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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER**

# 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 10-900-a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Steele, Alden Hatch, House  
other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 1010 South Franklin Street  not for publication  
city, town Olympia  vicinity  
state Washington code WA county Thurston code 067 zip code 98501

### 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 — buildings  
— — sites  
— — structures  
1 0 objects  
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.

Mary M. Kampson 5/11/92  
Signature of certifying official Date

Washington State Office of Archaeology and Historic Preservation  
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. Entered in the National Register 6/18/92  
 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:)

Aelene Byers \_\_\_\_\_  
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 dwellingCurrent Functions (enter categories from instructions)  
Domestic: single dwelling

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)Mid-Nineteenth Century

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete, brick  
walls wood: weatherboardroof other: composition  
other

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

Constructed in 1869 by a prominent territorial physician, the Alden Hatch Steele House is a two story, wood frame vernacular Victorian residence located near downtown Olympia in a neighborhood of single family houses, apartment buildings, and offices. It stands about 12 feet above Franklin Street on a small bluff. Originally, the house was at street level but a series of grading improvements in ensuing decades lowered the street considerably, and today the Steele House is perched above its surroundings.

As originally built, the Steele house was a two story, hipped roof structure built on a rectangular plan measuring 36 feet on the west facade and east rear elevation, and 32 feet deep on the north and south sides. Additions to the rear of the building created a more irregular floor plan, with a one-and-one-half story rear addition with gabled roof added in 1902 and a one story rear bathroom addition added in 1972.

The original house is a rare example of double box construction, in which the exterior walls are formed of two layers of rough cut cedar planks (approximately 12 inches wide and five-quarter inch thick) without studs. The planks rise the full height of the house from the sills to upper plates, forming both the exterior and interior structure of the house. The ten-inch-by-ten-inch cedar sills have hand hewn tenon and mortis joints, and the floor joists are notched into the sills without nails. Originally, the sills rested on cedar posts atop brick piers. As these deteriorated, a brick rubble foundation was constructed under the front west wall and a vertical bond cinder block foundation was placed under most of the rest of the exterior walls. This was replaced in the latest rehabilitation with reinforced cinder block all around the perimeter walls. But many of the interior posts and piers remain in good condition, resting on the earthen floor underneath the house.

The house is capped by a low-pitched hip roof, with overhanging, open eaves. The roof is sheathed in composition shingles. The exterior walls of the Steele house are faced with the original six-inch cedar clapboard siding with a four inch reveal (replaced in kind in a few instances where the original clapboards had deteriorated beyond repair). The original skirting was deteriorated and replaced with cedar planks that had been removed from the interior of the house.

The facade of the Steele House features symmetrical fenestration and restrained classical trim that suggests a vernacular version of the Italianate style. A one story porch spans the facade, supported by four pairs of narrow posts which rise to the engaged hip roof. The posts are built of three sections, with arched and open central sections, and entablature moldings on the top and bottom sections. The porch was seriously deteriorated and was replaced after careful measurements were

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made of the surviving elements. A curved board was placed at the entry to replicate the original element as seen in historic photographs. A railing that was located along one side of the porch was replicated and extended across the front and sides of the porch.

The porch shelters a recessed central entry. The large front door is framed by sidelights and surmounted by a transom window. This entrance is flanked on either side by two pairs of eight-foot high windows, with four-over-four double hung wood sash. Other fenestration generally consists of four-over-four double-hung windows, trimmed with shelf entablature hood molds. The upstairs windows are one foot shorter than the large downstairs windows. The north side elevation features a bay window to light the first floor parlor and a double window to light an upstairs bedroom. These features no doubt were intended to exploit the view of Puget Sound and the Olympic Mountains.

The Steele house was built as a single family residence. Soon after the turn of the century, Dr. Steele's sister-in-law moved into the building. By the time of the Great Depression, the building had been converted to a boarding house. In the 1949 earthquake, the foundation was damaged and the original chimneys collapsed. The building was later remodelled and turned into apartments. To install plumbing and electrical wires, the ceiling on the first floor was lowered from 12 feet to ten feet. In the 1990 rehabilitation, the ceilings were restored to their original height. The original floor plan featured a central entry hall with a staircase rising to the second floor. Many of the interior finishes such as the broad stairway in the central hall are still intact. Interior doors and hardware are also all original, surviving interior trim includes cedar door and window surrounds with simple corner blocks, and the original fir flooring remains under carpeting.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

 nationally     statewide     locallyApplicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     DCriteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture  
Social History

Period of Significance

1869-1902

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

Steele, Alden Hatch

Architect/Builder

Not Known

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

The Alden Hatch Steele House is historically significant for its association with a prominent physician and civic leader in territorial Washington. Built in 1869, the house is also a rare example of two story box construction, reflecting the building technology and vernacular Italianate style of the era. The Steele house retains good exterior integrity and strongly reflects its mid-19th century character.

**Background:** Born in Oswego, New York in 1823, Alden Hatch Steele studied medicine at the University of New York (graduating in 1846) and moved to the Northwest frontier in 1849, where he settled in Oregon City. In addition to practicing medicine Steele served for eleven years as a city council member and three years as mayor. In 1863, Steele was appointed surgeon at Fort Dalles, where he served three years. In 1866, he was transferred to Fort Stevens, and in 1868 to Fort Steilacoom, where he remained one year. In 1869, Steele moved to Olympia where he resumed his private practice and remained the rest of his life.

Steele earned a reputation as one of the most progressive physicians in the region. He was particularly noted in medical circles for his pioneering use of chloroform in surgery in the 1870s. In 1869-1870, he served as physician to the Chehalis and Nisqually Tribes, and beginning 1873, he was the territory's examining surgeon for pensions for both the Army and Navy (a position he held for 15 years). For six years, he was medical inspector of the territorial penitentiary.

Steele was also an important figure in the territorial civic affairs. Active in politics, business, and religious life, Steele served as a regent of the territorial university in Seattle from 1876 to 1880; was director of the First National Bank of Olympia; was an organizer of the first gas and power company in Thurston County; was a stockholder in the Tenino Railroad; and was a founder of the Olympia Diocese of the Episcopal church, the first Episcopal Bishopric in the Northwest. Steele also served as the local medical examiner of the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York for 26 years. He died in 1902.

The house that Steele constructed reflects the restrained classicism, symmetry, and cubic massing of the vernacular Italianate style. More importantly, it is a significant reflection of the building technology of the era. The house is a rare extant example of double box construction, in which the house is constructed of a double layer of cedar planks (12 inches wide and about an inch thick) that rise from sill to upper plate. The cedar planks form both the exterior and interior walls without intervening studs or braces. The use of box construction was common at the time (and even promoted in agricultural journals at mid-century) because it was an expedient building method prior

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to the widespread availability of dimension lumber, and particularly suited in areas of limited building materials like nails.

In the Steele house, the rough cut cedar boards still bear the circular cut of the saw blades. The ten-inch-by-ten-inch sill plates are joined by hand hewn mortis-and-tenon joints, and the floor joists are notched into the sills without using a nail. The doors, windows, and decorative trim, also all of cedar, were products of the fledgling millwork shops doing business along the Olympia waterfront, but the doors and windows no doubt were shipped to the site.

In the 20th century, the Steele house was converted to a boarding house and later an apartment house. These changes in use led to the construction of a rear addition, and the division of the interior into rental units. Even so, the house retains much of its original character including the box construction, cedar clapboards, and tall double hung windows. The recent rehabilitation in 1990 restored the ceilings to their original 12-foot height and replicated a deteriorated front porch. The setting, as well, reflects the 19th century, with the house sitting on a bluff above the regraded street, which was lowered in the last century (with the earth used to fill mud flats and estuaries). Today, the Steele House is believed to be the second oldest extant structure in the city. It was entered in the Washington State Register of Historic Places in 1979.

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Washington West of the Cascades, Chicago: S. J. Clarke Co., 1917, Vol. III, pp. 220-221.  
Lenggenhager, Werner and Lucille McDonald, Where the Washingtonians Lived, Seattle: Superior Publishing Company, 1969, p. 72.

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 # \_\_\_\_\_

See continuation sheet

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

UTM References

A	10	507850	5209370
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Sylvester's Plat of Olympia, Block 62, South half of Lot 1 and South half of west 50 feet of Lot 2.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the lot historically associated with Alder Hatch Steele.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/title Denise and Chris Keegan  
 organization N/A  
 street & number 6341 Rich Road  
 city or town Olympia

date February 1, 1992  
 telephone \_\_\_\_\_  
 state Washington zip code 98502