moore. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.



Figure 4: Undated photograph of Anna Walker Moore. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.



Figure 5: Undated photograph of Mary Moore Hills. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.



Figure 6: Hills-DeCaro House: front (east) elevation, ca. 1960, before the 1976 fire. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.

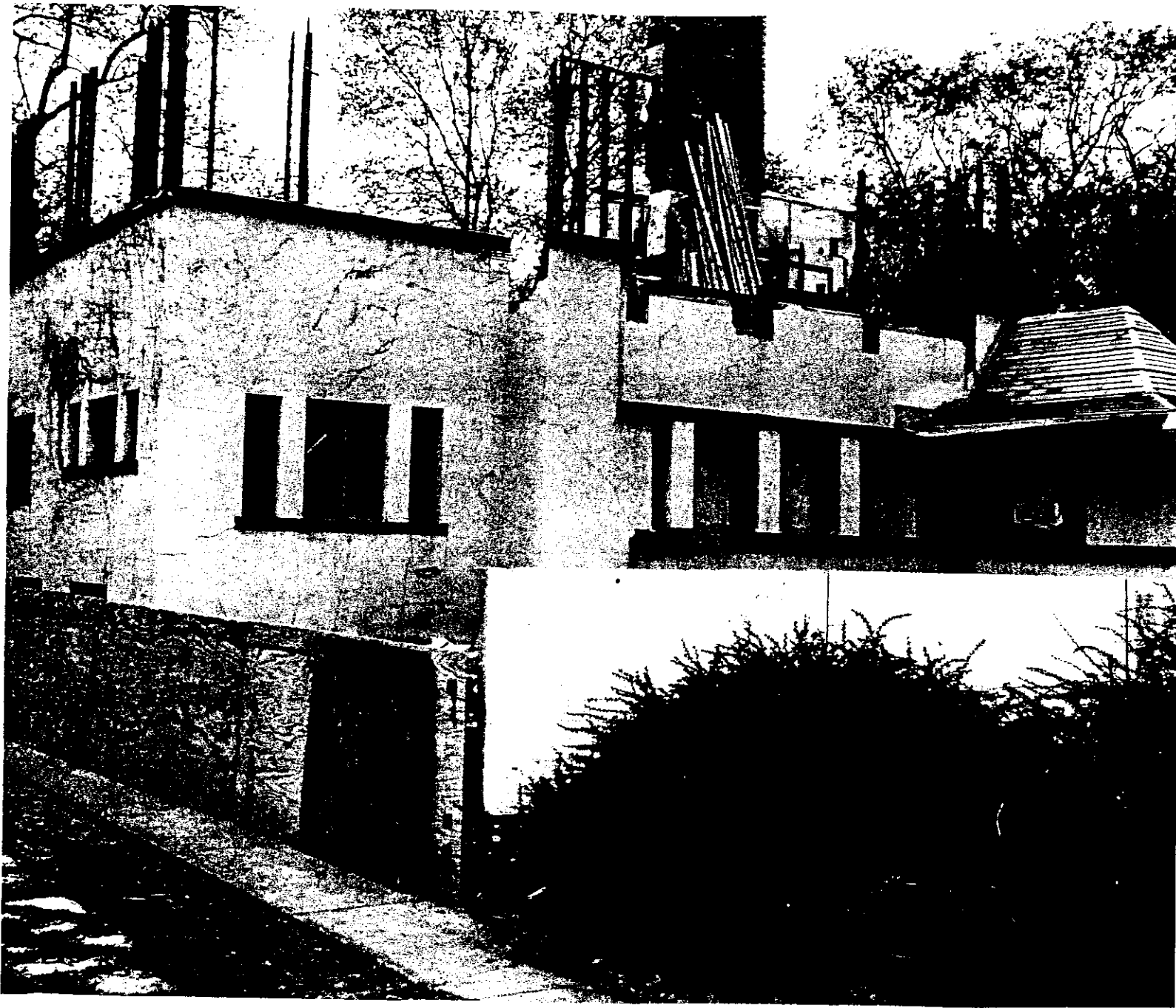


Figure 7: Hills-DeCaro House: front (east) elevation, January 1976, after the fire. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.



Figure 8: Hills-DeCaro House: front (east) elevation, during the 1976 reconstruction. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.

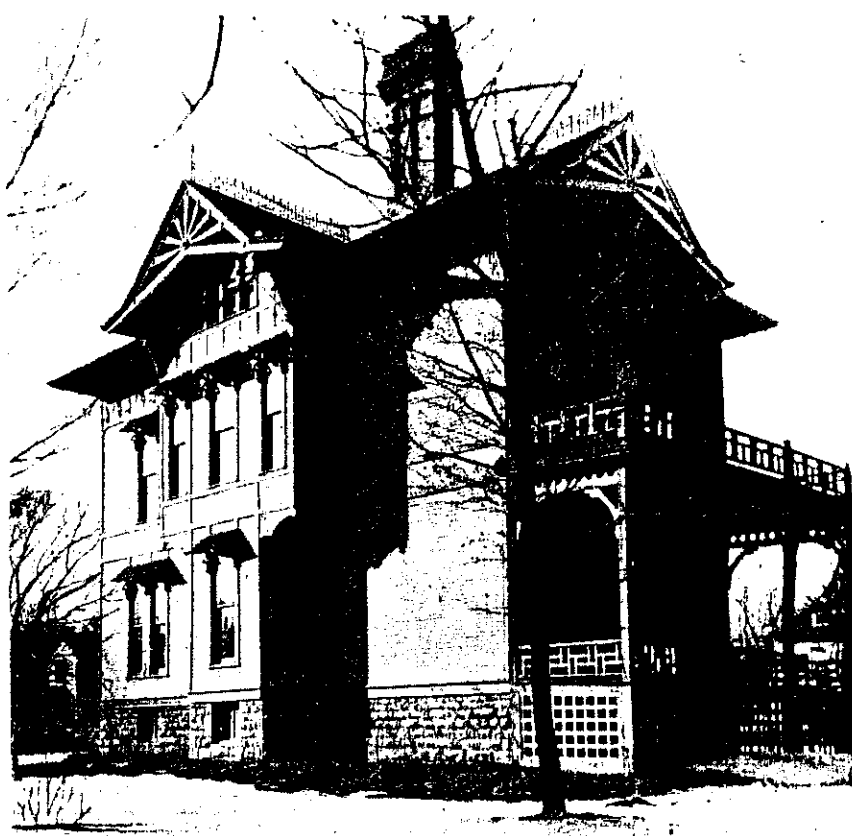


Figure 9: Hills-DeCaro House: rear (west) elevation, during the 1976 reconstruction. Photo courtesy of Tom and Irene DeCaro.

That Haunted House

In NORTHWEST ARCHITECT of March, 1951 we said: "We will explain how 1883 became 1903."

TO THE RIGHT IS THE DWELLING OF MY UNCLE FRANK S. GRAY DESIGNED IN 1883 BY CHARLES C. MILLER, ARCHITECT. IT WAS MOVED 200 FT. SOUTH IN 1903 AND TURNED 90° TOWARD THE STREET. REMODELED BY FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT, AS YOU SEE IT PICTURED ON THE EDITORIAL PAGE AND BELOW, IT WAS GIVEN AS A WEDDING PRESENT BY NATHAN G. MOORE, TO HIS DAUGHTER MARY MOORE HILLS, WHO IS STILL LIVING THERE IN 1952.



MOORE HOUSE OUT OF PICTURE AT RIGHT; HORSE STABLE AND GARDEN FENCE AT REAR.



REAR OF HILLS HOUSE FROM NORTHWEST PRIVATE GARDEN ENCLOSURE OF MOORE.

THIS little picture story shows how a considerable cast of characters were united by circumstances, over a period of sixty years, to make a contribution of happiness to a very large audience. Not only those of us who lived on Forest Avenue and in Oak Park, but hundreds of students who come every year are delighted and encouraged by what is to be seen, of the meaning of America, in three blocks of this now most famous street of dwellings in America.

My uncle and my father began the self conscious architectural era on Forest Avenue by employing Architect Charles C. Miller to produce houses which were new and exciting when built. Beginning in 1874, Miller, who died in 1903, must have produced a dozen large houses in Oak Park, perhaps many more, if they could be identified. They were very good and original types of their time in the lively 1880's and there was much talk about the new fashions in architecture.

But it was in 1893 when Wright built his own home on Forest and Chicago Avenues and began, year after year, to build houses up and down the street that Oak Park's days of fame were assured. About the year 1902 I can recall my father sitting down before the evening steak and remarking, "If that Wright don't quit he'll have our street ruined." As I was by then a great admirer of Sullivan I did not share my father's views.

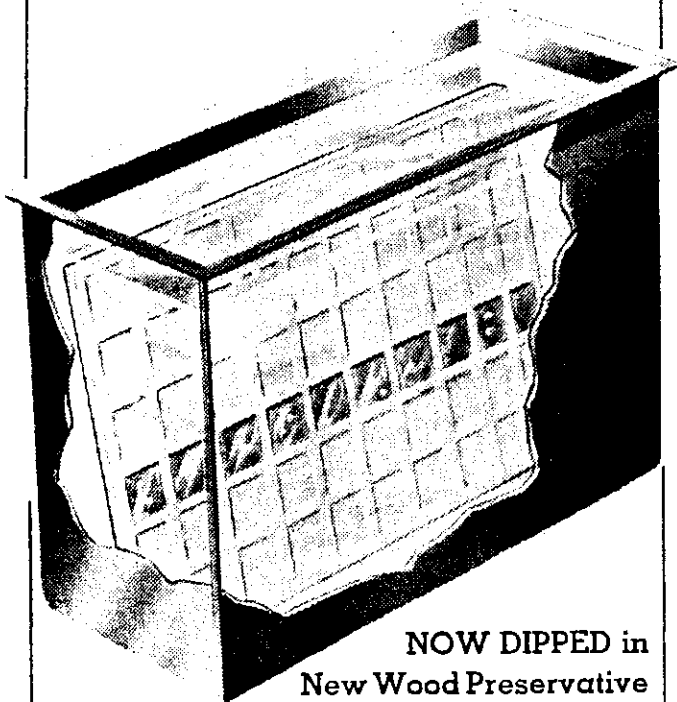
Nathan G. Moore contributed more to the beauty of Forest Avenue than any one. Moore employed the newly married Wright to design his own home, one of Wright's very first commissions. In 1902 Moore demolished the McDaniels (1869) and Seabury (1872) houses to make possible the very broad expanse of lawn and garden to the south of this now famous architectural landmark.

The pictures to the left (1906) show this fine

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Wood sections shall have stiles and rails of vertical grain Douglas Fir, hardwood dowelled and steel pinned, water-proofed glued. Rails to extend full width of door. Panels to be of three (3) ply laminated fir $\frac{1}{4}$ " exterior plywood manufactured by the hot plate process with phenolic resin glue.

HARDWARE

Hardware shall include safety torsion springs on a continuous shaft across full width of door, rustproofed aircraft type cable (chain not permitted), rollers having a minimum of ten (10) ball bearings $\frac{1}{4}$ " diameter with both inner and outer races of hardened steel (use of roller shaft as inner race will not be permitted), bottom corner brackets mortised under bottom of door and of sufficient height to be secured across both rail and stile. Doors over 12'6" wide shall be additionally reinforced with suitable horizontal trusses to prevent sagging when open. Doors over 16'0" wide shall have suitable support to prevent sagging when closed.

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spread and how Wright related the homes of father and daughter with architectural garden enclosing features. The Moore house was burned in 1922 and restored to a greater beauty in a fine example of restrained remodeling under Wright's hand. The refreshed design conserved the special personal qualities with which twenty-eight years of good American family life had endowed the original Wright thesis, with twenty-six more to come before Nathan Moore's death in 1948 at the age of 95.

"To have great architects you must have great clients, too." W.G.P.

NORTH CENTRAL CONFERENCE

(Continued from Page 12)

campus pattern so their comings and goings would not interfere with classes.

Department heads on the campus projected their needs to the probable peak in 1970 and basic plans were shaped in accordance with this. The effects of interdepartmental flow and of internural activities was taken into consideration.

Previously there was cross traffic on the site but this was stopped and parking areas were located at each



A product discussion brought together Rolin Child (U. S. Quarry Tile), Donald Haarstick and Dick Hammel, St. Paul AIA.

side. There was no through, and consequently heavy, traffic on the campus. Residences and recreational buildings were located above the campus to enhance the building of student and faculty friendship circles. The arrangement was informal.

Other projects keenly followed by those who attended were presented by Lawrence B. Perkins of Chicago and Eero Saarinen of Bloomfield Hills, Mich. "The Architect and the Building Process" was discussed for the dinner group by Serge Chermayeff of Chicago.

The Saturday morning session was filled with a panel discussion under direction of Robert Cerny, A.I.A., Minneapolis. Panel members were Messrs. Perkins, Saarinen, Chermayeff and L. Morgan Yost of Kenilworth, Ill.

Many attended the Minnesota-Purdue football game in the afternoon, following close of the sessions.

Details of the highly successful conference were handled by a Minnesota chapter committee of Chairman Donald Haarstick, William Berget, Brooks Cavin, Gordon Comb and Richard Hammel.