

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
 NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

THEME Commerce and Industry

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**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 Eugene V. Debs House

AND/OR COMMON

Eugene V. Debs House

**2 LOCATION**

STREET &amp; NUMBER 451 North 8th Street

CITY, TOWN

Terre Haute

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

7th

STATE

Indiana

\_\_ VICINITY OF

CODE

18

COUNTY

Vigo

CODE

167

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input checked="" 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 type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME Eugene Victor Debs Foundation

STREET &amp; NUMBER

P. O. Box 843

CITY, TOWN

Terre Haute

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE

Indiana

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

COURTHOUSE, Registry of Deeds, ETC. Vigo County Courthouse (Recorders Office)

STREET &amp; NUMBER

3rd Street

CITY, TOWN

Terre Haute

STATE

Indiana

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE None

DATE

\_\_ FEDERAL \_\_ STATE \_\_ COUNTY \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 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		

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### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Eugene V. Debs House is a two-story frame structure that now appears very much as it did when Debs lived there. Apparently designed and originally furnished by Katherine Metzger, Debs lifelong companion, the house contained some nine major rooms, full basement and attic used as a storage area.

The house has seen numerous changes conducted by the various owners. In 1916, while the property was still owned by Mr. Debs, the original wooden porch was replaced with the present brick one. After the death of Mrs. Debs, the property was owned for ten years by Dr. John Shannon. No known changes took place during this period. Then in 1948 the property was acquired by the Tau Sigma Alpha Fraternity. The Fraternity immediately covered the original clapboard siding with wooden shingles. Changes were also made on the interior. In the basement the original coal bin was transformed into a bar and the basement into a lounge area, and initiation room. A shower was installed on the second floor. The attic was used as one massive bedroom for the total membership. In 1962 the property was sold to Mr. William Heck a local contractor, who converted the house into apartments. The original mantels were ripped from the walls and the hardwood floors covered with asphalt tile. Fortunately, the Eugene V. Debs Foundation, under the direction of Curtis Culver bought the property.

Since acquisition by the Debs foundation much has been done in restoring the first and second floors. The Foundation, for purposes of security, placed an apartment in the basement. It is used by the curator of the museum, presently Mr. Ned Bush. A modern heating and air conditioning system has also been installed.

Proceeding from the west entrance, one enters the reception hall. On the left is the parlor in which is located a beautiful handcarved oak mantel. Most of the furnishings in the house were not the direct property of Debs though most are connected with him in some way or another, and most are of Debs family provenience. To the east of the parlor is the library in which are located two beautiful built-in oak bookcases on either side of another interesting handcarved mantel. In this room is a fine parquet inlaid cabinet. Built by an inmate at the Federal Prison in Atlanta while Debs was there, it was the property of the warden and has 34,500 pieces of wood in 6 varieties. To the south of this room is the dining room. The dining room furniture was a present of Mr. Debs to his brother, Theodore. At the rear of the house on the first floor is the kitchen and pantry, the latter of which is converted into a public rest facility. In the kitchen are located various articles of Debs' parents, imported french wine jars from his father's store and his mother's pots and pans.

(Continued)

## 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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1890-1922

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Since the influence of labor leaders constitutes an integral aspect in the history of American industry, Eugene Victor Debs' career holds an unusually high place in the Nation's industrial history. It is as the founder of industrial unionism in this country that Debs required consideration. Whereas his espousal of Socialism accomplished little, his earlier efforts apropos of industrial unionism remain a landmark in the overall growth of American commerce and industry.

Eugene V. Debs lived in this house on 8th Street in Terre Haute from 1890 until his death in 1926. In 1875, Debs became a charter member and secretary of the Vigo Lodge Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen, and in 1880 was named Grand Secretary of the Brotherhood of Railway Firemen.

The leadership role of Debs in the union struggles of the 1890's is unquestionable. In August of 1893, Debs was active in the union when it struck the Great Northern Railway. After 18 days the railway granted the union's demands. In May of 1894 the famous Pullman strike began. As a result of his leadership-role, Debs, along with other union leaders, was jailed in August of that year. Again in 1895 Debs and other ARU leaders were jailed for contempt of court in connection with the Pullman strike. He remained in jail until November 22, 1895.

Although Debs was later a candidate for the presidency and an outspoken proponent of socialism, landmark status is primarily due to Debs' work in the organization of labor unions.

### BIOGRAPHY

Terre Haute, Indiana, was the birthplace and lifelong home of Eugene Victor Debs. Born on November 5, 1855, of parents who had migrated to America from Alsace, Debs acquired an early admiration and sympathy for the laboring class by reading Voltaire and Victor Hugo. The latter's novel Les Miserables, remained Debs' favorite book. He read and reread it until his death.

It was fortunate that Debs acquired a taste for reading when quite young, because he began to work when only fourteen. He worked in a factory, then as a foreman on a railroad, and then as clerk in a wholesale grocery store until 1875. The job that he always proudly remembered was his work as a foreman. And it led to his becoming a railroad union officer.

(Continued)

# 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Dictionary of American Biography.  
 Ginger, Ray, The Bending Cross (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1949).  
 Madison, Charles A., Critics and Crusaders (New York, 1948).  
 Painter, Floy R., That Man Debs and His Life Work (n. p., 1929).  
 Pelling, Henry, American Labor (Chicago, 1960).

# 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one acre  
 UTM REFERENCES

A	1 6	4 6 5 1 2 0	4 3 6 9 0 0 0	B			
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING		ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C				D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See Continuance Sheet)

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

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

# 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Joseph S. Mendinghall, Historian (original form submitted by Albert W. Banton, Jr.)

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

5/13/75

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

202-523-5464

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C. 20240

# 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 designated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

Designated: Nov 13, 1976 date

Boundary Certified: Henry J. Henry date

DATE: Dec 7, 1977 date

FOR NPS USE ONLY

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

DATE

4/24/78

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

(NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS)

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From the entrance hall an oak balustrade winds to the second floor. Here the original three bedrooms and Debs' study are located. The bedrooms have been named to honor famous personalities. The front, guest, bedroom, above the parlor is presently called the James Whitcomb Riley Room. Located here are mementoes of Debs' relationship with the Hoosier poet as well as campaign memorabilia of Debs' local, State, and national efforts. East of this room is the former master bedroom, now called the Workmen's Circle Room which contains various collections of Debs' articles. The same is true of the John L. Lewis Room at the top of the staircase. Located at the rear of the second level is the former maid's quarters which has been furnished with office furniture from the Debs' Terre Haute office.

Plans call for the development of the attic into a hall for civic use. On the east side (rear) of the house is a small commemorative garden with a foundation in the center. The foundation plans to erect bronze plaques to great labor leaders along the garden wall.

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Debs' charter membership in the Terre Haute unit of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Firemen dates from 1875. Even though no longer a fireman, he became the secretary of the lodge. In 1880, he became editor of the Brotherhood's national magazine and the order's secretary-treasurer. During the 1880's Debs at first opposed strikes and violence, placing greater hope in a cooperative approach to employers. His hopes proved unavailing, however. Furthermore, when he resigned from the union in 1892, Debs had also decided that craft unions could accomplish very little.

Dissatisfied with the efficacy of craft unions, Debs sought to create an industrial union for the railroad industry. Instead of having one union for the firemen, one for the engineers, and so on, and none for the unskilled workers, Debs wanted to bring all railroad laborers into one organization. Then, he believed, the working man could negotiate with the railroad industry.

Debs, acting upon his idea, succeeded, but his success led to failure. He initiated the organization of the American Railway Union in June 1893. In April 1894, James J. Hill announced a reduction of wages on the Great Northern Railroad. Debs' union struck. Eighteen days later Hill gave in. The victorious union gained national prominence, and by June 1894, the union counted 150,000 members. But before the American Railway Union could consolidate its gains, it became involved in the Pullman strike. The new union thus proved its loyalty to the working movement, but speeded its own destruction. Unable to cope with the adamant opposition of the employers, the application of the Federal injunction, and the arrival of soldiers, the strike finally collapsed. Debs, as a result of his defiance of the injunctions, was jailed for six months.

Jail proved to be no hardship, and Debs received a mammoth welcome when he returned to Chicago in November 1895. Over 100,000 people acclaimed him. The amazing popularity of the labor leader failed to help resuscitate the American Railway Union, however, and Debs finally ended his career on June 18, 1897. Before the union disbanded, though, "its spectacular success publicized and proved the virtues of industrial unionism."<sup>1</sup>

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1. Ray Ginger, The Bending Cross, (New Brunswick, New Jersey, 1949), p. 181.

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The demise of the American Railway Union came a half year after Debs had proclaimed his support for socialism. A humane, sympathetic, moral, and just person, Debs sought comfort and justice for all Americans. Disappointed and disillusioned by his union work, he could now see no other way to improve conditions than through socialism.

As a socialist, Debs ran for the presidency in 1900, 1904, 1908, 1912, and 1920. He was a magnetic speaker and his sincerity impressed more than just the members of his party. Debs also adhered to his convictions. After America's entry into the First World War, he still spoke out for what he thought was right. On June 16, 1918 he denounced the arrest of those accused of sedition. Four days later he was indicted for violating the Espionage Act and on September 14, 1918, was sentenced to a ten year term. Thus his last race for the White House in 1920 was made while in jail. The winner of the 1920 election, Warren G. Harding, pardoned Debs in 1921. Debs returned to Terre Haute where he lived until his death on October 20, 1922.

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The Eugene V. Debs House is located at 451 North 8th Street. The house sits on the second lot from the corner. The area around the Debs house has been severely encroached upon. Across Sycamore Street, Indiana State University has built a multi-story dormitory complex which now stands vacant due to a decrease in the student population.

The house sits on lot 39 and fronts on 8th Street. The northern, eastern and southern sides of the lot are bounded by a parking lot. The boundaries of the Debs property are indicated on the accompanying plat map labeled the Eugene V. Debs Grounds. In addition to this lot, the Foundation acquired ten feet of property on the north side of the lot up to the possible right-of-way for a widened Sycamore Street. As of the present, no work on the widening of Sycamore Street has begun.