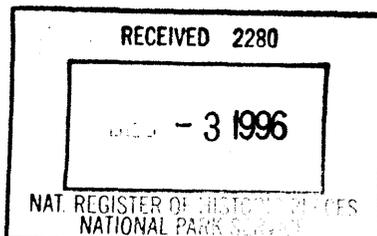


96-1540

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 for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
other names/site number Cure & Hensley Mortuary 109-386-64156

2. Location

street & number 127 South Main Street N/A  not for publication  
city or town Martinsville N/A  vicinity  
state Indiana code IN county Morgan code 109 zip code 46151

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 36CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant  nationally  statewide  locally. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

*Paul R. Kalk*

10-31-96  
Date

Signature of certifying official/Title

Indiana Department of Natural Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria. (  See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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:)

*Edson H. Beall*  
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

1-2-97

Name of Property

County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

Category of Property (Check only one box)

Number of Resources within Property (Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

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

- building, district, site, structure, object

Table with 3 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing, and Resource Type (buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total). Values: 1, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0, 0, 0, 0, 1, 0.

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

FUNERARY: Mortuary

FUNERARY: Mortuary

7. Description

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

MID-19th c.: Gothic Revival

19th & 20th c. REVIVALS: Tudor Revival

OTHER: Central passage

foundation STONE: Sandstone

walls BRICK

roof ASPHALT

other STONE: Limestone

SYNTHETICS: Vinyl

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
B removed from its original location.
C a birthplace or grave.
D a cemetery.
E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
F a commemorative property.
G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1860-c. 1890

1925-1946

Significant Dates

1860

1925

1927

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Unknown / Weesner, Walker

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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

Name of repository:

IHSSI

**10. Geographical Data**Acreage of Property <1**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1	16	549230	4363970
	Zone	Easting	Northing

3	16		
	Zone	Easting	Northing

2	16		
	Zone	Easting	Northing

4	16		
	Zone	Easting	Northing

 See continuation sheet**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

**11. Form Prepared By**name/title Joanne Raetz Stuttgen, Presidentorganization Morgan County Historic Preservation Society date 2-15-96street & number PO Box 1377 telephone 317/349-1537city or town Martinsville state IN zip code 46151**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets****Maps**A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.**Photographs**Representative **black and white** photographs of the property.**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Kenny & Debbie Costinstreet & number 127 South Main Street telephone 317/342-5775city or town Martinsville state IN zip code 46151**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
Morgan County, Indiana**

*Section 7-Description*

The Blackstone House property consists of two historic buildings and contemporary additions. The two historic buildings, the Blackstone House and the former Martinsville Telephone Company Building, were joined in the early 1960s and are part of the funeral home operation which has been in the building since the 1920s. The connector is located to the rear of the house and joins to the southwest corner of the telephone building. This nomination includes the Blackstone House, Telephone Building, and all additions. The description will cover the original house first, then the old Telephone Company Building.

Blackstone House

West (Front) Facade

The Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary is a brick central passage, one and one-half story house with a rear ell set back approximately 30 feet from Main Street and 30 feet from Jackson Street. The house faces Main Street. The foundation is hand-quarried sandstone. The bricks are soft and handmade, laid in a common bond pattern alternating seven rows of stretchers with one row of headers.

The house is Gothic Revival in style, with a steeply pitched side-gabled roof and front cross gable. The gables are decorated with vergeboards. The house also shows later stylistic influences: an Italianate bay on the north gabled wall and a lovely Queen Anne front porch with turret, turned columns, scrollwork, and spindlework.

The front is well-balanced with a paneled central door (a replacement of the original) flanked by stained-glass sidelights and an elegant stained glass fan light overhead. The door trim with its narrow flutes is reminiscent of Greek Revival which in Martinsville, appears to have been replaced with the Gothic style about 1860, the year this house was constructed.

Central in the facade is a rather steep cross gable above the entrance. Today this gable is pierced by a short window; the original opening was a door, with the remainder of it now filled and covered with shingled siding. This window is flanked by narrow stained glass panels and is ornamented with a decorative painted limestone hood similar to those found above the other windows in the house. Clean, orange brick on the exterior surrounding the former second floor

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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door indicates that a small balcony was once found there.

The front facade is symmetrical, with a pair of narrow one-over one windows with decorative painted limestone hoods on each side of the central entrance. On the upper level this symmetry is maintained with a pair of small dormers flanking the original albeit now modified opening. The dormers, according to local contractor Larry Curtis, who has done much work on the house, are original. These dormers are now clad with shingled siding. Two brick chimneys emerge from the roof plane and are located on either side of the cross gable.

About 1890, a wraparound porch was added to the front and north and south sides of the Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary. This porch is dramatic and eye-catching. The base and floor of the porch is now concrete, but the columns, round turret, gabled entrance and Victorian bric-a-brac are original. The turret is especially lovely with its finial, shingle roof, and shingled and spindle ornamentation. Paint shadows on the brick wall indicate the front door was framed by columns similar to those supporting the porch.

The brick remains unpainted. All of the limestone hoods are white, as are the wood window frames. The asphalt roof and the shingled roof on the turret are gray. The two masonry chimneys are painted brown to match the brick.

Blackstone House  
North Facade

The north facade clearly shows the plan of the original house despite later additions. The gable side wall of the front portion of the house is pierced with four windows: two pairs of narrow one-over-one windows with the same limestone hoods as those over the front windows.

Perhaps as few as 15-20 years following the initial construction of the house, the north side of the house received an addition. At the west corner of the original gabled north wall is located a three-bay projection; the west bay contains an entrance and the other two bays contain windows. These openings are topped with a keystone and lintel course. This bay is clearly Italianate in style, with paint shadows indicating that brackets were once located at the cornice.

In the early 1960s, the house underwent additional remodeling on its west side. According to

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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Larry Curtis, the original west wall of the rear ell was dismantled, its windows removed and placed in a new wall flush with the gabled west wall of the front. The roof of this addition intersects the original roof of the ell. The addition connects the Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary with the former Martinsville/Bell Telephone Company building, erected in 1927 and vacated in 1951. (This building became the property of Hester Cure, the previous owner of the Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary, following the departure of the telephone company.)

Blackstone House  
East Facade

The east facade has undergone alterations but still retains evidence of its original gabled appearance. This wall was originally identical to the gabled north wall of the front of the house, with two limestone hooded windows on the first story and two above them on the upper story and a half. Well before the turn of the century, an open inset porch was converted into a two-story brick enclosure, the first floor of which appears to have been used as a kitchen. As a result, the gabled east wall reveals an alteration in its brickwork.

When the Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary was connected to the Martinsville/Bell Telephone Company building in the 1960s, the east facade was also affected. The connecting addition has a gable roof that touches the east gabled wall of the rear ell.

Blackstone House  
South Facade

The south facade of the rear ell reveals the most significant alterations, the earliest of which include the two-story porch enclosure and a projecting brick addition. All of these occurred prior to 1900, as evidenced by the materials, decorative elements, and the earliest Sanborn fire map dated 1906. Today, the south wall retains an appearance of the early twentieth century, with the exception of a vinyl clad frame garage-like structure and carport, which recently replaced a much earlier carport.

The south gabled end wall of the front of the house is identical to the north wall, with two hooded windows on the upper story over two windows on the first story. Paint shadows on the

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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east end of the wall reveal the outline of the former carport. Further paint shadows indicate the brick wall once was adorned with decorative columns similar to those supporting the porch. They too have been removed.

Blackstone House  
Interior

The interior plan of the Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary retains its historic integrity despite the adaptation of the former Blackstone residence into a modern funeral home. Clearly, the first undertakers, Jesse Cure and Herman Hensley, valued the building's historic nature, as the current owners, Kenny and Debbie Costin, do today. Larry Curtis, the Costins' contractor, has three years of architectural study at Ball State University and is knowledgeable about both historic construction techniques and decorative design. Where previous remodeling was inappropriate, it was reversed or changed to more closely reflect the building's original character. For example, in the rest room area, paneled doors replaced solid doors and new door and window molding was crafted to match historic molding.

On the first floor, the central hall features a lovely quarter turn walnut staircase that ascends along the north wall of the hall and gently curves south to meet the second floor. The steps themselves are decorated with molding under the treads and the hall-side, outer stringer is adorned with carved fan insets. The handrail is quite low, perhaps reflecting the height of a member of the Blackstone family. Behind the staircase, a 1930s replacement paneled door has an elegant paneled hood that mirrors the stained-glass fanlight over the exterior door.

Characteristic of the central passage house, this hall is flanked by front rooms, which are historically identical. The south room serves as an office. The only alteration in this room is located between the chimney and east wall: a 1930s built-in cupboard with a large Gary safe. A door leading into the enclosed porch is found in the rear wall, and near the front wall, a second door leads into the hall. Directly opposite this door is another leading into the north room. This north room retains its original appearance with one exception: what may originally have been a rear exterior door has been converted into an open passthrough leading into the Italianate bay addition.

Both front rooms have notable scalloped ornamentation affixed to the arched trim over the

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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windows, with identical scalloped ornamentation over the doors. Inside the rooms, transoms have paneled covers, now permanently closed. On the hall side of the doors, for unknown reasons, the transoms have been plastered over and the arched hoods and scalloped trim lowered.

The Italianate bay addition is sympathetic with the original house. It has a more generous ogee curve in its floor molding, which is interestingly paired with sharply angular trim over the windows; instead of the gentle arch and scallops found over the windows in the front rooms, the window and exterior door in the bay addition are topped with a triangular pediment decorated with projecting molding. The interior pass-throughs are topped with similar but less angular trim. The arched exterior door is particularly beautiful, with inset panels above and below a large, colorful stained glass window.

The bay addition leads into the original rear ell, which now serves as a chapel; its original north wall has been dismantled and its windows installed in the north wall of a 1960s viewing room addition. The two rooms are now divided by a wood accordion door. The 1960s addition reflects the character of the original ell in its proportions and decorative detail; in particular, the wood floor molding and window trim is nearly identical. In the chapel, located in the original rear ell, the south wall is broken on the east by a paneled elevator door (the 1940s elevator connects the exterior receiving area with the first floor public rooms and the second floor preparatory/embalming room), and two original paneled doors leading to the enclosed porch. Like those in the front rooms, these transoms are obscured by paneled covers. On its west wall, the chapel is connected with the front hall by the paneled door behind the staircase.

The enclosed porch is found on the chapel's south wall. Today it consists of a meeting area, service room, and rest rooms. Next to the exterior door is an old flue, most likely attached to a cook stove in earlier years. The enclosed porch and rest rooms have plain, plank floor molding and window and door trim; in the rest rooms, however, are found corner blocks carved with a flower. Outside of the rest rooms, the trim over the windows and doors has the same triangular shape as that found in the chapel, viewing room, and bay addition but is less ornate.

All of the rooms on the first floor are meticulously cared for, with cheery pastel pink and blue walls and complementing patterned paper and borders. (Debbie Costin explains that she wanted to create a soft, cheery atmosphere, not the typical sober atmosphere of other funeral homes.) In all of the rooms on the first floor, the wood molding, doors, and paneled transom covers are

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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painted white. The floors are carpeted, although the hall floor is covered with new parquet.

on the second floor are located three rooms: one on either side of the hall and one in the rear ell. With its stained glass front windows, once sidelights for the removed door, the hall is the most ornate of the second floor spaces; its wood trim, however, is the same plain plank trim found in the rooms. According to Larry Curtis, the north room once had four dormers--two pairs--like those found on the front of the house. They were removed in the 1980s because of severe rot.

Early in Cure and Hensley's ownership, the large room making up the second floor of the rear ell was modified with the addition of the preparatory/embalming room found along its south wall. In the east end of the south wall is found the elevator. Prior to its installation in the 1950s, corpses and caskets were brought up and down the front stairs.

In all of the rooms on the second floor, the wood molding and paneled doors are painted white. The floor is yellow pine. The walls are plaster covered with paper. The upper rooms are used for storage and are not for public use; thus, they do not exhibit the conscientious maintenance and sensitive decorating that characterize the first floor rooms.

**Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
North Facade**

Completed in July 1927, the Martinsville Telephone Company Building is a one story, flat roofed, rectangular brick building facing onto Jackson Street, connected at its southwest corner to the Blackstone House. Newspaper accounts of the time describe the wall material as oriental brick; it is a hard fired face brick of a predominantly dark brown color with shades of green, red, and orange in the dark brown overall color. Martinsville Brick Company, I.G. Poston, owner, provided the brick for the exterior. Moldings and trim are of Bedford limestone. The foundation is of soldier course brick and a stone water table course.

The north facade is the main facade. It is a three part composition with two window groupings flanking a central entry. All openings are trimmed with quoined stone surrounds. The recessed entry has a glazed wooden door surmounted by a three part multi-paned transom and flanked by multi-paned sidelights. The window groupings are formed by a central multi-paned double-hung sash with narrow double hung units on either side. Multi-paned, three part transoms are above

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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the double hung windows. Splayed stone mullions divide the sash and transoms. All windows are painted metal, and are original. A stringcourse over the windows meets the lintels and forms a continuous band around the parapet. The crenelated parapet has a molded stone coping following the embrasure openings. Header brick and stone tabs surround the embrasures as well. Centered over each window is flat style stone molding in the embrasure area, each having a diminutive stone shield ornament.

Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
East and West Facades

The decorative treatment wraps around to the east elevation, having one window group as previously described. South of the window group on the east side, the decorative parapet treatment is abandoned and a simple molded stone coping follows the flat parapet. Four evenly spaced six-over-six double hung units with soldier course lintels line this flank of the building. The west elevation (photo 4) has the crenelated parapet, with very widely spaced embrasures. Two windows are visible, each has two-over-two windows and header course lintels. To the south, the Blackstone House adjoins, obscuring any previously existing windows.

Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
South (rear) Facade

Photo 3 shows the rear of the telephone company building. The stone water table and upper stringcourse are not present; only a soldier course runs above the windows. The four two-over-two windows are set to the east to accommodate an at grade functional entry to the west.

Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
Interior

When built in 1927, the interior contained an office to the front, a large open switchboard room, a room for equipment and storage, an office for the wire chief, and restrooms. The basement contained a battery room, store rooms, a furnace room, and a coal room. This configuration is largely intact today.

The front office is rented by an insurance firm (photo 19). Though it originally had gray marble

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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trimming according to newspaper accounts, the marble is now gone. The windows and other aspects of the room are original. The switchboard room has no equipment and is vacant. To the rear, the equipment storage and wire chief's office has been rehabilitated (photo 20). It serves as a casket display area and lounge. The basement is used for storage.

*Section 8-Statement of Significance*

The Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary and Martinsville Telephone Company Building is located at the southeast corner of Main and Jackson Streets in Martinsville, Indiana. Found one block south of the Morgan County Courthouse Square, it neighbors the 1891 Gothic Revival First Christian Church, the 1906 Neoclassical Carnegie Library, and an Italianate gabled-ell house. The two buildings were joined in the 1960s and are nominated as one property.

The house was constructed in 1860 by Dr. Benjamin D. Blackstone on the occasion of his second marriage to Mary Jane Worley Reynolds. <sup>1</sup> The house is a fine example of the Gothic Revival style locally. The Martinsville Telephone Company Building was completed in 1927 and served for about 25 years as the local telephone exchange building for the community. It was the first building made specifically for electric telephone service in the Martinsville. The complex is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C because of its architecture and under Criterion A because of its significance in local commerce. The Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary received a "notable" rating in the Morgan County Interim Report (the house and phone company building were recorded as one site).

*Significance-Blackstone House*

The Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary is an excellent example of vernacular architecture, blending fashionable high style influences--Gothic Revival at the point of its construction and Queen Anne c.1890--with a traditional central passage form. It served as a residence for the Blackstone family, both parents and married children, with Dr. Blackstone receiving patients in a modest brick building nearby. It represents the first wave of permanent construction that replaced settlement-era buildings in Martinsville, which was founded in 1822.

During the period 1850-1875, Martinsville began to attain the appearance of a thriving county seat: the courthouse was built in 1857-1859, Italianate buildings began to appear in the

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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commercial district, and by 1860 the Indiana and Vincennes and Big Four Railroads linked the city with Indianapolis and other neighboring locales. At this time, business interests included a variety of commercial establishments; grain mills; lumber mills; agricultural implement dealerships; tanneries; a pork packing company; and the like. It was not until the 1890s that Martinsville became well-established as a producer of furniture (Old Hickory), bricks, and gold fish (Grassyfork), as well as a national leader in the mineral spring sanitarium/resort industry.

During this period, Martinsville attracted many new residents, including Dr. Benjamin D. Blackstone, who moved from Athens, Ohio, in September 1852 and established a medical practice. Within a few short years, Dr. Blackstone had become one of the most prominent and respected members of Martinsville society and "was, without a doubt, the best all around educated man in the county."<sup>2</sup> Blackstone was a city ward trustee, school trustee and school examiner, and founding member of the Morgan County Medical and Surgical Society established in 1855. He was conscripted into the Union Army as a surgeon and was a leader in the local Democratic party. In addition to his medical practice, he was for a time co-owner of Tarleton drugstore, which served as the local "Tammany Hall."<sup>3</sup>

Upon the death of Dr. Blackstone in 1902, his wife having died a year earlier, the house became the property of his daughter, Julia Kessinger and her husband, Dr. Charles A. Kessinger, and his son, Charles Blackstone and his first wife Flora. Like his father-in-law, Dr. Kessinger was a prominent medical practitioner, both in private practice and as founder and owner of the first Martinsville Sanitarium, which he established in 1892. The Martinsville Sanitarium, in a city boasting 12 fine sanitariums, would acquire the reputation as "One of the Three Best Known Watering Places in America."

Following the deaths of Julia and Charles Kessinger, in 1911 and 1912 respectively, the house became Charles Blackstones. (His gambler son, Benjamin B. Blackstone, upon the death of his mother in 1914, hired an attorney to claim a share in the estate. The ruling determined Charles Blackstone to be the property's only owner.<sup>4</sup>)

Charles Blackstone was the most unfortunate member of the family.

Once the secretary at his brother-in-law's Martinsville Sanitarium, he became the owner of a pool hall/cigar shop on the north side of the public square, later operating several motion picture

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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theaters when that form of entertainment was a novel popularity. Although he had several altercations with the law, mostly concerning illegal gaming in his pool hall, Charles Blackstone is still remembered by elderly community members for having murdered Edward Stewart in his cigar store on April 6, 1928, for which he was imprisoned for life in the state penitentiary at Michigan City. He died of "apoplexy" less than a year later--ironically, just after attending a motion picture show. <sup>5</sup>

It appears that Charles Blackstone had encountered financial difficulties as early as 1922, the year he mortgaged the Blackstone House to the Martinsville Trust Company for \$3500. In 1923, he again mortgaged the property, this time for the sum of \$4500. On March 23, 1925, Charles Blackstone and his wife Caroline, gave up their residence in the Blackstone House and rented the entire building at a cost of \$50 per month and promise of significant repairs to Jesse Cure and Herman Hensley, proprietors of Cure and Hensley Undertaking.

On March 21, 1929, the date of Charles Blackstone's death in Michigan City, Caroline Blackstone, his second wife, sold the house to Jesse Cure and Herman Hensley. Their joint ownership continued until Herman Hensley's death in 1946. Three years later, in June 1949, Jesse re passed away, leaving the Blackstone House and the undertaking business to his widow, Hester H. Cure. <sup>6</sup> Finally, in February 1985, the Blackstone House was sold to Kenny and Debbie Costin. They continue operating an undertaking and funeral home business--Cure and Hensley-Costin Funeral Chapel--in the house. In fact, the business has become one of the oldest continuously operating businesses in Martinsville.

The house is significant as an historic property not only because of its association with important local individuals and its longtime contribution to local commerce, but also because of the legend which surrounds it, namely that it was used as an underground railroad station. There is, perhaps, a basis of truth in the tale. In his obituary, Dr. Benjamin D. Blackstone is described as an "intense abolitionist [who] had the courage of his convictions."

The accuracy of the legend is unimportant. What is important is that the community adamantly believes that it is true. In fact, this legend is so imbedded in the community's traditional belief that the Blackstone House/Cure and Hensley Mortuary attracts interest and visitors to the degree that it is perhaps the most well-known house in Martinsville. <sup>7</sup>

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**Blackstone House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building  
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*Significance-Martinsville Telephone Company Building*

Adding to the commercial significance of the Blackstone House as one of the oldest continuously operated businesses in the community is the Martinsville Telephone Company Building attached by a 1960s addition to the Blackstone House.

Charles Blackstone sold the property on which the Telephone Building stands to the phone company on July 26, 1926, after a 90 day option had expired. Having rejected many offers to sell this land for a parking garage, Blackstone believed the phone company building would not only harmonize with surrounding buildings and land uses, but that it would benefit the city as a whole.

Indiana Bell Telephone was a statewide subsidiary of Bell Telephone, and during the 1920s, Indiana Bell embarked on a statewide program of standardizing service and constructing buildings specially designed for electric telephone communications. Previously, local phone companies were haphazard affairs with facilities in any available building. Often, these buildings were not suited to the weight of the equipment or the fire hazards of early electrical service.

Indiana Bell's chief architect during this time was Walker J. Weesner.<sup>8</sup> A resident of the Indianapolis suburb of Irvington and son of a building contractor and architect, Weesner worked in his father's business and then on his own until 1924. That year, he became the architect and building engineer for Indiana Bell. He remained with Bell until 1933, designing or remodeling telephone exchanges for Indianapolis, Terre Haute, Evansville, South Bend, Michigan City, Kokomo, Marion, Bloomington, Anderson, and Muncie, as well as the 1927 building for Martinsville. His most notable achievement was the moving of the Bell phone building on Meridian Street. The 10 story building was moved while occupied to a new site facing a side street to allow construction of a new headquarters building (which Walker designed).

The Martinsville Telephone Company Building is a good example of Weesner's small city commissions for Bell. More importantly, it was the first building in the community designed specially for phone service, and served as such until 1950. The phone exchange moved into a building on East Washington Street, but retained the old building until 1957, when a new phone company building was built on South Jefferson.

Contemporary newspaper reports described the Martinsville Telephone Company Building as

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“one of the most up-to-date telephone service buildings in Indiana,” and as a “model in the telephone world”. Bowman Construction was the general contractor, Martinsville Brick Company provided the brick, and S.A. Hickman Planing Mill Company of Martinsville provided the cement, lumber, and millwork. Martinsville Milling Company provided the lime, plaster, and other incidentals.

In summary, the Blackstone-Cure and Hensley House and Martinsville Telephone Company Building is eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places because the house portion is a notable example of vernacular architecture: a traditional central-passage form exhibiting high-style Gothic, Italianate, and Queen Anne influence. Furthermore, it is associated with a long-time local business, as well as with historic patterns and trends, namely the development of Martinsville from a pioneer settlement community into a thriving commercial center based upon local manufacturing and the mineral water-health care resort industry. The Telephone Company Building contributes to the local significance of the property, since it was a locally important example of how a state-wide monopoly provided service to small cities. Lastly, the property's significance in the community's traditional culture should not be disregarded or undervalued.

**End Notes**

- 1 Obituary for Mrs. Dr. Blackstone, Martinsville Republican, May 16, 1901.
- 2 Obituary of Dr. B.D. Blackstone, Martinsville Republican, January 30, 1902.
- 3 Blanchard, History of Morgan, Monroe, and Brown Counties: 24, 40, 89, 91; The People's Guide: 349; Morgan County Scrapbook I: 215; undated newspaper clippings found in the vertical files of the Morgan County Public Library.
- 4 Property abstract in the possession of Kenny Costin.
- 5 The Daily Reporter, April 7, 1928; The Daily Reporter, April 10, 1928; The Daily Reporter, April 18, 1928; Verdict #5937, State of Indiana vs. Charles Blackstone; obituary for Charles Blackstone, The Daily Reporter, March 21, 1929.

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6 Property abstract in the possession of Kenneth Costin.

7 For more on the underground railroad legend surrounding the Blackstone-Cure and Hensley House, see Martinsville Daily Reporter, January 7, 1966; Martinsville Daily Reporter, April 13, 1976; Martinsville Daily Reporter, no date [1985].

8 Information on Walker J. Weesner from "Record of Experience-Walker J. Weesner, 53 Downey Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana," (a resume) and various unidentified clippings, collection of Irvington Historical Society.

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"Martinsville As I Remember it 50 Years Ago." The Daily Reporter,  
undated clipping.

Martinsville Daily Reporter, undated [c.1976, 1985] news clippings about Blackstone-Cure and  
Hensley House.

"Martinsville Telephone Co. Will Make Change Saturday Night," Martinsville Daily Reporter,  
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"Morgan County Played Big Role in Railroad." The Daily Reporter,  
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"1905 Doctor's office, Former Cure Home to Be Razed." Martinsville Daily Reporter, undated  
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Property abstract for Lots 5 and 6, Block 16, original plat of Martinsville. In the possession of  
Kenny Costin, Martinsville, Indiana.

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*Section 10-Geographical Data-Verbal Boudary Description*

Lots 5 and 6 in Block 16, original plat of Martinsville.

*Boundary Justification*

This is the historic boundary of the Blackstone-Cure and Hensley property, including the Blackstone House, Martinsville Telephone Company Building, and all additions and connections.

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Photographs

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PHOTOGRAPHS

Note: All negatives and proofs are located in the Morgan County Historic Photograph Collection, Morgan County Public Library, 100 South Jefferson Street, Martinsville, IN 46151.

Photographs #1-17 were taken by Tina Chafey on February 21, 1996. Photographs #18-20 were taken by Tina Chafey on July 19, 1996.

1. West (front) view.
2. Southwest view.
3. Southeast view.
4. Northwest view.
5. Central hall with staircase and front door.
6. South front room (office), with built in storage cupboard and Gary safe. The enclosed porch/summer kitchen is seen through the open door.
7. Enclosed porch/summer kitchen located behind office, now public visiting room with rest rooms.
8. North front room, with view of Italianate bay addition.
9. Italianate bay addition.
10. Staircase in central hall, with portraits of Jesse Cure (left) and Herman Hensley (right)
11. Central hall, leading into chapel (first floor, rear ell).
12. Chapel with viewing room to the north (left).
13. Hall, second floor, showing original door opening converted into window.
14. North second floor room.

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Photographs

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15. Second floor room, rear ell, with preparatory/embalming room at right.
16. Preparatory/embalming room.
17. Limestone steps leading into basement/root cellar from enclosed porch/summer kitchen. According to legend, this is where the runaway slaves were hidden. The floor joist at right has wood stops for the former "trap door"; a triangular-shaped strap hinge is found between the stops.
18. Martinsville Telephone Company, northeast view.
19. Martinsville Telephone Company, interior, east front room: former office, current insurance office.
20. Martinsville Telephone Company, interior, west rear room: former equipment storage, current lounge for funeral home.