



THE FRANCIS AND MARY LITTLE HOUSE: *FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT'S DEEPHAVEN MASTERPIECE*

If you live in Deephaven, you really should know the story of one of its most famous residences. A person must now travel to three cities (Minneapolis, New York, and Allentown, Pennsylvania) to visit the pieces that remain of this classic bit of local history. But here, we've compiled the tale.

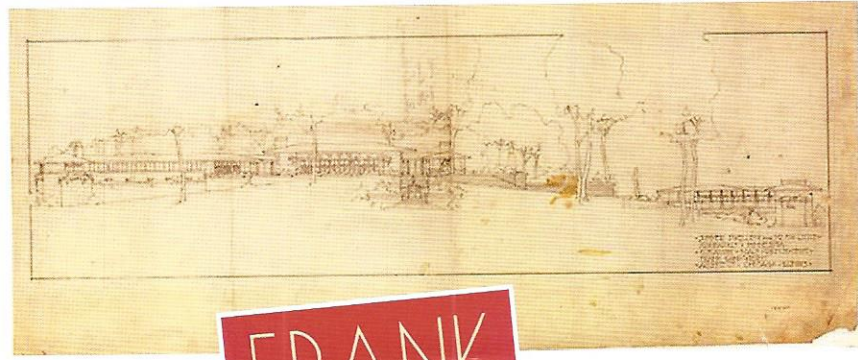
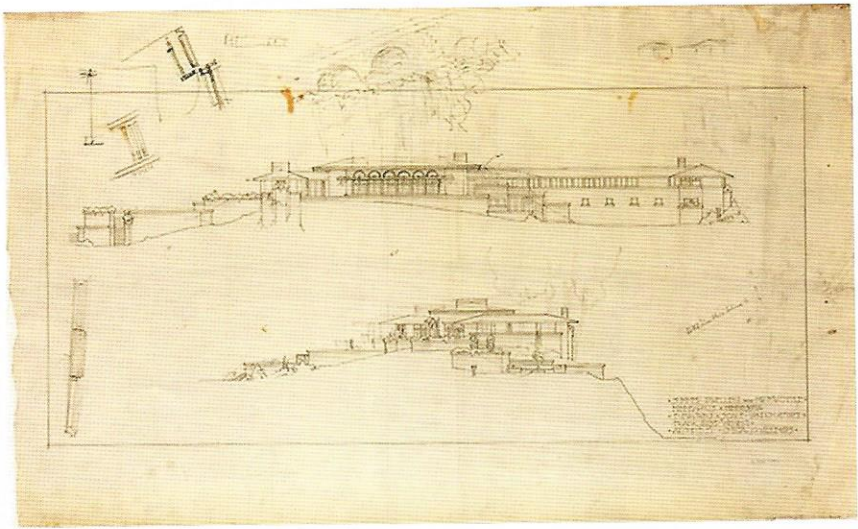
Around 1906, Francis Little, a lawyer and owner of a utilities company, was advised to move north from his home in Peoria, Illinois, for health reasons. Upon arriving in Minnesota, he moved into a house in the Kenwood area of Minneapolis with his wife, Mary, and their daughter, Eleanor. In 1907, he purchased land in Deephaven, Minnesota, about ten miles west of Minneapolis, overlooking scenic Lake Minnetonka. (We know the neighborhood as Northome.)

And around 1908, the Littles commissioned Frank Lloyd Wright, who had designed their home in Peoria, to design a summer residence for them on the lake site; initial plans were drawn that same year. Because Wright left for Europe in 1909, returned in 1911, and then spent part of 1913 in Japan, the house was not completed until 1914. Although several letters from Mr. Little to Wright indicate his frustration with the delay, the Littles had a close relationship with Wright and were willing to wait for him rather than choose another architect. During this time, the Littles spent their summers on the lake property in a cottage that Mr. Little designed in the style of Wright's work.

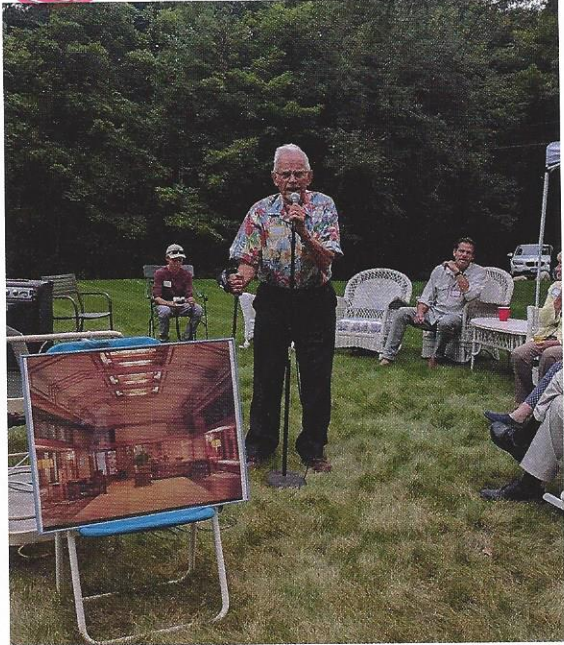
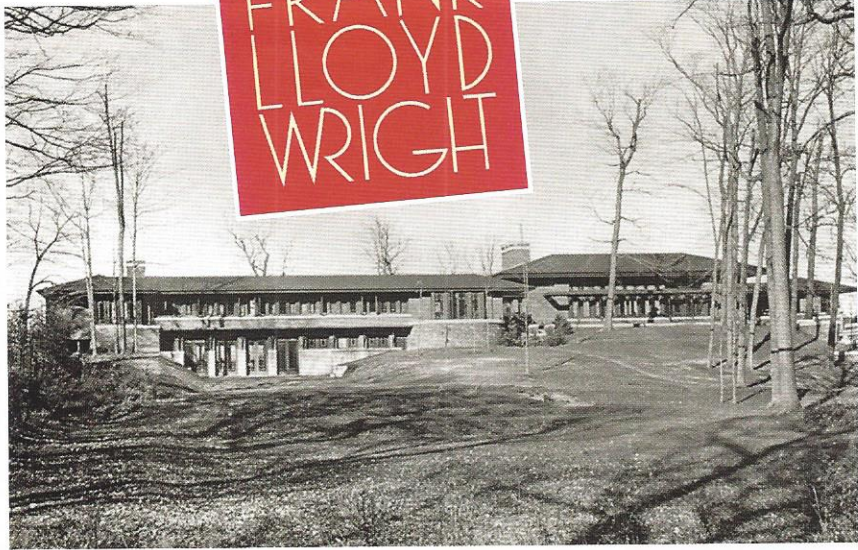
Wright designed one of his last great Prairie School-style residences for the Littles. It consisted of two offset rectangles joined at the corner, which formed a single 250-foot axis parallel to the lakeshore. The characteristic long, low, hipped-roofed building hugged two gentle hills overlooking the lake. Windows spanned the entire lakeside elevation, giving the Littles full advantage of the scenic view; Wright, who drew elaborate designs for the windows, and Mr. Little, who did not want an intricate design that would obscure his view, discussed this feature at length. The most spacious and elegant room of the house was the large living/music room designed especially for Mrs. Little, an accomplished pianist who had studied under the composer Franz Liszt in Cologne and who planned to host recitals at the house. The sprawling brick-walled and wood-trim dwelling also included an appropriately grand entrance stair of thirty-six steps in three levels.

After Mr. Little died in 1923, Mrs. Little moved into her husband's cottage and gave the summer home to Eleanor and her husband, Raymond Stevenson. Around 1951, the Stevensons sold their Minneapolis home, "winterized" the summer house, and moved in full-time. By the late 1960s, the Stevensons had grown weary of the challenges of living in a Wright-designed building—its large size, rising property taxes, built-in furnishings that were difficult to change, and numerous uninvited visitors. Not wanting to move or tear down the Wright house and yet wanting something smaller put the Stevensons in a difficult situation because city

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FRANK
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A photo from our November issue: Jim Haverstock this fall at a Northome neighborhood gathering, sharing about the Frank Lloyd Wright "Little House," which was part of his family. The living/music room is where Jim and his wife were married.

zoning ordinances would not allow them to build another home on the same lot.

Since no local buyer or institution could be found to save the house, a group of Wright enthusiasts contacted officials at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York to see if they might be able to purchase it for installation. The Metropolitan bought the house in 1972, allowing the Stevensons to retain the property. Portions of the interior were dismantled piece by piece for future installation in the Metropolitan and to sell to other institutions. That same year, the Metropolitan sold the library of the Little House to the Allentown [Pennsylvania] Art Museum and a hallway to The Minneapolis Institute of Arts; in 1982, the large living/music room was installed in the New York museum. The Minneapolis Institute of Arts has installed its hallway, which originally connected to another hall leading to the master bedroom, in its Ulrich Architecture and Design Gallery.

