

Allegheny School of Natural History,
Quaker Bridge, N.Y.

August 4, 1940.

Dear Kan,

Remember me? I never intended to lose touch with you, or to let such a long time go by without writing. However, ~~and~~ "education", along with all its other shortcomings that we used to hear so much about at Taliesin, is a very busy business, with always a little more work to do than actually gets itself done.

Now I'm wondering very much whether this will find you back at Taliesin. Your letter sounded as if you might go back, and recently I heard from Railey that you hadn't come back but that they were still hoping you would. I do think you might be one of the people who could get something out of it (even if that is the wrong attitude). For one thing, you have something that Mr. W. wants, and in order to get it he might make it easier for you to get some of what you want. Besides, you really want to be an architect and really have a sympathetic feeling for Mr. Wright's work (it seems to me), and probably have enough talent and enough ideas of your own so that you wouldn't be snowed under permanently. Also you seemed to be diplomat enough to get along there, if the life didn't finally get under your skin and make you too miserable to benefit by it. Well, I should like to know what conclusion you came to yourself on these questions, and how you have been spending the last months and intend to spend the next ones.

Your report of Mr. Wright's very involved explanation of "organic architecture" interested me very much and (I hope you don't mind) amused me quite a little. I think that sometimes he fails ~~entirely~~ to achieve entirely the simplicity he aims at in building, and certainly he fails to achieve it in words. If it came natural to him, he wouldn't be so aware of it as a problem. Now, my own opinion is that the explanation, and understanding it, is not very important one way or the other--and theoretically maybe Wright would agree, though he'd not like the idea that his verbal expression is exceedingly muddy. I think that what does matter is how you feel about the building as building, and your own relation to it as a developing architect. I stick to the idea that the old meaning of architecture ("science of building", Concise Oxford Dictionary), is a sound one; though art of building may be a better description. However, building is the essential part; and an architect is to be judged by his buildings, not by what he says about them. Of course, what he says may be illuminating to other architects--or it may not. To me, the words you report are quite meaningless, and I should be unwilling to admit that the fault lies entirely with me, though perhaps it does in part.

My semester at Oberlin was all right in its way. I studied elementary botany, dendrology, ecology, and rural sociology. The last was terrible, but the others should prove useful, eventually, whatever I finally do. I chose Oberlin because of the professor of Botany there, Dr. Sears. He had written the article which originally got me interested in the field of landscape architecture. He is an interesting teacher and a splendid writer. I recommend especially his book "This is our World" (Paul B. Sears). I think you would enjoy it if you could get hold of it. If I have any idea of the meaning of the word, I think his approach to the world is really "organic".

On the other hand, I did and do suffer from all the shortcomings of "education". I think that most of what Mr. Wright says about it is quite true. The worst thing is that you learn so much about things, and come out

so helpless to do anything. Certainly a system of apprenticeship would be better, if it were an apprenticeship where the responsibility between the master and the apprentice was mutual and not one-sided, either way. But if such an apprenticeship exists, I've not been able to find it as yet. One thing which the month at Taliesin did for me was to convince me that, however ~~irksome~~ irksome and unsatisfying the schools may be, life has, at least from my personal point of view, worse fates to offer. At least the schools, however bunglingly, are designed with a view to helping the student to get what he wants, and until a better method has been put into practise, I have to make the best of them.

It was rather hard for me to get back to studying again after all these years, but I found I could do it as well as before, or better, being more interested and having a purpose in mind. College life was hard to take, especially at Oberlin where there are very few older students. It made me realize how much my friends and I have changed in the last ten years. I had taken it for granted that the whole world must have changed with us, but actually students are just like they were when I was one. I hope that at a big University it may be different, to some extent, and am now trying to choose between Michigan and Wisconsin. Wherever I go, I am resigned to the notion that the work will be much more theoretical and less practical than it ought to be, but there doesn't seem to be anything to do about it. Now I know such a lot about vegetation, and only the little bit I was able to glean in a few days work with you about plants. I still couldn't put one in the ground and do something about it if it didn't grow.

Wisconsin has the advantage of being tied up with the state agricultural and conservation work, but I'd rather go to Michigan, because I'd be near my brother and other friends and would feel so much less dismal about starting work there. I'm trying to figure if it mightn't be just as good. All the catalogues sound alike--perfectly wonderful. Maybe my resistance to Madison is tied up with the fact that it is associated in my memory with those dismal visits from Taliesin.

You see, I didn't take my projected trip over the country this summer. The main reason was that I didn't feel I could undertake all that driving alone, and didn't know any congenial person who could go with me. It probably would have been easy to find somebody to help drive, but I thought that if the person turned out to be unsympathetic personally, or not interested to some extent in the same things I was, it might be terribly dismal or downright impossible. So I came here to summer school, to get more actual field work. The place is situated much too deep in the woods for my taste, among flat, monotonous, ~~wooded~~ small wooded mountains. It is in a state park, and it has been interesting to study the recreational facilities and the work done by the CCC. I have to write a paper about this, and it may not be very good. I think the CCC and the National Parks Service have done some pretty swell planning and building, though doubtless the Fellowship would not agree--or know a darn thing about what has actually been done. Apart from that, I can't imagine why thousands of people choose to spend vacations here, except that it's cheap and they don't know any better.

After this week, I'm off on another project. I am supposed to be writing a book about the Amish people. Have you ever heard of them? They are a religious sect who have been remarkably successful farmers, and have kept their lands in unusually good condition over several centuries. My teacher Sears says he can get something published if I get it written. I wrote a paper on them, about ten thousand words, for my sociology ~~xxxx~~ course, and have almost enough material for a book. This is more interesting, the kind of thing you would like too. I read a lot about them at Oberlin, and visited some of them and talked to them in Ohio. Now I must do more visiting and question asking, which is really pretty fascinating. They were very nice to me, and responsive, in Ohio.

I still hope to make that western trip some time before the country is at war and gasoline gets rationed. It is very annoying that what I want to do seems to involve endless going to school before I can do it, and I keep looking for ways to cut it short. However, I have been advised to become acquainted with a number of subjects, and each of these is so highly specialized that it is hard to get hold of them, even though practical people think that the specialties and the specialists are really rather passé. If you are doing the nursery business again, how would you like to have me some time as an apprentice? I imagine it would be worth years of school to me.

I do hope you'll write to me sooner than I deserve, and I'll try to do better next time. ~~I think~~ I look back with so much pleasure on that trip of ours, and hope that some day I'll be able to equal your courage and success in ringing strange door-bells. As a matter of fact, it's ~~always~~ almost always successful, but I have to work up the courage every time. Maybe I'll get used to it.

With all best wishes,

Elinor

My address to the end of August is Bonney Camp, Oquossoc, Maine, whence mail will be forwarded. ~~After that~~ I expect to be visiting in New York at the end of the month, in spite of the Fair, which I have successfully avoided so far. After that, 2615 Talbot Road, Baltimore, Maryland - will reach me.