

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 J. Sowers House

and or common

2. Location

street & number 221 Home Street not for publication

city, town Palmyra vicinity of

state Missouri code 29 county Marion code 127

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s) | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private | <input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied          | <input type="checkbox"/> commercial                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> structure              | <input type="checkbox"/> both               | <input type="checkbox"/> work in progress    | <input type="checkbox"/> educational                  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> site                   | <b>Public Acquisition</b>                   | <b>Accessible</b>                            | <input type="checkbox"/> entertainment                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> object                 | <input type="checkbox"/> in process         | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted     | <input type="checkbox"/> government                   |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> being considered   | <input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted   | <input type="checkbox"/> industrial                   |
|   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NA      | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> no       | <input type="checkbox"/> military                     |
|   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> museum                       |
|   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> park                         |
|   |   |  | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence |
|   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> religious                    |
|   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> scientific                   |
|   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> transportation               |
|   |   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> other:                       |

4. Owner of Property

name James D. and Nancy C. Talley

street & number 5 Thornhedge Court

city, town The Woodlands vicinity of state Texas 77381

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder of Deeds

street & number Marion County Courthouse

city, town Palmyra state Missouri 63461

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Missouri State Historical Survey has this property been determined eligible?  yes  no

date 1984 federal  state  county  local

depository for survey records Missouri Department of Natural Resources P. O. Box 176

city, town Jefferson City state Missouri 65102

## 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 Peter J. Sowers House is a two-story ivory-painted brick house in the Greek Revival style, with some transitional Italianate features. A conservatory along the south side of the house has scalloped arches and was presumably added in the 1870's. The house is distinguished by its generous scale and rich detailing inside and out.

The main block of the house is three bays wide and two deep; the smaller-scale rear wing is two bays by two and has an enclosed shed-roofed porch along its south side. Both blocks have low hipped roofs with recently restored standing-seam tin roofing painted red oxide, and both have modillioned cornices, that in front underlined by a broad molding. The stone foundation is finely cut in a vermiculated pattern under the west elevation, where it is capped by an ashlar water table. The center bay of the west elevation breaks forward about a foot or so, providing a visual support for the deeply recessed low pedimented gable above it. The front door, with its sidelights and tall toplight, is flanked by paired Doric antae and sheltered by a porch roof supported by four Ionic columns. The wooden floor of the porch rests on a stone foundation and is approached by three stone steps, the top riser of which is inscribed "P. J. Sauer. 1855." At the side of this step is a less-clearly legible name, possibly Joseph Dirich. Above the columns are coffered soffits, classically detailed architrave, and modillioned cornice. The cast-iron balustrade on the porch roof is composed of finely detailed verticals in what might be called a foliated lyre pattern. The porch window has a hinged wooden panel below it which allows it to be used as a door. The large windows, rising ten feet from the first floor, have six-over-six double-hung barn red sash, working louvered green shutters (some rescued from the trash pile), and bracketed and elaborately scrolled iron pediments. The bracketed pediments are repeated on the south side, but elsewhere plain wooden lintels prevail. Two round-headed windows mark the center of the rear elevation.

The conservatory or glazed porch on the south side of the house is a white wooden construction on a brick base. Old photographs show that this base replaces a wooden balustrade with urn-shaped balusters. A similar balustrade once crowned the conservatory roof. The conservatory is three bays wide and one deep, each outlined by a scalloped or three-lobed arch supported by small volutes. The ivory-painted spandrels are ornamented with incised disks, while the shaped posts between bays have capital blocks and large scrolled brackets. Smaller brackets underline the cornice. The arched portions of the openings are glazed in yellow, blue and purple. The clear lower glass is set in three divisions to each bay, the center of which are double-hung except in the case of the center bay, which has a door.

The rear porch dates in its present form from the 19-0's. It has a clapboard base and fixed four-pane windows.

Opposite the front door the visitor is greeted by a staircase ascending at right angles to the axis of entry, contrary to expectation. The staircase curves at both ends and rises through both main floors to the attic. The area beneath the staircase may once have been open but is now enclosed by coffered paneling as a storage space. The front hall is also notable for its woodwork. Doors and baseboards are grained; the doors are paneled and have extra beaded moldings on their formal faces; doorcases have carved low pediments. Some door locks have porcelain covers shaped like feathers over their keyholes. These details are repeated in the doors and windows of the south room, which

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

**Specific dates** built 1855 **Builder/Architect** unknown

### Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Peter J. Sowers House at 221 Home Street in Palmyra, Missouri, is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in that it embodies the distinctive characteristics of the Greek Revival style of architecture in northeast Missouri. It demonstrates the last phase of the style, the transition to the Italianate style which became dominant in the region. The exceptionally fine detail and craftsmanship preserved in the front porch, staircase, doors, and windowcases are particularly worthy of note. Secondly the house is eligible for the National Register under Criterion B (associated with the lives of persons significant in our past) in that it was the last home of William H. Russell, an owner and organizer of the Pony Express, a celebrated though brief episode in the opening of the West.

By 1840 the Greek Revival was firmly established as the style of choice in Missouri. Both the state capitol in Jefferson City and the courthouse in St. Louis were then under construction. In the next two decades, the Italianate and Gothic Revival established themselves here as well, but the Greek Revival remained popular until the Civil War, during which, for example, the front part of the Chatillon-DeMenil House in St. Louis was built. While the most sophisticated designs were generally confined to St. Louis, northeast Missouri could boast some relatively elaborate Greek Revival buildings, too, including the Ralls County Courthouse built in New London in 1858.<sup>1</sup> Palmyra had its Greek Revival Courthouse four years earlier (replaced at the turn of the century) as well as several temple-shaped residences.<sup>2</sup> The unknown builder of the Peter J. Sowers House was not as thoroughgoing a Greek as some others, however, applying Greek detail to a basic building form that was equally suitable to Italianate treatment, and designing the library upstairs entirely in the Italianate mode. Whatever the builder did was of high quality, however, not only large eye-catchers such as the portico and the curving staircase (possibly taken from a builders manual such as Peter Nicholson's of 1848) but even in the finely cut foundation stones.<sup>3</sup> It is thought that this one builder was responsible for many of the finest surviving mid-century houses in Palmyra and nearby Marion County, but his identity is not known, although further research is underway.

According to the census of 1850, Peter J. Sowers was 33 years old, a native of Virginia, and a merchant, with a wife, Mary, and children aged 7, 5 and 3, all born in Missouri. He seems to have prospered, rising in worth between the 1840 and 1850 censuses from \$5,000 to \$50,000. In late 1860 he helped to convene a meeting in Palmyra which expressed support for the seceding states, and he is said to have suffered during the war because of his Confederate sympathies.<sup>4</sup> After selling this house in 1869, he moved away from Palmyra. He appeared in St. Louis in 1878, where he moved from year to year with the fashionable population westward along the central corridor; his last address was 4917 Berlin (now Pershing Place). He died in 1901 at the age of 85.<sup>5</sup>

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

- Holcombe, R. I. History of Marion County, Missouri. St. Louis: E. F. Perkins, 1883.
- Palmyra Sesquicentennial Corporation. Palmyra 1819-1969. Palmyra, Mo.: Palmyra Spectator, 1969.

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property less than one acre

Quadrangle name "Palmyra, Mo."

Quadrangle scale 1: 24,000

UTM References

|   |           |               |                |   |      |         |          |
|---|-----------|---------------|----------------|---|------|---------|----------|
| A | <u>15</u> | <u>626700</u> | <u>4406155</u> | B |      |         |          |
|   | Zone      | Easting       | Northing       |   | Zone | Easting | Northing |
| C |           |               |                | D |      |         |          |
| E |           |               |                | F |      |         |          |
| G |           |               |                | H |      |         |          |

Verbal boundary description and justification

Lots 5 and 6 and south 54 feet of Lot 7, Block 26, Town of Palmyra.

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

state Missouri code 29 county Marion code 127

state \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_ county \_\_\_\_\_ code \_\_\_\_\_

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Esley Hamilton

organization \_\_\_\_\_ date September 1984

street & number 1169 Ursula Avenue telephone (314) 727-0428

city or town University City state Missouri 63130

## 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 John Karel

John Karel, Director & Deputy State Historic Preservation  
title Officer, Division of Parks & Historic Preservation date 11-29-84

For NPS use only:

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

date \_\_\_\_\_

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date \_\_\_\_\_

Chief of Registration

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet Peter J. Sowers House

Item number 7

Page 1

runs the full depth of the house. The recessed ceiling of this room was replastered in 1963 without its original egg-and-dart molding, but its center medallion is original. A broad frieze has been created, presumably late in the last century, by means of a narrow picture molding. The fireplace lacks a hearth but has an early arched iron grate and a vaguely Italianate mantel. The northwest room has notable detailing including a mantel in the Greek Revival style of the door and windowcases (The fireplace opening has been blocked by the furnace vent). The overmantel is a later addition, but the rich cornice is similar to the exterior one. The room behind the staircase and the northeast room of the main block (the latter now reduced in size by the insertion of a bathroom) are more simply detailed. The number of rooms on this floor makes their use difficult to determine. They were supplemented by a library in the space behind the staircase on the second floor. This is the room lighted by the round-headed windows, whose pattern is repeated in the closet doors on the opposite side of the room. Both are ornamented by spandrels carved in a ribbon pattern. This woodwork contrasting in style with the rest of the house suggests the Italianate.

Apart from the installation of bathrooms, the main alteration to the house has occurred in the service wing, where a steep narrow service staircase was replaced in the 1940's (it is thought) by a broader straight stair whose lower landing opens into the back porch. The kitchen does retain its fireplace. Upstairs the back stair landing cuts into the rear portion of the large north bedroom. A wall has been removed from this space, which would have made its rear nine feet an alcove or withdrawing room. This bedroom has the only upstairs fireplace, with plain pilastered mantel and shallow closet. Other upstairs rooms were heated by stoves, whose holes are still visible. Upstairs windows are low, scaled to the exterior proportions of the house.

The present owner is in the process of restoring the house to its original appearance; some evidence of current work can be seen in the accompanying photographs.

Until the early 1970's the house was approached by a circular walkway of unknown date. Still remaining at the edge of the front sidewalk is a stone hitching post with a chain attached to its top. At the northeast corner of the property stands a large brick smokehouse with a pyramidal roof and a later shed-roofed, shiplap-sided storage room. The deterioration of the masonry has reached the point of collapse at the southeast corner of the smokehouse, prompting the owner to apply a temporary sheathing until proper repairs can be made. Inside is a frost-proof toilet, said to be the first in Palmyra. The interior of the shed room is lined with narrow beaded tongue-in-groove siding placed horizontally. The metal cistern cover, formerly located south of the rear porch where the stone cap is still in place, is now kept inside the house. It is dated 1876 and marked "Perin & Gaff Mfg. Co."

The house sits among large oaks in a residential neighborhood on the east side of Palmyra's business district.

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National Park ServiceNational Register of Historic Places  
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Continuation sheet Peter J. Sowers House

Item number 8

Page 1

The buyer of this house in 1869 was John W. Russell (1836-1907), who just two years previously had become cashier (the chief administrative officer) of the Marion County Savings Bank in Palmyra, which was then being organized.<sup>6</sup> Born in Lexington, Missouri, he was the son of William H. Russell (1812-1872), one of the founders of the Pony Express.<sup>7</sup> The father had lived in Lexington prior to the Civil War, where he had organized a freight-hauling firm called after 1854 Russell, Majors and Waddell. The firm itself had its headquarters in Leavenworth, Kansas, while the Pony Express, which was inaugurated April 3, 1860, operated out of St. Joseph, Missouri. With the completion of the overland telegraph to California, the Pony Express ceased operation in October, 1861, and the larger firm went bankrupt the next year. Russell was left with massive debts and an indictment (never brought to trial) on federal charges stemming from financial arrangements he had made with the Secretary of War. After the war, he came to live in Palmyra with his son, and he died in this house.<sup>8</sup> Two years later Julia McCormack Russell died too, leaving three children. Following these events, Russell moved out of the house and sold it. He later lived on the other side of town at 630 South Dickerson; he remarried had two more children, and lived until 1907.<sup>9</sup>

The house was purchased in 1874 by Milton McDonald. Born in Colpepper County, Virginia; in 1832, he seems to have come to Palmyra after the Civil War.<sup>10</sup> He operated a store on the west side of Main Street north of Olive advertising dry goods, carpets and notions. It was no doubt McDonald who added the conservatory on the west side of the house. Following his death in late 1918 and that of his wife in 1920, the house passed to their daughter Idaline, who lived there until 1936; she died in 1949.<sup>11</sup> She sold the property to Thomas E. Pratt (1868-1950), a native of Palmyra who in 1892 had operated a store close to her father's, advertising "hardware, stoves, tinware, china, glass and queensware, farm implements and coal." Pratt, orphaned at age 7; had been raised by Enoch McLeod, then county sheriff, and he himself later served in that office. He purchased this house with an eye toward retirement from his position as Chief Special Agent of the Burlington Railroad. He is warmly remembered in Palmyra for his bequests to three local institutions: the Masonic Lodge, the Methodist Church, and the Episcopal Church, all of which were thus enabled to erect new buildings.<sup>12</sup> Thomas E. Pratt, Junior, (1896-1960) lived in this house until 1956. Thereafter the house passed through a series of six ownerships and was divided into apartments. The present owners acquired the property in 1981 and have been working since then to restore it to its original appearance.

Notes

1. John Albury Bryan, Missouri's Contribution to American Architecture (St. Louis: St. Louis Architectural Club, 1928); Lawrence Lowic, The Architectural Heritage of St. Louis 1803-1891 (St. Louis: Washington University, Gallery of Art, 1982), chapters 2 and 3; Talbot Hamlin, Greek Revival Architecture in America (New York: Dover, 1944-1964), pp. 249-255.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Inventory—Nomination Form

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Continuation sheet Peter J. Sowers House

Item number 8

Page 2

2. Marian M. Ohman, Encyclopedia of Missouri Courthouses (Columbia, Mo.: University of Missouri-Columbia, Extension Division, 1981). Palmyra is sorely in need of a systematic inventory of its historic buildings.
3. Nicholson's design is illustrated by J. Frazer Smith in White Pillars (New York: Bramhall House, 1941), p. 236.
4. R. I. Holcombe, History of Marion County, Missouri (St. Louis: E. F. Perkins, 1883), p. 350.
5. St. Louis city directories; St. Louis Republic, Sunday, December 1, 1901.
6. Holcombe, pp. 573, 870-871.
7. Howard R. Lamar, ed. The Reader's Encyclopedia of the American West (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1977), pp. 949, 1053-1054.
8. Raymond W. Settle and Mary Lund Settle, Saddles and Spurs (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 1955, 1972), p. 199; Palmyra Sesquicentennial Corporation, Palmyra 1819-1969 (Palmyra Spectator, 1969), p. 55; Greenwood Cemetery, Palmyra.
9. Hannibal-Palmyra directories for 1881, 1892, 1897; Marion County Probate Court, file 2280.
10. Greenwood Cemetery; local directories.
11. Title abstract.
12. Greenwood Cemetery; Palmyra 1819-1969, p. 55.

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Continuation sheet Peter J. Sowers House

Item number 11

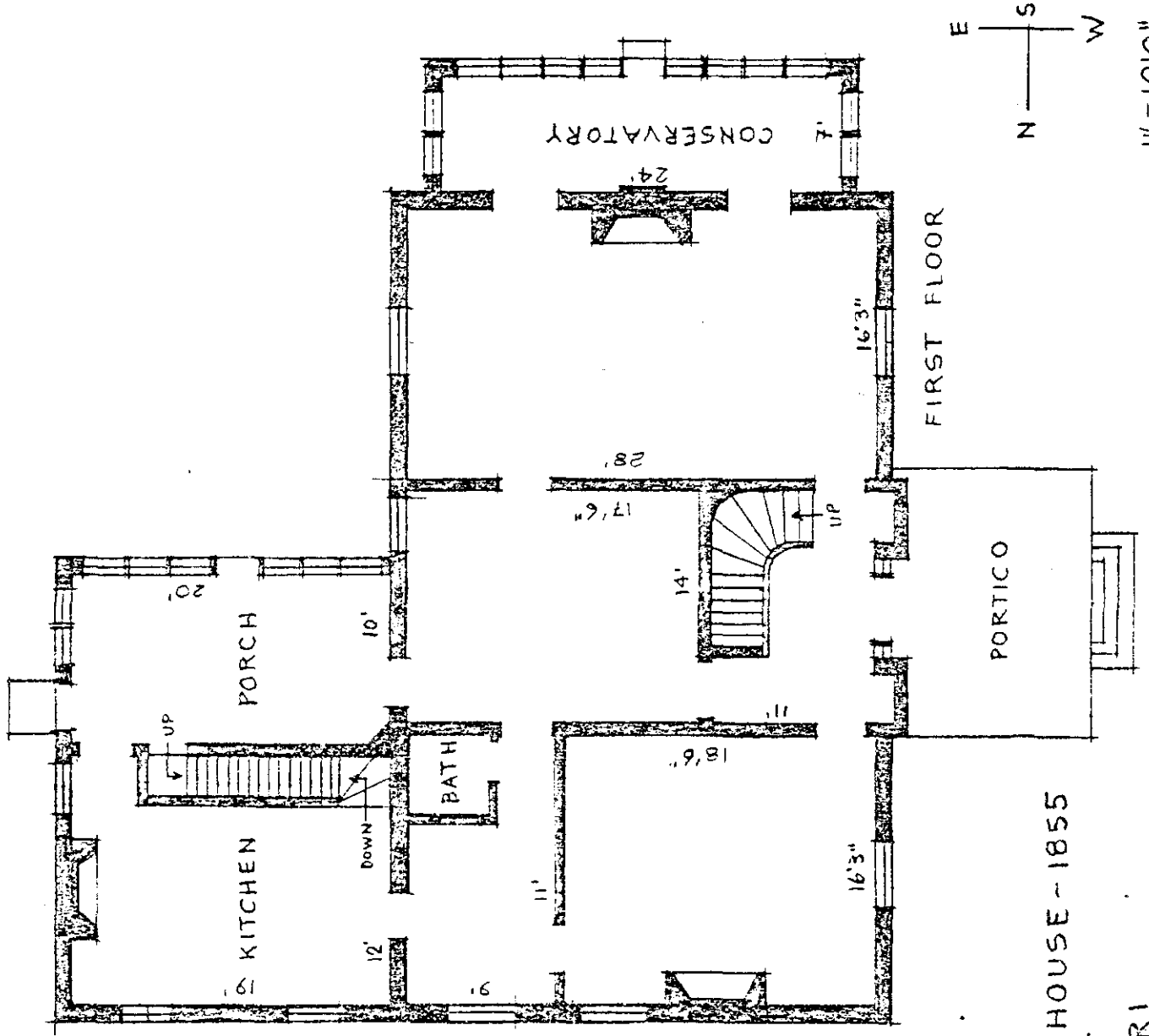
Page 1

2. James M. Denny, Chief of Survey and  
Registration Section and State  
Contact Person

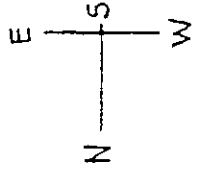
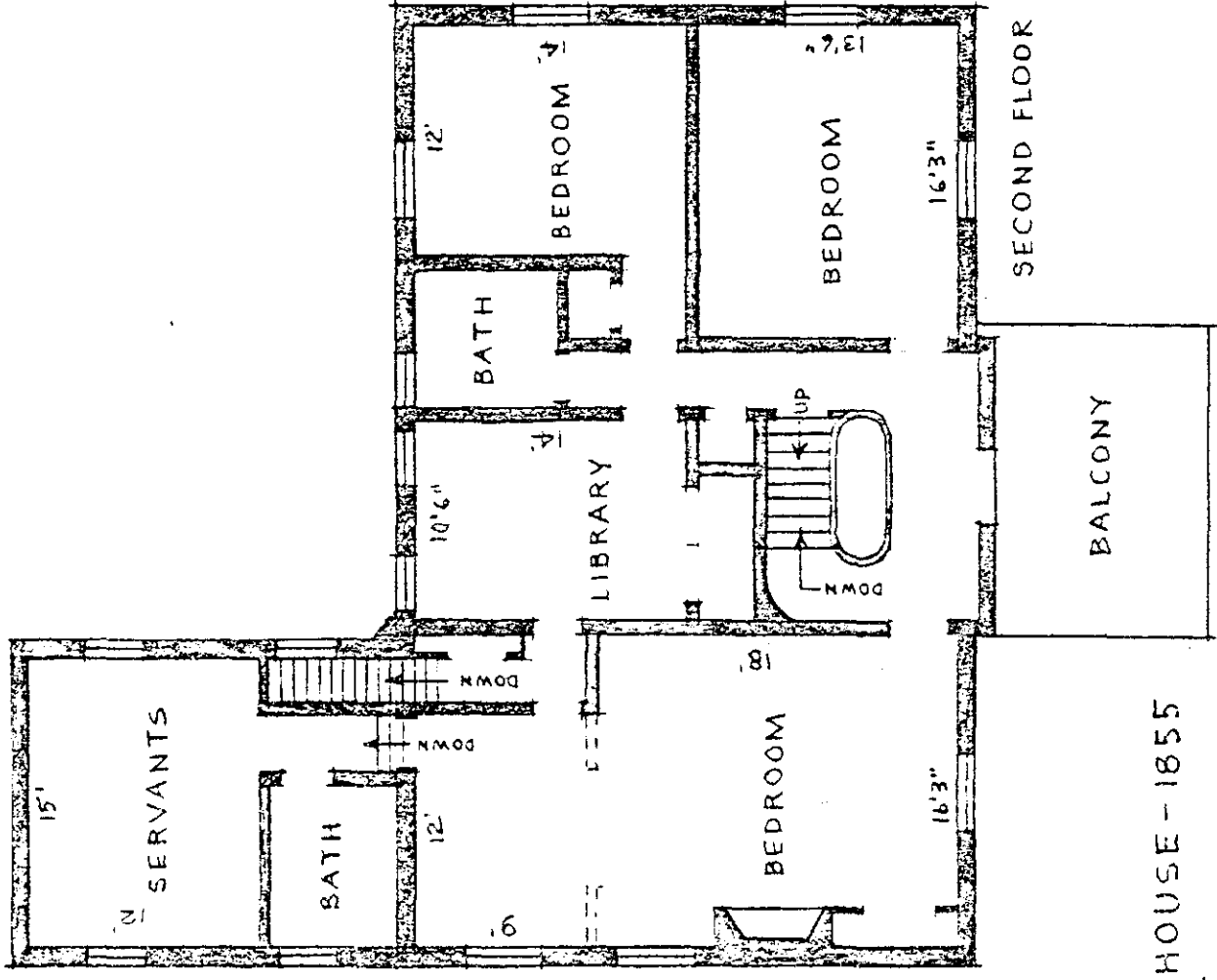
Historic Preservation Program  
Department of Natural Resources  
P.O. Box 176  
1915 Southridge Drive  
Jefferson City

November 15, 1984  
(314) 751-4096  
Missouri 65201





PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE - 1855  
 221 HOME STREET  
 PALMYRA, MISSOURI



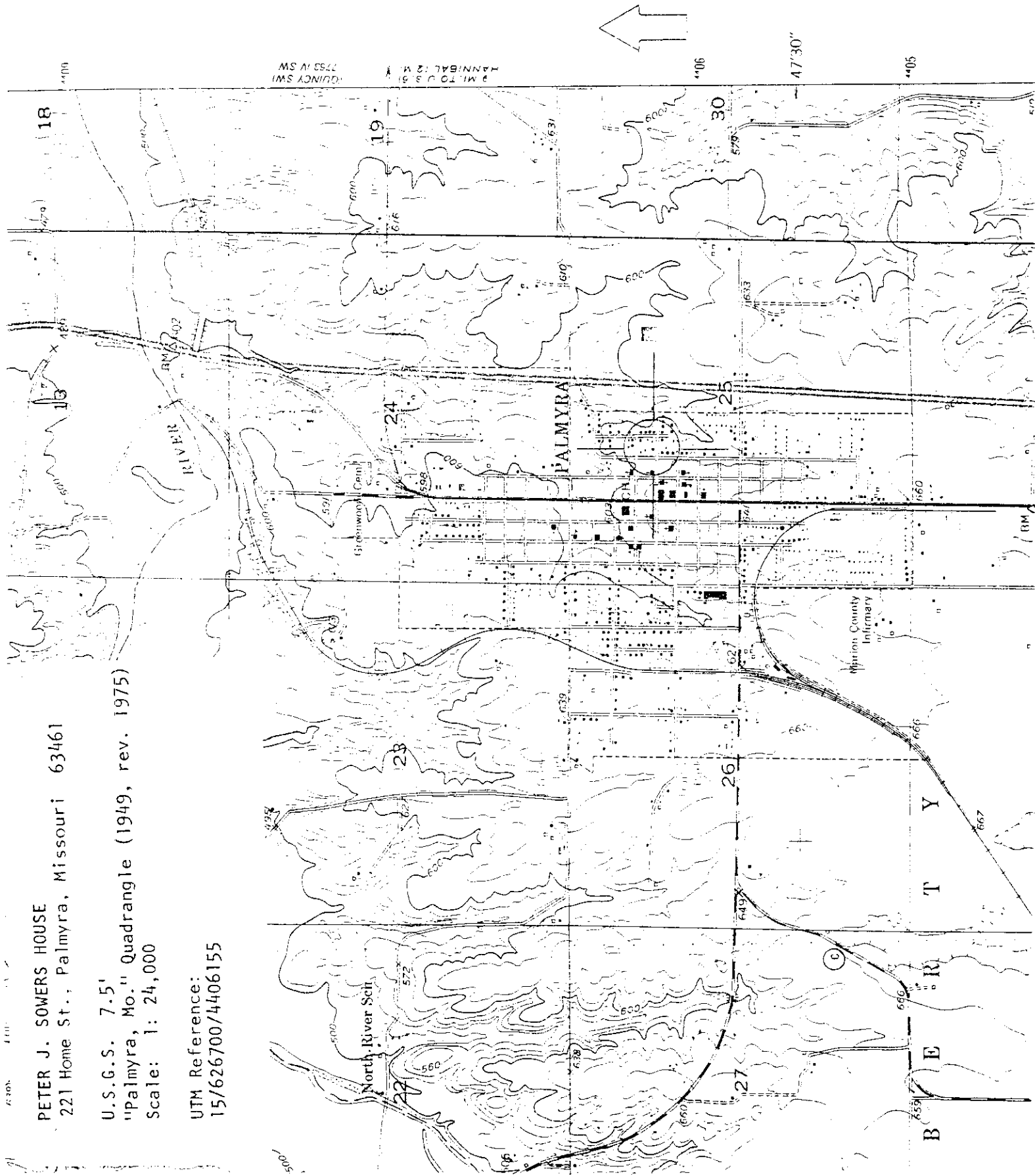
1" = 10'0"

PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE - 1855  
 221 HOME STREET  
 PALMYRA, MISSOURI

PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE  
221 Home St., Palmyra, Missouri 63461

U.S.G.S. 7.5'  
"Palmyra, Mo." Quadrangle (1949, rev. 1975)  
Scale: 1: 24,000

UTM Reference:  
15/626700/4406155



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE                    1 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
          University City, MO 63130

front and north elevations from northwest



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE 2 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
University City, MO 63130

close-up of entry; note inscription on  
top step, "P. J. Sauer. 1855"



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE                      3 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
University City, MO 63130

south side with conservatory  
from southwest





PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

4 of 12

Photog.: historic photo, c. 1910  
Neg. Loc.: on site  
McDonald family and southwest angle of  
house; note balustrades of front porch  
and conservatory



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE                      5 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
University City, MO 63461

east side and rear wing from southeast



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE 6 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
University City, MO 63130

front staircase from first floor,  
looking up toward south



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE 7 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: James Talley, August 1984  
Neg. Loc.: on site

front staircase from second floor,  
looking down toward south





PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE                    8 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: James Talley, August 1984  
Neg. Loc.: on site

south first-floor room (parlor)  
looking southwest



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE 9 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
University City, MO 63130

close-up of northwest door of parlor



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE 10 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
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northwest room, showing fireplace and  
later overmantel



PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE 11 of 12  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

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closet, west wall of second-floor library





PETER J. SOWERS HOUSE  
221 Home St., Palmyra, MO 63461

12 of 12

Photog.: Esley Hamilton, July 1984  
Neg. Loc.: 1169 Ursula Avenue  
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smokehouse and shed (with temporary  
covering), northeast corner of lot,  
from southeast

