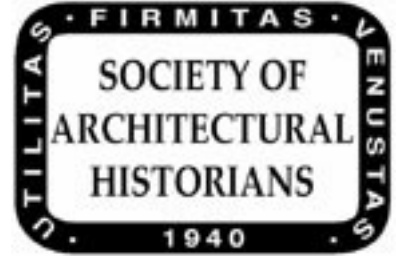




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# H. Allen Brooks, 1925–2010

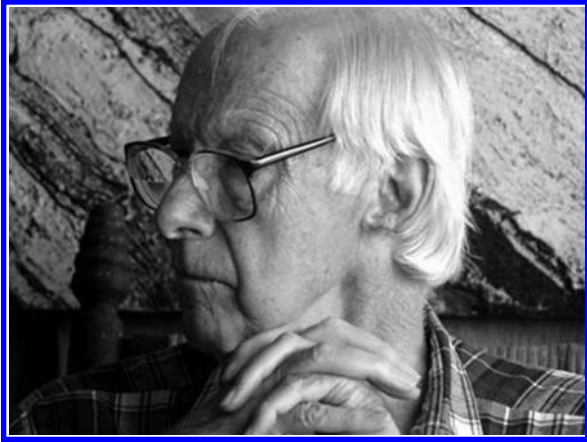
**H**arold Allen Brooks died quietly on 8 August 2010 in Hanover, New Hampshire. A renowned Frank Lloyd Wright and Le Corbusier scholar and past president of the Society of Architectural Historians (1965–67), Brooks spent most of his career teaching in the Department of Fine Arts at the University of Toronto. Born on 6 November 1925, in New Haven, Connecticut, he attributed his interest in architectural history to his parents' decision, when he was fourteen, to commission an architect to design their family home. As the family searched for an architect, young Brooks searched through design magazines for houses he liked. They eventually selected Andrew Euston, whose presentation drawing adorned Brooks's room at the end of his life.

Brooks was drafted into the army in 1946 during his first year at Dartmouth College and spent two years stationed in the Philippines as an engineer. Back at Dartmouth, Brooks majored in art history, but it was the architectural history lectures of Hugh Morrison that influenced the course of his future career. He received his BA in 1950 and, interested in becoming an architect, spent the next two years learning to be a contractor. Architectural history, however, held more allure, and he resumed his studies at Yale, where he worked

as a teaching assistant to Vincent Scully and earned his MA in the history of art in 1955. Scully suggested Brooks's dissertation topic—the architects who worked in Frank Lloyd Wright's Oak Park office from 1900 to 1910. Brooks transferred to Northwestern University for his PhD, a move that allowed him to be closer to Wright's buildings, the community of scholars working on Wright, and to Wright himself. He met the architect at Taliesin soon after, and he took pleasure in recounting how he slyly persuaded Wright to give him a repeat tour of Taliesin by commenting "OK, Mr. Wright, if you don't think your architecture is worth a second look." The young scholar's meetings and interviews with Wright and Marion Mahony, just a few years before their deaths, formed a foundation for decades of scholarship. After completing his doctorate in 1957, Brooks taught for one year at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign before accepting a position at the University of Toronto, where he spent the rest of his career. Through a Toronto colleague, Brooks was introduced to the rugged northland beauty of Georgian Bay, where he eventually purchased an island. Here, in Spartan isolation, with no electricity, he authored all of his books and articles.

Brooks's contributions to scholarship began while a master's student at Yale. In 1954 he submitted an essay entitled "The Home of Ithiel Town, Its Date of Construction and Original Construction" to Charles Peterson, who published it in the American Notes section of the *JSAH*.<sup>1</sup> Between 1960 and 1971, Brooks published six articles

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H. Allen Brooks, Georgian Bay, Ontario, in 2005 (Barbara Nettleton photograph)

on Wright in the *JSAH*, *The Art Bulletin*, and *The Burlington Magazine*. In 1972 the University of Toronto Press published his landmark study *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries*, which received the Alice Davis Hitchcock Award from the SAH and remains in print after thirty-eight years. Brooks coined the term “Prairie School,” using it first in print in an article in the *JSAH* in 1960 to identify the predominantly residential and suburban Prairie School from the more urban, commercial, skyscraper orientation of the earlier Chicago School.<sup>2</sup> Four more books on Wright followed: *Prairie School Architecture: Studies from “The Western Architect”* (editor, 1975); *Writings on Wright: Selected Comment on Frank Lloyd Wright* (editor, 1981); *Frank Lloyd Wright and the Prairie School* (1984); and *The Prairie School* (2006). Among these, *Writings on Wright* was particularly notable for the fresh perspectives it offered on many of the popular conceptions of Wright’s legacy.

Brooks’s ongoing fascination with creative genius prompted him in 1973 to head in a new research direction—early Le Corbusier—supported by a Guggenheim Fellowship. Spending every spring semester in France, he worked extensively at the Fondation Le Corbusier, becoming the general editor of the monumental 32-volume *Le Corbusier Archive* (1982–84). Reproducing 32,000 sketches by the architect, this audacious publication set a benchmark for

the documentation of an architect’s work. In 1997 Brooks published *Le Corbusier’s Formative Years: Charles-Edouard Jeanneret at La Chaux-de-Fonds*, bringing to light architectural drawings and sketches, legal documents, and previously unknown correspondence from the architect’s early career. The book challenged the prevailing impression that Le Corbusier’s career had begun in Paris and earned Brooks a Pulitzer Prize nomination and a first prize from the Association of American Publishers for Architecture and Urban Planning.

Throughout his career, Brooks was committed to the professional advancement of architectural history. He served as a board member and president of the Society of Architectural Historians, ultimately becoming a Fellow of the Society. He was also a charter member of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada and a life member of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain. His work with the Frank Lloyd Wright Building Conservancy earned him the Wright Spirit Award. Brooks was a frequent guest lecturer abroad, most often in England, where for many years he taught a two-week seminar at the Architectural Association in London. Taking early retirement in 1986, he moved to Hanover, New Hampshire, but continued to summer in Georgian Bay. He remained actively involved in the field until recently. In 2006 he led a week-long SAH study tour focusing on “Louis H. Sullivan and His Prairie School Legacy: The Midwestern Banks and Other Prairie School Masterpieces.” He delivered his last public lecture in September 2009 at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on the twenty-fifth anniversary of receiving an honorary Doctorate of Architecture from that institution. He is survived by the legacy of ground-breaking scholarship and support for the Society of Architectural Historians, to which he remained dedicated for over half a century.

ROBIN B. WILLIAMS  
Savannah College of Art and Design

#### Notes

1. Charles Peterson, “Town’s New Haven Villa, 1836–37,” *JSAH* 13, no. 3 (Oct. 1954), 27–28.
2. H. Allen Brooks, Jr., “The Early Work of the Prairie Architects,” *JSAH* 19, no. 1 (Mar. 1960), 2.