



## SEASONS OF CARE

### TENDING TO THE SETH PETERSON COTTAGE IS A YEAR-ROUND AFFAIR

*By Bill Martinelli*

**M**ost of the yearly maintenance projects at the Seth Peterson Cottage are taken care of during our April work week. This year we had a few projects that were completed during the summer because of unforeseen circumstances.

We ordered a new glass cooktop in late March to be installed during the work week. Because of supply problems, we didn't receive it until June. The new cooktop is ready for many years of delicious cottage meals.

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**Above:** *The Peterson cottage at the November 2021 open house. Tours are offered the second Sunday of each month.*

# WRITINGS

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

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- Ryder Will, Superintendent Mirror Lake State Park

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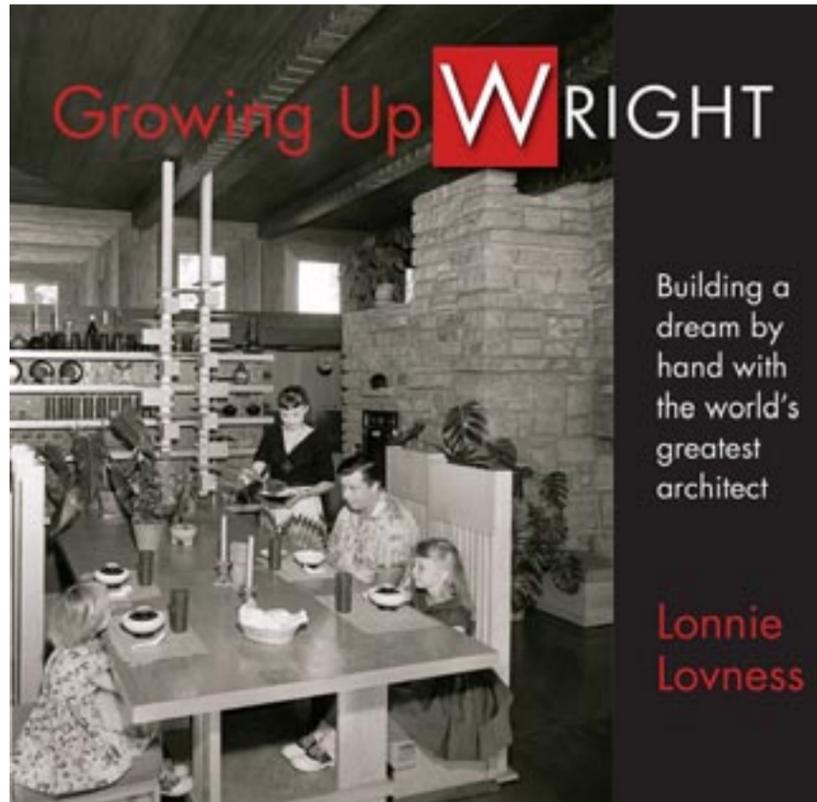
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## PETERSON COTTAGE INSPIRES A MINNESOTA TWIN IN THE 1970s

By Brian R. Hannan

In her delightful memoir of the two Frank Lloyd Wright-designed buildings her parents commissioned for land they owned in Minnesota—and her experience growing up in them—Lonnie Lovness devotes a chapter to the Seth Peterson Cottage that inspired one of those structures—the Don and Virginia Lovness Cottage.

When they visited the Peterson cottage in 1970, it had been closed for four years—having passed on to another owner and then to the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources that was building Mirror Lake State Park.

Lonnie recalls: “...(A)nything built by them would be a copy, but it seemed probable that if built,

their cottage would be the only cottage; at the time, Seth Peterson’s original appeared not long for this world.

“I’m sure they felt some kind of obligation to preserve the design, which even in its ramshackle state exuded an energy and solidity, even though it was tiny.”

Wes Peters and John Rattenbury adapted the original Peterson plans for the Lovnesses. A building permit was issued in July 1971, and construction was completed approximately four years later. Don and Virginia joined in—enlisting friends and acquaintances “when extra hands were needed.”

**Editor’s Note:** Learn more about “Growing Up Wright” and order a copy at [growingupwright.com](http://growingupwright.com). Signed copies are available. 



## FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska

As we get involved with a Frank Lloyd Wright-designed property, we want to know more about the architect. We read books about him. Google information from the internet and hear stories repeated time and again.

On a road trip we took an audio book on his life and work. I’m making my way through “Many Masks: A Life of Frank Lloyd Wright” by Brendan Gill. In between chapters of Gill’s book, I read “My Father, Frank Lloyd Wright” by John Lloyd Wright.

We can agree Wright led an interesting and complicated life. We can further agree his work was unique and deserves to be preserved for future generations to study and enjoy.

The homes are “alive” and meant to be lived in.

That was the impetus for the creation of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy (SPCC), which was setup as a charitable and educational organization to restore and preserve the Seth Peterson Cottage and to make the house available for viewing by the general public as well as for short-term rental.

Looking forward to June 2022, SPCC will have been carrying out its purpose for 30 years. The Seth Peterson Cottage was the first Wright-designed home available for public rental. Reservations for overnight stays started out slowly in the 1990s. Now, through continuous growth, it is booked year-round for many months in advance.

Additionally, we have provided regular monthly open

**Above:** Fall foliage at Mirror Lake State Park

houses, giving more people the opportunity to get an up-close view and to walk through the cottage.

Mark June 12, 2022, on your calendar and plan to join us for our 30th anniversary celebration. 

## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Ryder Will, Park Supervisor

Leaves are changing, temperatures are dropping, the geese are heading south, and Mirror Lake State Park is getting ready for fall and winter. We are enjoying a pause between the summer season of camping, swimming and hiking and our full winter of skiing, snowshoeing and ice fishing. Our summer, limited-term staff have all headed back to school or other jobs, and the full-time staff is staying busy getting equipment ready for winter.

The terrific fall weather gave us a great opportunity to get out and work on trails around the park. We were able to take care of a lot of maintenance and upkeep. On an exciting note, we also made a great deal of progress on building approximately 3 miles of new trail on the north end of the lake.

A few years ago, we built a parking area along Highway 23,

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# FERN DELL GORGE STATE NATURAL AREA NO. 407

By Bill Martinelli

A short distance to the east of the Seth Peterson Cottage is what is known as the Fern Dell Gorge State Natural Area No. 407.

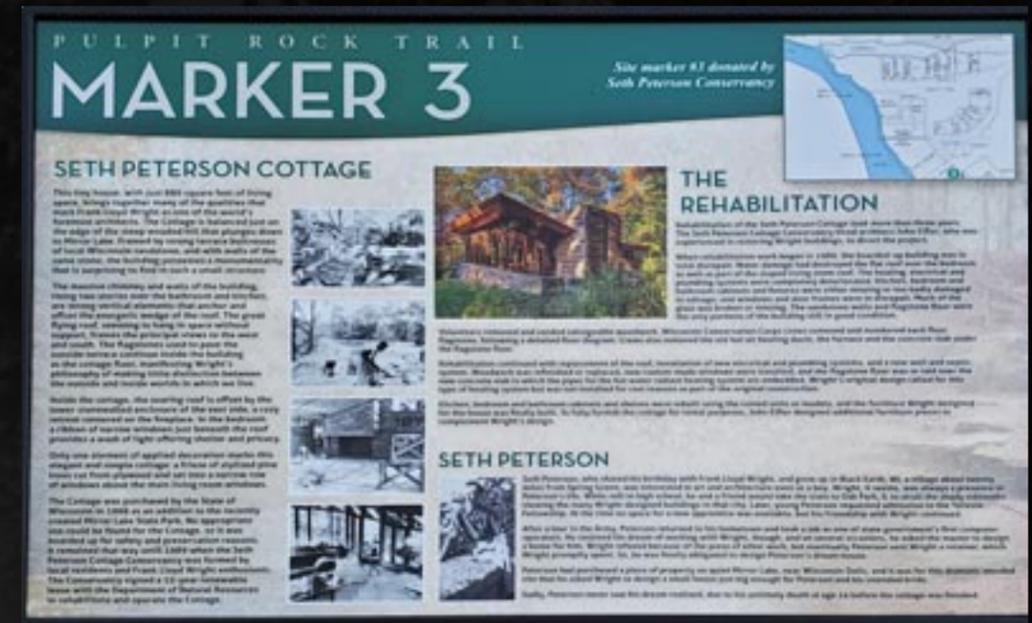
This natural wonder has all but been hidden for years, until last year, when the Mirror Lake State Park staff improved the Pulpit Rock Trail and erected informational markers that tell the natural and manmade history of the area.

It was inhabited first by Native Americans and then by a very close-knit group of cottage and cabin owners that called themselves “Fern Dellers.”

The cabins and cottages were bought by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) when Mirror Lake State Park was being developed back in the mid-1960s.

There are now 16 informational markers, with the third marker telling the history of the Seth Peterson Cottage.

The next time you’re staying at the cottage—or in the area for our monthly open house—take a walk back in time to enjoy the Pulpit Rock Trail. Also of note is what DNR describes as a “...breathtaking overlook (of) the upper narrows of the lake and the beautiful sandstone cliffs that surround the lake.”



© Brian R. Hammen

## FROM THE GUESTBOOK

Our four wonderful kids gave us this fabulous holiday to celebrate our 55th anniversary. The best unwinding, relaxing, joyful space of time closing out the chaos and worry of 2020. We'll all continue to be careful (masks, etc), looking forward to better health for all in 2021, and perhaps less division in our county. Views, birds, walks, fires all from within and outside this very special cottage. Thank you to all who contribute to its upkeep.

Marcia & Tom  
Hortonville

Wow—what a special little place this is. A wonderful (pandemic) getaway for my 30th birthday. FLW has gifted us all with his architecture, an opportunity to enjoy for generations to come. Thank you for everything This place will not be forgotten.

Tyler & Nickie

We booked in 2019 as a 50th wedding anniversary gift to ourselves. Then COVID-19 happened, and we postponed a year. We are here now, vaccinated and feeling like life will return to a new normal. This place is the perfect place to put a period on a very difficult year. The cottage has everything necessary for a quiet interlude in the woods. Being untethered from the world and connected to nature is healing our bodies and souls. We truly appreciate the work of the conservancy and the care taken to provide such a comfortable experience. FLW knew how to create peace and space for the soul.

Dave & Lynn

We came here to celebrate our 14th wedding anniversary, and this gem in the woods did not disappoint. We booked this two years ago before the pandemic, and we didn't want to pass up the opportunity to stay here. Having the



opportunity to appreciate all of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural details in such a peaceful setting was exactly what we needed after such a tough year last year.

Chuck & Pam  
New Brighton, Minnesota

Despite having to wait a year to celebrate my husband's 50th birthday at this beautiful cottage designed by FLW, we had an amazing time. The pandemic moved our visit from December to August, and we had a beautiful summer day. Seth Peterson had the right idea, social distancing before it was mandatory. We all loved the collapsed boundaries between indoors and outdoors as we could feel a part of nature.

The Riske Family  
Downers Grove, Illinois



*Above:* A new cooktop is installed.

## SEASONS OF CARE

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The second summer project was unexpected. The original exterior electrical outlet on the lakeside terrace was installed just 2 inches above the stone terrace. Over the years, it slowly rusted out until the GFI outlet installed as part of the 1992 rehabilitation finally shorted out in July.

This project was more than just a simple electrical project. Before the new code-compliant junction box and outlet could be installed, the old box and wiring had to be removed. The stone around the old box was cut out, and the stone where the new box was to be installed had to be removed. A new box and outlet were installed and rewired, and new stone was mortared in place.

This repair entailed two visits by the stone mason and three trips by the electrician. This all had to be coordinated around our guests checking in and out over a six-week period. The project is done, and we now have a code compliant covered GFI outlet on the terrace.

## MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

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and have now established trails leading from that parking area to the highlands and ridges along the narrows of Mirror Lake. The new trails will provide a significant expansion of snowshoeing trails in winter and will showcase a beautiful area of the park and lake all year long. This is a limited development trail and will give hikers a more rustic experience than many of our wider hiking and skiing trails. We hope to highlight this less-developed portion of the park while not changing the character of the area.

The trail will be open for hiking and snowshoeing in the next month or so, and we will continue to make improvements as the weather allows.

We also have completed our water system shut down for the year and have moved to our off-season camping operations. Each year near the end of October we close most of our campgrounds and shut down water systems throughout the park. Water will remain available at the park office, and there are eight sites that remain available for hearty campers in the winter. If you are reading this article near a cozy fire at home (or maybe in the Seth Peterson Cottage), think of those campers making the most of a tent and a campfire!

It makes me happy to see visitors enjoying the park all year—and maybe a little cold thinking about sleeping in a tent.

Winter camping is just one example of all the great year-round recreation opportunities available at Mirror Lake and all the other Wisconsin state parks. The park system is a great value and incredible asset for Wisconsin. Every season offers a wide range of activities for visitors. I encourage you to take advantage of the parks all year long while enjoying hiking trails, camping, skiing, fishing, biking, bird watching and so many other activities.

Those of you that may be reading this article before or during your stay at the cottage, please be sure to take a little time to appreciate not only the amazing architecture and beauty of the buildings but also the incredible natural beauty surrounding them. Take a short walk down the driveway to the trails across the road, wander down to the lake or take a meander through the woods.

One of the things that most impresses me about the cottage is the different feel and experience a person can have from season to season. No matter the season, I am proud that the cottage is here at Mirror Lake State Park and that so many people have been able to enjoy it all year long.



*Left:* Board president Kermit Traska, far left, presents the Kristin Visser Historical Preservation Award to the 2021 winners: Lauren and Nick Witkowski. They own the William Drummond-designed Brookfield Kindergarten (1911) in Brookfield, Illinois.

## MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION REPORT

*By Marcus Jaeger, President*

My friends tease me, and my family just rolls their eyes when I have someone new on the boat. Apparently, I sound like a tour guide during a boat ride on Mirror Lake. From Timmes Mill to Ishnala and from the Devil's Postoffice to the Star of Mirror Lake, my guests are subjected to the history of my favorite lake. It's no different as we enter the west end. In spring and in autumn, I am able to point out the Seth Peterson Cottage. Come the end of June, I can point out the cottage, but it's mostly hidden by the trees. Hidden or not, I still talk about the cottage and its history.

In my last article, I wrote about my former neighbor—Audrey Laatsch. I witnessed firsthand her dedication. Since becoming president of the Mirror Lake Association and joining the board of the Seth Peterson Conservancy, I see that same dedication in the current board. Restoring the cottage was a lot of work, but, make no mistake, maintaining the cottage as well as everything else that goes into this project is a ton of work. These folks take on the task with relish.

The Mirror Lake Association was able to resume group social activities this year. In June we held our annual meeting, albeit outdoors, at the Bluewater Pavillion in the state park. The day was warm, and, being outdoors, those who wished were able to spread out and still participate. Tom Ritzenthaler served as our guest speaker and spoke of his ties with the Hoffman family of Ishnala. Also interesting is that Tom has constructed a new home on Mirror Lake, just the second home built on the lake in the past 15 years.

Our picnic was held in August, and we were back at the state park. Again, it was a wonderful turnout and really fun to see our lake family together.

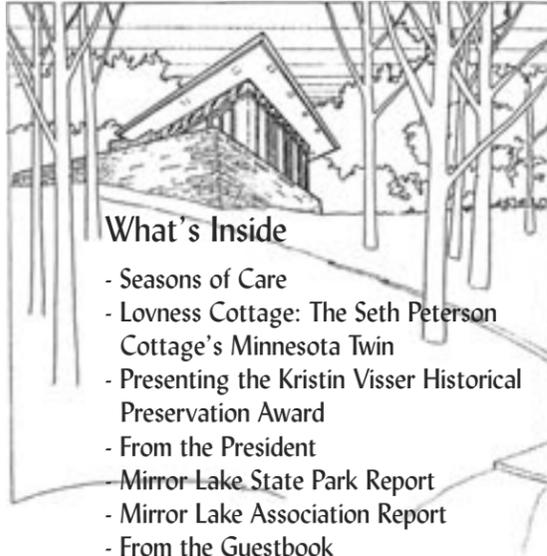
Labor day weekend saw our annual flotilla take place. This year we saw nine pontoon boats linked up in the center of the lake. Year after year, this event proves to be a lot of fun for all.

# WRITINGS

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

**Note:** Cottage location in map below

## Address Service Requested



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Want to learn more about Frank Lloyd Wright's work in Wisconsin? Visit [WrightInWisconsin.org](http://WrightInWisconsin.org).

## UPCOMING EVENTS

### Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour

- Dec. 23 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Jan. 9 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- Feb. 13 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- March 13 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- April 10 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- May 8 1 to 4 p.m. \$5
- June 12 1 to 4 p.m. \$5

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

### Annual Meeting & Volunteer Recognition

- 4 p.m. Dec. 12. RSVP by sending an e-mail to [sethpetersoncottage@gmail.com](mailto:sethpetersoncottage@gmail.com). The meeting lasts approximately one hour. After, we'll have social time and dinner.

✓ 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 each month.

For more information about the cottage, visit us online at [SethPeterson.org](http://SethPeterson.org).

