



Spencer House Building
City of Erie Historic Resource Nomination Binder



Photo 1. William & Mary Spencer House, Primary Façade facing South, M. Falcone. February, 2026.

Description

The Spencer House is a three-story brick and wooden residential building on Erie's 6th National Historic District in the Our West Bayfront neighborhood of Erie, Pa. The building's style can primarily be categorized as a Second Empire intermixed with elements of Stick and Eastlake design.

Primary façade: The primary façade of the Spencer House faces 6th street and can be



Photo 2. William & Mary Spencer House, Primary & Secondary Façade facing South West, M.

divided into three distinct bays. The central bay is a wooden tower that protrudes from the brick line of the building and marks the primary entrance to the building. A series of granite steps lead under a pediment accentuated with dental molding and supported by a series of painted wooden columns. The porch, which extends eastward from the primary entrance to the building, wraps the corner of the house and from the street is defined by a pitched, slate roof with scale-patterned tiles of various hues. Within the porch, ornate wooden rib vaulting creates decorative, geometric patterns that bely their structural functionality. Squared wood, brick, and stone pillars that wrap the side of the building provide structural support to the porch's roof. Under the roof of the porch, this easternmost bay of the building contains two, one-over-one, double hung windows with unadorned granite headers and footers.

The western bay lacks a porch but similarly to the eastern bay contains two, double hung windows. The absence of the porch on this western bay makes the decorative brickwork more visually accessible from the street. A Flemish bond brick pattern is present throughout the building, though the alternating use of red and yellow bricks create a woven, decorative course that distinguishes the first and second story. The asymmetry of the first floor gives way to symmetry of the second floor in that the eastern and western bays are mirror images of one another. Each contains two, one-over-one, double-hung windows framed by simple rectangular granite headers and footers. Once again, yellow and red patterned brick work in the form of diagonal steps distinguishes the second story from the roofline.



Photo 3. William & Mary Spencer House, Primary Façade, Porch Detail facing East, M. Falcone. August, 2025.

Decorative woodwork obscures the building's gutter system and partially overhangs the second story. The roof is a straight-edged mansard roof line with scaled patterned grey slate tiles. Over the eastern and western bays, the mansard roof is punctuated by a single dormer, covered with decorative woodwork accentuated with painted patterns and crowned with iron crestings. A wooden tower, which is proud of the building's brick façade, occupies the central bay of the building and vertically transverse the decorative brickwork meant to visually define each of the building's stories, including the roofline. The first floor of the tower is occupied by the pediment over the entryway, while the story of the tower contains four, one-over-one double hung windows. Above each of the windows is a recessed square containing painted wooden stencil work. The third floor of the tower contains two, one-over-one, double hung windows that are framed by wooden cross bracing over vertical wooden bead board. The tower is crowned with a pediment containing ornate geometric woodwork accentuated by a trifecta of paint colors present throughout the woodwork present on the primary façade.

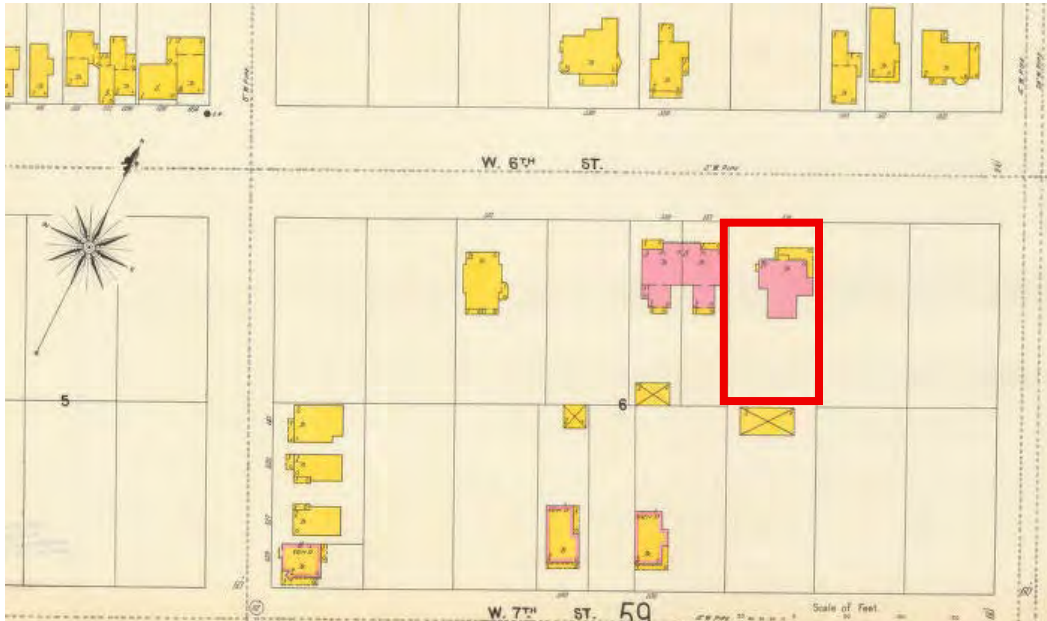


Photo 4. William & Mary Spencer House, Primary Façade facing South West, M. Falcone. February, 2026.



Photo 5. William & Mary Spencer House, Primary Façade facing South, M. Falcone. February,

History



- Fig. 1. *Map of Erie (Detail)*. 1900. Accessed: <https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/7954/rec/3>. Resource is bounded within the red lines.

Site History – Pre-Constriction

The land that would later become home to Spencer House was originally connected to indigenous peoples. The Erie people (also referred to as the Kahqua, Eriechronon, Riquéronon, Erielhonon, Eriez, Nation du Chat) were an Iroquoian group who lived along the south shore of Lake Erie in what is now Ohio, Pennsylvania, and western New York. Ultimately European colonists would settle this land.

Site History – Construction

The Spencer House is the first permanent structure to occupy this site and was constructed in 1871. This area was originally part of Millcreek Borough and rapidly developed after the completion of the Erie Extension Canal on December 5, 1844 that connected Lake Erie to the Ohio River. This rapid development would lead to this section being annexed into the City of Erie in 1848. Ultimately, the advent of the railroad led to a decline in use of the canal and in 1871, the same year the Spencer House was constructed, the Erie Extension Canal would close.

Sandborn maps of the area indicate that the Spencer House was one of the largest single structures in this neighborhood and the only single structure that was constructed entirely of brick. Although several other larger homes would develop along West 6th Street, it would

be several decades before the Spencer House was surrounded by homes of similar size, scale, and design. The plat map from 1900 indicates that the lot on which the Spencer House was constructed stretched from W. 6th Street to W. 7th Street and remained in the 1921 edition. By 1951 the lot had been subdivided roughly along the mid-point of the block, in keeping with other homes in the neighborhood. The subdivision of the lot was the last major change to the property.



Fig. 2. *Map of Erie (Detail). 1921.* Accessed: <https://digital.libraries.psu.edu/digital/collection/maps1/id/8644/rec/1>. Resource is bounded within the red lines.

Significance

A. It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of Erie history

B. It is associated with the lives of persons significant in Erie's past

The Spencer House meets this criterion as it is the building most affiliated with William & Mary Spencer, as well as the Spencer Family, who made significant contributions to Erie's business, social, religious, and civic history.

Judah Colt Spencer was born on July 1, 1813, in Hadlyme, Connecticut to William and Deborah (Selden) Spencer. In 1829, upon invitation from his uncle, Judah Colt, one of the pioneers of Erie, Judah Colt Spencer moved to Erie at the age of 15 and enrolled in the Erie Academy. At the age of 16 he completed his formal schooling and joined his uncle working at the Pennsylvania Population Company. Judah Colt passed away in 1832, and Judah Colt Spencer would assume "management of the affairs of the company". In 1852 he began working in banking and on June 22, 1863, would charter the First National Bank of Erie, taking advantage of the newly minted federal banking



*Judah Colt Spencer,
Erie Times-News.*



*William & Mary Spencer, Spencer
House B&B Collection.*

program. In addition to his professional work, J.C. Spencer was president of the Erie Cemetery Company for twenty years, a trustee of the Park Presbyterian Church, and treasurer of the Erie County Agricultural Association. The construction of the Spencer House at 518 W. 6th Street was paid for by J.C. Spencer as a wedding gift for his son, William Spencer. J.C. Spencer passed away in 1885, and William Spencer would assume the position of president of the National Bank of Erie. William was born in Erie on June 14, 1848, and prior to assuming this position, William was educated at the Erie Academy, Princeton, and completed European grant tour. In addition to his life-long work at the National Bank of Erie, William

became involved in several other companies, the Erie Traction Company and the Mutual Telephone Company.

Mary, born in Philadelphia, married William Spencer on February 16, 1880 and made their home at 519 W. 6th Street. Their family would include four boys and two girls. Both William and Mary were active participants in the Park Presbyterian Church and later the Church of the Covenant. 519 W. 6th Street would play a prominent role in the Spencer's involvement in the church and other social functions. The society pages of the Erie Times-News frequently reported on suppers, coffee socials, and other functions the Spencers hosted at their home. Interestingly, in 1915 the home would host a gathering of local suffragettes.

Mary also founded and was a long-time (27 years) president of, the Needlework Guild, which was an outgrowth of her work with the Erie Women's Association. This guild was comprised of several prominent women in Erie who spent one afternoon a week stitching bedding, garments, and other items for refugees, mission stations, and those in need. A letter from St. Quentin, France illustrates the impact of their work:

All the knitted articles, socks, stockings, sweaters, and bonnets are welcome in a city of ruins where the cold begins to be cruelly felt... all the little pillows have been given in each layette... these pillows fill and help make a little softer boxes which often replace little beds for our babies.

These efforts must have been all the more meaningful for Mary as her son was deployed and injured in the course of World War I.

Mary was very involved in several philanthropic efforts throughout Erie, and the Spencer House played a prominent role in this work. For example in March of 1916 the Philanthropy Department of the Women's Club held a fundraiser in the Spencer House, raising over \$216 (roughly \$7,000 today).

Mary's grandson, Herbert R. Spencer, Jr. recalls his grandmother was an avid swimmer and used to drive around Erie in an electric car. A 1912 advertisement selling an electric coupe would seem to indicate that Mary had a life-long proclivity for electric vehicles. William Spencer passed away on February 18, 1920, in 519 W. 6th Street and Mary would continue living and hosting in the house, though traveling extensively, until her passing in the home in 1933. Though the home would remain in the Spencer family, it was rented out until Judah Colt Spencer, one of the sons of William & Mary Spencer, took up residency in the 1940s. Judah Colt Spencer would remain in the home until his passing in 1980. The house would remain vacant until

1991 when Keith and Patricia Hagenbuch purchased it to turn it into a bed & breakfast. In August 2018, Steve and Lisa Freysz purchased the home and continue the stewardship of the house as Erie's only Bed & Breakfast.

C. It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction

The Spencer House meets this criterion as it is an excellent example of late 19th century Second Empire architectural design infused with elements of Stick and Queen Anne design, in Erie. Specifically, it is one of the most refined, remaining examples of the style executed in Erie by architect David K. Dean.

The Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission provides definition and context on Second Empire architectural style, stating that it "...was an immensely popular style throughout the United States in the 1860s and 1870s. It was used extensively in the northeastern and midwestern parts of the country. The Second Empire style had its beginnings in France, where it was the chosen style during the reign of Napoleon III (1852-70), France's Second Empire, hence its name. Well-attended exhibitions in Paris in 1855 and 1867 helped to spread Second Empire style to England and then the United States. The Second Empire style harkens back to an earlier time, the 17th century designs of French architect Francois Mansart, for whom the mansard roof is named. The mansard roof is the key identifying feature of this style and was considered both a fashionable and functional element since it created a fully usable attic space.

In its time, the Second Empire style was viewed as a contemporary "modern" style, rather than revival style, since it was popular in France and the United States simultaneously and its combined design elements did represent a new building form. The style was first seen in America in the 1850s and flourished after the Civil War. It was so commonly employed in that era that it was sometimes referred to as the "General Grant style."

Perhaps the best-known example of this style in Pennsylvania is the Philadelphia City Hall, built in 1871-1881. While it is distinguished by its crested mansard roof, City Hall has opulent Second Empire details throughout, including dormers with decorative hoods and elaborate columned window surrounds. Examples of the Second Empire style can be found in almost every Pennsylvania town, usually in the form of single residences, duplexes or rowhouses. Second Empire mansions or

public buildings are often elaborately detailed, but many other buildings of this style have only the curving lines of the shingled mansard roof to mark them. Other commonly seen details are a bracketed cornice beneath the mansard roof, round arched windows, decorative dormer windows, an iron crest at the roofline, and columned porches or porticos.

PHMC further notes several character-defining features of this style:

1. Mansard roof
2. Patterned shingle roof
3. Iron roof crest
4. Decorative window surrounds and dormers
5. Eaves with brackets
6. One story porch
7. Tower
8. Quoins
9. Balustrades

Many of these architectural features are present in the Spencer House, including a mansard roof, a patterned shingle roof, ornate ironwork on the roofline, decorative window surrounds and dormers, eaves with brackets, a one-story porch, a central tower, and balustrades.

Erie is fortunate enough to have several other examples of Second Empire architecture. The Daniel Illig House at 2016 Peach Street is similar to the Spencer House in that it is a free-standing residential home with mansard roof, decorative iron cresting, and ornate window surrounds. Unsympathetic modifications in the early 20th century have altered several aspects of the first floor of the home, which has a fundamentally different neighborhood setting. The Canalside Apartments are also excellent examples of Second Empire architecture and, like the Spencer House, are contributing buildings in the 6th Street National Historic District. While this structure shares similar architectural elements like a mansard roof, iron crestwork, and ornate iron cresting, as a duplex they are of a differing typology than the Spencer House.

The Spencer House also conveys significance as one of the best examples of residential Second Empire architecture designed by prominent Erie architect David K. Dean. Much of Dean's work, few of which remain, was centered on larger structures that served civic or educational functions. Among these were the former Erie City Hall (demolished), Longfellow School (509 W. 8th Street), and Penn School (554 E. 10th Street). The house at 209 W. 21st Street is, like the Spencer House, a residential structure designed by Dean. While it is of comparable scale and contains many similar elements, it employs a Romanesque Revival design and is primarily comprised of stone. The Spencer House stands out as an exemplary

manifestation of Dean's residential work, particularly in the Second Empire style. Given the exceptionally high degree of architectural integrity on both the building's interior and exterior, it remains one of the finest examples of Second Empire architecture within the city of Erie.

D. It has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in Erie's prehistory or history

This resource does not likely meet this criterion.

E. It represents a cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological or related theme expressed through distinctive areas, properties, sites, structures or objects that may or may not be contiguous

This resource does not likely meet this criterion.

F. It exhibits a unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or Erie.

The Spencer House is a prominent visual feature on West 6th Street's National Register of Historic Places district because of its use of its ornate and visually engaging architectural style and because of its size, scale, and massing in relation to its surroundings.



William & Mary Spencer House, Undated Photograph, Spencer House B&B Collection.



William & Mary Spencer House, Side Elevation Rendering, Spencer House B&B Collection.

Historic Integrity

- Location – The Spencer House retains integrity of location as the resource remains in the same location as when it was first constructed.
- Design – The Spencer House retains integrity of design, as a comparison of the original blueprints and the current existing state illustrate.
- Materials – The Spencer House retains integrity of materials. The original brick, terra cotta design elements, windows, metalwork, and stonework remain.
- Workmanship – The Spencer House retains integrity of workmanship, which is present throughout the woodwork and masonry of the building's exterior.

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William & Mary Spencer House - Areal View with Photo Key

