



Register of Historic Kansas Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating individual properties and districts. The format is similar to the National Register of Historic Places form. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets. Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Grace Bedell Billings Home
Other names/site number KHRI # 143-86
Name of related Multiple Property Listing n/a

2. Location

street & number 602 N Custer St not for publication
city or town Delphos vicinity
state Kansas code KS county Ottawa code OT 143 zip code 67436

3-4. Certification

I hereby certify that this property is listed in the Register of Historic Kansas Places.
Applicable State Register Criteria: A X B C D
Patrick Zollner
Signature of certifying official/Title Patrick Zollner, Deputy SHPO Date 5-17-22
Kansas State Historical Society
State agency

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box)

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

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing
2	buildings
	district
	site
	structure
	object
2	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the State Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single family

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

FOLK VICTORIAN

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation: STONE

walls: WOOD and METAL

roof: ASPHALT

other:

Narrative Description

(Describe the current physical appearance of the property.)

Summary Paragraph *(Briefly describe the overall characteristics of the property and its location, setting, and size.)*

The Grace Bedell Billings Home was built in 1880 by George N. Billings and is located at 602 N. Custer St in Delphos, Kansas. The one and a half-story Folk Victorian house and is being nominated to the Register of Historic Kansas Places under CRITERION B: for its association with Grace Bedell Billings, a person of historical significance for her correspondence with President Lincoln during the 1860 election. The house has received many alterations and is clad in metal siding.

Elaboration *(Provide a detailed description of the building's exterior, interior, and any associated buildings on the property. Note any historic features, materials, and changes to the building/property.)*

Setting/Feeling

Delphos and Ottawa County are located in the north central part of Kansas, approximately 69 miles south of the Nebraska border. The Billings house is located in the northern portion of Delphos, near the intersection of 6th street and Custer Street. The town has few commercial or industrial buildings, and primarily consists of residences. The entire town measures just 0.6 square miles, with the largest population of the town being 494 people in 1990. When George and Grace Billings lived there the median population was around 400 residents.¹ The average current population is around 330 residents (according to the Census Bureau in 2019).² The Billings house has one ancillary structure, that being the garage/carriage house that the Ottawa County appraiser states was constructed in 1930.

Exterior

The one and a half-story wood framed house features a cross-gable roof. There is no remaining ornamentation on any of the elevations, porches, or bay windows. The west (main) elevation features a hipped-roof porch supported by two square wood posts. The door is centered under the porch and flanked by two one-over-one windows. All of the windows appear to be original or historic wood one-over-ones and the same size and shape unless otherwise noted. Unless noted, all of the windows are covered with storm windows.

The south elevation has two primary divisions, the gable-end to the west, and the cross to the east. The end-gable features a pair of windows on the upper level, and a centered bay window on the lower level. The cross section has a gable with one central window on the upper level and centered within the eastern portion of the elevation. There are three single fixed stained-glass windows on the upper level; one to the west of the corner, and two evenly spaced on either side of the gable. At the meeting of the cross-gable is a shed-roof porch supported by two square wood posts. There is a door at the corner, and a window on the west of the corner, and one to the east of the door. There are two other windows on the lower level; one is a shortened one-over-one.

The east elevation has two primary divisions, the gable-end and a shed roof. The gable features two pairs of windows, one at both the upper and lower levels, centered under the gable. The shed/partially hipped

¹ Biggest US Cities, February 3, 2022, <https://www.biggestuscities.com/city/delphos-kansas>.

² Ibid.

roof portion features a horizontal rectangular window, followed by another two windows, a door, and fourth window.

The north elevation can be divided into three portions; the shed/gable roof, a middle bump-out at the crossing, and the western gable-end. The shed/gable roof features two shortened windows; one a both the upper and lower levels. The crossing creates a zig-zag shape and features one window on the three elevations; west, north, and west. The gable features a window centered at the lower level.

Interior

The interior is in fair to poor condition but retains some historic finishes. Most of the walls retain plaster, though some appear to have paneling. The baseboards, door and window trims appear to be historic and remain intact with little ornament. There are historic transom windows over some of the doors. The original wood flooring appears to remain as well has some original wood doors. The historic wood balustrade is turned and an accent to the stairs and landing. There is an original arched opening at the bay window on the first floor, which is surrounded in historic wood trim.

Alterations

The home is now covered with secondary steel siding, which obscures any historic materials that might be present. There is an early historic photo of the home which documents the elevation with a historic bay window. The home was originally a Folk Victorian cross gable house with some simple ornamentation such as accented trim pieces, stylized columns, and decorative window hoods including on the bay window. The front (west) entrance originally features a shallow hipped roof with three large turned wood Doric columns with accented base and capitals that supported the heavy cornice of the porch. This porch is now replaced with a shed roof porch, and simple wood posts supporting the roof.

The bay window featured an accented bulkhead under the windows, and a decorative, though simple, cornice above. Each window featured original wood shutters. The upper floor windows in the gable-end featured an accented window hood. It is unknown if these features still exist. The building is covered in steel siding and there are no visible indications that the simple decorative elements are still on the home.

The cross portion of the building was originally a single story with no upper-level windows and a flat-roof porch in the same style as the original front porch and columns. The porch now has a slopped shed roof with wood post supports. At some unknown date, a dormer, upper floor addition, and extension were added to the home expanding its square footage. This possible historic addition (date unknown) changed the configuration of the home. In the historic photos, there was a rear porch on the structure with simple wood posts, which was removed at an unknown date.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for State Register listing)

- A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or grave.
- D a cemetery.
- E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F a commemorative property.
- G less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

POLITICS

Period of Significance

1880-1936

Significant Dates

NA

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above)

Grace Bedell Billings

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

George Billings

Period of Significance (justification)

The properties period of significance is from 1880 when the house was first built to 1936 when Grace Bedell Billings died.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

NA

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary Paragraph *(Provide a summary paragraph that notes under what criteria the property is nominated.)*

The Grace Bedell Billings home was built in 1880 by Billings' husband, George Billings. The home is nominated for the Kansas Register of Historic Places under CRITERION B. The property is associated with someone significant in our past. Grace Bedell Billings is notable for having written President Abraham Lincoln as a little girl to ask him to grow his infamous beard so that he may win the 1860 Presidential Election. Her thought process was that women would think he was attractive and therefore would tease their democratic husbands into voting for Lincoln. The property in Delphos is not where the letter was written but instead is nominated because Billings lived in the home from 1880 until her death in 1936.

Elaboration *(Provide a brief history of the property and justify why this property is locally significant.)*

Ottawa County and Delphos City History

Named for the Ottawa Tribe, Ottawa County was established on February 27, 1860 by William Sitt, George Darling, and Seymour Ayers. Although "founded" in 1860, the county would not be officially established until six years later. The original county had five cities with Delphos being one of the original settlements. Ayersville was the original county seat; however, after only a year the county seat was moved to Minneapolis, Kansas which is 12 miles away from Delphos.³ The county comprises 460,800 acres, much of which is desirable farming land.⁴

The city of Delphos is located in the northwest part of Ottawa county and was laid out by W.A. Kiser in 1869-'70 but the town was not officially founded until 1878 when a railroad was guaranteed to be built. The Solomon Valley Railroad was built in October of 1879 and is named after the river near Delphos.⁵ Just as the railroad was finished inhabitants started to make their homesteads in Delphos including Grace Bedell and her husband George N. Billings. When William G. Cuttler first wrote his book in 1883 the population was about 400 inhabitants, the population remains almost the same with 371 inhabitants in 2019 according to the United States Census Bureau.

Lincoln Letter History

In a Journal Article titled "Why Lincoln Wore a Beard", published in 1931, historian George A. Dondero argues that Abraham Lincoln left his physical appearance up to the decisions of an 11-year-old from Westfield, New York. October 15, 1860, Grace Bedell wrote President Lincoln arguing that a "whiskers" would make him look more handsome and therefore would get him more votes, the transcript of the letter is as follows: ⁶

"Westfield, Chautauqua Co. N.Y.
Oct. 15, 1860.

³ Kansas State Historical Society, "Ottawa County, Kansas," Kansapedia, October 15, 2015, <https://www.kshs.org/kansapedia/ottawa-county-kansas/15327>.

⁴ Cutler, William G., *History of the State of Kansas*, "Ottawa County." (A.T. Andreas, Chicago, 1883). <https://www.kancoll.org/books/cuttler/ottawa/ottawa-co-p5.html#DELPHOS>.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Roy P. Basler et al, 2020, <http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gracebedell.htm>.

Hon A. B. Lincoln

Dear Sir:

My father has just home from the fair and brought home your picture and Mr. Hamlin's. I am a little girl only eleven years old, but want you should be President of the United States very much so I hope you wont think me very bold to write to such a great man as you are. Have you any little girls about as large as I am if so give them my love and tell her to write to me if you cannot answer this letter. I have got 4 brother's and part of them will vote for you any way and if you will let your whiskers grow I will try and get the rest of them to vote for you, you would look a great deal better for your face is so thin. All the ladies like whiskers and they would tease their husbands to vote for you and then you would be President. My father is a going to vote for you and if I was a man I would vote for you to but I will try and get every one to vote for you that I can. I think that rail fence around your picture makes it look very pretty I have got a little baby sister she is nine weeks old and is just as cunning as can be. When you direct your letter direct to Grace Bedell Westfield, Chatauque County, New York. I must not write any more. Answer this letter right off.

Good bye,

Grace Bedell.”

The President wrote Bedell back in his own handwriting and Grace kept the letter her whole life, some newspaper articles state that she displayed it in her home in Delphos and other state that it was kept in a safe in the Delphos State Bank. President Lincoln did in fact grow a beard and sported it at his inauguration, it has become recently known that the President kept the letter Bedell wrote him and took it to Washington D.C. Lincoln stated that he grew the beard because if he had a daughter who has asked him to grow “whiskers” he would have gladly done it. Lincoln actually met Bedell on February 16, 1861 on his way to his presidential inauguration, the Philadelphia Enquirer reported Lincolns accounts of the meeting:

“Some three months ago, I received a letter from a young lady here; it was a very pretty letter, and she advised me to let my whiskers grow, as it would improve my personal appearance; acting partly upon her suggestion, I have done so; and now, if she is here, I would like to see her; . . . A small boy, mounted on a post, with his mouth and eyes both wide open, cried out, ``there she is, Mr. LINCOLN,” pointing to a beautiful girl, with black eyes, who was blushing all over her fair face.

The President left the car, and the crowd making way for him, he reached her, and gave her several hearty kisses, and amid the yells of delight from the excited crowd, he bade her good-bye.”⁷

Historian Sara Kettler has argued that Lincoln’s beard may have protected him against an assassination attempt on the way to his inauguration. There were rumors that there would be an attempt on his life in Baltimore the same day he met Bedell. Although there were no pictures of Lincoln with a beard and therefore, he may have been unrecognizable to the assassins.⁸ Although newspapers that aimed to make fun of the President claimed he dressed as a woman to gain safe passage to Washington D.C.

⁷ National Park Service, “Westfield, New York – Inaugural Journey,” Lincoln Home National Historic Site. March 5, 2017, <https://www.nps.gov/liho/westfield-inaugural-journey.htm>.

⁸ Sara Kettler, “The Surprising Reason Abraham Lincoln Grew a Beard,” Biography.com. February 11, 2020, <https://www.biography.com/news/abraham-lincoln-beard>.



Dondero further argues the importance of Lincoln's beard to those who gave their life fighting in the Union Army by stating: "A very large portion of the Union army during the Civil War was composed of beardless boys in their teens. To these beardless boys the President was a bearded father. They did not know him in any other way. It is doubtful whether a beardless Lincoln would have impressed them at the time as deeply as their bearded "Father Abraham" or whether the affectionate term which they applied to him would have been as significant as full of meaning if it had been directed to a beardless Lincoln".⁹ President Lincoln was never again seen beardless and died with the same beard he kissed Grace Bedell on the cheek with. There is a memorial statue in Westfield, New York of Abraham Lincoln and Grace Bedell that was erected in 1999 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Lincoln-Bedell Monument in Westfield, New York. Image from the National Park Service.

Grace Bedell Billings Life after meeting Lincoln

In 1867 Grace Bedell married George N. Billings who served in the Union Army. In 1870, Horace Greeley the Editor of the New York Tribune urged thousands of New Yorkers to move West to Colorado. Bedell and her new husband did just that and ended up settling in Delphos, Kansas after deciding that the soil in Greeley, Colorado, where they attempted to first settle, was not to their liking. Bedell was just 21 when she moved to Delphos, she stated in an interview just a few years before she died that she kept the letter that Lincoln wrote her and cherished it her entire life. When President Lincoln's family passed away the widow of one of his children returned the original copy of the letter she wrote to Lincoln to Grace Bedell.¹⁰ In Delphos, Bedell and her husband built the Grace Bedell Billings Home and she lived there until she died in 1936.

Their two-story home, known today as Folk Victorian, was extremely popular in the United States beginning in the 1880s because it was still ornate but more affordable for a middle-class American in the late 1800s.¹¹ Often the variations in the Folk Victorian style came from Italianate, Queen Anne, or Gothic Revivals. The ornate spaces included the porches, the roof-wall junction, and gables.¹² The notable elements on the Billings home include the mouldings, fascia board, and projecting bay window.

In a newspaper article from February 15, 1890 celebrating the anniversary of Bedell's encounter with Lincoln, The Delphos Republic notes that Grace's husband is the mayor of the town and that they proudly display the Lincoln letter in their home for visitors to see.¹³ Another newspaper article from 1922 describes that Mrs. Billings was by a friend of Abraham Lincoln to appear in a movie about the late President, a copy of the article is included below. Even if Grace Bedell Billings was not in a movie about Abraham Lincoln in the early

⁹ George A. Dondero, "Grace Bedell and A. Lincoln, Why Lincoln Wore a Beard," July 1931, https://www.jstor.org/stable/40187731?seq=11#metadata_info_tab_contents.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ McAlester, Virginia Savage, "A Field Guide to American Houses," (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013) p. 398.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ The Delphos Republican, 15, Feb, 1890

1920s two producers, Mark Esslinger, and Eric Burdett produced a movie in 2010 titled Grace Bedell to honor the 150th anniversary of the exchange between the President and Bedell.¹⁴



Figure 2: The Salina Daily Union, August 11, 1922

Furthermore, Delphos has a monument "The Grace Bedell Billings: Lincoln's Little Correspondent Monument" located on 2nd Street and South Washington Street. The town also has the pen that Bedell wrote the letter to Lincoln with on display in the Delphos Museum. There are many newspaper articles from all over Kansas were written about the little girl who wrote to and met President Lincoln. Most all the articles mention that Bedell was a Kansas resident even though the original letter was written in New York. Grace Bedell Billings and her husband were founding members of Delphos, during their time in the city Billings' husband served as a bank clerk and eventually a mayor to the city. Their home built by Billings is an important part of the towns history as they were one of the original settlers of the county building their home not even a year after the railroad was established. Both the house and the letter continue to be passed down through the Billings family tree; the home is deteriorating and has undergone some major modifications.

¹⁴ History of American Women, "Grace Bedell," No date, <https://www.womenhistoryblog.com/2013/03/grace-bedell.html>.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form)

- h Biggest US Cities, February 3, 2022, <https://www.biggestuscities.com/city/delphos-kansas>.
Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Roy P. Basler et al, 2020,
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<https://www.biography.com/news/abraham-lincoln-beard>.
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National Park Service, "Westfield, New York – Inaugural Journey," Lincoln Home National Historic Site. March 5, 2017,
<https://www.nps.gov/liho/westfield-inaugural-journey.htm>.
The Delphos Republican, 15, Feb, 1890

10. Geographical Data

Acree of Property Less than one

Provide latitude/longitude coordinates OR UTM coordinates.

(Place additional coordinates on a continuation page.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1 39.279037 -97.762701 3 _____
Latitude: Longitude: Latitude: Longitude:

Verbal Boundary Description (describe the boundaries of the property)

SE ¼ of SE ¼ of Section 9 Township 9S Range 4W

Boundary Justification (explain why the boundaries were selected)

The boundary includes the parcel on which the Grace Bedell Billings home is located.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Haylee Rose and KSHS National Register staff

organization Kansas State Historical Society

date February 9, 2022

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telephone 785-272-8681

city or town Topeka

state KS

zip code 66615

e-mail haylee.rose@ks.gov

Grace Bedell House
Property Name

Delphos, Ottawa County
City and County

Property Owner:

name Duane B. Billings

street & number 723 N 7th St

telephone 785-822-2222

city or town Salina

state KS

zip code 67401

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:



5













