



ROY WILCOX HOUSE (104 Wilcox Street)  
Intensive Survey Form - Continuation Sheet (1)

ARCHITECTURAL STATEMENT:

Situated on the east bank of the Chippewa River, the Wilcox residence combines elements of Prairie School and Georgian Revival architecture. The two story brick structure is rectangular in shape and covered by a hip roof with broad extending eaves. Three hip roof dormers containing paired double hung windows mark the main facade, while single dormers are featured on the north and south facades. The main entrance is centrally located and paralleled by sidelights and small rectangular window openings. A simple portico sheltered by a flat roof serves the entrance area. The facade is arranged in a nearly symmetrical manner, but the variety of window shapes deviates from the standard pattern displayed by Georgian Revival architecture and instead differentiates the interior use of space.

(1981 photo - 25/25)

HISTORICAL STATEMENT:

Associated with the life of a significant person: The Roy Wilcox house is a significant historical resource because of its identification with the life of Roy Wilcox, a prominent political figure active at both the state and local levels during the early decades of the twentieth century. A native of Eau Claire, Wilcox was trained as a lawyer and practiced in his community from 1897 until his death in 1946. In the political realm, Wilcox spearheaded the legislation providing for the commission form of government in Wisconsin cities. In turn he advocated that type of government for Eau Claire, which in 1910 adopted the new form, the first city in Wisconsin to do so. As an elected official, Wilcox served as state senator from 1917 to 1920. He was initially a Progressive, but left the party over the war issue. Stressing a strong nationalist position, Wilcox was unsuccessful in two attempts for the Republican nomination for governor and in one attempt for the nomination of U.S. Senator.

Born in 1873 Wilcox attended local schools and then Cornell University where he received his law degree in 1897. From that time until 1933 he practice law in the firm Frawley, Bundy & Wilcox (in 1902, following the death of Frawley, it became Bundy & Wilcox). In 1933 he established the partnership of Wilcox, Wilcox & Sullivan and served as its senior partner until his death in 1946. Using his profession and following his belief in the commission form of government which was developed as an alternative to the politically oriented mayor-council form, Wilcox assisted in drafting the legislation providing for government by commission in Wisconsin. He worked for the legislatinn's passage and with that accomplished he returned to Eau Claire where he strongly advocated this governmental form. It was adopted in 1910 after a local referendum passed 1,866 to 955 (G,H).

In addition to his law interests Wilcox was involved (he served as president and was a principal stockholder) in the Chippewa Valley Railway, Light & Power Company, originally organized by Eau Uaire and Menomonie lumbermen and a forerunner of the present Northern States Power Company. Reflecting that business interest, he advised saate lawmakers on utilities legislation and aided in drafting bills during the 1909 and 1911 sessions (D,E).

Wilcox entered the world of state politics in 1917 when he was elected saate senator on the Republican ticket. One historian, Robert S. Maxwell, noted that

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Wilcox stood out from the rest of the freshman senators and from the rest of his party which was already split by the Progressives. Maxwell reported, "He took the lead in condemning Senator LaFollette, in demanding a more rigorous prosecution of the war, and in promoting the Liberty Bond and other fund-raising drives throughout the state. Wilcox also opposed much of Philipp's (Emanuel, Philipp, a Republican, was governor at the time) legislative program and this opposition soon brought him into direct conflict with the governor" (E).

Only a year later, Wilcox ran for the Republican nomination for governor against Philipp and James Tittlemore. Stressing the loyalty issue, the issue which had caused him to introduce the amendment denouncing Senator LaFollette for his opposition to the European war (it was adopted by both the state senate and assembly), the dynamic Eau Claire lawyer traveled the state, forging a coalition of Progressives and moderate Republicans and questioning the patriotism of his main opponent, the incumbent governor. When the primary was over, Philipp had defeated Wilcox by 450 votes, Philipp's poorest primary showing (E).

Wilcox's second attempt at the Republican gubernatorial nomination came in 1920. Running again as an "ardent nationalist", Wilcox, in the eyes of an historian of the Progressive movement, "set out to defend the state against the ravages of the Nonpartisan League, which he denounced as an un-American carrier of the alien doctrines of socialism and free love" (F). He was strongly supported in this appeal by the Milwaukee Sentinel. Once again, however, Wilcox was defeated in the primary, losing to John J. Blaine, a Progressive. Wilcox's final political race was one for the Republican nomination for U.S. Senator in 1925. Wilcox, running against Robert LaFollette, Jr. to fill the unexpired term of LaFollette's father, was defeated.

Following the 1925 campaign, Wilcox returned to his law practice in Eau Claire. He later served as president of the Wisconsin Bar Association and was a member of the advisory board of Marquette University (D). Wilcox died in Eau Claire in 1946.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION (cont.):

- F. Margulies, H. 1968. The Decline of the Progressive Movement in Wisconsin, 1890-1920. pp. 199-231.
- G. History of Eau Claire County, 1914. pp. 293-294.
- H. Eau Claire Telegram. March 29, 1949.