

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED **DEC 8 1976**
DATE ENTERED **AUG 29 1977**

**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

Benjamin Loers House

AND/OR COMMON

LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

2046 Swantown Road

___ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Oak Harbor

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

2nd - Lloyd Meeds

STATE

Washington

___ VICINITY OF

CODE

53

COUNTY

Island

CODE

029

CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- ___ DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- ___ STRUCTURE
- ___ SITE
- ___ OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- ___ PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- ___ BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- ___ IN PROCESS
- ___ BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- ___ UNOCCUPIED
- ___ WORK IN PROGRESS

ACCESSIBLE

- ___ YES: RESTRICTED
- ___ YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- ___ AGRICULTURE
- ___ COMMERCIAL
- ___ EDUCATIONAL
- ___ ENTERTAINMENT
- ___ GOVERNMENT
- ___ INDUSTRIAL
- ___ MILITARY
- ___ MUSEUM
- ___ PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- ___ RELIGIOUS
- ___ SCIENTIFIC
- ___ TRANSPORTATION
- ___ OTHER:

OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Donald Pease

STREET & NUMBER

2046 Swantown Road

CITY, TOWN

Oak Harbor

___ VICINITY OF

STATE

Washington

LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Auditor's Office, Island County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Coupeville

STATE

Washington

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Washington State Inventory of Historic Places

DATE

September, 1974

___ FEDERAL STATE ___ COUNTY ___ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Washington State Parks & Recreation Commission

CITY, TOWN

Olympia

STATE

Washington

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input 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

One of the largest islands in the country, Whidbey Island is located on Washington's extensive inland waterway at the head of Puget Sound. The town of Oak Harbor is situated on a sheltered cove in the northeastern portion of the Island. It functions as a service center for the local agricultural community as well as for the Island's rapidly expanding U. S. Naval Air Station. The Benjamin Loers House was constructed in 1911 approximately one-half mile southwest of Oak Harbor on a crest of land which overlooks Saratoga Passage to the east. The house stands at the intersection of Swantown Road, Ft. Nugent Road, and State Route 525. The structure is set back from the roadway with its chief elevation facing south. The house and its surrounding lawn are enclosed on four sides by shrubbery and general vegetation, a stand of fir trees, and an orchard.

The Loers House is a two-story frame residence exhibiting characteristics of both the Queen Anne and the Neo-Classical Revival styles. The structure was virtually unaltered until a recent renovation by the present owners, in which the historic architectural fabric was successfully retained. The house is a basic T-shape in plan with intersecting gable-roofed units. The roof line is defined by an undecorated frieze and boxed cornice, returned on the gabled elevations. Several elements add considerable variation to the essentially simple massing of the house: a single corner turret crowned with an onion dome, a full width front porch and balcony which wrap around the turret, a ground floor bay window on the east elevation, and a narrow one and one-half story, gabled unit to the rear of the main body of the house.

The Loers House rests on a series of above-grade wooden posts supported on poured cement blocks. The major portion of this foundation system is hidden behind a scored cement facing. The first and second story walls are sheathed with clapboarding. The gables and uppermost portions of the turret are shingled in a pattern of irregular courses. Surfaces are further distinguished by corner boards, and by a single board fascia which creates a pediment within the gable of the south elevation. Vertical and horizontal fasciae divide the curved surfaces of the turret into distinct rectangular units. Presently the roofing material consists of asbestos shingles. Wooden shingles which originally covered the main roof surfaces and onion dome were removed and replaced some time ago.

A variety of openings occur on each facade of the Loers House. On the whole, windows consist of one-over-one light, double-hung sash. Balancing the main entryway on the front elevation of the house is a broad window with a fixed plate glass sash and a wide, leaded-glass transom. This arrangement is repeated in the center face of the dining-room bay window on the east elevation. Recessed within the gable of the front facade is a mullioned attic window with multi-paned sash. The door which provides access to the balcony at second-floor level on the same elevation is of particular interest for it exhibits hand-carved, whimsical designs of various stylistic origins.

The full-width verandah and balcony are major architectural features of the front elevation of the Loers House. Both elements wrap around the corner turret and terminate on the east facade. The foundation posts which support the raised verandah are hidden by latticework. Ionic columns of wood with terra cotta capitals support the broad balcony above. The columns are tied together at verandah level by a simple, squared post balustrade. This railing design is repeated along the outer edges of the balcony with sturdy squared posts corresponding to the columns below.

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The corner turret with its rakish onion dome is also a dominant aspect of the mansion's architecture and is chiefly responsible for its Queen Anne effect. Double-hung window sash at first and second-floor levels feature curved plate glass, some of which has been recently replaced. The base of the onion dome itself forms a broad collar, or skirt, which serves to divert rainwater from the walls of the turret. At the peak of the onion dome is a copper finial which replaces an original decorative ball of an unknown white metal.

Alterations to the mansion's exterior have been minimal, and non-obtusive in nature. During the recent renovation of 1973-1974, the balcony flooring was covered with protective fiber glass sheeting. An extension of approximately three feet was made to the rear of the house, in the replacement of a small back porch. The original exterior color scheme, consisting of two shades of brown with grey trim, had apparently remained continuously exposed since 1911. The recent renovation therefore included repainting, with a change from the original color scheme to one of Williamsburg blue with contrasting white trim.

The grounds surrounding the Loers House have undergone certain changes over the years; however, a number of original features remain intact. The mature stand of fir trees to the west of the house, beyond the driveway, were planted by Benjamin Loers himself in 1911. The same fact holds true for the extensive orchard to the east of the mansion. These original plantings include plum, cherry, apple, and pear trees. A small lilly and gold-fish pond at the southeast corner of the house, also installed by Loers, has been recently filled in. A large barn and an automobile garage for Benjamin Loers' new car (1911) are no longer standing. A wood shed and below-grade root cellar with poured cement walls remains standing directly to the rear of the house. A modern garage has been appended to this structure.

The interior of the Loers House has been altered to a certain extent to accommodate the modern-day needs of the present owners. During the 1973-1974 renovations, the kitchen was enlarged through the removal of partitions which originally formed an adjoining bathroom. A modern bath and laundry room were created to the rear of the kitchen through the reconstruction and extension of an existing enclosed back porch.

Toward the front of the mansion, the parlor and dining room are partially separated by Ionic columns on continuous low pedestals. The capitals atop these column shafts are cast in terra-cotta. Originally dark-stained and varnished, the woodwork here and in most locations throughout the house was painted white in the recent renovation. All elements of woodwork were fabricated from local fir. Patterns which reoccur consistently in each room include doors with five horizontal panels, and door surrounds with simple cap entablatures. Parlor and dining room walls were originally hung with a brown oatmeal wallpaper. This has been entirely removed and all walls have been painted. An existing fireplace in the living room is not original to the house, but was inserted at an interim date. A new wooden mantlepiece and marble facing has been installed by the present owners.

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Other first-floor spaces include a room which adjoins the dining room and kitchen and originally served as the bedroom of Benjamin and Mrs. Loers. This room was recently converted to a study. Adjoining the parlor at the front of the house is the entrance and stairhall. An imposing open stringer staircase was stripped of its varnish and restained, leaving the natural surface of the wood exposed. The several newel posts of this staircase are classical in flavor - squared, panelled, and edged with egg-and-dart carvings. The balusters are simple squared posts, and the handrail is molded.

On the second floor some manipulation of partitions has occurred in the conversion of a rear bedroom into a three-room bath and dressing unit. The necessary additional woodwork was custom milled to match original elements, including five-panel doors and surrounds.

FINEST DETAIL ALTERED
LETROUX
3.28.77

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 checked="" 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 checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1911 BUILDER/ARCHITECT William D. Rotschafer

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Benjamin Loers House was constructed in 1911 by William Rotschafer, a local architect-builder. In two major respects, the house has played a significant role in the physical development of central Whidbey Island. Historically, the mansion was built to serve as a retirement home for Benjamin Loers, a successful Whidbey Island dairy farmer. In the still-remote agricultural community which surrounded the town of Oak Harbor, the Loers House represented the area's most imposing architectural specimen, as well as one of the earliest residences equipped with such modern conveniences as indoor plumbing and electricity. The house demonstrates an unusual juxtaposition of the outmoded Queen Anne style with the more fashionable Neo-Classical Revival style.

Benjamin Loers, while still a resident of South Dakota, purchased a small package of land on Whidbey Island, in Washington's vast inland waterway. Upon arriving with his family in 1896, Loers found this property unsatisfactory and exchanged it for land upon which the present-day Swantown Road golf course is located. Here he operated a profitable dairy farm until his retirement in 1911. At that time Loers, his wife and five of their nine children moved to an 18½ acre property acquired by Loers specifically for his retirement years. On this property Loers erected a substantial residence for a total construction cost of \$5,200.

William Rotschafer, an architect from Holland, Michigan, was hired to design the house and, apparently, to supervise its construction as well. Rotschafer had retired to Whidbey Island to be near his son who served as a minister in the local Reform Church. Although Rotschafer's active career in the Midwest has not been thoroughly researched, he has been credited with the design of various churches, residences, and institutional buildings. In the town of Oak Harbor, Rotschafer erected several other houses, among them the Judson House and the Stallman House. Both of these were more modest and contemporary in character than the Victorian-flavored Loers mansion.

Benjamin Loers himself participated in the planning of his new home. He was given access to the drawings and plans which Rotschafer had accumulated in the course of his career. Loers' personal choice was an expansive, transitional style mansion with distinctive Queen Anne features. His insistence upon execution of the onion dome was reportedly a source of dismay to Mrs. Loers.

At the time of its construction, the Loers House boasted modern conveniences virtually unheard of in most area homes. Although the family initially relied upon gas lighting, electricity generated on the property was installed shortly thereafter. Indoor plumbing was designed into the new house as well. Water was stored in a tank on the hill to the rear of the house, and was conveyed to the kitchen and bathroom by gravity flow. A water heater in the bathroom, connected by coils to the stove in the adjoining kitchen, supplied hot water for the bathtub. Heating in the Loers House consisted of a simple combination of

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Personal interview: Winifred Loers Freund, daughter of Benjamin Loers, Sept. 15, 1976

The Seattle Times. "Blending the Old with the New". Sunday, October 27, 1974.

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,0	52,47,0,0	5,34,77,2,5
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

B			
	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

Florence K. Lentz

ORGANIZATION

Office of Archaeology & Historic Preservation

DATE

10/1/76

STREET & NUMBER

P. O. Box 1128

TELEPHONE

(206) 753-4116

CITY OR TOWN

Olympia

STATE

Washington

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

Arthur M. Steinhilber

TITLE

State Historic Preservation Officer

DATE

November 30, 1976

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

Florence K. Lentz

DATE

8/29/77

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

ATTEST:

Charles A. ...

DATE

8-2-77

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

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wood stove and heater in the kitchen and dining room, from which a certain amount of heat was transferred upstairs through large vents.

In 1911, the Loers House was stylistically something of an anachronism. The architectural composition is clearly controlled by the turret and onion dome of the south or front elevation. The asymmetry which these elements establish on the main facade, in combination with bay windows, decorative shingle siding, and, originally, a color scheme of contrasting browns and greys, convey the spirit of the Queen Anne style. The span of this style's popularity in the Pacific Northwest, from 1880-1900, indicates the relatively outdated character of the Loers House design.

On the other hand, the mansion exhibits features of the more fashionably contemporary Neo-Classical Revival. The plan is basically a T-shape with a simple gabled roof configuration. Such elements are in direct opposition to the complexities of massing which exemplified the Queen Anne style. Many other details of classical derivation can be identified: boxed cornice and frieze with returns on the gable, Ionic columns and simple squared balusters on the porch and balcony of the main facade, clapboard siding and cornerboards, and interior features such as Ionic columns and egg-and-dart ornament.

The juxtaposition of these two opposing styles is unusual in a structure of this date. Because elements of both styles are boldly and proficiently expressed, the transitional nature of the house's architecture is at once apparent. Benjamin Loer's choice of this particular design, drawn from the repertoire of Rotschafer's former work in the Midwest, helps to define the character and taste of Loers himself and suggests the relative isolation of Whidbey Island from architectural developments on the mainland.

The visual impact of the Loers House, at the time of its completion in 1911, was a powerful one. Situated high on a hill above the tiny settlement of Oak Harbor, the onion-domed mansion was an incongruous addition to the surrounding rural landscape. Today, the Loers House still commands an impressive view of Oak Harbor and Saratoga Passage. Thus far, it has escaped the fate of many older structures in Oak Harbor, where rapid development stemming from the growth of the U. S. Naval Air Station has altered the historic fabric of the town irreversibly.