

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

Final

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 Boxley, George, Cabin

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number Pioneer Hill at First & Main Streets N/A ☐ not for publication

city or town Sheridan N/A ☐ vicinity

state Indiana code IN county Hamilton code 057 zip code 46069

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

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:

- ☐ 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

Boxley, George, Cabin
Name of Property

Hamilton IN
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private
☒ public-local
☐ public-State
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property
(Check only one box)

- ☒ building
☐ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	1	Total

Name of related multiple property listing

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed
in the National Register**

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: single pen log cabin

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation WOOD: Log

walls WOOD: Log

roof WOOD: Log

other

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.

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

EXPLORATION / SETTLEMENT

Period of Significance

c.1828-1853

Significant Dates**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Boxley, George

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Boxley, George (builder)

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:

Sheridan Historical Society

Boxley, George, Cabin
Name of Property

Hamilton 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 16 56 6 3 6 0 44 4 3 2 8 0
Zone Easting Northing

2

3

4

☐ 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 for Sheridan Historical Society date 10-09-2004
street & number 1753 South Talbott 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 Town of Sheridan
street & number 506 South Main telephone 317/ 758-5293
city or town Sheridan state IN zip code 46069

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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George Boxley Cabin

Hamilton County IN

NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The George Boxley cabin sits atop a knoll called Pioneer Hill (formerly known as Boxley Hill) at the north edge of the small town of Sheridan, Adams Township, near the northwest corner of Hamilton County. Off to the north and west is open farmland. To the immediate south and east is an area that in recent years has been made into a town park (see photo 1). To the immediate northwest of the cabin is a cluster of trash-filled outbuildings and pens, the majority of which are post-World War II. The oldest among them is entirely surrounded by lean-to additions, but what can be seen indicates a small gabled building that may date to as early as the 1870s. Farthest from the cabin in this cluster is a small barn that appears to have been built in the early twentieth century. In a small wooded area to the northeast of this cluster across a small meadow are the ruins of a larger nineteenth century barn and adjacent shed, with a later addition that had linked them together. None of these structures are included in the nomination. The postwar pens and structures nearest the cabin are being cleared away. From the late 1870s until 1997 a large frame Italianate dwelling with a slate roof had stood immediately south of the cabin, which then became an outbuilding. The dwelling was destroyed by arson.

Some time after the construction of the Italianate house, two outhouses were built adjacent to the log cabin on either side. Only the one on the east survives (see photos 2,3,4); the one on the west collapsed some time after 1994. The remaining outhouse appears to have been built in the late Victorian era, and the use of wire nails in its construction indicate it was built no earlier than 1890. Because of its close proximity to the cabin--a mere nine inches--of necessity it must be included within the boundaries of the nominated property but is a non-contributing resource.

At the time of its construction around 1828, the George Boxley cabin was quite isolated in a heavily wooded region that over time was cleared for farmland. In the 1830s a state road linking Noblesville with Lafayette was platted across George Boxley's land to the north of his dwelling, but it was scarcely improved and not even completed until

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the early twentieth century. The town of Sheridan (at first called Millwood) was not platted until 1866, after which the route of the state road was shifted southward to go through the town.

The log building (photos 2,5,6), neglected for decades and in desperate need of restoration, has retained a substantial portion of its original fabric over the approximately 175 years of its existence. Although a percentage of intact original material is difficult to calculate, approximately two-thirds of the original building is still there. The original roof is gone, but its rafters survive (see photo 13). Within the past few years the roof had partially collapsed when a large tree fell onto it during a storm. The original walls of hewn logs are largely intact, aided by the clapboard siding added at some point (perhaps as early as the 1870s when the Italianate dwelling was built just to the south of it, but more likely a few decades later). This siding was still in place when the nomination was first submitted in October 2004, but was just removed in May 2005 to facilitate a feasibility study for the cabin's restoration (see photos 14,15,16,17). The north and south walls are nine logs high, and the gable end walls are eight. The recent evaluation preparatory to restoration has revealed that the top logs sustain some significant deterioration and the sill (foundation) logs may need to be replaced, although every effort will be made to reuse them. The seven floor joists--some left as round logs, some hand-hewn--are largely intact (see photo 12), apart from two cut off in the northeast corner, in order to accommodate the addition of a stair (likely built circa 1940) to the basement. Seven of the original nine hand-hewn ceiling joists survive (see photo 18), as do the rafters, as mentioned above. These are smaller logs, eighteen in all, approximately four inches in diameter, flat on the side supporting the roof, with the bark still intact (see photo 9). Two of the ceiling joists, while still intact, had fallen in recent years because of the damage inflicted by the tree. In April 2005 the rafters were carefully numbered, removed, and placed in storage, to be returned to their proper positions when the cabin is restored. At this point it appears that four of the eighteen will need to be replaced. The interior of the cabin has a partial loft with a board floor and ladder access, clearly a later improvement to the dwelling. Although it is not unlikely that the loft space had been used in some fashion

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from the beginning, this construction appears to be early or mid-twentieth century. Undoubtedly the building was originally roofed with wood shingles, but later (possibly in the 1870s when the Italianate house was constructed), it was reroofed with slate just like that of the house. This slate was removed in April 2005 as its weight was threatening the cabin's stability and also posing a safety hazard.

The cabin measures eighteen-and-a-half feet by sixteen-and-a-half feet. The walls are nine feet high, and the cabin is fourteen-and-a-half feet high at the peak of the gable, which runs east-west. The hewn logs of the cabin walls are all about fourteen inches high (photos 7,10,11).

On the south side is an entrance just slightly east of center with a wooden door comprised of three boards--one of which is two feet wide--and two hewn battens. (The door has been removed for safekeeping and is in storage at present.) Typical of cabins built in this period, there is also an entrance opposite on the north side that was covered over when the cabin was sided. The door frame and door are still in place. Until recently it could barely be seen from the inside, as the north wall was almost entirely obscured on the interior with a very large bookcase that appeared to date to the early or mid twentieth century. One could see only the bottom of the door beneath the bottom shelf of the bookcase. The bookcase was only just removed from the interior in May 2005 (see photo 19). Indeed, the entire cabin was filled with trash, making thorough examination difficult, as did the precarious condition of the floor. There is a single window opening on the east side (photos 2,3,4), which had contained the remains of double-hung, four-over-four sashes and movable wooden louvers, very similar to those in the window openings of the small barn, mentioned above, that stands to the northwest of the cabin. Given that similarity, the louvers likely were added when the barn was built in the early twentieth century. There is a window opening just west of the entrance on the south, and opposite this window is one in the north wall, immediately west of the north entrance (photo 19). The north and south windows are almost certainly original. The east window may have been cut later, but probably still early in the historic period. There originally would have been a fireplace centered in the west wall; the opening still exists, although it had been hidden beneath the clapboard

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siding. A brick chimney (photos 5,6), installed in the mid-twentieth century, stood on the west side and was in place when the nomination was originally submitted, but it was recently removed because of safety concerns. There is an additional cut just south of where the fireplace would have been that appears to have accommodated a later door. This leaves about sixty percent of the west wall intact, although the fireplace opening is original. The cabin currently has a full basement roughly six feet deep and lined with brick. This basement was excavated later. Early sources maintain that there was a smaller excavation, described as a pit, beneath the cabin when it was built, so it is possible that this may simply have been enlarged. The early excavation is said to have been four feet deep and fifteen feet square. An obviously later stair (probably constructed in the 1940s) at the east end of the cabin descends to the basement; construction of the stair necessitated cutting two of the log floor joists. The basement contains, among other things, a small 1940s oil furnace that had been connected to the chimney. The former pioneer dwelling was used as a sort of year-round playhouse for the children of the family that acquired the property about 1940.

After the nomination was submitted in the fall of 2004, the town of Sheridan erected a substantial temporary shelter over the cabin to protect it from the elements until it could be restored. The shelter consists of a frame roof supported by utility poles, with plastic sheeting attached to boards nailed horizontally across the poles. While this has helped immensely to protect the cabin, it obscures views and has made subsequent photographs very difficult to obtain. A feasibility study was conducted in April and May 2005. No original material has been removed from the cabin, apart from the rafters, out of concern for safety. As indicated above, they were carefully numbered and are stored nearby.

NARRATIVE STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The George Boxley Cabin is significant under Criterion B for its association with abolitionist and fugitive George Boxley and his contributions to the settlement of and early education in Adams

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George Boxley Cabin

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Township, Hamilton County. Boxley was the first settler in Adams Township (in a place that decades later became the town of Sheridan), and therefore the building is eligible under Criterion A in the area of exploration/settlement. Indeed, his two oldest sons, Thomas and Addison, went on to found the town of Boxley some four miles away in 1836.

The log structure is in admittedly poor condition and did have later alterations as described above, but a majority of its original fabric remains intact. The Sheridan Historical Society, with the backing of the town, which owns it, has enthusiastically undertaken to restore the building and to interpret it properly. It is, obviously, the oldest building in Adams Township.

George Boxley (ca.1780-1865), a native of Virginia, came to Indiana as a fugitive from justice. Details vary in the sources, but the facts are that Boxley, a merchant, mill owner, and himself a slaveowner, opposed--or came to oppose--the institution of slavery. (Evidence suggests that he may have become a slaveholder only through his wife, Hannah Jenkins, who brought some to the household when they married.) Boxley was accused of helping slaves to escape and of fomenting a slave rebellion in Spotsylvania County, Virginia. Jailed, he made his escape aided by his wife. Although many accounts have it that Boxley had been tried and sentenced to death, a notice in a Virginia newspaper posted after his escape in 1816 indicates that he had not yet stood trial when he broke from jail. After fleeing Virginia, Boxley may have spent a brief time in Pennsylvania. Various accounts indicate that he lived in Ohio and the Missouri Territory at different times, and that at least once he was confronted by bounty hunters but was able to elude them. His family eventually joined him when he relocated. Finally, Boxley headed to Indiana, pausing first at Strawtown with the idea of continuing westward to settle along the Wabash River. Sources indicate that on his way west through the heavily forested land, Boxley took note of what was to become his future home and decided to stake a claim there.

Accounts vary as to the exact year that Boxley arrived to stay in Adams Township; some say as early as 1827, others as late as 1829. In any

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case, the eighty acres of land on which he had built his cabin was recorded in 1830, the earliest in the township. His family soon joined him. Boxley was a well-read man and believed strongly in education. On his land he soon constructed a small structure to serve as a school for his own children and those of other settlers that were coming into the area. He is credited with establishing the first school in the township. Boxley taught his pupils from the books in his own library, educating them in history, literature, law, and politics, about which he held strong views. Some sources suggest he also shared his abolitionist sentiments with the children, which is certainly likely. How long he kept the school going is unclear. The settlement of Bakers Corner (originally called Englewood and never formally platted) about four miles to the east occurred between 1831 and 1837. After this time the families of Bakers Corner established a subscription school, held in private houses until a cabin was constructed for the purpose near the settlement. We may assume that Boxley kept his school going until at least about 1838, when that alternative became available, and possibly even longer, since Bakers Corner was some distance away from Boxley's homestead. It was not until 1851 that a township school was finally established near the southeast corner of Boxley's land.

Local folklore holds to the notion that George Boxley participated in the Underground Railroad by hiding runaway slaves in his alleged excavation beneath the cabin. Certainly his abolitionist views were widely known, but there is at this time no concrete evidence to support this contention. Such activity is known to have taken place to the east, in the Westfield area, and some sources indicate there was a route that would have passed and could have included Boxley's cabin. On the other hand, since Boxley's eccentric libertarian and abolitionist sympathies were public knowledge, logic suggests that the Boxley property might be a too obvious--and thus insecure--hiding place for fugitive slaves. This would certainly not have prevented him from helping in any number of other ways.

George Boxley had eleven known children. While some were young adults when Boxley arrived in Indiana, the youngest among them were born in his years on the run, most of them probably in Ohio. His youngest child became the first recorded death in the township; young Benjamin

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Boxley was killed during a severe thunderstorm by a falling tree. In 1836, Boxley's two oldest sons, Thomas and Addison, founded a town about four miles to the northeast of the Boxley cabin on the Lafayette Trace, which remained a significant road for some decades even though in the 1830s a state road had been routed to the south that ran diagonally across George Boxley's property. The sons were friends of Indianapolis entrepreneur Calvin Fletcher, who had purchased several tracts of land in Adams Township and who invested heavily in the Boxleys' enterprise.¹ In gratitude, they wanted to name the town Fletcher, but the erstwhile namesake demurred and urged that they call it Boxleytown instead. (The "town" was eventually dropped.) The brothers opened a store; in a few years Addison Boxley opened an inn that was a noted stop for decades. He continued to farm in the area and served a term in the Indiana General Assembly. Thomas was a physician and the town's first postmaster.

After the death of his beloved wife in 1853, George Boxley's health deteriorated and at some point he left the cabin to live with his son Caswell (1817-1891), a lawyer and schoolteacher. Caswell's first wife died in 1858, and possibly his father came to live with him at that time. Caswell wasted little time, however, in finding a second wife, Sarah Ann Kercheval, whom he married the following year. By this point Caswell owned the land and it is possible the cabin was used for a tenant dwelling, but this is conjecture. The elder Boxley died in 1865 and is buried in the cemetery at the town that bears his name.

In the late 1870s Caswell and Sarah Boxley moved onto the original Boxley land into a large new Italianate house built just south of the cabin. Virtually nothing is known about the cabin's use at this point and for decades after, although it was sided with clapboard at some time, probably the late nineteenth century or a bit later. Clapboard covered the north entrance entirely, orienting the cabin to the house. The roof was covered in slate to match the house. Eventually outhouses were constructed on either side of the cabin; the construction style points to around 1890 or later. A small gabled building was built

¹ At least they were well acquainted and partners in business. Addison's first wife, whom he married in 1839, was Harriet Taylor, who had worked for the Fletcher household.

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nearby to the northwest, and later--probably around the first decade of the twentieth century, a small two-story barn was constructed a little farther west. The cabin no doubt served some good use on a working farmstead. Some evidence suggests the cabin may have been occupied at times by hired help or tenant farmers.

The property and the cabin stayed in the family several decades after, passing into the hands of Caswell and Sarah's only child, Anna Boxley (1866-1936). Anna had continued the family tradition and was a schoolteacher in Adams Township for many years. In midlife she married a fellow teacher, and she and her husband, Charles Martin (1886-1969), lived in the house with its outbuildings, including the cabin, until her death in 1936. Anna's death left Charles bereft, and he invited a local family, the Staffords, to live with him in the spacious house. In 1941 Charles transferred the property to Olive Stafford for a nominal sum, but remained living in the house until his death.

After the Stafford family moved in, the cabin took on a more active life as a children's playhouse. An oil furnace was installed in the basement so the children could be comfortable in the cabin in the winter. Possibly the loft space was altered at this time. A large bookcase along the north wall was installed. The family had a great number of exotic pets, so over time a jumble of sheds and pens was added to the property behind the house and near to the cabin. Ordinary farm animals were still sheltered in the buildings as well.

The house and outbuildings were vacated in the early 1990s. The property remained in the hands of the Stafford family; after a fire in 1997 started by arsonists destroyed the Italianate house, the town of Sheridan purchased the Boxley cabin and six acres of surrounding land with the intention of creating a park. As indicated above, the town desires to restore the cabin and interpret it; the Sheridan Historical Society is enthusiastically raising funds for the project. They erected a substantial shelter over the building last fall to assure that it would survive the winter and protect it during the restoration process. A feasibility study was completed on the cabin in June 2005.

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The George Boxley Cabin is eligible under Criterion A in the area of exploration/settlement. It was the first cabin built by a European-American settler in Adams Township, Hamilton County. It is significant under Criterion B for its association with abolitionist and fugitive George Boxley and his contributions to the settlement of and early education in the township. Significantly, his sons Addison and Thomas went on to plat a town only a few miles away on the Lafayette Trace, Boxleytown, where Addison's inn was an an important stop for travelers and emigrants for several decades.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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George Boxley Cabin

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History of Hamilton County, Indiana, with Illustrations and Biographical Sketches of Some of Its Prominent Men and Pioneers.
Chicago 1880.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Starting at a point 292 feet north of the center of First Street and two feet west of the southwest corner of the cabin, proceed due east 26 1/4 feet, then due north 20 1/2 feet, then due west 26 1/4 feet, then due south 20 1/2 feet to the point of origin.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

None of the nearby buildings are from the pioneer era, the period of significance of the Boxley cabin. Therefore the boundary as delineated incorporates only the cabin and one non-contributing outhouse because of its close proximity.

