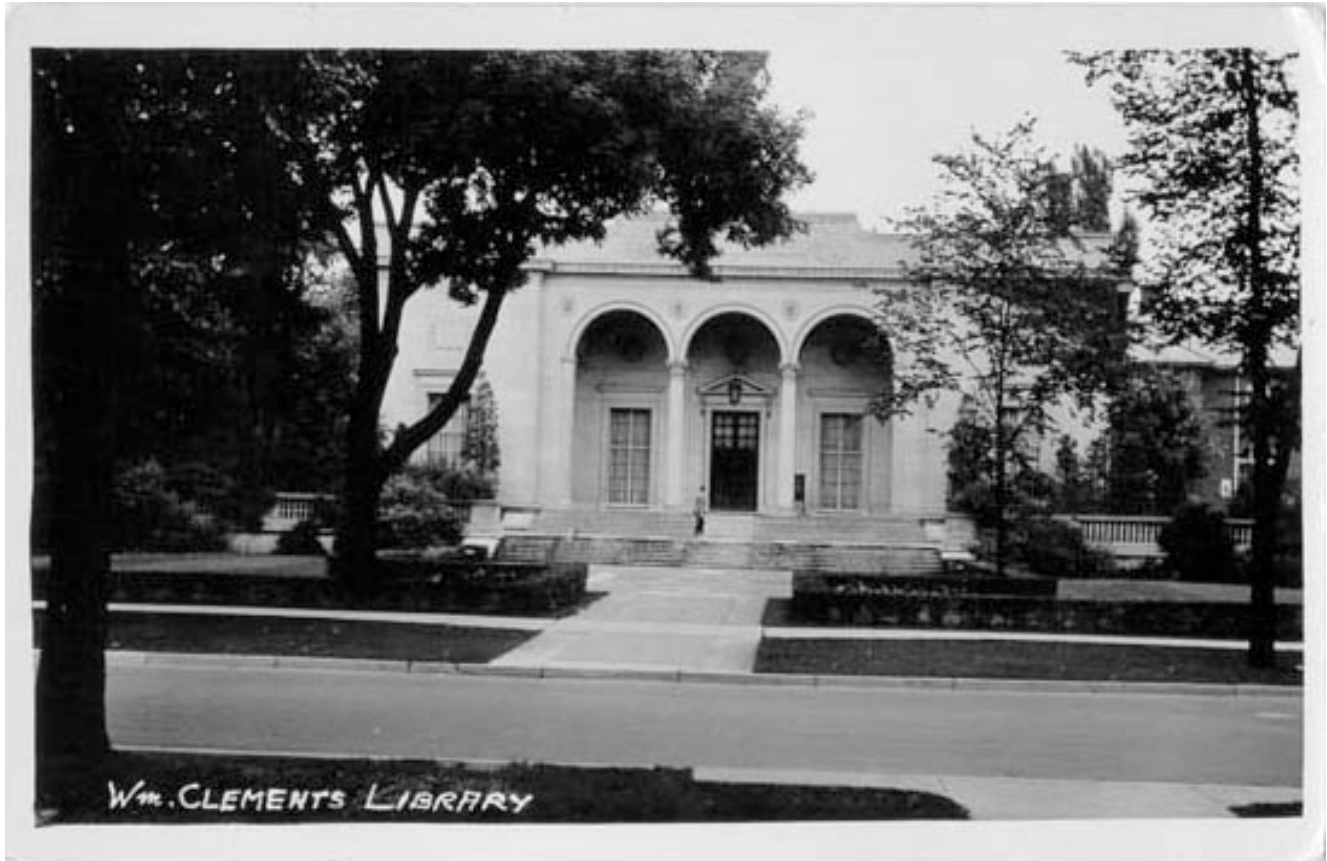


Architecture and Power

William L. Clements Library



I walk down South University on a daily basis, usually in a trance-like state as I think about my next class or the busy evening ahead of me. However, each time I walk

by the William L. Clements Library, it always manages to catch my eye. I can never help but stare at the façade as I uneasily walk past. The building has a way of forcing me to take notice of it and, although I'm extremely curious to know what is in its interior, I usually want to put the building's image behind me as I hurry by. Of the many diversely built building across our campus, the Clements Library is one that exudes and conveys a sense of power through its architecture and other exterior characteristics.

At first glance, the Clements Library appears to be one gigantic marble slab that was thrown down onto the earth. The exterior is extremely smooth and barren with only a few long and tall windows on each side. The building appears to be more sculpted from the earth than actually constructed. Because of the framed stairs leading up to the main entrance, it also appears like the building is firmly anchored to the ground, like it needs extra fortification on the ground to withstand the weight of the building. Whether deliberate or not, the building makes me think of a fortified bank vault – holding secure the University's paper treasurers and literature artifacts.

While there is little ornamentation on the exterior of the building, the architecture harkens back to the classical period of Rome. With Ionic columns, three archways at the building's entrance and entablatures on top of the window frames, the entrance reminds me a Mediterranean temple. In addition, the ceiling of the front entrance is a groin-vault, which is a classical example of architecture found in the monolithic Gothic churches of France and Italy. These different aspects and details of the façade's architecture are purposefully designed to make one think of very large buildings in Europe used for religious purposes and make one associate the building with divinity and the power that gods held.

The symmetry and perfectly ordered construction of the building conveys a sense of power through its perfection and crispness. The building is entirely symmetrical and rectilinear, only the arched entrance has curved surfaces. The monochromatic yellow-gray stone that composes the entirety of the building provides no emotional appeal or enthusiasm when an individual looks at it. The color does strikingly contrast the red and brown Hatcher Graduate Library and West Hall that surround it, causing the building to stick out and forces its presence and image upon everyone who walks by. Although all the building surrounding it are physically larger, the Clements Library holds its own with these buildings, not appearing to be any less grand and more soundly and elegantly created than any of the structures. People's eyes are naturally drawn to the sharp, crisp, and clean building each time it comes into view.

The ordered construction of the building also continues to the grounds surrounding the Clements Library. All the landscaping is also rectilinear, with large perfectly square patches of grass in the front and back of the building. There are a few hedges and shrubs that surround the building, acting like the steps to help anchor the structure to the ground and frame the façade while also giving the overall building a heavy feeling, like it could crush anything that sat below it. Interesting, there is a large and imposing tree with many mangled and twisting branches on the west side of the building. This tree appears out of place to the rest of the ordered environment, yet readily reminds me of a tree found next to an abandoned or condemned mansion. At night, the overhead lights illuminating the walkways and the sides of the building cast eerie shadows on the sidewalks as you walk by the building, almost like arms trying to grab at something as you pass.

Another interesting aspect of the building that makes it convey power is the marble sidewalk leading up to the entrance. From the street to the main entrance door, the Clement Library's pathway is made of marble, which cuts through the normal cement sidewalk from the street. This oddity would make anyone, even if they were looking down, to look towards the structure to see why they are suddenly walking on marble instead of cement. In addition, when it rains, and almost throughout the entire winter, the marble is extremely slippery and has caused many people to lose their footing as they pass. I always approach the marble section of the sidewalk with dread, knowing that I will have to tread carefully.

The William Clements Library clearly conveys power through its architecture and design. From the ordered grounds, marble sidewalk, monochromatic color, and framed landscaping to the architectural elements that remind back to European temples, and the rectilinear and symmetric aspects, the building is intimidating and stands out among the other structures on South University. Most importantly, it has the ability to change people's feelings and actions as they walk past, forcing people to remember and react to the structure. Maybe someday I'll summon up the courage to walk up the slippery marble walk and actually venture into the heavy vault that is the William Clements Library.