

Dec. 12, 2004

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Indiana Department of Natural Resources  
Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology  
402 West Washington Street, Room W274  
Indianapolis, IN 46204

RECEIVED  
BY HISTORIC PRES. & ARCH  
DEC 20 2004  
INDIANA DEPT. OF NATURAL RESOURCES

RE: Jesse Vermilyea House, 003-021-70038

Dear Paul,

I would like to nominate my home—the Jesse Vermilyea House—to the Indiana Register of Historic Places. Although a National Register Nomination is being written for this property, I am also hoping to qualify for the Indiana Historic Homeowner Tax Credit, prior to April 15. For that reason, I respectfully submit this nomination.

The Jesse Vermilyea House is eligible for the Indiana Register of Historic Places under criteria A.) “sites that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.” The Jesse Vermilyea House provides an exceptional example of a canal-era home built and used for commerce using the canal. It is also eligible under criterion C.) “sites that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.” The Jesse Vermilyea House was the first and is the oldest (c. 1839) brick home in Aboite Township, with fine details such as walnut and butternut carpentry, that have been retained and restored. A second period of architectural significance for the home is 1940-1950, when a rerouting of US 24 to the north of the home gave impetus to the owners to restore the home, and add several “colonial features” as were popular for historic preservation aficionados at the time. Since 1999 I have worked to restore the home, retaining some of the c. 1940 additions, restoring windows, fireplaces, and wood trim, and completing a sympathetic addition which conforms to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards.

The Jesse Vermilyea House is located in a rural area in Aboite Township, Allen County, on a hill overlooking the Aboite River and the path of the Wabash and Erie Canal. Directly to south of the home is a low, flat field, where a canal basin was once located. Two early farm structures are also located on the site. A third barn associated with the property was sold during the 1940’s and has been converted to residential use on the adjoining property. To the west of the property, across the old US 24 route –now Redding Drive- is located a wide earthworks, which runs along the south side of the road for almost ½ mile. This earthwork is the original canal and towpath. To the east of the home, just south of the intersection of Redding Road and modern US 24 is located the Aboite Creek Canal Aqueduct. Original wooden beams from this structure are located in the streambed, and early abutments are visible as well.

Jesse Vermilyea was born in Dutchess County New York in 1809, and raised in Salem, Washington County, Indiana. His sister, Phoebe, married David Burr, in 1818. In 1831 Jesse moved to Grant County, where he was served as Clerk of the Circuit Court of Grant County in 1831. In 1832 he married Maria McTaggart at Brownstown, and in 1833 the family moved to Allen County. He purchased land from Raccoon, a Miami civil chief, which included an area proposed for the Wabash and Erie Canal, by his brother-in-law David Burr, who served as one of three Canal Commissioners appointed by the State of Indiana to develop the canal. Vermilyea is reported to have lived in the Treaty house of Raccoon briefly, while constructing his home.

The Jesse Vermilyea House consists of the original 2 1/2 story, Federal style three-bay brick house with a 1 1/2 story, four-bay gabled wing. To the original home was added on the west wall a 1 1/2 story wood and brick garage addition c.1945. On the east side of the original home a c. 1945 shed addition which housed a bathroom has been removed, and a 1 1/2 story brick addition was added c.2000, at an angle to the original house. This addition holds a new kitchen and attached garage. This addition was completed following the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.

The original front entrance—facing Redding drive-- is on the left side of the south wall of the 2 1/2 story façade, and has a classical door surround with sidelights and entablature. Two windows are located to the right of the door. The Windows—recently rebuilt-- are wood with 6/6 glazing, and are found on each side of the door opening on the first floor, and three windows are located on the second floor. Some original windows were replaced with vinyl windows during the 1970's and the new wood windows match earlier photos. Lintels and sills are stone. The foundation is of fieldstone.

To the west of the original entrance on the south side is located the west addition, c. 1945. First floor walls are common bond brick, and match the original brick in size and color. The second floor walls are vertical wood siding. Four windows are located on the second floor, with 3/3 glazing. On the first floor, two garage door openings remain, and the middle door has been in-filled with brick. The north side of this addition has wood vertical siding on the second floor with four 3/3 windows, and brick walls on the first with three garage door openings with wood garage doors.

The north façade of the home underwent a substantial alteration during the c. 1940-1950 period. When US 24 was rerouted to the north side of the property the owners created a new main entrance on the north façade of the original 2 1/2 story section of the home. A full 2 1/2 story portico was added, with pediment and entablature, supported by 4 square wood columns. Under this portico is located trap-door-style entrance to the cellar.

On the north façade, in the 1 1/2 story addition to the west of the portico is located a shed roof over a small porch area and the original north doorway.

To the west of this is located the new addition, constructed at an angle to the original body of the home, to identify it as new construction. Common bond brick, 6/6 wood windows and other features match the original home in size and color.

Jesse Vermilyea opened his home as a tavern and inn, and he also served as the first postmaster for Aboite. The interior of the home retains several features that convey its use as an early site of commerce related to the Wabash and Erie Canal. Both the current north and original south entrances open to a central hallway with an ornate staircase to the second floor. On the northwest wall of the hallway is located an early door which originally lead to the tavern area. This walnut door has a large bullet embedded in it, from the era of its use as a tavern door.

Double parlors are located to the west of the hallway. Each is trimmed in walnut. Large doors are located between the two parlors. Fireplaces are centered on the west wall of each parlor. The north parlor features walnut cupboards to either side of the fireplace. The south parlor features a cupboard to the north of the fireplace. To the south is located a built-in desk and cabinet of walnut, with multiple cubbies, used by Vermilyea in his capacity as postmaster. The north parlor includes an original oil painting of one of the Vermilyea's daughters. Both parlors also include oil paintings of Jesse and Maria Vermilyea, reproductions of the original Horace Rockwell paintings housed at the Allen County Public Library.

To the east of the central hallway is located the Dining Room, originally used as a tavern for canal-travelers. Wide wood windowsills still retain scratches, dents, and knife carvings from this period, when the sills were most likely used by customers to hold their mugs. A fireplace has been restored on the west wall of this room.

To the west of the dining room is located the early kitchen. A massive fireplace with a large opening is located on the east wall of this room. An iron stove was installed very early into this space, with a date of

1832 visible on the door. The fireplace was faced with "colonial" bricks at some point during the 1960's, and plans to remove them are underway. The north wall has the original north exterior door, and a window. To the east of this early kitchen is located the c. 2000 addition, and a doorway from this room opens to the modern kitchen. A small half-bath has also been added, with a doorway next to the massive fireplace.

Traveling up the stairs from the central hallway, one finds a small door that leads to a finished third story attic space. At the top of the stairs are found two bedrooms on the west, a modern bathroom on the south, and a large bedroom on the east.

The west bedrooms are similar in size to the double parlors located below, and double walnut doors are located on the connecting wall between the two. Both rooms have fireplaces centered on the west wall, with cupboards on either side. The north cupboard in the north bedroom has been converted into a doorway to access the west addition. This north bedroom is trimmed in walnut. The south bedroom is completely trimmed in butternut, the only place in the house where this wood is found.

Two bedrooms are found to the east of the hallway. The southern room has been extended into the space of the 1 ½ story addition to enlarge the space into a master bedroom suite. The roof of the 1 ½ story addition was raised 3 inches to allow the bedroom to expand into both spaces. At the east wall of this large bedroom is found a doorway to the modern addition, and a second master suite bathroom.

Jesse and Maria Vermilyea were actively involved in the growth of canal era Allen County. Jesse was one of the original directors of the Fort Wayne branch of the state bank. He also served as a contractor for portions of the canal construction, and worked with Samuel Hanna to construct the Lima Plank Road, after Hanna encouraged him to travel to Canada to inspect similar roads being installed there.

The Vermilyeas were also popular hosts for travelers on the canal and several lodgers recorded their stays. John Dawson wrote: "The 'bill of fare' was always equal to the occasion, and prepared in the very best style. This lady and gentleman were equally matched."

Jesse Vermilyea contracted cholera and died in August 1846, and Maria died in 1848. Family members in Fort Wayne and in Grant County raised their minor children. The Vermilyea House was rented for a number of years by Philo Rumsey, a restaurateur and innkeeper, who maintained the public use of the home through the years before the Civil War.

There is also strong oral tradition of use of the house as a stop on the Underground Railroad, the stories being traced to at least 1900, and its location is consistent with such use. Further research is needed in this area.

Mr. Diebold, please find enclosed several photographs of the home's exterior and interior. If you have any questions please contact me at *960-436-7100*. You might also contact Angie Quinn at ARCH, who assisted with this nomination at 260-426-5117. Thank you for your assistance with this nomination.

Sincerely,



Todd Freeland