

## JOSEPH LADD NEAL AT SMALL POINT

When Small Point's founders commissioned architect Joseph Ladd Neal to design the Club House in 1895, they were hiring a rising star. Just one year earlier, Neal and partner, S. Alfred Hopkins had clobbered 64 competitors in a national competition for the city of Augusta's public library, the Lithgow Library and Reading Room.

Though he practiced in Pittsburgh for most of his career, Neal was originally a Mainer. Born in Wiscasset, he was the son of a successful local hardware merchant. Before the Small Point job, he had studied in Boston through an old-school apprenticeship with C. Howard Walker, a classically trained professor of architecture at M.I.T, worked as a draftsman for Shepley, Rutan & Coolidge the successor firm of the great H.H. Richardson of Brookline, Massachusetts, and was employed in New York by James Renwick, Jr., architect of St. Patrick's Cathedral.<sup>i</sup>

When Neal moved to Pittsburgh at the turn of the 1890s, it was the epicenter of a building boom. Just prior to establishing Neal & Hopkins in 1893, he may also have worked for Longfellow, Alden & Harlow, a prestigious Boston firm with a Pittsburgh office and major projects there. The principal, Alexander Wadsworth Longfellow, a nephew of poet, Henry W. Longfellow, was a Portland native and Neal's Maine roots, conspicuous talent plus "the need for extra hands" on the Longfellow team's mammoth Carnegie Institute cultural complex, make a strong case for his association with that firm.<sup>ii</sup>

His partnership with Hopkins only lasted a year but Neal went on to complete the Augusta library, the equally acclaimed Morrill Memorial Library of Norwood, Massachusetts,<sup>iii</sup> the Small Point Club House and a multitude of well-documented projects in the "Three Rivers" city where he remained for the next quarter century. After a brief second partnership (Neal & Rowland 1902-6), he practiced solo, evidently with great success. An 1899 trade journal, *The Interstate Architect and Builder*, included him among the "Leading Architects in Seven States."<sup>iv</sup> An article about Pittsburgh movers and shakers in 1900 saluted the 33-year old Neal for "attaining high distinction for superior and artistic work" and noted that he "had designed and supervised the construction of one hundred and fifty residences in the suburbs of Pittsburgh."<sup>v</sup>

Neal's portfolio included churches, railroad terminals, a hospital annex, a hotel, a powerhouse for a local utility company, an orphanage and vacation houses. A few of his suburban residences still stand in posh Pittsburgh area neighborhoods. Some are brick, built in a formal Georgian Revival style; some in the popular Shingle-Style, a la the Small Point Club. The Lithgow Library and Reading Room which was dedicated in 1896 and the Club, which opened its doors in 1897, are both listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Romanesque Revival style library, renowned for its elegant interior woodwork, towering fireplaces, round stained-glass windows inspired by Renaissance era printers' marks and subtle gold leaf ornamentation, is said

to have been a favorite of Pittsburgh industrialist and philanthropist, Andrew Carnegie. Carnegie donated \$9,000 towards its construction and endowed 1,679 new U.S. libraries between 1886 and 1913 but he only kept drawings of four of them in his inner sanctum - his private office. One was the Lithgow.<sup>vi</sup>

According to Tom Hinkle, the Small Point Club's resident historian, Neal's work on the Lithgow Library was likely his ticket to the Small Point project. Joseph H. Manley, a founder of the Club and an Augusta resident, may have recruited him on the strength of the design of the library then under construction.<sup>vii</sup>

In the 1997 *Centennial History of the Small Point Club*, Hinkle describes Neal's original plans and drawings for the Club. They show a three-story building with a broad, wraparound piazza (i.e. porch), a roof with a trio of dormers on each side and deep overhangs supported by brackets. Exterior wall surfaces are elaborate, "divided into geometric patterns by decorative 'sticking' reminiscent of English Tudor timbering." Today, the basic structure remains essentially as Neal envisioned it but most of the exterior trim, the most picturesque aspect of his design, was "never executed,"<sup>viii</sup> undoubtedly "rejected for budgetary reasons."<sup>ix</sup> The shingled wall cladding eventually selected was understated in comparison yet right in sync with other grand Eastern Seaboard mansions of the day.

Recently discovered in a box of old Club records, Neal's final building specifications indicate that he approved the change. He directed the contractor to cover the first story with "spruce clapboards" and "Above that [referring to the upper two stories], the sheathing" was to be covered "with clear cedar shingles laid in a *simple pattern* satisfactory to the owner." All the work, in fact, right down to the "dark red brick" and the slightly unorthodox "dark red mortar" of the original "chimney breast in the living room," he said, "should be done to the satisfaction of the owner."<sup>x</sup>

Alas, Neal's name disappears from Pittsburgh city directories by 1917. After that, the record is silent about his career specifics but the U.S. Federal Census of 1920 places him in the Youngstown, Ohio area and the 1930 census puts him about as far as he could get from Maine without forsaking the east coast, in the heart of downtown Miami, Florida. He's 63 years old, still listed as a working architect.<sup>xi</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> "Architects Neal & Hopkins," *The Lithgow Library and Reading Room*, [Augusta, Maine 1897] 142-3. Thanks to Earle G. Shettleworth, State Historian, the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for providing this historic booklet which details Neal's early career and includes a picture of him.

<sup>ii</sup> Floyd, Margaret Henderson, *Architecture after Richardson: Regionalism before Modernism: Longfellow, Alden and Harlow in Boston & Pittsburgh*, [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994] 421, 502n6. Tufts University architectural historian, Floyd, notes the impact of Longfellow's influence on Neal's work.

<sup>iii</sup> The exterior of the Morrill public library, which was completed in 1898, is almost identical to that of the Lithgow and its interior features similar stained-glass.

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<sup>iv</sup> *Interstate Architect & Builder*, 1:3 (March 4, 1899), 11 Thanks to Albert M. Tannler, Historic Collections Director, Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, Pittsburgh, PA., who provided this information as well as that of Neal's many project in and around Pittsburgh. s.

<sup>v</sup> *Pittsburgh : The Distributing Point for the West and South*, [Pittsburgh: Mercantile Illustrating Company, 1900], 58.

<sup>vi</sup> Floyd, 421. Library statistics are from "Carnegie Libraries, the Future Made Bright, on the National Park Service Website,

[www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/www/ps/lessons/50carnegie/50carnegie.htm](http://www.nps.gov/nr/twhp/www/ps/lessons/50carnegie/50carnegie.htm)

<sup>vii</sup> Hinkle, Thomas Lee and Vandervoort, Elena Drake, eds., *A Centennial History of the Small Point Club 1897-1997* [ Bath: Small Point Club, Inc., 1997], 6.

<sup>viii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>ix</sup> Thomas Lee Hinkle, correspondence with Patricia Dane Rogers, May 2011.

<sup>x</sup> Neal, Joseph L. ,two documents detailing "Building Specifications" for the "Exterior Finish, Brick Work" and "Carpentry," for "The Small Point Club at Cliffstone, Maine" were recently discovered in unfiled Club records. Thanks to Club secretary, Nettie Houghton for making copies available.

<sup>xi</sup> The author is working with archivists at Florida's State Preservation Office, Florida International University and the Wolfsonian Museum to identify Neal's work while he was living in that state..