

STATE OF INDIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
INDIANA HISTORIC SITES AND STRUCTURES INVENTORY

Additional Architectural Information

A. NAME John Roelker House C. NUMBER 82-196-0254  
B. ADDRESS 555 Sycamore Street  
D. UTM References 

1	6
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4	4	9	9	7	0
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4	2	0	2	8	0	0
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E.

When Roelker built this house in about 1858, he was virtually on the outskirts of the town. The foundry in which he was part owner was at the rear of the house on Fifth southeast to Main. The Wabash and Erie Canal bordered the foundry as it made its way to a terminal basin on the site of what eventually became the Vanderburgh County Courthouse (1888-90).

F. INFORMATION SOURCES Reflections.

G. PREPARED BY Douglas L. Stern

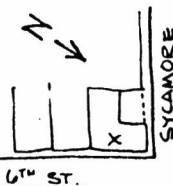
H. DATE 29 Jan 82

A. NAME  
D. ADDRESS 555 Sycamore Street  
G. SITE X STRUCTURE H. M. NHL NR HAER HABS  
B. COUNTY Vanderburgh  
E. TOWN/CITY Evansville  
F. QUAD SHEET Evansville South  
C. NUMBER 82-196-0254  
I. UTM Reference 16 49970 4202800

STATE OF INDIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
INDIANA HISTORIC SITES AND STRUCTURES INVENTORY

1. HISTORIC NAME JOHN H. ROELKER (?)  
2. OWNERSHIP: PUBLIC ☒ PRIVATE  
NAME Theo. Lodgeor / Doran Perdue  
ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_  
3. LOCATION NOTES Eastern Enlg. L16, Block 31  
4. VISIBLE FROM PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY: ☒ YES ☐ NO

SITE PLAN



IDENTIFICATION

5. USE PRESENT PAST  
Residential (sing.) ☐ ☒  
Residential (mult.) ☐ ☐  
Commerce ☐ ☐  
Industrial ☐ ☐  
Agriculture ☐ ☐  
Transportation ☐ ☐  
Organization ☐ ☐  
Military ☐ ☐  
Political ☐ ☐  
Unknown ☐ ☐  
Vacant ☐ ☐  
Other LAW OFFICES ☒ ☐

6. CATEGORY  
☒ DISTRICT  
☒ BUILDING(S)  
☐ STRUCTURE  
☐ SITE  
☐ OBJECT

8. ENDANGERED  
☒ NO  
☐ YES/BY WHAT \_\_\_\_\_

7. ACCESSIBLE  
☒ YES/RESTRICTED  
☐ YES/UNRESTRICTED  
☐ NO

9. DATE c. 1850-60?  
10. ARCHITECT/BUILDER \_\_\_\_\_

CLASSIFICATION/DATE

11. PERIODS: PREHISTORIC 17TH/18TH CEN. 1800-1880 ☒ 1861-1890 1900-PRESENT

12. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE

<input type="checkbox"/> Archeology-Prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> Conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> Law	<input type="checkbox"/> Sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> Archeology-Historic	<input type="checkbox"/> Economics	<input type="checkbox"/> Literature	<input type="checkbox"/> Social/Humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> Agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> Education	<input type="checkbox"/> Military	<input type="checkbox"/> Theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> Music	<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> Art	<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/Settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> Philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Specify) _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Commerce	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Industry	<input type="checkbox"/> Politics/Government	
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	<input type="checkbox"/> Invention	<input type="checkbox"/> Religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning	<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> Science	

SIGNIFICANCE

13. STYLE

☐ Federal  
☐ Greek Revival  
☐ Gothic Revival  
☐ Italianate  
☐ Second Empire  
☐ Stick Style/Eastlake  
☐ Queen Anne  
☐ Romanesque Revival  
☐ Colonial Revival  
☐ Neo-Classical  
☐ Bungalow  
☐ Vernacular  
☒ Other (Specify) NA

14. CONDITION

☐ EXCELLENT  
☒ GOOD  
☐ FAIR  
☐ DETERIORATED  
☐ RUINS  
☐ UNEXPOSED

16. SITE INTEGRITY

☒ ORIGINAL SITE  
☐ MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

17. OUTBUILDINGS/SECONDARY STRUCTURES

☐ NO  
☐ YES

15. ALTERATIONS

☐ UNALTERED  
☐ MINOR  
☒ MAJOR

18. IN ESTABLISHED HISTORIC DISTRICT

☒ NO  
☐ YES/NAME \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIPTION

19. DESCRIPTION OF ENVIRONMENT (NATURAL AND MAN-MADE) DOWNTOWN ROELKER'S EAGLE  
FOUNDRY WAS BEHIND IT, ON THE CANAL.

20. INFORMATION SOURCES TOWNSHIP ASSESSOR; REFLECTIONS UPON A CENTURY  
OF ARCHITECTURE.

21. PREPARED BY NANCY J. LONG 22. DATE 9/7/77

1. D "L" SHAPE
2. C 2 STORIES
3. D 4 BAYS
4. C-S COMMON BOND BRICK, PAINTED. STONE AROUND BOTTOM IS RECENT.
5. B
6. C NONE
7. A FRONT STEPS
8. I A ROLLED ROOFING
9. K GABLE W/ HALF GABLE AT REAR
10. A-3 FLUSH GABLE CHIMNEY
11. D BRICK
12. I ALTERED-COMpletely COVERED W/ ROOFING MATERIAL
13. A CLOSE EAVES
14. \_\_\_\_\_
15. N PLAIN PARAPET GABLE, IRREGULAR
16. E TILE TRIM
17. C-A NONE
18. A FLAT WINDOWS
19. B-1 PLAIN LINTELS ADDITIONS HAVE BEEN MADE
20. A PLAIN SIDES TO THE REAR
21. H STONE LINTELS, BRICK SIDES
22. A STONE SILLS (2ND STORY)
23. B DOUBLEHUNG WINDOWS
24. A-6, B-6
25. B-7 2nd FLOOR WINDOWS SHORTER
26. B-2 RIGHT ENTRANCE
27. A FLAT DOOR OPENING
28. B-1 STONE LINTEL
29. \_\_\_\_\_
30. \_\_\_\_\_
- 31.
32. \_\_\_\_\_
33. \_\_\_\_\_
34. \_\_\_\_\_
35. C UNKNOWN

## NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

Substantive Review

EVALUATION / RETURN SHEET (Downtown Evansville 1991B)

Property: Boelker, John H. House  
State, County: IN, Vanderburgh  
Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_Working No. 560/82-1506

Fed. Reg. Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Due: 6/17/82-7/14/82

Action: \_\_\_\_\_

ACCEPT \_\_\_\_\_

RETURN 7/1/82

REJECT \_\_\_\_\_

photos \_\_\_\_\_

maps \_\_\_\_\_

- \_\_\_\_\_ resubmission  
 \_\_\_\_\_ nomination by person or local government  
 \_\_\_\_\_ owner objection  
 \_\_\_\_\_ appeal

Substantive Review: \_\_\_\_\_ sample \_\_\_\_\_ request \_\_\_\_\_ appeal ☒ NR decisionReviewer's comments: Statement of significance is weak. Additional info. on changes and additions is needed.Recom./Criteria ReturnReviewer L. McClellandDiscipline Arch HistDate 7.1.82

\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: ☒ technical corrections cited below  
☒ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name \_\_\_\_\_

2. Location \_\_\_\_\_

3. Classification \_\_\_\_\_

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
	Public Acquisition	Accessible	

4. Owner of Property \_\_\_\_\_

5. Location of Legal Description \_\_\_\_\_

6. Representation in Existing Surveys \_\_\_\_\_

has this property been determined eligible? \_\_\_\_\_ yes \_\_\_\_\_ no

7. Description \_\_\_\_\_

Condition		Check one	Check one
_____ excellent	_____ deteriorated	_____ unaltered	_____ original site
_____ good	_____ ruins	_____ altered	_____ moved date _____
_____ fair	_____ unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- \_\_\_\_\_ summary paragraph  
 \_\_\_\_\_ completeness  
 \_\_\_\_\_ clarity  
☒ alterations/integrity  
 \_\_\_\_\_ dates  
 \_\_\_\_\_ boundary selection

Please date and describe additions and alterations.

## 8. Significance

Period \_\_\_\_\_ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates \_\_\_\_\_ Builder/Architect \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

- ☒ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☐ applicable criteria
- ☒ justification of areas checked
- ☒ relating significance to the resource
- ☒ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

Please strengthen the statement of significance by explaining in more specific detail: Roelker's local importance as foundry owner; the role of foundry as it enhances importance of owner's residence and as it constituted a major 19th century industrial architectural merit in context of mid-19th century residential development locally.

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

## 10. Geographical Data

Address of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

USGS Reference \_\_\_\_\_

please provide

Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Form Prepared By

## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is

\_\_\_\_ national \_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature \_\_\_\_\_

Title \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

## 13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

B. McClelland

Signed Braham

Date 2-1-82

Phone: 202 272-3504

Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet



**STATE OF INDIANA  
DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES  
INDIANA HISTORIC SITES AND STRUCTURES INVENTORY**

Additional Architectural Information

**A. NAME** John H. Roelker House **C. NUMBER** 82-196-00254  
**B. ADDRESS** 555 Sycamore Street  
**D. UTM References** 116 4499710 4202800

**E.** 19:

The John Henry Roelker House is significant for three reasons. First, the small dwelling is one of only two ante-bellum residences left in the Downtown. It is a solitary reminder of the manner of construction prevalent locally in the late-1850s before the advent of more pretentious architectural styles. Second, the dwelling had associations with an industry important to understanding the commerce of the city--namely iron work. Moreover, the foundry established by the property's builder behind his dwelling illustrated the evolution of the Downtown area from a locus containing varied land uses to one far more specialized and less industrial. The third basis of significance is the property's association with John Roelker, a successful early businessman and prominent local politician.

John Henry Roelker (b. 1816; Osnabruck, Hanover) was one of the smaller number of Germans to arrive in America before the first substantial wave of immigration in the late 1840s. Roelker landed in Maryland in 1835, making his way westward to Pittsburgh, Louisville and then St. Louis. By 1840, Roelker was living in Cincinnati's substantial German-born community and working for the first time in the stove business. His rise through the ranks of the foundry was gradual, but by 1854 he had accumulated enough capital "with savings as a result of his thrift and economy" to go out on his own. In that year he traveled to Evansville, where he had already begun assembling land in 1852. Roelker went through an early partnership and in 1858 became the senior partner of the Eagle Foundry, soon to be one of the city's most prosperous producers of stoves, hollow-ware, store and house fronts, and the like. The proprietorship of Eagle Foundry included one Henry Blount from 1860 to 1869, the same Henry Blount who retired from his successful iron plow business in about 1885 to live at his Washington, DC, residence, Dunbarton Oaks. Roelker's Eagle Foundry found success early in the history of the city's commerce as it tapped Evansville's growing markets in the South and West (principally, for Roelker, Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, Missouri, Arkansas, and Kansas). The city's selection as a Port of Entry in 1856 coincided with Roelker's ascendancy and illustrated Evansville's hegemony in the

(CONTINUED)

**F. INFORMATION SOURCES** History of Evansville, J P Elliott, 1897; 1888 Panoramic  
View of Evansville; A Biographical Directory of the Indiana General Assembly.  
Vol. I, 1816-1899. Courier and Evansville Daily Journal, 10 June 1892;  
Sunday Courier and Press, 19 March 1972.

**G. PREPARED BY** Douglas L Stern **H. DATE** 07 December 1982 (Amended)

FEB 23 1984

trade of the region.

The year that Roelker assumed senior partnership at Eagle Foundry was very likely the year in which he constructed his dwelling at the corner of Sycamore and Sixth streets. In February of 1858, Roelker purchased the land at the corner for \$600 from one of the men who may have recruited him to Evansville in the first place, Fred W. Brinkmeier, an early business partner. By 1860 (the next recorded assessment) the value assigned to land remained \$600 while the value of the improvement was listed as \$1500, the cost of a substantial dwelling in pre-war Evansville. The house has all of the physical characteristics indicative of mid-century construction: Gabled roof (instead of the later flat roof preferred for urban building lots); small scale; the arrangement of the facade into four bays; corbelling beneath the eaves; 6/6 windows; an open rear gallery; and old brick. An 1875 construction date for the dwelling rumored recently cannot be supported by any assessment or mortgage records, by the occupation of the person credited with the 1875 building date (a coachman), or by the probability of retardataire building practices.

The Roelker House is the last intact vestige of Downtown buildings connected with the Wabash-Erie Canal, an enormous public project which rose and fell rapidly in the first half of the 19th century. A few industries such as the Eagle Foundry located on the canal route as it made its way down Fifth Street toward a terminal basin on the site of what would later become the Vanderburgh County Courthouse (1888-91). The canal never managed to make much difference in the success of Roelker's business, however, for it effectively closed in the 1860s. Nevertheless, the canal project presents a significant social and economic event in the history of the city and state, and Roelker's house is virtually the last intact evidence of its existence in the Downtown.

Roelker himself was a significant personage in the history of the city, and his dwelling at Sixth and Sycamore is the only physical association left. His political contributions to the city and, to a lesser extent, the state, were considerable. True to the profile of early German immigrants, Roelker was a Republican. He served seven terms beginning in 1858--the year of his dwelling's construction--through 1872 as a member of the Evansville City Council. His involvement in local politics came at a time when city-wide seats were still being filled by non-Germans (a series of German mayors came to office beginning with the second wave of immigration in the 1880s) while ward representation was more closely allied with ethnic groups. In 1881, Roelker was elected to the State Legislature as a representative from Vanderburgh County for one term. "He was an earnest republican," noted Roelker's obituary, "and might have been the recipient of higher honors from his party but preferred to give his whole time and attention to the development of his business in which he so magnificently succeeded."



19. AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE: Specify the significance for each area checked

ATTACH  
NEGATIVE  
ENVELOPE  
HERE

<input type="checkbox"/> Aboriginal	15:
<input type="checkbox"/> Arts	The Roelker House is essentially L-planned with a partially
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Architecture	enclosed side gallery. It is brick constructed and stands two
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commerce	stories in height. A saddleback roof forms side gables. The
<input type="checkbox"/> Communications	modified side hall plan is denoted on the four bay facade, with
<input type="checkbox"/> Community Planning	three double-hung, 6/6 windows on the first floor with an entrance
<input type="checkbox"/> Education	on the NW side and with four corresponding openings above. An interior
<input type="checkbox"/> Engineering	end chimney is apparent on the Sycamore Street elevation. The common
<input type="checkbox"/> Environs/Neighborhoods	bond brick is white-painted. The only significant exterior alteration
<input type="checkbox"/> Exploration/Settlement	has been the fairly recent application of a rustic-looking limestone
<input type="checkbox"/> Humanities	watertable. The windows have simple stone trim. The approximate acreage
<input type="checkbox"/> Indian	of the site is .09 acre.
<input type="checkbox"/> Landscape Architecture	
<input type="checkbox"/> Military	
<input type="checkbox"/> Politics/Government	
<input type="checkbox"/> Religion	
<input type="checkbox"/> Science/Technology	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Social/Ethnicity	
<input type="checkbox"/> Transportation	
<input type="checkbox"/> Vernacular/Construction	
<input type="checkbox"/> Other	

19: See Additional Architectural Information form.

20. INFORMATION SOURCES Deed records; Assessment records; city directories; Pigeon Township plats; 1880 Atlas of Vander-  
burgh County; Census rolls; Industries of Evansville, 1880; Evansville and Its Men of Mark, 1974; History of (cont'd)

21. SURVEYOR Douglas L. Stern 22. DATE 07 December 1982 (Amended)

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Roelker, John H., House (Downtown Evansville MRA)  
Vanderburgh County  
INDIANA

*Substantive Review*

Working No. 5/20/82-1506  
Fed. Reg. Date: 2.5.85  
Date Due: 4/3/84  
Action: ☒ ACCEPT 4-6-84  
☐ RETURN  
☐ REJECT

- ☒ resubmission  
☐ nomination by person or local government  
☐ owner objection  
☐ appeal

Federal Agency: \_\_\_\_\_

Substantive Review: ☐ sample ☐ request ☐ appeal ☒ NR decision

Reviewer's comments:

Recom./Criteria Accept B+C  
Reviewer W. J. W. J.  
Discipline A.P.  
Date 4/6/84  
\_\_\_\_\_ see continuation sheet

Nomination returned for: \_\_\_\_\_ technical corrections cited below  
\_\_\_\_\_ substantive reasons discussed below

1. Name

2. Location

3. Classification

Category	Ownership Public Acquisition	Status Accessible	Present Use
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4. Owner of Property

5. Location of Legal Description

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

Has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☐ no

7. Description

Condition	Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered
<input type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input type="checkbox"/> altered
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed	<input type="checkbox"/> original site
		<input type="checkbox"/> moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

- ☐ summary paragraph  
☒ completeness  
☐ clarity  
☐ alterations/integrity  
☐ dates  
☐ boundary selection

*could be more complete. Additions to rear not described or evaluated.*

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## 8. Significance

Period \_\_\_\_\_ Areas of Significance—Check and justify below

Specific dates \_\_\_\_\_ Builder/Architect \_\_\_\_\_

Statement of Significance (*in one paragraph*)

- ☐ summary paragraph
- ☐ completeness
- ☐ clarity
- ☒ applicable criteria - *Association with the canal is tenuous*
- ☐ justification of areas checked
- ☒ relating significance to the resource
- ☐ context
- ☐ relationship of integrity to significance
- ☐ justification of exception
- ☐ other

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## 9. Major Bibliographical References

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property \_\_\_\_\_

Quadrangle name \_\_\_\_\_

UTM References \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal boundary description and justification \_\_\_\_\_

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## 11. Form Prepared By

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## 12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

\_\_\_\_ national      \_\_\_\_ state      \_\_\_\_ local

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title

date

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## 13. Other

- ☐ Maps
- ☐ Photographs
- ☐ Other

Questions concerning this nomination may be directed to \_\_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

*Comments for any item may be continued on an attached sheet*





DOWNTOWN EVANSVILLE RESOURCES  
Vanderburgh County, Indiana  
N. Long, DMD 1977

~~#120:~~ view south of

#112 555 Sycamore Street  
Roe/Kor, John, House

Please refer to the map in the  
Multiple Property Cover Sheet  
for this property

Multiple Property Cover Sheet Reference Number: 64000186