



*Celebrating  
125 Years!  
1900-2025*

# Wright on the River

**News from the Historic B. Harley Bradley House**  
***Frank Lloyd Wright's First Prairie Design - 1900***

June 2025

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## Tom Knicklebine

### Hands-on Restorer of the B. Harley Bradley House

The year 2025 marks the 125th Anniversary of Frank Lloyd Wright's B. Harley Bradley House, designed in 1900 and completed in 1901. This celebration would not have happened, had the house not been restored in 2005-2010. Gaines & Sharon Hall are recognized for their completion of the monumental task of bringing the House back to the original floor plan Wright designed for the Bradley family. The Halls, however, share an important, additional story. It is about a man named Tom Knicklebine, a native of Kankakee and son of Edward and Barbara Knicklebine. The following article was contributed by Gaines Hall.



**Tom Knicklebine inside the Carriage House, shortly after restoration.**

Tom was the hands-on restorer of the B. Harley Bradley house and should be recognized as the reason the restoration occurred and was done so in an excellent fashion. Tom earned his architectural degree from the University of Idaho. After graduation, he returned to Kankakee and worked for a time with the local architectural firm of Turner and Witt alongside the current Executive Director of Wright In Kankakee, Bob Bohlmann. Shortly after being (*continued on page 2*)

## From the Executive Director -

The Bradley House loaned a place setting of Frank Lloyd Wright Imperial Hotel china for a display at the Dana Thomas House Foundation Annual Dinner/Fundraiser in Springfield, Illinois on Friday, April 11th. Tim Totten, an expert on the life and career of Frank Lloyd Wright, presented a 'lecture' on FLW's Imperial Hotel, Tokyo, Japan. The guests were able to see it first-hand and marvel at this elegant dinnerware which he designed for formal service in the hotel's main dining room.

*Bob Bohlmann*



**A set of FLW's Imperial china was donated to the Bradley House by John and Kathleen Westberg in 2022. The china is on permanent display in the Bradley House dining room.**

hired at the architectural office, the economy stagnated so Tom left the firm and began working as a carpenter with his father and uncle who were well-respected builders in the area. Tom never returned to the drawing board full time.

The B. Harley Bradley House, a masterpiece of Prairie School architecture, designed by the renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright, stands as a testament to the innovative spirit of early 20th-century American design. However, by the early 2000s, the house had fallen into disrepair, its grandeur fading with time. It was during this period that Tom Knicklebine emerged as a pivotal figure in the restoration efforts that spanned from 2005 to 2010.

Tom Knicklebine's involvement in the restoration of the B. The Harley Bradley House was distinguished by his steadfast commitment to maintaining the architectural integrity and historical importance of this landmark. As a craftsman in woodwork with a design sensitivity, Knicklebine brought to the project a wealth of experience and meticulous attention to detail, ensuring that every aspect of the restoration honored Frank Lloyd Wright's original vision.

One of the key contributions Tom made was his leadership in coordinating the restoration team. He oversaw the collaboration among all who participated in the common goal: to return the B. Harley Bradley House to its former glory. His ability to unify these diverse talents was instrumental in navigating the complexities of restoration work, where historical accuracy and modern techniques often intersect.

Knicklebine was also deeply involved in studying the original drawings that provided invaluable insights into the home's original design and construction. This extensive research was crucial in guiding restoration decisions, ensuring that the work remained faithful to Wright's architectural principles while addressing the house's contemporary needs.

Additionally, Tom Knicklebine's expertise in woodworking played a significant role in the restoration project's success. He worked diligently to reproduce missing elements of the house and employed traditional craftsmanship techniques to repair and replace damaged elements. Whether it was restoring the almost unsavable stable or refurbishing the intricate woodwork, Knicklebine's commitment to authenticity was evident in every detail. His wife Joan was always there supporting him throughout the entire project. Without his careful attention to details and an understanding of architectural design, the finished product never would have been realized.

Beyond the physical restoration, Knicklebine recognized the historic value of the property and understood house and stable not only as a preserved historical site but also as a living museum that could inspire and educate future generations about the importance of architectural preservation.

In conclusion, Tom Knicklebine's role in the 2005-2010 restoration of the B. Harley Bradley House was marked by his leadership, research, material expertise, and educational advocacy. His contributions were instrumental in reviving this architectural gem, "the house that changed the face of American architecture," ensuring that it continues to stand as a testament to Frank Lloyd Wright's genius and as a source of inspiration for preservationists and architecture enthusiasts alike.

Gaines Hall

**Thomas Edward "Tom" Knicklebine**

**Master Woodworker, Custom Home**

**Builder, and Restorer.**

**July 5, 1948 - November 14, 2024**





## 4th Annual Sip, Shop & Stroll

**Tuesday, June 17\*, 2025, 5-8 p.m.**

Come out for a relaxing evening at the beautiful Bradley House, located on the bank of the Kankakee River. Enjoy the gardens, well-appointed giftshop, and an indoor art exhibit by BBCHS art students. Music on the lawn will be furnished by Katzpa Jamas & Jerry Downs. Acting Out Theater Co. will also perform music from their upcoming show, *Godspell*. Check out the tasty food and drink offered by Flight 102 & Candy & Cake. There's lots to do and plenty of folks to see, so invite a friend, bring your lawn chair and be part of the celebration of the anniversary of this local historical gem.

Tickets are \$10 and include a complimentary beverage.

Purchase online: <https://wright1900.org/events/>

**\*Rain date Tuesday, June 24**

## Dolly & Me Tea Party



**Saturday, June 21, 2 - 4 pm.**

Join us at the Bradley House for a tea party in the living room with your favorite doll. Bring your favorite adult too! Tickets are \$10.00. Doors open at 1:45 pm. Purchase online:

<https://wright1900.org/events/>

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## Highlights from High Tea May 13, 2025



**Did you miss the Tea Party?**

**Mark your calendar for Saturday,  
October 25, 2025. Tickets will be  
available soon!**



Help celebrate the 125th Anniversary through a donation to Wright in Kankakee for the preservation of the B. Harley Bradley House, Frank Lloyd Wright's first Prairie Design! All donations are tax deductible. Recognition is given in the newsletter twice per year.



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