A STUDY OF TWO ARCHITECTS

FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT AND PERCY BENTLEY

(AN ATTEMPT TO DETERMINE THE EXTENT OF THE INFLUENCE OF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT ON HOUSES DESIGNED BY PERCY BENTLEY IN LA CROSSE, WISCONSIN, BETWEEN THE YEARS 1911-1921)

BY MARY EATER

When I first moved to La Crosse nineteen years ago I was told that Frank Lloyd Wright was the designer of several La Crosse homes. A few years later the A.A.U.W. (American Association of University Women), started to sponsor annual home tours, and some of these homes were written about in the local newspaper. I learned that it wasn't Frank Lloyd Wright, but a local architect named Percy Bentley who was the designer of the homes, which do bear a resemblence to the work of Frank Lloyd Wright during his early "Prarie Home" years. Still, the idea that Wright had a hand in it somewhere lingers on. In fact, the belief is so prevalent that when I called on one family who live in a Bentley home, the son of the family told me, "Oh, no, it wasn't Bentley who designed this house, it was Frank Lloyd Wright". Many people who know about Percy Bentley being the designer of our Wrightian houses think that Bentley was a student of Wright's, or that the two architects must have worked together. This is not the case, even though it was so widely believed that it was written into Bentley's obituary of February 2, 1968, in the La Crosse Tribune, that Bentley was a protege of Wright's.

When I decided to use these two architects as a subject for this term paper, I wondered where I would obtain enough information about Percy Bentley. Wright would be easy. There have been many books written by him or about him over the years. But Bentley was another matter. I found out that Mrs. Keith Swanson had done a report on Bentley for a meeting of the Campus Dames Organization at La Crosse State University in October, 1968. She very graciously lent me her notes for that report and steered me to some other people who might help me. I am very much indebted to her and to three other people who gave me information. Miss Phyllis Bentley, Percy Bentley's niece, who lives in Menominee, Wisconsin, answered many questions by correspondence. Also, I talked Mr. Sherwood Wing, who was a draftsman for Bentley for part of the time Bentley had an architectural office in La Crosse. Mr. Harold Weisse, a friend of Mr. Wing's and an acquaintance of Bentley's, gave me information. I talked to all the people who live in Bentley designed homes, and most of them had information about the age or construction of the homes, or about the architect, that helped me put together the information contained in this paper.

In order to study the similarities and the differences of Frank Lloyd Wright's and Percy Bentley's work, it is

necessary to know much about each man, so I delved into the mountain of information about Wright. He was born in Wisconsin in 1869.[1] He was slated to be an architect from the very first, it seems. His parents, especially his mother, had progressive ideas about child rearing. Anna Lloyd Jones Wright had an intense interest in the Froebel Kindergarten system of teaching children with educational toys - blocks of wood in geometric shapes - and this gave him the "desire to design".[2] It should be pointed out that these "Kindergarten gifts" came to him when he was either seven or nine years old, depending on which date you accept as his birth date. So he, no doubt, was able to understand and grasp their artistic content. This early training taught young Frank to look for patterns of construction and stimulated his sensitivity to materials and to color.[3]

There is no doubt that his mother's dominant personality influenced him in the whole thrust of his life.

---

1 Thos. J. Hines, "Frank Lloyd Wright - The Madison years", Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Dec. '67, 227 - 233
This article points out the fact that there are three reliable records showing that Wright was born in 1867, not 1869. In his own writings, Wright consistently used the June 8, 1869 date and biographers have accepted his word and compounded the error hundreds of times. Whether it was an honest mistake or the result of some effort to hide poor career beginnings by Wright, a complex, genius-type personality, is open to speculation.

2 Frank Lloyd Wright, Writings and Buildings, p. 18, 19

3 Forsee, Aylesa, Men of Modern Architecture, p. 35

However, his father's gentle influence also left it's mark. His father was a musician and although he was eccentric, (his mother and father were divorced when Frank was 15 years old) the music with which he inundated the Wright home at all times left young Frank with a love of music that sustained him all through his life.[4]

Frank Lloyd Wright grew up in Madison, Wisconsin. He enrolled at the University of Wisconsin in Madison in January, 1886, in the engineering school. There are some descrepancies as to just how much education he achieved there. In his own book, A Testament, written in 1957, he states:

> The University of Wisconsin had no course in Architecture. As civil-engineer, therefore, several months before I was to receive a degree, I ran away from school (1888) to go to work in some real architect's office in Chicago.[5]

Elsewhere it is recorded that it was more than several months before receiving his degree. Records at the University show that he was there only two semister as a special student and during this time his scholastic record was not a distinguished one, to say the least.[6]

---

4 Blake, Peter, The Master Builders, p. 268

5 Wright, Writings and Buildings, P. 20

6 Thos. J. Hines, "Frank Lloyd Wright - The Madison Years", Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, Dec., '67, 232

Because of his lack of formal education, he being the type of personality he was, he always had a contempt for formal education. Time and time again he would laugh at formal education[7] saying that it could only teach formulas, not principals. He spoke sarcastically of college trained architects. "No conditioned Harvard man" would be likely to have the ability to design good houses,[8] he thought. At any rate, in the spring of 1887, Wright came to Chicago with the intention of becoming an architect.[9]

Wright had no trouble finding a job in Chicago. He worked as a draftsman for the firm owned by Joseph L. Silsbee for one year. Then he bettered himself by going to work for the well known firm of Adler and Sullivan, again as a draftsman. The man, Louis Sullivan, an interesting subject himself, was a successful architect at this time. He had rather progressive ideas about architecture, despite the fact that he had graduated from the French Ecole des Beaux-Arts, which turned out rather conservative architect, insisting on formulaes and imitations of old styles.[10]

---

7 Blake, The Master Builders, p. 353

8 Wright, The Natural House, p. 186

9 Smith, Norris Kelly, Frank Lloyd Wright, A Study in Architectural Content, p. 353

10 Ibid, p. 18

Sullivan was an inspiration and a "dear master" to Wright. The two men were alike in that they were men of ideas and philosophies which both expressed in writings, as well as in their architecture.

Wright stayed with Sullivan for six years, and then set up his own firm. At this time most of the work he had done for Sullivan and for himself in his spare time, were home designs. He was contemptuous of the American styles of homes of his day. In his own words:

> The buildings standing then were all tall and all tight. Chimneys were lean and taller still, sooty fingers threatening the sky. And beside them, sticking up by way of dormers through the cruelly sharp saw-toothed roofs, were the attics for "help" to swelter in. [11]

And further on:

> The whole exterior was be-deviled - that is to day, mixed to puzzle pieces with corner-boards, panel boards, window frames, corner blocks, plinth blocks, rosettes, fantail, ingenious and jigger work in general. This was the only way to "put on the Style". [12]

The houses Wright began to design were lower - no attic. He did away with basements, also. The roofs were gently sloping or flat, and often had a large overhang. Nothing jutted up sharply to give a vertical line emphasis. Wright says he scaled his houses to fit a normal man. The effect of this was to broaden a house out, bringing in spaciousness.

---

[11] Wright, Writings and Buildings, p. 40

[12] Ibid, p. 40

"It has been said that were I three inches taller (I am 5'8½" tall), all my houses would have been quite different in porportion. Perhaps." [13]

The interiors of Wright's houses were drastically different from the busy clutter of our Victorian age. He did away with mantels, and the fireplaces were large and meant to be used. Rooms were opened up, light and airy. What had been cut-up rooms, "boxes beside or inside other boxes", [14] as he called them, became a whole floor as one room with areas such as the kitchen the only out off space. Windows and doors were lower and he used broad bands of plaster on the walls above the windows, the plaster the same color as the ceilings. The sense of the whole was broadened and the enclosing walls and ceilings were thus made to flow together. He used casement windows which he felt associated the house with the out of doors. [15]

Wright was a firm believer in using what products the machine age yielded. He was searching for a new direction, a truly American expression in architecture. He believed that houses should fit their environment, as already stated, and this implies a "natural" look - a house at peace with its setting, look like it belongs there, not disturbing nature. This organic theory of architecture had been the philosophy of architects during the 19th century , but their

---

13 Ibid, p. 42

14 Ibid, p. 43

15 Ibid, p. 44

theories of organic architecture took a much different expression than did Wright's 20th century works.

Wright also believed in using the man-made machines to turn out his materials such as continuous ribbons of glass, concrete, tile, steel. But at the same time he loved wood and rock and nature's materials and he used them extensively in all his earth-hugging "prairie homes". He believed in using decorations and ornaments only when they agreed completely with the nature of the material used. One example is concrete block such as he used in the Ennis House (1924) in California. Wright recognized the concrete block as a plastic and malleable material that needed the impress of human imagination. He impressed it with a pattern of his own design to lift it above itself. [16] He was contemptuous of mixing old styles with new and the addition of old style ornamentation to mad-made materials calling for new ornamentation was basic to him. He believed there was poetry in the machine age and that "echoes are by nature decadent". [17]

Frank Lloyd Wright was a very complex man in every phase of his personal life. However, one thing he stressed over all in his early architecture was simplicity. No doubt he was rebelling against our over-sentimental, fussy mixture of classical styles known as the Victorian age. He summed up his ideas of organic simplicity in nine motives

---

16 Robert Masher, House Beautiful, Nov. '55, p.320

17 Wright, Writings and Buildings, p.64

and indications, which are:

First - To reduce the number of necessary parts of the house and the separate rooms to a minimum and make all come together as enclosed space - so divided that light, air, and vista permeated the whole with a sense of unity.

Second - To associate the building as a whole with its site by extension and emphasis of the planes parallel to the site, thus leaving that better part for use in connection with the life of the house. Extended level planes were found useful in this connection.

Third - To eliminate the room as a box and the house as another by making all walls enclosing screens - the ceilings and floors and enclosing screens to flow into each other as one large enclosure of space, with minor subdivisions only.
Make all house proportions more liberally human, with less wasted space in structure, and structure more appropriate to material, and so the whole more livable. Extended straight lines or streamlines were useful in this.

Fourth - To get the unwholesome basement up out of the ground, entirely above it, as a low pedestal for the living portion of the home, making the foundation itself visible as a low masonry platform on which the building should stand.

Fifth - To harmonize all necessary openings to "outside" or to "inside" with good human proportions and make them occur naturally singly or as a series in the scheme of the whole building. Usually they appeared as "light-screens" instead of walls, because all the architecture of the house was chiefly the way these openings came in such walls as were grouped about the rooms as enclosing screens. The room as such was now the essential architectural expression, and there were to be no holes cut in walls as holes are cut in a box, because this was not in keeping with the ideal of "plastic". Cutting holes was violent.

Sixth - To eliminate combinations of different materials in favor of mono-material so far as possible; to use no ornament that did not come out of the nature of materials to make the whole building clearer and more expressive as a place to live in, and give the conception of the building appropriate revealing emphasis. Geometrical or straight lines were natural to the machinery at work in the building trades then, so the interiors took on this character naturally.

Seventh - To incorporate all heating, lighting, plumbing so that these systems became constituent parts of the building itself. These service features became architectural and in this attempt the ideal of an organic architecture was at work.

Eighth - To incorporate as organic architecture - so far as possible - furnishings, making them all one with the building and designing them in simple terms for machine work. Again straight lines and rectilinear forms.

Ninth - Eliminate the decorator. He was all curves and all efflorescence, if not all "period". [18]

I believe this sums up Wright's early years, called the "prairie house" phase of his architectural career. His style did evolve over the years and his buildings such as the Johnson Wax Company office building and the Guggenheim Museum show just how far his transition went!

The architect, Percy Bentley, is, of course, much harder to talk about because he was not famous except in a small way, and next to Wright, not at all. He was a hometown boy in La Crosse, and although he did not visit here often in the later years of his life, there are a few people still around who remember him. Bentley was born in

---

[18] Ibid., p 45 and 46

1885, (either 18 or 20 years after Wright). His early years were no doubt easier than Wright's, as he was born into one of La Crosse's affluent families. His father was E. E. Bentley, president of the Batavian Bank, (he followed Gysbert Van Steenswyk, who founded the bank, and he preceded E.M. Wing, brother of Florence Wing, after whom the LSU building is named). Bentley grew up in La Crosse. His family home was at 823 King Street. (Haddad's Rug and Carpet Co. is now located in what was then the Bentley barn and coach house.) In 1903-'06 Bentley attended Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio. He studied at Armour Institute which was a parent institution of Illinois Institute of Technology, from 1906 - '10. So, in the matter of education, it would seem that Bentley, in contrast to Wright, had a thorough and very impressive background.

The two men led very different personal lives. Wright was married three times and his personal life was considered wild and scandalous by the establishment of the day. (Perhaps he would be considered the same way today.) He suffered from what is known as a "bad press". Bentley, on the other hand, never married and although he sowed his wild oats as a young man in La Crosse, he was always respected. He is reported to have owned one of the first cars in La Crosse. Bentley was very jovial and was a much sought after dinner guest

in La Crosse during the years from 1911 - 1920 or 1921. Mr. Sherwood Wing told me that the best way to get Percy Bentley to design a house for you in the early days was to have a dinner party and while he was in a good mood to discuss the matter with him.

Like Wright, Bentley loved music and was, in fact, an accomplished musician. As already stated, music played an important part in Wright's life, and he was an amateur pianist. Bentley had a decision to make as to whether to become a full time pianist and organist or to concentrate on architecture. During his La Crosse years he became somewhat of a dilettante in both fields. He played the piano for hours at parties. He played the organ in the Methodist Church at 9th and King Sts., and also at the Congregational Church for a time. The story goes that after attending services at the Congregational Church, two elderly ladies came outside fussing about the fact that Percy had "jazzed up" not only the postlude, but also "Onward Christian Soldiers".

Lest I give the impression that Bentley was all playboy, just working when he felt like it, let me say that he did do quite a bit of architectural work in La Crosse. His original office was in an attic-like area above Niebuhr Plumbing Company, which was then located where the Hollywood Theatre is now. Later he moved to the third floor of the Batavian Bank Building in the back, where there were north windows. A catalogue of Bentley's

works in La Crosse, as complete as I can make it, is included at the end of this paper.

A study of the buildings Bentley designed in La Crosse shows that he was a rather versatile architect. He built in many styles. The homes most showing the Wrightian flavor are the ones which are the best known. I learned from Bentley's niece, Miss Phyllis Bentley, that he never studied with Wright. This is corroborated by a letter I received from the Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation in Taliesin West, Scottsdale, Arizona, which states:

> Unfortunately we are unable to find any concrete evidence that would confirm the statement concerning Percy Bentley as a student of Frank Lloyd Wright. Of course, many were influenced by Mr. Wright who were not actual students at Taliesin or draftsmen to Mr. Wright during his years in Oak Park, Los Angeles, and Tokyo.

Several houses done by Bentley in La Crosse between 1911 and 1920 or 1921 are similar in many respects to what Wright did in Chicago from 1893 to 1909. If Bentley never came into direct contact with Wright, where could the influence have come from? Frank Lloyd Wright was never one to "hide his light under a bushel." He was outspoken in speeches he gave and he began to write articles on his own ideas and on architecture in general very early. Wright's own literary production, beginning in 1894, was considerable, and went on uninterruptedly until his death.[19]

---

[19] Scully, Vincent Jr., Masters of World Architecture p. 117

In a group of statements in an article entitled "In The Cause of Architecture, (I)" from Architectural Record, XXIII, 3, 1908, as well as a publication in Berlin in 1910, Wright explained his principles of organic architecture, as inherited from Sullivan.[20] Also, his concept of style, which was closely related to his principles of organic architecture, was discussed.[21] Even before that Wright published articles and spoke at meetings of groups. The following is a list of these speeches and published articles:

1. 1894 - Speech to the University Guild, Evanston, Ill.
2. 1896 - Speech to the University Guild, Evanston, Ill.[22]
3. 1900 - Article,"The Architect", Brickbuilder, June, 1900
4. 1901 - Article, "The Art and Craft of the Machine", Chicago Architectural Club, Catalog of the 14th Annual Exhibition, Chicago.
5. 1901 - Article, "A Home In Prarie Town", Ladies Home Journal, February, 1901
6. 1901 - Article, "A Small House With Lots Of Room In It", Ladies Home Journal, July, 1901
7. 1901 - Article, "The Village Bank", Brickbuilder, August, 1901[23]

---

20 Sullivan and Wright both drew from the traditions of Andrew Jackson Downing and Alexander Davis who preached philosophies of organic architecture in the early to mid Nineteenth century.

21 Green, Samuel M., American Art, A Historical Survey, p.453

22 Frank Lloyd Wright, An American Architecture, p.265

23 Frank Lloyd Wright, On Architecture, p.267

8. 1902 - Speech to the Chicago Women's Club [24]

9. 1906 - Article, Introduction to Hiroshigi: An Exhibition of Collected Prints, Chicago, 1906

10. 1907 - Article, "A Firepwoof House for $5000", Ladies Home Journal, April, 1907 [25]

The before mentioned "In the Cause of Architecture, (I), from Architectural Record, 1908 and II, 1914, and any or all of these articles and speeches by Wright could have been known to Bentley. He was in Chicago in school from 1906 to 1910. Miss Phyllis Bentley states, "Surely students at Armour Institute were made aware of Wright. (It was) inescapable. Afterward the influence continued because he was an architect interested in what was going on in his field".

In Mrs. Swanson's notes it states that Bentley left La Crosse in 1917. Les Crocker informed me that he was mentioned in the 1919 city directory. There was no directory published in 1918. Mr. Sherwood Wing thinks that Bentley left town, selling out his business to his ~~partner~~ draftsman, Otto Merman, in 1920 or 1921. It seems logical to me to suppose that Bentley left town for a period of time between 1917 and 1918, returned, but left for good in 1920 or 1921. At any rate, after Bentley did leave La Crosse he was in partnership with a man named Hausler in an architectural firm in St. Paul, Minnesota. Shortly

---

[24] Wright, An American Architecture, p. 265

[25] Wright, On Architecture, p. 267

after moving to St. Paul his old interest in music got the upper hand and for about 10 years or more he forsook architecture and became a musician with a St. Paul orchestra. He moved west in 1930 and opened an architectural firm in Eugene, Oregon. He became well known in the area and in his later years most of his commissions were for business buildings. His niece reports that "his style evolved over the years and he preferred designing business buildings". She also points out that the American Architectural Directory; 2nd edition, 1962, lists Bentley and included several of what it calls his "principal works", all of which are in Oregon.

In 1957 the Chamber of Commerce in Roswell, New Mexico, in connection with the Roswell Museum, prepared an exhibit to honor "a group of progressive American architects who lived and designed in the period between 1900 and 1920". Bentley was one of the group to be so honored and buildings he designed in La Crosse were mentioned, specifically the ~~Hood~~ Katz house, (now the Bevington house) 1634 King Street, the Oyen Building, 509 Main Street, and the Felber residence, the house now lived in by the Albert Funk family at 1408 King Street. I think it is interesting to note that Bentley was honored for buildings he did so young in life and so far from his best known achievements. In his obituary in the Eugene, Oregon newspaper, the early La Crosse days were not

even mentioned except to say that he was born here.

The first of the three houses to be discussed is the house now lived in by Milton Bevington and his family, at 1634 King Street. Several years ago the art historian, Mr. Allen Brooks, from Toronto University, came to La Crosse to see Bentley's houses here. He was doing research on a bood about prarie architecture. Mr. Brooks is reported to have made the statement that the proportions on this house were the best of the Wrightian houses, the windows being particularly good. This house is constructed of hollow tiles, plastered on the inside, stuccoed on the outside. There never has been a crack in the inside ~~or the outside~~ walls. The house, built by Henry Salzer of the Salzer seed Company in 1912, cost $80,000 to build without lawn or garden, so it was a very dear house for that day and age when the price on construction was so much less expensive than now. This house is close in feeling to the Winslow house[26] done by Wright in River Forest, Illinois, in 1893, and also to Wright's Ingalls house[27] in Oak Park, Illinois, 1909. Wright's houses often had a contrasting color on the outside, either a decorated second story, as in the Cooney house[28] built in 1908 in Riverside, Illinois, or the Winslow house. Often he has a course of contrasting

---

26 Smith, Norris Kelly, Frank Lloyd Wright, A Study in Architectural Content, p.60

27 Ibid., p.61

28 Cheney, Sheldon, The New World Architecture, p. 243

color and also window trim of the same color, as in the Tomek house,[29] 1907, also in Riverside, Illinois. This Bentley house is all one color now, although there is a course set out under the second story windows which could have been of a contrasting color at one time. The entrance of this house is particularly close to Wright's Tomek house.

Inside the Bevington house there is a more conventional not as Wrightian, feeling or concept. The fireplace is in the living room on the porch wall and is rather small in contrast to Wright's "integral fireplace, buring deep within the masonry of the house itself".[30] There is a central hall with stairway, living room and enclosed porch on one side, dining room, den, back hallway on the other side of the central hall, and another small wing beyond that under a separate roof line. If you would leave the wings off the house, it would be symmetrical. I believe the interior of the house does not call for a special type of furnishing, as do many of Wright's houses. In this matter perhaps it could be said that the house is a better house to be adapted to our modern day living than were Wright's houses, as houses change hands oftener today and are lived in by many families with many tastes in interior decoration. This house could be decorated

---

29 Wright, An American Architecture, p. 54

30 Wright, Writings and Buildings, p. 42

with colonial or contemporary or any good taste in furniture and it would fit in. The ceilings do not give a feeling of lowness that one reads about in Wright's prarie houses. Mrs. Gert Gordon, the daughter of the family that built the house, says that her mother wanted a colonial house, but her father wanted "something that would better fit into the surroundings". Perhaps the mother preferred a more traditional type of interior. In this connection, Mr. Brooks is quoted in a letter that I received from Miss Bentley, as follows:

> I am trying to obtain as much documentation as possible on who and why concerning favorism pro and con Wrightian or historical styles. It has been my thesis that men preferred the Wrightian type on logical grounds, while women preferred the historical styles on the grounds that they were more homelike and adaptable, and that after the first World War the women won out! (thus few Wrightian houses after 1918).

The second home for study is that of Robert Hickish at 1222 Cass Street. It was designed by Bentely in 1913 or 1914 for the Dan McMillan family. Of historical interest to some may be the fact that there is a rose window in the library bathroom that is from the original Cargill house. It was salvaged after the house was extensively damaged by fire.

This house is built of dark brown brick and stucco, with hip roof and overhanging eaves, (a wider overhang than on the Bevington home.) There is more decoration on the outside than on the Bevington house, with bands

(X) 1634 King was owned + lived in by William + Anne Katz in the 1930's to 1960's - They remodeled it inside + out.

of dark brown wood contrasting with the yellow stucco. This house can be compared in looks to the Robie house 31 that Wright did in Chicago in 1909. It contrasts to the Bevington house in that the Bevington house has an established shape - a rectangle. The Hickish house is irregular in shape, more of a block on block type, as is the Robie house.

The fireplace has a more prominent place in this house. It is located in the center and is larger and more dominant. It is placed so that it could be used on two sides, the kitchen as well as the living room, but Bentley did not choose to make it serve both rooms. There are two rooms that definitely "bring the out-of-doors inside", as many of Wright's houses do. One is the first floor extention of the living room with windows on three sides, and the other is the room over the car port, used for a study, also with windows on three sides. The low ceilings and casement windows are Wrightian touches. There are definite rooms in this house, not the boxes next to boxes of the Victorian era, with many doors to be used to shut off rooms from each other, but perhaps this house is not as wide open as Wright's ideal prarie home.

The Dahl house at 128 South 14th Street looks more like a Wright prarie home today than it did originally.

---

31 Smith, FLW, A Study, p.62

It has been pointed out to me since I started this paper that for that very reason(that so many changes have been made in the original house) it may not have been the best choice for study. However, it does still have the same lines as Bentley's design, and I was able to obtain a picture of it as it was originally from Mrs. Eleanor Dahl. The house was built in 1915 for the Emil Mueller family. Mueller was a local brewer. The house cost $45,000 to build. Originally the house was stucco with wood trim. When I first saw it in the 1950's it was painted a light green color with the wood painted a dark green to contrast. Originally the front porch was separated from the front room by French doors and the porch had casement windows on three sides. When the Dahls remodeled in 1947 they extended the living room into the front porch area and changed one casement window on the porch in the front to a picture window. Then in the late 1960's they remodeled the outside of the house, making it the lovely stone and natural wood you see today. Except for the roof line, which is different, the Dahl house resembles very closely Wright's Ingalls house,[32] built in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1909. It has a block on block feeling like the Hickish house, but is rectangular in shape except for

---

[32] Ibid., p. 61

a room built off the south side which has a flat roof. This breaks up the silouette in two places, the porch area in front and the room on the south side. The inside of this house has the Wrightian concept of low ceilings and openess. It has beamed ceilings in the dining room and den. All woodwork throughout the house is quarter-sawed oak, now rare. The house has many Wrightian touches, more than other Bentley houses I have seen. There is a band of wood at door top level carried around the perimeter of the front room and the dining room. Originally it was a three-band pattern which has been carried throughout the home. This motif decorates the leaded glass casement windows, the light fixtures, the fireplace andirons and even a grandfather clock. In this touch Bentley followed Wright's practice of having special furnishings built to go with a specific house, although only the clock and andirons are to be seen in the house today as an example of this. The entrance is the typical Wrightian entrance, hidden from street view. The fireplace is a prominent one, important to the house, and is in the center of the house.

There are really quite a few similarities to Wright in Bentley's work. The exteriors of many of his homes bear a marked resemblence to one or the other of the examples of Wright's prarie homes. However, Bentley,

while being a very adequate architect, was no Frank Lloyd Wright. There is only one Wright, the genius, and anyone would suffer by comparison. Bentley was, however, rather inventive and versatile. His homes are built to last and he insisted on good materials. Mrs. Funk informed me that to even hang a picture requires a drill, not just a hammer and nail. His homes all have basements, which was something that Wright despised, but, to my way of thinking, a necessity in a Wisconsin house. Bentley's houses have good practical floor plans and are adaptable to many tastes in furnishings from oriental to colonial, suitable to a wider range of individual tastes than are Wright's. Wright was inventive. Many features of his houses are firsts, such as heating coils in the walls and floors of his houses. Bentley was the first in La Crosse to put in a conduit electrical system, something that is, of course, standard practice today. There are very inventive touches in his homes, such as windows (since replaced, but new and different for that time) in the Dahl house that allowed a breakfast room to be used as a porch in the summer, or as a closed room in the winter. The windows dropped into the walls. Also in the Dahl house there was a low wall leading from

the house in back to the garage and to a green-house. In the wall were housed pipes carrying heat to these out-buildings.

The two men were both art and music lovers. They were both interesting characters. Bentley's name still evokes a happy memory to La Crosse people who know him. Mrs. Swanson states that "eyes twinkle" when you ask a question about Percy Bentley's early days in La Crosse. Wright was a controversial figure his whole life, but he always had a large group of loyal friends and supporters. Both men's styles evolved and neither continued to design the prarie type house after about 1920. I feel that La Crosse is fortunate to have had a native son like Percy Bentley who left us his legacy of some fine buildings.

Catalogue of buildings:

This is a listing of Bentley's buildings in La Crosse, Wisconsin, as complete as I can make it. In obtaining the information and dates of these buildings, I talked to Mr. Sherwood Wing, Mr. Harold Weisse, Mrs. Gert Gordon, Mrs. Agnes Fox, and Mr. Myer Katz, each of whom added something to my list.

Residence at 104 S. 17th St. - built for J. J. Hogan in 1912. Said to be the first home that Percy Bentley designed in La Crosse. Present owner is Ben Burgess. Material used is red brick and stucco, has hip roof, with medium overhang, chimney placement is in front, facing Main St., near entrance. Has entrance on Main St., off center - has canopy roof over car-port on west side.

Residence at 1634 King St. - presently owned by Milton Bevington - described in paper.

Residence at 1222 Cass St. - presently owned by Robert Hickish - described in paper.

Residence at 128 S. 14th St. - presently owned by Kenneth Dahl - described in paper.

Residence at 221 S. 11th St. - built for Dr. Chase about 1915 - one of two homes just alike side by side. Built of stucco and wood, rectangular shape, hip roof with large overhang, chimney on north side of building, entrance on north side. Present owner is John Dykstra.

Residence at 223 S. 11th St. - built for Henry Wohlhuter in 1915. Description same as 221 S. 11th St. Presently owned by Paul Tyvand.

O.J. Oyen building, 509 Main St., built in 1915. Is a store building, now owned by Art Soell and housing the Soell Cut-rate Liquor Store. Of interest on this building is the second story front with three small balconies and two recessed pillars. Built of brick. The store front has been remodeled and is not like the original.

Residence at 1421 State St. - built for Gus Sexhaur in 1916 - presently owned by Robert Dunn - built of red brick on first story, stucco on second, with strips of wood decorating the stucco - has hip roof with overhang,