

Footsteps of La Crosse

A JOURNEY THROUGH TIME & ARCHITECTURE



CASS/KING TOUR OVERVIEW

The Cass/King Residential Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1997, the second NRHP district in the city and the first listed residential district. The district covers a large area roughly twenty blocks square; west to east from West Ave to 20th Street, and north to south from Main Street to Madison Street. This neighborhood on the south side of La Crosse is the most outstanding concentration of fashionable and architecturally significant late 19th and early 20th century residences in the city. The Cass/King District includes 287 properties, of which 220 are considered contributing to the significance of the district and 44 are identified as excellent examples of historic styles built between 1880 and 1940. The twenty buildings on this tour represent the best representatives of 19th century late Victorian and 20th century Early Modern architecture in the city. Styles represented include Queen Anne and Romanesque from the 1890s, Prairie Style from the 1910s and 1920s and Classical, Colonial and Tudor Revival from 1900 to 1940.

As La Crosse boomed after the Civil War, residential development continued east from the river along the sandy floodplain which provided no obstacles to building construction. The first homes in the district were built in the 1880s by a few wealthy residents looking to live on the edge of the city on larger lots, away from the noise and commotion of the core city. Cass Street and King Streets east of West Avenue became the most prestigious avenues in town and attracted more residents who built larger and more grandiose homes in the late Victorian Era. The neighborhood also has excellent examples of the paradigm shift in building style and interior décor that occurred in America around the turn of the century. The shift from the imposing grandiosity of the Queen Anne and Romanesque to the more open, simplified and modern appearance of the Arts and Crafts influenced Prairie Style can be seen within a few blocks walk in the district. Reflecting the impact of the early 20th century aesthetic are four examples of high-style late Victorian homes that in the first two decades of the 20th century had a complete “make-over” inspired by the Arts and Crafts Movement. And most likely an effort to keep up with the neighbors!

The socio-economic profile of the first owners of the grand homes in the district reflects the eastern-born Yankee background of most of the early successful entrepreneurs in the city as well as a good representation of the self-made German and Norwegian immigrants. Professions represented include lumber, finance, construction, beer-making, manufacturing and medicine; all base industries in La Crosse in the years between 1880 and 1940. Although a few of the large high-style homes were converted to multi-family occupancy by the mid-20th century, the district has retained its elegant and somewhat exclusive appearance and reputation. Pride of ownership, a sensitivity to the historic architectural flavor of the neighborhood and a commitment to historic preservation is evident throughout the district. Today, the Cass/King Historic District remains a prestigious and attractive neighborhood with a high density of architecturally significant buildings. Enjoy your tour of this fine neighborhood!

Site 1: Daniel McMillan House
1222 Cass St.
Built in 1914

The Daniel McMillan House is an excellent example of the Prairie Style as interpreted by local architects Otto Merman and Percy Dwight Bentley. This home was built after Bentley left La Crosse and was likely a Merman interpretation of the popular style. The McMillan House shows Merman’s move away from the rectangular symmetry of Bentley’s earlier designs in favor of a more Wrightian horizontal irregularity. Prairie elements include the low pitch hip roof, horizontal band of windows and broad flat chimney. The two-story high-contrast brick and stucco exterior features narrow strip detailing which highlights the horizontal feel. The heavy brick piers on the first story add a vertical element to the L-shaped rectangular mass. The porte-cochere/2nd story addition on the west side was designed by Merman in 1918.

Daniel G. McMillan was a third generation La Crosse McMillan, the great-grandson of Scots immigrant and pioneer settler Duncan McMillan who arrived in La Crosse in the early 1850s. The McMillans were a prominent family of enormous wealth and influence in the formative years of the city. John H MacMillan married Edna Cargill, daughter of commodity baron W. W. Cargill, and moved the Cargill company to Minneapolis in the first decade of the 20th century. The MacMillan/Cargill family still controls Cargill, Inc. the largest privately owned company in the world. This powerful multi-national corporation began with the MacMillan and Cargill families in La Crosse but no longer has any ties to the city. (the Cargill mansion was located on the southeast corner of Cass and West) Daniel McMillan was also a business partner of Philo Gelatt who hired Otto Merman to design a Prairie Style house next door at 1212 Cass Street in 1917.

Site 2: Joseph M. Hixon House
1326 Cass St.
Built in 1902

The brick and stucco Joseph Hixon House evokes the architecture of 16th century Elizabethan England and is the finest Tudor Revival style residence in La Crosse. The half-timbered asymmetrical mass with steeply pitched gables, tall brick chimneys and arched entry are all hallmarks of high-style Tudor Revival architecture. The decorative bargeboard and octagonal and rectangular bays add even more texture to the exterior. The brick multi-car garage that sits on the rear of the property has some Prairie Style elements.

This house was built for Joseph M Hixon, the second son of Gideon Hixon. Joseph was very active in the family lumber and financing business and is well known for his role in the preservation of Grandad Bluff and the establishment of Hixon Forest along with his mother, Ellen Pennell Hixon. Chicago based architects Handy and Cady designed the Tudor Revival home that was built by local general contractor James Stormondt for \$25,000. Interiors were designed by the local firm of Segelke-Kohlhaus Company and the metal fireplace hood in the library is the work of noted interior designer Odin J Oyen.

Site 3: Easton/Copeland House
1317 Cass St.
Built in 1886/1909

This spacious two and one-half story home was built by Jason Easton, a prominent La Crosse lumberman and financier for his 27 year old son, Lucian Easton. Lucian married Mary Losey the daughter of another prominent local figure, Joseph W. Losey. Originally built in the Queen Anne style in 1886-87 it was dramatically remodeled and expanded by later owner and former La Crosse Mayor Frederick A. Copeland in 1909. Frederick Copeland's daughter married Joseph Hixon who built the Tudor Revival mansion across the street in 1902. The remodeling of 1909 displays design elements of the Tudor Revival and Craftsman styles that were very popular in the Midwest at the turn of the 20th century. F. A. Copeland's decision to "Tudorize" his residence was likely influenced by the high-style example across the street.

The original Queen Anne style home was designed by noted local architect William Parker in 1886 and significant exterior alterations were made in the 1909 remodeling (see photo). The contrasting half-timbered stucco/wood shingle exterior walls, exposed beams, low-pitched roof on the entry, porches and porte-cochere are all Early Modern elements that lend a Tudor appearance to the house after 1909. During the remodeling, the interior was also re-designed with a floor plan, windows and woodwork all reflecting the popular early 20th century Arts and Crafts movement. Subsequent owners have maintained the Craftsman and Tudor Revival elements on the interior and exterior. The two-car detached garage also has Early Modern design elements.

Site 4: Nymphus & Jessie Holway House
1419 Cass St.
Built in 1891

The towering limestone-faced Holway House is a high-style blend of Richardsonian Romanesque and Queen Anne elements. The heavy stone massing, triple-arched entryway and central bay with projecting parapet wall flanked by rounded corner towers are reflective of the Romanesque influence. The complex asymmetry with multiple towers and bays and colorful wooden decorative elements all evoke the Queen Anne influence. The interior is equally grandiose, with high quality hardwood flooring and trim, wooden spindle-work and many stained and beveled glass windows. There is a large entry hall, open staircase and eight fireplaces. The two-story stone carriage house to the rear has similar late Victorian architectural elements. The landmark Holway House is one of the most photographed of the "Castles on Cass," and is the best-preserved example of high-style late 19th century residential architecture in the city.

This residence was designed for wealthy lumberman Nymphus B. Holway by noted local architects Hugo Schick and Gustav Stoltze. N. B. Holway died before the home was finished but his widow Jesse Holway lived here until the 1920s when the massive building became the Bishop's House for the Diocese of La Crosse and was owned by the Catholic Church for several decades. In the 1970s the Carlisle family purchased the home and restored much of the interior to its original appearance. In the 2000s the Wood family purchased the home returned the home to a single-family arrangement and did some major renovation and updating.

Site 5: Dailey/Smedal House
1420 Cass St.
Built in 1889/ca. 1910

The wood frame Dailey/Smedal House exhibits a blend of Queen Anne and Classical Revival elements. This combination of styles is often seen in late Victorian era residences and is sometimes referred to as Free Classic. This hybrid style complements well the surrounding late 19th century homes situated along prestigious Cass Street. The rectangular mass of the Dailey/Smedal House is accented with several dormers, a modified turret and an unusual two story bay capped by a hip roofed dormer. A distinguishing feature of the front façade is the bracketed gable-end pediment. A circa 1904 photo shows the turret with a band of windows and a conical roof extending above the roof-line. Both the reduction of the turret and the placement of a horizontal band of windows on the second floor were adaptations likely made in the 1910s. The open wrap-around porch extended into a porte-cochere on the northeast corner may have also been an alteration made after the original construction. The Classical elements in the open porch include the Tuscan columns arranged singly or in pairs.

Interior alterations include differing ceiling molding in the living/dining room areas, Craftsman influenced tile fireplace surround and geometric inlay details in the doors and trim in the dining room. The exterior and interior alterations were likely made during the ownership period of Drs. Greggar and Eilef Smedal (1909-1939) and show the Craftsman influence in the woodwork, built-in bookcases and horizontal band of casement windows visible on second story of the north wall. Another "modern" adaptation is the conversion of the large carriage house with hay-loft into a garage for motorcars and living quarters for a chauffeur. The 3/1 and 4/1 windows in the garage show the Craftsman influence.

The Dailey/Smedal House is one of several Cass Street homes that were altered and "modernized" to fit with the popular Craftsman tastes of the times. Where the Michel House (1431 Cass) and the Easton/Copeland House (1327 Cass) had extensive exterior alterations during the Early Modern period from 1900 to 1940, the Dailey/Smedal House had changes that were less dramatic but still display a change of emphasis from the Late Victorian to an Early Modern design aesthetic.

Site 6: Charles & Louise Michel House
1431 Cass St.
Built circa 1892/1927

The massive brick Michel House has a multi-gabled hip roofed mass, with conical roofed tower, hip-roofed dormers and round-arched entry. Originally designed in 1892 as a high-style Queen Anne mansion with a three-story square tower (see photo) the Michel House exterior was dramatically altered and "modernized" in 1927. The original red brick exterior was changed to cream brick, the tower was removed and in general the exterior details were reduced and simplified to reflect a Period Revival influence that prevailed in high style mansions of the 1920s. The interior continues to display the grand open stairway, leaded glass windows and numerous fireplaces of the original design. Charles Michel died in 1904, and the remodeling in 1927 was done during the ownership of his son, Carl Michel.

German immigrants Charles and John Michel came to America in 1848 and arrived in La Crosse in 1856 to work in construction. They saw an opportunity in the beer making business and built a brewery a year later in 1857. They incorporated as C. and J. Brewery in 1886 and by the turn of the 20th century were one of the largest breweries in La Crosse. The Michel Brewery survived the Prohibition Era by producing soft drinks and in 1933 was renamed La Crosse Brewery. They bought out the Gund Brewery name in the late 1930s and bottled beer under the Peerless label until closing in 1965. Other buildings associated with the Michel brewing company are the C. and J. Michel Building (1892) at 113-115 South Third Street (see the Downtown tour) which served as a sampling room for the company and the Michel Brewery (1907) at 710 South 3rd Street which was razed in the 1990s.

Site 7: W. W. Withee House
1434 Cass St.
Built in 1897

The Withee House, an unusual patterned brick interpretation of the Queen Anne style is one of the most prominent of the "Castles on Cass". The irregular hipped roof mass is surrounded by two tall conical towers and a shorter, broader tower on the east. The central entry bay is topped by a three-panel Palladian window. The open, wrap-around front porch supported by classical columns is typical of the Queen Anne style. A flat-roofed porte-cochere with arched openings is attached to the west side. The original coach house remains to the rear. This highly picturesque mansion is an essentially unaltered and an excellent intact example of high-style late Victorian architecture.

W. W. Withee was the son of entrepreneur Nyrum Withee, a prominent early area lumberman. W. W. Withee was also involved in the lumber business and was president of the Security Savings Bank.

Site 8: Villas on Cass-English Lutheran Church
1601 Cass St.
Built in 1925/2007

Designed by local architect Otto Merman while in partnership with Herbert Skogstad, this buff brick building had elements found in most Gothic Revival churches from the late 19th and early 20th centuries. These elements include pointed arch or lancet windows and entry, steep gable red tile roof, stepped buttresses and tracery surrounding the large stained glass windows. The two-story hip-roofed addition on the west side is unusual. The rather abstract modern Gothic Style of this church reflects the transition in La Crosse when historic styles were used for inspiration rather than for form.

The English Lutheran Church was established in 1898 and the community had its own building by 1901. The name English reflects not the ancestry of the parishioners but the language of the liturgy. Other Norwegian Lutheran and German Lutheran churches in the city continued services in their native language for several decades into the 20th century. When a new church was built for the English Lutheran community on King and 15th Street in 1994, the Living Word Christian Church established their home in this building. In 2007 this church building was converted to luxury condominiums. Although several of the architectural elements have been preserved, the adaptive re-use greatly altered the overall architectural character of the building.

Site 9: Henry & Clara Salzer House
1634 King St.
Built in 1912

This outstanding Prairie Style home designed by Percy Dwight Bentley displays the broad sweeping horizontality of overhanging eaves and rows of windows that identifies this style. The stucco exterior is highlighted by horizontal decorative elements and contrasting vertical piers defining the corners and recessed entry. Horizontal details are evident even on the broad, flat chimneys. Also situated on this sprawling corner lot are large Prairie style planters situated on the corners and flanking the walkway to the entry. Sidelights and bracket lamps also highlight the entrance. The detached garage shows Prairie Style design elements similar to the house. The Henry Salzer House is the most visible and highly recognizable example of Prairie Style architecture in La Crosse.

Henry Salzer was the son of John A. Salzer (1823-1892), German immigrant and founder of the Salzer Seed Company. The Salzer Seed company started in the La Crosse south side backyard of John Salzer in 1865, was incorporated in 1886 and by the turn of the 20th century was one of the largest mail order seed companies in the US. After his father's death in 1892, Henry Salzer led the company until his death in 1916. The Henry Salzer House was built by local contractors Schwalbe and Sons with one-foot thick hollow tile walls. The interior of the house reflects a Colonial Style interior that was the preference of Henry's wife, Clara.

Site 10: Frank & Alice Hixon House
1431 King St.
Built in 1892/1905

The Frank Hixon House is one of the most prominent of the late Victorian era homes that were remodeled a decade or so later to reflect the popular Arts and Crafts movement of the early 20th century. Like the Easton/Copeland House at 1327 Cass and the Charles Michel House at 1431 Cass, the Frank Hixon House has stucco walls, steep gables, gable-roofed dormers and diamond-paned windows which all evoke a "quaint" English Tudor Revival aesthetic. The gabled entry with a highly decorative fascia and bracketed roof are additional examples of the Arts and Crafts influence. Historic photos of the interior show many of the original late Victorian as well as Craftsman design elements and furnishings. Surrounded by a picturesque brick and stucco fence with wrought-iron gates, the Frank Hixon House is a fine local example of late 19th century architecture modified to create a "modern" early 20th century appearance.

Frank Hixon (1862-1931) was the eldest son of Gideon and Ellen Hixon. He started work in his father's sawmill in 1879 in Hannibal, Missouri and returned to Wisconsin to manage a lumber company in Merrill, Wisconsin in 1883. Upon his father's death in 1892, he returned to La Crosse to manage the family's large financial interests in the region. Frank married his second wife, Alice Green Hixon, in 1919 and moved to Lake Forest, Illinois in 1925. Frank expanded the Hixon family financial interests begun by his father. He was a leader in civic affairs in La Crosse and was active in advocating a plan for city parks in La Crosse developed by noted landscape architect John Nolen. Alice Green Hixon (1883-1982) preserved the Gideon Hixon home and furnishings and donated the Hixon House to the La Crosse County Historical Society in 1965.

Site 11: Gunnar Gunderson House
1504 King St.
Built in 1927

This fine two-story multi-gabled stucco residence is a very well preserved example of period revival architecture with Tudor and French Provincial decorative elements. The gabled wall dormers, multi-paned windows, half-timbering and arched stone entry are all distinguishing Tudor Revival elements. The Gunderson House was designed by Otto Merman during his partnership with Herman Skogstad from 1924-1928. After Prairie School architecture went out of style in the 1920s, many architects switched to Period Revival motifs for their wealthy and prominent clients.

Dr. Gunnar Gunderson (1897-1979) was the third son of Dr. Adolf Gunderson (1865-1938), founder of the Gunderson medical dynasty. Adolf had seven sons, six of whom became doctors; with four sons remaining in La Crosse to join

with their father in establishing Gundersen Clinic on the south side of La Crosse in 1930. The Gunnar Gunderson home remains in the Gundersen family.

Site 12: John & Virginia Elliott House
1420 King St.
Built in 1936

This two-story red brick Neoclassical Revival style is distinguished by a centrally placed high style full-height open porch. This decorative element, called a pedimented portico, is supported by classical Corinthian style columns. The brick façade with contrasting white trim, symmetrical window placement and entry is typical of the classically influenced period revival houses of the early 20th century. Other classical decorative elements include the broken pediment over the entry, cut stone lintels over the windows and evenly-spaced modillions under the eaves. The two-story gable roofed extension on the west has a similar architectural motif. The large lot and circular drive add to the elegant appearance of this late period revival house.

Site 13: C. J. & Helen Felber House
1408 King St.
Built in 1913

This two-story brick Prairie Style house designed by Percy Dwight Bentley features the low-pitched hip roof, overhanging eaves, horizontal band of windows, contrasting exterior surfaces and broad flat chimneys typical of this style. The large recessed bays, set-back second story and irregular massing are unusual design elements of this early interpretation of Prairie School residential architecture by Bentley. The interior décor was designed by local artist and decorator Odin J. Oyen. The wood frame garage on the west side complements the scale and appearance of the house. The original garden plan designed by Bentley at the rear of the house has been altered.

Charles J. Felber was president E. R. Barron Company at the time this house was built. The E. R. Barron Building (1891) located on the southwest corner of Main and Fifth Avenue was built as a dry goods and sundries store and operated as a small downtown department store until the 1980s.

Site 14: Frank Schwalbe Jr. House
1420 Madison St.
Built in 1914

This two-story brick and stucco Prairie Style home was designed by Otto Merman for friend, client and contractor Frank Schwalbe, Jr. (1889-1929). The narrow single lot required an unusual sideways presentation of this large home that appears almost like a bungalow from the street perspective. However, the cut stone/brick/stucco contrasting surfaces, exaggerated overhanging eaves, rows of geometric leaded glass windows and broad flat chimney are the unmistakable hallmarks of an architecturally designed Prairie Style house.

The Schwalbe Construction Company founded by German immigrant Joseph Schwalbe in the late 19th century built several of the most historically and architecturally significant public, commercial and residential buildings in La Crosse from the 1890s until the middle of the last century. Joseph Schwalbe, followed by his son Frank, Sr. and his grandsons Frank, Jr. and Art, were leaders in the construction industry in La Crosse. Several of the homes they built between 1890 and 1930 are the finest surviving examples of the late Victorian Queen Anne style and the early modern Prairie Style. Many of the most architecturally significant and well-preserved homes in the Cass/King Historic District were built (and several lived in) by the Schwalbe builders. The Schwalbe's ability to work with several different architects, home styles and a variety of commercial and residential clients indicates a skill and versatility that served them well during the period of the city's greatest growth.

Site 15: Will Ott House
1532 Madison St.
Built in 1897

The Will Ott House is one of a series of well-preserved Queen Anne Style mansions located in the 1500 Block of Madison Street. Four of these residences were built in 1897 and 1898 at the height of the popularity of this high-style late Victorian architectural form. The Will Ott House has the irregular hip-roofed mass, rounded towers, bracketed projections, open wrap-around porch and decorative shingle-like cladding that define the Queen Anne style. Classical elements that further typify the later Queen Anne style include the triple-section Palladian window in the front gable and the classical Ionic columns supporting the pedimented portico entrance.

Designed by local architects Hugo Schick and Gustav Stoltze, the lavish interior woodwork and windows were supplied by the Segelke-Kohlhaus Company and Egid Hackner Altar Company. The Teutonic connection here is obvious. Also, Will Ott was president of the Segelke-Kohlhaus Company. The Will Ott House, located prominently on a large corner lot and directly across the street from the site of the former Central High School was individually listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, over seventeen years before the surrounding homes were included in the Cass/King NRHP District.

Site 16: Ben & Jessie Ott House
241 17th St. South
Built in 1923

The two-story stucco Ben Ott House is one of the last and most complete expressions of the Prairie Style by local architect Otto Merman. Like many other of his Prairie School designs, the Ott House displays an accentuated asymmetrical horizontality with an elongated low-pitch hip roof, broad flat chimneys and bands of decorative leaded glass windows highlighted by horizontal detailing (note the "picture windows" on the Cass Street elevation that anticipate the popularity of this window in Ranch Style homes of the 1950s and 1960s). The octagonal bay and recessed second story are elements that Merman employed in many of his Prairie designs. A recent addition on the north side incorporating the original porte-cochere is faithful to the Prairie aesthetic. This highly visible house sits upon a large corner lot and is a virtual "gateway" to the Prairie Style residences in the district.

Ben Ott was president of Ott Radio, Inc. when he lived in this house. In 1926 he became lumber superintendent of the Segelke-Kohlhaus Company, a local manufacturing business directly connected to the building trade, where his brother served as president (see 1532 Madison Street).

Site 17: Edward & Flora Bartl House
238 17th St. South
Built in 1913

The Edward Bartl House is significant as the first of architect Percy Dwight Bentley's Prairie School designs. Drafted as early as 1910, this prototypical Bentley design has an unusual cubic mass and was adapted from a 1907 Frank Lloyd Wright design. Bentley studied architecture in Chicago from 1906 to 1910 at the Armour Institute and was clearly influenced by Wright and Sullivan, who had offices nearby at the time. However, there is no evidence that Bentley studied with or worked for either Wright or Wright's mentor, Louis H Sullivan. Bentley returned to La Crosse in 1910 and brought those Chicago-learned architectural inspirations back to La Crosse and designed the Bartl House and several other Prairie Style residences in succeeding years.

The low pitch hip roof, wide overhanging eaves, contrasting surface material, broad flat chimney and rows of windows are typical of the Prairie form. The wrap-around second story windows and corner pier were elements borrowed from designs by Walter Burley Griffin, one of the prominent Chicago School architects. Bentley adaptations include the row of square windows on the street façade and an unusual prow-shaped stairway on the north side that projects away from the exterior wall at a 45-degree angle. The Bartl House is identified by architectural historians as a significant regional variation of the Prairie Style.

Edward Bartl (d. 1957) was the president of Bartl Brewery. The brewery began as the Eagle Brewery in 1857 and in 1885 was purchased by Franz Bartl. The Bartl Brewery survived Prohibition but ceased operation and was sold in the 1930s.

Site 18: Frank & Lucinda Schwalbe House
223 17th St. South
Built in 1921

This stunning and impeccably maintained Prairie Style residence was the second home designed by Otto Merman for personal use by Frank Schwalbe, Jr. of the Schwalbe Construction Company (see 1420 Madison Street). Along this block of South 17th Street are three other Prairie Style homes designed by Merman and built by the Schwalbe Company. All are distinctly Prairie School, slightly different and all four were built between 1921 and 1923. In Chicago and elsewhere, by the early 1920s Prairie Style was becoming passé, with Period Revival taking its place as the most popular style for the well-to-do.

Frank Schwalbe House #2 has the low-pitch hip roof, exaggerated overhanging eaves, broad flat chimney and horizontal band of windows that identify the Prairie Style. There are some elements that distinguish this interpretation from other Prairie Style houses in La Crosse. The centrally placed light-colored stucco band with thin rectangular detailing and cut stone water table evoke the horizontal appearance in a highly recognizable manner. In contrast, the heavy "blockhouse" entry with round arched entry door and octagonal bay on the north side are details that Merman used to counter the horizontal flow of the façade. The Schwalbe-built Prairie Style houses on 17th Street were some of the last Prairie Style residences by designed Merman.

Site 19: Kingston Apartments
203 16th St. South
Built in 1924

The three-story Kingston Court Apartments reflect an early 20th century interest in new living styles and a U shaped footprint most often associated with middle-class multi-family housing in large cities. The heavily bracketed barrel-tiled ornamental pent roof on the street side of the north and south wings alludes to the Spanish Colonial style. The plain brick surface, three over one double-hung windows and large segmental-arched windows above the entries

suggests a Classical Revival influence. Built by the Louis Fleischer Company of Minneapolis, and an important example of an early 20th century apartment building, the Kingston Apartments originally consisted of five-room, four-room and three-room units. The original ten bay brick and tile garage is situated just to the south of the main building.

Site 20: Emil T. Mueller House
128 14th St. South
Built in 1914

The Emil Mueller House, designed by Percy Dwight Bentley, is one of the most recognizably Wrightian of the Prairie Style residences in La Crosse. Interestingly, there are no identified buildings in the La Crosse area attributed to Frank Lloyd Wright, nor did the local architects working with the Prairie School form have any direct connection to the Chicago and Oak Park based legend. The Mueller House has the low-slung geometric mass, overhanging eaves, decorative band of windows and broad, flat chimney that signify the Prairie Style. Interestingly, the Mueller House shares a footprint and overall appearance similar to the Frank Lloyd Wright designed Laura Gale House (1904) in Oak Park, Illinois.

The original light-colored stucco exterior (see photo) was replaced in the mid-20th century with the rough-cut limestone and Cherokee red clapboard siding associated with Wright's Prairie buildings. Far from detracting from its appearance, many architectural historians feel that the altered exterior actually enhances the early 20th century Prairie School appearance of the house. The original open Prairie influenced floor plan and Arts and Crafts interior finish have been preserved and enhanced.

Emil Mueller married a daughter of Gottlieb Heileman and was general manager and president of G. Heileman Brewing for many years (see photo).

