



JACK AND GLORIA GRABOW HOUSE

HOWE-DESIGNED HOME WINS 2023 KRISTIN VISSER PRESERVATION AWARD



The John Howe-designed Jack and Gloria Grabow House (1970) in Rochester, Minn., is the winner of the 2023 Kristin Visser Historical Preservation Award. The bi-annual award has been presented since 2007 by the board of directors of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy.

The Grabow House is owned by Ellen Bendel-Stenzel and her late husband Michael. Ellen, seen in the photo to the left with her children Lilly and Linus, graciously shared this story:

My family undertook a complete rehabilitation of the house after purchasing it in the autumn of 2020. Work was completed in the early months of 2022, after a long construction campaign undertaken at the height of pandemic-induced supply chain disruptions and construction delays.

The result is stunning, but there is a story behind the house and this restoration that bears telling. After relocating

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WRITINGS

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

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RESERVATIONS

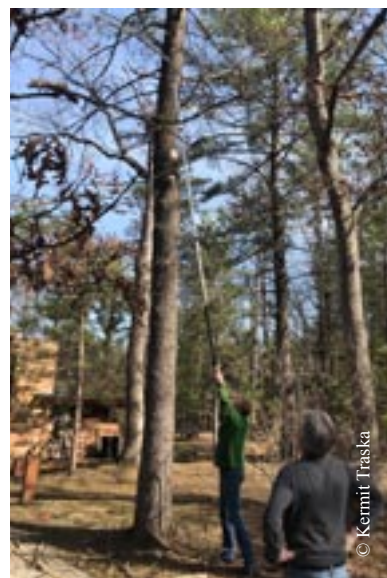
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2023 COTTAGE WORK WEEK



Board members and volunteers completed a number of projects to maintain the cottage during our annual work week in April.



FROM THE PRESIDENT

By Kermit Traska


Looking back and looking forward. It's hard to believe the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy has been operating the Seth Peterson Cottage more than 30 years. The use has grown to where we are fully booked a year and one-half to two years in advance.

While this is good news for the stable financial support of the cottage, it also brings up a real concern. How are we going to be able to ensure the architectural integrity of the facility with so much use? The board of directors will be diving into this issue in the coming year to develop a long-range plan to make sure we care for the historic and architectural significance of the cottage while continuing to make it available for public rental and monthly open houses.

There are three natural components of the cottage: stone, wood and glass. Each has proven durable, given the considerable use they have received. The woodwork requires occasional refinishing, and the window glass needs cleaning. Regular maintenance is provided by our rental agency and the annual spring work week projects that keep everything in good condition and looking great. There is a brief update in this newsletter on the accomplishments during this year's work week.

The emails from our website come to me asking two regular questions: Is the cottage available in the near future? When is the next open house? Unfortunately, the first inquiry must be answered with, "Sorry, there are no vacancies in the next 12 to 18 months." We encourage people to regularly check the website as cancellations do occur, though vacancies are usually filled quickly. So keep checking!

Open houses are held the second Sunday of every month from 1 to 4 p.m. Interestingly, most of the people coming for the open houses arrive right at 1 p.m. This makes for a very busy time for tours at the start and not much activity from 2:30 to 4 p.m. If you are planning on visiting the cottage for a tour on an open house day, it is better to arrive after 2 or 2:30 p.m. This will spread out the tours, making it a more enjoyable time for visitors and tour guides.

The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy is a membership organization. You can renew your membership or become a new member to help support the conservancy by going to our website: sethpeterson.org. Click on "The Conservancy" and then "Membership." We look forward to your continuing support. 

MIRROR LAKE ASSOCIATION REPORT

By Marcus Jaeger, President

Greetings from the middle of Mirror Lake! Just two days ago, I wore a t-shirt and shorts as I did some clean up down by the dock. It was warm. Then I grabbed something to drink and read outside for at least an hour. Some 48




Above: The cottage during this spring's annual work week

hours later, as I write this article, there is over seven inches of snow on the ground! This weather is sure goofy.

As we gear up for a wonderful summer, there is plenty of work to do. Due to the storm we experienced in December (rain, then a quick freeze, followed by a heavy snow), there is an unprecedented amount of trees in the lake. In a normal year, we have four or five trees down, but I hazard a guess how many we have now—maybe as much as 10 times that! Very few companies are equipped to remove these trees and the ones that do are not inexpensive. Those of you who are fisherpeople (one of Audrey Laatsch's expressions, by the way) know that we keep some trees in the lake to provide important habitats for the fish. Trees are removed primarily for ease of navigation. There will be plenty of habitat this year. I hope the fish appreciate it.

As president of the Mirror Lake Association, I encourage you, as you visit the Seth Peterson Cottage, to spread your wings a bit and explore Mirror Lake. The beauty that Seth himself saw as he selected a spot for his cottage still exists today.

As I am thinking and writing about what Seth must have seen, my thoughts go to my grandparents, Otto and Jeanette Jaeger. They came to the Wisconsin Dells on their honeymoon in 1924. While on that trip, they purchased a lot just a bit west of the cottage. To say the lake has not changed in those 99 years would not be accurate. However, I believe it has changed less than just about anywhere else. My neighbors on the lake and I never tire of the beauty of nature here on Mirror Lake. That beauty extends to the wildlife—ducks, eagles, ospreys and birds of all types live alongside fox, beaver, otter, deer, squirrels (a billion squirrels!) and a rare bear. Hey, I almost left out cranes! You can find cranes nesting on the west end of the lake this time of year.

Well, I am going out to shovel some more snow, doggone it! Thank you for your support of the Seth Peterson Cottage. There are many wonderful, committed people putting in countless hours to preserve this jewel in Mirror Lake State Park. 



Above: Seth Peterson may have been Frank Lloyd Wright's youngest client. This is his high school graduation photo from 1954.




UNPACKING THE ARCHIVES

By Bill Martinelli

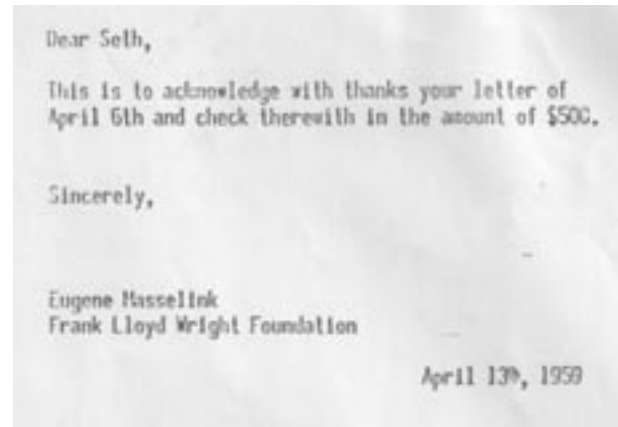
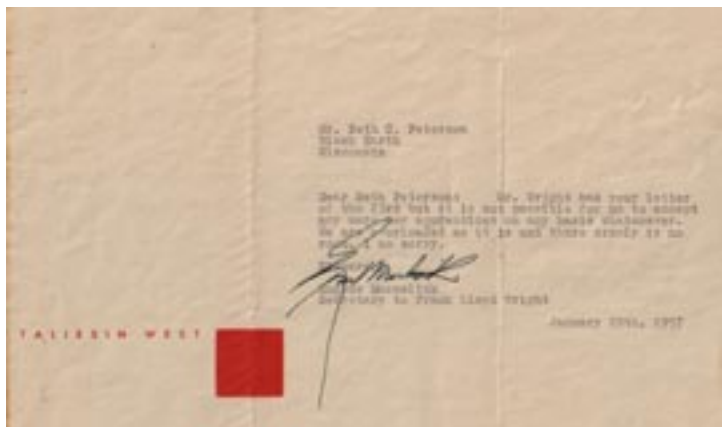
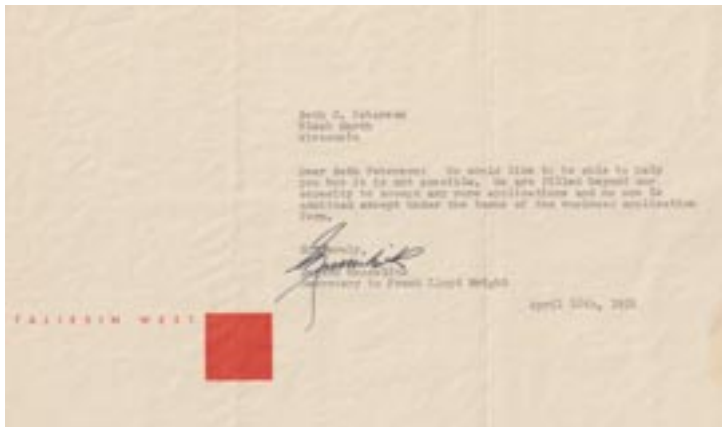
Dear Mr. Wright," the letter from Seth Peterson to Frank Lloyd Wright begins. "Please credit my account with the enclosed check for the amount of \$500."

The April 6, 1959, payment was mailed from Black Earth, where Seth was born, to Taliesin in Spring Green—just three days ahead of Wright's death. Wright and Seth shared the same birthday of June 8.

Seth long admired Wright's architecture. He often traveled to Oak Park to see Wright's work there and attended events at Taliesin. As a computer programmer for the state of Wisconsin, Seth attended an event in Madison where Wright spoke to promote one of his projects. Seth twice applied to become an apprentice with the Taliesin Fellowship and was twice declined.

Thankfully, Seth's request for Wright to design a cottage for a wooded bluff he owned overlooking Mirror Lake was granted. I thought you might enjoy seeing some of the correspondence we have in the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy archives. 

Left: These letters show the rejection of Seth's submittal letters to join the Taliesin Fellowship. It was always thought that Seth applied to join Taliesin once, but these two letters show he applied twice—and Taliesin was at capacity both times.

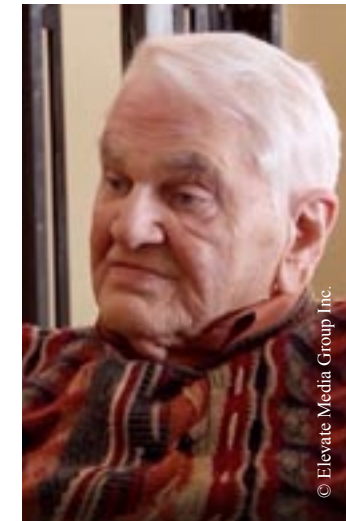
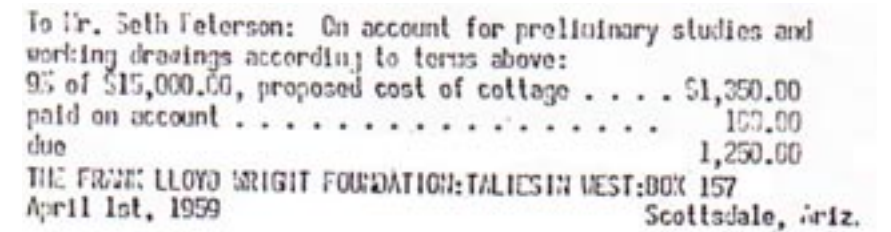


Above left: Construction of the cottage is well underway in this 1959 photo.

Top: This letter from Seth was sent to Wright on April 6, 1959, along with a check for \$500 to deposit on the account for the cottage design. We do not have any other evidence of when the rest of the account was paid.

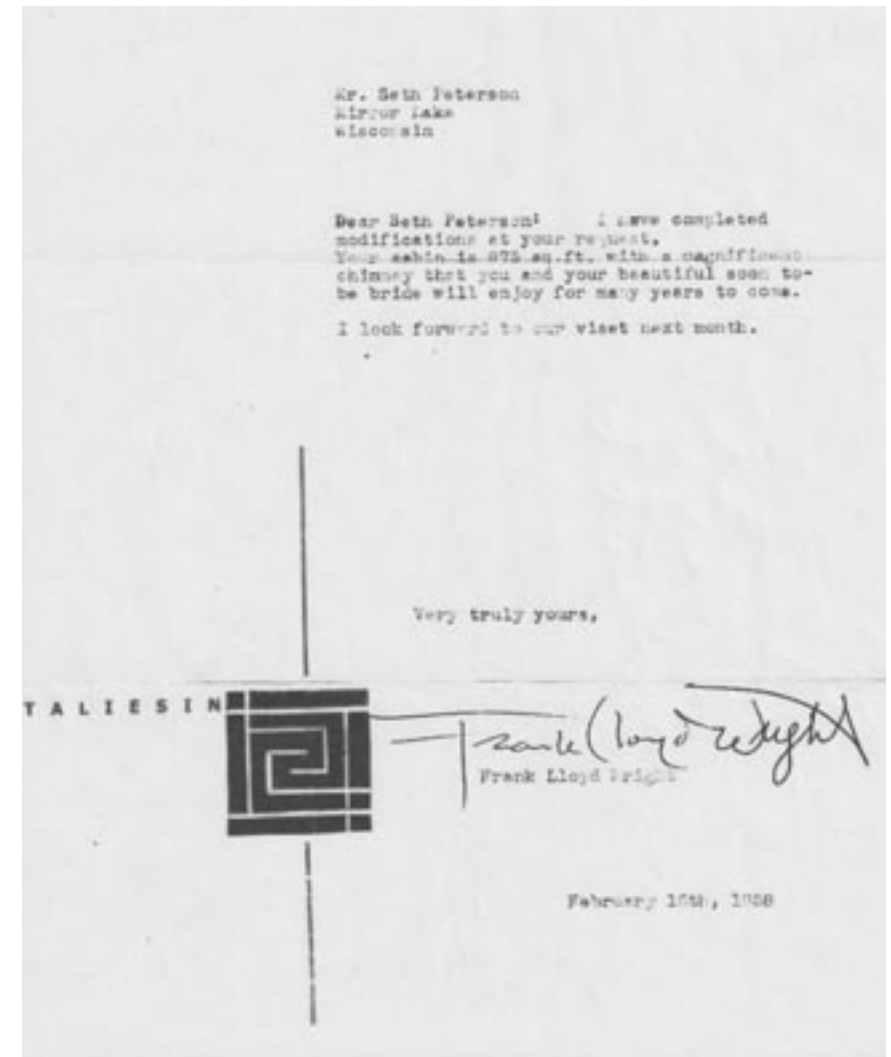
Above: This letter, dated April 13, 1959, acknowledges the receipt of Seth's \$500 check. Wright died 4 days prior.

Right: This letter from Wright, dated Feb. 16, 1958, acknowledges the completion of the plans for the cottage. It is interesting that Wright is aware of Seth's engagement and that Seth will be visiting Taliesin in March, I assume, to finalize the construction drawings.



Above: This invoice, dated April 1, 1959, shows the estimated cost of the cottage to be \$15,000, with a 9% design fee of \$1,350. Also interesting is that it shows \$100 already being paid on account—putting to rest the story that Seth had sent Wright a check for \$1,000 that Wright subsequently cashed and forced him to take on the commission.

Left: Seth's childhood friend, Bert D. Goderstad, held on to—and then donated—many of the items in the Seth Peterson Cottage archives.



FROM THE GUESTBOOK

Another great stay. Magical place. Difficult to explain the feelings associated with staying here but feel them instantly we did! We will come back periodically for as long as circumstances allow. Hike, swim, canoe, rest, recharge. It's all here.

Michael & Heather
Twin Cities, Minn.

Our first visit to Seth Peterson was 30 years ago to celebrate my 30th birthday. We've been regular visitors since then, but this will probably be our final visit. Seth's cottage was always the place where we made our best meals and drank our best wine. But over the years we've realized we don't really need to go anywhere to do these things, and you can do them a lot more often if you don't have to wait for your reservation! That's not to say that Seth's cottage isn't a super cool place, so enjoy your stay. We feel fortunate to have been able to enjoy it all these years. Thanks so much to all who've made it possible!

John & Pamela
Minneapolis

We came to celebrate our 44th anniversary and the beauty of fall in Wisconsin. This is a magical place—a wonderful experience to spend time in a work of art.

John & Shelly
Fort Atkinson, Wisc.

First time in January 2020 and the second time here we've completed half the circle. We now have spring and summer to complete the year's seasons. The cottage is everything it's meant to be—quiet, serene, inspiring, simple, comfortable. Now to book for spring and summer—which we will. This place is a gem. Thanks for preserving it and its land for all.

Peggy & Denis

We all had a fun time at the cottage. A very nice way to spend the new year. Conor won the most games of Sequence, so he got to sleep in the bed. It started snowing on our last night. With our fire roaring, it was very serene. Gorgeous nature, good friends, memorable experiences. I definitely won more games of Sequence but let Conor take the bed out of generosity. A camp cot near the fizzling-out fire was cozy anyways. Much appreciation to those who keep the cottage looking so well cleaned and true to Wright's design.

Conor, Victor & Letie



Above: Sandstone outcroppings along Mirror Lake


MIRROR LAKE STATE PARK REPORT

By Patrick Cieslewicz, Park Superintendent

In early December, Mirror Lake experienced a heavy wet snow that knocked down trees and branches throughout the park. Staff spent more than two weeks cutting and removing trees and branches from the ski trails to allow our grooming equipment to prepare the trails for the skiing season. Overall, the ski conditions remained fair for the winter and even offered a few warm weather skiing days into March. Several hundred people attended our January and February candlelight hike/snowshoe and ski events. These are always well-attended events and are made successful with the help of our many volunteers.

As the weather is warming and the snow is melting, staff are starting the process of spring cleanup of the campgrounds, beach and boat landing area. They're turning on the water to our toilet and shower buildings. The Sandstone and Cliffwood campgrounds opened for camping on April 28, and the Bluewater Bay campground opened on May 5. Our current reservations for the upcoming summer show that it will be another busy season.

The Friends of Mirror Lake was awarded multiple Knowles-Nelson Stewardship grants for updates to the drinking fountain in the main office at Mirror Lake, a new firewood storage shed in the Bluewater Bay Campground and new maps and interpretive signs throughout Mirror Lake. The Friends of Mirror Lake is a great partner to Mirror Lake State Park and provides financial assistance for development projects and our part-time naturalist.

If you find yourself at the cottage this summer, please spend some time enjoying the beauty of Mirror Lake, the sandstone outcroppings of Rocky Arbor State Park or the breathtaking views of the Wisconsin River from the Dells of the Wisconsin River State Natural Area. 



GRABOW HOUSE

continued from cover

my medical practice to the Mayo Clinic, I lived in an apartment with no intention of buying property (other than our) family home we loved in Edina. My husband had different ideas. He discovered the Grabow House and was instantly in love. His passion gradually led me to concede, and our good friend and real estate agent, Curt MacKenzie, (helped) us make Michael's dream a reality. After having our offer accepted, we were surprised to see it featured in the Minneapolis "Star Tribune." Michael joked that it made it easy to describe to our curious family and friends.

It was important to us to maintain the original intent and integrity of John Howe's design, so we hired Tim Quigley, of Quigley Architects, to oversee the project. His book on John Howe's architecture was on the coffee table when we toured the house, so I Googled and blind-called him, requesting his help. His reply ("I am retired and only

accept projects I'm passionate about, and I'm passionate about this.") delighted us, and we began the process prior to closing. Unfortunately, three days after purchasing the house, the unimaginable became my reality.

While driving to visit our daughter in Iowa, our car was struck by a distracted driver. Michael was killed, and I was left with critical, life-threatening injuries, with lesser ones for our son.

As I gradually recovered, I had thoughts of abandoning the project, but my college-age children and I decided to forge ahead as a tribute to my husband and his love of the house. I managed to make project decisions and persevere with the support of my design friends who had all met Michael prior to his death and understood the importance to our family of moving ahead.

Tim patiently supported and chauffeured me as we picked out materials and appliances, never judging me even though I often cried during these outings. Michael and I had worked for years with Anne Klemm Rogers, of Da-




nish Teak Classics, and she also took the redecorating design on as a mission of love.

Our contractors, Springline Builders, also embraced this project, despite the difficulties of distance to Rochester and COVID-19 shortages. Curt was a never-ending source of support.

Michael referred to the house as our "cabin," since a second home in Minnesota should be designated as such in his eyes. Through the support and love of so many people who picked me up at the lowest point of my life, we have created an amazing home that is full of family pictures and treasures that remind us of Michael.

It has become a family legacy in tribute to his amazing spirit and I am grateful for my children's support and the teamwork of compassionate professionals that went above-and-beyond to make this a reality.

Editor's note: *This article has been lightly edited for length.* 

WRITINGS

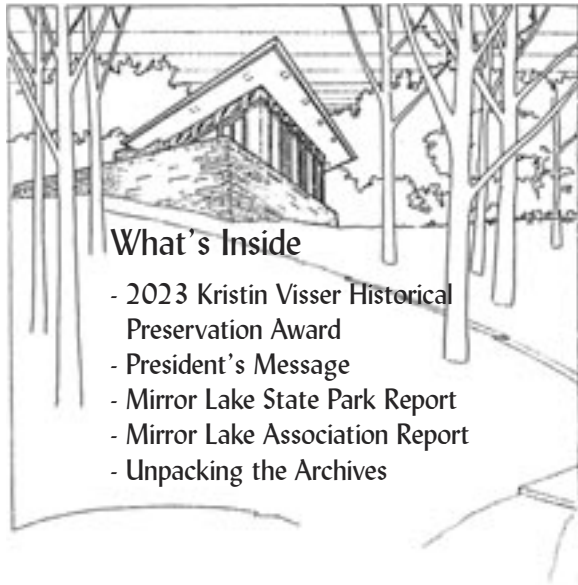
The Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy Inc.

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Note: Cottage location appears in the map below.

Address Service Requested



What's Inside

- 2023 Kristin Visser Historical Preservation Award
- President's Message
- Mirror Lake State Park Report
- Mirror Lake Association Report
- Unpacking the Archives

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

UPCOMING EVENTS

Seth Peterson Cottage Open House and Guided Tour

- | | | |
|------------|-------------|------|
| • June 4 | 1 to 4 p.m. | Free |
| • June 11 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • July 9 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Aug. 13 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Sept. 10 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Oct. 15 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |
| • Nov. 12 | 1 to 4 p.m. | \$5 |

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

Become a Member of the Seth Peterson Cottage Conservancy

More information is available on our website, sethpeterson.org. Click "Membership," under "The Conservancy" on the top menu.

Visitors find touring the cottage a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon. Take a scenic drive and experience firsthand this restored Frank Lloyd Wright-designed home

during the open house tours held on the second Sunday of each month.

For more information about the cottage, visit us online at SethPeterson.org.

Seth Peterson Cottage
E9982 Fern Dell Road
Lake Delton, Wisconsin

