

FINAL

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 18). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Wheeler, Frank, Hotel  
other names/site number Brown-Wheeler House, 071-328-11008

### 2. Location

street & number Corner of Second and Main Streets N/A not for publication  
city, town Freetown N/A vicinity  
state IN code IN county Jackson code 071 zip code 47235

### 3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
		Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>3</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this  nomination  request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Patricia R. Kelso  
Signature of certifying official  
Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

7-23-91  
Date

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.  
 See continuation sheet.

determined eligible for the National Register.  See continuation sheet.

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

## 6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

DOMESTIC: hotel

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

## 7. Description

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Queen Anne

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE

walls WOOD: weatherboard

roof ASPHALT

other CONCRETE

GLASS

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Frank Wheeler Hotel is located in the small town of Freetown in rural Jackson County, Indiana. The two story wood frame building was constructed as a house. It stands in a residential section of Freetown at the southwest corner of Second and Main Streets.

In style, the house has most elements associated with the Queen Anne mode: asymmetrical massing, multiple gables, a large porch with turned woodwork, and other decorative woodwork.

Roughly L-shaped in plan, the Wheeler Hotel rests on a stone foundation. The stones are each 36" X 18" X 12", and were obtained from a site two miles west of Freetown known as Gorbett's Heaven. All exterior walls have wood clapboard siding, except the vertical board rear kitchen addition. Belt courses connect several window headers and exposed "sill plates" connect some sills.

The front and sides of the house each have a steeply pitched gabled projection. The main elevation faces east (photo 1). Centered in the front gable on the first story is a wide square sash surmounted by a stained glass transom. As with most exterior openings, the surrounds consist of fluted boards joined by bull's-eye corner blocks. Flanking this are chamfered or cut-away corner bays. These bays display the typical window type: narrow one-over-one double-hung sash. The northeast bay is sheltered under a frieze of turned spindles with half wagon wheels, the other bay is under the porch.

The second floor has a paired window in the gable end. Scroll brackets are found at the corners. Exposed purlins and rafters are scroll-ended. The barge board is fluted and has bull's-eye blocks. An arched decorative gable truss crowns the apex.

Connecting the east elevation to the south elevation is the porch. The porch is irregular in plan and basically fills in the corner between the front gable and the offset south gable.

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Period of Significance

c.1890-c.1930  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Dates

c.1890  
c.1900  
c.1930

Cultural Affiliation

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Significant Person

N/A  
\_\_\_\_\_

Architect/Builder

Unknown  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Wheeler Hotel meets Criterion C, because it is the best example of Queen Anne style architecture in Pershing Township of Jackson County, Indiana. The building also has local merit as a representative of the prosperity of Freetown.

The Wheeler Hotel, though modest in scale, embodies all the characteristics associated with the Queen Anne style. Its asymmetrical massing, irregular porch, elaborate millwork, and interior elements clearly mark it as a fine Queen Anne residence. The style was first seen in Jackson County in about 1880. Naturally, several good examples can be found in urban areas such as Seymour or Brownstown.

The Wheeler Hotel, however, is the only example in Pershing or Salt Creek Township (from which Pershing Township was separated in 1919) which has all the characteristics associated with the style. Several other houses in the area have Queen Anne or Eastlake porches or elements attached to vernacular buildings. No others have the plan, massing, or other elements of the style.

Furthermore, the Wheeler Hotel is the only building in Freetown or Pershing Township with any pretense to "style" per se. All other existing properties are vernacular or functional buildings which display style elements as an afterthought, if at all.

The property was recorded as originally being owned by Wheeler's father, George W. Wheeler and his uncle, Jacob B. Wheeler in 1880. In 1882, it was deeded to George W. Wheeler and his wife, Lydia A. Wheeler. The home was constructed as a residence (c.1890). The exact date and builder are not available, however, old timers recall of being told how the huge stones were moved by horses, from the hills of Gorbett's Heaven, two miles west of Freetown to the construction site, where they were hand hewn and fitted as foundation stones, three feet long, eighteen inches wide and twelve inches deep. In 1894, the Wheeler's sold the property to Eliza Brown and she and her husband, John Will Brown, moved into the property in 1894 and it was their residence until 1905. The Brown's operated a general store across the  See continuation sheet street which was later destroyed by fire. Mrs. Brown left Freetown and moved to Columbus in 1905, but did not sell the property.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

"Freetown Items." Brownstown Banner. July 31, 1890; April 26, 1894; May 17, 1894; May 9, 1894; June 21, 1905; p.1

Guthrie, Wayne. "Hotel Owner was Practical Joker,": Indianapolis News, "Ringside in Hoosierland" series, October 1, 1962, p.11

Guthrie, Wayne, "Jolly Innkeeper Puts Town on Map," Indianapolis News, "Ringside in Hoosier Land" series, February 14, 1958, p.9.

Jackson County Interim Report. Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory, 1988.

Noblitt, Loren W., Ph.D. and the Jackson County Historical Society. The Composite History of Jackson County, Indiana. Paducah, KY: Turner Publishing Co., 1988.

See continuation sheet

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:  
Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

**UTM References**

A 16 | 575040 | 4313980  
 Zone Easting Northing

C \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

B \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_  
 Zone Easting Northing

D \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_ | \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

Lot 20 in the town of Freeport, now known as Freetown, in Jackson County, Indiana

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

This is the historic property boundary.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Russell L. and Donna M. Fritz date 10/22/90  
 organization Owners telephone 812/497-2808  
 street & number R. R. 1, Box 431 city or town Freetown state IN zip code 47235

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The porch has a wood floor resting on stone footings. Lath-turned wood posts support the irregular hipped and cross gabled roof. An elaborate frieze spans the porch. It features a stylized ivy cut out and a register of turned spindles with a scalloped fringe. The main entry is located under this porch on the south wall.

West of the porch on the south elevation is a projecting gabled area with one window centered on the first story and a paired window group on the second story. This gable has similar details to the front gable. The gable roof joins to a central hip roof on this elevation.

Adjoining the main block of the house to the west is a one story kitchen area. It has a "square-front" type straight balustrade obscuring its shed roof on the north and south sides. A single window is found on the south elevation of this section.

A vertical boarded addition with shed roof stands west of the kitchen. It has a four paned square window and door on the south side.

The north elevation is plainer than the south side. The east area of this side has no openings. Roughly centered is a projecting gabled section. This gable has one window on the first story. A window to the east and door to the west infill the gable. The gable is detailed similarly to the front gable.

West of the gable is the square-fronted kitchen. It has paired windows on the north wall.

The blank end of the vertical boarded addition is presented to the north. On the west, this addition has, from south to north, two square windows, a door, and a square window.

The building has three brick chimneys: one in the addition, one in the kitchen, and one toward the rear of the main section.

The interior has equally high integrity. The first floor consists of seven rooms: a formal parlor, parlor, dining room, bedroom, kitchen, summer kitchen and enclosed rear porch. The main entry is under the front/side porch. The oak door has a large single light framed by a bead-and-reel molding and capped by a



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denticulated cornice on the upper half. The lower half is paneled in a "Philadelphia Square" design. The door leads to a parlor which in turn connects to most other rooms in the house. Common elements to the first floor include ten foot high ceilings, wood floors, plastered walls, and oak woodwork. Baseboards have simple cap moldings.

Door and window surrounds in the front parlor and parlor show Eastlake influence. Both door and window surrounds extend to the floor and consist of chamfered and fluted boards with bull's-eye corner blocks. Fringe-like cresting crowns the header piece. A large opening in a diagonal wall with paneled double doors leads to the front parlor. Double pocket doors lead to the dining room and bedroom.

The front parlor has been altered by the addition of carpeting and plywood paneling. It retains all of its woodwork. The room features diagonal walls to the front and rear, giving it an unusual plan.

The dining room has a diagonally set fireplace with simple oak mantel and cast iron insert. It originally had blue ceramic tiles surrounding the insert, they have been removed. A second style of woodwork is found in these less formal areas. It consists of a simple reeded convex molding.

An enclosed staircase leads to the second floor. A balustrade with oak newel post and turned balusters closes off the staircase upstairs. A short hallway leads to three bedrooms. Woodwork upstairs is of the simpler type used downstairs. Transomed and paneled doors lead to the bedrooms. Doors retain elaborate false graining.

Two other buildings stand on the property. One is a c.1900 frame, one story, two room building.

One room appears to have been a coal and wood shed, the other was likely a laundry room. A fruit cellar is found in the basement. The other building is a concrete privy with wood door, dating from c.1930.

All three buildings (house, c.1900 shed, and privy) contribute to the significance of the property.

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That residence was converted to the Freetown Hotel, soon to become known far and wide as the "Frank Wheeler Hotel", due to the notoriety of the innkeeper, Frank "Brass" Wheeler. The sidewalk bears his name and the date 1905 as the year in which he became the innkeeper. The residence served the community as hotel for thirty-three years until the death of Wheeler in 1938. Wheeler had come back to the Freetown community in 1890 and soon his witty humor made him widely recognized as a prominent businessman in the community, opening a butcher shop, a restaurant called the "Oklahoma" and also innkeeper of another hotel in Freetown. Wheeler also played the violin in a band with other young men of the area and soon was known more affectionately by the young and old as "Brass" Wheeler.

The arrival of the railroad in 1889 caused dramatic growth in this small rural community. Between 1889 and 1895 the town tripled in size with five new additions platted. Industry flourished in the town and by 1889 there were two saw and planing mills, a flour mill, and a grist mill. Freetown's production of wood products included cross ties, mine props, hoop poles, spokes and lumber. For many years Freetown had one of the most active train depots in the region with four passenger stops each day, the hotel became the center of activity. A sidewalk was built from the front porch of the hotel from huge stones through the community to the train depot some twelve blocks away so that folks could get off the train and walk on stone paths to the hotel. (The walks remain in place on the property and the inscription, "Frank Wheeler 1905" remains plainly visible today.)

Some of the uses for the rooms changed when it was converted from a residence to an inn. The large formal parlor was used for guests to sleep in and the parlor would serve as the inn lobby and office, where oftentimes guests would gather around a large round table for an evening of games and cards, sometimes lasting all night. The rooms were lighted by the use of kerosene lamps until 1923 when the Brownstown Electric Light and Power Company brought electricity to the community. The heating was supplied by a fireplace in the dining room and wood stoves in many of the ten rooms. Cooling of the home in the summer was helped by the giant four maple trees in the front yard by providing lots of shade and also the bay placement of the windows in the front of the home and the summer kitchen in the rear of the home.

Frank Wheeler operated the inn in Freetown with his wife, Emma, for 33 years and it was known far and wide for its fine food and

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its genial hospitality. Lodging was fifty (50) cents a night and meals were thirty-five (35) cents. The inn was so popular that the drummers (traveling salesmen) made special effort to spend the night there, enroute to other areas in the county and state. They would arrive by train, load their trunks of samples on a trunk wagon, they would rent from the blind man who operated the livery stable near the depot and make their trips to stores in nearby Houston, Maumee, Story, Stonehead, Pike's Peak and other points. In those days they would use the Freetown community as their stopping point, stay overnight at the inn, then radiate out from there to the nearby country stores in Jackson and Brown counties.

One of the two stone-lined wells on the grounds near the summer kitchen was used by Mrs. Wheeler to keep her butter and cream cool. She would hang them in tin buckets from a rope and lower them into the coolness of the well, so they would stay fresh and cool.

A two-room building was constructed at the rear of the home about 1900, one side of the building was used as a coal and wood shed, while the other side of the building, with a fruit cellar beneath, was used to do the washing and ironing for the hotel guests. A cement out-house with a wood door built in 1930 replaced the original frame out-house.

The death of Frank Wheeler in 1938 ended the era of hotels for Freetown and the property was then converted back to apartments and residential use until its purchase in 1989 by Russell and Donna Fritz of Freetown, Route 1, (DBA, R & D Fritz, Inc., 523 Washington Street, Columbus, Indiana).

Nothing has been done to change the integrity of the home. The interior retains all of the original woodwork, doors, floors, windows, etc., and the exterior of the home remains in its original state. Therefore, the Frank Wheeler Hotel is significant in the context of late nineteenth century Queen Anne-style architecture, being built during the period c.1890 satisfying the registration requirements context relating mainly to the date of construction and the integrity of the property. The Frank Wheeler Hotel clearly qualifies for listing under this context and for the commercial use it satisfied for the Freetown community from 1905-1938.



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## Bibliography (continued)

Records from the Jackson County Courthouse, Deeds office and Recorders office, including deed record 18, p.256 and deed record 36, p.203.

'76 Star Spangled Days, A Bicentennial Commemorative of Jackson County, Indiana. Brownstown, IN: Brownstown Banner, 1976.