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NATIONAL REGISTER

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

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 Kerr, William, House  
other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 501 North Columbia Street N/A not for publication  
city, town Union City N/A vicinity  
state Indiana code IN county Randolph code 135 zip code 47390

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
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>2</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

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.

Richard Hart for J. M. Kiderow  
Signature of certifying official

7-29-87  
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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:)

Arlene Byer entered in the National Register 10-1-87

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: single dwelling

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)QUEEN ANNE

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE  
walls BRICK

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roof STONE: slateother METAL: tin, wood

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

The Kerr House is a 2½ story brick-veneered residence, located on the northwest corner of North Columbia and Division Streets in Union City. The c. 1896 house contains many elements of the later Queen Anne vocabulary, featuring an irregular silhouette and massing, and classical detailing. The southeast corner of the building is dominated by a hexagonal tower which pierces the roofline. On the south and east facades, gabled 3-sided bays project out from the main block of the house.

A one story porch dominates the visage of the house, wrapping around the south and east sides. The porch, like the rest of the house, rests on a rock-faced ashlar stone foundation. Entry to the porch is gained by stone steps with low stone siderails, set at a 45 degree angle at the southeast corner of the porch, with the entry marked by a pedimented gable. The porch features a spindled baluster, paired columns with egg-and-dart capitals, and a full entablature with a dentilled cornice. The dentils are repeated on the pediment over the steps. Historic photographs reveal that a second story porch rail once existed.

The octagonal three-story tower is centered at the porch entrance steps. The 45-degree angled wall at the corner features a stained glass window, which lights the foyer inside. The other walls of the tower are flush with the house walls on the ground floor, as well as on the second floor. The second story features a single one-over-one doublehung window in the angled corner, with a large dressed stone lintel and rock-faced stone sill, which is standard for the rest of the house. The tower interrupts the cornice above the second story, extending into a full third story with doublehung windows on each of its three visible sides. The tower terminates in an octagonal, steeply pitched roof.

On the south wall, between the tower and the projecting bay, is the main entrance, which opens onto the front porch. A double-hung window is located directly above the door on the second story.

West of the entrance bay on the south side is a three-sided, two story projecting bay. Each side of the bay has a doublehung window on each story. All first story windows are sheltered by the front porch. Above the second story windows, built-in gutters are located in a sheet metal cornice, which surrounds the entire house except where the octagonal tower interrupts it. The cornice underscores the pedimented gable atop the projecting bay. Within the gable the walls are decorated with diamond shaped metal shingles. Low, segmentally arched windows, divided vertically, are located in the gables. The raking trim on the gable itself is very similar to the cornice.

**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

COMMERCE

Period of Significance

c. 1896-1935

Significant Dates

c. 1896

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Kerr, William

Architect/Builder

George F. Barber and Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The William Kerr House is significant as one of the finest homes remaining in Union City, and as the home of a prosperous businessman. The house is also notable as one of few documented "catalog houses" in Indiana, designed by the George F. Barber firm out of Knoxville, Tennessee.

William Kerr was born in 1843 in Bedford, Pennsylvania, and moved with his parents to Indiana at the age of eight. In 1866 he moved to Union City and, after learning the tinner's trade in Richmond, he returned to Union City and purchased a tin and stove store from Mr. Beechler. Union City had begun in 1852 with the construction of the Bellefontaine & Indianapolis Railroad through the city. Beechler had established the tin and stove store in 1867; the first in the city had been established in 1858 by J. M. Shank. An 1882 history of Randolph County listed William Kerr's store as the second oldest tin and stove store in the city.<sup>1</sup> In 1877 he added a hardware and agricultural implement department to his store, and the same 1882 history described Kerr as carrying on "perhaps the leading house in the city in his department." An 1884 history described Kerr's business as "one of the oldest and most prominent houses of Union City engaged in this important department of trade."<sup>2</sup> His warehouse and salesrooms were described as being "among the finest in the state," with "one of the most complete and comprehensive stocks of merchandise in this line to be found in the state." His trade was said to extend "throughout this and adjacent counties in Indiana and Ohio."

In addition to operating one of the oldest and most prominent businesses in the city, William Kerr served as the president of the Commercial Bank for seventeen years. Shortly before his death in 1935, the Union City Evening Times honored Kerr's ninety-second birthday with a story about his life. The article described him as "one of our pioneers and most honored citizens--for William Kerr has been one of the community and business builders of Union City for almost 70 years."<sup>3</sup> Kerr was married to Mary Trindle of Centerville, Indiana, and they had seven children. Mr. Kerr spent his last years in this house with his two daughters. Following his death in 1935, the house passed to his daughter Susan, who lived there until 1971. It passed out of the Kerr family in 1977.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Lynch, Martha C. M., Reminiscences of Adams, Jay and Randolph Counties. Fort Wayne, Indiana: Nelson & Singmaster, 1896 (?), page 254.

Resources of Principal Places in Wayne, Henry, Delaware and Randolph Counties, Indiana. Cincinnati, Ohio: Historical and Statistical Publishing Company, 1884, page 169.

Smith, John, and Driver, Lee, Past and Present of Randolph County. Indianapolis, Indiana: A. W. Bowen and Company, 1914, page 569.

Tomlan, Michael A., "Toward the Growth of an Artistic Taste," The Cottage Souvenir No. 2. Watkins Glen, N.Y.: American Life Foundation and Study Institute, 1982, pages 5-19.

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: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property Less than one acre

UTM References

A 

1	6	6	8	6	4	8	0
Zone		Easting				Northing	

4	4	5	2	3	0	0
Northing						

C 


B 

Zone		Easting				Northing	


D 


See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

City Lot #64 of Samuel Carter's Addition

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the city lot that has been historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Susan Judelle Hufford date 3-17-87  
 organization N/A telephone 317-964-3956  
 street & number 501 North Columbia Street state IN zip code 47390  
 city or town Union City

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The east side of the house is very similar to the south side. North of the tower on the ground floor is a single, small window. Above this on the second floor is a doublehung window. North of this is another three-sided projecting bay, which is identical to that on the south side, except that a door is located in the south-eastern angled bay, opening onto the front porch. Also, the front porch on this side covers only this angled bay, stopping short of the middle panel of the three-sided bay.

North of and attached to the projecting three-sided bay on the east side of the house is a small one-story porch, with a door opening onto it immediately north of the projecting bay. North of the door on the ground floor are two doublehung windows. Another window is located on the second floor, positioned between the two windows below.

On the rear (north) facade of the house is a one-story, hip-roofed enclosed porch of wood frame construction that is believed to be original. A panel of diagonal latticework extends along the east side of the porch, and different latticework paneling extends around the base of the porch. There is a roofed, concrete stairway to the basement immediately west of the porch on the rear facade.

Above the porch at the second story are two doublehung windows, with rock-faced stone sills and brick segmental arches. Above these is the cornice, and a pedimented gable similar to those on the three-sided bays. The gable window, however, resembles only the left half of the windows seen on the other gables.

The west side of the house is uninterrupted by projections or towers. There are four ground floor windows and three second story windows, all of which are similar to those on the other facades. A pedimented gable like those on the south and east facades is roughly centered on the west wall.

The hipped, cross-gabled roof of the main section and the roofs of the tower and enclosed porch are covered with the original slate shingles. The roof ridge is topped with sheet metal cresting. There are four brick chimneys on the roof.

A few feet north of the house is an unattached brick garage, believed to have been built c. 1920 (Photo #6). A long lintel spans the paneled wooden garage doors. The roof is hipped and is covered with composition shingles.

The interior of the house is richly ornamented and remains essentially unaltered. There are six rooms on the first floor and six rooms on the second floor. Inside the main entrance on the south side of the house is a foyer, featuring the stained glass window mentioned earlier (Photo #8), and an elaborately decorated stairway (Photo #7). The stairway features a newel post lamp of Salome (Photo #9). The foyer and sitting room have parquet oak floors (Photos #12,20). Woodwork in the house is quarter-sawn oak which retains its original finish. All windows and doors have original hardware. The house contains four fireplaces, of which three are original, and one is a replacement for an original that was damaged by fire early in the house's history.

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Three are located on the first floor, and one is on the second. All four fireplaces feature carved oak mantels, ceramic tile surrounds, and brass fire fronts (Photos #11, 14, 17, 21).

A number of original fixtures remain in the house. A combination gas and electric ceiling lamp hangs in the parlor, and there are other original lamps as well (Photos #10, 16, 18). The second floor bathroom contains a pedestal sink and claw-foot bathtub (Photos 22, 23), and another sink is located under the stairs (Photo #13). An interesting feature is a small electric elevator, located in the butler's pantry (Photo #19). The elevator was added in the 1920's by the Kerrs.

Original plans and specifications from George F. Barber and Company are in the possession of the owner.

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Although some sources list the date of construction as 1880, the specifications for the house are written on a document printed in 1894. A county plat map shows the house in existence in 1896. Original drawings and plans for the house show that the house was designed for William Kerr by George F. Barber and Company, Architects of Knoxville, Tennessee, making it one of only sixteen known Barber designs in Indiana.<sup>4</sup>

The idea of marketing architectural plans through the mail is thought to have originated with George Palliser, who began publishing his catalogs in 1876. George Barber is known to have possessed a copy of Palliser's 1878 American Cottage Homes,<sup>5</sup> and presumably he borrowed the idea of selling house plans through the mail from Palliser. The idea of selling plans, and later houses, through the mail is one that increased in popularity near the turn of the century and later, being pursued eventually by such mass marketers as Sears and Roebuck and Montgomery Ward. Barber was among the earliest, having started with an illustrated sampler of eighteen engravings produced in 1887 or 1888 in his home town of De Kalb, Illinois.<sup>6</sup>

George F. Barber (1854-1915) was born in De Kalb, Illinois, but grew up on his sister's farm near Marmaton, Kansas. His formal education was sporadic, but in 1873 he was sketching architectural elements into a notebook, which suggests that he educated himself by copying a handbook. Barber apparently dealt in nursery stock for a time, although tax records list him as a carpenter. In 1884 he left Kansas to return to De Kalb, possibly to work for his brother as a carpenter. By the mid-1880's he was working as architect for Barber and Boardman, Contractors and Builders.<sup>7</sup> This may have provided the incentive for his first sampler c. 1887, and for a subsequent sampler including twenty-five designs in 1888, which may also have been produced in De Kalb, and in which Barber invited readers to write to obtain house plans.

In 1888 Barber moved to Knoxville, Tennessee, for health reasons. There he expanded into a more nationwide distribution with his Cottage Souvenir No. 2, copyrighted in 1890, which contained designs for 59 residences plus several other types of structures. He published nine more catalogs after this, some in several yearly editions. He also launched a monthly magazine, American Homes, A Journal Devoted to Planning, Building and Beautifying the Home, first published in January 1895. This idea he borrowed from Robert W. Shoppell, another of Palliser's imitators. American Homes was used as a vehicle to support Barber's mail-order business, but also contained articles on subjects related to homes and suburban life. The circulation of the magazine at the turn of the century was about 9,500. Barber retained control of the magazine until 1902.<sup>8</sup>

Barber's mail order business continued until about 1908, when local construction projects became the firm's major focus.<sup>9</sup> In all, Barber's firm produced as many as 20,000 sets of plans, although some estimates would assign an even higher figure. By 1900, George F. Barber and Company was the largest architectural firm in Knoxville, employing thirty draftsmen and twenty secretaries.<sup>10</sup> Barber houses were built in almost every state in the Union, establishing him as one of the most important and successful late 19th century architects.

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The early designs concentrated on the Queen Anne style, most houses featuring elaborate porches, bay windows, towers and balconies, with some Romanesque elements being added. Barber's Colonial designs first appeared in 1893, although Romanesque elements were also sometimes added to these as well. Other styles were also included in later catalogs, but most of those built were in the Queen Anne and Colonial modes.<sup>11</sup>

No design number has been found for the Kerr House, although its c. 1896 date and style suggest that its design might be found in a catalog dating after the 1890 Cottage Souvenir No. 2, and before the Artistic Homes, How to Plan and How to Build Them, No. 3, of 1896. The Kerr House, executed in brick, shows less elaborate exterior surface ornamentation than most of the Queen Annes in the 1890 catalog, and a strong classical influence in the porch, which originally also had a balustrade at the second story. As an example of a free classic Queen Anne house, it is one of the finest high-style homes in Union City. Except for the loss of the second story balustrade, its integrity is excellent, particularly inside, where original elements shown in Barber's sketches are still in place. It is assumed that Kerr served as his own contractor for the metal work on the roof.

Although it is probably certain that thousands of catalog houses were built in Indiana, few of them are known. Michael Tomlan, who has done extensive research on George Barber and his work, only knew of fifteen in Indiana prior to the discovery of the Kerr house. Considering its fine level of integrity, there is no question but that the house is important for its representation of the catalog house movement in Indiana, in addition to its association with William Kerr, and its status as a local example of the Queen Anne style.



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- <sup>1</sup>E. Tucker, History of Randolph County. (Chicago, Illinois: A. L. Kingman, 1882), page 452.
- <sup>2</sup>Resources of Principal Places in Wayne, Henry, Delaware and Randolph Counties, Indiana. (Cincinnati, Ohio: Historical and Statistical Publishing Company, 1884), page 169.
- <sup>3</sup>Union City Evening Times, February 25, 1935, page 1.
- <sup>4</sup>Letter, Michael A. Tomlan, Ithaca, New York, to Nancy Long, May 30, 1987. Indiana Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology.
- <sup>5</sup>Michael Tomlan, "Toward the Growth of an Artistic Taste," The Cottage Souvenir No. 2 (Watkins Glen, N.Y.: American Life Foundation and Study Institute, 1982), page 6.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid., page 5
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., page 6
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., pages 7-9
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid., page 15
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., pages 10-12
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., pages 12-15

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Tomlan, Michael A., Letter to Nancy Long. Division of Historic Preservation and Archaeology, Indianapolis, Indiana, May 30, 1987.

Tucker, E., History of Randolph County. Chicago, Illinois: A. L. Kingman, 1882, pages 439, 441, 452, 458.

"William Kerr Celebrates his Ninety-Second Birthday Anniversary Today," Union City Evening Times. (February 25, 1935), page 1.

Original drawings and specifications in possession of owner.