

HISTORIC DESIGNATION STUDY REPORT

I. NAME

Historic: Lester L. Carr House

Common Name:

II. LOCATION

2537 W. Kilbourn Avenue

Legal description: Tax Key No.: 389-0501-000

HARRISON'S SUBD. OF PART OF 100 ACRES IN NW 1/4
SEC 30-7-22, BLOCK 275 N 100' LOT 1, W 6' OF N 100'
OF LOT 5 ADJ.

ALDERMANIC DISTRICT: 4th

III. CLASSIFICATION

Structure

IV. OWNER

NHS-Milwaukee
4914 W. North Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53208

V. YEAR BUILT:

1897

Architect: Henry J. Van Ryn

VI. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Lester Carr House is located on a 100-foot by 60-foot lot at the southeast corner of West Kilbourn Avenue and North 26th Street. It is set back from the sidewalk behind a narrow 7-foot border of slightly bermed lawn and foundation plantings. The site is in the heart of what had once been a fashionable West Side neighborhood built up with large Victorian era houses, duplexes and apartments. Today, many modern apartment buildings dot the area.

The Lester L. Carr House is a 2 1/2-story rectangular brick building in the German Neo-Gothic style. The juxtaposition of robust and delicate Gothic motifs, the tan brick laid with narrow mortar joints, the substantial masonry porch, the diminutive pyramidal roofed front dormers, and the prominent roof that lends an almost top-heavy look to the house all reflect the German interpretation of the Gothic style as manifested in Milwaukee in the 1890's.

The Carr House has articulated elevations on each of its north, east and west sides, while the south or rear is more utilitarian in character. The Kilbourn Avenue facade is asymmetrical in design and dominated by the large, two-story bay on the south and prominent masonry porch which extends across the front. Shallow rounded bays on the first and second stories are located at the west end of the facade. The porch rests on brick skirting with lancet arches and between the brick piers extends a wooden balustrade carved with Gothic cusped designs set in ogee arches. A similar balustrade, but with cusped designs set in rondels, encircles the upper deck of the porch. Cusped forms also ornament the lacy wooden spandrels between the brick piers.

Other Gothic details include the limestone label mouldings above the second story windows and the diamond paned leaded glass window at the center of the second story. The building is crowned by a steeply pitched, side gabled roof that is punctuated on its Kilbourn Avenue front by decorative shingle-clad dormers.

The medieval-looking large center dormer has a gabled roof, flared eaves with half timbering and three Gothic-style cusped windows with diamond paned leaded glazing. The diminutive side dormers that flank it have pyramidal roofs and lancet windows.

The west elevation, facing North 26th Street, is simpler than the main facade and features a 2-story, 3-sided bay window that resembles the one on Kilbourn Avenue. The east elevation is highlighted by a 2-story, shingle-clad box bay that terminates in a crenelated parapet. This side also has a shingle clad oriel window. A limestone beltcourse accents the division between the first and second story on both these elevations as well as the Kilbourn Avenue facade. Label mouldings frame the second story windows and the attic windows in the gable ends. Gothic-style cusped windows with latticed leaded glass, like those in the front dormer, are repeated in the attic story and the box bay at the east elevation of the house. The rear or south elevation has a projecting 2 1/2-story gabled service wing that is set off from the main block of the house. Windows feature stone lintels and sills but no stone label mouldings, and the stone beltcourse that extends around the other three sides of the house does not continue around the south elevation. This elevation's few ornamental features include the shingle cladding of the gable end, the wooden label moulding over the attic windows, and a decorative hood with flared eaves and cusped ornament that is

Page 3
Study Report
Lester L. Carr House
located above the rear door.

Other ornamental features on the building include the quoins that accent the second story corners of the Kilbourn Avenue facade, the ornamental metal straps that fasten the copper downspouts, and the floral carving on the limestone blocks at the bases of the parapet gable walls.

Alterations to the Carr House include the construction of a 2 1/2-story, clapboard-sheathed stair tower on the east elevation and a rebuilt side porch along the service wing fronting North 26th Street. The small rear yard contains a brick-veneered, hip roofed garage built in 1926.

VII. SIGNIFICANCE

The Lester L. Carr House is architecturally significant as a fine example of one of Milwaukee's dwindling stock of German influenced buildings. Popular here from the 1890's until World War I, the German influence on architectural style manifested itself in designs that imitated contemporary German architecture in Europe. At that time, a strong theme in German architecture was the revival of Germany's Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque heritage. Although the patrons of such buildings in Milwaukee were generally of German ethnicity, as were their architects, clients with non-German ethnic backgrounds, like Carr, also commissioned German-style buildings which would fit in with the houses being built by their wealthy German neighbors in fashionable areas like Kilbourn Avenue. Other than its ethnic architectural characteristics, the Carr House is a fine example of a late nineteenth century upper middle class residence that features beautifully executed Gothic detail in stone, wood and glass.

The Carr House is also significant as a distinguished residential commission by Henry J. Van Ryn, an important Milwaukee architect, better known for his institutional work with his partner, Gerrit J. DeGelleke.

VIII. HISTORY

The fine brick residence at 2537 W. Kilbourn Avenue was built by Lester L. Carr in 1897 when he was 54 years of age. Carr was born in Jonesville, Hillside County, Michigan on June 27, 1843, the son of De Mott and Harriet M. Carr. Lester received a public school education and attended Wayland Academy in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin before he enlisted in Company K of the First Wisconsin Cavalry in 1862. He was discharged from the service due to poor health and subsequently taught in various

Page 4

Study Report

Lester L. Carr House

Wisconsin schools before deciding to change careers and attend Spencerian Business College in Milwaukee in 1866. By this time, the rest of the Carr family had settled in Milwaukee; Carr's father, De Mott, worked selling machinery and agricultural products, and his brother, Selden, worked as a clerk and bookkeeper. The family lived at a variety of addresses including today's 735 North 4th Street, 715 West Clybourn Street, and 1912 West Wells Street. Lester Carr worked as a bookkeeper with the Judd and Hiles Manufacturing Company and with H. S. Benjamin before securing employment as a deputy in the office of the Internal Revenue Collector.

Carr augmented his social standing by marrying the niece of millionaire meat packer John Plankinton on December 4, 1873. Elizabeth P. Plankinton was the daughter of John Plankinton's brother Thomas and Thomas' wife, Sara Camby, and was born in Milwaukee in 1856. Thomas Plankinton was a butcher, first with his own shop, then later on working for his brother's Plankinton, Armour & Company. Lester Carr's employment as a storekeeper at the Plankinton House Hotel (1881-1883) and later as a bookkeeper-clerk for the Plankinton Packing Company (1895-1906) are most likely the result of his ties-by-marriage to John Plankinton. Selden S. Carr, Lester's brother, also worked for John Plankinton's company in the 1880's.

By all appearances, Lester Carr's father-in-law, Thomas Plankinton, lived a comfortable life, but one far removed from the opulence of his millionaire brother, John. Thomas and his family lived at what would be 542 North 10th Street today. Thomas developed gangrene in his left foot and leg and died on June 24, 1879. His spinster sister, Julia Ann, took over the management of the household, and the Carrs moved in with the ailing Julia in 1884, a year before her death at age 75. The Carrs remained on 10th Street until they built their new and more fashionable home on West Kilbourn Avenue in 1897. Not long after getting settled into their new Kilbourn Avenue home, Carr's daughter, Edith, and her new husband, Alexander C. Starkweather, moved into the Kilbourn Avenue house. They remained there with the Carrs for two decades. Lester Carr retired from his position at the Plankinton Packing Company around 1906 and went into the insurance business and also briefly managed the Modern Specialty Company in 1908 and 1909. Lester's wife, Elizabeth, died at home of breast cancer on February 6, 1924 at the age of 68. In 1927 Carr, his daughter Edith, and his son-in-law Alex Starkweather, moved to a new home at 3494 North Frederick Avenue. Lester L. Carr died at his Frederick Avenue home of pneumonia at the age of 86 on July 8, 1929. The old house on West Kilbourn Avenue was rented out to realtor Fred L. Herwig in 1927 and then to toolmaker Arba R. Walworth and his wife, Mary, in 1928 and 1929.

After Lester Carr's death, the Kilbourn Avenue house was vacant in 1930, but was then sold to new owners and managed by Ernest W.

Page 5

Study Report

Lester L. Carr House

Reuter as a rooming house. The property remained a rooming house until it was acquired by Campus Circle.

Information on Alexander C. Starkweather

Alexander C. Starkweather was born in Milwaukee on April 26, 1876, the son of Cooperstown, New York native Alexander B. Starkweather and German immigrant Mary Lantow. Alexander's father supported the family by working as a clerk and for a number of years held a position with Kieckhefer Bros. The family lived at a variety of addresses including 839 South 3rd Street, 1418 West Wells Street, 545 North 11th Street, 549 North 9th Street, 826 North 17th Street, and 2535 West Juneau Avenue. In 1904 Alexander B., his wife Mary, son Frederick W., and daughter Elizabeth G. moved to the city's East Side at 3229 North Oakland Avenue.

Alexander B. Starkweather followed in his father's footsteps and worked as a clerk in the New Insurance Building on 611 North Broadway, a building known today as the Loyalty Block.

Alexander's marriage to Edith Carr resulted in his getting a new job with the Plankinton Packing Company, no doubt at the recommendation of his father-in-law, Lester L. Carr, who already worked for the firm.

Starkweather worked as a clerk, then cashier, for the Plankinton Packing Company from 1898 through 1912. Starkweather apparently was able to get his brother Frederick a job with the Plankinton firm also, and Frederick was employed there from about 1902 to 1915.

Alexander C. Starkweather subsequently worked as the manager of the safe deposit box area of the Second Ward Savings Bank, an institution later known as the First Wisconsin National Bank and Firststar Bank today. Alexander retained this prestigious position until his retirement in the 1940s.

City directory listings indicate that Alexander C. Starkweather moved in with his in-laws, the Carrs, after his marriage to their only daughter, Edith. The Carrs had had one other child, Lester, Jr., who died on November 14, 1894. After Starkweather's mother-in-law died in 1924, they purchased a new home at 3494 North Frederick Avenue on the city's Upper East Side from a retired paint store owner, Rudolph Panduro, and his wife, Louise. Panduro had built and occupied the Frederick Avenue house for just a short while in 1925 before moving to another new house in what was then a brand new neighborhood. Lester L. Carr died at the Frederick Avenue house at the age of 86 on July 8, 1929. The Starkweathers, who apparently had no children, lived

Page 6

LESTER L. CARR HOUSE
2537 WEST KILBOURN AVENUE
INFORMATION - ALEXANDER C. STARKWEATHER

out the remaining years of their life on Frederick Avenue. Edith died in January of 1944 at age 67, and Alexander followed her in death on January 12, 1951 at the age of 74. Their house on Frederick Avenue was subsequently occupied by their nephew, Frederick W. Starkweather and his wife, Virginia. Frederick was the son of Alexander's brother, Frederick.

The Architect

Henry J. Van Ryn was born in Milwaukee on June 8, 1864. His father, a native of Utrecht, Holland, came to Milwaukee and was a successful tobacco manufacturer until his death in 1878. Henry Van Ryn was educated in Milwaukee's public schools until 1881 when, at the age of 17, he became an apprentice architect in the Milwaukee office of Charles A. Gombert. Later Van Ryn worked as a draftsman in the offices of Milwaukee architects James Douglas and Edward Townsend Mix. After completing an apprenticeship, Van Ryn went into partnership with Robert G. Kirsh around 1885 as H. J. Van Ryn & Company. The partners ran an office at South Second Street and West Pittsburgh and at North 5th Street and West Juneau Avenue and were among the first local architects to publish patternbooks including the *Carpenter and Joiner's Hand-Book* and *Model Houses & Cottages or Hints on Economical House Building* in addition to *Specifications*, an edition devoted to brick and frame buildings costing over \$5,000. The partners also advertised that they designed furniture, interior decorations, and monuments.

Van Ryn took on new partners, Charles Lesser, in 1891 and then F. W. Andree as Van Ryn, Andree & Lesser. The firm designed mostly residences, but also had commissions for public buildings and apartment houses. In the fall of 1897, Van Ryn established a partnership with Gerrit De Gelleke, who had recently returned to Milwaukee after completing an architectural studies course at the University of Pennsylvania.

Gerrit J. De Gelleke was born in Milwaukee on August 19, 1872. His father, a native of Holland, was a Milwaukee building contractor. After graduating from Milwaukee's East High School in about 1890, De Gelleke went to work as a draftsman for Henry Van Ryn, but left in 1895 to take a 2-year course in architectural studies at the University of Pennsylvania. After graduating in 1897, De Gelleke returned to Milwaukee as an architect and formed a partnership called Van Ryn and De Gelleke with his former boss. The firm was very prosperous and most of their extensive residential and commercial work was designed in the period revival styles of the day. The firm later

Page 7

LESTER L. CARR HOUSE
2537 WEST KILBOURN AVENUE
INFORMATION - ALEXANDER C. STARKWEATHER

specialized, however, in institutional work and designed school buildings and hospitals throughout the state. Between 1912 and 1925, the firm designed all of the Milwaukee public school buildings including the Central Milwaukee Area Technical College building and Bay View and Riverside High Schools. In 1920 the firm was awarded first prize in the national architectural competition for the Milwaukee County General Hospital building.

Van Ryn retired from the firm in 1936 and De Gelleke continued in practice on his own. Van Ryn lived out his life in a house at 1904 West Kilbourn Avenue on the city's West Side where he died on January 2, 1951 at the age of 86. He is buried at Calvary Cemetery.

IX. STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Lester L. Carr House, 2537 West Kilbourn Avenue, be studied for possible designation as a City of Milwaukee Historic Structure as a result of its possible fulfillment of criteria e-5 and e-6 of the Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 308-81(2)(e), of the Milwaukee Code of Ordinances.

X. PRESERVATION GUIDELINES

The following preservation guidelines represent the principal concerns of the Historic Preservation Commission regarding this historic designation. However, the Commission reserves the right to make final decisions based upon particular design submissions. Nothing in these guidelines shall be construed to prevent ordinary maintenance or the restoration and/or replacement of documented original elements.

A. Roofs

Retain the roof shape and dormers. Skylights may be added to roof surfaces if they are not visible from the street. Avoid making changes to the roof shape which would alter the building height, roof line or pitch. If replacement is necessary, duplicate the appearance of the original roofing as closely as possible.

B. Materials

1. Masonry

- a. Unpainted brick, terra cotta, or stone should not be painted or covered. This is historically incorrect and could cause irreversible damage if it was decided to remove the paint at a later date.
- b. Repoint defective mortar by duplicating the original in color, style, texture and strength. Avoid using mortar colors and pointing styles which were unavailable or were not used when the building was constructed.
- c. Clean masonry only when necessary to halt deterioration and with the gentlest method possible. Sandblasting limestone, terra cotta, or brick surfaces is prohibited. This method of cleaning erodes the surface of the material and accelerates deterioration. Avoid the indiscriminate use of chemical products which could have an adverse reaction with the masonry materials, such as the use of acid on limestone.

LESTER L. CARR HOUSE
2537 WEST KILBOURN AVENUE
INFORMATION - ALEXANDER C. STARKWEATHER

- d. Repair or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the old as closely as possible. Avoid using new material which is inappropriate or was unavailable when the building was constructed.

2. Wood/Metal

- a. Retain original material, whenever possible. Avoid removing architectural features that are essential to maintaining the building's character and appearance.
- b. Retain or replace deteriorated material with new material that duplicates the appearance of the old as closely as possible. Avoid covering architectural features with new materials which do not duplicate the appearance of the original materials. Covering wood trim with aluminum or vinyl is not permitted.

C. Windows and Doors

1. Retain existing window and door openings. Retain the existing configuration of panes, sash, surrounds and sills, except as necessary to restore to the original condition. Avoid making additional openings or changes in existing fenestration by enlarging or reducing window or door openings to fit new stock window sash or new stock door sizes. Avoid changing the size or configuration of window panes or sash. Use storm windows or protective glazing which have glazing configurations similar to the prime windows and which obscure the prime windows as little as possible. Restore the diamond-paned leaded sash and replace missing sash with new sash to match.
2. Respect the building's stylistic period. If the replacement of doors or window sash is necessary, the replacement should duplicate the appearance and design of the original window sash or door. Avoid using inappropriate sash and door replacements. Avoid the filling-in or covering of original openings with inappropriate materials such as glass block. Avoid using modern style window units, such

as horizontal sliding sash or casements, in place of double-hung sash or the substitution of units with glazing configurations not appropriate to the style of the building. Vinyl or metal clad prime window units are not permitted. Glass block basement windows are not permitted, except on the rear elevation, where they may be allowed in locations where they will not be visible from the street.

3. Exterior mounted steel bar security doors and window guards are generally not allowed. If permitted, the doors or grates shall be of the simplest design and installed so as to be as inobtrusive as possible.

D. Trim and Ornamentation

There should be no changes to the existing trim or ornamentation except as necessary to restore the building to its original condition. Replacement features shall match the original member in scale, design, color and appearance.

E. Additions

No additions will be permitted on the north, east or west elevations. Any other addition requires the approval of the Commission. Approval shall be based upon the addition's design compatibility with the building in terms of height, roof configuration, fenestration, scale, design, color, and materials, and the degree to which it visually intrudes upon the principal elevations or is visible from the public right-of-way. The non-historic east stair tower addition may be removed if the east elevation is restored to its original appearance.

Page 11
LESTER L. CARR HOUSE
2537 WEST KILBOURN AVENUE
INFORMATION - ALEXANDER C. STARKWEATHER

F. Signs/Exterior Lighting

The installation of any permanent exterior sign or light fixture shall require the approval of the Commission. Approval will be based on the compatibility of the proposed sign or light with the historic and architectural character of the building.

G. Site Features

New plant materials, paving, fencing, or accessory structures shall be compatible with the historic architectural character of the building if visible from the public right of way.