

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Wertz-Bestle Farm  
other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location

street & number 51387 Portage Road N/A  not for publication  
city or town South Bend  vicinity  
state Indiana code IN county St. Joseph code 141 zip code 46628

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 3-1-01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

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

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

<input type="checkbox"/> entered in the National Register. <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	Signature of the Keeper _____	Date of Action _____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined eligible for the National Register <input type="checkbox"/> See continuation sheet.	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> determined not eligible for the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> removed from the National Register	_____	_____
<input type="checkbox"/> other, (explain:)	_____	_____

Wertz-Bestle Farm

St. Joseph IN

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private, public-local, public-State, public-Federal

- building, district, site, structure, object

Table with 3 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, and Resource Type (buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total). Values: Contributing (2, 1, 2, 0, 5), Noncontributing (0, 0, 0, 0, 0).

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling, AGRICULTURE/SUBSIST Animal Facility

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling, DOMESTIC: Secondary Structure

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Italianate, OTHER: Schweitzer barn

foundation: STONE, walls: BRICK, roof: ASPHALT, other: STONE

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

AGRICULTURE \_\_\_\_\_

ARCHITECTURE \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

c. 1872 - 1948 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Dates**

c. 1872 \_\_\_\_\_

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

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

**Cultural Affiliation**

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

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographic References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository:

Wertz-Bestle Farm  
Name of Property

St. Joseph IN  
County and State

### 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 12.7

#### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1 

1	6	5	5	8	2	8	0	4	6	2	1	8	6	0
Zone	Easting						Northing							

3 

1	6	5	5	7	9	2	0	4	6	2	1	4	1	0
Zone	Easting						Northing							

2 

1	6	5	5	8	4	4	0	4	6	2	1	4	3	0
Zone	Easting						Northing							

4 

1	6	5	5	7	9	2	0	4	6	2	1	8	5	0
Zone	Easting						Northing							

See continuation sheet

#### Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

#### Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

### 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Glory-June Greiff  
organization \_\_\_\_\_ date 11/30/98  
street & number 1753 South Talbott Street telephone 317-637-6163  
city or town Indianapolis state IN zip code 46225

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

##### Maps

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

##### Photographs

Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.

#### Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Elizabeth Lauber  
street & number 51387 Portage Road telephone 219-277-8063  
city or town South Bend state IN zip code 46628

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Wertz-Bestle Farm

St. Joseph County IN

## NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The surviving farmstead of the historic Wertz-Bestle Farm (surrounded on three sides by 34.3 cultivated acres that were part of the original plat) lies on the west side of Portage Road northwest of South Bend near the Michigan state line. Across Portage Road from the property lies considerable suburban development, which has been encroaching upon this agricultural area for several years. To the south along Portage Road lies rapidly approaching commercial and industrial development, which has been expanding at a furious pace since the US31 bypass was completed to the west of South Bend. There are a few other farms still remaining in the vicinity, mainly to the west and north, and the land in general is a mix of rolling fields typical of glacial moraine and patches of second-growth forest.

The farmstead, largely bounded by treelines and a lane on the south, consists of 12.7 acres and is surrounded on three sides by cropland. The entrance to the drive leading to the house and barn is marked at Portage Road by flanking brick pillars that likely date to the construction of the house (photo 1). Maple trees line the drive along the south; a stand of large walnut trees lies southeast of the barn. The expansive yard contains many medium and some large deciduous trees (mostly a mix of walnut, maple, and white oak), giving the property a park-like quality (see photos 1,2). A few old and very large fir trees surround the house and may date to its construction. West and southwest of the house is a young woods; the area may have contained other outbuildings in the past. A shed--long gone--once stood in this area, west and a little north of the barn.

The brick house (photo 3), possibly dating to 1872, is a two-story, T-gabled building with a one-and-a-half story kitchen wing on the west. It rests on a foundation of shaped fieldstone. The wide overhang suggests that originally there may have been brackets beneath the eaves, in keeping with the Italianate influence prevalent in the area at the time. The house does possess the typical segmental-arched windows, most of which survive intact, with one-over-one double hung sashes. Some of the

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upper-story window openings contain a pair of very narrow double hung sashes. The original louvered wooden shutters survive, but are in storage at present.

The kitchen wing on the west (see photo 4) has been altered somewhat, particularly with the enlarged window opening on the upper level. What presumably began as a small back porch on the northwest was enclosed early on. The porches on the southwest and southeast (see photo 3), probably added in the 1890s but possibly earlier, were originally identical and flush with the south wall of the house. The present owner extended them outward a few feet and enclosed the one on the southeast to create a sunroom. The original front entrance door from the southeast porch remains in place, now inside.

The interior of the house, never ornate, survives virtually intact. The original doors (photo 5), surrounds, and stairs, which appear to be of walnut, all remain. Most are painted, as they likely would have been from the start; the doors are stained and retain their original hardware. Spatially the interior remains essentially the same; the load-bearing walls are brick covered with plaster. The footprint of the house reflects the rooms within. On the first floor there is a large central room; to the east, a parlor, and off it to the south the former porch that is now an enclosed sunroom. There is a smaller room to the north and the kitchen is to the west. Upstairs are two rooms plus a partly finished attic space above the kitchen. The basement, which may have been dug in the 1880s, has walls of rubblestone. Its floor retains an embedded brick circle where some early heating source once stood, for in the floor above the circle was a grate (now covered).

The gabled frame barn (photos 6,7) is approximately three-and-a-half stories high and contains two levels. The upper level has two rows of tall, narrow arched louvered openings on the east (see photo 2) and north sides only; it is entered on the north up a reinforced earthen bank (the concrete abutment was surely added later) through tall double doors (photo 6). The large open space (photo 9), the middle portion of which was a threshing floor, looks much the same as when it was used to store hay. The upper

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level is cantilevered over the lower on the south (photo 7), forming a shelter where, no doubt, there once were animal pens. The lower level has windows on all but the north side (owing to the bank), which are four-light sashes with peaked surrounds. Inside (photo 8) there are several wooden stanchions and stalls with hand-hewn upright beams connected with pegs, and areas set apart with work benches and spaces for specific farm tasks. Some of the ceiling joists appear simply to be tree trunks with some fragments of bark still remaining, scarcely hewn at all.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Wertz-Bestle Farm is a substantial remnant--one of the few remaining--of an 1870s farmstead in German Township, St. Joseph County, once an entirely agricultural area noted as "highly favorable" to that purpose. In recent years, especially since the completion of the US31 by-pass and the expansion of the Michiana Regional Airport, farms have been giving way to rapid development, chiefly commercial (including a new golf course) and industrial, but including pockets of upscale residential construction mostly in the northern half of the township. The Wertz-Bestle Farm contains a brick T-gabled farmhouse and a particularly fine frame Schweitzer barn; it was designated a Local Historic Landmark by the Historic Preservation Commission of South Bend and St. Joseph County in 1993. The property is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its significance in the area of agriculture in St. Joseph County, and under Criterion C in the area of architecture, for its splendid example of a Schweitzer barn.

German Township was so named in 1830 (its present boundaries were established by 1840) for some early settlers in the region from Germany. Even the briefest glance at nineteenth century census records shows the township continued to remain largely populated by people of German descent for many decades. From the start the area was noted as fertile and "highly favored for agriculture"

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(Howard, 275). John Wertz, who was born in Ohio in 1831 of German parents, came to St. Joseph County in 1853, settling first in Center Township, where two years later he married Belinda Kollar, who was also from Ohio and of German parentage. Although he could not even write his name, Wertz was nevertheless noted to be "industrious, upright and honest" (Chapman, 694) in all his dealings. He and Belinda had six children. In 1872 they moved to German Township onto 120 acres of land straddling the Niles Road (present day Portage Road) north of Auten Road, just south of the Michigan state line. West of the road they built, or had built for them, the brick farmhouse. The frame Schweitzer barn was probably built at the same time or shortly after. Wertz sold the 33 acres of land east of the road in 1875 to one David Wagner. Three years later, Wertz sold the remaining 87 acres with the farm buildings, but continued to live and farm elsewhere in German Township.

German-born Godfrey Bestle (alternatively, Bestley) purchased the property from John Wertz. He had come to America at the age of 26, first settling in Michigan just north of the Indiana state line in 1852, where he married Dora Beyrer, also a German native, three years later. The Bestle family, which eventually included nine children, first came to German Township in 1864. Described as "a hardworking, industrious man all his life" (Chapman, 689), Bestle and his family ultimately farmed not only what had been the Wertz property, but additional acreage in German Township and across the state line. Typical of late-nineteenth and early twentieth century practices in the area, they indulged in mixed farming, raising such crops as wheat, corn, oats, and hay, and maintaining a herd of dairy cows and a number of pigs and chickens, the latter mainly for home use.

After Godfrey Bestle's death, his son Charles purchased the other heirs' shares of the property and lived in the house while continuing to farm the eighty-seven acres. At some point a forty-acre tract on the west was sold off, probably in the 1950s. The farm remained in the Bestle family until about 1970, when it was purchased by a neighboring longtime landowner, Agatha Wilhelm, the mother of the present owner, Elizabeth Lauber. The tillable acreage was incorporated into the adjacent farm and worked with



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Wertz-Bestle Farm

St. Joseph County IN

the Wilhelm land. The house was rented out until 1982, when Ms. Lauber purchased 11.4 acres of non-farmed property. Later, Ms. Wilhelm gave her daughter the remaining acreage of the original Bestle purchase that surrounds the farmyard on three sides, for a total of 47 acres.

While the house has been altered somewhat, with the enclosure of the southeast porch and the new window on the west, it remains reasonably intact. The architectural significance of the property, however, lies in the beautifully restored Schweitzer barn that retains its original interior of rough-hewn joists and wooden stalls and stanchions in the lower level. Here the animals were sheltered and various work stations for different tasks are divided off. The upper level, reached by way of an earthen bank and cantilevered on the south, was used for storing hay, threshing grain, and housing large implements. It is rare today to find a historic barn of such high architectural merit in such good condition, appearing as if it could return to its original role at a moment's notice. As intact as it is, the barn clearly still represents the various agricultural activities it once housed.

While the other outbuildings that no doubt once completed the farmstead have not survived, the Wertz-Bestle Farm nonetheless retains much of the character of its origins in the 1870s. It remains a fine example of a late nineteenth century family farmstead. The house has not been substantially altered and retains most of its original fabric, but the Schweitzer barn is an especially fine example of the Midwestern variation of this type and is remarkably intact. Also surviving from the nineteenth century are the brick entrance posts at the end of the maple-lined drive and the walnut grove south of the barn. The property--one of the few surviving farmsteads in the area--is especially notable in light of encroaching suburban sprawl and more recently, commercial and industrial development in the area. The property appears to meet both Criteria A and C (significance in agriculture and architecture, respectively) and thus is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

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Wertz-Bestle Farm

St. Joseph County IN

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESOURCES

Chapman, C.C. and Company, comp. History of St. Joseph County, Indiana. Chicago 1880.

Higgins, Belden and Company, comp. An Illustrated Historical Atlas of St. Joseph County, Indiana. Chicago 1875.

Historic Preservation Commission of South Bend and St. Joseph County. Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Inventory of St. Joseph County. South Bend 1985.

Howard, Timothy Edward. History of St. Joseph County, Indiana. Chicago 1907.

Interviews with Elizabeth Lauber, present owner, September-November 1998.

Ogle, George, and Company, comp. Standard Atlas of St. Joseph County. Chicago 1895.

\_\_\_\_\_. Standard Atlas of St. Joseph County. Chicago 1911.

St. Joseph County Mortgage Records.

St. Joseph County Record of Deeds.

GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning due west of an iron survey marker at the center of the intersection of Auten and Portage roads, proceed northwesterly along the west edge of the right-of-way of Portage Road 849 3/4 feet; thence due west (along the treeline) 534 feet, thence due south 800 feet, thence east 849 feet (along the westward extension of Auten Road) to the point of origin.

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Wertz-Bestle Farm

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Boundary Justification

Constitutes the remaining intact farmstead of the Wertz-Bestle property, which includes all surviving historic buildings and structures.

SOUTH BEND WEST QUADRANGLE  
 INDIANA-ST. JOSEPH CO.  
 7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

NILES, MICH. (U.S. 12) 5 MI. 86°15'

(NILES EAST)  
 37°15' SW

17°30' | 1330 000 FEET

558

560

561

562

41°45'

4622

Wertz-Bestle Farm, St.  
 Joseph Co., Indiana

Trone 16

	E	N
1	558280	4621860
2	558440	4621430
3	557920	4621410
4	557920	4621850

1 540 000  
 FEET

4619

4620

