



Claude Nicholas: self portrait greeting card 1914, in uniform c.1916, and in 1927.

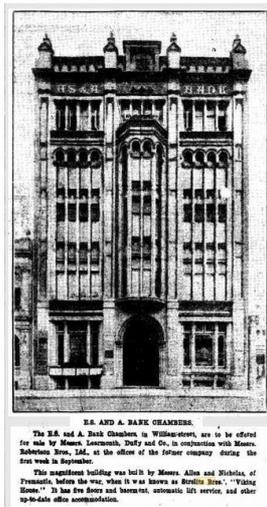
(SLWA 1523PD; SLWA 3097B; *Truth*, 2 April 1927, p.8)

**Claude Henry Nicholas** (1889-1966) was born at Fremantle in 1889 to Frank and Marion (nee Hughes), who had other children David Frank ["Guff"] b.1887, Lillian Mabel ["Bid"] b.1891, and Ernest ["Nip"] b.1894. Frank Nicholas served as Secretary of the WA Shipping Association; he sat on the Fremantle Municipal Council for sixteen years, six of those as Treasurer, and thus was well-known if not influential with the port town's affairs. Young Claude attended Fremantle Boys School, then travelled to Melbourne for further education, and from a 1927 newspaper comment noting 'twenty years in the business', may have commenced in architectural practice around 1907.

There is little doubt Frank Nicholas would have known an equally politically-active Fremantle identity, the architect Joseph Francis Allen (1869-1933). Claude Nicholas began working for Allen at Fremantle from as early as 1908, and was named in the practice Allen & Nicholas Architects from December 1911. It would not have been simply by connection that Claude obtained a position within Allen's practice. Following exhibitions at North Fremantle, Nicholas had been recognised in 1906 for his skill at map and ornamental drawing; and in 1907 for ornamental writing, mechanical drawing, map drawing, and caricature drawing. Nicholas was praised by George Pitt Morison of the Perth Art Gallery, a judge at the 1907 exhibition, for a reproduction of an architectural drawing of Charles II's palace at Greenwich Hospital. Nicholas had demonstrated a talent that was recognised at Fremantle and beyond.

Living and working exclusively in the Fremantle area from birth to death, Nicholas was very active with civic, commercial and residential work around the port; but initially with Allen and then on his own account, he also designed buildings at many other places around the Perth metropolitan area and in the State of Western Australia.

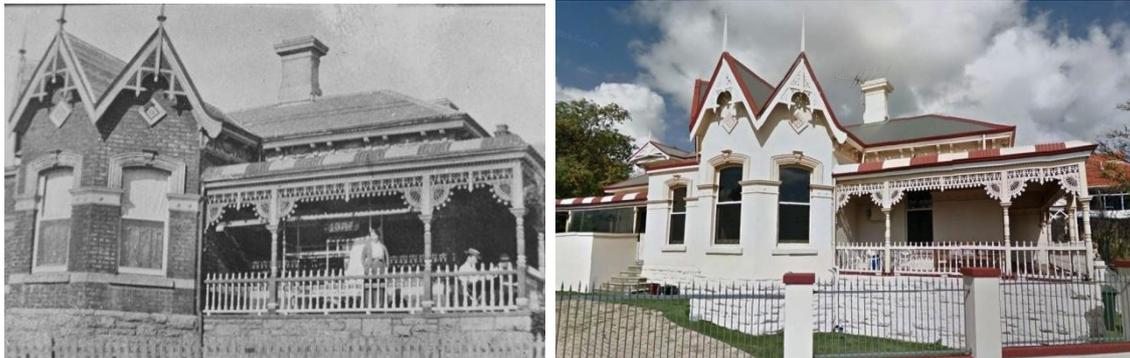
Early and long-term clients of Allen's practice, the Hamburg-born brothers Paul and Richard Strelitz were successful merchants who steadily expanded their commercial interests across the State. Designed by J.F. Allen Architect in late 1909, almost certainly with significant input from Claude Nicholas, 'St Just' at 44 View Street Peppermint Grove was built for Richard Strelitz and his wife Bessie. Nicholas kept a photo of the extensive Federation-era residence with his papers that were deposited with the State Library at his death, perhaps indicating a strong connection to his work on the place. During the First World War the Strelitz brothers were interned by authorities as enemy aliens, and they had moved to NSW by the 1920s.



Viking House, William Street Perth - the head over the entry was modelled from Perth identity Malachi O'Dwyer (*Sunday Times*, 4 February 1912, p.9; SLWA 013372d; Dallas Robertson).

Built in 1912, Viking House in William Street, Perth was designed as a commercial venture for Strelitz Bros. The design was described as being of American Romanesque style, and the building also incorporated in its details the sinuous forms of Art Nouveau. Strelitz Bros made note in the Battye Cyclopaedia of 1912 their intention to move their head office from Fremantle to Perth with the completion of Viking House.

Unfortunately Viking House was demolished in Perth's rabid demolition period of the 1970s, when much of Perth's very important gold boom built heritage was to be obliterated. The intricate lobby and decorative details of this splendid building perhaps demonstrated an evolution of design ethos at Allen & Nicholas - as young Claude moved the practice forward from the Federation Free Classical designs evident in Joe Allen's preceding commercial works.



'Armistice', the Nicholas family home from c.1914, overlooking the harbour at 116 Tuckfield Street Fremantle – the house is extant, but now numbered 79. (B/W photo c.1920 by Claude's photographer friend Joseph Hans Stubbe 1895-1977 - SLWA 001528PD; Google 2016)

Whilst resident at his parent's home in Tuckfield Street, Fremantle, Claude enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force for the First World War and subsequently attended the AIF Engineers' Training School at Roseville NSW in 1917-1918. He embarked from Sydney on *HMT Persic* in March 1918 for service in England, only crossing the Channel to France in January 1919, and fortunately was not subject to the suffering of war-time Western Front service. Returning from England in June 1919, Nicholas disembarked at Fremantle in August and resumed architectural practice with Allen & Nicholas, although perhaps some 1920 work at Rottne Island was called in Nicholas' name only due to Allen's conflict of interest as a member of the Island's Board of Control.

After the *Architects Act of Western Australia 1921* received formal assent, Nicholas was within the first batch to be registered with the Architects Board on 29 May 1922, receiving registration number 19. Also in 1922, designs for the Fremantle War Memorial at Monument Hill were called for and the winning design awarded to Claremont architects Wilkinson & Ross for an elaborate plan comprising a colonnaded tower and lookout chamber. Local sculptor Pietro Porcelli was initially contracted to complete the memorial and he began work in 1925. After some controversy, the contract with Porcelli was dissolved and, in

1927, the local firm in Allen & Nicholas were appointed as honorary architects to modify the existing plans, in light of the paucity of available funds. In October 1927, local builder and Councillor R. Rennie was awarded the contract for erection of the memorial at a cost of £5,931.26

On Anzac Day of 1928, the foundation stone of the Fallen Sailors' and Soldiers' Memorial was laid by His Excellency Governor Campion. As part of the ceremony, Dr J.S. Battye was asked to prepare a history of the memorial by the Memorial Committee and a copy of this document, dated 25 April 1928, was placed under the column. The completed Allen & Nicholas designed memorial was then unveiled on Armistice Day in November 1928.



Design for Fremantle War Memorial.  
It is proposed to erect the memorial in Fremantle, Western Australia, to commemorate the memory of the sailors and soldiers of the Western Australian forces who fell during the War of 1914-18. The memorial is to be erected on the site of the old Fremantle Prison, and the site is to be reserved for the purpose. The memorial is to be erected in Fremantle, Western Australia, and the cost is estimated at £5,000.



First design for Fremantle War Memorial by Wilkinson & Ross; Allen & Nicholas' design opened in 1928 (*Western Mail*, 27 April 1922, p.7; 2006 photo by Gngarra - commons.wikimedia.org).

Joe Allen died suddenly on 23 May 1933, probably of a heart attack. His body was found in the Swan River at East Fremantle, and the coroner found no suspicious circumstances. Claude Nicholas was burdened with the difficult task of identifying his business partner's body.

No doubt with recognition of the importance of Allen's standing within the community; Nicholas continued the practice name for some 30 years following Allen's passing. Claude appears to have mainly been involved in smaller-scale domestic and local government works after the gregarious Allens' passing. This article contains just a 'snapshot' of the works of Allen & Nicholas - notable Western Australian architects whose influence and contributions, particularly at Fremantle, remain to be thoroughly documented.

A noted bachelor at Fremantle in the 1920s, Claude married Peggy Cooper during February 1935. One of Nicholas' colleagues 'Westerner' flippantly reported on the event through *The Daily News* section "With the Man in the Street" under the title of *LAST OF THE MOHICANS*:

*JUST as the ceaseless wear and tear of the sea broke down finally the splendid resistance of the old long jetty at Fremantle, so it was with Claude Nicholas, of Fremantle. A splendid example of the men who could play around Eden for many years, and be content with a nodding acquaintance with Eve, Claude, like the old jetty, has had to throw the towel into the ring and acknowledge that in the end Time wins.*

*Claude is getting married. While you who read are devouring these lines Claude, last surviving bulwark of Fremantle's proud bachelordom, is saying 'I will' somewhere in the vicinity of an organ that is telling the world the old, old tale of the voice that is alleged to have breathed and to be keeping up the habit of breathing, "o'er Eden."*

*The deficit is with us; the unemployment problem is possibly relieved, but is still a decided and bothersome factor — most of our troubles of the last four years are static. But Claude has crumbled; Claude has changed. Yesterday he was still the champion of the die-hards who remained adamant to the blandishment of women whose eyes have a language which starts in ecstatic incoherence and settles down in ... domesticity. (There's a word missing there, but every married man can fit it in to his own liking.) Today he is an also ran at whom the rabble are throwing rice.*

*The pity of it! To twenty-five years ago my memory goes back and recalls the boys of the old brigade of whom Claude was one of the leaders. It was a literary-artistic confraternity which worked hard, and played, in its spare time, until the clock went to bed with nothing of the middle syllable of 'enjoyment' unexploited. There were Ernie Brewer, 'Westerner,' Loch Ward, Jack Marshall, Hal Warwick, Teddy Pulham, 'Horry' Dobbie, Arcus, Nicol (of 'Sands and Mac's.'), and others — some of them dead, all of those left — now — married.*

*We of the old brigade were proud of Claude because he was the one fox who refused to sacrifice his tail — you remember the Aesop fable. While he*

*remained a bachelor we always had a snappy answer to a domestic argument on a Sunday morning. Now, he reveals himself as another Brutus and the Caesars are sick, sore and sorry because of his defection.*

*Still, the music of the bells, the tinkle of the rice, and the joyous laughter of the bridesmaids, for the moment — just for the moment — dispels the gloom of the old brigade and 'eyes right, at the salute' we congratulate Mrs. Nicholas upon her election as the bride of our Claude, Prince of Good Fellows— one who, if thought by us to have been the last unassailable surviving tribute to single blessedness, has the best of good reasons to show for the hauling down of the bachelor flag.*

*On behalf of the Old Brigade, I congratulate Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas.*

*And no heel taps!*

### Marriage of Fremantle Architect



MR. and MRS. CLAUDE NICHOLAS leaving St. John's Church, Fremantle, after their wedding on Saturday night. The bride was formerly Miss Peggy Cooper, of Hamilton Hill, Fremantle.

Forty-five year old Claude Nicholas was married to twenty-six year old Peggy Cooper in 1935  
(*Daily News*, 25 February 1935, p.3)

Claude Nicholas died at Fremantle on 21 March 1966, aged 76 years, and Peggy passed away soon after on 16 September 1966, at 58 years old. The couple did not have children.

## References:

- 'North Fremantle Art and Industrial Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 6 September 1906, p.7.
- 'North Fremantle Exhibition', *The West Australian*, 6 September 1907, p.6.
- 'New Presbyterian Church', *Northam Advertiser*, 15 August 1908, p.1 (Nicholas at Northam).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 9 December 1911, p.1 (shop and grain store Canning Road East Fremantle for J. Porter – first recognition of Allen & Nicholas as named partners?).
- 'Malachi O'Dwyer', *Sunday Times*, 17 November 1912, p.1 (A&N seeking Viking head model).
- 'The Progress of Perth', *Western Mail*, 28 February 1913, pp.24, 38 (photo, text, Viking House).
- 001523PD: Self portrait of Claude Nicholas "Nix" used on a greetings card, 1914
- 001527PD: Self portrait of Nicholas "Nix" on a greetings card sent to Dr. J.H. Stubbe, ca.1915.
- 001528PD: House in Fremantle, ca.1915, photo taken by Claude's photographer friend Joseph Hans Stubbe (1895-1977).
- 'Nicholas, Claude Henry', Attestation papers for the AIF, military correspondence, NAA, B2455.
- 'Mainly About People', *The Daily News*, 5 April 1919, p.3, (letter to father from Glasgow).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 26 June 1920, p.9 (w-b bungalows etc for Rottneest Island Board of Control, perhaps called in Nicholas' name only due to Allen's conflict of interest).
- 'State War Memorial', *The West Australian*, 24 April 1922, p.8 (first Fremantle War Memorial design by Wilkinson & Ross of Claremont, second place S. Rosenthal).
- 'Design for Fremantle War Memorial', *Western Mail*, 27 April 1922, p.7 (Wilkinson Ross sketch).
- 'Personal', *The West Australian*, 4 January 1924, p.6 (death and details Frank Nicholas).
- 'Fremantle War Memorial', *The West Australian*, 24 April 1924, p.10 (A&N to supervise erection of memorial gratuitously).
- 'A Chat - About This and That', *Truth*, 2 April 1927, p.8 (photo and details of CHN).
- 'Last of the Mohicans', *Daily News*, 23 February 1935, p.1 (upcoming marriage Peggy Cooper).
- 'Architect Marries', *Daily News*, 23 February 1935, p.2 (wedding at St John's Fremantle).
- 'Carnarvon Boys' Club', *The West Australian*, 4 April 1936, p.9 (honorary architect for AIM).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 6 November 1937, p.3 (w-b and asbestos residence cnr Chester and Wardie Streets Fremantle for J.A. Williams).
- 'Miniature Memorial', *The West Australian*, 12 May 1939, p.16 (Nicholas presents model of Fremantle War Memorial to the Fremantle branch of the RSL).
- 'Deaths', *The West Australian*, 23 March 1942, p.1 (death of Marion Nicholas, family names).
- 'Architect Fined - Scapegoat of Housing Commission', *Kalgoorlie Miner*, 5 February 1948, p.1, (CHN and for Mills & Ware fined as post-war regulations breached in cost of house).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 6 May 1950, p.40 (painting, toilets at oval, Fremantle Councils).
- 'Special Advertisements', *The West Australian*, 16 January 1954, p.2 (office move from Henry Street to 8 William Street Fremantle).
- 'Tenders', *The West Australian*, 28 September 1954, p.20 (Melville Park Tennis Pavilion, Fremantle Oval ladies and umpires rooms etc).
- 'Claude Nicholas papers', SLWA MN 268 Cuttings book (1913-1937), mainly relating to Fremantle and architectural matters, donated by Nicholas in 1966; illuminated address

presented to Frank Nicholas by members of the Fremantle Chamber of Commerce (1920); autograph board presented to Claude Nicholas on his 21st birthday (1910) containing signatures of many well-known people.

'Trustees Act 1962', *WA Government Gazette*, 10 June 1966, p.1644 (Nicholas' last addresses 160 High Street and 12 Swanbourne Street, Fremantle,).

Claude Henry Nicholas – biographical notes by Dallas Robertson 2017.

Per comm. 17 July 2017 Reg Curedale (m. Maureen Nicholas, daughter of Ernest Nicholas).

Contributing author: John Taylor

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