

Martin House Complex

Fact Sheet

Frank Lloyd Wright in Buffalo

Each of the Frank Lloyd Wright structures built in Buffalo between 1903 and 1926 had a connection to Darwin Martin and the Larkin Soap Company. In 1902, Darwin Martin was the chief financial officer for the Larkin Soap Company. On a visit to Chicago that year, Martin saw some unique houses designed by a young, regional architect named Frank Lloyd Wright. Martin's subsequent patronage brought international acclaim to Wright's career (see Frank Lloyd Wright biography).

Wright designed the Martin house and complex for Darwin D. Martin and his family beginning in 1903. In 1926, Wright designed a summer home for the Martins called Graycliff, on the shore of Lake Erie (Derby, NY).

In 1905, the Heath house, on the corner of Bird Avenue and Lincoln Parkway, was designed for W. R. Heath, a lawyer for the Larkin Company. In 1908, the Davidson house on Tillinghast Place in the Parkside district of Buffalo, was designed for Alexander Davidson, the advertising manager for the Larkin Company.

Wright's relationship with Darwin Martin also led to the architect's first—and perhaps most important—commercial building: the Larkin Administration Building, built in 1906. The demolition of this building in 1950 is widely regarded as a great architectural loss to the world.

FLW visited Buffalo many times during the construction of these buildings.

Today, nearly 50 years after Frank Lloyd Wright's death (1959), plans are under way to build three more Wright-designed structures in Buffalo.

In 2004, a structure originally designed by Wright for the Martin family was finally built. It is called the Blue Sky Mausoleum and it is in historic Forest Lawn Cemetery. Darwin Martin and his wife, Isabelle, are buried nearby, in another part of the cemetery.

Wright also designed a gas station for a location in downtown Buffalo, and a boathouse for the University of Wisconsin Boat Club. Construction of the boathouse—to be used by the West Side Rowing Club—is well under way, and there are plans to build the gas station in the near future.

The legacy of the great American architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, is an ever-present ingredient in the architectural heritage of the city of Buffalo.