

James Whitcomb Riley House
(John R. Nickum House)
528 Lockerbie Street
(formerly 26 Lockerbie Street)
Indianapolis
Marion County
Indiana

HABS No. IND-51
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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. IND-51

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY HOUSE
(JOHN R. NICKUM HOUSE)

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Location: 528 Lockerbie Street (formerly 26 Lockerbie Street),
Indianapolis, Marion County, Indiana

Present Owner: James Whitcomb Riley Memorial Association

Present Occupant
and Use: Historic House Museum

Statement of
Significance: The James Whitcomb Riley House was built in 1872
for John R. Nickum. Riley was not the owner of
the house; however, he lived in it for about the
last twenty-three years of his life as a paying
guest of Major and Mrs. Charles L. Holstein.
Riley wrote many of his later works at the
Lockerbie address.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: The first city directory listing John R. Nickum as living in the house is that of 1872.
2. Architect: Not known.
3. Original and subsequent owners: The legal description of the property on which the house stands is as follows:
Lot No. 4 in McQuat's Subdivision of Out Lot No. 53 in the city of Indianapolis, Indiana, together with 6 feet adjoining said Lot No. 4 on the west side thereof, being the east half of the vacated alley as shown in Town Lot Record 55, page 281, in the Recorder's Office, City-County Building, Indianapolis, Indiana.

1866 Warranty Deed, June 13, 1866, recorded June 18, 1866
in Town Lot Record 29, p. 263.

James W. Smither
to
John R. Nickum

The house remained in the family until after
the death of Mrs. Charles L. Holstein on Octo-

ber 18, 1916, when a group of Riley's friends purchased it from the estate. They were Booth Tarkington, George Ade, Meredith Nicholson, William C. Bobbs, William Fortune, George C. Hitt, and others. They held the house until 1922. HABS IND. 49-IND 8-

1922 Warranty Deed, May 11, 1922 recorded April 9, 1924
in Record 715, p. 501
William Fortune
to
James Whitcomb Riley Memorial Association

4. Builder: Not known.
5. Original plan and construction: Central hall plan unusually well-designed for convenient circulation. The formal and the family dining rooms are conveniently served through a pantry connecting to the kitchen. The bathroom near the rear of the house, on the second floor, is said to be original.
6. Alterations and additions: The rear porch on the west side appears to be an addition. (See Architectural Information.)

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Building:

James Whitcomb Riley was born on October 7, 1849 in Greenfield, Indiana. As a boy, visiting the courthouse with his father, he learned country speech and manners. In Greenfield, he became editor of the town paper, then came to Indianapolis and was with the Indianapolis Journal from 1877 to 1885. His popularity began during these years. He aspired to be an actor and was a successful public reader of his own verse. His poems in dialect were an original contribution to American literature. He never married. (Nolan, Vol. XV, pp. 611-613.)

In 1880, Riley discovered Lockerbie Street, two irregular blocks in length, with houses encircled by shrubbery, flower beds above the sidewalks, and maples and sycamores in majestic borders. He called on Major Charles L. Holstein on Lockerbie Street in 1893 and subsequently resided there as a paying guest until his death on July 22, 1916 (Nolan, pp. 236-237). While Riley lived there, the house on Lockerbie Street became almost a shrine for his admirers, children, and friends from all over the world. (Nolan, Vol XV, p. 613).

John R. Nickum was born in 1821 and came to Indianapolis from Ohio in 1862. He associated with Horace Parrott and opened a confectionery and bakery, continuing in business until 1885.

During the Civil War the firm supplied bread and hard-tack on government contract to troops at Fort Morton and made considerable money. After the war, the firm left the retail field and became completely wholesale. The firm had the first "reel oven" in the state. Nickum died December 16, 1902 and was survived by his wife, Charlotte, who died in 1904, and daughter Magdaline, who was the widow of Charles L. Holstein (Dunn, pp. 343, 344).

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Holstein was a graduate of Harvard Law School in 1866, became assistant to the U.S. District Attorney in Indianapolis in 1871 and was appointed U.S. District Attorney for the Indiana district in 1880. After 1885, he retired from this office and resumed private law practice until his death on January 22, 1901. He married Magdaline V. Nickum in 1868 and lived with her parents on "one of the most quiet and beautiful residence thoroughfares in the heart of Indiana's capital city" (Dunn, pp. 339-342). The 1873 city directory lists Holstein's residence as Lockerbie Street (3).

C. Sources of Information:

1. Old Views: Photograph of house taken from directly across the street in Indiana: Historical, Industrial, Commercial Survey. 1931, p. 72.

Photograph taken from the east, showing front and part of the east side of the house and neighboring houses in Centennial History of Indianapolis, Indianapolis, 1920, p. 41.

2. Primary and unpublished sources: None.
3. Secondary and published sources:

Dunn, Jacob Piatt, assoc. ed. Memorial Record of Distinguished Men of Indianapolis and Indiana. Chicago and New York, 1912.

Swartz & Tedrowe's Indianapolis City Directory, 1872, ending March 1873. Indianapolis, 1872.

Swartz & Tedrowe's Indianapolis City Directory, 1873, ending March 1874. Indianapolis, 1873.

Nolan, Jeannette Covert. James Whitcomb Riley Hoosier Poet. New York, 1941.

Dictionary of American Biography. Scribner, 1935.

Information from guide sheet "The Lockerbie Street Home of James Whitcomb Riley", James Whitcomb Riley Memorial Association. HABS IND.

Prepared by Wesley I. Shank
Iowa State University
August 1971

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PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The residence is an excellent example of nineteenth century monumental domestic architecture, in the Italianate style, built near the downtown area of Indianapolis. The residence even now is without question one of the most finely detailed and well preserved examples of nineteenth century domestic architecture in Indianapolis. The house is operated as a museum and has been placed on the National Register.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: 42'1" x 67'7". Number of bays: Three. Number of stories: Two stories with a basement under the south and central elements, no basement under the rear (north) element. The front and central units have an unfinished attic, with no attic over the rear (north). Layout, shape: The house is composed of three distinct units: the front (south) unit, the central unit and the rear (north) unit. The central and rear units are slightly off center and are lower in height than the front unit. One-story porches are located at the southwest corners of each of the units along the west elevation of the residence. The cornice height of each unit is successively lower from the front (south) to the rear (north).
2. Foundations: The foundation walls are stone and define the first floor line of the residence. The height of the foundation wall above the finish grade varies from about 1'0" at the rear (north) to about 2'6" at the front (south) because the grade falls from north to south. The elevation of the top of the stone foundation wall or belt course is constant. The top of the foundation wall is beveled. The exterior stone facing of the south unit is

of large blocks of rock-faced stone, no horizontal mortar-joints. The stone facing of the middle and rear units is rock-faced stone laid in a random ashlar bond. No evidence of moisture penetrating the foundations, and they appear to be in excellent condition.

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3. Wall construction, finish and color: Exterior walls are of a deep red brick. The size of the bricks varies considerably: The average size is 2- $\frac{1}{4}$ " x 3- $\frac{3}{4}$ " x 8- $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Many of the bricks, however, are only 7" long and appear to have been clipped, probably because very few of the exterior horizontal dimensions are masonry (brick) dimensions. The initial brick course on the front (south) unit and middle unit is an alternating header and stretcher brick, while the initial course at the rear (north) unit is a header course. All of the brick walls of the front (south) unit except the east wall are laid in common bond without header courses. The east wall of the front unit is laid in common bond, with every sixth course a bond course of bricks laid in alternating headers and stretchers. This latter system is used in laying up all of the other exterior brick walls. The horizontal coursing at the corners of the middle unit and rear unit do not always line up - thus there is no bond on the exterior wall surface of these two units; yet it does not appear that the rear unit was added at a later date. The vertical joints in the alternating courses do not always align vertically and header bricks are often off center of the stretcher in the brick course below and above. Brick joints are flush about $\frac{3}{8}$ " thick, and the brick work is in excellent condition.
4. Structural system, framing: Stone, wall bearing, exterior walls, interior walls in basement are of brick construction. First floor joists are 2 x 12, spacing varies from about 16" on center to 20" on center; double joists are frequently used. X bracing is used at the $\frac{1}{3}$ points of the span when the span is more than about eight feet. The framing for the second floor is probably similar but this is impossible to accurately determine since there are no spaces where one can gain visual access in the structural system. Attic framing is of wooden construction, roof rafters are 2 x 6 at 20" on center. Roof decking is of 1 x 6. Columns are 4" x 6" with camfered edges. The structure is in excellent condition.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads:
 - a. Porches: One story open porch (6'0" x 12'6") at south-

west corner of south elevation (facade) with deck. The deck has a superimposed wooden balustrade. Pairs of square columns on plynths define the extremities at the west and east ends of the porch. The columns carry a wide elliptical arch with small arches spanning the narrow spaces of each pair of columns. The result is an a, b, a rhythm similar to a Palladian opening. The classically inspired entablature has a frieze of wooden dentils above five triglyphs. A second porch (4'6" x 8'6") near the center of the west elevation is also one story and of wooden construction, with square columns, diminutive brackets under the cornice and a flat deck above. The third porch (8'0" x 8'0") also on the west elevation of the porch has a diagonal latticework from the porch deck to the arch. The north face of the porch is screened. There is a bulkhead under this porch but there is no access to it from the porch. Thus, it seems that the porch was not a part of the original construction. The wooden members of the porches are painted white. The floor of the porch on the south elevation (facade) is a single monolithic stone (6'0" x 13'6"). The top of the stone slab is about two inches below the finish floor line. A flight of concrete stairs (four risers) of recent construction provide access to the porch. The other two porches have wooden decks painted grey. The front porch ceiling is wooden with a series of rectangular recessed panels. The other porch ceilings are tongue and groove. All ceilings are painted white.

- b. Stoop: The front stoop at the main entrance (south elevation) is of stone and approached by three stone risers. An iron railing defines the stairs.
6. Chimneys: All chimneys are of the inside type. They are rectangular in shape and of brick construction. The chimney near the northeast corner of the house has two tile flue caps with geometric patterns.
 7. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The main entrance (south elevation) has a limestone frame, the head is a semicircular arch with a projecting keystone of limestone. The double doors are recessed about two feet into the facade wall. The deep jamb pockets or recesses are composed of a series of raised wooden panels. The rectangular wood doors have a semicircular transom with a glass light. The doors have large glass lights of etched glass, a semicircular heads and rounded corners, a raised bead

surrounds the glass lights. Small square panels are below the lights. Unfortunately, double screen doors mask the handsomely detailed double front doors.

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The doors at the central block (west elevation) have a semicircular headed glass transom. The doors are rectangular with large glass lights with rounded corners and two molded panels below. The frame trim and doors are varnished. Screen doors visually conceal the doors. Other exterior doorways are similar but are painted white and more simple in detail.

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- b. Windows and shutters: The windows at the first floor of the facade (south elevation) are paired, long narrow, wooden double-hung units. The heads of the sash are segmental in shape. The sashes are painted black, the frames are painted white. Segmental limestone stone arches with limestone keystones define each window sash. A similar single window at the first floor is on the east elevation of the front unit, and another single window at the northwest corner of the front unit has an identical window but the arch is segmental and of brick.

The windows at the second floor directly above the first story windows which have just been described are similar but they have semicircular heads and are outlined by semicircular limestone heads. An additional semicircular headed window is centered over the main entrance.

The other windows are also long narrow wooden double-hung rectangular units with two lights over two lights. Sashes are painted black, frames are painted white and all of these units have louvered wooden shutters painted white. The heads of these units have brick segmental arches.

There is a stained glass double-hung window at the second story of the central block on the west elevation. The pattern is geometric and floral.

A small vertical elliptical window is located at the first story in the rear unit on the west elevation.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof of the front (south) and central block of the house is hipped, with an asymmetrical flat deck. The roofing is slate with copper valleys. The deck roof and the flat roof over the rear block is a built-up roof. Its condition is excellent.

- b. Cornice, eaves: A bracketed cornice with a paneled frieze defines the front (south) block of the house. It is of wooden construction and painted white. A simple box cornice of wooden construction defines the other two units of the house. HABS IND. 49. IND 8.
- c. Dormer: A simple wooden dormer at the rear of the central block opens onto the north unit of the house. It is painted white. There is no cupola or tower.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

Basement: Central hallway running north-south with an east-west stair hall at the north end of the central hallway. Four rectangular spaces located at the north-west, northeast, southeast and southwest. The north-west space is currently used as clothes washing and drying area. The northeast space is a shop, the south-east is the mechanical equipment space and the south-west area is a storage area. All basement walls are stone and brick and are painted yellow, the concrete floor is painted maroon. No ceiling, wood joists exposed. Basement is in excellent condition.

First floor: Central hall runs north-south with an eastwest stair hall at the north end of the central hall. Thus, major circulation is L-shaped with four major spaces at the corners (of basement). A library is at the southwest. The former family dining room now used as a bedroom by the housekeeper is to the northwest, the formal dining room is to the northeast and the drawing room is to the southeast. To the rear (north) of the former family dining room is the former kitchen. Its function now is a living room for the housekeeper. A secondary stair at the west wall gives access to the second floor.

2. Stairways: Basement stairway is an enclosed single flight of wooden risers and treads. (Thirteen risers at about 7".) A second basement enclosed stairway at the north-west corner of the house originally gave access to the outside through a bulkhead opening. This opening has since been covered over by the rear porch. The main stairway is an open well two-flight stairway that runs from the first floor to the attic. The risers and treads are wooden, covered with red carpet. The wooden newel post at the first floor is finely carved. Mounted on the post is a 2'0" tall brass light standard with an

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etched glass globe. The gasolier has been converted to electricity. The open string stairway has ornamental brackets and all of the exposed wooden elements of the main stairway are of cherry. A stenciled wainscot of a geometric design runs from the first floor to the second floor. A service stairway at the northwest corner of the house is an enclosed stairway of two flights and one landing. It runs from the first floor to the second story. The treads and risers are carpeted and the walls and ceilings are plastered and painted buff in color.

3. Analysis of first floor:

a. Drawing room (southeast corner of residence):

Flooring: Bordered carpet (original) black background with green and yellow floral pattern.

Wall and ceiling finish: Walls are plaster painted turquoise in color. A stenciled band about 1'6" deep below the cornice is of a garland design in greens, with pink and white flowers. The cornice is painted in hues of grey.

The ceiling has a stenciled geometric design. The background is blue with rose, gold, grey and black elements. There is a molded plaster leaf pattern at the escutcheon for the crystal light fixture.

Fireplace: White Italian marble, round arched opening, cartouche at center with circular panels in spandrels. Sculpted grapes and leaf forms full circular panels.

b. Library (southwest corner of residence):

Flooring: Bordered carpet soft green background with black geometric floral pattern.

Wall and ceiling finish: Plastered walls painted a grey green with a stenciled pattern of plant forms in muted greens, greys and yellow is just below the cornice which is painted in grey green and black. The ceiling is stenciled, geometric pattern, with grey greens and deep green on a buff background.

Fireplace: Similar to fireplace in the drawing room except that simple spandrels replace more complex system of circular panels. The overmantel is a cherry framed rectangular mirror with a cartouche centered in the head of the frame.

Bookcases: Cherry bookcases flank the fireplace. The doors have glass lights with pull drawers at the base. HABS
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- c. Front hall (hallway north-south between library and drawing room): 49-IND

Flooring: Red carpet. 8.

Wall and ceiling finish: Stenciled wainscot geometric design in greys, red and soft greens. Walls above are painted buff. Ceiling is also plaster with a geometric stenciled border and pattern with colors similar to wainscot. Elliptical arch opening with cartouche and brackets at north wall opens into main stairway hall. This space is similar in materials and color.

- d. Formal dining room:

Flooring: Carpet is light red geometric design on dark red background.

Wall and ceiling finish: Dark brown parchment paper wainscot with floral pattern wallpaper (red on red) similar to carpet. White molded cornice. Ceiling is plastered, painted white with a narrow (1") molded plaster border of bells. There is a molded plaster design at the center of the ceiling of apples (painted red) and leaves.

Fireplace and china cabinet: Brown veined Vermont marble round arched opening, cartouche and paneled spandrels. Overmantel has wooden (cherry) framed mirror with a wood cartouche at the center. The fireplace is on the north wall. Built-in china cabinet to the left of the fireplace has semicircular headed door with glass light. Architect framed recess in south wall has built-in buffet of cherry with a marble top.

- e. Former family dining room and former kitchen (these spaces have been somewhat modified to provide an apartment for the hostess):

Flooring: Carpet.

Wall and ceiling finish: Wallpapered walls and painted ceilings.

4. Analysis of second floor:

- a. Nickum bedroom (southwest corner of house):

Flooring: Carpet is blue grey geometric print on blue background with a narrow band (about 4") of a multi-colored design. HABS
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Wall and ceiling finish: Papered, blue grey background with flower pattern of white and red roses and green entourage. Picture molding of plaster with buff wall-paper to cornice. Ceiling is papered off-white in color. 8.

Fireplace: The white marble fireplace and the overmantel are similar to those in the library on the first floor.

b. Holstein bedroom and sitting room (southeast corner of house):

Flooring: Bordered carpet, black, tan and gold geometric design.

Wall and ceiling finish: Papered, brown background with floral design to picture mold, then a two foot high band painted buff with raised plaster (molded) design of garlands and geometric elements painted gold. Ceiling is painted grey. Elliptical arched opening defines sitting space, over main entrance, from bedroom. Color scheme and materials in sitting space are identical to those of the bedroom.

Fireplace: Similar to the one in the Nickum bedroom.

c. Mr. Riley's bedroom (east of stair hall in middle block):

Flooring: Carpet, tan background with multi-colored geometric pattern.

Wall and ceiling finish: Paper, white "snowflake geometric designs" on light brown background to picture mold. Delicate raised plaster swaths plus a thin horizontal string of flowers painted gold, tan background, to molded cornice. Plastered ceiling painted tan in color.

Fireplace: Similar to unit in library except that it is a dark Vermont marble.

d. Guest bedroom (in middle block north of stair hall):

Flooring: Bordered carpet of gold, geometric pattern of gold on gold.

Wall and ceiling finish: Wallpaper is blue and green to

picture mold, then white paper to ceiling. Ceiling has white paper.

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e. Front hall and stairway:

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Flooring: Red carpet not the original.

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Wall and ceiling finish: Walls and ceilings are plastered and painted buff.

f. Middle hall:

Flooring: Red carpet.

Wall and ceiling finish: Dark brown pressed parchment paper "Lincuster of England" geometric pattern. Walls and ceiling are plastered and painted a buff color.

g. Rear hall:

Flooring, walls and ceiling are similar to those of middle hall; however, there is no wainscot in the rear hall. Wood tongue and groove wainscot in hall recess at lavatory.

h. Bathroom:

Flooring: Carpet with a red background and pattern of yellow and blue.

Wall and ceiling finish: Cherry tongue and groove wainscot with wallpaper above. Paper has a red field with a flower pattern. Ceiling has white paper on plaster.

i. Housekeeper's bedroom (northeast) corner:

Flooring: Green carpet.

Wall and ceiling finish: Green and white wallpaper. Ceiling is white paper.

5. Doorways and doors:

Basement: Tongue and groove with "Z" braces.

First floor: All doors and frames are cherry. Doors in the front block are approximately 10'0" high with seven molded panels in four tiers. Original doors in the middle and rear blocks are 8'0" high with glass transoms. These doors usually have two tiers of molded panels.

Second floor: Doors and doorways in the front block of the house are butternut, about 8'0" high. There are five panels in three tiers with glass transoms. The doors in the middle and rear block are similar except they are of walnut and are four panel, two tiered. The door between the middle hall and rear hall has two glass lights with semicircular heads and a tier of two panels below the glazed spaces.

6. Notable hardware: Brass hardware is extensively utilized and all of it appears to be a part of the original installation.
7. Mechanical equipment:
 - a. Heating: New gas fired warm air heating system.
 - b. Lighting: Originally the house was lighted by gas. All of the major rooms have the original gas fixtures although many have been modified for electric lighting. Most of the fixtures are brass and constitute a fine collection of fixtures. The three globed gas pull-down fixture wall mounted over the headboard in the Holstein bedroom is most unique, and is a most handsome fixture. Indeed the ceiling brass gas light fixture also in the Holstein bedroom is a very well designed fixture.
 - c. Plumbing systems and fixtures of note: Water was originally pumped from cisterns located in the backyard to water tanks in the attic to provide an adequate supply of water for the house. The Holstein and Nickum bedrooms did not have running water. The lavatories in all of the other second floor bedrooms are original; all have marble tops and brass fittings.

The bathroom fixtures (second floor) are original. The tub is copper lined and set in tongue and groove cherry enclosure. The water closet has a cherry tank and seat and a crystal pull. The water closet is china with a leaf pattern and is set on a slab of marble. The lavatory is an oval china basin with a marble top and back-splash. It is set in a cherry cabinet with raised molded panels which outline a door and a tier of three drawers. Lavatory taps are brass.

Another china lavatory has a marble top and backsplash. The unit is set in a tongue and groove cabinet that appears to be walnut. This unit is located in the rear hall recess. The taps are brass.

- d. Speaking tubes: These are in the second floor rear hallway for communication with the household staff in the kitchen on the first floor.

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D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The entrance setting is the south elevation and faces Lockerbie Street. The site is about 170'0" (east-west) x about 130'0" (north-south). A stone retaining wall (about 2'0") defines the front (south) property line. A simple iron fence is set on the stone wall. It is about 2'0" high but was added about the turn of the century. A stone walk runs across the front (south elevation) and along the west side of the house. The site is well-landscaped and equally well maintained.

Prepared by David R. Hermansen
Ball State University
August 1970

PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

These records were prepared as part of a cooperative project in 1970 between the Historic Landmarks Foundation of Indiana and the Historic American Buildings Survey. During this project, nine buildings in Indianapolis were measured and drawn, and sixteen more were recorded with professional photographs and written data.

The project was under the general direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey. Measured drawings were prepared by student architects under the direction of Professor David R. Hermansen of Ball State University, Muncie, Indiana. Professor Wesley Shank of Iowa State University prepared the historical data and Jack E. Boucher, HABS staff photographers, provided the photographic record. H. Roll McLaughlin, FAIA, State Preservation Coordinator, President of the Historic Landmarks Foundation, and member of the HABS Advisory Board, served as consultant throughout the project.