

Eau Claire's  
Carnegie  
Library

Historic  
City Hall



Eau Claire, WI



*First City Hall, 1898*

## Sawdust City Hall

The history of Eau Claire's City Hall dates back to the early days of the town's past, to a time when the city was called "Sawdust City." Since this time, Eau Claire has inhabited two city hall buildings. The first building was constructed in 1872, shortly after the city was incorporated. Located on the corner of Eau Claire and Farwell Streets, the building was modest, housing a single floor of city offices. However, by the turn of the century, Eau Claire had grown into a thriving industrial city. The citizens of Eau Claire wanted a new city hall that reflected the progress and status of the city. Thus, in 1915, Eau Claire began the construction of its second City Hall building.

Since the erection of the second City Hall building nearly a century ago, the City of Eau Claire has undergone many changes in its population, economy, and size. Likewise, the City Hall has changed with it. Today, Eau Claire's City Hall is one of the most recognizable and historically significant properties in the city. Located on 203 S. Farwell Street, downtown Eau Claire, the building now consists of two adjoining properties, the second City Hall building and the former Carnegie Library.



*Carnegie Library, 1903*

## Carnegie Library: Mr. Carnegie's Gift to the City

Eau Claire was the fourth city in the state of Wisconsin to open a public library in 1875. The original library consisted of a one room reading center, located along Graham Avenue. However, by the turn of the century, with a collection of over 8,000 books, the library board began searching for a larger space.

In 1902, the board contacted philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, who granted the city \$40,000 for the construction of a new library building. Soon after, the city chose a site for the new building in downtown Eau Claire, on the corner of Farwell Street and Grand Avenue. The architectural firm Patton and Miller, of Chicago, was selected to design the building.

*Front desk of Carnegie Library, 1931*

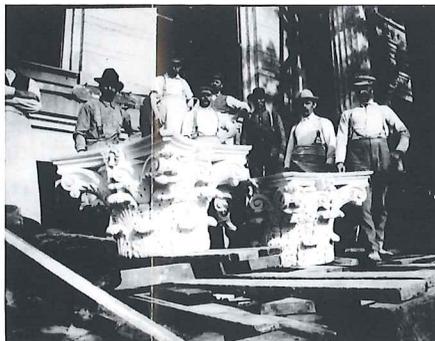


*Eau Claire City Hall (above), a replica of the Petit Trianon*

Construction of the building began in the summer of 1903. The three-story, square structure was designed in the Beaux Arts Neo-Classical Revival style. The exterior was finished with buff Bedford limestone and lined with a pedimented portico with a large Corinthian order. The inside of the building was accented with two impressive fireplaces and ornamented stained glass windows.

The building served as site of Eau Claire's public library from 1904 to 1976. In 1976, the public library was moved to its current facility, one block north on Eau Claire Street.

*Library construction workers, 1903*



## City Hall: "Forever France"

The construction of the City Hall lasted from 1915 to 1917, and cost a total of \$72,000. A former resident of Eau Claire, architect George Awsumb, of Chicago, was selected to design the building, as well as choose its new location. Impressed with the architecture of Carnegie Library, he chose a location just north of the library, along Farwell Street. Awsumb envisioned this block as the future hub of government and culture within the City of Eau Claire.

Awsumb's design emphasized both historic and aesthetic importance. Built to complement the existing library, Awsumb designed the building in the same Beaux Arts Neo-Classical Revival style. However, many Eau Claire citizens did not know that the building is a replica of the Petit Trianon, the famous palace given to Marie Antoinette in Versailles, France. The two-story, square building was constructed of imitation French Caen stone. An upper flight of marble steps led to an entrance under a projecting pavilion, supported by four Corinthian columns. The entrance of the building opened up to a grand stair hall constructed of marble.

On September 17, 1917, the city offices moved to the new facility. The ground floor of the building hosted the business departments as well as the council chamber, while the second floor contained public board offices.

*City Hall staircase*

## “City Hall has a New Look”

The City Hall remained relatively unchanged until 1978, when the Carnegie Library and the City Hall were joined together in an extensive remodeling project. In this project, the vacant library building was converted into additional city office space, doubling the size of City Hall. While maintaining the integrity of the two buildings, the interior of the buildings was updated to provide added space for technological and structural changes. Additionally, a three-story structure was built on the lot between the two buildings, serving as the new entrance to the complex. The new facility enabled the city to house all of the administrative offices, with the exception of the police department, in one complex.



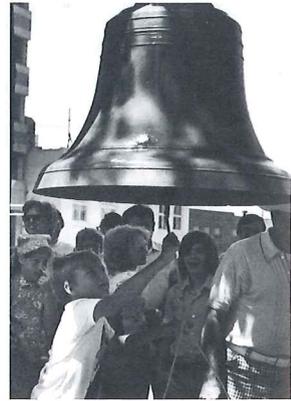
*City Hall, 2008*



*Old Carnegie Library, 2008*

## Old City Hall Bell

In 1875, the City of Eau Claire purchased a bell for the belfry of the fire department, located on the ground floor of the original City Hall building. In the early days of Eau Claire, the bell played an important role, announcing fires and city council meetings, as well as the city's 9 p.m. curfew. However, with the implementation of more sophisticated warning systems, the bell lost its importance. After the old engine house was torn down in 1943, the bell was saved and kept in the basement of the Fire Station No. 10. In the 1970s, the bell was rediscovered and placed on the corner of Eau Claire and Farwell Streets, on the grounds of the City Hall. Today, the bell serves as an important piece of history from the early days of Eau Claire.



*City Hall Bell, 1976*

## City Hall Today

The original City Hall building and the former Carnegie Library were added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1981. This Act ensures the future protection of these structures and reinforces their historical significance to the City of Eau Claire. Today, this structure houses city government offices, which preside over all city business. As the city continues to grow and flourish, the city business conducted within these walls may change; however, the buildings will remain a testament to the the same integrity and spirit the city possessed a century before.



*Front steps of City Hall in winter*

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