

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY
NOV 28 1975
RECEIVED
DATE ENTERED JUN 3 1976

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
 * * D. W. Griffith House
AND/OR COMMON
Same

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
206 North Fourth Street
CITY, TOWN
LaGrange
STATE
Kentucky
VICINITY OF

COUNTY
Oldham
CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
04
CODE
185

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input 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
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Judith and Jerry R. Nigh
STREET & NUMBER
206 North Fourth Street
CITY, TOWN
LaGrange
STATE
Kentucky

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Oldham County Courthouse
STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN
LaGrange
STATE
Kentucky

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
Survey of Historic Sites in Kentucky
DATE
Supplement 1975
DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS
Kentucky Heritage Commission
CITY, TOWN
401 Wapping Street
STATE
Kentucky

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Located on the southwest corner of Fourth and Madison Street in an older residential area of LaGrange, five or six blocks from the center of town, the Griffith House appears much the same as when owned by the Griffith family. It is a two-story frame Victorian house with windows of irregular size and spacing. The irregular plan reflects the relationships of the interior spaces. A two-story porch at the present main entrance appears to be a later addition or simplification of the original. The house would appear rather stark if it were not for the turned spindle railing and arched trim accenting the balcony and the "gingerbread" Victorian trim within the gable of the projecting wing.

The house underwent extensive remodeling in the 1950's when it was compartmentalized, but has since been turned back into a single residence. It is presently being remodeled by the current owners, who hope to restore it to the period when it was owned by the Griffiths. As it is now the front entrance leads into a hall with a stairway at the far end leading to the second floor. To the immediate left of the entrance hall is a room once used as a library. To the right is a parlor and dining room. At the center back is the kitchen. There are four rooms on the second floor. The house is painted white, as it was when owned by Griffith.

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 type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)		
Film						

SPECIFIC DATES circa 1905 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Sue and Charles Smith

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Few names in the development of the film are as important as that of David Wark Griffith, born in Oldham County, Kentucky, in 1875. Griffith's achievements as a cinema film director during the first two decades of the twentieth century include the development, with his cameraman G. W. "Billy" Bitzer, of techniques such as the close-up, long shot, "switchback" or parallel montage for suspension, fade-in, fade-out, soft focus, back lighting, tinting, rapid cutting, mist photography, and the moving camera. Such technical achievements freed the motion picture from the spatial limitations of the stage, "re-creating a new and unique art form, able to control and use time, space, and movement for its own visual and dramatic ends " (DAB, p. 349).

As significant for the diversification and expansion of the possibilities of the film as his technical innovations, was his treatment of the motion picture for purposes other than mere entertainment. The Birth of a Nation (1915) and Intolerance (1917), considered two of the most influential films in motion-picture history, established the film as a medium capable of artistic excellence and historical significance (DAB, p. 349).

In 1948, some thirty years after the release of The Birth of a Nation, Griffith died in relative obscurity in a second-rate Hollywood hotel. As stipulated in his will, his body was flown back to Kentucky and buried in the family plot at Centerfield, eight miles south of LaGrange. Griffith had always considered Kentucky his home. On registers of hotels in many foreign countries may be found his signature and address "David Wark Griffith, LaGrange, Kentucky," regardless of where he happened to be living at the time. During most of his working life he lived almost wholly in hotels. In later years he owned two properties in California (a ranch in San Fernando and a residence on Peck Drive in Beverly Hills), but made little use of them. A much greater attachment was to the house in LaGrange, which he purchased in 1913 for his mother and sister whom he visited often. It was to this house he brought his second wife in 1936 where they lived for three years. It is the residence most closely associated with the noted director and his family.

Griffith was born on a farm not far from LaGrange at Floyds Fork, described locally as a wide place in the road, between Centerfield and Beard's Station (name changed in 1910 to Crestwood). Griffith's father, Jacob Griffith, whom his son idolized, was a man who pursued various occupations, none with any degree of diligence. He practiced medicine, fought in the Mexican War, spent two years in California during the Gold Rush, served in the

(continued)

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

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10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY 1 acre

UTM REFERENCES

A

1	6
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6	41	1	05
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4	25	2	1	4	0
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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

B

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ZONE EASTING NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Gloria Mills

July, 1975

ORGANIZATION

Kentucky Heritage Commission

DATE

STREET & NUMBER

401 Wapping Street

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Frankfort,

STATE
Kentucky

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

Eldred W. Meeter

TITLE

SHPO

DATE

11-24-75

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

Acting

[Signature]

DATE

6/3/96

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST

DATE

6-2-76

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

RBR for WJM 6-2-76

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The Griffith house has a typical, but nevertheless interesting, late 19th-century floor plan, which is being restored from the affects of conversion of the one-family dwelling to apartments in the mid-1940s. The interior layout is reflected in the somewhat irregular exterior. A central hall entered from the formal porch is the focal point of all the other rooms, many of which open off it. A reconstructed three-flight stair provides vertical circulation and visual interest. The formal living room is a separate compartment in the southeast corner of the first floor. A less formal library opens off the hall in the northeast corner, adjacent to the dining room, which projects beyond the plane of the wall of the library and of the laundry at the northwest corner. The kitchen, with its pantries, opens off the dining room and onto a small back porch. Similarly, on the upper story, the bedrooms, one of which was replaced by a bath (supposedly by Griffith himself) rotate around the hall.

The woodwork, much of which has had to be reinstated or reconstructed, is also of a typical late 19th-century type--one which, curiously, resembles a machine-made version of the early 19th-century Federal-style reeded frames with concentric corner blocks. The doors throughout have five horizontal panels. Wherever possible, the present owners are using the existing millwork. Otherwise, they are obtaining similar features from houses of the period and installing them to duplicate the originals.

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D. W. Griffith House

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Kentucky Legislature 1853- 1855, and was a colonel in the Kentucky cavalry during the Civil War. In 1848 Griffith married Mary Oglesby and the couple moved into her father's house. A cottage was built on the grounds for them, which was later razed and a larger four-room house built for the growing family (Henderson, D. W. Griffith, pp. 17, 23).

The Griffiths were to have a difficult time financially. The war left them impoverished and, after Jacob's death in 1882, his wife sold the house and was forced to move to a small farm in nearby Shelby County. Soon afterward she moved with her children to Louisville where she ran a boarding house. Because of their lack of means, David, although bright and an avid reader, was forced to leave high school and seek employment.

As a young man Griffith planned to be a writer-dramatist. He was attracted to the theater and joined an amateur theatrical company in 1895. For the next ten years or so he earned his living as an itinerant stock company actor, playing bit parts throughout the United States. His first contact with the motion-picture industry was in 1908 in New York when he was paid for story ideas by the Edison Company and the Biograph Company. He was also used as a bit actor. In June 1908 he was offered a trial assignment to direct for the Biograph Company. His first films were successful and Biograph hired him as its principal director. During his years with the studio (1908-1913), he demonstrated an increased mastery of the motion-picture medium. Griffith became known as a skilled judge and trainer of actors, developing into stars such players as Mary Pickford, Lillian and Dorothy Gish, Henry B. Walthall, Mae Marsh, and Blanche Sweet. As a director, Griffith pioneered a new style of acting, emotion revealed by more restrained movements and subtle expressions rather than the grandiose gestures characteristic of stage actors at the time (DAB, p. 348).

Griffith left Biograph in 1913 and joined Reliance-Majestic where in 1914 he formulated the most daring and ambitious of his films, The Birth of a Nation. Released in 1915, it was the longest (12 reels) and most expensive film produced up to that time and proved to be perhaps the most controversial film of the first half of the twentieth century. It dealt with the general period of the Civil War and aroused some ill feeling among Negroes for his portrait of Blacks, which they felt was biased, and the glorification of the Ku Klux Klan. The picture proved an enormous popular, critical, and financial success with white audiences.

Griffith left Reliance-Majestic in 1915 to join with Harry Aiken's Triangle Company or Fine Arts Studio (Henderson, pp.159, 165). It was at this point that Griffith attempted an even more ambitious epic--four historical epochs and places were portrayed, tracing

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the history of prejudice and intolerance through the ages. "Although not as popular as The Birth of a Nation, Intolerance had greater influence on other film makers, who studied the remarkable build-up of dramatic tension through parallel cutting in the modern American sequence, and the vast grandeur and crowd movement of the Babylonian shots " (DAB; p. 349).

In 1918, after Triangle's collapse, Griffith attempted producing films independently (Henderson, p. 181). One year later he joined with Charlie Chaplin, Mary Pickford, and Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., to form United Artists. Among Griffith's more important films during this period are Broken Blossoms (1919), a subtle film emphasizing atmosphere, lighting, and pictorial composition, and Orphans of the Storm (1921). His films were not financially successful and from 1924 to his retirement in 1931 he worked as a studio director. His last picture was aptly entitled the The Struggle.

Griffith married twice. The first marriage to Linda Averson in 1903 ended in divorce. He married a second time in 1936 and brought his new wife, Evelyn Baldwin, to live in the frame house on Fourth and Madison Streets that he bought for his mother. The house had been built in 1905 by Sue and Charles Smith for use as a residence and funeral home. Griffith's mother died in 1914 but his sister Ruth had continued to reside here until her death in 1934. Griffith's brother and his family, which included his wife Mary and a daughter, lived on in the home after Ruth's death. He spent his time writing and making improvements on the old home and appeared content with life in LaGrange. "Each morning he walked from his house the five or six blocks to the center of the town where he would insist on treating everyone who happened to be in the Sweet Shoppe to coffee. In the afternoon he regularly visited the law office of J. Ballard Clark, with whom he would discuss anything and everything, but particularly enjoyed reminiscing about his father " (Bridwell, p. 200). He moved back to California in 1939 in anticipation of finding work. However, his dream of a job directing in films never materialized. Divorced in 1947, he died the following year.

The residence in LaGrange was sold by Griffith in 1940, although Griffith's niece continued to live on in the house until 1950 when it was again sold and compartmentalized. In 1974 the property was purchased by the present owners and is currently being converted back into a single residence.

The passage of time seems only to increase Griffith's stature within the film world. As the first important creative artist in motion pictures, "his influence on world cinema was enormous, ranging from the young Soviet directors, who screened Intolerance over and over before making

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their first film, to the many Hollywood directors who worked for Griffith or studied his techniques. His epics The Birth of a Nation and Intolerance laid the foundation for an entertainment industry centered in Hollywood that sent its films to every country, shaping images and habits throughout the world " (DAB, p. 351).

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