

This PDF includes a chapter from the following book:

Frank Lloyd Wright versus America

The 1930s

© 1990 MIT

License Terms:

Made available under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International Public License

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

OA Funding Provided By:

National Endowment for the Humanities/Andrew W. Mellon Foundation Humanities Open Book Program.

The title-level DOI for this work is:

[doi:10.7551/mitpress/3039.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/3039.001.0001)

**Architectural Issues:
National versus
International**

The Fellowship and autobiography did not occur as isolated phenomena. They must be seen as part of a stream of events that flowed together to compose Wright's career in the 1930s—personal promotions, polemical presentations, and architectural designs—all diverse to say the least. In architecture they were not without observable trends and historical consistency if often obscured by astonishing newness. Because his buildings appeared new (and this was usually construed to mean that they did not fit traditional or fashionable modes) and because of their obvious architectural excellence, they attracted attention, appreciation, and analysis, all of which was too often uncritical in favor of either derogation or adulation. To fully understand the trends and historical links in and of his architecture it is best in these relatively short essays to isolate and clarify particular aspects: communities, buildings, ideas, forums.

6 Architecture

While it may not seem the most obvious, Wright's exploration of old ideas with new structural techniques sometimes generated unique aesthetic responses in the 1920s and 1930s that were more daring, so to speak, than the Prairie School years. The core and cantilever structure, an adaption of the National Life Insurance Company "skyscraper" of 1924 that he refined for the St. Mark's Towers of 1929, was rhythmically connected to form a group of apartment buildings in Chicago in 1930. Still connected, it became the high-rise wall of a large complex called Crystal Heights Towers of 1940 for a site in Washington, D.C. None of these tall structures was built, although one of the St. Mark's buildings was modified to become the Price Tower in Bartlesville, Oklahoma, in 1952.

He also explored a concrete masonry system for a series of designs in the early 1920s and used it on houses for Millard, Storer, Freeman, and Ennis. Wright derived his "textile" masonry system from a more sophisticated product called "Knitlock" that had been designed and produced in 1917 by a former Studio employee and confidant, Walter Burley Griffin, while the latter was residing in Australia.¹ Although Wright apparently thought of using some form of concrete block in 1906 on the Harry Brown house project for Geneseo, Illinois, it was to be something like a long, narrow, rectangular masonry log. It should not be confused with the constructional developments of Griffin and Wright. With assistance from Wright, Charles McArthur used one modification of textile blocks to construct the Arizona Biltmore Hotel. Dr. Chandler was attracted to the constructional/structural scheme enough to believe it should be used on his San Marcos in The Desert tourist