

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Date listed 09/07/2007
NRIS No. 070009201
Oregon SHPO

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instruction 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 classifications, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Olson, Charles and Fae, House

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 765 SW Walters Rd. not for publication

city or town Gresham vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97080

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally.

[Signature]
Signature of certifying official/Title - Deputy SHPO

7-24-07
Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:
Action

Signature of the Keeper

Date of

 entered in the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

 determined eligible for the National Register
 See continuation sheet.

 determined not eligible for the National Register

 removed from the National Register

 other (explain):

Olson, Charles and Fae, House
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(check as many as apply)

Category of Property
(check only one box)

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

- private
- public - local
- public - state
- public - Federal

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

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
<u>1</u>		Total

Name of related multiple property listing
(enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

None

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(enter categories from instructions)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

DOMESTIC: Single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Flat-Roofed Contemporary Modern

foundation: CONCRETE
walls: BRICK, WOOD
roof: ASPHALT
Other: _____

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

See continuation sheets.

Olson, Charles and Fae, House
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National 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.

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE
SOCIAL HISTORY: Post WWII
housing trends

Period of Significance
1946-1957

Significant Dates
1946, Construction begins
1957, Construction ends

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 of age or achieved significance Within the past 50 years

Significant Person
(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)
N/A

Cultural Affiliation
N/A

Architect/Builder
Olson, Charles, Designer and Builder

Narrative Statement of Significance
(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite books, articles, and other sources used in preparing the form on one or more continuation sheets) See continuation sheets

- Previous documentation on file (NPS):
- preliminary determination of individual listing (36CFR67) has been requested
 - previously listed in the National Register
 - previously determined eligible by the National Register
 - designated a National Historic Landmark
 - recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
 - recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

- Primary location of additional data:
- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Olson, Charles and Fae, House
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 1.5 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 10 544350 5037496
Zone Easting Northing

3 _____
Zone Easting Northing

2 _____

4 _____

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Gregg Olson

organization Historic Building Repair date April 29, 2007

street & number 6499 Stageline Lane SE telephone (503) 580-7380

city or town Salem state OR zip code 97317

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation sheets

Maps: A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs: Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

name Olson Family Trust Executer Eric Olson

street & number 7037 N Ivanhoe telephone (503) 289-8889

city or town Portland state OR zip code 97203

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, PO Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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bedroom has site-made windows and exterior door. The floor is concrete, poured two steps above the playroom floor, and is covered with hardwood and carpet. The bath is unusual for having a sunken tub cast in concrete down two steps below a brick floor. White tile is the finish of the tub and all the remaining walls. The space is illuminated by glass block. An open shower is built into the tiled wall below the glass block.

Outside the bedroom is a concrete sidewalk built above a short brick retaining wall, which supports the master bedroom porch. One can walk under this porch and in front of the playroom door and windows to reach the front stairs. The structure of the master bedroom porch extends in both directions to create a platform to facilitate window washing. Under the structure to the south is a curvilinear brick retaining wall and planter. A similar curvilinear retaining wall exists under the kitchen porch on the northeast corner of the house.

ALTERATIONS:

Many of the alterations to the house by the owner-designer-builder might be considered corrections. The roof edge has been extended upward twice, first to cover the additional layers of tar and second to hide a layer of insulation. Storm windows and insulated glass have been added throughout the history of the house. A forced-air duct running through all the living-room floor joists was abandoned when new furnaces were installed in 1978. In the early 1960's, the sliding glass door in the dining room replaced a fragile and remarkably large manufactured assembly of glass and wood having the proportions of the windows in the back hall. The kitchen remodel in 1962 included removing a standard stove, which separated the kitchen nook and the kitchen, a change which included a new owner built palette-shaped pedestal table and benches for a large family. (The pedestal was half of a Model T axle.) At the same time, the two-light window over the sink, the only site-built window in the structure which originally had a horizontal proportion, was reduced to one pane. The glass enclosure of the patio in 1975 solved drainage problems and reduced heat loss. The patio floor near the dining room wall was raised and steps were placed in the middle to access the original barbeque and eating area. Two changes were losses. In the living room, wooden period French doors were replaced by a standard sliding glass door in about 1980. In the compartment lavatory the two sinks with side-mounted faucets, along with period cabinet doors below and florescent fixtures on each side of the mirror, were replaced with modern fittings in 1985.

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SUMMARY:

The Charles and Fae Olson house was designed by resident Charles Olson while he served overseas during World War II, and built by him in the years after the war. The front of the house, which overlooks the city of Gresham, features a strong horizontal roofline twenty feet above the ground and appears to be two-story but is single story over a daylight basement. A large sunken living room with a massive fireplace and exposed beamed ceiling dominate the middle of the form. This center portion has a butterfly roof, and aggressive indirect lighting above a sixteen-foot wide window. The roof water is channeled onto separate lower roofs, which slope to the outer edges. These outer roofs protect the kitchen on the east and master bedroom on the west, both of which have distinctive corner windows with open painted structural elements above and matching elevated porches with iron railings. A dining room with a wall of glass connects with the kitchen in the same roof form, followed by a bedroom wing. This wing at a level three steps up includes a compartmental bath and a two-story form at the south end. Brick floors run for fifty-six feet from the front door to a back fireplace. The master bedroom wing includes three more bedrooms. The house design is distinctive for its size, complication, and lack of interior doors. The Olson family resided in the back rooms of the building in 1946, and framed the entire house the following year. Each year more rooms were finished until 1954 when only four bedrooms and the adjoining baths remained to be finished. Each of three children was involved in the interior design and finishing of one of the bedrooms before they graduated from high school. Alterations by the same owner began with the kitchen remodel in 1962, a greenhouse addition in 1975, and included heating changes, insulating and insulating-glass improvements.

SETTING:

The Olson Residence is a Flat-Roofed Contemporary Modern¹ house of three levels, which conforms to the slope of Gresham Butte where it is built. Construction started in 1946 and the entire house was framed and roofed by 1947. The house is located at 765 S.W. Walter's Road in the City of Gresham. Walter's Road begins at West Gresham Grade School on Powell Boulevard and climbs straight south until it meets the one-and-a-half-acre Olson property where the road becomes steep and curves to the east and winds around the house. The house has strong views of Mt. Hood, Larch Mountain, the Troutdale Bluff, Mt. Adams, Mt. St. Helen, and Rocky Butte. The horizontal lines of the house can be seen in winter from nearly any part of historic Gresham through the trees. The property to the west and south of the house is steep and belongs to Gresham City Parks. Two driveways service the residence, conforming to the levels of the house. Landscaping to the west and south has always been left deliberately natural except for a small patio back yard area. The lower level, the front of the house, is landscaped with lawn and includes a turn-around. This oval is paved in concrete and known as the "egg." A concrete ramp connects the two driveways. There is a rock garden on the house side

¹ Virginia & Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 1984, p. 482

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of the ramp and a developed border on the east. The upper driveway is graveled with a short concrete walk to a service entrance. The front door is accessed by a series of steps in concrete and brick, with curvilinear brick planters on each side, climbing from the "egg" until the stairs turn under the expansive five foot wide eave of the house and run east up to the porch and the front door.

CONSTRUCTION:

The house is largely wood frame over a concrete foundation, which functions in many places as a retaining wall. The many interior brick floors and planters are laid over wood structure. The house is sheathed in rough one-inch boards of varying widths. The hot asphalt roofing is applied over the sheathing. Two-by-eight boards painted white edge the flat roof. The slopes of the roof forms which are not butterfly are made by nailing ceiling joists and rafters together at one end and spreading them at the other before nailing them together. The building is sided largely with striated shakes. Rough cut board or board-and-batten break the repetition of the striated shake, as do a veneer of brick, which occurs on three corners. The windows, except for six purchased the first year, are site-made using a jointer to surface, rabbet, and chamfer solid mullions, which often serve a structural role. Railings, with every other vertical heated in the middle and twisted one turn, are welded together of standard sections of steel.

EXTERIOR:

The north-front façade is sixty feet across not including porches. The eave extends five feet out in the front and at the corners is reduced to just the structure. Under these open roofs are corner windows accessible on the outside by porches. The porch on the west has no exterior access, and the front porch on the east facade is accessed by the main door. The use of glass is lavish for the period, and the large expanses of striated shakes are broken up by a section of very wide vertical boards without battens. The lower portion appears to be brick and glass, but the brick at the corners are a veneer and the brick in the middle is infill. Brick curvilinear planters flank the front walk and stairs to the front door.

The east-side exterior is short and has less glass in response to the strong east wind in the winter. The kitchen window with glass block below is typical for the date. The porch is protected by an overhang similar to the front, which is distinctive compared to the surrounding short eaves. Two sets of two traditional sash windows, with horizontal proportions are separated by a large section of glass block all set in a wall of board-and-batten. A two-story section with no windows, and a garage door below, finishes the design.

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The west elevation, which has more glass and height, was built beside a small ravine. The corner window continues down the wall, and the end window is unusual for lower ventilating panels. The hillside is retained by a broken brick curvilinear wall and planter.

The remaining exterior wraps around a courtyard or patio area, with the hillside completing the enclosure. There is more glass facing this area, which is protected from the east wind. A circular planter in the middle of the patio contains a native dogwood tree. From the perspective of the patio, the house forms to the east and north have aggressive overhangs. The back wing, to the east, has two windows whose panes have the proportions of a horizontal brick, in a wall of board-and-batten siding. An original lowered eating area to the north of the patio is paved in brick, enclosed in glass, and features a barbecue on the back side of the fireplace mass. Looking west from the patio is another corner window. The upper room to the south has a wide overhang and porch, which looms over the patio and the horizontal window below.

INTERIOR:

The living room is the centerpiece of the design. It sinks by two, ten-foot wide brick steps from a front hall. The hall has a brick floor, is finished in stained mahogany, and its width adds five feet visually to an already large room. An indirect-light valance hangs over the wide front door, and to the side of the door a short wall with opaque glass gives definition to the hall. The other end of the hall, going south towards the dining room, gives privacy to the dining-room/living-room relationship. At the opposite end of the living room, a standard width hall accesses bedrooms. This hall rises three steps above the living-room floor, and the perspective across it adds interest and dimension. The volume of the living room is exaggerated by the standard ceiling heights of its adjoining halls.

The living room has two opposing focal points, the view and the fireplace. The fireplace mass is ten feet wide, 48 inches deep and projects twenty-four inches. It houses an elevated forty-eight-inch Heatilator and has ventilation on the front and each side. A wood box, open in the front and with a door at the back for loading firewood from the outside, is part of the fireplace mass. A brick floor, which appears to be a continuation of the fireplace structure, stretches out five feet from the wall for the length of the room, but the remaining majority of the flooring in the room is made of wide Oregon oak. Plate glass flanks the fireplace with operable transoms above. On the west side, the raised hearth of the fireplace, continues around a large brick planter, which is followed by a sliding glass door, with another operable transom above. On the east is a built-in corner couch, with a bookshelf above.

The hall roof structure is the same as the kitchen, and the ceiling continues unchanged in the two spaces. The living room has a butterfly roof, but the hall ceiling height continues into the living room to the point of the fireplace mass. At that point the ceiling dramatically opens to show the sloped open

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beams in the remainder of the living room. In this way the ceiling divides the room in the north south axis, while the brick floor divides it in the east-west axis. The upper four inches of the beams are hidden for insulation concerns and the ceiling boards are carefully cut between the beams.

A large and dramatic indirect light reflector directs the light from hidden fluorescent fixtures out into the room and across the ceiling boards, which dramatizes the blackened beams. In the space behind the sloped reflector is the connection for the butterfly roof. The two-by-six members cantilevered over the front wall are each through-bolted at their ends to prevent horizontal shear, and nailed to the side of the main beams and to the structure of the reflector, which along with bearing on the front wall, create the moment connection necessary to hold the cantilever. The south eave is less dramatic but utilizes steel, which is let into the surface of the ceiling and painted out, to create the connection. On the other side of the living room, to the right of the large north facing view window, is a vertical ventilating window with two casements. The remaining wall is covered by the resting curtain, a hi-fi cabinet, and a magazine storage cupboard.

East of the living room, the kitchen adjoins the front hall upstairs. The kitchen ceiling is nine-inch ceiling tile with holes, and the floor is linoleum. A valance runs between the ceiling and upper cabinetry. The valance contains five florescent fixtures behind opaque glass, which cast indirect light across the ceiling and down over the sink. Below this light fixture is a site-built window centered over eight feet of glass block. There are two courses of the glass block, set directly level with the counter. The kitchen walls and cabinets are painted with rabbeted, varnished, ash plywood drawers and doors. Brand name Thermopane windows are set in site built frames to make a corner window. A kitchen nook with built-in benches and palette-shaped pedestal table are underneath the corner window. On the opposite side, a stair to the basement is protected by an iron railing. Beyond the sink counter, an outside door opens onto the service porch. The south end of the kitchen is largely cabinetry, with a pass through and china cabinet above with sliding glass doors on both sides.

The dining room is just south of the kitchen and has larger ceiling tile and a floor of brick pavers. A teak table with two pedestals is bolted through the brick and joist structure below. A built-in buffet runs the length of the east wall. The dining room also serves as an extension of the front hall, which flows without articulation into it. The west wall is floor to ceiling and wall to wall glass. The wall of glass is placed just outside the structure as it runs south. The glass wall currently is a manufactured sliding glass door.

After flowing through the dining room, the front hall continues south up three brick steps to a long brick back hall that serves a bedroom, a bath, and a den. On the outside wall of the hall is a door leading down brick steps to the patio. A long narrow brick planter, lined in zinc, follows with a manufactured window, with eight horizontal panes above to provide light. The other side of the back hall includes a bedroom door, built-in laundry hamper, linen closet, and entrance to the bathroom.

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The woodwork of this hall is fir, painstakingly shaped and finished with white pigment rubbed in as stain.

The bedroom to the east of the hall has a pair of windows with two-over-two horizontal lights. The finish is of large ceiling tiles, a linoleum floor, and dressed-fir boards finished like those in the hall. The room's furniture, a closet, two dressers, two nightstands and a desk with bookshelves is entirely and compactly built in. A framed sheetrock panel provides relief from the natural wood. The fronts of the dressers, the desk, and the bookshelves are painted.

The bath is compartmentalized into three rooms. From the hall the doorless bathroom opens with a lavatory area. From this lavatory space to the east the tub room is separated by a conventional door, and to the north the toilet is accessed through a sliding door. The finish of the woodwork is clear varnish over fir. The ceiling is very large tile sections with small holes, and the floor is linoleum. The compartment for the tub has the exterior wall, which is all glass block above twenty-eight inches. A secondary wall at this level and below protects the plumbing from frost. The toilet room is small with painted walls and is lit from the tub room by privacy glass. The toilet room is ventilated mechanically through a light fixture made of the ceiling material. The lavatory has natural light from the hall window through the door-less entry, an opaque glass panel, and a large mirror with flanking lights. The sink cabinet has storage underneath and storage is arranged in the stud space under and to the side of the mirror. The counter curves to nothing to allow space to enter the door for the tub room. A curved swinging cabinet made of half-round molding fills the space underneath.

The brick hall flows south, without articulation, into the den. The brick floor changes from pavers to common brick laid on their side, which run up to a small fireplace with visually interesting holes at the base on either side of the firebox and just below the mantle. The fireplace has a steel firebox, custom made, and the masonry was designed such that a fan at the back circulated the heat out of the masonry. The remaining east part of the floor is carpeted. Another fixed-glass window to the west allows light into the space and a similar double-sash window on the east creates ventilation. The finish work of this room is similar to the hall and bedroom. The wall to the east of the fireplace is a built-in cabinet, and west of the fireplace is a stair leading to another bedroom over a workshop.

This workshop, below the bedroom, was a temporary kitchen during construction and retains kitchen cabinets. The room is built of hollow clay tile on the south and west and has site-built windows on the south. On the north is a deteriorating manufactured window with eight horizontal panes and a site-built door to the back yard. The east wall is a site-built garage door. The floor is tinted red concrete.

The bedroom above has an open-beam ceiling and an exterior door on the west wall, which leads to the roof of the larger workshop below. The south and east wall of the bedroom have no aperture. The north wall, east of the fireplace chimney, consists of a site-built wall of glass. The stair from the den

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below intrudes into the space four steps to the bedroom door. There is a built-in bunk bed with storage underneath on one side of the door and a closet, hiding the chimney on the other.

West from the living room, the short hall that is visible services another two bedrooms and a bath. The southern-most of these bedrooms has a site-built corner window. A fixed window with operable-ventilation panels underneath, and views the forest on the west. A built-in desk, day bed, closet, and chest of drawers line the west and north walls. The flush cabinetry of the chest of drawers in ribbon mahogany includes lighting over a mirror, which covers all of the remaining wall.

A conventional bath separates the two bedrooms. The bath has both a tub and shower. The shower is made partially in the space of the closet in the corner of the south bedroom, and has glass walls where it projects into the bathroom. Site-made cabinetry hides the plumbing from view.

The master bedroom on the north has a corner window to match the one in the kitchen with more glass running down the west wall to view the natural forest. The ceiling is open beam except where the framing changes to support the large front overhang. A freestanding closet shelters a half bath and dressing area.

BASEMENT:

Below the living room is a large room with a low ceiling used as a playroom. The structure is post-and-beam, has a long row of site-built windows, a large door to the front, and brick infill between the remaining posts. Shuffleboard tiles are built into the floor tiles, which cover the concrete floor. The ceiling and end wall are sheetrock panels with rough one-by-eight brown boards surrounding each sheet. A furnace room, which incorporates the concrete buttress of the long retaining wall, juts into the middle of the space. This room, along with one free standing post, supports the brick floors and hearth above. A simple kitchen with counter and cabinets of brick with wooden doors is built along the remaining south wall.

A garage is built under the space of the front hall and kitchen stairs. A hall with three more steps down to the playroom runs behind the garage. This hall has storage cabinets on the north that use the space over the nose of the car, and hall steps lead up to a windowless laundry room under the kitchen paneled in pine with a wooden floor and a low ceiling. The end wall of the laundry room is a fruit shelf. Cabinets, mostly hanging, cover the concrete east wall making space for a traditional concrete sink and washer and dryer. A door leads to the garage again down three steps.

The space under the master bedroom is a bedroom and bath, accessed through the playroom. The two spaces are separated by a freestanding brick wall and double-sided closet with opaque glass placed above at an angle facing towards the bedroom. The ceiling finish matches the playroom. The

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bedroom has site-made windows and exterior door. The floor is concrete, poured two steps above the playroom floor, and is covered with hardwood and carpet. The bath is unusual for having a sunken tub cast in concrete down two steps below a brick floor. White tile is the finish of the tub and all the remaining walls. The space is illuminated by glass block. An open shower is built into the tiled wall below the glass block.

Outside the bedroom is a concrete sidewalk built above a short brick retaining wall, which supports the master bedroom porch. One can walk under this porch and in front of the playroom door and windows to reach the front stairs. The structure of the master bedroom porch extends in both directions to create a platform to facilitate window washing. Under the structure to the south is a curvilinear brick retaining wall and planter. A similar curvilinear retaining wall exists under the kitchen porch on the northeast corner of the house.

ALTERATIONS:

Many of the alterations to the house by the owner-designer-builder might be considered corrections. The roof edge has been extended upward twice, first to cover the additional layers of tar and second to hide a layer of insulation. Storm windows and insulated glass have been added throughout the history of the house. A forced-air duct running through all the living-room floor joists was abandoned when new furnaces were installed in 1978. In the early 1960's, the sliding glass door in the dining room replaced a fragile and remarkably large manufactured assembly of glass and wood having the proportions of the windows in the back hall. The kitchen remodel in 1962 included removing a standard stove, which separated the kitchen nook and the kitchen, a change which included a new owner built palette-shaped pedestal table and benches for a large family. (The pedestal was half of a Model T axle.) At the same time, the two-light window over the sink, the only site-built window in the structure which originally had a horizontal proportion, was reduced to one pane. The glass enclosure of the patio in 1975 solved drainage problems and reduced heat loss. The patio floor near the dining room wall was raised and steps were placed in the middle to access the original barbeque and eating area. Two changes were losses. In the living room, wooden period French doors were replaced by a standard sliding glass door in about 1980. In the compartment lavatory the two sinks with side-mounted faucets, along with period cabinet doors below and florescent fixtures on each side of the mirror, were replaced with modern fittings in 1985.

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SUMMARY:

The Charles and Fae Olson Residence is proposed for nomination to the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A for its contribution to the understanding of the post-World War II housing boom. The residence encapsulates the trend of the World War II Veteran returning from service to build his own house, which he designed during the war. The Olson's preserved wartime correspondence reveals how the husband-and-wife team exchanged ideas and drawings of their "dream house." Following the many frustrating years of waiting, they purchased property and built, while they lived in, the new house. This large house is a collage of contemporary architectural thought gleaned by the designers from exhibitions, magazines, and books. The construction was accomplished largely by Charles, with help from his children, with materials logged from the site, salvaged from the Vanport flood, and purchased locally from Montgomery Ward. It was designed and built by a schoolteacher, and it is a study in economy, overcoming the problems of cost in post war Contemporary Modern housing.

NATIONAL TRENDS:

A major trend in post-war American housing began with the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, "G.I. Bill," of 1944.¹ This law made it possible for servicemen to entertain the thought of a "dream house." It became common for servicemen to write home during the war with thoughts about their future house. For servicemen and women and their spouses languishing all over the world, waiting for the battles to be over, it was a relief to think and plan about their house of the future. A 1944 article in *House Beautiful* noted that "it is seldom, indeed, that a group of GI's get together that the conversation doesn't sooner or later get around to it. Every man has a dream-house for the post-war period.... There is a girl back home, or in the WAC, who shares this particular dream."²

Following an invitation for servicemen to describe their dream houses, *House Beautiful* reported that, "...we can say that the majority of letters showed a marked desire for change, progress, and a breaking of the shackles of sentimentality in design."³ As one of the letters states, "In the first place we are 'Moderns,' and you will find that the majority of Yanks are leaning in that direction."⁴ An earlier article, also in *House Beautiful*, stated, "Modern has strong adherents among the manly,

¹ The passage of this bill helped facilitate housing production and homeownership by authorizing the Veterans Administration to guarantee mortgage loans to returning war veterans for the purchase, construction or improvement of homes. Elisabeth Sadler Wilson *Postwar Modern Housing and a geographic information system study of Scottsdale subdivisions*. p 44; This bill "created a Veterans Administration mortgage program similar to that of FHA. This law gave official endorsement and support to the view that the 16 million GI's of World War II should return to civilian life with a home of their own." Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, New York, 1985, p 233

² The Veterans of World War II Say They Will Want--', *House Beautiful*, August 1944, p. 33.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

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probably because it's direct and functional and gives them a feeling of lots of space to move around in."⁵

"Flat-Roofed Contemporary Modern," the term used to describe this architecture,⁶ was familiar to the designers of this period and they knew what the words meant. The style springs from the International Style,⁷ but the siding material is not so severe, the overhanging roof more livable, and the connection to the ground and nature an important philosophical change. "No visible roof" is an "Usonian concept," and is at the core of the style. Slab on grade is another Usonian concept, which pulls the style to the ground. This style does not have the sophisticated understanding of the vertical and horizontal associated with Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian designs, but there is an overlap. There is also an overlap with the "ranch" concepts of open planning, and connecting with interior space with the outside.⁸ These are modern concepts, which were natural additions to the ranch tradition.⁹ "The influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Richard J. Neutra, Mies Van der Rohe, and other modernists inspired many architects to look to new solutions for livable homes using modern materials of glass, steel, and concrete, and principles of organic design that utilized cantilevered forms, glass curtain walls, and post-and-beam construction. The contemporary home featured the integration of indoor and outdoor living area and open floor plan, which allowed a sense of flowing space. Characteristics such as masonry hearth walls, patios and terraces, carports, and transparent walls in the form of sliding-glass doors and floor-to-ceiling windows became hallmarks of the contemporary residential design."¹⁰

Magazines were very influential in focusing popular opinion before and after the War. "Between 1936 and 1950 forty-one surveys were taken"¹¹ by magazines in order to determine the public interest around which articles were written, and *House Beautiful* had several articles picturing contemporary houses designed for veterans,¹² or that were built for little money by owners.¹³ "During the war, government and industry both played up the suburban house to the families of absent servicemen."¹⁴

Following the War this desire to build a dream house coincided with a severe American housing shortage. "Continuing a trend begun during the Great Depression, six million families were doubling up with relatives or friends by 1947, and another 500,000 were occupying Quonset huts or

⁵ Marion Gough, 'Even Men can't agree about Decoration,' *House Beautiful*, February 1943, p.50.

⁶ Virginia & Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, 1984, p. 482.

⁷ 'The Veterans of World War II Say They Will Want---' *House Beautiful*, February 1945, p. 73.

⁸ Alan Hess, *The Ranch House*, New York, 2004, p. 17.

⁹ *Ibid.* p 34

¹⁰ *National Register Bulletin Historic Registrar Suburbs* 148

¹¹ Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home*, Chapel Hill, 1986, p.201.

¹² 'A House for a Veteran to Build in 1946', *House Beautiful*, June 1946, pp. 87, 88, 92, 93.

¹³ 'They Built This House for \$1200', *House Beautiful*, March 1946, pp. 106-109.

¹⁴ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, New York, 1985, p.232.

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temporary quarters. Neither figure included families living in substandard dwellings or those in desperate need of more room."¹⁵ "The need was intense. People were doubled up with relatives, friends, and strangers, war worker and veteran lived in rooming houses and camped out in cars. Some tried to convert chicken coops and barns into family housing,"¹⁶ "By 1950 the national suburban growth rate was ten times that of central cities, and in 1954 the editors of *Fortune* estimated that nine million people had moved to the suburbs in the previous decade ...between 1946 and 1956, about ninety-seven percent of all new single-family dwellings were completely detached, surrounded on every side by their own plots."¹⁷

"More than most people realized, the determining factor in 1950's middle-class suburban house construction was cost, measured both in time and money."¹⁸ The anticipated house of the future would be built in a factory,¹⁹ but in reality suburbia was the factory.²⁰ The first efficiency was to have only one house plan and for all the parts to fit any house. A "rapid production of houses in a continuous production process"²¹ was pioneered by 1939. For the large builder, it was cost effective to own a lumber company along with a forest. "All materials from nails to appliances were made to exact specifications and purchased through a subsidiary... Materials arrived precut and 'combat loaded,' so that the first items needed were on top.... They built thousands of almost identical 800-square-foot houses..."²² They hired non-union workers who were equipped with new small power tools to perform repetitive operations on house after house. Compared to skilled carpentry, the de-skilled work was boring."²³ After the war the FHA²⁴ approved the Cape Cod and later the Ranch House avoiding the Contemporary Modern. The Usonian House was not approved even though it was well thought out and revolutionary for holding down costs. Further, the suburban lot was the only lot considered appropriate for an FHA loan.²⁵ A serviceman who wanted to follow his wartime design and dream of a Modern Contemporary house built upon a hill was on his own. Architects were essentially left out of the equation, and were left to write books and magazine articles.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, New York, 2003, pp. 131-132.

¹⁷ Kenneth Jackson, *Crabgrass Frontier*, New York, 1985, pp. 238, 239.

¹⁸ Clifford Edward Clark, Jr., *The American Family Home*, Chapel Hill, 1986, p 217.

¹⁹ H. Ward Jandl *Yesterday's Houses of Tomorrow* Washington D.C. 1991 p.158.

²⁰ Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, New York, 2003, pp. 133.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid. p. 134.

²⁴ The FHA administered the GI bill for the Veteran's Administration. Neil Larson, 'An Overview of Post-World War II Housing and its Significance in Newton, Massachusetts' Chapter III p. 2.

<http://www.ci.newton.ma.us/cdbg/Historic/12_2006_updates/Chapter%203%20-%20Post%20WWII%20Housing.pdf>, accessed 19 April, 2007.

²⁵ Ibid. Chapter III p 3

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Pattern books have passed on the flow of ideas in American housing for centuries. In mid-nineteenth century Oregon alone there are architectural examples of Asher Benjamin, A. J. Downing, and Henry W. Cleaveland. They all authored pattern books aimed at changing the culture's fixation on the Greek Revival. Similarly, the pattern books published between 1946 and 1950, directed at the post-war housing boom, were all looking to alter public perceptions about housing and were specifically opposed to the Cape Cod. In 1946 *Tomorrows House*, by the editors of "Architectural Forum," was attempting to change attitudes about what was truly needed in a house for both the public and the professional.²⁶ In 1946 *Sunset Western Ranch House* by Cliff May and the editors of *Sunset* were pushing a more relaxed lifestyle, ideas and plans, and in 1947, *Homes*, by the producers of *Progressive Architecture*, recommended hiring an architect to get a special home that fit your family and your site. Compared to the nineteenth century, the twentieth century had enormous quantities of books and magazines to read. A normal person could not possibly have been exposed to them all but they were exposed to each other and the same ideas sprang forth over and over in the different publications. Each may have had a particular style bias based on contacts. Cliff May was associated with *Sunset*. A reader of *House Beautiful* might not fully understand the importance of "Ranch" design just as the reader of *Sunset* might not recognize that Modern concepts could exist without Ranch Architecture. In the end it did not matter because the sheer number of ranch houses defined the period.²⁷ Post-war housing was not about architecture, it was about money.

LOCAL TRENDS:

The local trend in Gresham mirrored on a humble scale what was happening nationally. In Gresham between 1946 and 1950, there are 170 new houses built in or just out of the City limits.²⁸ There is no official information as to whether they were owner built or if they belonged to veterans.²⁹ These houses are largely filling in areas in existing neighborhoods. Norman Street, where there were a remarkable number of new houses, has a row of Sears Kit homes. The other houses are sprinkled around and are very identifiable having the familiar materials: striated shakes, manufactured windows with horizontal proportions, glass block, a generous use of brick and hipped, almost eaveless, or Cape Cod roofs. A few modest attempts at Modern Contemporary can be found.³⁰ In general the buildings appear to be the work of either the owner or small contractors and many fit the

²⁶ The magazine *Architectural Form* was owned by Luce publications who promoted the mass produced housing by Levitt and Sons. Dolores Hayden, *Building Suburbia*, New York, 2003, p 134

²⁷ *National Register Bulletin Historic Registrar Suburbs* 147

²⁸ *Metro Map 1946-1950*, (CD-ROM), Metro Data Resource Center, Portland, Oregon.

²⁹ Metro Data Resource Center, Portland, Oregon.

³⁰ One small, and very low, slab on grade building with a flat sloping roof, brick and glass for walls built in 1950 is a good example of contemporary modern. Others have contemporary influences but could be mistaken for other styles.

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model that would have been approved by the FHA.³¹ The typical postwar home, which was mass-produced in a development by a single contractor, and which overwhelmed existing infrastructure, was not a local pattern. On Gresham Butte, separated from the city by Johnson Creek, there were only ten dwellings built before 1955. One was manufactured (a trailer), and six were owner built, two by veterans.³² Many people were struggling to build housing for themselves and many of those would have been veterans.³³

BACKGROUND:

Charles H. Olson was born in 1908 in Linwood, a small town on the Utah/Wyoming border, where his father clerked at a store. The family homesteaded a small protected plot near Manilla Utah where they attempted to make a living farming. Charles grew up there in a hand-hewn log house with a clay roof built by his father. This house fit the "ranch-house" criteria³⁴ and it was always described as such³⁵. The family moved to Evanston, Wyoming in 1926 in favor of their children's education. Charles' father was involved there in a failed chicken business.

Charles went to high school in Evanston but he also started a machinist apprenticeship. He boarded and took night classes while working for the Union Pacific railroad in Cheyenne, Wyoming and graduated from Cheyenne High School in 1932. He enlisted in the Wyoming National Guard in 1931 to play trumpet in the army band. He attended classes at the University of Utah in the fall of 1932, graduated from the ROTC in 1936, and received his Bachelor's degree in Music there in 1939. Charles played trumpet in a jazz band that toured the Midwest in 1933. His interest in jazz and the railroad pass he held from working as a machinist got him to Chicago where he attended the Worlds Fair. Charles Olson taught math for Gresham Union High School starting in 1946. This subject took less outside time than a band instructor, leaving more time to work on the house. He was head of the math department at Centennial High School after 1959. After the house construction was under control he worked in the summers for Tektronix as a machinist and he pioneered the job of machinist in the Physics department at Reed College. In his later years he was best known as a ski instructor.

Fae Cottam was born in Provo Utah in 1916. Her father taught botany at Brigham Young University until the early 1930's when he was asked to leave because he taught evolution.³⁶ The family moved to Salt Lake City where Fae attended East High School. They lived in a remarkably small 1929 house where the five children focused on grades and education. Fae majored in art while attending the

³¹ Charles' FHA loan request was rejected because of the butterfly roof. Interview with Charles in the 1960's when the Gresham First National Bank remodel included a butterfly roof.

³² Eric Olson, interview held in Gresham, Oregon, April 2007.

³³ Kent Olson, interview held in Gresham, Oregon, April 2007.

³⁴ Alan Hess, *The Ranch House*, New York, 2004, p. 17.

³⁵ The Olson Family were homesteaders, but liked to call their house The Ranch.

³⁶ Interview with Dr. Walter Cottam April 1975.

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University of Utah where her father was teaching. She later switched majors and graduated in psychology. Charles took every available job while he worked his way through college and was working as a model for a drawing class when he met Fae.

Charles and Fae married in 1938 and had two children born during the war in 1941 and 1943. Charles was an officer, eventually holding the rank of captain, and was transferred from fort to fort during the war with Fae attempting to follow him with the children.³⁷ Their need for housing was a constant subject when they wrote letters while apart all through the war. They were in a schematic phase of the house design in late November and early December 1944 when the relevant letters were written. On November 25, 1944 Charles wrote in a letter, "I have been trying to work out our dreamhouse again today." Fae was living with her parents, and Charles was on a ship anchored "somewhere in the Pacific". Fae guessed which day he wrote each letter and wrote that date on the envelope. It is clear that they had been in this process for some time. Charles and Fae never had a government-backed loan, but they were totally involved with the excitement of planning a "dream house."

WARTIME DESIGN:

Conditions on the ship could have been better for the task of house design. Charles wrote: "I think I could do better with an eraser...I tacked this one on a board to work on outside this afternoon, but as you see the weather was a little rough. It was hard to hold down in the wind but I enjoyed the coolness while working it out."³⁸ Being on board the ship did have advantages. His knowledge of architecture at the time would not have been possible without some assistance. "I have finished several books and gone through all the magazines available."³⁹ Many years later he said, "I had studied Frank Lloyd Wright books while in the service."⁴⁰

Charles' war letters are love letters, but they are also a presentation of his design ideas. He wrote: "I have a sunken living in my head so if you don't like the idea you had better let me know quick. It will be two steps below everything except the patio, which will be connected by two French doors."⁴¹ "I have never mentioned the deck I have had in mind all the time. I still don't know for sure how it will work out but I have shown it here with a vertical ladder. As you see it has a railing. It sits out over the

³⁷ Laura Monteirh, "Charles Huston Olson a Biographical History," unpublished biography, pp.8-14.

³⁸ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," December 4, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

³⁹ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 19, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁴⁰ W.R. Chilton, ed., *Gresham Stories of our Past*, Gresham, 1996, p. 235.

⁴¹ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 19, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

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eaves so that it can be about six feet wide or deep and no higher than a foot or so about the eave."⁴² (This may be the beginning of the flat roof.) "What do you think about the basement windows here?"⁴³ Fae tended to be pleased and impressed. "I think you have a very dramatic idea in your front entrance, landing, and sunken living room."⁴⁴ She added, "The patio looks wonderful."⁴⁵

The patio was built with many of the ideas presented in the drawing and many of those ideas are informal, like the ranch house definition, but they also are common in other architectural books and magazines at the time. Charles had ideas of an open plan and privacy: "I tried to give the impression one might get after entering the front door. The idea is to see into the dining room to give a feeling of depth, withholding the living room from first glance. Then, when in the living room I have tried to block the dining room from view."⁴⁶

Fae had ideas of her own. She was influenced by a house they rented at Hick's lake, likely a Craftsman home, during the time Charles was stationed at Fort Lewis. Her ideas were to be used in a "cabin." Previously, she had painted a watercolor in college titled "A Cabin in the Woods." Charlie worked on the cabin design as well. "This cabin shouldn't take much to build and I think it would be very livable."⁴⁷ Initially the cabin concept represented a separate building, possibly a vacation cabin.⁴⁸ In reality it became the beginnings of the large, Gresham house. It is the south end of the house, built first and used temporarily while working on the larger structure. Of the larger design decisions articulated in 1944 only the exterior finish (white stucco),⁴⁹ and the roof (tile),⁵⁰ were clearly abandoned.

The existing 1944 letters associated with the design predate the worst of Charles' war experiences, the battle of Okinawa,⁵¹ but the strategy of focusing the serviceman on the future worked to get him

⁴² Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," December 4, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Fae Olson to Charles Olson, Salt Lake City, Utah, December 11, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁴⁵ Fae Olson to Charles Olson, Salt Lake City, Utah, December 12, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁴⁶ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 28, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ "It should be within a hundred miles, less if possible of our house, where ever it is." Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," December 3, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁴⁹ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 28, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁵⁰ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," December 4, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁵¹ Laura Monteirh, "Charles Huston Olson a Biographical History," unpublished biography, pp. 12-14.

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through the war. He arrived in Gresham in 1946 with a little money, sketches on paper, plans in his head, malaria, difficult war memories, and a few hand tools, ready to build.

INFLUENCES:

In 1933, after touring in the midwest playing trumpet with a Jazz band and with a Union Pacific railroad pass in his pocket, Charles visited Chicago to hear other bands. He attended the Chicago World's Fair⁵² which featured the exhibition "The Homes of Tomorrow." It included Howard T. Fisher's General House, Inc. a flat roofed factory produced house with corner windows very familiar to the later Gresham design.⁵³

During the war Charles was stationed at different forts and some undisclosed locations. When possible Charles would reside with Fae who, in an effort to be near to him, rented houses across the country. They both were exposed to modern architecture in Washington, Oregon, California including San Francisco and Los Angeles, and Texas. One surprising letter in 1945 has Charles in France for a very brief time.

The working design in the closing days of 1944 has a patio and front elevation much like the one built later but also includes a tile roof. One can imagine the tile roof being witnessed repeatedly in Charles' and Fae's experiences in California and Texas. In describing the patio drawing on December 4th, 1944, Charlie admits "I have never mentioned the deck I have had in mind all the time. I still don't know for sure how it will work out but I have shown it here with a vertical ladder." This deck is on the roof and is the first suggestion of the flat roof.

Charles regarded an officer named "Gately," who was on the ship with him, as a design professional.⁵⁴ F. R. Gately also did nude pinup art for the men.⁵⁵ Although they played cards together and Charles would have appreciated the help there is no evidence that Gately had any influence over the design of the house.

Charles and Fae owned *Tomorrow's House*, by Nelson and Wright, published in 1945. Their copy has a materials take off list in pencil on the inside cover. Their clever door-less side hall of the back hall and den appears on page 146 of that book. Their "three-passenger bath" in the back wing is

⁵² Interview with Charles in Chicago July 1968

⁵³ "Century of Progress World's Fair at Chicago in 1933 introduced Americans to a number of modern houses, including the house of Tomorrow by George Fred Keck, noted for its polygonal form, innovative use of glass, and showcase of modern building materials." *National Register Bulletin Historic Registrar Suburbs* 149

⁵⁴ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 28, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

⁵⁵ Olson family collection of Charles Olson's service memorabilia.

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described on page 104, and pictures of their original double sink are shown in illustration 112. The curvilinear lavatory cabinet made of half round molding appears in illustration 110, and a wall of glass block in illustration 105. Their pedestal dining room table bolted through the brick floor structure is shown in picture 144 and also appears in *House Beautiful*.⁵⁶

Fae had a subscription to *House Beautiful* for decades.⁵⁷ Her copies from the war years do not survive but the influence of the articles and advertisements appear unmistakable. In 1945 the Hotpoint appliance ad features a kitchen design that largely parallels Fae's original kitchen; another ad features Thermopane windows installed above the breakfast nook. In addition, a home design piece in the magazine the same year shows a photo of board and bat siding, an article about recreation features a shuffleboard floor created in tile, and a piece about garages recommends making storage use of the space above the nose of one's garaged automobile. The notions of a sliding-glass wall to a patio and the outside and a brick barbecue also appear in that magazine.

The flat roof is common in Frank Lloyd Wright's work, is pictured repeatedly and described in *Tomorrow's House* and appears regularly in articles in *House Beautiful*. A specific article in *House Beautiful* features a house by architect William Deknatel, a student of Frank Lloyd Wright, showing the overhang specifically as it relates to a "solar house."⁵⁸ A picture of a beach house by Donald Kirby architect, explicitly shows how to transform an International Style "box" into a Flat Roof Contemporary Modern "beauty." "The resulting shadows create good scale."⁵⁹

The overhang that is reduced to only the structural members can be found four times in *Tomorrow's House* and is pictured repeatedly in *Homes and Sunset Western Ranch House* illustrates it once. At *Falling Water* it is thought of as a trellis but at *Pope-Leighly* it would appear to be a design to allow more light into the windows below. In the Charles and Fae Olson Residence all the white paint in the open work greatly illuminates the corner window area when the sun is shining as would "Tomorrows House" illustration 213.

The sunken living room is not common in *House Beautiful*, but does appear in a picture⁶⁰ illustrating interior decoration. Wright's *Pope-Leighey Usonian* house has a living room lower than the front entrance. After 1944, when the concept was clearly already in Charles' living room design, it

⁵⁶ 'There ought to be MORE to a dining room than just DINING', *House Beautiful*, October 1943, p.71.

⁵⁷ Eric Olson, interview held in Gresham, Oregon, March 2007

⁵⁸ 'Summer protector against Solar Heat is the ROOF OVERHANG', *House Beautiful*, September 1943, p. 62.

⁵⁹ 'Imagine One of These---' *House Beautiful*, February 1945, p. 73.

⁶⁰ 'They Knew What They Wanted and How to Get it' *House Beautiful*, March 1941, p. 54.

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appeared often in publications. Cliff May's sunken living room was published in *Sunset Western Ranch Houses* in 1946, and the sunken living room appears seven times in *Homes*.⁶¹

Indirect lighting is prominent in the Olson Residence and is pictured once in *Tomorrow's House*. Indirect lighting is considered one of Frank Lloyd Wright's inventions, which lends support to Charles' comment that he studied books on the architect. Cliff May's design of a living room in the chapter, "Possibilities of a Ranch House," shows great potential for indirect lighting on the scale of the Charles and Fae Olson Residence, but it is not mentioned in the text.⁶²

Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian ideas of one construction having two finished sides, is used on the workshop walls and red floor, both fireplaces, the dining room glass wall and the entire exterior wall of the playroom. Wright was also an advocate of built-ins and an advocate of owner-built housing.⁶³

OWNER DESIGNER:

Charles had not ruled out an architect when he wrote "Architect's rates are high but their advice is worth it in materials they can save in the basic construction."⁶⁴ "I realize that there are probably many changes that might have to be made when it comes to drawing up the plans."⁶⁵ For Charles, the site was picked for his design. "It would be best on top of a raise where the ground could fall off quite abruptly in the front of the house",⁶⁶ and he designed specifically for the children he expected⁶⁷ Charles made a few more sketches that were not folded to fit an envelope and in the end there were no professional drawings.

OWNER CONTRACTOR:

Charles was less intimidated about his lack of knowledge as a builder. He leaned on his brother-in-law, Jim Almond,⁶⁸ a local builder, for advice. They owned a few tools jointly, Charles borrowed many more, and Charles purchased Jim's and his crew's labor on the occasion of the major concrete pour. Otherwise the house was going to be as good as Charles' ability to make it. Fae was important for

⁶¹ Thomas H. Creighton, Frank G. Lopez, Charles Magruder, George A. Sanderson, *Homes*, New York, 1947, pp.25, 35, 63, 87, 100, 145, 173.

⁶² Editorial Staff of *Sunset Magazine* and Cliff May, *Sunset Western Ranch House*, San Francisco, 1946 p 154.

⁶³ H. Ward Jandl, *Yesterday's Houses of Tomorrow*, Washington D.C. 1991 p. 119.

⁶⁴ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," December 7, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon

⁶⁵ Charles Olson, to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 27, 1944, Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jim Almond was a bridge engineer before and during the war and a building contractor after the war.

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support, but her opinions in terms of quality control were impressive. The parts of the house she did not inspect were of an entirely different nature than those she did. Fae did not physically work on the project but the children did. The five children all learned basic building skills and were important conveyers of materials. As young adults they were encouraged to be involved in design decisions and the finishing of bedrooms. The energy given to this project was great, especially in the early years. Neither Charles nor Jim Almond⁶⁹ were working to build a house the way the “merchant builders” were. The efficiencies developed in the suburban mass production of housing would never have involved a cross cut saw for felling trees, a portable mixer for concrete, or on site creation of windows and doors. The on-site labor costs for the Charles and Fae Olson Residence would have been truly alarming except that most of the labor was unpaid. A building this complicated could never have been produced cheaply no matter how many were made. This building was running in the opposite direction from the mass market and although it is doing exactly what the design concepts and the magazine articles of the time suggested, few buildings were made using the methods and technologies of this builder.

PROCESS

The purchase of six acres of forested hillside was cheaper than a standard suburban lot of the time,⁷⁰ because the hillside did not have city services and made an unusual building site not likely to have been approved for a loan. The trees, a resource to Charles and Fae, were felled using a crosscut saw,⁷¹ and picked up by the sawmill at Pleasant Home. Charles hired a bulldozer to establish the two terraces the house was built on before the lumber returned from the mill.⁷² The house was started at the south end in the summer of 1946, and the family moved into the beginnings of the back hall and adjacent rooms that fall. This two-story portion contained a temporary kitchen and a temporary storage cabinet divided off a temporary children's bedroom.⁷³ The parents slept upstairs before the stair was installed and accessed the unfinished bedroom from the outside on a plank.⁷⁴ The living room was located in the den entered beside the chimney where the later stair was constructed. The compartmental bath and the temporary kitchen were finished first. The temporary kitchen was abandoned in 1949, but the unusual bath served alone successfully for fourteen years. The interiors of the remaining rooms off the back hall were completed before the framing of the rest of the house. In 1947, a hand poured concrete foundation was placed and the remainder of the house was framed and roofed by the fall of 1947. The kitchen and dining room were occupied in 1949. The living room

⁶⁹ Jim Almond built less than five homes a year and was returning to engineering at the time of his death in 1957.

⁷⁰ Wilson, Elisabeth Sadler. 'Postwar Modern Housing and a geographic information system study of Scottsdale subdivisions.' 2002, p. 74

⁷¹ Kent Olson, interview held in Gresham, Oregon, April 2007. Charles with help from Jim Almond used the saw.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Fae Olson, repeated interviews

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fireplace was built in 1950 and the furnace was installed. The basement playroom served as a temporary living room and temporary bedroom after 1951. The basement laundry was finished in 1952. The living room was completed in 1954. The bedroom above the workshop was completed by 1957. The southwest bedroom was finished in 1959. The adjoining bath was completed in 1962, the master bedroom in 1963 and the basement bedroom in 1965.

MATERIALS:

Cement was in short supply in 1946 and hollow clay tile and slacked lime served to create the back foundation. A major brick manufacture, Columbia Brick Works, was located within a mile of the house and sand came from the Sandy River. The common brick purchased in the first years were a standard at the brickyard and made throughout the years of construction. For consistency, these red brick were used even after the availability of Roman brick in the 1950's. Few houses were constructed in 1946 because of shortages in materials. A number of the hollow clay tiles were deformed "clinkers" that were used under the house. Medium sized river rock was also used for footings to compensate for a lack of building materials. Windows were purchased in 1946 for the back section and the dining room. The dining room window was stored in the south wall of the two-story section before the dining room was framed.⁷⁵ This window was likely not custom-made for the house but rather the house was custom-made to fit a purchasable window. Purchase of a new Craftsman jointer in the spring of 1949, made further purchase of manufactured windows unnecessary. When the window for the dining room was installed in the dining room, site-made windows were installed in the workshop to replace it. The dining room window was framed outside of the adjoining wall and likely was thought of as a "glazed sliding wall"⁷⁶ before the fragility of the window purchase was assessed. By the time the rest of the house was enclosed and occupied, when access through the dining room window was considered, the manufactured sliding glass door then available was obviously a more practical solution.

The Vanport flood in 1948 made it possible to acquire oak flooring as flood lumber.⁷⁷ This flooring was used in all the rooms finished after 1949, except the basement bedroom. The history of finishing the rooms over time is most obvious in the ceilings where datable changes in the ceiling tile industry can be followed between 1946 and 1949. A purchase of eight inch milled tongue-and-groove pine with a large quirk and bead was used in the living room and upper bedroom ceilings and sheetrock was used in the 1960's. Aluminum storm windows were purchased and installed, in a group, for the back hall rooms, the living rooms and the southwest bedroom in 1959. Hardware changed over time, and variations could not always be avoided. The chrome striated hardware of the back hall and bath

⁷⁵ W.R. Chilton, ed., *Gresham Stories of our Past*, Gresham, 1996, illustrated p. 234

⁷⁶ George Nelson and Henry Wright *Tomorrow's House* New York 1945 p. 159.

⁷⁷ James Almond telephone interview April 22, 2007 Jim Almond salvaged quantities of materials from Vanport. The oak flooring he passed on to Charles.

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is replaced by brass hardware in the period 1949 through 1954, Hanging sliding hardware can be found in the closets of the 1960's. Doors and hardware are generally avoided throughout. The blue fixtures of the second bathroom were purchased in 1952 and stored for years in their wooden crates. The beams in the living room were finished by burning with a blow torch and the ash removed with a wire brush. This technique was revisited in 1965 in the basement bedroom for all the woodwork.

BUILT-INS:

Charles made the furniture in the early years to save money. Built-ins saved him time because he did not have to finish the side or back. This do it yourself attitude ran counter to the growing pains the rest of the nation was having. Some architects⁷⁸ and the building community⁷⁹ were trying to get parts or whole houses made in a factory to reduce cost. "Factory prefabricated or developer mass produced houses would always be less expensive than those designed by an architect."⁸⁰ The Ranch house, which adopted many contemporary modern concepts, was the solution to reducing on-site costs. "That advantage was overwhelmed by too many built-ins".⁸¹ Built-ins were a design efficiency of space, not a cost effective way to mass produce furniture. But if the builder's site time was not considered, the most inexpensive solution was site built built-ins.

CONCLUSION:

The Olson Residence is eligible for listing in the National Register of historic Places under Criterion A as an imposing example of a contemporary/modern-style dream house designed by the veteran and his wife during World War II, and hand-built for their own family following the War. The house is unusual in having supporting documentation in the form of letters that establish the designer's thoughts that led to the creation. These letters definitely link the design to specific dates during the war and to the architectural ideas of the time. The design is directly influenced, just before it is commenced, by the important book *Tomorrow's House*, and the building documents the difficulties of building in 1946. Although the style and size were a common dream, they are unusual because neither fits the economics of the post war housing and banking industries. The structure only exists because Charles and his family built it themselves; the processes used to bring the dream into reality were often singular and always resourceful. The unique design is good architecture: it inspires, conforms to its site, and accommodated its original occupants for sixty years. The structure is stable, and remains intact, in the setting in which it sprung.

⁷⁸ H. Ward Jandl *Yesterday's Houses of Tomorrow* Washington D.C. 1991p 157-167

⁷⁹ Clifford Edward Clark, Jr. *The American Family Home*, Chapel Hill 1986 p. 195

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 205

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

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_____. Letter to Fae Olson, "Somewhere in the Pacific," November 27, 1944. Personal Files of Charles Olson family, Gresham, Oregon.

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Olson, Charles and Fae, House
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
County and State

NPS Form 10-900-a

OMB Approval No. 1024-0018

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Olson, Charles and Fae, House
Name of Property

Multnomah Co., OR
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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION:

The boundary includes the entire tax lot of the subject of this nomination described at "Beginning at the southwest corner of Section 10, Township 1 South Range 3E of the Willamette Meriden, running thence East along the South line of said Section 10, 436.0 feet more or less to the center line of Walters Road (Country road 1074) thence in a Northerly and Westerly direction, tracing the center line of said Walters Road, to the point of the intersection of said road with the West line of said Section 10; thence South along the West line of said Section 10, 752.4 feet more or less, to the place of beginning.

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION:

The boundary encompasses the entire tax parcel described in the Verbal Boundary Description and includes all important historic resources related to the property including the Charles and Fae Olson Residence, the surrounding landscaping, and associated features.

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1. Mapquest location maps, 2 pages
2. Plat map
3. Site map, Olson, Charles and Fae, House
4. Floor plans, Olson, Charles and Fae, House
5. "A House for Vetrans to Dream About," *House Beautiful*, May 1945
6. Letter with basement drawing from Charles to Fae November 27, 1944
7. Letter from Charles to Fae November 28, 1944
8. Charles' drawing of front elevation November 28, 1944
9. Charles' drawing of interior November 28, 1944
10. Charles' drawing of cabin kitchen December 1, 1944
11. Charles' drawing of patio December 4, 1944
12. Fae's letter to Charles with sketch of front elevation December 12, 1944
13. Drawing in plan that was not folded to fit a standard envelope, unsigned and undated
14. Excerpts from *Tomorrows House*, showing the building, illustrating the fenestration of the back hall, and describing the three-passenger bath
15. "There Ought to be More to a Dining Room than Just Dining," *House Beautiful*, October 1943
16. Hotpoint kitchen ad in *House Beautiful*, repeated in 1945
17. "House Planners Study Course," *House Beautiful*, April 1945
18. "A Garage of the Future," by Karl Steinhauser, *House Beautiful*, March 1945
19. "Imagine One of These," *House Beautiful*, February 1945, demonstrates transition from the International Style to Flat Roofed Contemporary Modern
20. "They Knew What They Wanted and How to Get It," *House Beautiful*, March 1941