

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 Fraser & Isham Law Office
other names/site number Christopher Law Office

2. Location

street & number 306 East Fifth St. N/A not for publication
city or town Fowler N/A vicinity
state Indiana code IN county Benton code 007 zip code 47944

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 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:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

- 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:)

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: 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 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)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Professional

COMMERCE/TRADE: Professional

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

LATE VICTORIAN: Romanesque

foundation: STONE: Limestone, walls: BRICK, STONE: Limestone, roof: ASPHALT, other: WOOD: Shingle, STONE: Slate

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)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1896

Significant Dates

1896

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Alexander, James F.

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:

Fraser & Isham Law Office
Name of Property

Benton IN
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Less than 1 acre

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	<table border="1"><tr><td>1</td><td>6</td></tr></table> Zone	1	6	<table border="1"><tr><td>4</td><td>7</td><td>3</td><td>0</td><td>1</td><td>0</td></tr></table> Easting	4	7	3	0	1	0	<table border="1"><tr><td>4</td><td>4</td><td>9</td><td>6</td><td>1</td><td>3</td><td>0</td></tr></table> Northing	4	4	9	6	1	3	0	3	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Zone									<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Easting									<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table> Northing									
1	6																																														
4	7	3	0	1	0																																										
4	4	9	6	1	3	0																																									
2	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td></tr></table>			<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>							<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>									4	<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>									<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>									<table border="1"><tr><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td><td></td></tr></table>								

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 Tommy Kleckner, Program Assistant
organization HLFI Western Regional Office date 12/1/99
street & number 643 Wabash Ave. telephone 812-232-4534
city or town Terre Haute state IN zip code 47807

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 Richard L. Christopher
street & number 306 East Fifth St. telephone 765-884-0810
city or town Fowler state IN zip code 47944

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.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 1

**Fraser & Isham Law Office
Benton County, IN**

Description:

The Fraser & Isham Law Office is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C for its distinctive architectural design. The building is located at 306 East Fifth Street towards the east end of the downtown business district in the City of Fowler, Indiana. The building is situated on the south side of the street with the primary façade facing north (photo 1). Consistent with most downtown buildings, it sits flush with the concrete sidewalk. A blacktop parking lot is located along the eastern edge of the property. A small grass lawn extends from the rear of the building to the southern edge of the lot. A three-story commercial building abuts the law office building and property to the west.

Designed in 1895 in a unique Victorian Romanesque architectural style, the one-story, red brick building is rectangular in plan and can be divided into two sections: the original 1896 structure and the 1952 rear addition. The brick foundation is faced with rusticated limestone on the primary façade. Fenestration on the building consists of original wood double-hung, 1-over-1 windows in the 1896 structure and wood divided light casement windows in the 1952 addition. The roof shapes vary from mansard and engaged conical roofs on the original structure to a flat roof on the rear addition. Roofing materials of wood, slate and asphalt exist on the building.

The primary elevation of the building is the north façade, which faces East Fifth Street (see photo 1). The brick foundation on this façade is enhanced with rusticated limestone facing. This facing extends from ground level to approximately 5 feet in height giving the appearance of a massive foundation. Dominating the symmetrical façade are two rounded, front bays that extend from the main body of the building. Each bay has three evenly spaced wood double-hung, 1-over-1 windows with stone sills (photo 2). These windows curve to conform to the shape of the bays. A small basement window is centrally located at the base of each bay. A decorative wrought iron grill covers each window. Short, decorative wrought iron fencing encloses the small space between the sidewalk and each corner of the building (photo 3).

Centered between the bays is the main entrance (photo 4). Bands of rusticated limestone over the windows and door serve the double function of lintels and stringcourse. Five worn steps lead up to the thick, wood front door. The large beveled, single-light upper glass panel of the front door bears the original stenciled letters of the first proprietors, "Fraser * & * Isham / Lawyers." Elaborate wrought iron straps hinge the front door. Similar in design are the wrought iron door latch and plate (photo 5). A gable formed at the roofline above the main entrance rises to the same height as the roofs of the bays. A flagpole attached to the gable extends upward approximately half the height of the building. Located below the flagpole is a limestone tablet bearing the name of the building, "Fraser * & * Isham" (photo 6). An elaborate wrought iron bracket used for suspending a lantern extends outward from the brick wall just below the limestone tablet.

The two bays are capped with cone-shaped roofs with wood shingles (see photos 1 & 2). These cone-shaped roofs are engaged with the main slate-shingled mansard roof. The bays feature built-in gutters with metal downspouts that are painted tan. Metal coping is found on all roof ridges. All roof surfaces are painted tan, similar in color to the east elevation of the main building.

The west wall of the building abuts the east wall of a large commercial building. Stucco painted tan covers the east wall of the original structure. A stepped parapet with terra cotta coping extends along the top of the east wall. The rear addition extends from the eastern half of the south elevation of the main building. A wide louvered opening is located on

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7 Page 2

**Fraser & Isham Law Office
Benton County, IN**

Description (continued)

the south elevation just above the roof of the rear addition. The western half of the south elevation features a window unit consisting of four 4-light, wood casement windows with a concrete sill.

The rear one-story, red brick addition was constructed in 1952 (photo 7). The east wall of the addition has a paired, 3-light, wood casement window unit located slightly off-center. The south elevation features a large window unit consisting of five 4-light, wood casement windows with a concrete sill (photo 8). Located to the right of the window unit is the rear entry doorway with concrete steps. A wood storm door with 4-light glazing protects the solid-wood rear door.

The southern half of the addition's west elevation is solid brick and extends beyond the northern half. The northern half has two, small 3-light wood casement windows. A narrow concrete walk wraps around the south and west sides of the rear addition. This walk connects the rear entry to a small, ½ story brick, basement entry that is situated against the intersection of the main building and addition. The 1952 addition has a flat, rolled asphalt roof. The gutters and downspouts on the rear addition are painted tan.

The original building consists of three rooms: the main front office, the partner's office and the law library. The front entrance on the north façade opens into the main front office, which presently serves as a reception area (photo 9). This room remains virtually unchanged from its original appearance. The entire front office is floored with amber-yellow and sky-blue encaustic tile. Narrow rubber floor runners extend from the front entrance to the doorways of each back room. The plaster walls, all original, are painted a light golden hue. Lining the lower east and west walls are oak cabinets. Three oak bookshelves are evenly spaced on top of the lower cabinets of each wall. Natural oak trim frames the front door and the front bays. The heavy trim work surrounding the openings of the front bays resembles fluted pilasters with dentiled cornices. Each bay has a built-in, wood bench that conforms to the curve of the bay. An impressive vault is centrally located in the south wall of the front office. The vault door with its simple decorative relief is painted the same golden hue as the walls. A central light fixture of classic design hangs from the white plaster ceiling. Many of the furnishings in the front office are original to the building.

Flanking the vault to the rear of the front office are the partner's office and the law library. These rooms mirror each other in shape and size. The doorway to the right of the vault opens into the partner's office. Centrally located on the west wall is a fireplace with a grand marble mantle and the terra cotta fireplace surround (photo 10). Lining the west wall north of the fireplace are simple wall-mounted wooden bookshelves. A picture rail approximately four feet from the floor extends the length of the southern half of the west and east walls. A large window unit, consisting of four, 4-light wood casements, is located in the south wall. A small light fixture hangs from the center of the acoustical tile ceiling. The brown ash paneling on the walls and the light bluish-green carpeting are from a later remodeling.

To the left of the front office vault is the doorway to the law library. Doubling as a client meeting space, the library is lined with mahogany bookshelves (photo 11). The library floor is covered in the same type of carpet found in the partner's office. The plaster walls, wood trim and baseboards are painted a shade of green similar to the color of the carpet. Wide decorative trim with rosette corner blocks surrounds the doorways. Topping the bookshelves is a decorative trim board in a scalloped pattern. A modern fluorescent lighting unit is located in the center of the white plaster ceiling.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 7, 8 Page 3

**Fraser & Isham Law Office
Benton County, IN**

Description (continued)

The ceiling above the hall space of the library has a large attic vent installed. A doorway in the west wall of the library provides access to the partner's office.

To the rear of the law library is the 1952 addition. A hallway extends from the library to a rear office. Located on the west side of the hallway are a modern restroom and a storage room. A narrow, 3-light wood casement window is found in the west wall of each room. The rear office is paneled with wood similar in appearance to the partner's office. A large window unit similar to the partner's office is located in the south wall. The rear entry door is to the left of the window unit.

Statement of Significance:

The Fraser & Isham Law office is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C for its distinctive architectural design. An outstanding example of what may best be described as Victorian Romanesque style architecture, the building was designed by architect James F. Alexander in 1895 for Daniel Fraser and William Isham, partners in the Fraser & Isham Law Office. Functionally, the building has served its original use continuously since its construction. Physically, it remains virtually unchanged from its turn-of-the-century appearance. A windshield survey supports the fact that the Fraser & Isham Law Office is a rare example of its architectural style in Fowler.

Early settlement of the Benton County area was agriculturally related – the tall marsh and prairie grasses proved ideal for stock grazing. Moses Fowler, a prominent Lafayette businessman and banker, was one of several early land speculators who foresaw the agricultural opportunities of the land. He purchased large tracts in the central region of the county and, in 1872, platted the Town of Fowler on a portion of his land that lay on the Big Four Railroad. A thriving community within a year, Moses Fowler used his influence to have the county seat moved from Oxford to his town. By 1900, Fowler was the largest community in Benton County.

The family of Donald Fraser, or Daniel Fraser as he became known as during his career, was one of the pioneers of Benton County. Born in Canada in 1855 the son of James and Sareph Fraser, Daniel moved with his family to Benton County in 1869 where his father established a homestead farm. Privately tutored during his early education, Fraser received a Bachelor of Philosophy degree in New York then returned to study law in Fowler. Following his admission to the bar of the Benton Circuit Court in 1876, Fraser commenced practicing law with John T. Brown. The firm of Brown & Fraser was formed shortly thereafter. Following the dissolution of the firm several years later, Fraser practiced alone until becoming partners with William Isham in 1889.

Isham was born on a farm near Epworth, Iowa, in 1860. Following his father's death in 1876, Isham moved with his mother to New York City where he attended Cooper's Institute. In 1880, Isham moved to Benton County, Indiana, to pursue a teaching career. He studied law on his own volition while teaching before joining Daniel Fraser in 1889 to form the Fraser & Isham Law Office. The firm soon established themselves as a leading law firm in the region with an extensive practice in United States courts in both Indiana and Illinois. Fraser, the more prominent of the two partners,

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 4

**Fraser & Isham Law Office
Benton County, IN**

Statement of Significance (continued)

was frequently called to argue cases in the courts of New York and the United States Supreme Court. He was also elected president of the Indiana Bar Association in 1906. Both Fraser and Isham held the position of Dean of the Benton County Bar at the time of their respective deaths.

When a fire destroyed the law office of Fraser and Isham in May 1895, the partners also lost their law library and all their legal documents. The law firm hired James F. Alexander, a locally noted architect of the period, to design their new law office building. A native of Lafayette, Alexander received training in architecture in St. Louis before receiving a degree from the University of Toronto. He moved on to gain practical experience in Chicago before returning to Lafayette. Notable buildings designed by J.F. Alexander during his career include; Normal Hall (1910) at Indiana State University in Terre Haute, Indiana; and the Lafayette Life Building (1918) in Lafayette, Indiana.* The final and built design of the Tippecanoe County Courthouse (1881-1884) in Lafayette, Indiana, has also been attributed to Alexander.

Alexander's design for the Fraser & Isham Law Office was in keeping with his ability to blend features of several styles to create an eclectic look. The law office, however was a break from the Neo-classical inspired designs that he became known for. He drew instead from several other architectural styles popular during the late-nineteenth century. The influence of the Romanesque Revival style can be seen in the use of brick with a heavy rusticated limestone foundation and stringcourse. The two rounded front bays are indicative of Queen Anne-style architecture and the slate mansard roof is a feature of the Second Empire style. Alexander's exceptional ability to scale these stylistic features to the proportions of a one-story building is unique to the Fraser and Isham Law Office as Alexander was noted for his grand houses and monumental public and commercial buildings. The law office also exhibits an unusual attention to craftsmanship and detail. Elaborate iron work was used for the front door hardware, the lantern bracket above the main entrance, the corner fencing and the basement window grills. The wood windows of the front bays are perfectly conformed to the curve of the bays.

Beyond the quality of the exterior is the integrity of the interior. The original amber-yellow and sky-blue encaustic tile floor, installed by Jonathan Lilly of Indianapolis in late 1895, still exists in the front office. The oak bookcases that line the front office walls were ordered by Fraser & Isham from the Brunswick Corporation of Chicago in 1896. These bookcases are filled with leather-bound legal volumes, all with "Fraser & Isham" embossed on the spine. Located between the bookcases are four bronze statuettes on oak pedestals, also original to the building. Contributing to the stateliness of the front office is the classical detailing of the oak molding of the front bay openings.

The impressive front vault, manufactured in Chicago and original to the building, contains extensive files of important legal documents and historic records. These historic records verify the authenticity of many original features and period furnishings. Included in the historic records is original correspondence between the clients and the architect. In one such correspondence from Daniel Fraser to J.F. Alexander, Fraser requests the design of the building to evoke "the full breasts of a beautiful woman." Hence the perfectly rounded and scaled bays on the front façade. Extending his architectural role, Alexander also designed the partner's desk and secretary's desk. The massive partner's desk still dominates the front office as it did in 1896, with the matching secretary's desk set off to the side. Original sketches of Alexander's design for these two pieces can be found in the extensive files of the vault.

*the Administration Building at Ball State (Muncie) was also designed by Alexander.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8, 9, 10 Page 5

Fraser & Isham Law Office
Benton County, IN

Statement of Significance (continued)

The partner's office retains much of its original features and period furnishings, as well. Jonathan Lilly of Indianapolis, the same gentleman that installed the tile flooring in the front office, installed the grand fireplace in the partner's office. Fraser and Isham ordered the Mission-style oak desk, chairs and sofa in 1903 from the Tobey Furniture Company of Chicago. These pieces still have their original leather cushions and pillows. Also dating to the early period of the practice of Fraser and Isham's are the wall hangings in the partner's office. These include a photoengraving depicting a trial scene entitled "The Trial of Effie Deans" and a 100 year-old copy of the Magna Carta.

Following Daniel Fraser's death in 1927, Isham and his son, William (Bill) S. Isham, continued the practice under the old firm name of "Fraser and Isham." The father-son practice lasted until 1940 when William Isham died. Bill Isham continued to run the law office as his father had, keeping everything intact but adding the rear addition. The younger Isham rose to prominence in the legal field and, like his father's partner, served as president of the Indiana Bar. Bill Isham and Jim Gardner became partners in 1952 and the two practiced together until Isham's death in 1961. Gardner then ran the office himself with current owner, Richard Christopher, joining the practice in 1975. Gardner died in 1978 and Christopher has run and maintained the office himself since. Respecting its historic integrity, Christopher continues to maintain and preserve the 104-year-old structure as close as possible to its original state.

Bibliography

Brooks, Bill. "A step back in legal time." *Res Gestæ*. January 1998, pp. 14-16.

Cullen, Kevin. "He wouldn't change a thing." *Journal & Courier*. May 3, 1998. p. C-1,2.

Dollase, Mark. "Fowler office still turns heads." *Indiana Preservationist*. January/February 1998. pp. 8-9.

Fowler Centennial 1871-1971: Fowler, Indiana - historical review. The Benton County Historical Society and the Fowler Centennial Executive Committee. 1971.

Maroney, Dave. "Law office from the past." June 27, 1976. p. B-5.

Ward, John R. "Fowler building a distinguished landmark." *The Benton Review*. Vol. 123, No. 50. December 11, 1996.

Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 423 in the original plat of the Town of Fowler, Benton County, Indiana.

Boundary Justification

This city lot retains its original property lines.

