The
Larkin-Hubbard-Martin-Wright
Story:
From Soap to Riches

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John Larkin
Elbert Hubbard
Darwin Martin
Frank Lloyd Wright
Question: How are John Larkin and Elbert Hubbard connected?

Answer: They were brothers-in-law and business partners.
John Durrant Larkin

Father:
• Levi
• English immigrant
• Blacksmith
• Dies when John is 7 years old
• Leaves 7 children

Mother:
• Mary Ann Durrant
• English immigrant
• Guelph, Ontario
John D. Larkin

• Born 1845 in Buffalo (Died 1926)
• Age 11, finishes school
• Age 15, works for brother-in-law, Justus Weller, in soap factory
• Age 19, attends Bryant & Stratton
• Age 25, partners with brother-in-law Justus in soap co. in Chicago
• Hires Justus’s cousin, Elbert Hubbard, to sell soap in Chicago
• Age 29, marries Justus’s cousin, Frances “Frank” Hubbard
• Age 30 (1875), moves to Buffalo and hires Frances’s brother, Elbert (partners 1877)
• 1875-85 - Sells to retailers

• 1875 - Hubbard hires Frank Martin to “sling soap”

• 1878 - Hubbard hires 13-year-old Darwin Martin as soap slinger, later bookkeeper

• 1886 - Darwin’s card-ledger system is implemented for mail order $6 Combination Boxes

• 1891 - Chautauqua premiums offered ($10 Combo Boxes)
Heath: Larkin’s brother-in-law
Esty: Larkin’s son-in-law
Robb: Larkin’s son-in-law
Top: The three earliest premiums of the Chautauqua line as shown on the back cover of the Premium and Larkin Plan circular entitled *Can We Break The Crust?*, probably issued in 1895.
Soap manufactory
and
Premium-based
mail-order business

• 900 Products (soaps, perfumes, pharmaceuticals, food)

• 600+ Premiums (household furnishings)
10 families … Monthly combo box for 10 months …
Secretaries visited Buffalo

Also:
- Pantry parties
- Sales booths
Larkin Warehouse / Larkin @ Exchange
Larkin Warehouse / Larkin @ Exchange
Question: How are Larkin Soap Co. and Frank Lloyd Wright connected?

Answer:

1 - Wright designed the Larkin Administration Building.

2 - Wright designed Prairie style houses for Larkin Company executives.
19 plant buildings (A through T) built over the years

Wright-designed Administration Building
1903-1907 ... Air-conditioned ... Fireproof ... Light-filled ... 1800 clerical employees
Light Court (skylight)

Wright-designed Administration Building
Fourth Floor
Wright-designed Administration Building

Victoria & Albert Museum
Administration Building Demise

• 1939 - Larkin Retail Store moved into building
• 1943 - Building sold
• 1944 - Building abandoned
• 1945 - City takes ownership on tax foreclosure
• 1949 - Building sold
• 1950 - Demolished for shovel-ready site
  (Steel beams: W. Virginia coal mine / Bricks and stone: Buffalo’s Ohio Basin fill)
Larkin Company

- Soap manufactory and premium-based mail-order business
- 19 plant buildings (A through T) built over the years
- Products and premiums manufactured by Larkin on Seneca Street, by Larkin subsidiaries, by other manufacturers
- Larkin department store on Seneca Street; 154 chain stores in WNY and Peoria, IL
- Larkin Hammerless Gas sold in Larkin gas stations in Buffalo, Rochester, and Erie
Footnote: Forest Lawn Cemetery
Question: How are Elbert Hubbard and Frank Lloyd Wright connected?

Answer: Both are involved in the Arts & Crafts movement.
• 1893 - Hubbard leaves company to pursue writing and Alice Moore
• Tours England and influenced by William Morris, founder of Arts & Crafts Movement
• 1895 - Founds Roycroft in East Aurora
• 1903 - Gets divorced
• 1915 - Dies on Lusitania
East: Gustav Stickley

East: Elbert Hubbard
Arts and Crafts Movement

Midwest: Frank Lloyd Wright

West: Greene Brothers
Arts & Crafts: Wright’s Prairie Style
Horizontal ... Low to the ground ... Imitates endless prairies ... 
Incorporates nature

Example:
Wright-designed Martin House Complex
Wright-designed Martin House Complex

1903 Barton House
1904 Martin House
1904 Pergola
1904 Conservatory
1904 Carriage House
1905 Gardener’s Cottage
1903 … Prairied style … Barton married Martin’s sister, Delta … Martin “testing” Wright … Porte cochere used to extend horizontality and make house look lower
Wright-designed
George Barton House

Ribbon art glass windows …
Hip roof …
Widely overhanging eaves with stucco soffits
Wright-designed George Barton House

Wright-designed stained glass window

Wright-designed furniture
Wright-designed Darwin D. Martin House
125 Jewett Parkway at Summit

Porte cochere used to extend horizontality and make house look lower
Wright-designed Darwin D. Martin House
125 Jewett Parkway at Summit

Porte cochere used to extend horizontality and make house look lower
Wright-designed Darwin D. Martin House
125 Jewett Parkway at Summit

No separating wall between rooms …
Use of “natural” materials like Roman bricks …
Supporting piers instead of supporting walls
Wright-designed Darwin D. Martin House Complex

125 Jewett Parkway at Summit

Historic photo: Carriage house … Garden … Pergola
Wright-designed Gardener’s Cottage
285 Woodward Ave.

- Prairie Style
- 1905
- Ribbon windows
- Overhanging eaves
Wright-designed Gardener’s Cottage

Living room and dining room
Graycliff
Derby, NY
1927

Left: model
Graycliff was commissioned in 1927 when Martin was 62 years old.
Discussed in 1927 when Martin was 62 years old (same year as Graycliff finished) … When Martin died in 1935, his entire estate totaled 37 cents, plus properties.
Wright-designed Heath House
76 Soldier’s Place at Bird
(William Heath was head of law department at Larkin factory)

Prairie Style … 1905 …
Verandah used to extend horizontality and make house look lower
Wright-designed Heath House
76 Soldier’s Place at Bird

Prairie Style … 1905 … Broad, flat chimney … Roman bricks
Wright-designed Walter Davidson House

57 Tillinghast Place

(Davidson was also a Larkin executive)

Prairie Style … 1908
Wright-designed Walter Davidson House

57 Tillinghast Place

Living room
Originally designed for the University of Wisconsin Boat Club, but never built

Footnote: Wright’s plans were used to build West Side Rowing Club Boathouse
Footnote: Wright’s plans used to build gas station for Pierce-Arrow Museum Station

Designed 1932, but never built
And...
The end.

Questions? Comments?