

General Lew Wallace's Study

"I want a study, a pleasure house for my soul, where no one could hear me make speeches to myself, and play the violin at midnight if I choose. A detached room away from the world and its worries. A place for my old age to rest in and grow reminiscent, fighting the battles of youth over again." —Gen. Lew Wallace, December 4, 1879.

Late in 1895 Lew Wallace started construction on his Study that he had been dreaming of for twenty years. He designed it himself as an eclectic mix of Periclean Greek (the front porch), Roman (the tower) and Byzantine (the main structure) architecture. It took three years to complete and around \$30,000 to build. It was wired for electricity when it was built, as Crawfordsville had its own power plant by 1891, but it also had gas lights as a backup system.

The building is made of hydraulically pressed, vitrified brick from Akron, Ohio, and limestone from Bedford, Indiana. The floor of the structure is six inches of cement poured over corrugated steel plating, supported by floor joists of Carnegie steel "I" beams. The full basement has porthole windows that overlooked a pond or lagoon on the east side of the building. It would eventually become known as the general's "moat" because it blocked access to the back porch from the outside of the building. It was also stocked with fish, and the general taught his grandsons to fish there.

The roof of the structure is copper with a large cupola protecting a skylight in the main room. The stained glass in the center of the skylight is supposedly from Tiffany. The cupola was also a ventilation system. The windows could be opened by a system of pulleys that allowed the hot air to escape through the top of the building.

The tower is forty feet tall and contains the fireplace chimney, as well as the coal furnace chimney. The gas fireplace is located in an inglenook with benches on the west side of the main room.

The main room is 25-foot square and about 30 feet high. The woodwork is white oak as are the bookcases built around the interior walls. On their shelves he eventually place his library of about 1,200 volumes. In the northwest corner of the room is a full-length sliding mirror that is disguised as a door. When the Wallace's entertained at the Study, Lew would amuse himself by pulling out the mirror to see how long it took the ladies to start primping. Its actual purpose was for him to use when practicing his speeches.

A small room on the northwest corner of the building was called the "mechanical room" and has rounded walls in the interior and three arched windows. The staircase to the basement, located in this room, is narrow, steep and curved. The basement contained a furnace, a workshop, a working kitchen and a wine cellar.

Crowning the building is a hand-carved limestone frieze with a face in the center of each side. The faces represent characters from *Ben-Hur* and *The Prince of India*. Judah Ben-Hur is over the front door, Tirzah, his sister, is on the east, the Prince of India on the north and the Princess Irene (pronounced E-ri-na) on the west.

The building sits in the middle of 3-1/2 acres of wooded grounds in the current Elston Grove Historic District of Crawfordsville. There was originally a reflecting pool on the northwest area of the grounds. The "moat" was drained prior to the fall of 1903 for fear that some child playing on the grounds might fall in when the general was not there to help. At some point the reflecting pool was filled in, as well.