

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS use only

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Grey Towers (William Welsh Harrison House)

and/or common Gray Towers; Beaver College

2. Location

street & number Easton Road and Limekiln Pike

___ not for publication

city, town Glenside

___ vicinity of

state Pennsylvania

code

county Montgomery

code

3. Classification

Category

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

Ownership

- ___ public
- private
- ___ both

Public Acquisition

- ___ in process
- ___ being considered

Status

- occupied
- ___ unoccupied
- ___ work in progress

Accessible

- yes: restricted
- ___ yes: unrestricted
- ___ no

Present Use

- ___ agriculture
- ___ commercial
- educational
- ___ entertainment
- ___ government
- ___ industrial
- ___ military
- ___ museum
- ___ park
- ___ private residence
- ___ religious
- ___ scientific
- ___ transportation
- ___ other:

4. Owner of Property

name Beaver College

street & number Easton and Church Roads

city, town Glenside

___ vicinity of Philadelphia

state Pennsylvania 19038

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Montgomery County Courthouse

street & number Airy and Swede Streets

city, town Norristown

state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Montgomery County Pennsylvania Planning Commission Inventory

title of Historic and Cultural Resources has this property been determined eligible? ___ yes ___ no

date 1975

___ federal ___ state county ___ local

depository for survey records Montgomery County Planning Commission, Montgomery County Courthouse

city, town Norristown

state Pennsylvania

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Grey Towers Castle is a 41-room, three-story structure built of grey Chestnut Hill stone with six towers. Indiana limestone is used on the exterior for the windows, doorways, balustrades, and such ornaments as gargoyles and the crenellations which top the walls and towers. The eclectic style is that of a medieval English castle, particular inspiration deriving from 12th century Alnwick Castle in Northumberland, England. The ground plan is that of an "L" measuring roughly 166 ft. by 174 ft. exclusive of terraces, with the main entrance on the east front within a porte-cochere. Towers of varying sizes stand at the northwest, northeast and southeast corners, at the west end of the kitchen wing, in the east wall beside the porte-cochere and in the south wall overlooking the south terrace. Open terraces line part of the east and west walls, joining at their northern ends a covered terrace along the north front. Another deeper terrace with balustrades runs along a portion of the south front with a double-curving stairway of limestone descending to the drive. All roofs are flat, concealed by the crenellations. From the towers rise smaller towers also topped with crenellations. A circular solarium, connecting with the dining room, once stood on the south terrace. Greenhouses located on the south lawn have also been razed.

Just within the east entrance to the castle, the interior is dominated by a main hall rising three stories to a coffered, barrel-vaulted ceiling in the style of the French Renaissance with similarities to vaulted ceilings at Chambord. Galleries surround the hall on three sides at the second and third floor levels. At the west end a grand mahogany stairway rises to a landing and divides right and left to the second floor gallery. A music room opens through a large archway onto the landing. All woodwork in the main hall and music room is of mahogany handcarved in French Renaissance chateaux as Chambord and Amboise. The mantel in the music room is clearly inspired by one of the mantels in the Salle des Gardes in the chateau at Blois. At first floor level, in the north and south walls of the main hall, are set large fireplaces framed in marble with mantels of limestone carved closely on the lines of the other mantel in the Salle des Gardes in the chateau at Blois. American-made tapestries produced by the firm of Baumgarten (signed and dated 1898) are set above the wainscoating in the music room and other tapestries from the same source hang above the wainscoating around the second and third floor galleries.

Doorways in the north wall of the main hall led to two large, ground floor rooms elaborately decorated; that on the east is in ungilded late Louis XV style while the west room is gilded early Louis XV style with mirrored doors and two sets of French doors opening onto the west terrace. The ceilings of these two rooms are inset with oil paintings, the single large one in the west room bearing the signature of Francois Lafor (or Lafon). Each room has a single corner fireplace with marble mantel carved in the appropriate style. Both rooms have been carefully restored.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
prehistoric	archeology-prehistoric	community planning	landscape architecture	religion
1400-1499	archeology-historic	conservation	law	science
1500-1599	agriculture	economics	literature	sculpture
1600-1699	X architecture	education	military	social/
1700-1799	art	engineering	music	humanitarian
X 1800-1899	commerce	exploration/settlement	philosophy	theater
1900-	communications	industry	politics/government	transportation
		invention		other (specify)

Specific dates 1893 **Builder/Architect** Horace Trumbauer (1869-1938)

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

Horace Trumbauer, one of the most successful practitioners of European-revival styles. Trumbauer spent eight years in the office of George and William Hewitt as an errand boy. He had never been to Europe yet opened his own office in 1892.

His first major commission, Grey Towers, is an American Castle that proclaims its owner "cultured", wealthy, and a patron of the arts.

The first great step in Trumbauer's career came when he received the commission to design Grey Towers for William Welsh Harrison in 1893. Until then his commissions as a newly-established architect had been on a small scale. Grey Towers typifies the eclectic school of architecture developing at the time and Trumbauer's own first important residence in this style. When complete the building was known as one of America's largest homes and is recognized today as an outstanding example of an American castle. It attracted attention to Trumbauer and led to commissions for other large mansions in the European manner.

In the Philadelphia area Trumbauer enjoyed the patronage of the Widener and Elkins families. In 1896 he created Cheltenham House in the Tudor style for George W. Elkins. In 1898 the Italian Renaissance villa Elstowe Park was built for William Lukens Elkins and in the same year came Lynnewood Hall, the Georgian home of Peter A. B. Widener. Meanwhile, in 1897, Trumbauer had designed Balangary, another Georgian mansion, for Martin Maloney at Spring Lake, New Jersey. In 1899, he drew plans for The Elms, the eighteenth century French home of Edward Julius Berwind in Newport, Rhode Island. Succeeding years found him creating more residences in Newport (Chetwode in 1900, Clarendon Court in 1903, and Miramar in 1913), town houses in New York, Philadelphia, and Washington, and several hotels, office buildings, medical school buildings, and private clubs in Philadelphia. He also designed campus buildings for Harvard and Duke Universities. In 1916, his office began work on Whitmarsh Hall, the vast suburban Philadelphia estate of Edward T. Stotesbury, now a large housing development.

Some critics regard Trumbauer as the successor to Richard Morris Hunt in creating mansions of distinction for America's wealthy. Most of the plans produced in Trumbauer's office ranged from Medieval and Tudor styles through Italian and French Renaissance to Georgian and eighteenth century French. In time he appears to have designed more in the latter two periods. Never again did he produce a medieval castle such as Grey Towers.

9. Major Bibliographical References

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 2.75 Acres

Quadrangle name Germantown, PA

Quadrangle scale _____

UTM References

A

1	8	4	8	5	9	2	5	4	4	3	6	6	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

B

Zone		Easting				Northing								

C

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D

Zone		Easting				Northing								

E

Zone		Easting				Northing								

F

Zone		Easting				Northing								

G

Zone		Easting				Northing								

H

Zone		Easting				Northing								

Verbal boundary description and justification

SEE CONTINUATION SHEET

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

state _____ code _____ county _____ code _____

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kenneth D. Matthews, Jr., Professor, Edited by Carolyn Pitts, Architectural Historian

organization Beaver College/History Division

date July 17, 1984

street & number National Park Service

telephone 343-8166

city or town Washington

state DC

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature _____

title _____ date _____

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date _____

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date _____

Chief of Registration

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The ceiling paintings in the east room done by the firm of William Baumgarten and Company.

To the south of the main hall lies a paneled library. One pilaster carries the carved date of 1897. This room is now slightly altered to serve as the college president's office. Next to it stand a dining room with carved wooden Renaissance wainscoating, mantel and ornamental strapwork ceiling (now altered with low dividers for office and fluorescent lights suspended from the ceiling), and breakfast room with carved wooden wainscoating, hunting tapestries above (by Baumgarten) and a glassed-in extension opening onto the south terrace. West of these, forming the other arm of the "L" plan, were kitchen and service rooms now altered for use as offices. None of these alterations are permanent structural changes.

Behind the grand stairway in the main hall and beneath the music room lies an oak-paneled billiard room with fireplace.

The principal bedroom suites on the second floor, with dressing rooms, fireplaces and marble baths, have been slightly altered to serve as dormitory rooms today. This is true of the other rooms on the second and third floors. Although the bathrooms have been more extensively changed, alterations in the other rooms are in the form of light partitions.

Throughout the entire building heavy Belgian glass, sometimes beveled, is used in windows, doors, mirrors and the skylights of the main hall. Much of the craftwork in wood and stone was reputedly done by European craftsmen settled in nearby Edge Hill.

In the attic above the main hall can be seen heavy beams of steel and sturdy oak as well. Surprising also for such an early date, rooms in the castle had their own mercury thermostats for controlling the heat supply. In the basement, a set of huge fans circulated cool air throughout the structure in summer. Heat and electricity for Grey Towers Castle and the Stable Building came through pipes and lines laid in underground tunnels leading from the power plant (now the Fine Arts Buildings).

The large stables nearby are in the same style and are today used as classrooms.

The building description is taken from Dr. Kenneth Matthews essay on Grey Towers for the National Register of Historic Places nomination.

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As his practice increased, Trumbauer left much of the studio work to a black designer on his staff, Julian Abele. Scholars are studying Mr. Abele's work in the Trumbauer firm from 1909 on but there is no doubt that Grey Towers is entirely Horace Trumbauer's creation.

THE OWNER-

Grey Towers, with its associated outbuildings, typifies the architectural complex considered appropriate for the existence of a family of great wealth at the turn of the century. It particularly symbolizes the social aspirations of those rich entrepreneurs who sought to establish themselves through a show of opulence with family roots in the historic past. This spirit is seen not only in the castle form of Grey Towers but also in the fact that its owner researched and published his own family geneologies.

Grey Towers was erected for William Welsh Harrison, a member of Harrison, Havemeyer and Company, sugar refiners. In 1887 this family enterprise was incorporated as the Franklin Sugar Refining Company. The Harrison family played an important role in the educational and cultural life of Philadelphia in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. William Welsh Harrison joined his brothers in founding the John Harrison Laboratory of Chemistry at the University of Pennsylvania and the George L. Harrison Memorial House of the Episcopal Hospital. As a graduate of the University of Pennsylvania, where his brother later served as trustee and then provost, Mr. Harrison was a constant financial contributor to that institution. His son, W. W. Harrison, Jr., raised at Grey Towers, gave strong financial support to Abington Hospital.

In commissioning the construction of Grey Towers, W. W. Harrison not only satisfied some of his own aspirations but at the same time encouraged the creation of a monument to the taste and craftsmanship of his period. The castle itself is replete with the finest examples of handwork in wood, stone, glass, and plaster ornamentation.

William Welsh Harrison died in 1927 and in April 1929 Beaver College purchased the estate from his widow. Founded in 1853 in Beaver, Pennsylvania, the college moved to the Beechwood School property at Jenkintown in 1925. After the purchase of Grey Towers the college operated at both sites until 1962 when the former Harrison estate finally became the sole campus. Originally under the auspices of the Methodist Episcopal Church, later under Presbyterian sponsorship, today it is independently controlled.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Grey Towers is on the Northwest side of Easton Road on parcel of ground beginning on the Northwest side of Easton road ca. 750 feet Southwest of the junction of Limekiln Pike and Easton Road ca. 300 feet than Northwest ca. 400 feet than Northeast ca. 300 feet then Southeast ca. 400 feet to the starting point on the Northwest side of Easton Road.