

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

MAY 31 1989

NATIONAL
REGISTER

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 16). 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 French, Henry, House

other names/site number Salmon-French House, 019-305-61069

2. Location

street & number 217 East High Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Jeffersonville

N/A vicinity

state Indiana

code IN

county Clark

code 019

zip code 47130

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

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

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Name of related multiple property listing:

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.

Signature of certifying official

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

Date

5-4-89

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:)

Alvord Byer

Entered in the
National Register

6/29/89

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: I-house

Federal

Colonial Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation BRICK

walls BRICK

CONCRETE

roof ASPHALT

other WOOD

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Henry French House (main block, ca. 1832; rear ell, ca. 1839) is a substantial, free-standing late-Federal brick dwelling situated on the northeastern half of a pair of relatively small, narrow urban lots roughly one mile upriver of downtown Jeffersonville. It rises two stories in height with a slightly raised basement on the principal elevation, adding a full basement story on the rear elevation as the site falls to the Ohio River nearby. (Site Plan and Photograph #1.).

The immediate surroundings are much as they have been for the last century and one-half; a mixture of resident and commercial uses, the latter dominated by the vast shipyards separating the French House from the nearby Ohio River. The High Street neighborhood is particularly attractive, with a handful of well-preserved 19th century houses nearby, including the robust Victorian Edmunds J. Howard House a couple blocks away.

The house faces northwest to High Street, just as the 90-foot wide road ends in a cul-de-sac just to its northeast. (The prevailing width of other streets in the area are closer to 60 feet). The two lots on which the house is situated (Numbers 59 and 60 in the Port Fulton plat) measure 50 by 200 feet each and presently run fully from High Street southeast to Utica Pike and the shipyards. (Historically, according to the plat, similarly sized lots--with improvements--were southeast of a 20 foot lane or alley bordering the French House which later became Utica Pike and an enlarged site for the shipyards, only after widening of the lane and demolition of the improvements.) About 35 feet separate the front of the house from High Street, and the sides of the house are set back from the sides of the lots only by two feet on one side and less than five on the other. (Site Plan.)

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There are not any significant outbuildings, plantings, or other distinctive landforms on the site other than the slight drop in grade from the northwest to the southeast as the lot falls to the river about 700 feet away. There are, however, several superb deciduous trees lining High Street and on other adjoining and nearby lots, possibly suggesting intentions for a shady residential oasis bordered by the early industry and commerce of the river on one side and the outlots, woods and fields of the incipient town's edge on the other side.

The house is typical of the I-style vernacular so widely associated with the region during its late-settlement period (Photo #1.) Bricks appear to be soft and were most likely hand-made on (or close by) the site. They are laid in Flemish Bond on the two-story front of the house only--in the usual manner--without any surviving evidence of special mortar work or details. The balance of the house is laid in English Common Bond, with the header course varying in pattern from the sides and rear of the original block of the house (every sixth course) to the later ell on the rear (every eighth course) (photos 5 and 8).

The roof is a plain saddleback form, low-pitched and covered now in a 1930s-vintage patterned synthetic shingle. A pair of ca.1922 dormers pierce the roof over the facade. Brick end-chimneys flank the facade (although shortened) and rise above the roof elsewhere along the rear of the house and its service ell (at full height with brick necking).

The roof structure (with wood shingles still evident through the purlins) is engineered much like an inverted ship's hull, with sawn rafters bearing on a slight roof ridge (nailed only) without the benefit of any vertical or diagonal posts or bracing. Exposed joists here and downstairs are also sawn, showing vertical saw marks. The ambitious clear-spanning suggests that French--or another local ship builder--had a hand in the design or construction of the house or that early housewrights and boatwrights shared technologies.

The facade is five bays wide, with a center-hall entrance. The fenestration is unchanged, with tall windows underscored by stone and wood sills and framed by excellent rubbed brick sides and

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jack-arches. (The corners of the facade also appear to have rubbed brick edges.) The glazing on the facade, however, has been altered to one-over-one double-hung sashes. (The sides of the main block of the house and the rear ell have earlier--and probably original--six-over-six double-hung sashes intact.)

The entrance porch--compact but still elegant--is a Georgian Revival addition, an alteration dating to about 1922, according to the oral tradition of a former occupant (Photo 3.) The present porch replaced an earlier portico, one most likely original or, perhaps, mid-19th century. The diminutive Greek Revival-style is shown in a ca. 1906 view of the house (Photo 2). A sweeping flight of concrete steps leads to the balustraded concrete porch. The porch extends to beneath the entrance itself as well as the two windows flanking on the first floor. A one-story Tuscan-columned portico covers the doorway, its low-arched ceiling echoing the broad fanlight below.

The date of the Georgian Revival entrance is inconclusive. Although not original, a ca.1906 photo shows the present doorway, with sidelights and fanlight, substantially predating the ca.1922 date given to the porch itself. The bricks flanking the front entrance show evidence of being broken to accommodate a wider doorway, and the pattern of the bricks--so regular and precise everywhere else--are irregular adjacent to the door frame (Photos 2 and 3).

The large, two-and-one-half story rear ell apparently postdates the main block. The brick work and fenestration differ between the two. There are also differences inside in millwork, mantles and other finishes. Furthermore, there is a connecting "seam" visible in the northeast elevation just behind the main block (Photos 4 and 5). Oral tradition puts the date of construction of the ell at ca.1839.

The ell is remarkable for its size--almost doubling the original square footage of the house--as well as its capacious two-sided wooden galleries, filling the inside angle of the ell and towering two stories over the full basement (Photos 6 and 7). The house takes advantage of the region's prevailing summer wind direction with its orientation, the rear three-story galleries facing the

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southwest for good daylight and the relief of occasional breezes. There are no doors and relatively few windows on the northeast side of the ell. (The orientation also relates well to the cardinal points, favoring the original kitchen and dining room with sun in the morning and the parlor in the afternoon.)

The ell's wooden galleries are difficult to date (Photos 8 and 9). The supporting columns and demi-columns on the back are more slender than the columns of the front porch. The lathe-turned rear balustrades are also far more elaborate than the smooth-tapered stair balusters inside. This would suggest that the weather-exposed rear galleries were later, perhaps dating to the ca.1839 construction of the rear ell or later. There is evidence visible in the basement of an earlier porch predating the ell in the form of exposed joist pockets along the rear wall of the original block. There are several doors opening onto the galleries at all three levels--as well as an abundance of windows--indicating the importance that this southwest-facing side of the house had in making daily life both comfortable and productive.

The interior of the house is essentially unaltered in plan. A broad center hall (approximately eight feet wide) in the main block is flanked on the first and second floors by one room on each side (Photo 10). These rooms--parlor and dining room on the first floor and bedrooms on the second--all measure roughly 17 by 22 feet or 14 by 16 feet. Ceilings are plain and are about 11 feet tall on both floors.

Mantles and millwork differ from the main block to the ell, reinforcing the different dates for the two and suggesting alterations. The woodwork of the staircase is original, with slender rail and balusters, paneling and delicate feathering all intact (Photos 10 and 11). The richly molded baseboards and bull's-eye door frames of the main block could be products of later alterations to the main block, matching inside as they do to the millwork of the exterior Georgian Revival entrance (Photo 12). The elegant six-paneled doors of the main block (also Photo 12) contrast to the much simpler four-paneled doors of the ell (see Photo 14). The tall, classical mantle pieces of the main block may also be later, contrasting as they do with the coarser-looking mantles of the rear ell (Photos 13 and 14).

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
Maritime History

Period of Significance

1832
1836-1864

Significant Dates

1832
1836
c.1839

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 Henry French House is significant for its association with Clark County's early architecture and urbanization and with one of the community's prominent early shipbuilders. It is a rare, late example of the I-style vernacular characteristic of the first quarter of the 19th century. It represents the period of Clark County's first wave of post-settlement growth, riding a tide of immigration which included a class of manufacturers and entrepreneurs drawn to the region's commercial promise.

The French family was one of the region's first and most prominent ship builders. This site is the only known property--residential or otherwise--with any associations with the family which still survives. All of the other French family houses and the family's substantial ship building assets have either vanished or have been totally altered.

Henry French (1812-1878) emigrated from Philadelphia, his birthplace, as a youth and made his way west with his family. He arrived in the Jeffersonville area and Clark County in about 1829 or 1830 after living with his family for awhile in Cincinnati. It is unclear just when the French family left the East, but like a lot of others in the Middle Atlantic, they may have been drawn west as part of the transmontane migration which accelerated during and immediately after 1812, the year of Henry's birth.

9. Major Bibliographical References

BOOKS

Baird, Capt. Lewis C., History of Clark County, Indiana, Indianapolis, B. F. Bowen & Company, 1909

History of the Ohio Falls Cities and Their Counties, 2 vol., Cleveland, L.A. Williams & Company, 1882.

CORRESPONDENCE

Interview of Eugene A. Stemler by Pamala and Greg Smith, May 1988.

Letter from Mrs. Dan (Louise Newkirk) Denman to Mrs. Virginia Knight Stemler, November 22, 1960. (Copy owned by Pamala and Greg Smith.)

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

Acreeage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 16 611860 4237490
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

All of Lots 59 and 60 in Port Fulton Plat, now part of the town of Jeffersonville, Indiana.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

This is the historic property boundary.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Douglas L. Stern, Consultant
 organization Private date October 28, 1988
 street & number 2404 Hawthorne Avenue telephone 502/625-6306
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Henry French and the rest of the French family soon became involved in the burgeoning shipbuilding industry concentrated upriver of the Falls of the Ohio on the Indiana side of the river. While Louisville, Kentucky, would soon establish its hegemony over the other Falls communities and the rest of the region as well, it was Jeffersonville--and Port Fulton adjacent and upriver--which captured the market for building the steamboats and other vessels for Ohio and Mississippi River commerce, largely because of the availability of the raw materials and ". . .the best and deepest harbor between Pittsburgh and New Orleans," as Baird's History of Clark County put it in 1909.

The earliest yards were established in Jeffersonville in about 1819. By the time the Frenchs arrived on the scene, there were only a handful of competing ship yards, perhaps only two or three other than the Frenchs'.

Port Fulton and Jeffersonville were riding their first wave of prosperity when the Frenchs arrived in about 1829 or 1830. (In his May 1878 obituary, Henry French is noted as being one of the community's oldest citizen--at age 66--at the time of his death.) The Louisville and Portland Canal had opened in December 1830, circumventing the barrier of the Falls and increasing the economy of river trade in the process.

Henry and brothers William and George French entered the shipbuilding business shortly after they set foot at the Falls of the Ohio. They remained in business together--"and turned out some fine boats," according to the 1882 History of the Ohio Falls Cities and their Counties--until 1847, when Henry joined Peter Myers in partnership.

(Family tradition has it that these Philadelphia Frenchs were related to the prominent early Pittsburgh shipbuilder, Daniel French, a rival of Robert Fulton in the use of steam power. Baird's History of Clark County declares that William French "was the genius of the family.")

The Henry French and Peter Myers combination shipyard and sawmill venture lasted another five years, with French getting the ships and Myers settling for the mill when the two split up in 1852.

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Baird's History places production during the five year French-Myers association at 20 boats.

Henry French apparently remained in the ship building business alone, though when--or if--he retired is unknown. (French sold out his shipyard interests in 1864). His obituary noted a couple of different terms in public office late in his life, so he evidently dabbled in politics when he retired or when his interest in business waned.

French married Julia Winters in 1835 when he was 23 years old, about five years after his arrival in Port Fulton. Than was one year before Lots #59 and #60 of the Port Fulton town plat (recorded in 1835 and later annexed by the city of Jeffersonville) were purchased in 1836 by George French, one of Henry's brothers.

Henry's house was built a few years earlier--in about 1832--by John Salmon, a whiskey distiller and part-time land speculator who laid out the Town of Port Fulton and built its first house, only to lose both.

In May 1829, 134 acres of the Illinois Regiment's Grant Lot #2, Letter D, were purchased by Salmon for \$1,600. Salmon took on an investor--his distillery partner in Louisville, James Marshall--in May 1832 with a mortgage of over \$5300. The 1832 Louisville Directory (the city's first and, until the 1850s, only city directory) lists Salmon and Marshall as still residing in Louisville.

About a year and a half later, in October 1834, Salmon sold the entire 134 unplatted acres to Victor Neef (or Neep or Neff) of Port Fulton (and later New Harmony) for \$10,000. The substantial increase in value reflects the cost of the construction of the house built by Salmon and occupied by the Henry French family and descendants for nearly a century to follow.

Although Salmon owned the property before it was platted in July 1835 by Neef into 189 50 by 200 foot lots, it is likely that Salmon already had the lot dimensions and configurations for the town planned when he built the house--with practically no side yard setbacks--in 1832-33. (Prominent Jefferson County, Kentucky,

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surveyor and nurseryman Edwin D. Hobbs is recorded on Neef's Port Fulton Plat.)

Nevertheless, Salmon's March 1883 obituary states that the London-born native came to Port Fulton in 1824 and "laid out that little city and built the first house there." Salmon's wife, according to the obituary, was a Mina Neff (sic), very likely a relative of Victor Neef, the person to whom Salmon sold out in 1834.

It was Neef (with Marshall still holding a mortgage) from whom George French purchased 57 lots--including Lots #59 and #60--in September 1836 for slightly over \$4100. It is unclear just why George purchased the land on which his brother Henry came to live, or exactly when the two lots came into Henry's hands from George. (Those familiar with Clark County title histories insist that intra-family transactions were often not recorded.)

Court records, although incomplete, report that George was judged insane in October 1837. This judgment would have required the transfer of his property and other business interests to his heirs and assigns, including brother Henry. (George was not the only French investing in early Port Fulton real estate. Brother William bought four lots on High Street in 1836--Lots #85, #86, #89 and #90--across from where Henry came to reside. William sold off #89 in 1837 and #86 in 1841. Henry purchased 12 lots--#33-39 and #27-32--also in 1836, selling off all but two adjacent to the shipyards to brother George a year later.)

It is clear, however, from first-person recollections that the two lots which George purchased--as part of the much larger collection of 57 subdivided parcels--did contain the house in which Henry lived and raised his family, eventually growing to twelve children. The French family held onto the property until 1919, with only four other families owning it before its present owner.

Henry and Julia settled into the original section of their house when Jeffersonville was little more than a village and Clark County was still a vast, undeveloped expanse of forested knobs. Clark County, formed in 1801 out of territorial Knox County, was dominated by the thousands of acres set aside as part of the military warrants granted to General George Rogers Clark and

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others for the Revolutionary War service of the Illinois Regiment. About 10,000 people lived in the county when the Frenchs arrived in about 1830, up from fewer than 9,000 in 1820.

Port Fulton, Jeffersonville and Clark County were soon growing, however, keeping pace with the tide of prosperity created by the completion of a canal around the Falls of the Ohio on the Kentucky side of the river in December 1830 and by other internal improvements, both real and only visionary. (Railroads--and an imaginative, but alas, unbuilt proposal for dual Ohio River tunnels--surfaced in the 1850s) By 1840, the county's population had risen to about 14,600; by 1850, it was nearly 16,000, just about doubling the 1820 figure. (It would be after 1910 before the county's population would double again.)

The French Family also grew rapidly. Henry and Julia eventually had twelve children, the latest born in 1858. The solid but simple four-room I-style main block of the couple's house soon proved inadequate--for the size of the family as well as, perhaps, Henry's fortunes--and the rear ell was added in about 1839 to its river side. Family tradition indicates that the house served Henry's brood as well as an extended family of other relatives.

The French House is one of the last surviving links with the early-19th Century Town of Port Fulton, an early but short-lived episode in the urbanization of the Falls area soon overtaken on the Indiana side of the river by Jeffersonville. The street names in the vicinity (Main, Division and High, for example) and uses (Market Street, for example) suggest independent--and, perhaps, grand--aspirations for Port Fulton, as do some street widths and, of course, the presence of improvements such as the French House (see 1835 Port Fulton Plat).

The siting of the French House reinforces the early objectives of the town's first settlers. The house is situated on Lot #60 as if it were a proto-town house, practically filling the lot from side to side in anticipation of the growing town's other attached dwellings which were to follow (see Site Plan).

The I-style vernacular of the French House is well-represented in the region, particularly on the Kentucky shore, where settlement

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was slightly earlier and more prosperous. For example, the I-style vernacular can be found throughout Jefferson County, Kentucky (Clover Hill, in Shively, Kentucky, to name one).

But within Clark County, Indiana--and especially the towns of Jeffersonville and Port Fulton--domestic structures of the size and manner of the Henry French House are rare.

The surviving recorded example most similar to the French House in the immediate Indiana vicinity (according to the Falls of the Ohio Metropolitan Council of Governments, 1974) is the Daniel Yenowine House of about 1840 on State Road 64 near Edwardsville in adjacent Floyd County. The two-story, Flemish bond structure still bears the same small porch ensemble which appeared on the French House before 1906--alternately looking back to the Federal and looking forward to the Greek Revival.

The recently completed Clark County survey has located nine I-houses in the county with an "outstanding" rating. (The Indiana Historic Sites and Structures Survey gives the designation "outstanding" to properties which are considered eligible for the National Register.) Charlestown and Charlestown Township, in the center of the county, has some of the finest examples of the style, such as the Lutz House and the Downs House (listed 1984). The French House is at least comparable in integrity and quality of detailing to these examples of the vernacular. Furthermore, according to the survey, the French House is the best house of its type in Jeffersonville. (It is the only I-house in Jeffersonville which received an "outstanding" rating.)

Along the Ohio river in Madison, Jefferson County, Indiana, are several outstanding and well-known Federal Period houses which presage the vernacular seen in the French House. Best preserved and documented of these types are the Sullivan House (1818) and Talbott-Hyatt House (1815).

The French House was built as the Indiana towns of the Falls region were just beginning their ascendancy, drawing on a building technology and frame of mind rooted in late-18th and early-19th Century folkways. It would not be long, however, before the region's rising immigration and growing cosmopolitanism gave way to building types and styles associated with modern tastes and values, notably the Greek Revival.

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Henry French House
Jeffersonville, Indiana

PERIODICALS

(Daily) Evening News, Jeffersonville.

Louisville Directory, Louisville, Richard W. Otis, 1832; reprint,
Louisville, George Rogers Clark Press, 1970.

National Democrat, Jeffersonville.

RECORDS

Civil Order Books, Clark County Court Clerk.

Deed Records, Clark County Recorder.

Plat Books, Clark County Recorder.

Probate Records, Clark County Court Clerk.