

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Risley, Samuel D., Dr., House

other names/site number Gifford, Elton B., House

2. Location

street & number 430 North Monroe Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Media

N/A vicinity

state Pennsylvania

code PA

county Delaware

code 045

zip code 19063

3. Classification

Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>one</u>	<u>n/a</u> buildings
_____	_____ sites
_____	_____ structures
_____	_____ objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of related multiple property listing:

n/a

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Dr. Brent D. Glass

Signature of certifying official

3/21/90
Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic / single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic / multiple dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Late Victorian: Gothic

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone: Granite

walls Stone: Granite

roof slate

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Risley House, built in 1877 and occupied by the spring of 1878, is a two-and-a-half story gray stone house, which sits on the southwest corner of 5th and Monroe Streets in a quiet residential neighborhood.

I. Frank Lees, in his book, From Media's Past (Media, 1980), published a view of the house as it looked about 1890. This is the earliest known view of the building. It shows a "widow's walk" (no longer extant) on the roof, doubtless there for the purpose of taking command of a view mentioned by the Chester Daily Times in an article published on April 12, 1878. Also noticeable in this photograph is a different paint scheme from that which is on the house today. Some careful scraping about the eaves and windows might reveal the original colors.

Some time after 1887 an alteration was made to the North side of the house. A window was cut out to make way for a door. This door is reached by stone steps and now services apartments on the upper floors of the house. This entrance may have been created for Dr. Risley's staff, as it was customary in this period for servants to come and go by a separate entrance.

The property is surrounded by large, stately maple trees and a period wrought iron fence. Stone gate posts, both for drives and walkways, originally carried matching gates. These gates have been removed and do not seem to be extant.

On the South, or carriage entrance side of the house, there is a handsome porch leading from the drive into the hall. The floor of this porch has been raised considerably since the 1890 photo and is now covered with colored slates. Incorporated in the porch design is a small conservatory to the right that can be entered from the South Parlor. The structure of the conservatory has been repaired several times, but some of the glass appears to be old, if not original. The present roof of the conservatory is built in simple cupola fashion, but may have had more of a "Hindu" look to it originally - that is, with a glass onion dome on top.

The tall chimneys on the Risley house, built of cut stone, are chamfered and finished off with clay pots in a style generally associated with Gothic Revival. An "ancient" appearance is further enhanced by a patterned slate roof, still extant on the house.

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The foundations and superstructure of the Risley house are built of dressed granite from the quarry of J. Howard Lewis, Springfield Township, Delaware County. The weight of the interior walls is carried by a double row of stone arches in the cellar, forming a passage beneath the central portion of the house. This passage corresponds with the halls on the ground, second and third floors of the dwelling.

The room arrangement on the ground or principal floor is relatively simple. Proceeding from the verandah on Monroe Street, there is a parlor on both the North (right) and South (left) sides of the entrance hall. The entrance hall is panelled with oak wainscoting dating from the period 1890-1900. There is an open staircase leading to the upper floors. This is lit by an oculus window with cobalt blue glass. The lighting effect is particularly dramatic, perhaps best described as the filtered blue light of a cathedral.

Beyond the staircase, the hall turns South (left) to form an "L", thus giving access to a side-entry for the carriage approach to the house, as well as providing access to the dining room. To the North (right) of the dining room is the former butler's pantry (now a kitchen), and beyond that, the old kitchen, now an office or apartment. Formerly, the kitchen extended into a small frame service wing on the Northwest corner of the house. This wing is finished with board-and-batten on the exterior, most of which appears to be original.

Both parlors and the dining room have fine period mantelpieces. There is a white marble mantelpiece in the French Renaissance style in the North parlor. It is designed to hide ductwork for forced air heating, thus the fireplace opening is covered with marble grillework. Above this mantelpiece is a fine mirror of later date; the original was probably elaborately carved and gilded in the style of the mantle. Also of later date, perhaps from the 1890s, is the wood mantelpiece in the Eastlake Style in the South parlor. The fireplace opening for this mantelpiece is finished with decorative tiles. The overmantle mirror (actually a structural extension of the mantelpiece itself) has been forcibly removed and does not seem to be in the house any longer. The finest mantelpiece of the three, however, is in the dining room. It is of dark grained marble or basalt and is cut in the "Rhenish" or "Burgundian" style. Its design is clean and free of the overdecoration so common for this period (1870s).

The hardwood floors on the first floor have a border pattern around the outside edges, i.e., that portion of the floor closest to the walls. The window sills are deep and there is a minimum of decorative woodwork immediately surrounding the window sash. There is a crown moulding forming a border around the ceiling. Apart from the crown moulding the ceilings are devoid of decoration or pattern. The dining room has a chair rail encircling the room. The chair rail stands at a height of 48 inches off the floor. Both parlors have pocket doors which open onto the central hall.

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The stairs to the second floor are comprised of two straight flights with a one hundred eighty degree turn at an oblong landing beneath the aforementioned circular window with blue lights. At the top of the stairs there is an oblong room in the center of the house which serves as a "hall" access to the stairs leading to the third floor and the four large rooms surrounding it on the second floor.

The stairwell and the bedroom over the dining room occupy the short or Southwest part of the "L" shaped floor plan. The Southwest room above the dining room has a noteworthy grey marble mantelpiece of Chester County marble. This room also has a door leading to the balcony on the West (rear) facade of the house. There are two built-in cupboards in the North wall. The cupboard doors have glass panels thereby affording one a clear view of the contents of the cupboards. Double doors next to the cupboards give access to an oblong closet-like room which separates this room from the room in the Northwest quadrant.

Each large room on the second floor of this house is buffered from its neighbor by a smaller oblong space. Each oblong room has a door opening into each of the larger rooms on either side of it. All of these smaller oblong rooms on the second floor have a window in them. Currently, these oblong rooms have been converted into bathrooms and closets.

All of the rooms on the second floor have five-inset panel doors. The top and bottom pair of panels are vertical and the fifth panel which is located in the center of the door is horizontal.

There is a crown moulding surrounding the ceiling in each of the four large rooms on the second floor. Aside from the crown moulding, the ceilings are devoid of decoration or pattern. The window sills are deep and there is a minimum of decorative woodwork surrounding the window sash. There is no decorative border in the flooring on this floor.

There is a second enclosed pair of stairs which ascends from the first to the third floor. It is located between the kitchen and the north parlor. A door was cut in the north wall of the house, thus providing exterior access to the back stairs.

The configuration of the rooms on the third floor is similar to that of the second floor. Both of the flights of stairs leading to the third floor are similar to the stairs which lead to the second floor. Again there is an oblong central hall at the top of the steps. The four large bedrooms each have a door opening out into the central hall area.

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As on the second floor, the four large rooms are each buffered from each other by the presence of the smaller oblong rooms in between. Some portion of all of the rooms on the third floor are located under the eaves of the house. The only windows on the third floor are located in the gables and dormers of the large rooms.

There is no pattern in the flooring, no crown moulding, and no decoration of any kind on the walls or ceiling. The doors on the third floor are plain horizontal insert panel doors.

The house has been converted to apartments. There is one apartment on the first floor and two on each of the second and third floors. Minor alterations have been made to meet fire and safety code regulations.

Earlier alterations, such as the servant's entrance on the North facade of the house, have been utilized in the structure's conversion to a multi-family use.

The architectural integrity of the Risley house is excellent. The Risley has not been compromised by its conversion from a single family dwelling into an apartment building. The changes that were made in the conversion were the addition of small kitchen facilities on the second and third floors and the construction of a partition with a door at the top of the steps on the second floor to enclose the main staircase.

The Risley house had been converted to an apartment building prior to June of 1967 when the present borough secretary for Media took office. During an interview on March 1, 1990, Gordon Grimditch, Media Borough Secretary, was unable to provide documentation of the conversion because no building permits exist for Media prior to June of 1967 and the Media Water Authority records were inconclusive.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)
Architecture

Period of Significance

Significant Dates

1877

1877

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

unknown

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

The Risley house is a strikingly impressive eclectic house, combining themes from several popular 19th century picturesque styles. Its design creates the impression of great size. A series of 2-1/2 story blocks have been arranged at different angles around the central hall to form wings and gables, thus creating, visually at least, the picturesque angles and broken lines of a medieval or "Gothic" manor house. The Gothic character, however, has been downplayed in preference to more exotic and delicate detailing.

The exterior window treatment, with its rounded arches, provides a connection with the "Rundbogen" or "Rounded Arch" style begun in Germany in the early part of the 19th century, and popularized in this country during and after the 1850s. The decorative finishes on the house, however, make references to Gothic Revival and certain aspects of the Swiss Chalet Style. The intended effect is romantic and picturesque.

The verandah in particular combines elements of Gothic Revival and the Rounded Arch Style. The decorative pattern on the wooden arches is probably intended to create the effect of the "Norman" arch, which was widely reused in "Cottage Gothic" buildings. Twisted wire-work trellises fitted in beneath the wooden arches create a visual effect of lightness, which greatly enhances the design of the porch.

References to the Chalet Style may be found in the use of wide, pronounced eaves, eave braces, cross-bracing on the gables (particularly on the dormer windows), pent roofs over the windows, and particularly in the use of a gallery porch on the West side of the house.

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According to a notice in the Chester Daily Times for April 12, 1878, the Risley House was built between 1877 and 1878. Certainly, by the Spring of 1878 it was ready for occupancy. In describing the house, the Daily Times said:

It is built of granite from the quarry of J. Howard Lewis, Springfield, Delaware County. The grounds have been neatly sodded and terraced. It is situated at nearly the most elevated part of land in the borough, and has a commanding view of the Delaware River and surrounding country. It is one of the finest residences in our vicinity.

The owner of this remarkable house was Elton B. Gifford, a Quaker, and an executive in the firm of Joel J. Bailey and Company, a large dry goods business in Philadelphia. Gifford, born September 27, 1827, was the son of Jonathan and Esther Mathis Gifford of Tuckerton, New Jersey. On November 10, 1864, he married Mary Pennell (born November 29, 1833) at Middletown Friends Meeting, Delaware County. Mary was the daughter of James Pennell (1807-1874) and Elizabeth Sharpless (1806-1885). Her sister-in-law, Deborah Yarnall Pennell of Wawa, was a local writer of some note, who published two volumes of poetry under the titles Dew Drops and Wavelets.

In March of 1877, Gifford and his wife purchased two contiguous, undeveloped lots along Monroe Street in Media. These lots were part of a larger tract of land then being subdivided by James Edward Farnum, a land developer. Shortly after purchasing the property, they began work on a large residence and carriage house, both of which are still extant, although now on separate properties. The Giffords maintained another residence at 510 Marshall Street in Philadelphia. Gilbert Cope, in his history of the Smedley family, noted that the Giffords had lived in Media for some time. In any case, the Giffords remained in possession of the property until May of 1886, when they sold it to Dr. Samuel D. Risley, a Philadelphia physician.

The Risley ownership of the house is still remembered locally, although the Risleys sold the property in 1920. Risley's widow, Louisa Robinson Risley, acting as executrix for her husband's estate, sold the house and land to James A. Finley. Nevertheless, since Dr. Risley was a prominent figure in the development of Media, his name rather than that of the Giffords has been popularly connected with the house ever since.

There is no hard evidence indicating who the architect was who designed the Risley house. At first impression, this structure appears to be very similar to Awbury Park in Germantown, which was designed by Addison Hutton for Jonathan Evans in 1875.

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A review of Addison Hutton's papers and calendars in the Quaker Collection at Haverford College showed that Hutton met with an "E.B.G." on Wednesday, January 17, 1877. It should also be noted that Gifford's wife was related to one of the draftsmen working in Hutton's office. However, a further check of Hutton's business records and day books at the Atheneum did not show any notation indicating that Hutton had been employed to draw house plans for Gifford.

The only other architect with whom we can find any connection to Gifford is Benjamin D. Price. In 1873, Price designed a five-story structure to house Joel T. Bailey & Company's store at 719-721 Market Street, Philadelphia. Bailey also permitted his name to be used as a reference in Price's advertisements in Gopill's Business Directory as early as 1869. Gifford was an executive with Joel T. Bailey & Company prior to the construction of the new Bailey store and continued employment with the Bailey Company long after the house he had built in Media had been sold to Dr. Risley.

Benjamin D. Price worked in Delaware County, Pennsylvania, during the latter half of the 19th Century. There is documentation to prove that he designed St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church, Baltimore Avenue, Lansdowne, as well as a residence on Lansdowne Avenue, Lansdowne. Both structures still exist; however, St. John's has been substantially remodeled, enlarged and all of the "Queen Anne" shingles have been removed.

No matter who the architect was, one can't help but get the feeling that he was greatly influenced by the work of A. J. Downing and Downing's design for a plain Timber Cottage-Villa. The similarities between the Risley house and Downing's plain Timber Cottage-Villa are striking, despite the fact that the Risley house was constructed of stone and the Downing design was executed in wood.

The Risley house stands out in Media as one of its landmark residential structures, a house representative of the age when Media was a country spa town for well-to-do Philadelphians. Regardless of its architect, the Risley House still lives up to the Chester Daily Times' claim that it was one of the finest residences in the vicinity. And best of all, because it was built of Springfield stone, it serves as a tie between the very localized building traditions of Delaware County and the broader, more international styles embodied in the design of the house itself. It combines the best of two very rich traditions.

Risley House
Delaware County
Media Quad - Zone 18

Full #15 N 4 7 70

KIRKLYN
11 MI. TO INTL

1.7 MI. TO PA. 320

