

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*  
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic The Kent House and the Hitchens House

and/or common Kent House and Hitchens House

2. Location

street & number 500 Main Street and 303 Lincoln Street N/A not for publication

city, town Williamsport N/A vicinity of

state Indiana code 018 county Warren code 171

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Marion Pahl and Mr. and Mrs. Jack Gerhart  
Marilyn Fillis 601 W. County Rd. 600 North

street & number 5 Fall Street W. Lafayette 47906

city, town Williamsport 47993 N/A vicinity of state Indiana

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Warren County Recorder

street & number Warren County Courthouse

city, town Williamsport state Indiana

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date  federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records N/A

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The matched pair of Italian Villa country houses are located adjacent to one another in Williamsport, Indiana. (Photo #1). The houses were built in 1854 and are two-story brick structures with three-story towers set at an angle to the main part of the building. The 1865 map of Williamsport suggests that there was a curved drive from Main Street which approached each of the houses from the north at an angle to the main part of each house, and on an axis with each of the towers.

No other documentation of these curved drives exists. Today the property on the corner of Main Street and Lincoln Street has been subdivided and built upon with 1960 ranch style houses. No evidence remains of the 1865 drive to the Hitchens House; the driveway today approaches the Hitchens House (Photo #1) from Lincoln Street. The driveway to the Kent House today is a narrow dirt path straight along the property line between the two properties (Photo #3). The Kent House property is heavily wooded, including the area shown as the drive in the 1865 map, and there is no paving or stone material evident from the original driveway location. The view from this approach would be outstanding. It is a low-lying area which approaches the small hill on which the houses are built. The view accents the towers and the nonsymmetrical massing. Main Street is approximately six feet above this original driveway area and the embankment is very steep. Drainage culverts extend under Main Street, indicating that Main Street was raised at one time.

The houses' relationship to each other is extremely unusual. They appear to be the twin focal points of a landscaped villa composition. The plan expresses the "elegant culture and variety of accomplishment of a man of the world," as the Italian Villa Style was described by A. J. Downing.

The houses were originally mirror images of each other. The plan was basically "L" shaped with the three story tower set at an angle to the front facade. The buildings are two stories high with 16" thick brick exterior walls and 8" thick brick interior walls. The exterior walls are constructed with a cavity between the interior and exterior wythes. All brick is laid with a common bond. The foundations are large limestone blocks with a rough cut finish. The original front porch deck was wooden with large limestone steps, wooden lath below the floor deck and a wooden railing with balustrade. The front facade also had a wooden balcony with two large wooden brackets on the second floor. Neither house has its original porches or balcony today.

The front facade is an asymmetrical massing, with the tower set at an angle to the main part of the building (Photo #4). The tower has tall, double-hung windows with four lights per sash and shutters on the first and second floors. The third floor of the tower has narrow, paired, round-top windows which extend up into the cornice. The tower cornice has paired brackets at the corners and single brackets on each side of the window. The roofs are hipped, almost flat and hidden by projecting eaves when viewed from the ground. The entry door is at the base of the tower, facing the porch. The cornice brackets and eaves on the main part of the house are similar to the cornice and brackets on the tower. The windows on the front elevation are tall, rectangular, paired windows, centered with the porch.

The side elevations have paired or triple double-hung windows.

## 8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1854

Builder/Architect Unknown

### Statement of Significance (~~in one paragraph~~)

The Kent House and the Hitchens House are significant architecturally as fine examples of the Italian Villa style of architecture. That they are a matched pair makes them particularly unusual.

The Italian Villa style was the result of the discovery, around 1800, of the picturesque qualities of the "vernacular" architecture of the Italian countryside. A. J. Downing thought that "as a rural style" the Italian was "inferior to pointed and high-roofed modes" but, nevertheless, "remarkable for expressing the elegant culture and variety of accomplishment of the retired citizen or man of the world." The English architect, Francis Goodwin, pointed out that it permitted "many freedoms which, in a more finished and consistent style, would not unjustly incur censure." A. J. Downing further wrote in 1850: "As picturesqueness denotes power...picturesque architecture, where its picturesqueness grows out of strong character in the inhabitant, is more interesting to most minds." The Kent and Hitchens Houses are a unique vernacular expression of the Italian Villa Style. The design has been adapted here to reflect the partnership between Kent and Hitchens. While each house is identical in design, the mirror-image plans and site location give each a strong identity. Each is a focal point of the total site design.

William Kent, eldest son of Perrin and Rebecca (Dill) Kent, was born in Paxton Township, Ross County, Ohio, May 15, 1821. He was named for his Revolutionary Grandfather, William Kent. At the age of five, he came to Indiana with his parents and lived with them on their farm in what is now Kent Township, Warren County. When a young man, he moved to Williamsport, the county seat, where he spent the remainder of his life.

In 1846, he and Elisha Hitchens established a general store in Williamsport under the firm name of Kent & Hitchens. The grain trade in that section had already reached large proportions and, in 1847, boats had commenced to run on the Wabash & Erie Canal, which is located on the opposite side of the river. This gave the buyers in nearby Attica and other places on the canal a great advantage over those in Williamsport. As early as 1848 the question of a side-cut canal to serve Williamsport was broached and in 1849 and 1850 a subscription was started to raise funds to carry out the project. William Kent headed the list with \$1,000, and many others subscribed smaller amounts. The side-cut was finally completed in 1852 at a cost of about \$16,000. Kent & Hitchens built a large grain warehouse near the river, and also a pork packing establishment. They bought a fleet of boats to carry their produce to market, one of the boats being named "Mary Kent."

After the completion of the railroad, William Kent built a grain warehouse on the north side of the tracks. He also built branch grain houses at various stations and opened a general store at Marshfield. At the latter place his brother, Thomas D. Kent, had charge of the business. The Warren Republican, which was published in Williamsport, in its issue of August 6, 1857, said: "William Kent is shipping shelled corn from his warehouse by railroad. This is the first shipment of grain by rail from this place." It is said that at about this period there were as many as 78 teams waiting at one time to be unloaded.



# 9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 3 1/2

Quadrangle name Williamsport

Quadrangle scale 1:24000

UTM References

A 

1	6	4	7	5	4	4	0	4	4	5	8	8	6	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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D 

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E 

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F 

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Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code county code

state code county code

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Harry Mohler

organization Schuette Mohler and Associates date 9-15-83

street & number 1015 Main telephone 317/742-0252

city or town Lafayette state Indiana 47902

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national  state  local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature [Signature]

title Indiana State Historic Preservation Officer date 1-26-84

For NPS use only

I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

The original roofing material was standing seam metal. The Hitchens House still has its metal roof under layers of asphalt; however, the Kent House today has only asphalt shingles. The heavy brick chimney is centrally located on the plan.

The window sills and heads are plain limestone. An unusual feature of the windows is that on the upper floors the head of the window cuts through the brick stringer at the bottom of the cornice brackets.

The interior window dressings are quite plain (Photos #16-20). The detailing shown in Figure 122 of A. J. Downing's "The Architecture of Country Houses," is an accurate view of the simple but massive dressings. In the dining room of the Hitchens House, the woodwork has been altered to a more Roman Style (Photo #21). Only two of the original fireplace mantels remain, one upstairs and one downstairs in the Hitchens House (Photo #24).

Over the years both houses have had additions to the rear (Photos #6, 14). The Hitchens House has an interesting drive-thru attached carriage house and a small outbuilding.

Today, the Kent House is unoccupied. In 1973, a fire destroyed the interior of the house, including the wood floors and roof, leaving only the walls standing. The house sat untouched and exposed to the weather for about two years. New floors, stairs and roof were then constructed eight years ago. The framing was done with wood members and, it appears, was to match the original structure as much as possible. The Kent House has a later kitchen, with a breezeway connecting it to the original house.

The Hitchens House is in good condition. The original stair to the tower is intact (Photo #17), as well as the original windows and some fireplaces. The west veranda has been enclosed over the years and the breezeway connecting the summer kitchen to the house has been expanded to two floors. Brick walls with wrought iron fencing have been added on the south and east to enclose courtyards.

The Hitchens House is used as a private museum and antique shop. The former owner and current shopkeeper is Virgil Scowden. The museum is open 1-5 p.m. every day, or by appointment.

Kent was actively interested in the construction and early operation of the Toledo & Wabash Railway and a Director of that company for the fiscal year ending August 31, 1859, and subsequently to December 31, 1864, inclusive. He was appointed to meet Abraham Lincoln at State Line City, February 11, 1861, when Lincoln was on his way to Washington for his first inauguration.

William Kent owned considerable real estate in Williamsport and platted several subdivisions to the town, including the first lots platted in the new town after the railroad was built.

While still in the prime of life, he met with an injury which prevented him from continuing in active work. He passed away at his home May 10, 1884, and is buried in Hillside Cemetery.

Elisha Hitchens was born in Chillicothe, Ohio, August 10, 1806. His parents were George and Sarah (England) Hitchens. In early life he served an apprenticeship to the blacksmith trade, following it until 1828, when he started a store at Clarksburg, in the northern part of Ross County, Ohio. In 1832 he went to East Liberty, Logan County, Ohio, where he engaged in business until the fall of 1836. He then went to Lafayette, Indiana, and was, for a short time, a partner in a general store at that place. He then returned to Logan County, where he remained until 1841, at which time he moved to Williamsport, Indiana, where he spent the remainder of his life.

In 1846, he and William Kent, his future son-in-law, formed a partnership in a general store in Williamsport under the firm name of Kent & Hitchens. They continued in this business until 1855. They were also in the grain trade for several years.

For a number of years prior to 1870 he was agent for the Wabash Railway at Williamsport, and in 1873 was appointed Postmaster at that place, which position he held for 12 years.

On June 11, 1826, he was married to Miss Mary King in Ross County, Ohio. After 53 years of married life, she died on August 19, 1879. He survived her for nearly 18 years, passing away March 24, 1897, aged 90. Both he and his wife are buried in Hillside Cemetery at Williamsport, Indiana.

Wilbur D. Peat's book, Indiana Houses of the Nineteenth Century, surveys Italianate and Tuscan Villa houses in Indiana. Other examples of the Tuscan or Italian Villa design in the state are: the McClelland-Layne home at Crawfordsville, which has the tower rising from the middle of the "L" shaped plan; the Sonntag-Kiechle residence at Evansville is a variant with its tower protruding from the building rather than receding within the mass. Another good example of the towered Tuscan Villa is the Foellinger-Lutes brick residence at Fort Wayne. The only other known Italian or "Tuscan" Villa home that is noted as having the tower set at an angle to the main part of the building is the Carnahan-Tinsman home at Attica—across the Wabash River from Williamsport. Apparently, the Carnahan-Tinsman home has been demolished since 1962 when Peat published his book, because a modern survey of Attica did not locate the home. Thus, the Kent and Hitchens houses are believed to be the last remaining examples in the state of Italian Villa homes with the tower set at an angle to the main part of the building.

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Counties of Warren, Benton, Jasper and Newton, Indiana. Historical and biographical. Illustrated. Chicago: F. A. Battey & Co., Publishers, 1883.

Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses, 1850.

Kent, Kent Genealogy, 1931

Peat, Indiana Houses of the Nineteenth Century, 1962.

Wabash Commercial - April 19, 1854

Warren Republican - April 2, 1897

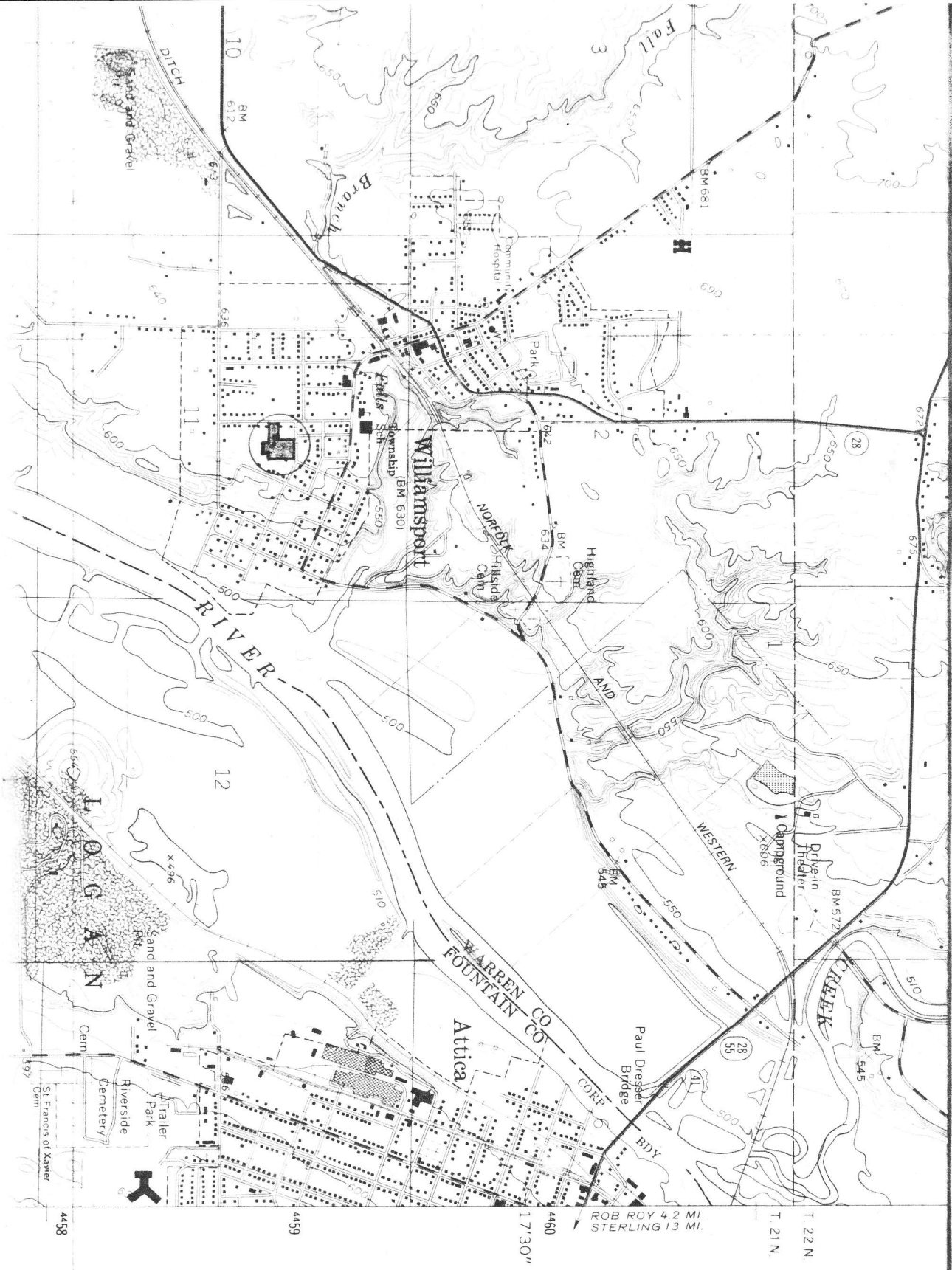
Whiffen and Koeper, American Architecture 1607-1976, 1981.

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Item 10 -- Verbal Boundary Description and Justification

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The property boundary begins 240' east of the intersection of Lincoln and Main Streets. Proceed east along the south right-of-way of Main Street, 248'; south 415'; west 70'; south 70'; west 130'; north 70'; west 280' to Lincoln Street. 150' north along the east right-of-way of Lincoln; then east 240'; then north 265' to the beginning point.



Kent and Hitchens Houses  
 Williamsport, Indiana  
 UTM References: 16/475440/4458860