

Helena Saxby Gervais McCullough and Frank Lloyd Wright

Though she was an active member at Grace Episcopal Church, Helena Gervais never lost her devotion to Unity Temple. Shortly after her husband Paul's death in 1963, she began assisting the minister of the congregation, Rev. Robert Rice (minister 1952-1970). (Under his leadership in 1954, the word Unity was dropped from the church's name to avoid confusion with the Unity Movement, and the name became the Universalist Church in Oak Park. After a national denominational merger in 1961, the name became the Unitarian Universalist Church of Oak Park at Unity Temple. And after the merger with Beacon Unitarian in 1994, the name became the Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Oak Park, later shortened to Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation.) While working with Rice, Helena participated in the growing local and national interest in the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright, which was happening only a few years after his death. She assisted Rev. Rice in giving informal tours of Unity Temple to curious visitors who asked to see it, and tours of the building were made available to the public in 1967. Helena connected with the group of people who were interested in preserving and restoring the building. The group included Marion Herzog, who started sharing Helena's apartment at 201 Linden, staying until 1980. (Marion had graduated from Oak Park and River Forest High School in the same class as Helena's older brother Lewis Weyburn Saxby.) The group sponsored a Frank Lloyd Wright Week from June 1-8, 1964. Helena worked with her friend Elsie Jacobsen (1914-2003) on setting up the architecture tours of the Temple. At Elsie's death, the memorial service for her was held at Unity Temple.

In 1969, Helena again joined a coalition of community activists to promote Oak Park, especially its architectural treasures, in the Frank Lloyd Wright Festival. The month-long event lasted from Memorial Day to the Fourth of July. It included public lectures that focused on Wright's architecture and a series of musical performances. A highlight of the festival was the Frank Lloyd Wright Tour, a house walk and bus tour sponsored by the Friends of the Public Library, under chief librarian, Barbara Ballinger (b. 1925--later

president of the board of the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation). As a public building, Unity Temple was already available. But Helena and her assistant, Marie Prescott, managed to persuade Wright homeowner to open the Winslow House in River Forest and the Edwin Cheney House and the Mrs. Thomas Gale House in Oak Park. Successful beyond expectations, the tour attracted 1,800 people who paid \$2.50 each to participate. This tour became the prototype for the annual Wright Plus house tours, begun by the Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio Foundation in 1975, organized by Elsie Jacobsen.

As part of the festival, two special awards were given to honor individuals who had worked for years to preserve Wright's heritage. One award went to Mr. and Mrs. Clyde Nooker, the owners Wright's house and studio, for their efforts to preserve and restore it. The other went to Rev. Robert Rice, the minister at Unity Temple, for providing tours for visitors there.

Lloyd Wright (1890-1978), Frank Lloyd Wright's son and himself an architect, came to Oak Park during the Festival. Helena, along with Marion Herzog, hosted him at Helena's home during his stay. He wrote Helena a letter dated July 2, 1969, thanking her for her hospitality. This letter, along with newspaper clippings about the tour, is in a scrapbook that she later donated to the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation. [Unfortunately, that scrapbook can no longer be found.]

Marion Rawls Herzog (1902-1992), , was dedicated to Unity Temple. Marion was a long-time member of the Unity Temple congregation. Her grandfather, Thomas Skillin (1843-1912), had been president of the congregation when the Temple was designed. Marion grew up in Oak Park in the home of her uncle, Ralph Skillin (1886-1968). As a professional librarian, Marion served as head of the Art Institute's Burnham Library of Architecture, and she had assisted the author Grant Manson in researching his definitive book on Wright's work before 1910. He dedicated the book to her. She served on the board of directors of the Temple's congregation and on its restoration committee. She dedicated herself to petitioning to get Unity Temple declared a National Historic Landmark in 1971, and she helped

found the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation (UTRF) in 1973. Helena was among its first members. Marion and Helena once drove to Minnesota to visit Grant Manson and to bring his archival materials to the Oak Park Public Library. Marion Herzog died in Escondido, CA.

Helena and many others also supported the preservation and restoration of Frank Lloyd Wright's Home & Studio. A consortium of local banks, at the urging of Wright enthusiasts, bought the complex to keep it off the private market. These preservationists formed the Frank Lloyd Wright Home & Studio Foundation in 1974. Helena was a personal friend of the Foundation's first board president, Dawn Follett Goshorn (1936-present). Helena acted as a secretarial assistant to Dawn and in that capacity took the minutes at one of the first gatherings of the future board. As with the Unity Temple Restoration Foundation, Helena became an early member, though she and her second husband lived in Pennsylvania from 1974-78. The Home & Studio complex was turned over to the National Trust for Historic Preservation and was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1975. The Home & Studio Foundation restored the property from 1974-87. It eventually took over the restoration of Robie House, became the Frank Lloyd Wright Trust, and now manages the public tours of the Home & Studio, Unity Temple, Robie House, the Emil Bach House, and the Rookery.

The extended Gervais family can be proud that the family home at 201 Linden Ave., the Stennett house, was chosen to be on the Wright Plus tour on May 19, 2018, almost one hundred years since the property was purchased by W.B. Gervais in 1919. After Helena's death in 2006, Paul and John Gervais and Bob Trezevant sold the property to Kellie and Robert Scott. Kellie could afford to deconvert the house from a two-flat to a single-family home. She doubled the living space by utilizing the attic and basement, and she completely upgraded the interior to create a modern ambience. She sold the property to its present owners in 2016. They became only the fourth family to own the house since its construction in 1886.

