

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

For NPS use only

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

received DEC 19 1979

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*

Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic West Chester

and/or common D. S. Chamberlain House/Wesley Acres

2. Location

street & number 3520 Grand Ave. not for publication

city, town Des Moines vicinity of

state Iowa code 019 county Polk code 153

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	<b>Public Acquisition</b>	<b>Accessible</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other: Retirement

4. Owner of Property

Home Offices

name South Iowa Methodist Homes, Inc.

street & number 3520 Grand Ave.

city, town Des Moines vicinity of state Iowa 50312

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. County Clerk's Office

street & number Polk County Courthouse

city, town Des Moines state Iowa

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

## 7. Description

### Condition

excellent  
 good  
 fair

deteriorated  
 ruins  
 unexposed

### Check one

unaltered  
 altered

### Check one

original site  
 moved      date \_\_\_\_\_

### Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

West Chester is an excellent example of the Jacobethan Revival in Des Moines. As such it exemplifies the influence of Richard Shaw and predates other local examples of this style in the city. The house was designed by Boston architect William George Rantoul.

The central mass of West Chester house consists of a long rectangle on plan (95' by 68') with a square side wing which thrusts diagonally forward to the east or left hand side. The two story house is oriented to the north, and presents a series of five gables and dormers on its main facade which are individually treated with contrasting wall surfaces, window treatments, and different half timber effects. The east half of this facade, including two gabled fronts (one of which features an interior end chimney, the other a pavilioned front with stone coping) are fully veneered with redish-brown Flemish bond brick with darker vitrified stretcher bricks. The remainder of the main facade combines the same brick surface on the first floor with half timbered bays and dormers above. Window treatment varies on the main facade, and includes a wide range of varied pane shapes and surrounds. The house has three massive chimneys, two on each side of the east end and one on the west end wall are differentially treated. One is in-wall, topped with three chimney pots, another is partially projecting with clustered diagonally set flues. The rear chimney has similar multiple flues set diagonally and is in-wall. The stone foundation projects four inches beyond the wall plane and is joined to that plane by a course of molded brick.

The rear or south side of the house consists of two gabled wings, executed in similar half timber style with stucco infill, and a series of shed-roofed dormers which are stepped up the roof line. A balconied porch which covers part of a rear piazza area has been enclosed and the balcony removed.

The house is styled after the half timbered homes of Chester, <sup>England,</sup> but does not appear to have attempted to use any single house as a model. The main front entrance consists of a porch with Tudor arch, surmounted by a gabled bay with ornately carved eaves. An entry addition at that point dates from 1954 and is the only point of actual contact between the house and the newer complex which surrounds the house on three sides. The Jacobethan Revival characteristics possessed by this house include gables which rise above the ridged roofline, and tall chimneys with separate shafts for each flue, which are often diagonally clustered. Richard Norman Shaw was an architect who during the 1860's popularized the combination of the two storied stucco panelled half timber with these same attributes. Shaw favored combining the entrance hall with a fireplace and stairway and this combination which was a precursor to the open plan concept is found in this house.

The house interior was somewhat transformed during the 1949 conversion, most notably the two story open living room was eliminated. A small vestibule opened to a small living room with end fireplace and open stairway with a ninety degree turn. The large formal living room in the west end has an end fireplace. The rear chimney serves both a corner fireplace in the dining room and one in the entrance hall or small living room. The original oak woodwork and staircase survive downstairs. The second floor was greatly altered in 1949. In that year the house was converted for use as a home for the aged.

## 8. Significance

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

**Specific dates** 1901 **Builder/Architect** William George Rantoul, Architect

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

West Chester house is an excellent example of the Jacobethan Revival in Des Moines. As such it exemplifies the influence of Richard Shaw and predates other local examples of the style by a quarter of a century. The house was designed by the Boston architect William George Rantoul.

David S. Chamberlain (1848-1933) relocated his family firm, Chamberlain and Company, a patent medicine business, to Des Moines in 1881. The firm in 1892 became the Chamberlain Medicine Company. The 1900 expansion of this firm paralleled the construction of this family house. By 1928 this firm was one of the five largest pharmaceutical and toiletry manufacturing firms in the nation (it is interesting to note that all five firms were owned and operated by Iowans). The company had a worldwide trade and was in 1930 the medical part of the firm was sold by the family. Locally Chamberlain was honored for his securing the establishment of the Scottish Rite Consistory in the city (NHR, 9-9-83) and served as executive chairman of Iowa's Belgian Relief Association. In 1903 he built the Chamberlain Hotel, the first fireproof hotel in the state (non-extant).

Chamberlain resided in a single story farmhouse or lodge on this property during the construction of this house in the years 1901-03. The architect's rendering has a notation on its frame which states "Started 1898-finished or moved in in 1904." William George Rantoul (1866-1949) was the Boston architect who designed the house. The architect's rendering also appeared in *American Architect* (Vol. 80, May 2, 1903) titled "A House In Iowa." The original plan was with only a few minor exceptions faithfully executed. The 1901 Sanborn Fire Insurance map shows the dwelling with most of its porch elements in place. Chamberlain occupied the house along with his wife Lydia (died 1922) and sister Izanna Chamberlain. The house, library and interior were featured in *The Midwestern Magazine* in 1907. The lodge house and a five car garage remained on the property and housed Chamberlain's various trophies from his world wide travels. The house library was cited for its many rare and antique volumes. In 1949 the house was sold and converted for use as a home for the aged. The architectural firm Kratch and Kratch planned the work. Subsequent additions on the rear of the property have not compromised the house's integrity and the original approach is not disturbed.

William George Rantoul designed two similar houses prior to taking on the commission for Chamberlain in Des Moines. These included one for C. S. Roberts in Cambridge, and one for F. S. Moseley, at Beverly Farms. It is possible that Chamberlain saw these houses as published in the *American Architect* and *American Architect and Builder*, where they were published in 1896 and 1897. Chamberlain had also commissioned a Chicago architect to design a house prior to selecting Rantoul, so Chamberlain was shopping around. Rantoul appears to have favored this commission above his other works since the complete plans and tear sheets from *The Brick Builder* (December 1903) and *The American Architect* (May 1903) of this house are found in his papers at Essex Institute in Salem, Massachusetts.

# 9. Major Bibliographical References

Refer to Continuation Sheet

# 10. Geographical Data

Acreege of nominated property 1.3 acres

Quadrangle name Des Moines S.W.

Quadrangle scale 124,000

UTM References

A 

1	5	4	4	4	6	1	0	4	6	0	3	5	8	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

Measuring from a point which is located 115' west and 40' south of the NW corner Sec. 7, T-78-N, R-24-W, 5 P.M. (also known as Lot 5, Pierces Sub-division, City of Des Moines), thence ~~335'~~ on course N 0° 0' 0", thence ~~125'~~ on course N 45° 0' 0", thence ~~125'~~ on course S 90° 0' 0", thence ~~275'~~ on course S 45° 0' 0", thence 175' on course N 0' 0" to place of beg. (See map of same).

state N.A. code county code

state code county code

# 11. Form Prepared By

name/title James E. Jacobsen, National Register Coordinator

organization Iowa SHPO date 9 December 1983

street & number Historical Building  
E. 12th & Grand Ave. telephone 515-281-8152

city or town Des Moines state Iowa 50319

# 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 *Adrian D. Anderson*

title Executive Director Iowa State Historical Department date 12/9/83

For NPS use only

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

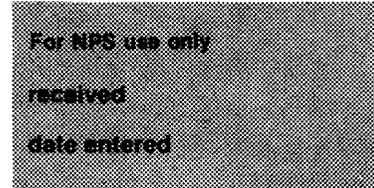
*John Andrew Byers* Entered in the National Register date 1/19/84  
Keeper of the National Register

Attest: \_\_\_\_\_ date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

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Fire escapes were added on the south side, with some loss of third story windows. A connecting door was added on the southwest corner, replacing a window.

The house is located nearly three hundred feet south of Grand Avenue, a major thoroughfare and formerly the location of many major area residences. Originally part of a much larger estate, only the front yard and a part of the original approach drive survive, the remainder of the property being occupied by more recent expansion and construction. The original vista is preserved, and surviving landscape plantings largely screen the newer buildings. Aproximately twenty five feet of the back yard survives behind the house. Originally the back yard included the lodge house, and a five car garage both of which stood along the east side of the property, on the other side of a six foot retaining wall which began at the southeast corner of the house and ran due south across the rear yard. Formal gardens and a patio area were terminated by a curved pergola-arbor. These features are non-extant.

Of particular interest is the architect-designed cooling system, possibly the first effort of its kind by Rantoul. Consisting of a forty inch wide tunnel running lengthwise below the basement floor, with opposing right-angle end tunnels, access tunnels provided fresh air. Convection currents drew cooler air into the house through ten foot wide ducts which connected the tunnel and first floor.

The current owners envision further restoration of the interior of the house, including the formal living room balcony area on the second floor, and the removal of many second floor walls which are not original. The original roof surface (wood shingles) will be replaced and the cornice work and half-timber will be restored by eliminating a dry rot problem. Any further construction on the property will not encroach on the subject property.

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Continuation sheet Bibliography

Item number 9

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Bibliography:

- "Good Record of a Typical Industry of City of Certainties", Des Moines Register, 6 Nov. \_\_\_\_.
- "D. S. Chamberlain, Lotion Firm Head Dies." Des Moines Register, 16 Nov. 1933. Phoenix Arizona Republic, 11 April 1934.
- "Dr. Lowell Chamberlain, Lotion Firm Head Dies." Des Moines Register, 23 July 1945.
- "Nation's Pharmacy Chiefs all Started Live in Iowa." Des Moines Tribune, 1 April 1928.
- Undated letter, Davis Chamberlain III to Florence W. Parnham.
- Sarborn Fire Insurance Maps, Des Moines, Iowa, 1901, 1920.
- "A House in Iowa." American Architect, May 2, 1903, plate 1927.
- Papers of William Georqe Rantoul, Essex Institute, Salem, Massachusetts.

