

# Thomson and Wright: [Tradition Reinterpreted]

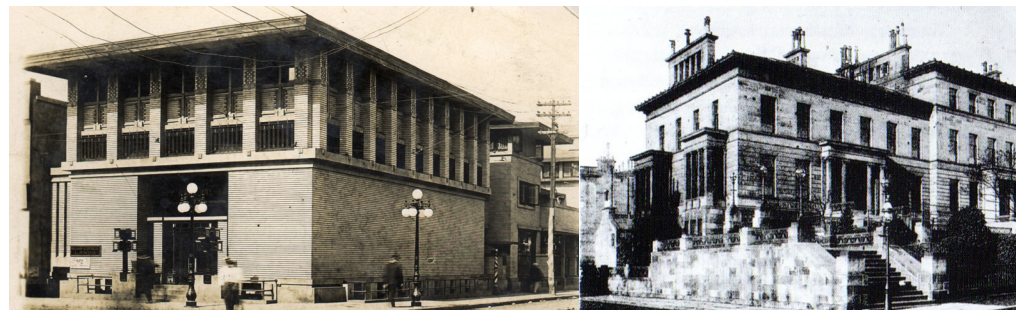
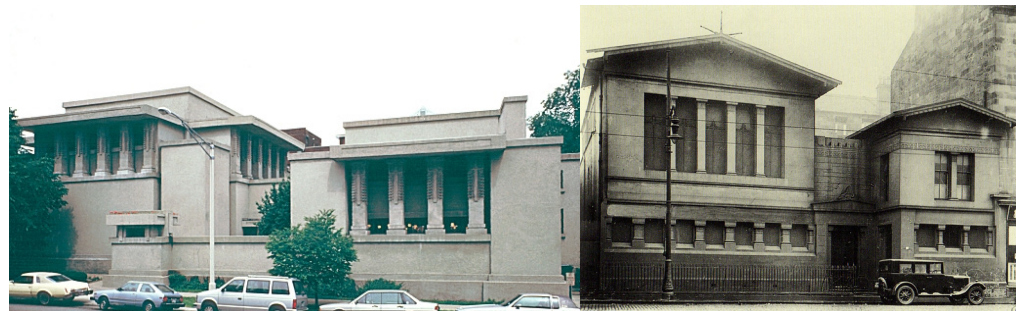
Despite being born at opposite ends of the 19th century and with no evidence of communication in their lifetimes, Alexander "Greek" Thomson's Greek Revivalism and Frank Lloyd Wright's early Prairie Style bear a striking resemblance. More importantly, their similarity is neither coincidental nor superficial, but rather, two manifest strains of an analogous logic which sought an appropriate expression of modernity rooted (whether explicitly or not) in historical precedent. Both men reconciled the humanism, sublimity, eternality, and gravitas of the Classical with the simplicity, elegance, and economy of Modernism, **effectively disproving the mutual exclusivity of the two traditions**. Their similarity invites a rich evaluation with implications for the notion of imitation and invention and its appropriate expression in 21st century architecture.

This project's motivation is decisively rooted in the ubiquitously incessant question that permeates contemporary traditionalist circles while being simultaneously neglected in much of contemporary architectural discourse: **How do we appropriately express our buildings in relation to the historical continuum?** It is the author's opinion that through documentation, diagramming, and analysis, these two precedents and their interplay can illuminate the path toward a richly balanced mindset of new and old that affords the two symbiotic value.

Embracing technologies of cast iron and glass, Thomson abstracted Grecian formal and ornamental typologies into inventive contemporary buildings unimaginable to that culture. Likewise, in steel and art glass, Wright geometrically abstracted the tripartite expression into an architecture devoid of canonical orders, but laden in veiled reference to not only the oft-discussed eastern traditions, but to Grecian architecture itself. Despite their differences, both men were keenly adept at encapsulating the sublimely ethereal quality of Grecian architecture within an innovative and highly regional context. Both fused the principles of the classical anthropocentricity with the Modernist tendency towards elegant simplification to develop a highly sophisticated regional language with the gravitas of the monumental. The two contain a recognizable element of the universal, with a supremely refined regionalism. This proposal seeks to analyze not only that universal element recognizable in both men's work, but the idiosyncratic response to place that made both successful.

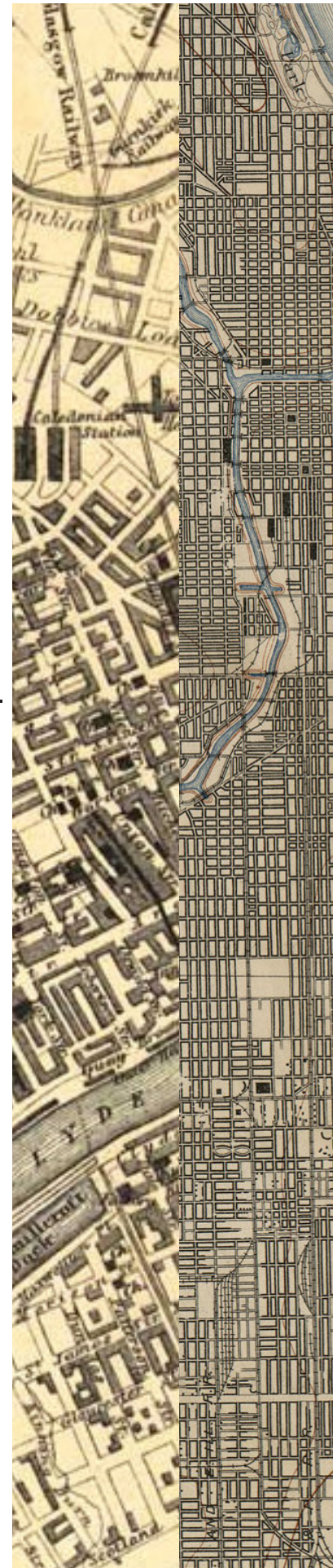
Long relegated to the shadow of fellow Glasgow architect, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Thomson's work is only beginning to receive the research its innovation and influence warrants. In the same strain, Wright's corpus of research is remarkable, but lacking in its analysis of Wright as an architect of historical precedent. This proposal intends to document and analyze Thomson's architecture through not only the lens of an ideological modernist working in the language of an ancient tradition, but the influence on his American counterpart who, in his early work, did much the same. By distilling the thought process that informed these parallel strands of logic, **this proposal seeks to validate the coexistence of modernism and traditionalism in contemporary design.**

"Both fused the principles of **classical anthropocentricity** with the Modernist tendency towards **elegant simplification** to develop a highly sophisticated regional language with the **gravitas** of the monumental."



**Above:** Wright's Unity Temple compared to Thomson's Chalmers Memorial Free Church

**Below:** Wright's Historic Park Inn Hotel compared to Thomson's Great Western Terrace



## [Tentative Itinerary]

- Mason City 1 Day**  
Historic Park Inn  
Stockman House  
  
Mason City>Milwaukee
- Milwaukee 1 Day**  
American System Built Homes  
Bogk House  
  
Milwaukee>Chicago
- Chicago 3 Days**  
Unity Temple  
Home and Studio  
Robie House  
Winslow House  
Gale House  
James A. Charnley House  
Bradley House  
Heurtley House  
  
Chicago>Glasgow
- Glasgow Week 1**  
Craig Ailey Villa  
Seymour Lodge  
Double Villa at Langside  
The Knowe  
Tor House  
Holmwood House  
Moray Place  
Ellisland
- Week 2**  
Eton Terrace  
Great Western Terrace  
Moray Place  
Millbrae Crescent  
Walmer Crescent  
Lorne Terrace  
Nithsdale Road
- Week 3**  
Gordon Street Warehouse  
Grecian Buildings Sauchiehall St  
West Nile Street Warehouse  
Buck's Head Buildings  
Egyptian Halls  
Watson Street
- Week 4**  
Caledonia Road Church  
St. Vincent Street Church  
Queen's Park Church  
Beattie Tomb  
Middleton Tomb