

How Fallingwater came to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy

"...The dynamic process at the core of Fallingwater is a necessary uplifting of humankind and the natural environment."

Entrusting the conservation and preservation of an architectural masterpiece to a nature organization may seem unusual, but the mission of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to enrich the human relationship with the natural world embodies the same goals Frank Lloyd Wright had for his architecture. As Edgar Kaufmann, jr., commented about Fallingwater:

"In Wright's design and our experience, the forested grounds and the run were as much a part of the architectural statement as was the structure."



At no other Wright site can the visitor so intensely experience the profound integration of site, building, and inhabitant, which brings dignity and repose to daily living. The WPC's operation of Fallingwater exemplifies our attempts to achieve unity with nature: through buildings which embrace the earth and heighten awareness of our natural environment, and through careful stewardship of the very resources which comprise the natural world, of which we are part.

The nature-loving Kaufmanns, along with the founding members of what was to

become the Conservancy, were all part of a national movement in the early 20th century to protect vanishing natural areas, creating vast and wild national parks as well as corner playlots and urban parks. The WPC had its beginnings as the Greater Pittsburgh Parks Association, and since 1932, has protected over 200,000 acres of prime natural lands throughout western Pennsylvania. Nearly all such lands are transferred at cost to public agencies for parks, forests, and game lands, set aside for the enjoyment of all people, for all time. At over 25,000 members, volunteers, and supporters, the WPC has been the leading conservation organization in Pennsylvania for over 75 years.

It was Edgar jr. who entrusted Fallingwater to the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy in 1963, following his father's suggestions made before his death in 1955. Edgar Kaufmann Sr. had been a Director of the Greater Pittsburgh Parks Association since 1945, and in 1951, played an instrumental role in the protection of nearby Ferncliff Peninsula and subsequent creation of Ohiopyle State Park. His attachment to this area, however, had probably begun decades before when he worked in a small store in Connellsville, where most of the business occurred on the weekends. During the week, he supposedly relaxed by taking long horseback rides around the countryside. On one of those rides, he may have discovered Ohiopyle and Bear Run, and was no doubt impressed by the natural beauty of the area.

Fallingwater is a symbol that people and nature can exist in a harmonious relationship, and is a most appropriate place for the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to meet the public. Direct WPC education programs are conducted

via the visitors' pavilion exhibits, self-guided nature trail, and in the many special environmental programs offered during the annual Spring Celebration and Annual Meeting, held each year at Bear Run Nature Reserve. In addition, each year a large percentage of new WPC members join at Fallingwater, making it one of the most effective tools for spreading the word about the WPC's conservation efforts.

Bear Run Nature Reserve, adjacent to Fallingwater, has over 20 miles of hiking trails in a highly significant natural area. The Reserve protects the watershed of Bear Run, which through the WPC's efforts, has become an exceptional value stream, with the highest water quality designation available in Pennsylvania.

Edgar Kaufmann, jr.'s comments made at the ceremony of transmission in the fall of 1963 best express the significance of Fallingwater for the Kaufmann family, the public, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy.

These ceremonies mark the establishment of a new agency of our community: the Kaufmann Conservation on Bear Run, given to the public, in care of Western Pennsylvania Conservancy, as a memorial to my parents, Liliane and Edgar Kaufmann.

Why a memorial to Liliane and Edgar Kaufmann? Because these grounds and this house of theirs were given shape by them, and were vitalized by the happiness which they experienced living here, even years before they built the house. This is their place as it stands. If it is suited to a new existence, that is because they shaped it well.

What are these grounds and this house? Acres of rock and acid earth, second-growth trees and icy streams, roughly cast in the Appalachian mold – and something more: a place of vigorous beauty, of self-renewing enchantment, of adventuresome picturesqueness that answers perfectly a romantic need in modern hearts, the need to be natural, to experience nature not as grist for our mills but as the habitat that has formed us.

Designed for this setting, the house was hardly up before its fame circled the earth; it was recognized as one of the clearest successes of the American genius Frank Lloyd Wright.

It takes but an instant to see the character of the house; yet, after all these years, there are details and relationships in it, which I've discovered only recently. Its beauty remains fresh like that of the nature into which it fits. It has served well as a home, yet has always been more than that, a work of art, beyond any ordinary measures of excellence. Itself an ever-flowing source of exhilaration, it is set on the waterfall of Bear Run, spouting nature's endless energy and grace. House and site together form the very image of man's desire to be at one with nature, equal and wedded to nature.

Without drawing on tradition, without relying on precedent, Fallingwater was created by Frank Lloyd Wright as a declaration that in nature man finds his spiritual as well as his physical energies, that a harmonious response to nature yields the poetry and joy that nourish human living.

Such a place cannot be possessed; it is a work by man for man, not by a man for a man. Over the years since it was built Fallingwater has grown ever more famous and admired, a textbook example of modern architecture at its best. By its very intensity it is a public resource, not a private indulgence.

Finally, why are these acres and this house given as a conservation, in the care of the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy? Because conservation is not preservation: preservation is stopping life to serve a future contingency; conservation is keeping life going. The union of powerful art and powerful nature into something beyond the sum of their separate powers deserves to be kept living.

As the waterfall of Bear Run needed the house to enter the realm of art, to the join work of art, Fallingwater in its setting, needed the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy to enter a new life of public service. I believe the happy coincidences that have marked this enterprise from the start will continue to favor its new existence in the hands of the conservancy. I believe the Conservancy will give nature, the source, full due, and art, the human response to nature, full respect. For this confidence I am most grateful to Western Pennsylvania Conservancy and to the community that supports it so well.