

United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

For HCPS use only

National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Waitman T. Willey House

and/or common

2. Location

street & number 128 Wagner Road

not for publication

city, town Morgantown

vicinity of

congressional district

Second

state West Virginia code

54

county

Monongalia

code 061

3. 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:

4. Owner of Property

name Richard A. Raese

street & number 128 Wagner Road

city, town Morgantown

vicinity of

state

West Virginia 26505

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Monongalia County Courthouse

street & number High Street

city, town Morgantown

state

West Virginia

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title has this property been determined eligible? ☐ yes ☒ no

date ☐ federal ☐ state ☐ county ☐ local

depository for survey records

city, town

state

7. Description

Condition

☒ excellent
☐ good
☐ fair

☐ deteriorated
☐ ruins
☐ unexposed

Check one

☐ unaltered
☒ altered

Check one

☒ original site
☐ moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Waitman T. Willey House at 128 Wagner Road, Morgantown, Monongalia County, West Virginia, is a one and a half-story, L-shaped brick residence. Built in 1839-40 for Waitman T. Willey (1811-1900), lawyer, orator and statesman, the house is one of the most significant examples of Neo Classical architecture in West Virginia.

The highly symmetrical, broad front of the house is dominated by a 1-story penta-style Doric portico. The Doric frieze is complete with triglyphs and metopes, and the cornice is appointed with mutules. Above the fluted wood columns rises a high-pitched triangular pediment centered with a delicate roundel. Four bays of the facade beneath the portico are occupied with openings, the outer two with transomed doubledoors, and the inner two with tall, 12 by 12 light double-hung sash. Pairs of double-hung windows of similar design flank the entrance portico.

Paired interior chimneys rise at the gable ends above the medium-pitched shingled roof. The brickwork of both chimneys and walls is treated in a 5-course common bond.

The late West Virginia University historian, Charles Henry Ambler, described the Willey House in his Waitman Thomas Willey (1954). In Ambler's words,

"The residence fronted east and of north, and entrance was by a five-columned roofed veranda. A path led thence to a patio which formed a part of present Prairie Avenue to the brink of the terrace below. Thence descent was over stone steps to the 'road leading to Clarksburg', otherwise called the 'Palatine road.' A westward entrance over an open veranda commanded a beautiful view of the Monongahela River, as did also the main entrance."

The Willey House though much in appearance as it looked in the 19th century has, nevertheless, witnessed some modification. The major exterior change occurred with the addition of brick unit to the rear of the original kitchen ell. This work and interior renovation was planned in 1947 by a noted Florida architect, John Volk. The character of the rear addition is not obtrusive.

Volk's interior work comprised the installation of new plumbing, wiring, plaster repair or plaster replacement, and the installation of a new heating system. These improvements were required by the owner, Mr. Richard A. Raese, who purchased the house in 1944. In addition, a chimney was removed between the kitchen ell and rear hallway thus providing a formal doorway to the dining room. The character of both the living room and dining room is very formal; the crystal chandeliers and mantels installed by the Raeses were imported.

The multi-paneled front doubledoor (8 panels over 2 panels) opens into a formal hall with entrances to the living room on the right and double parlors on the left. Portraits of Senator Willey and Elizabeth Ray Willey hang over the parlor mantels. The second large entrance doubledoor opening into the parlor section of the house is now unused. It is possible that this entrance provided access to what may have been a business or law office rooms for the Senator. Original brass boxlocks remain on the major front doubledoor.

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 checked="" 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)
				<u>State history</u>

Specific dates 1839-40

Builder Architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Waitman T. Willey House in Morgantown, West Virginia, is significant because it represents one of West Virginia's premier extant examples of Neo Classical architecture. The Willey House is equally significant as a historic landmark. Waitman T. Willey (1811-1900), for whom the red brick house was built, was a lawyer, orator, and statesman who figured prominently in the great events leading to the formation of the State of West Virginia. Willey held various offices, but it was his role as one of West Virginia's first two United States Senators that accorded him state-wide fame.

When Willey settled at Morgantown in 1833 he was apparently well satisfied with the location. An entry from Willey's journal, "where I now live and where I expect to die", records the sentiment of the man who regarded the small northern West Virginia town as a permanent home. Construction of the Willey residence on a Morgantown hillside allowed for an impressive view of the town and the Monongahela River.

Choice of a classical-style house front was not unusual in provincial areas of the United States in the 1830's and 1840's. The Greek Revival was sweeping the nation at the time, and for Mr. Willey who aspired to public service, such a house was perhaps a reflection of an ancient democratic idealism and liberty with which the young republic was then imbued. While such sentiment was certainly present, the pretentious character and siting of the house was also a reflection of Willey's notion of his own importance in the community.

The house, built in 1839-40, was comfortable for its day; it was the first residence in Morgantown equipped with running water. Spacious hallways and high-ceilinged rooms heated with fireplaces provided its owners with fashionable surroundings. The fashionable exterior, however, is the subject which has captured the attention of later generations. Charles Patton, formerly of the Art Department of West Virginia University, often referred to the house with its five-columned portico as one of the finest examples of Neo Classical architecture in West Virginia. The late University of Illinois Dean of Fine and Applied Arts, Rexford Newcomb, said of the house: "Another somewhat Georgian mass, this time in brick, fronted by a Doric portico is found in the Willey House, 128 Wagner Road, Morgantown. Here, however, the windows, filled with 12-paned sashes, exhibit a characteristic of the Greek Revival. A curious feature of the portico is its use of five columns instead of the usual even number encountered in most classic architecture. This arrangement seems to have been enforced by the presence of two doors." The house was the life-long residence of Senator Willey and his wife, Elizabeth Ray Willey, and served the couple during most of the ordinary and momentous events of their lives.

The very survival of the house was in doubt during the spring of 1863. As the Civil War intensified, the Confederate Army sent raiding parties into northwestern (West) Virginia for the purpose of destroying vital rail and other transportation links, securing supplies and material, and demoralizing the pro-Northern population. A major objective of the famous Jones-Imboden Raid of 1863 was to burn the suspension bridge at Morgantown and destroy the home of Senator Waitman T. Willey. (Willey's staunch pro-Northern activities included the organization of an early Morgantown meeting resisting plans for "disunion", i.e., the secession of Virginia.)

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Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

date entered

Continuation sheet

Item number 8

Page 2

The interesting story of the Morgantown segment of the raid was occasionally told to history students at West Virginia University by Dr. Ambler. Many of the events of the visit of a Confederate party to the Willey House were related orally over the years, and were recorded in several sources, including a newspaper story by Beulah Hash in the Morgantown Dominion-Post of January 31, 1971.

Warned of the Confederate raiding party, Willey and Morgantown banker and later Mayor John C. Wagner, hurriedly left Morgantown for Wheeling. (Wagner reportedly took the bank's money to Wheeling for safety.) Horses and cattle were hidden in the woods near the Willey house, and hams were buried in the backyard. When a Confederate officer appeared at the Willey's front door to demand the surrender of Mr. Willey, Mrs. Willey is reputed to have replied: "Mr. Willey is not here, and he won't be as long as you are around. So you rebels can just act like gentlemen and turn around and head for home." The officer was deeply affronted and replied to his men: "The fox has slipped away, or so the lady says. We'll search the place and burn it and then ride back to Fairmont." Mrs. Willey immediately interjected: "There's no need to burn our home, and your men look too tired to build a fire. So do you for that matter. It looks like you and your men could stand a fine, hot meal and a little rest. Not to speak of some soap and water. We've got running water in this house. What do you say? We'll make you a meal, me and the girls and the slaves, and let you rest a bit. And you can do the same for your horses without having to look all day for the grain."

Following the promise that the house would not be burned, Confederate raiders were dined in the home of Waitman T. Willey.

Waitman Thomas Willey was born in 1811 in a tiny log cabin near the present town of Farmington, West Virginia, then part of Monongalia County. He obtained his education by walking forty miles to Madison (later Allegheny College) College at Uniontown, Pa., where he graduated in 1831. Willey studied law at Wellsburg in 1832, establishing himself in a law practice at Morgantown in 1833.

In 1840, Willey became an elector on the Whig Harrison-Tyler ticket. From 1841 to 1852 he served as Clerk of the County Court of Monongalia County; he also served during this period as Clerk of the Circuit Superior Court of Law and Chancery. Willey was a member of the Virginia Reform Convention from 1850-51, and in 1852 he was a Whig candidate for Congress. In 1859, Willey unsuccessfully ran for the office of lieutenant governor of Virginia. In 1860, he was a delegate to the convention that nominated Bell and Everett for the presidency and vice presidency. Willey's political efforts during this period earned him the reputation as the "wheel horse" of the Whig Party in northwestern Virginia. With the withdrawal of Virginia from the Union, Willey stood against the Richmond government and became an activist at the First Wheeling Convention. Although he was opposed to the immediate action of forming a new state, statehood sentiment at this convention was so strong that when Pierpont's resolution calling for a new convention was accepted, and a Reform Convention held, the "Restored Government of Virginia" elected him to the U.S. Senate to fill the vacancy of Senator James M. Mason. Willey was later elected to serve as one of the first two U.S. Senators from West Virginia (1863-1871). West Virginia's 1872 Constitution, adopted at Charleston, was drawn up with the assistance of Mr. Willey.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Waitman T. Willey House, Monongalia County, West Virginia

Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page

3

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Waitman T. Willey is considered the great orator of the West Virginia statehood movement. It was Willey who presented on May 29, 1862 the petition to Congress for a new state, and it was through the efforts of Willey that the Senate approved the statehood bill. The counties of (West) Virginia through which passed the B & O Railroad were included in the boundaries of the new state because Willey believed Virginia, following the war, might pass laws damaging the railroad and thereby making it less useful to West Virginia.

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**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Waitman T. Willey House, Monongalia County, West Virginia

Continuation sheet

Item number 9

Page 2

For HCRS use only

received

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Hash, Beulah. "The story of the Mansion on the Monongahela," "Sunday Dominion Post",
(Morgantown, WV), January 31, 1971 (sec. S).

West Virginia: A Guide to the Mountain State. American Guide Series, New York:
Oxford University Press, 1961, pp. 163, 259.

★

WILEY, WAITMAN T., HOUSE

★

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