

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form

MAY 31 1989

NATIONAL  
REGISTER

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 Beem, David Enoch, House  
other names/site number Beem Mansion, The Hill

2. Location

street & number 635 West Hillside Avenue N/A  not for publication  
city, town Spencer N/A  vicinity  
state IN code IN county Owen code 119 zip code 47460

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>3</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>3</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.

Signature of certifying official

*John T. Esteb*

Date

5-4-89

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.

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:)

*Patricia Andrews*

7/13/89

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: institutional housing

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Italianate

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation STONE: limestonewalls BRICKSTONE: limestoneroof STONE: slateother ASPHALT

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**Describe present and historic physical appearance.**

Setting high upon a hill overlooking the town of Spencer, Indiana, the Beem Mansion is an outstanding example of High Victorian Italianate architecture (photo 1). Mr. Beem selected a ten acre site overlooking the town from which he could view and be viewed by the town. The prominence of this site is matched by the prominence of the building design which was emphasized by a tower at the front entrance visible to most of the town. The elegant two story brick house rests on a low rusticated stone foundation. The light buff Indiana limestone contrasts pleasantly with the warm pinkish red bricks which were formed and fired on the site. There is a full basement and an attic. The brick tower at the central entrance rose one full story above the main entrance and was capped with a steeply pitched mansard roof which contrasted with the low sloped hipped slate roofs on the main house (photo 2). The tower has since been reduced to a low wood monitor with small window vents (photo 3).

The rear or north wing of the house while original and of the same brick as the main body of the house has a simpler steep pitched roof and lacks the embellishments both in window trim and cornice work of the main body of the house (photo 4).

The roughly "T" shaped plan is organized around the entrance tower. The library at the west of the tower projects forward while the parlor is set back from the tower at its east side (photo 5). To the rear, or north, of the first floor one passes through the hall beside the dining room to the kitchen.

The informal configuration of the floor plan allowed for the placement of four covered porches which occur roughly at the extreme corners of the plan (photo 5). These porches replace the original chamfered post arcaded porches.

The stone framed arched entrance door has the date 1874 prominently carved at the head. The stonework is highly detailed and embraces a leaded art glass transom. The doors are carved wood with glass panels (photo 6 and 7).

**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

Period of Significance  
1874

Significant Dates  
1874

Cultural Affiliation  
N/A

Significant Person  
N/A

Architect/Builder  
Unknown

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

The house, site and prominence of the Beem Mansion mirror the significance of the Beem family in the formation of the town of Spencer. The Beem legacy to the town began with Daniel Beem and his family settling in Owen County ca. 1816. Their original campsite is now their final resting place in Riverside Cemetery. The family donated the land for the Owen County seat, Spencer. By 1880, Daniel's son, Levi, had become the richest man in Owen County. Levi organized the First National Bank of Spencer. Levi's son, David, was the first university graduate from Owen County. David Beem upon graduation from DePauw College, entered the practice of law in Spencer. He became noted for his political speeches and helped to organize a volunteer militia from Owen County to serve in the Union Army during the Civil War. David served as First Sargeant and later as Captain of Company H of the 14th Volunteer Infantry. After his return to civilian life, David Beem was a noted orator and politician. He served as a member of the Indiana Republican Speaker's Bureau. As a businessman, David organized the Spencer Ice Company, a bedstead factory, and the Spencer County Pork Packing Company. David Beem was also vice president of the Board of Trustees of Purdue University.

In 1874, David built the "House on the Hill" which became one of Spencer's best known and best seen landmarks. This outstanding example of High Victorian Italianate architecture was built for one of Owen County's most prominent business and Civic leaders. The merchant-lawyer constructed the estate on a western portion of the Beem's family original land grant. The house constructed in 1874 became stylistically the most significant house in Spencer and was referred to by the townspeople as the "The Hill". Built in a large park-like setting high above the town, Beem created a baronial estate complete with his own pond and private island about 200 yards from the main house. During the winter, Beem invited townspeople to skate on the pond. A watershed was constructed on top of the hill to fill cisterns; thus allowing the Beem Mansion to become the first house in Spencer with running water.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

- Beem, David Enoch. Papers (1837-1923). Indiana Historical Society Library. Indianapolis, Indiana.
  - Beem, Levi Amasa. "My Indiana Heritage". (Unpublished Manuscript). Spencer/Owen County Library. 1964(?).
  - Beem, Levi. Papers (1821-1889). Indiana Historical Society Library. Indianapolis, Indiana.
  - Blanchard, Charles (editor). History of Owen County. "Tales of Pioneers Series." Volumes 1 & 2. Spencer Chamber of Commerce. Owen Litho Service, Inc. Spencer, Indiana, 1962.
- \_\_\_\_\_. "Captain Beem House." "Outdoor Indiana." Volume 6, Number 4, October 1962.

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 6 acres

**UTM References**

A 

1	6	5	1	9	9	0	0	4	3	4	8	8	0	0
Zone		Easting				Northing								

C 

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B 

Zone		Easting				Northing								

D 

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See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

A large concrete gate post, as now established, thence north 781.35 feet, thence east 334.5 feet to the half section line, thence south along said half section line 781.35 feet to the place of beginning, containing six (6) acres, more or less.

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

This is the historic property boundary.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Harriett O'Conner  
organization O'Conner Research Service date 8/26/88  
street & number 4451 N. Central Avenue telephone 317/283-5886  
city or town Indianapolis state Indiana zip code 46205

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 7 Page 1 Beem, Enoch House

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All windows are tall and narrow one-over-one double-hung sash with elaborate limestone hoods (photo 8). The only paired windows on the main facade are on the second story front bedroom which occurs over a brick bay with three windows which serve the parlor (photo 9). All other principle windows on the main facade are singles (photo 2).

Small windows between the brackets of the generous cornice serve the attic. The cornice, freize and brackets are white painted wood. The brackets were doubled at principle corners but these have been altered and are now all singular (photo 10).

The ornamental wood front porch is topped with a wood balustrade as is the bay (photo 5).

The Mansard of the tower had elaborate wood cornices both top and bottom. A low iron railing and flag pole capped the tower (photo 1). Three small brick chimneys punctuated the roof and they take on more importance today because of the lack of the tower.

The rusticated limestone base is only three courses high and is capped by a cut stone belt (photo 2).

The east facade is also characterized by twin windows over a brick bay. The window detailing, cornice work and trim are identical to the main facade. The west facade has twin bedroom windows over twin library windows. These windows occur within the projecting west wing (photo 10). The south porch on the west facade, which is entered from the library, matches the detailing of the front porch. A second porch at the north end was of simpler detailing and was topped by a steep sloped hipped roof. The windows in the facade behind this section of porch which serves the kitchen and servants bedroom upstairs have shallow brick arches with no ornamentation in keeping with the austere characteristics of the rear wing.

The north facade of the rear wing is likewise austere with two double-hung windows upstairs and rear entrance to the kitchen. A porch at the east side of this wing has been altered and has an asphalt shingle roof (photo 11).

The interior of the Beem Mansion contains eight rooms and four fireplaces (photo 12). There are high ceilings throughout the house--14 feet on the first floor and 12 feet on the second.

The first and second floors are planned around a hallway running the length of the house. Opening into this hallway on the first floor are the entrance vestibule on the south (which is also the base of the tower), the hallway leads past the library on the west and the parlor on the east, then past the dining room on the west and into the kitchen

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**Section number 7 Page 2 Beem, Enoch House

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at the north end of the house (photo 13 and 14). The kitchen has been remodeled and few traces remain of the pantry.

The second floor has three bedrooms, two on either side of the hallway plus one smaller servant's bedroom and a bath above the kitchen. A long elegantly carved open stairway leads from the first floor to the second (photo 15). This stair occurs within the hallways. There is a closed stairway leading from the first floor to the attic at the rear of the house. Another stair serves the basement from the kitchen.

Wood shutters remain at the windows (photos 16, 17 and 18). The main curved stair is original. The oak floors have patterned designs as illustrated in the photograph number 19. Plaster moldings enhance the ceilings throughout the house (photo 20).

There are two remaining out-buildings which also had been constructed in 1874 located on the grounds. One is located directly behind the house and is brick structure with a slate roof and stone steps. The original purpose of the building was to house the servants (photo 21). Today it has been converted into a garage with the entrance on the west side (photo 22).

Down a gentle slope to the east of the main house was a stone carriage house and stable with a slate roof and cupola. During the depression, the building was converted into an apartment and the cupola removed (photo 23).

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number 8 Page 1 Beem, Enoch House

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Financial reverses forced David Beem to sell the house in 1913. Although the house passed from owner to owner it has endured few alterations except for the removal of the tower ca.1968 and the remodeling of the kitchen interior and the porches. The basic integrity of the house has been maintained. The outbuildings were more dramatically altered on the interior but their basic form remains intact.

The Beem Mansion remains today a landmark in this small Indiana county seat.

**United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places  
Continuation Sheet**

Section number   9   Page   1   Beem, Enoch House

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Kline, Dixie. Fact and Folklore of Owen County. 2 volumes, 1976

Layman, Dorothy. Interview April 1988 in Spencer, Indiana.

Stratford, J. C. Spencer and Gems of "Sweet Owen". 1890.