



Carnegie Library - circa 1939. All Richland County History Room photos unless noted otherwise.

## Carnegie Public Library – 27 East Seminary Street – 1904.



Louis W. Claude - Architect.

The Women's Federated Club gained support from the city fathers in 1898 for the establishment of a free city library in a room of the Bancroft Law office located at 157 North Central Avenue. By 1904, the library had outgrown its allocated space. The Women's Club applied for and received for the city a \$10,000 grant from the Carnegie Foundation for the erection of a new library building. It was completed in 1905 at the southwest corner of Park and Seminary Streets. Many city fundraising events contributed toward the annual \$1,000 required by the Carnegie Foundation to maintain the library. The library also provided meeting rooms for the Women's Federated Clubs.

The history of the Carnegie Library in Richland Center has a connection to Frank Lloyd Wright. The Wertz House was located at the corner of Seminary and Park Streets where the library was built. This house was moved to the 700 block of South Park Street when the Carnegie Library was built. According to a newspaper article from *The Richland Observer* in 1967, this house was believed to be the true birthplace of Frank Lloyd Wright. Although many believe this is the correct house, nobody actually knows for sure. The house was subsequently razed when a campaign to find a buyer and save it failed.

Among the many commissions for small rural library buildings initiated by Louis Claude were many funded by the Carnegie Corporation during the height of its philanthropic activity in this regard.

Carnegie donated more than two thousand public libraries, a total of 30 in Wisconsin including Richland Center, just in the continental United States as well as over one hundred academic libraries to smaller colleges throughout the country. Andrew Carnegie is known to have changed the face of philanthropy as it was known in the 19th century, moving its focus to the creation of institutions focused on health, education, culture, and libraries.



**Wertz House – possible birthplace of Frank Lloyd Wright.**

Despite Carnegie's public statements of philosophy, it has been argued that his endowments of library buildings were, in fact, a propaganda tool or a weapon in the capitalist's war against the organized labor movements of the time. His first gifts were indeed to the communities of Homestead, Allegheny, and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. All communities where Carnegie employed a great number of the community in his steel mills and all sites of civil unrest fueled by the differences between organized labor and capitalist leaders of the time.

The philosophical impetus that propelled his innovations in the field of philanthropy was rooted in the then popular concept of "Social Darwinism." Carnegie stated his position that "the growth of vast fortunes was a natural condition of humankind" and that "the duty of the man of wealth should be to consider all surplus revenues which come to him simply as trust funds... calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community" as a whole. Social Darwinism, a nineteenth century philosophy adhered to by many in the Victorian Era of the United States, is largely associated with the work of Herbert Spencer, the philosopher who coined the oft-used term "survival of the fittest."



**Carnegie Library interior view.**

Frank Lloyd Wright had also enjoyed employment with this firm as a draftsman. In 1891, Claude left Conover and Porter to work for Adler and Sullivan in Chicago. While working for Sullivan, Claude formed a friendship with Frank

In 1894, just before the architect Louis Claude began his own practice, almost all of the wealth in the United States was concentrated into the hands of less than ten percent of the country's population, the rest living in near poverty.

Louis W. Claude attended high school in Baraboo and after high school he joined the University of Wisconsin – Madison as a general science major in the year 1887. In 1889, after studying civil engineering, construction, and mathematics at the university, he joined the Madison firm of Conover and Porter Architects in addition to his

Lloyd Wright, also employed by Sullivan at that time. Beginning in the fall semester of 1895, Louis Claude opened his own firm in a Madison building on the Capitol square at 29 West Main Street and was joined a year later by his partner, Edward Starck.

In 1902, seven years after Claude began his professional practice and right before the Carnegie Corporation's most active period of library building, the Architectural Review published an issue showcasing the best library designs; fifty-seven of the sixty-seven libraries showcased were built with classical details. Carnegie's administrators sought to pare down the ornamentation in an attempt to control costs and to impose their design philosophies on the buildings they were contracted to fund. Claude would succeed in translating the Prairie School style into a number of these buildings, implying that Prairie School architecture and its underlying philosophy was also palatable to the Carnegie Corporation's goals.



Small library design was where Louis Claude, as an architect, truly flowered. It was through his work in this type of building that his architecture spread out of the Madison area to the whole of Wisconsin, and further into Illinois and Minnesota. A Prairie School architect at heart, Claude was also a pragmatist and often designed using more classical architectural vocabularies for the communities that solicited his work. A third of the libraries attributed to him were in what is characterized as a classical style but others are strong prairie expressions with an arts and crafts influence. In the criticism of the time, these buildings were often given the label "Sullivan-esque." The earliest library identified as being built by Claude and Starck is in Baraboo, Wisconsin in 1903. This was followed in 1904 by the White Memorial Library in Whitewater, the public library in Richland Center, the Arabut Ludlow Library in Monroe, Wisconsin in 1905, the Free Library of Stoughton and the Galena Public Library in Galena, Illinois in 1906, the Aram Public Library in Delevan, as well as libraries in Watertown, and Ladysmith, Wisconsin in 1907.

One of the unique features of the Richland Center library was that it exhibited a completely different style compared to most of the other libraries designed by Louis Claude. The building exhibits many of the design features that characterize the English Gothic style. English Gothic is the name of the architectural style that flourished in England from about 1180



until about 1520. As with the Gothic architecture of other parts of Europe, English Gothic is defined by its pointed arches, vaulted roofs, buttresses, large windows, and spires. Louis W. Claude and Edward F. Starck: Louis Claude was born in Devils Lake, Wisconsin, in 1868 and educated in the public schools in Baraboo and Madison. He graduated from the University of Wisconsin in 1891 with a degree in civil engineering and worked

in the offices of Burnham & Root, Adler & Sullivan, and Schlacks & Ottenheimer for five years. In 1896 Claude returned to Madison and entered into partnership with Starck. Edward Starck was born in Milwaukee in 1868 and attended the Madison public schools. It is not known what, if any, education he had beyond secondary school; perhaps he and Claude met at the University as students. Before entering partnership with Claude, Starck worked in the offices of D.R. Jones (Madison), E. Townsend Mix (Milwaukee), and Handy & Cady (Chicago). Both men continued in partnership throughout the remainder of their professional lives. Both died in Madison, Starck in October 1947 and Claude in August 1951. The firm produced a wide variety of buildings, but specialized in educational and institutional structures. Among their commissions were more than thirty small-town public libraries in Wisconsin and surrounding states. In 1969 this unique, beautifully styled building was converted to apartments and met its demise in the late 1980s after a fire gutted the building.