

JUL 20 1987

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

For NPS 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 Peter Wanner Mansion

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number 1401 Walnut Street N/A not for publication

city, town Reading N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 042 county Berks code 011

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 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input 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 Heritage Investment Company

street & number 502 Walnut Street

city, town Reading N/A vicinity of state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Berks County Courthouse

street & number 33 North Sixth Street

city, town Reading state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title --NA-- has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

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

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Peter Wanner house stands at the end of Walnut Street on a built up terrace at the foot of Mount Penn, overlooking the city of Reading. It was clearly designed to take advantage of the views offered by the site, with a broad front porch and a high central tower providing pleasant vantage points. The house is a large stone building which merges Victorian form -- a central towered facade with jerkinhead gables -- and Queen Anne detail in a manner that marks the transition of styles at the end of the nineteenth century. Though converted into apartments at a later date, the building retains its original spaces and features with a high degree of integrity. The nominated property contains one contributing building.

The setting is one of the most remarkable features of the house, standing as it does on the base of Mount Penn which looms over the city of Reading. Walnut Street extends from the heart of the city, up a fairly steep incline, to the base of the mount and then continues via a short spur into the driveway of the house. It stands at the head of four terraces which seem to have been man made, presumably for the house site. The newspaper account in **The Reading Eagle** (14 August 1889, p. 1) reports that Wanner had added a vineyard, and that landscaping would continue into the following year. Little of that landscaping now survives. Although the great fir trees that now surround the house alter the original setting, as depicted in the turn of the century views, their obvious age suggests that they are remnants of the original landscaping. (Fig. 1, Fig. 12)

The house is designed on a "T" plan, with the principal facade forming the cross bar of the "T." This two-and-one-half story symmetrical elevation is dominated by the central tower, rising four-and-one-half stories above the entrance to terminate in a high pyramidal roof marked on each face by a shed-roofed dormer. This tower is the major feature of interest, not only by virtue of its height but because of its bold projection forward of the mass of the house and because of its richly textured shingle sheathing (although it has lost some of the half-timbered cross-bracing which originally clad its sides). (Fig. 12) The walls are constructed of squared rectangular stone, described at the time as "white sandstone" (**The Reading Eagle**, 14 August 1889, p. 1), although it is in fact limestone. Of special note is the blue pointing of the masonry. The walls are fenestrated in three registers of windows under segmental arches of reddish sandstone. These windows are double hung with wood sash; those of the outer registers are paired and divided by wooden mullions. The first story central register, at the base of the tower, contains the entrance. The ground story is fronted by a porch with knee braces and open work grillage for balusters. This mixture of Victorian features (the knee braces) and Queen Anne details (the openwork) is characteristic of the building as a whole. The cornice is also distinctive: although the section around the tower is bracketed, the eaves project beyond a frieze of vertical boards scalloped at the ends.

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Description (continued):

The side elevations continue the forms and materials of the front facade. The gable ends of the main block are capped with jerkinhead gables, penetrated in the center by a chimney mass. The windows are likewise capped with segmental stone arches and many of them retain their original two-over-two wood sashes.

In plan, the building's "T" shape houses a traditional plan: i.e. that of the old center hall Federal house (the cross bar of the "T") with a rear service ell (the shaft of the "T"). The main block contains the library on the left and parlor to the right.

The rear wing, which is nearly as long as the width of the front of the house, contained a large dining room, and, in turn, a pantry and kitchen. That wing is surprisingly narrow, and provides ventilation and light from both sides of the rooms within.(Fig. 3, 4) At the back is a one-story stucco addition that probably dates from the 1960s, and only minimally affects the appearance of the house.

The house is entered through a segmental stone arched portal, via a pair of doors with raised and grooved Eastlake detail. These are repeated at the far side of the vestibule, opening into a generous stair hall.(Fig. 5) Above both pairs of doors are segmental transoms infilled with etched glass that bring light into a short vestibule and then into the stair hall. Opening from the hall, on either side are large paneled doors opening into the parlor on the north and the library on the south. These three rooms -- the library, parlor, stairhall -- form an ensemble of the most richly treated spaces in the building, and are distinguished by the wooden millwork of their baseboards, doors and door surrounds. The wooden stair is of special interest: the stair newel, like the detail of the front porch, marks a transition into the coming Queen Anne, with turned elements at the corners, and grooved and incised floral ornament below the cap. (Fig.6) Massive square section balusters carry an oversized railing. It is worth noting that the original gas and electric bronze chandelier hangs in the hall, and the oak stair, and the cypress doors and millwork retain their original natural finish, having never been painted.

Beyond the entrance hall, which conveys a richness of finish appropriate to the home of a captain of industry, the public rooms are surprisingly simple. Newspaper photographs published in the 1890s indicate that much of the expected ornament came in the form of wallpaper frieze borders and richly patterned wallpapers on the walls which have been removed. The library is a long room that extends the full depth of the house and is lighted by large windows at the front and rear, and by two windows on the side.(Fig. 7) These are framed with grooved millwork with corner blocks ornamented with a roundel

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Description (continued):

with a paneled apron below the window. Similar detail occurs on all of the windows of the first two stories. Paneled and louvered wood shutters provide light control at each window. Interestingly, there is no fireplace or mantle -- and no evidence that there ever was one. The newspaper account describes the house being heated "by stoves and heaters, Mr. Wanner preferring them to furnaces or steam". (*The Reading Eagle* 14 August, 1889, p. 1)

The dining room is in the rear wing and opens off the library, through an archway. It is of interest in containing the only mantle (visible through the archway, Fig. 7)), which presumably contained a stove. It is of cypress like the millwork of the house. Beyond is a pantry (now the kitchen) followed by the kitchen which has been converted into a bedroom for an apartment. Although this remodeling has resulted in the loss of the historic fabric of the kitchen and pantry, the wood trim -- including the profiled door surrounds -- is largely intact.

To the north of the entrance hall is the parlor which, along with the library, was recorded in a photograph in *The Reading Eagle* of January 28, 1898. To its rear is a smaller secondary parlor, most likely used as a breakfast room. Like the library, both of these rooms have plaster walls, cypress millwork in the baseboards and heavily molded doors with bull's-eye corner blocks. Of particular interest are the two built-in closets in the corners of the rear parlor with their richly paneled doors. The plaster walls of the main parlor were originally hung with lavish wallpaper as the newspaper photograph reveals; except for its removal, these rooms are extremely well-preserved. An interesting feature is the small bathroom in the stairhall beyond the parlor that fits under the stairs and now serves the apartment. It was this that was referred to in the August 14, 1889 *The Reading Eagle* article which called attention to the building's "toilet rooms ... on each floor."

The second floor continued the same level of finish as the first. The oak stair has the same detail of the newel with turned corners and simplified grooved accents, and the balusters are oversized and square in section. (Fig. 9) On either side are bed chambers with paneled doors, numerous closets, and interior panelled and shuttered windows. (Fig. 10) Like the first floor, these are of cypress and retain the original natural reddish varnished finish.

Only on the third floor is there significant simplification of finish. There, the gables of the front block and rear wing shape the ceilings, and window trim is reduced to sills set into plaster walls. (Fig. 11) The newspaper account also reported that the millwork shifted from cypress to yellow pine, a change which is apparent in the yellowish cast of the wood. Here, too, the door frames are merely mitered at the corners, instead of having the corner blocks of the lower levels.

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Description (continued):

At the head of the stairs at the third floor, is a small sitting room, with a built-in settee providing a view through the paired windows at the base of the tower. A narrow stair behind the bench leads to the fourth level of the tower which provides a panoramic view of the city, one which was remarked on in the newspaper account of the house. That upper room is paneled in beaded, natural finished wood, like the rest of the woodwork of the house.

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 checked="" 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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics:government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1889 **Builder/Architect** Edward K. Mull, architect

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Peter D. Wanner residence "Mount Penn Home" was built to house one of the principal late nineteenth century industrialists of Reading, Pennsylvania and remained his home during his rise to prominence.¹ Erected from the designs of local architect Edward K. Mull, who was responsible for several Reading landmarks, the house is an excellent and largely intact example of the Victorian mansion which is given additional interest by its prominent site overlooking the city. Wanner and the house were of sufficient importance for the building to be regularly covered in the local newspaper, and it was included as well in *Art Work of Reading* (Chicago, 1897).²

Peter D. Wanner (1840 - c. 1910) was born in nearby Kutztown, son of a farmer, and attended the Union Seminary, in New Berlin, Pa. and then the Kutztown Seminary, before attending Franklin and Marshall College.³ Upon graduating in 1865, he was admitted to the Lancaster bar, and then was admitted to practice in Reading in the same year. From that position, he entered politics, serving as District Attorney (1871 ff) and later County Solicitor (1877).⁴

In 1872, Wanner married Kate Mellert, daughter of Arnold Mellert, son of the founder and operator of the Mellert Foundry. By the late 1870s, Wanner had turned his interest to industry. That rise within the business community is described in numerous sources, including *Reading: Its Representative Business Men and its Points of Interest* (New York, 1893) and Morton Montgomery, *History of Berks County in Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1886).⁵ By 1886, he was secretary and treasurer of the Mellert Foundry and had established the Reading Foundry Company.

The Mellert Foundry began as a stove works in the 1840s, became a pipe manufactory in the 1850s, and by the 1860s had enlarged its plant to build railroad cars for the Reading Railroad.⁶ Located at Second, Chestnut, and Grape streets, it was one of the city's largest plants occupying several city blocks and employing in excess of 150 men in 1893.⁷ A portion of the factory remains to commemorate Reading's industrial past at Second and Chestnut Street.

Wanner himself organized the Reading Foundry in 1884 in concert with members of the Mellert family as an extension of the original Mellert iron business. By 1893, it had surpassed the Mellert Foundry in size, employing two hundred men in the business of pipe casting at the Kissinger Street mill and by 1897 it had grown to employ 350 men.⁸ Among their products were water gates, stop valves and fire hydrants, including one of their own invention, the so called

(continued)

9. Major Bibliographical References

(See Attached)

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property 0.8

Quadrangle name Reading Quadrangle

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

118	4229110	446155110
Zone	Easting	Northing

B

Zone	Easting	Northing

C

--	--	--

D

--	--	--

E

--	--	--

F

--	--	--

G

--	--	--

H

--	--	--

Verbal boundary description and justification

(See Attached)

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date Revised: June 24, 1987

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215) 386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

state Pennsylvania

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

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

title Brent D. Glass, State Historic Preservation Officer

date

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Significance (continued):

"Mellert Hydrant" patented in 1890. As a result of the foundries' products, Wanner also came to be involved in constructing water works, leading to Wanner's simultaneous position as president of the Foundrymen's Association of Philadelphia, and the Pennsylvania Water Works Association.⁹

The "Mount Penn Home" of Wanner was erected at the height of his industrial activity, after he had left politics, at the point when he was chairman of both the Mellert Foundry and the Reading Foundry. It thus represented his position as a prominent industrialist both in its position overlooking the city and in its size. Presumably, it was because of Wanner's significance that the house was twice published by **The Reading Eagle** and in **Art Work of Reading**. During the years since Wanner's death in the early twentieth century, the house has seen several changes in ownership and was converted around the 1930s or 1940s into apartments. Nonetheless, these later alterations left both plan and materials largely untouched.

The house is of note as well, because it typifies the aspirations of a Reading industrialist in the national era of great mansions for the captains of industry. Reading's standards were somewhat less exuberant. The house is big -- fourteen rooms when erected -- but not immense. The level of finish is handsome, especially the cypress millwork, but it is not beyond the capabilities of local craftsmen. The design shows the influence of important trends in architecture, but it is still basically a restatement of a Federal house plan with detail and motifs from the middle of the century. It is most remarkable for its superlative state of repair, preserving the full range of its original woodwork and trim with its unpainted and unaltered nineteenth century varnished finish.

Edward K. Mull (active, 1865 - 1906), the architect of the house, was largely responsible for the character of the building. According to Montgomery's **History of Berks County in Pennsylvania**, Mull had reached prominence as a builder by the early 1870s.¹⁰ He listed himself as a carpenter, then a builder, and finally, by the late 1870s, as architect, marking the transition that so many builders made after mid century. By the 1880s, he had attained a level of prominence within the Reading vicinity, designing schools, firehouses and other public buildings including the Dives, Pomeroy and Stewart store on Penn Street in downtown Reading (1882), the Keystone Hook and Ladder Company in 1886, and, in 1889, the Wanner House. Interestingly, all three share common design characteristics -- central towers articulated on the main building facade by piers or pilasters, and capped by a pyramidal roof, strongly marked horizontal facade stringcourses, and symmetrical compositions. These were probably derived from pattern books of the 1860s and 70s, which

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Significance (continued):

would be likely sources for a builder turned architect. As such, the Wanner house provides solid evidence on the nature of local building styles in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. When Mull later designed the Summit House hotel at the top of Mount Penn, he merely continued details which he had already used with success on "Mount Penn Home", suggesting that he preferred the conservative builder's approach to continuity than the more adventurous adaptation of historical styles favored by his metropolitan contemporaries.¹¹

The Wanner house is located in an unusual neighborhood for a great late nineteenth-century suburban house in Reading. Immediately below it is St. Joseph's Hospital and then a sea of rowhouses of the city proper. In the 1895 **Baist's Atlas of Reading**, other large properties are shown at the base of the mountain, but with the exception of the nearby Keim mansion, "Edgemont", now demolished, most were merely empty land.¹² Instead, large, more up-to-date styled Richardsonian and colonial revival houses were being erected in the north end of Reading, removed from the pressures of the city and protected by the prevailing winds from airborne industrial pollutants. But the position of Mount Penn Home recalls the traditional setting of the industrialist's home, overlooking the factories which he operated.

The Wanner House, though a mansion of only moderate scale, is distinct among Reading's late nineteenth century houses, in materials as well as in its site and style. While brick remained Reading's material of choice, even for large houses, the white limestone of the Wanner House is highly unusual.¹³ Quarried by local mason J.S. Ammon from the same stone mountain on which the house stood, the stonework presented great difficulty; it is recorded that Wanner was almost persuaded to shift to cheaper rubble during the course of construction.¹⁴ The carefully squared ashlar of the walls is not only of high quality, but it is incorporated into an unusual and strident color scheme. The white stone walls and the red arches are thrown into high relief by an extremely rare example of blue pointing. This color scheme carries over into the wood trim where, as the paint analysis has revealed, the porch continued the deep red of the arches and shingles of the tower continued the blue of the pointing. Even in the nineteenth century, the building stood out among Reading's homes, which accounts for its several mentions in the local press.

As the principal residence of one of Reading's leading citizens, industrialist Peter D. Wanner, and as an intact and an exceptionally well-preserved example of an elite residence by an important local architect, Edward K. Mull, Mount Penn Home deserves to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Notes

1. The Reading Eagle, 14 August 1889, p. 1. He was still listed as the owner in 1897 in Art Work of Reading (Chicago, 1897, n.p.), and continues to be listed in the house into the twentieth century in the the city directories.
2. In addition to the publication noted above, see also The Reading Eagle, 28 January 1898.
3. Wanner's biography is given in Morton Montgomery, History of Berks County in Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, 1886, p. 577, and in Leland Williamson, ed. Prominent and Progressive Pennsylvanians of the Nineteenth Century, Vol. 3, Philadelphia, 1898, pp. 440 - 442.
4. Wanner's political career is discussed in Montgomery, op. cit., p. 557.
5. The most complete history of the Mellert Foundry is discussed in Reading: Its Representative Businessmen and Points of Interest, New York, 1893, p. 31 - 32.
6. Ibid., p. 31.
7. The growth of the Reading Foundry is further discussed in "The City of Reading", in Art Work of Reading, Chicago, 1897, p. 5.
8. Williamson, op. cit., p. 441.
9. Montgomery, op. cit., p. 729.
10. Mull's career can be assembled from a variety of sources, including Montgomery, op. cit., which lists several buildings, including Pomeroy's store, p. 738 (illus.), and St. John's Church, Wernersville, p. 1117. In addition, he designed the Keystone Hook and Ladder which is discussed in The Reading Eagle, 23 October 1886 and which was added to the National Register in 1985; a few projects are listed in the Philadelphia Inquirer, including a hotel at King/Shoemaker streets (13 January 1891, p. 6). Mull's career can be exhumed from the Boyd's City Directories, which list him until 1906 as an architect. Interestingly, a son, Edward Z. Mull, is listed at the home address as a contractor. His name continues in the directories after 1907.
11. The Summit House is illustrated in Art Work of Reading, op. cit., n.p.

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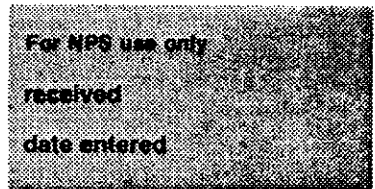
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Footnotes (continued):

12. The location of large houses can be seen in Baist's Atlas of the City of Reading, Philadelphia, 1895, pl. 32. Several are illustrated in City of Reading Pennsylvania, Jenkin Hill, ed., Reading, 1910.
13. The principal material for building in Reading was brick, trimmed with Philadelphia pressed brick in more lavish structures. Even at the start of the 1880s, very little building was done in stone and even this was generally confined to local field stone. Of the 40 stone or stone-faced buildings standing in 1880, all were constructed of this local brownish sandstone. See Building Stones and the Quarry Industry, Tenth Census of the United States, Henry Garnett, editor (Washington Government Printing Office, 1884) p. 104; 350.
14. The Reading Eagle, (1889), op. cit.

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Bibliography

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Reading: Its Representative Business Men and Its Points of
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Boundary Description and Justification

Beginning at a point, said point of intersection of the north right-of-way line of Walnut Street with the east right-of-way line at Fourteenth Street; thence extending in a northerly direction along said east right-of-way line of Fourteenth Street a distance of 160 5/10' to a point, a corner of Lot No. 2; thence extending in an easterly direction along said Lot No. 2 with an interior angle of 90-degrees with said east right-of-way line of Fourteenth Street a distance of 220' to a point on the west right-of-way line of Palm Street; thence extending in a southerly direction along the west right-of-way line of Palm Street with an interior angle of 90-degrees with the above-mentioned line a distance of 160' to a point on the north right-of-way line of Walnut Street; thence extending in a westerly direction along the north right-of-way line of Walnut Street with an interior angle of 90-degrees 2-minutes with the east right of way line of Walnut Street a distance of 220' to the place of the beginning and comprising the site of the house, walks, and grounds of the Wanner Mansion.

The boundary includes the nominated building and all historically associated land.

