

**Minneapolis Institute of Arts  
Accessions Proposal**

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Curator: Jennifer Komar Olivarez  
Department: Decorative Arts, Textiles, and  
Sculpture  
Date: November 16, 2011

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1. Description and Summary of Object or Group of Objects (please include image):

Loan Number: None assigned

Artist/Maker (nationality and date): Architectural firm of Purcell, Feick and Elmslie: William Gray Purcell (American, 1880-1965), George Feick, Jr. (American, 1881-1945), and George Grant Elmslie (American, born Scotland, 1869-1952)

Title/Object: Purcell-Cutts House

Date: 1913

Medium: Various

Dimensions (inches & cms): Various

Signed, marked or inscribed: Not marked

Country of manufacture: United States

Vendor/Donor: Anson Cutts, Jr.

For gifts check this box if a Deed of Gift has been completed.

Credit Line: Bequest of Anson Cutts

Present Location: 2328 Lake Place, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 55405

Price/Value:

2. Artist, Style, and explanation of the proposed object:

In 1913, architects William Gray Purcell and George Grant Elmslie designed a house that remains one of the most significant examples of the Prairie School style of architecture in the country. Built for Purcell's own family and named for Purcell's wife Edna, the house, near Lake of the Isles in Minneapolis, incorporated Purcell's talent for innovative residential planning with Elmslie's ingenious and exacting decorative detail. Their modest but stunning home is considered the most complete embodiment of Purcell and Elmslie's architectural philosophy. (Although the firm was known as Purcell, Feick and Elmslie at the time, George Feick is not considered a design partner for the house, and left the firm soon after).

Purcell wanted a house that would support a modern way of life for his family. He and Elmslie followed progressive Chicago architect Louis Sullivan's principles of organic architecture, creating an original and beautiful home that would be a strong contrast to the revival-style houses popular at the time. Sullivan believed the design of a building should reflect the structure's place and time in history, as well as be compatible to its site and natural surroundings. Purcell and Elmslie employed Sullivan's "system of ornament," a decorative philosophy based on natural forms that unified the design of progressive structures of this period. Their interpretation of Sullivan's principles included such Prairie School elements as a nearly flat roof, an open interior plan, earthen colors, and over eighty art-glass windows. Combining these elements with custom-designed stencils, furniture and artworks, they produced an architectural gem that suited the family's contemporary needs.

Purcell and his family lived in the house for only a few years before relocating to Philadelphia and later to Portland, Oregon. Anson Cutts and his wife, Edna, who purchased the house in 1919, realized it was architecturally relevant and did not significantly alter it during their residency. In 1985, the couple's son, Anson Cutts, Jr., bequeathed the house to The Minneapolis Institute of Arts along with funds for its restoration. In 1990, after a three-year restoration process, the house was opened to the public and is now known as the Purcell-Cutts House.

**In 1990, the decision was made by the MIA to accession the art glass components of the house and the five living room pendant lights (MIA 90.92.1-85); in 2005, the two sawed-wood panels from the end of the entrance beam were removed to the MIA due to deterioration, and accessioned as 2005.122.1,2 (one panel is on view in Gallery 300). It is now felt that the entire house should be treated as an art object, and should be accessioned at this time.**

3. Condition: Good.

4. Provenance: Anson Cutts, Sr. [1866-1949] and Edna Cutts [b. Edna Browning Stokes, 1875-1976]; Anson Cutts, Jr.[1905-1985], 1976-1985; the Minneapolis Institute of Arts, 1985-present.

5. Related Objects: Both the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Art Institute of Chicago have top Prairie School collections, although neither museum shows their collection objects together in one gallery as is done at the MIA.

6. Complements the existing collection: The Purcell-Cutts House is the gem in the crown of the MIA's Prairie School collection, which is in the top three of this material (see #5 above). It relates very strongly to the large group of furnishings, architectural elements, and objects by Purcell and Elmslie, Frank Lloyd Wright (including the hallway from the Francis Little House, 72.11), and George Washington Maher. The MIA has the largest collection of objects by Purcell and Elmslie: aside from the Purcell-Cutts House, numbering over 70 objects. For more information on the Prairie School collection, please see Jennifer Komar Olivarez, *Progressive Design in the Midwest: The Purcell-Cutts House and the Prairie School Collection at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts* (MIA, 2000) as well as MIA web site "Unified Vision: The Architecture and Design of the Prairie School" at <http://www.artsmia.org/unified-vision/>.

7. Plans for exhibiting: The Purcell-Cutts House is open the second weekend of each month for public tours, as well as by appointment for groups. It is also open for six weekends between Thanksgiving and New Year's Day for special holiday tours.

8. Why do you recommend the object? The Purcell-Cutts House is one of the best-preserved, stylistically significant works of Prairie School architecture in the country, and the most experimental of Purcell and Elmslie's residences. Due to the intelligence and sensitivity of its design, as well as the high craftsmanship shown throughout the house, it very successfully exhibits many of the elements of the Prairie School style of architecture. For these reasons, our visitors find great satisfaction in visits to the house, and it is also of significance to students and scholars of this material throughout the world.

**It is now understood that the house should be treated as a complete accessioned object in the collection, rather than only some components being accessioned objects and the house treated as a fixed asset (building) of the MIA. This will assure the house's proper preservation and status as a work of art in the MIA's collection.**

9. Comparable market prices:

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*Signature and Date*