o. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC William E. Breese, Sr. House AND/OR COMMON Cedar Crest 2 LOCATION STREET & NUMBER 674 Biltmore Avenue NOT FOR PUBLICATION CITY, TOWN CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT Asheville Eleventh VICINITY OF COUNTY CODE STATE CODE North Carolina 37 Buncombe 021 **CLASSIFICATION** CATEGORY OWNERSHIP STATUS **PRESENTUSE** LOCCUPIED DISTRICT PUBLIC AGRICULTURE ___MUSEUM X_BUILDING(S) COMMERCIAL X_PRIVATEUNOCCUPIED PARK ___STRUCTURE XPRIVATE RESIDENCE BOTH -WORK IN PROGRESS ___EDUCATIONAL ___SITE PUBLIC ACQUISITION ACCESSIBLE __ENTERTAINMENT ___RELIGIOUS X_YES: RESTRICTED __OBJECTIN PROCESS ___GOVERNMENT ___SCIENTIFIC ___BEING CONSIDERED .__INDUSTRIAL __TRANSPORTATION __NO ____MILITARY OTHER **OWNER OF PROPERTY** Mrs. James H. Butler Also: Mr. Daniel McCanless NAME 106 Park Drive Mrs. C. G. Wilson Union, S. C. 27379 STREET & NUMBER 674 Biltmore Avenue STATE CITY, TOWN North Carolina 28803 Asheville VICINITY OF LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION COURTHOUSE REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC. Buncombe County Courthouse STREET & NUMBER CITY, TOWN STATE Asheville North Carolina

REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE



CON	DITION	CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE	
EXCELLENT X_GOOD	DETERIORATED RUINS	X_UNALTERED ALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE MOVED DATE	
FAIR	UNEXPOSED			

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Known since the late 1930s as Cedar Crest, the William E. Breese House is located on a three-acre tract on the east side of Biltmore Avenue, just north of Biltmore Village on Asheville's south side. At the time the house was constructed, Biltmore Avenue (then called South Main Street) was little more than a well-traveled country lane that connected George Vanderbilt's manorial village with the town of Asheville to the north. Today development surrounds the Breese tract on all sides, and Biltmore Avenue has become one of the city's major traffic arteries. The house commands a prominent position behind a steep embankment high above the road, an object of curiosity to speeding motorists who happened to look up and notice it.

The house is one of the largest and most opulent residences remaining from Asheville's late nineteenth century boom period. Virtually nothing is known about the source of the design or about Charles B. Leonard, the contractor believed responsible for its construction. City directories indicate that Leonard was a carpenter active in the city throughout the 1890s, and the house bears many similarities with several small Asheville hotels--none of which survive--pictured in directories and promotional literature of the period. These were executed primarily under the influence of the Queen Anne style, being rambling frame structures with complex roof lines, turrets, and spacious, multi-level porches.

The house stands two-and-one-half stories on a raised stone foundation and is covered in weatherboards. It is of essentially rectangular plan under a complex roof system. A broad gable runs on an east-west axis to cover the north half of the structure, while the central portion is under a flat-top hip roof outlined with iron cresting. Parallel twin gables extend from the south slope of the hip on a north-south axis and complete the form. All four resulting gables are finished with flush diagonal sheathing. The eaves of the roof are supported underneath with what appear to be exposed, curvilinear sawn rafter ends. The roofline is broken at several points with hip roof attic dormers and second floor wall dormers, and three interior brick chimneys rise above the roof.

On every elevation the first and second floor levels are divided by a wide, molded, horizontal band that breaks into a hood-like segmental arch over each of the one-overone sash windows. Where an attic gable rises above a second floor wall, this same treatment separates the second floor and attic levels.

The asymmetrical, five-bay front (west) elevation is dominated by an off-center entrance tower set under a steeply pitched roof of pyramidal form, with iron cresting along the top ridge. This is faced on the west, north and south sides with steep gable dormers containing small windows with diamond-pattern upper sash. Modillion blocks are placed under the eaves of the tower roof.

Concrete steps (a mid-twentieth century replacement) lead up to the first floor entrance. The entrance is composed of a single door with a paneled lower half and upper half of leaded glass; sidelights and transom are also of leaded glass. The entrance is sheltered by a shallow second floor balcony supported underneath by molded diagonal braces. The balcony is protected by a shed roof with similar braces, and is fronted with a simple balustrade of square-in-section members.

The first floor levels of the south and east elevations are sheltered under a deep wrap-around porch that rests on massive, free-standing stone piers. Porch posts

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are turned and connected by a molded handrail supported by turned balusters. Curvilinear sawn brackets, each with a paneled spandrel, are set at the tops of the posts and carry a spindle frieze under the bracketed porch cornice. An identical spindle frieze connects the tops of the stone piers under the porch floor; on the south elevation, where the incline of the ground results in a full-height basement level, the piers are connected at their bases with a balustrade identical to that of the porch.

On the long, sloping roof of the north elevation is centered a broad second floor gable dormer, flanked by hip roof attic dormers. A simple mid-twentieth century carport on plain wooden posts shelters the north entrance.

The first floor interior follows a modified center-hall plan, with a transverse hall extending midway from the center hall to the north end of the house. A parlor and dining room are placed off the left side of the center hall on the southwest and southeast corners of the house; both rooms have access to the south porch through French doors. The transverse hall contains the principal stair, which rises along its east wall, and is flanked by a small smoking room and bedroom on the west side, and a kitchen, bath, and servants' rear stair on the east. A narrow butler's pantry connects the kitchen and dining room across the east end of the center hall.

The most astonishing feature of the house is the robust first floor interior woodwork, executed with a variety of woods and to a degree of lavishness unknown in the region outside of the Biltmore House. (NHL). Since the date of construction of the Breese House corresponds with that of the early stages of Biltmore House, local residents have long believed that Biltmore craftsmen were employed here as well, though to date no documentation has been uncovered to support this tradition. The center hall is fully paneled with deeply raised panels of various rectilinear configurations set off by fluted pilasters with Ionic capitals; the beamed ceiling is also fully paneled. The paneling continues up the stairwell to the second floor hall. The closed-stringer stair has paneled spandrel and a wide, deeply molded handrail supported by short chamfered balusters alternating with turned spindles. The stairwell is lighted by a stained glass window set in the aforementioned gable dormer on the north slope of the roof. A second large stained window is placed in the west wall of the center hallbetween the hall and the butler's pantry. A corbeled brick fireplace with arched opening is centered on the south wall of the hall; this same chimney serves corner fireplaces in the parlor and dining room behind it.

The parlor mantle is especially notable. This thoroughly Baroque composition features a carved cartouche in an elaborately foliated setting, fluted pilasters and colonnettes, carved swags, and a beveled glass mirror. The parlor is finished with panelled wainscoting and a wide, richly molded cornice. The dining room and smoking room are of only slightly less elaboration. The kitchen has been somewhat modernized. FHR-8-300A (11/78)

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The second floor and attic rooms are simply finished with standard milled woodwork of the period, and contain rooms of various sizes for guests. The basement contains one finished apartment and a large furnace room.

To the rear of the house is a small carriage house of frame and weatherboard construction under a hip roof, with a shed roof extension on the north side. At the top of the roof is a cupola under a cap of intersecting gables. This structure was converted into a residence by the mid 1930s, and houses a caretaker.

The steep grounds around the house are landscaped with dense growths of shrubs and stands of mature hardwood trees.

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The house known today as Cedar Crest was built in 1891 for William E \downarrow Breese, Sr. (1848-1919). On May 21, 1891, the Asheville Daily Citizen duly noted that "C. B. Leonard has the contract for building W. E. Breese's magnificent 20-room residence in Kenilworth to cost \$10,000."1 Another mention of this house, which indicates construction may have been well under way by the date of the news item, can be found in the county deed books dated March 6, 1891. There, in the process of describing a piece of property Breese was buying, is mentioned "Breese's New house."² William E. Breese had been born and raised in Charleston, S. C., having attended The Citadel and the Georgia Military Academy. At age sixteen he left his studies to enter the Confederate Army a year before the Southern surrender. Following the war, Breese worked in Charleston for the Bank of South Carolina as a cashier, and graduall prospered within the bank. By 1885, when only thirty-seven years old, William Breese opened a bank in Asheville,³ a mountain town long beloved by the Carolina lowland elite. Junius Adams writes that "The First National Bank was chartered in December, 1885, with a capital stock of \$100,000.00. Major Wm. E. Breese was president..."4 The bank was in a turreted, castle-like structure that was later razed to make room for the 1925 Pack Memorial Library. Breese and his family first lived in the old home of one of Asheville's first bankers, Dr. J. F. E. Hardy, in a house situated on what was called Swannanoa Hill, "on the east side of Biltmore Avenue, just north of the Swannanoa River."⁵ This house eventually burned,⁶ but certainly Breese found living in this area to his liking, for he chose it to build his "magnificent 20-room residence."

The 1880s were flush times in Asheville, for the railroad had finally pushed through at the beginning of the decade, and the local economy burst forth with pent-up energy. Mr. Breese and his bank were an important cog in that boom, and certainly the house on Biltmore Avenue was an emblem of the success of both. An old invitation, although surviving from Breese's stay on Swannanoa Hill, gives light to how he and his family entertained.

> Mr. and Mrs. William E. Breese request your pleasure in costume Tuesday evening October fourth at nine o'clock Swannanoa Hill 1887 An early answer is requested

The boom turned to bust by 1897 when the tobacco market failed, and too much overspeculation brought on its own unfortunate consequences. Breese's bank was the first to close, on April 23, 1897.⁷ Many thought Breese was personally responsible for the hard times, and just before his bank closed, on April 17, he wrote a letter

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to the paper stating that, "I feel that I cannot escape the fate of other unfortunate banksmen, nor fail to incur censure and detraction, possibly of the blackest and [most] malignant character....⁸ This letter contrasts remarkably with a high-toned oration he gave later in May as part of the Civil War Memorial Services at Central Methodist Church, where he harped on the valor of the Confederate mother, "Dishonesty never came nearer than her ears....⁹

Many in Asheville thought dishonesty had penetrated to the very soul of Maj. William Breese, for later that same year Breese, along with other bank officers, was charged with violating United States banking statutes. On October 7, 1897, a newspaper article appeared declaring that Breese had been indicted by the grand jury and charged with conspiracy and embezzlement. Charges were served

> at the residence of W. E. Breese near Biltmore...At the home of Maj. Breese, Marshall Free found that he had not arisen and was shown by servants to his bedroom...Maj. Breese was apparently unmoved by what followed the officer's entrance to the room. He expressed the hope that the officer would not drive him about the streets more than was necessary, and after a hurried preparation the two drove away, the members of the family not knowing the real impact of what had happened. 10

That Maj. Breese was strapped financially is clear from the deed books. A year prior to these troubles Breese sold his property (but continued to live there)¹¹ to a Henry W. Mittag of New York City, for a seemingly lofty sum of \$22,000. (This included the house and two acres of land.)¹² Breese was charged and originally convicted of embezzling about \$114,000. The case was appealed, and after a long series of hung juries, mistrials and the like, the original conviction was overturned in February of 1906.¹³ In the midst of this legal maneuvering, the Asheville Citizen tersely editorialized, "In a case of this kind one is tempted to think that the law is 'a ass' or that all men are not equal before the law."¹⁴

Breese and his family apparently continued to live in the house until around 1900, according to the Asheville City Directory, but afterwards a new family, belonging to Arthur F. Rees of New York City, arrived to live in what was now officially called the Kenilworth section. Rees purchased the property for only \$7,500 in late 1902,¹⁵ and named the house the Kenilworth Lodge.¹⁶ Arthur Rees was the general manager of the Hans Rees and Sons Tannery, which brought its operation to Asheville in 1900.¹⁷ The company built an enormous, for that day, industrial complex along the French Broad River. The operation was famous for its high quality leather belts that were used in that day to connect industrial machinery to its power source.¹⁸

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three

The Rees family members were social leaders in Asheville, enjoying the company and entertainment of men such as George Vanderbilt. Martha Rees was well occupied with the meetings of the Colonial Dames, Mayflower Society, Ladies Auxillary of All Souls Church, the Asheville Club for Women, and she worked during World War I with the injured veterans in the Oteen hospital.¹⁹ The Rees family lived in the house until 1926, the year Arthur Rees died. Many remember their daughter Rita vividly for the unusual figure she cut in Asheville. She had a very beautiful carriage with fine horses, and continued to travel in this manner long after the automobile began to dominate the roads. Rita is remembered as a large woman who was usually accompanied by a tiny black dog, creating a rather incompatible image.²⁰ The family loved to invite the local elite to their home for well-supplied evenings of entertainment, and thus the Kenilworth Lodge was evidently very much a part of the glittering, boom-fueled Twenties society.²¹ Area residents recall that this extravagant lifestyle took its toll, and the Rees family began to experience financial difficulties.²² By 1926 the house was heavily encumbered.²³ The part es ended abruptly with Arthur Rees' death that year, and the house became the property of a string of banks and insurance companies thereafter.²⁴

A Miss Mildred E. Sherwood replaced the Rees family and their rich friends with another group of people attracted to Asheville: those coming to breathe the healthy air, especially the tubercular. She rented the house as a sanatorium, called Sherwood Sanatorium, from around 1927 to 1932.²⁵ Eventually even the sick ceased to patronize Asheville, and the house faced inconsistent residency. After the different financial institutions that owned the house collapsed, ownership fell to Carl W. Gusoskey of St. Louis, Missouri, who "on Monday, the 26th day of March, A. D., 1934...at the Buncombe County Court House door..." bid the highest price for this proud house, \$7,500.²⁶ According to the City directories, the house was often empty during the nineteen-thirties. One exception was the notation that a Cecil L. Streadwick, a driver for the Blue Bird Taxi Company, lived there in 1935,²⁷ possibly as caretaker. Also in that year and early 1936 the house was leased to a Mrs. Sara L. Cole, who operated it as a boarding house called the Arden.²⁸

The following year John L. and Minnie Belle Page bought "all the land conveyed to Martha B. Rees...²⁹ from Mr. Gusoskey for the bargain price of \$5000.³⁰ Mr. Page managed two hotels on Biltmore Avenue, The Princeton and The Patton.³¹ Though John Page died in 1939, Mrs. Page continued to occupy the house and ran it as a tourist home known as Cedar Crest,³² and so it remains today. Minnie Page lived to be 95 years old, dying in 1976; she left the property to her three children by her first marriage. Her daughters, Mrs. James H. Butler (Anne McCanless), and Mrs. C. G. Wilson (Estelle McCanless), continue to manage Cedar Crest. Mrs. Butler remembers her mother as a very demanding housekeeper, and said "Mother never let

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us forget whose house it was." The fine state of preservation of the old house on a developing commercial strip is primarily due to Mrs. Page's forty-year devotion to the place. In apologizing for the condition of her near-immaculate kitchen, Mrs. Butler remarked, "Mother would never let the kitchen look like this." Minnie Page obviously wanted to maintain a high business standard for the patrons of Cedar Crest, but her daughter added that there was more than money involved, for "Mother loved this house." It is also clear the house is loved and appreciated by Mrs. Page's daughter today.³³

Cedar Crest has had a wide variety of uses and adaptations, from boarding house to sanatorium, from social opulence to vacancy. It was built during Asheville's first boom, and sold on the court house steps during the Great Depression. It is a house that parallels the peaks and valleys of the region's economy, and one that has been the residence of two prominent members of Asheville's early business class. The house is a reminder of a style of life made obsolete by the very commerce that rumbles along Biltmore Avenue today, just in front of the half-forgotten mansion of Kenilworth.

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FOOTNOTES

¹Asheville Daily Citizen, May 21, 1891.

²Buncombe County Deed Book 77, page 49.

³From material gathered by Mrs. James Butler from the Breese Collection, Western North Carolina University Library, Cullowhee, N. C.

⁴Adams, Junius G., "History of Asheville's Financial Institutions," an article appearing in <u>The Wachovia</u>, Sept., 1929, p. 16-24.

⁵Ibid, p. 16.

⁶Ibid, p. 16.

⁷Ibid. p. 18.

⁸Asheville Daily Citizen, April 17, 1897.

⁹The Semi-Weekly Citizen, May 11, 1897.

¹⁰Asheville Daily Citizen, October 7, 1897.

¹¹Breese and his family continued to live in Kenilworth, according to the Asheville City Directory listings, through the 1899-1900 edition.

¹²Buncombe County Deed book 98, page 154.

¹³The Asheville <u>Citizen</u>, December 5, 1902. Also information gathered by Mrs. James Butler in the Breese collection at Western Carolina University.

¹⁴The Asheville Citizen, December 5, 1902.

¹⁵Buncombe County Deed Book 126, page 80.

¹⁶The name Kenilworth Lodge was used in the Asheville City Directories throughout the Rees residency.

¹⁷"Leadership for a Century" a pamphlet printed privately by the Hans Rees' Sons, tracing the history of a company from 1846-1946, p. 19.

¹⁸Ibid, p. 19.

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¹⁹The Asheville Citizen, February 21, 1930.

²⁰Interview by the researcher with Mrs. Eleanor Field.

²¹Ibid.

²²Ibid.

²³Buncombe County Deed book 454, page 37.

²⁴Ibid.

²⁵Sherwood Sanitarium is mentioned in the Asheville City directories from 1932 to 1928.

²⁶Buncombe County Deed book 463, page 441.

²⁷Asheville City Directory for 1936.

²⁸Asheville City Directory, 1936 edition.

²⁹Buncombe County Deed book 505, page 233.

³⁰Ibid.

³¹The Asheville City Directory, 1938 edition.

³²Interview with Mrs. James Butler.

³³Ibid.

MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Buncombe County Deed Books, 77, 98, 126, 454, 463, 505.

Pamphlets

Junius G. Adams, "History of Asheville's Financial Institutions," an article in <u>The Wachovia</u>, September, 1929, p. 16-24.

10GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The nominated property includes four continuous tracts of land identified in the Buncombe County Tax Supervisor's Office as lots 8 and 13 of Ward 1, Sheet 9, and lots 118 and 119 of Ward 8, Sheet 1, totaling approximately 3 acres, and including the house, its carriage house, and associated landscaping.

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CITY OR TOWN Asheville,			STATE North Carolina 28805
12 STATE HISTORIC PRI	ESERVATION	OFFICER CERT	IFICATION
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As the designated State Historic Preserv hereby nominate this property for inclu criteria and procedures set forth by the N STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER	sion in the National Regi National Park Service.		
TITLE State Historic Pre	servation Officer		DATE January 10, 1980
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"Leadership for a Century," a pamphlet printed to commemorate the 100th Anniversary of the Hans Rees' Sons, 1846-1946.

Newspapers

The Asheville Citizen, various editions.

The Asheville Daily Citizen, various editions.

The Semi-Weekly Citizen, various editions.

Interviews

Mrs. Eleanor Field

Mrs. James H. Butler







