

# Mahony-A Woman in Architecture

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**Abstract**—It's very hard to survive female in Architectural profession as gender inequalities for female in world society. Before having license of M.Mahony, there are so many male architect was famous, as for example Mies Van-Der Rohe, F L Wright, but no any female architect were famous.

After a successful growth in this profession, it was noticed that no female come to this profession. So it is need for study how they came to be an architect, what social conditions and issues come in between.

After Mahony, Terressa Coady, Eileen Grey etc will get successes in this profession. This paper discusses the problems and issues related to career building in architecture for M. Mahony's as she is female.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Architect Marion Lucy Mahony Griffin was among the first women to prove that women had the intellectual capacity, creative talent and administrative ability to contribute to the profession of architecture, previously regarded as the right of men. She was the first licensed female architect of USA. She chose this field i.e. Architecture, when it was very hard for women to pursue in any professional field. Before she came into the profession, there were already many famous male architects like FL Wright, Mies Van-der-rohe, etc.

Being the only woman in this field she was treated badly in the field, society as well as on her physical appearance. So this became a big challenge for her to continue in this profession.



**Fig. 1: Griffin and One of Her Work**

## 2. EARLY LIFE

She was born on 14 February 1871. She was a young women who was strongly determined to fulfill what her mother and her mother's friends had started to give example of women in

the community, family, society, and their respective professional work. She was a successful principal and guide for women, also a promoter of new things i.e. in the field of education and art especially for women. She was a strong women who motivated and inspired young women to give them courage and also to fulfill their ambitions and dreams.

Her childhood life was very complicated and full of struggle as a child. Her both the parents were school principals. Her father died when she was 12. After great Chicago fire, her family moved to nearby Winnetka. As she was growing there, she became very fascinated by the quickly disappearing landscape as suburban homes filled the area. She did her graduation from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T) in 1894. She sometimes struggled with her place in both society and the field. She was unsure of her ability to complete the thesis required for her bachelor's degree, but her professors pushed her forward.

As a confident young and talented graduate architect of one year experience, who approached to FL Wright in 1897, in foundation years of his practice, to work under him as an assistant architect. Wright had an affinity with such modern women, grounded in the familial example of his mother, sister and aunts, his young wife Catherine, and, over the years, some of his clients such as Susan Dana and Mameh Borthwick Cheney.

## 3. AFTER GRADUATION

After graduation, Mahony worked in her cousin's firm which was located in Steinway hall at 64e. Van Buren in downtown Chicago. That space was shared by many other architects like Robert c. Spencer, Myron Hunt, Webster Tomlinson, Birch long and Frank Lloyd wright. She was the first employee hired by FL Wright in 1895, where she designed building, windows, furniture, stained glass and decorative panels. She was not only architect but also she helped design most of the inside of the Wright home. She was never given the credit for her beautiful water colour rendering of buildings and landscape which was came to known as a staple of Wright's style.

Barry a member of Wright's studio recalled:

*"She was the most talented member of FL Wright's staff. Mr. Wright would occasionally sit at Marion's board and work on*

her drawing *And I recall one hilarious occasion when his work ruined the drawings.*

*On that occasion Andrew Willatzen, an outspoken member of the staff, Loudly proclaimed that Marion Mahony was Wright's superior draftsmen. As a matter of fact she was, Wright took statement of her superiority equably."*

Marion's first independent architectural opportunity came in 1903 with the commission she received from her pastor, James Villa Blake, to design a new church for the Unitarian congregation of 'All Souls'. She had a democratic modern approach of "Form Follows Function". Although she was not able to please the church committee who favored revival style. But they must have been thrilled by the mural she executed herself on reredos wall, and also with the art glass skylight and beautifully disciplined interior. She had an organic simplicity and intimacy in her version on Gothic which did not save it from demolishing in 1962.

Ms. Birmingham points out those architectural historians who acknowledge Mahony have tended to focus on her relationships with men and on her physical appearance, often in unflattering terms. (She was frequently described as homely, though Brendan Gill, in "Many Masks," his 1987 biography of Wright, called her a "gaunt, beaky beauty.")

One of those Australians, Christopher Vernon of the University of Western Australia, has written extensively of Mahony's talent as a designer. Mr. Van Zanten goes so far as to say that Mahony, after Wright and Louis Sullivan, was "the third great progressive designer of turn-of-the-century Chicago."

During Mahony's whole life her work and talent was seen only as extension of male architect work. She was an important contributor to the reputation of Wright's studio, where she worked for fifteen years, particularly for the influential Wasmuth portfolio for which she created more than half of numerous rendering.

Architectural writer Reyner Bnanham called her the "Greatest architectural delineator of her generation". Her rendering of K.C DeRhodes House in South Bend, upon its completion was praised by Wright and many other critics.

According to John Lloyd Wright who was the son of FL Wright Mahony was one of the five draftsmen (three men and two women) who each made valuable contributions to Prairie style architecture for which Wright became famous.

#### 4. MAHONY WITH WRIGHT

Wright offered her studio work when he had gone to Europe in scandalous affair with Mamah Borthwick Cheney, client's wife, in 1909, which she declined. Hermann V. von Holst who had taken the Wright's commission after Wright had gone, hired Mahony with the stipulation that she would have control of design. In this capacity, Mahony was the architect for a number of commissions Wright had left. Two examples, the

first (unbuilt) design for Henry Ford's Dearborn mansion, Fair Lane and the Amberg House in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

That Mahony spent her most productive years in Australia, where she and her husband designed a plan for the new city of Canberra in 1911, has also lowered her profile in the United States. But "the Australians take Mahony as seriously as we take Frank Lloyd Wright," said David Van Zanten, a professor of art history at North western University.

She recommended Walter Burley Griffin to Von Holst to one of the project to develop landscaping area surrounding the three houses commissioned from Wright in Decatur, Illinois. Griffin was a fellow architect, a fellow ex-employee of Wright, and a leading member of the Prairie School of architecture. They both worked on Decatur project before marriage. Mahony and Walter Burley Griffin married in 1911. After their marriage, Mahony worked in Griffin's practice. Her water color perspective of Walter's design for Canberra, Austrian capital won the first prize Austrian capital in the international competition for the plan of the city. In 1914 the couple moved to Australia and left the US to oversee the building of Canberra. Couple lived there for almost 20 years. After arriving in Sydney Mahony published two articles on "Democratic Architecture" in Sydney's foremost architectural magazine "Building" in month of June, August in year 1914, Capitol House, an office building with theater in 1921, and the Eaglemont community plan in 1916-1923. In 1919, by working hard even on weekends they built themselves a small house in the yard of the Lippincott's Eaglemont house using the prefabricated Knitlock building system designed and patented by Griffin in 1918. They outwitted the local council calling it as a Doll's house.

Griffin resigned as Federal Capital Director of Design and Construction in 1920 and in 1921 they secured an option on 650 acres in Castlecrag, Sydney. Griffin formed Greater Sydney Development Association (GSDA) to purchase and develop the site as a model community.

Over next 25 years couple move to Australia, India, US designing over a hundreds of building. The one time she addressed the Illinois Society of Architects, she made no mention of her work, instead lecturing the crowd on anthroposophy, a philosophy of spiritual knowledge developed by Rudolf Steine.

#### 5. THE MAGIC OF AMERICA

In 1930 Marion would have publish their life together in a memory called: The Magic of America. For less than a year Griffin practiced in India in 1935, In 1936 she joined her husband in Lucknow, where he was designing a university library and other projects which includes residences, University buildings, a building for Pioneer Press and entire United Provinces Industrial and Agricultural Exhibition. After he died there in 1937, she returned to Australia, settled her affairs and moved home to Chicago. They both spread the

Prairie Style to two continents, far from its origins, mainly from Australia to India. Their partnership lasted for 28 years.

They both designed a development that was home to an outstanding collection of Prairie School dwellings, Rock Crest Rock Glen in Mason City, Iowa, is seen as their most dramatic American design development of the decade. It is the largest collection of Prairie Style homes surrounding a natural setting.

Mahony returned to Chicago in 1939 when she was of 68 years. There in early years of her return, during second world war she stepped back into community She advised and drew plans for projects for the World Fellowship Centre in Conway, New Hampshire and for Hills Crystals, Texas, a modified Radburn concept of residential sites with common nature reserves. The Texas plan for the Hills and Rosary Crystal subdivision revived earlier approaches to community planning. The 338-acre of site for the World Fellowship Center offered Mahony the opportunity to explore it once again ideas about community planning and democracy. Neither proceeded following Lloyd's death. A third project a plan for South Chicago did not proceed either. During this time she wrote "The Magic of America" a memorial to her life with Griffin and his life's work. The lengthy manuscript was over 1400. In her manuscript Mahony depicts herself as indissolubly fused with her husband. The memoir is divided into four sections, each casting the couple as champions of a cause. "The Imperial Battle" describes Griffin's final project, a library for the Indian city of Lucknow; "The Federal Battle" focuses on their largely failed efforts to see Canberra built as they envisioned it; and "The Civic Battle" describes Castlecrag, a planned community near Sydney that the couple designed.

The final section is "The Individual Battle," which describes the couple's struggles within American society. Mahony rails against class structure, imperialism, environmental degradation and of course Wright, whom she never names but refers to as "a cancer sore" who "originated very little but spent most of his time claiming everything and swiping everything."

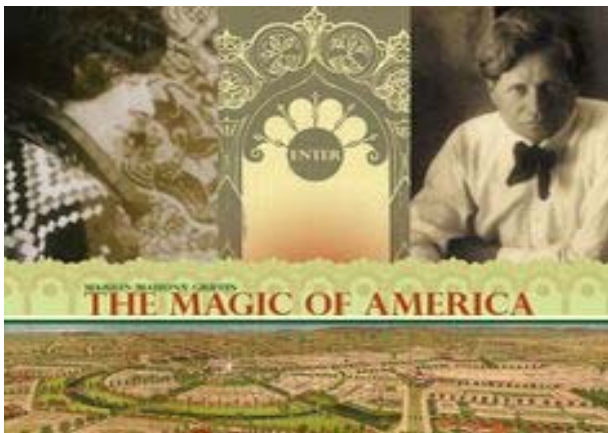


Fig. 2: The Magic of America

## 6. MAHONY PROFESSION

Her profession architectural work, Mahony was a keen horticultural, graphic designer and painter. Her art work includes a wide verity of work which includes portrait miniatures, a large mural. "Fairies Feeding the Herons" in Roger park school in 1931 and also the portraits of Australian trees on silk. In Castelcrag, Sydney she received MIT interest in theatre and was also involved in production, set and costume design for more than 12 plays in the Heaven Scenic Theatre. From 1930 when Marion Mahony joined Sydney Anthroposophical Society the teachings of founder Rudolf Steiner were a guiding force in her life. Griffin in 1931 also joined this society.

She lived and breathed architecture at a time when women were not carrier oriented. It was not an easy task but for her it was her life.

Despite her many decade career span, there are very few buildings designs which can be definitely attributed to Mahony griffin alone. Those includes her thesis project "the house and studio of a painter", in 1894, which was used a basic for Frank Lloyd Wright's addition of a studio-atelier to his own home in 1898. All soul church, Evanston Illinois in 1902, a one-storey house for herself and her mother in Chicago's Roger's Park in 1906. Adolph Muller house in Decatur, Grand Rapids and David Amberg's house, CW Wills House and drawings for the unbuilt Henry Ford House all works were in between 1909 and 1912.

## 7. MAHONY IN AUSTRALIA

In Australia, historians largely agreed that Mahony Griffin was responsible for the extra ordinary ceiling design for Melbourne's Capitol Theater (1922-1924) and also she worked on the interior design of the Café Australia in Melbourne in 1916 which was described as "extravagant and breathtaking" by an architectural historian Anna Rubbo. She was also credited for the outstanding design of Newman College at University of Melbourne in 1915 – 1918 and also the remarkable small house, Pholiota in 1922 that Griffin built for themselves in Heidelberg. Mahony registered papers at in Victoria in 1923 also stated that she was soley responsible for the design of Jeffery house in Surrey Hills in Melbourne.

Mahony worked on two "communities" for the World's Fellowship Center, in New Hampshire and in Hills Crystals, Texas in 1943 and plan for South Chicago in 1947, in her retirement back in Chicago.

Mahony lived for about 24 years after her husband's death, she died in Chicago at age of 90.



**Fig. 3: Griffin Last Time Works**

## 8. FINDINGS/CONCLUSION

Although women have participation in each profession now but still they face so many problems. In architecture from admission up to the graduation and for profession, women go through so many problems. Now a days only 20 percent of female students who passed out from architecture school, leads a good professional life.

About the Mahony, who is the first licensed architect of the world, she has gone through the problems at each and every step. But she never looks back and promotes herself. Finally, she is declared as a successful professional in the world. Professor Alice T. Friedman speaks eloquently of Marion's work. She states, "For Mahony, who was raised in a world that fostered gender equality and collaboration in a range of pursuits—from progressive educational philosophies that redefined the nature of teaching and learning, to shared household management and economic interdependence among family members and friends, to political activism in campaigns for women's suffrage and improved working conditions—being an architect and a collaborator were not mutually exclusive conditions. On the contrary, they were the building blocks of her identity as a professional, as a social reformer, and as a woman."

## REFERENCES

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- [2] Articles By Peter Harrisman
- [3] New York Times-Mahony Griffin