United States Department of the Interior National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received AUG - 1 1983 date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms* Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic	Alpha Tau Omega	Fraternity House (01d)	
and/or common	ATO House	· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·		
2. Loca	ation			
street & number	1143 Oak St reet	/		N/A not for publication
city, town	Eugene	<u>N/Avicinity of</u> Fou	rth Congressiona	l District
state	Oregon cod	e 41 county L	ane	code 039
3. Clas	sification			
Category district X building(s) structure site object	Ownership public private both Public Acquisition N/A in process N/A being considered	Status occupied unoccupied work in progress Accessible _Xyes: restricted yes: unrestricted no	Present Use agriculture commercial educational entertainment government industrial military	 museum park private residence religious scientific transportation other:
4 Own	er of Prope	rtv		
name street & number	Dr. Julius and N 1035 East 22nd #			
city, town	Eugene	<mark>∖/</mark> A vicinity of	state	Oregon 97405
5. Loca	ation of Leg	al Description		
courthouse. reals	stry of deeds, etc.	ne County Deeds and R	ecords	
street & number		5 East 8th Avenue		
city, town	Eu	gene	state	Oregon 97401
6. Rep	resentation	in Existing Su	urveys	
title	City of Eugene Historic Landmar	h Ah.'		ligible? yes _X no
date	June 24, 1980		federal sta	te county _X_ local
depository for su		Historic Review Board	, Dept. of Housi	ng & Community Conservat
city, town	Eugene		state	Oregon 97401

7. Description

excellent deteriorated	Check one unaltered _X_ altered	Check one X_ original site moved date	N/A
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Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The former Alpha Tau Omega House is a large two and one-half story Craftsman Style residence located just south of the intersection of Oak Street and 11th Avenue. It was constructed in 1910 by George Lill, a blacksmith and local entrepreneur, utilizing ornamental cast concrete blocks as a veneer. The building served as the residence for the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity between 1910 and 1922. It was then converted into studio and one-bedroom apartments. The building remained in use until 1978 when it was vacated due to building code violations stemming from an illegal conversion of the first floor into an antique shop. The house is currently vacant, and has recently been acquired by a former owner following default of a land sales contract.

Two nearby bungalows currently provide immediate context for the house. One, constructed sometime between 1902 and 1912, is situated at the rear of the lot, between the former fraternity house and an alley to the east. It is in poor condition and is scheduled for demolition imminently. The other bungalow is situated on a separate tax lot directly north of the Alpha Tau Omega House and, like the ATO House, faces west onto Oak Street. Sue Dorris and Allie M. Smith, who had purchased the fraternity house and converted it to apartments between 1922 and 1925, built the neighboring house between 1925 and 1928 as their residence.

Constructed in 1911, the First Christian Church is located directly across Oak Street from the former fraternity house. It was designed in the Classical Style according to a standardized plan developed by George W. Kramer, a New York architect. It is listed on the Statewide Inventory of Historic Properties.

The area encompassing the Alpha Tau Omega House was once part of Daniel Christian's Donation Land Claim, settled in 1854. "Christian's property extended from south of 11th Avenue to near 25th, from Olive to east of High Street. Christian, a carpenter, initially built a log cabin for his family but in 1855 replaced it with a frame house." ¹ The house, located at 170 East 12th Avenue, is representative of Eugene's early farm settlement and is the only known Donation Land Claim era house in the downtown area. The Christian House, a City historic landmark, is a half-block south of the Alpha Tau Omega House.

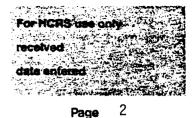
Rectangular in plan, measuring approximately 30x75 feet, the ATO House is oriented longitudinally on its 40x160-foot lot, with its main axis east to west. Its hip roof is characterized by broadly overhanging, bell-cast eaves supported on outriggers, and each of its slopes is broken by dormers with hip roofs of similar configuration.

The architectural styling of the Alpha Tau Omega House follows the principles of the American Craftsman Style. "These principles are simplicity, durability, fitness for the life that is to be lived in the house and harmony with its natural surroundings."² The idea of simplicity and durability are reflected in the use of ornamental concrete block.

The Alpha Tau Omega House is clad on all four sides in <u>solid</u> concrete blocks, applied as a veneer in whatwas then an innovative use of the material. The concrete is not tinted, retaining its natural gray hue closely resembling stone. Seven different patterns of block are combined to create a rich and varied texture. The organization of the ornament loosely follows Italian Renaissance principles. The foundation, first floor, and chimneys are decorated with blocks cast in a "pitch-face" design intended to simulate ashlar. The second floor consists of blocks having a shallow, vertically ribbed texture.

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Between the first and second floors there is a molded string course comprised of three independently cast elements. These are: an acorn design, an egg and dart motif, and a conge cap. The two chimney tops are also detailed with these three block patterns. The lintels on the first floor are capped with a single band of the acorn design.

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A horizontal emphasis is established through a series of projecting bands consisting of the beveled water table, the string course previously described, and broad bellcast eaves. Wooden balustrades, which originally circumscribed the main roof and front porches, and broad one-over-one double-hung sash windows further contribute to the building's overall horizontality.

The fenestration is irregular and a result of the internal organization and use of the rooms. On the west half of the north facade casement windows are used in pairs. These windows are an integral part of the built-in furniture and fireplace on the interior. Two windows, situated on the second floor above the front porch roof, contain clear leaded glass panes.

Touted as being "the handsomest in the minds of many, and an ornament to that portion of the city" (Eugene Daily Guard, March 11, 1910), the exterior of the building remains relatively intact except for some of the wooden elements. Sections of the boxed eaves show signs of decay and most of the balustrade is missing. However, a portion of extant balustrade detailing in the interior, and photographic documentation available at the Lane County Museum, "Anybody's" magazine and the University of Oregon's Oregana, would assist in restoration of the entire balustrade. The doors and windows are intact, although the original front door has been removed and is stored in the basement of the house.

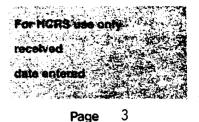
The plan was designed in accordance with the Craftsman philosophy. "Ample provision is made . . . for the healthful outdoor living that is now regarded as so necessary."³ The plan included full width verandas along the front and back which are topped with sleeping porches accessible from the second floor. These sleeping porches were used year-round "as nothing is better for the average housed-up human being than sleeping out of doors under plenty of covers."⁴

The reception hall, living room, and dining room are especially important areas in a Craftsman home. The Alpha Tau Omega House included a large U-shaped stairwell in the hall replete with a built-in seat. The living and dining areas are spacious and are separated only by a broad passage way. Fir, stained and varnished, is used extensively throughout these rooms. (See photos). As suggested in The <u>Craftsman</u>, "wood is used in the form of wainscotting, beams and structural features of all kinds."⁵ In the living room are built-in bookcases and a seat surrounding the fireplace which is embraced by a wooden mantel.

The dining room has a built-in buffet for china and linens, a pass-through pantry accessible from the kitchen, and a continuous plate rail. The adjacent "billiards room" also has built-in cabinets, wainscotting and a continuous plate rail. All of these rooms have oak flooring.

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The formal rooms, where wooden detailing is extensively employed, remain in good condition. Some elements which have been removed or damaged, such as cabinet doors and plate rails, are sufficiently represented in other areas of the house to facilitate their restoration.

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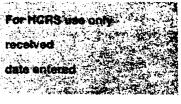
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Between 1922-1925 Sue Dorris and Allie M. Smith, charter members of the Eugene Business and Professional Women's Club, converted the structure into apartments. ⁶ These alterations took advantage of the building's original organization and detailing. The first floor was organized into two apartments, and the second and third floors provided four apartments each. These changes necessitated the addition of bathrooms and kitchens, along with the clustering of individual rooms. The sleeping porches were enclosed at this time. Since the building's convervsion into apartments maintained its stylistic integrity the effect is minimal, furthermore, these changes are entirely reversible.

In 1978, when an antique shop was established on the first floor, a second set of alterations occurred. Some of the partitions installed in 1922-25 were removed at this time, restoring the original organization of the first floor. The front porch and the main stairwell connecting the entrance hall with the second floor were enclosed and access to the apartments on the second and third floors was diverted to an original auxillary entrance on the south side of the building. The building was vacated in 1978 due to code violations stemming from its illegal conversion to commercial use. Since that time, the most extensive damage has occurred as a result of neglect and vandalism. The roofing has deteriorated and moisture has damaged some of the plastered walls. However, restoration would be easy to undertake as most of the damage is superficial and has not severely affected the structure or its detailing.

The endurance of the Alpha Tau Omega House, architecturally and in an adaptive sense, is attributable to the Craftsman ideals of simplicity, durability, and free-flowing plan. The house has maintained an allegiance to the moral sensibilities and innovative character of its age.

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Continuation sheet Item number 7 Page 4

Footnotes - Description

¹Rees, Judith: "History of the West University Neighborhood"; unpublished, page 2.

²Stickley, Gustav: <u>Craftsman Homes</u>: Architecture and Furniture of the American Arts and Crfats Movement; 1909; page 9.

³Ibid.; page 25.

⁴Ibid.; page 26.

⁵Ibid.; page 185.

⁶Obituary, from Scrapbook Collection at Lane County Museum Library (McCully 1, page 75), dated May 21, 1959.

8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899 X 1900–	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric archeology-historic agriculture X architecture art commerce communications		ing landscape architectui law literature military music	re religion science sculpture _X social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1910	Builder/Architect	George W. Lill	

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The old Alpha Tau Omega Fraternity House in Eugene, home of the University of Oregon, is located at 1143 Oak Street in the downtown core. Built in 1910, it is a two and a half-story building of wood frame construction with a veneer of solid, cast concrete block imitating both rock-faced ashlar and dressed stone. Other distinguishing features of the house are its full-length verandas at front and rear with sleeping porches The builder and original owner was George Lill, a blacksmith by training, who above. acquired the patented equipment to manufacture the block in Eugene. The house was vacated by the fraternity in 1922 during the period when fraternities began to cluster in closer proximity to the University campus. Between 1922 and 1925, the house was converted to apartments with resulting enclosure of sleeping porches and addition of bathrooms and kitchesn to accommodate six individual units. The house has been vacant since 1978 and has suffered superficially from deterioration and neglect. The wooden balustrades which originally circumscribed the roof and porch decks are missing but could be reconstructed readily on the basis of historic photographs and a surviving section of railing stored on the premises. The building was declared a City of Eugene Historic Landmark by action of the City Council in 1980.

The Alpha Tau Omega House meets National Register criterion "c". It is locally significant as the only known residential building in Eugene faced entirely with ornamental concrete block and it is one of only three examples of fraternity house architecture antedating 1915. The house exemplifies the Craftsman aesthetic, which combined practical and economical design with flexibility to suit the special needs of the client. The design philosphy, based on the Arts and Crafts ideal, was promulgated by Gustav Stickley in The Craftsman magazine, 1901-1916. The ATO House illustrates the popularity or ornamental concrete as a practical and affordable building material in the early 1900s. In its ornamental treatment following Italian Renaissance principles of variegated articulation of upper stories, the ATO House is unusually sophisticated. It ranks second only to the Levi Mellon House in Corvallis as an outstanding example of concrete block residential arhcitecture in Oregon. The property also meets National Register criterion "a" in that it is locally significant for representing the first surge of Greek letter fraternity development in Eugene. Organized as the Alpha Club in 1907 and chartered as Gamma Phi chapter of Alpha Tau Omega in 1910, Alpha Tau Omega was the fourth Greek letter fraternity established at the University of Oregon.

The design for the former Alpha Tau Omega House, 1143 Oak Street, appears to have been derived from "The Craftsman House Series" which appeared in <u>The Craftsman</u> beginning in January 1904. The plans may have been modified somewhat by the builder as this was an acceptable practice, and was even encouraged by the editors of <u>The Craftsman</u>.

The house appears to have accommodated the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity admirably. However, there is evidence which indicates that some of the rooms were not used in accordance with original plans. The dining room, for example, was found to be too small to accommodate all the fraternity members; the "billiards room" was used in this capacity and the dining room was used as a library. Considering the fact that the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity was the building's first occupant, the adjustments in room use would seem

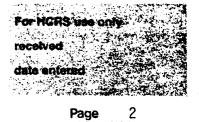
9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet

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to further indicate that the plan was derived from a residential prototype.

The builder and original owner was George W. Lill, a blacksmith residing in Eugene. An article appearing in the <u>Eugene Daily Guard</u> on March 11, 1910, identifies Lill as the builder. The article states that Lill manufactured the concrete blocks on site "with two assistants."

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The building progressed rapidly. On March 15, 1910, the <u>Eugene Daily Guard</u> stated that Lill had completed manufacture of the concrete blocks, apparently having begun some time during the previous fall. Two weeks later, on March 31st, excavation had begun and by April 26, 1910, the wooden frame was completed. Further progress on the building's construction is not documented. Construction was finished by August 2, 1910, when the structure was identified as the new home for the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity.

A major tenet of the Craftsman philosophy involves individualizing a building's design to meet the specific needs and interests of its occupants.¹ The Alpha Tau Omega House's large formal living and dining rooms, and the open communal sleeping porches were designed to promote a sense of unity and camaraderie. The <u>Oregon Emerald</u> took special note of the size and grandeur of the Alpha Tau Omega House when it first opened during the fall of 1910. "It has fourteen bedrooms and is steam heated. Among other things it contains a large reception hall and a billiard room on the first floor, and a cozy lounging room with a fireplace on the second floor."²

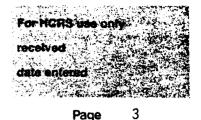
The Craftsman philosophy emphasized the importance of the owner's involvement in the design and construction phases.³ Lill, a blacksmith by trade, is an exemplar of the Craftsman ideal. The Alpha Tau Omega House stands as Lill's only known architectural achievement, and a unique adaptation of designs illustrated in <u>The Craftsman</u>. The architectural styling is expressive of the Arts and Crafts movement in America, extolled by Gustav Stickley in <u>The Craftsman</u> between 1901-1916. The use of ornamental concrete block in imitation of stone illustrated the typically American interest in innovative and economical techniques for replicating traditional building materials and styling. The Craftsman aesthetic was also the forerunner of the Bungalow, which became ubiquitous in the Western United States.

Lill's use of ornamental concrete is characteristic of the rapid rise in popularity of concrete as a building material. Concrete received considerable national attention as a building material during the decade immediately following the earthquake and subsequent conflagration of San Francisco in 1906. Concrete construction was acclaimed by the <u>Pacific Coast Architect</u> as being "fireproof, . . . sound-proof, vermin-proof, and moisture-proof. At the end of ten years, the man who builds a house of fire-proof construction is ahead in dollars and cents, besides having the comfort of a house cool in summer [and] warm in winter."⁴ The Alpha Tau Omega House reflects both national and local concerns for safe and sanitary housing.

The local manufacture of concrete blocks was in its infancy during the construction of the Alpha Tau Omega House. The Eugene Daily Guard noted that, "Mr. Lill has special machinery for the manufacture of concrete blocks, and is doing the work himself" (March

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11, 1910). This direct control over the manufacture of the blocks enabled Lill to successfully integrate both pattern and module into the overall design.

Concrete construction is usually executed in one of two methods: either cast-in-place or cast into molds forming blocks. The blocks are usually formed with hollow cores, reducing the amount of material necessary to produce each block while providing an air space as an insulator. Assembly of the blocks follows traditional masonry practices.

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The Alpha Tau Omega House combines innovative and traditional building practices. The blocks used in the Alpha Tau Omega House are unusual, as they are cast <u>solid</u> and have a depth approximately one-half that of hollow core blocks. It is doubtful that the reduction in depth was economically motivated, as a hollow core block has between 50-55 percent of its volume contained in the voids.⁵ However, Lill chose a traditional construction method, namely, a masonry veneer applied over a wood-frame system. Application of ornamental concrete blocks as a veneer permitted the structural framework to be completed speedily and independently.

It appears that Lill manufactured the blocks using a "face-down" machine, either patented by The Ideal Concrete Machine Company of Cincinnati, Ohio, or a similar device. Numerous block-making machines were patented between 1902 and 1910. Direct reference to a specific block machine was not found. The lintels and window sills which are simple in design may have been cast in molds made by Lill. The blocks measure 5-1/2" in height and 4" in depth with widths ranging from 6" to 24" in increments of 6".

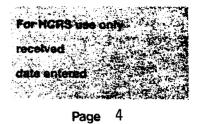
The process of casting designs into blocks was explained in a contemporary publication available locally. The author states that "no satisfactory surface for fine work can be obtained by the simple act of pouring concrete into an iron mold, and it becomes necessary to produce a face by auxiliary treatment."⁶ One of his suggestions involves a two-part process: first, a dry mortar mix is applied to the face of the pattern, either molded from an iron sheet or made by impression into iron-molder's sand; then, the core is filled with a wet concrete mix containing aggregates with a diameter of from 3/4" to 1". A finely grained surface, which accurately replicates the design, and a seam between the two mixtures is the result of such a process. Both of these characteristics are evident in the blocks manufactured by Lill.

On September 24, 1910, the <u>Oregon Emerald</u> noted the completion of the Alpha Tau Omega House and remarked that "at no previous time has there been such activity in building among fraternities." The rise of fraternities at the University of Oregon during the 1910s corresponds to an acceleration in the growth of Eugene. Construction of the Alpha Tau Omega House, the fourth Greek letter society established at the University was indicative of the future growth which both the University and the City of Eugene were to experience.

The Alpha Tau Omega House is characteristic of the initial development of fraternal organizations because if its location and its architectural style. Initially, these homes developed independently of each other; they were not clustered together about the fringes of campus, as they are today. Sigma Nu, the first fraternity to be established at the University, was located on the northeast corner of 11th Avenue and Pearl Street,

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just one block east of the Alpha Tau Omega House. "Fraternity rows" occurred during the second phase of rapid fraternity development in the 1920s.

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The Craftsman/Bungalow idiom prevails in the design of the early fraternity houses in contrast to the Tudor and Colonial Revival styles popular during the second phase. However, the Alpha Tau Omega House remained unique among its contemporaries by employing "artistic" concrete blocks as building material. Of all the fraternity houses built before 1915, the Alpha Tau Omega House is one of only three remaining, and the only one located downtown.

The location of the Alpha Tau Omega House downtown is not as unusual as it may seem today. Eleventh Avenue served as a major corridor for Eugene'e electric streetcar system. The Fairmount Loop began at 11th Avenue and Willamette Street, one block west of the Alpha Tau Omega House, and passed "through the heart of campus." The streetcar system operated during the 1910s and continued until 1927, when they were replaced by "small but sturdy buses."⁷

On October 12, 1922, the <u>Oregon Emerald</u> reported the Alpha Tau Omega fraternity's move from the Oak Street house and remarked that "in no previous year has such a wholesale migration of living organizations taken place." The fraternity relocated on the western edge of campus, and the former house was converted into apartments.

A change in the philosophy of University administrators corresponds to the growth of fraternal organizations and a greater visibility of the University student in the city. The <u>Eugene Daily Guard</u> noted that "aside from the purely academic influences of the fraternities and sororities, a distinctly livening effect is felt as the result of their existence. Intra-collegiate athletics, in this very athletic school, receives a powerful stimulus from the intense rivalry existing between the fraternities."

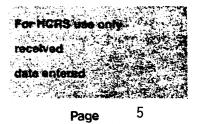
The playing of practical jokes among University students was also part of the general easing of restrictions imposed upon students by their educators. A story relayed by John MacGregor, an Alpha Tau Omega member and alumnus, reflects this spirit: The fraternity employed a Chinese cook, who lived in the house and was the object of the fraternity's playful antics. One day all the fraternity members gathered together their alarm clocks, synchronized them, and set the alrams to go off at 15-minute intervals throughout the night. They then hid the clocks about the cook's sleeping quarters; the alarms kept the cook up all night long!⁹

The Gamma Phi Chapter of Alpha Tau Omega was incorporated on February 25, 1910. It was formed out of a local organization known as the Alpha Club. The Alpha Club, formed in 1907, "showed great energy in striving for a charter, leasing its own house in 1908 and obtaining many excellent students. Consent of the five nearest chapters was secured and the charter unanimously approved by all Alpha Tau Omega chapters:" (The Alpha Tau Omega Story, Claude Reno, page 199.)

In 1909, the Alpha Club resided near High Street and 13th Avenue. The fraternity moved to 1143 Oak Street in 1910, staying until 1922. It is not known why the fraternity moved in 1922 to a house on 13th and Kincaid Street. However, John

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MacGregor, a fraternity member at the time of the move, suggested that it was out of the desire to be closer to campus. (Letter dated December 22, 1981.) The fraternity had its own house built in 1925, located at 1306 East 18th Avenue. This was the only house actually owned by the fraternity, all others being rented.

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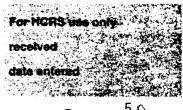
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The Alpha Tau Omega House is associated with national, regional, and local trends and developments characteristic of the early 1900s. These developments include the Arts and Crafts movement in America, the expansion and diversification of the Portland cement industry, and a recognition among University administrators of the Value of fraternities in teaching of social skills.

Listing of Property Owners

- Lill, George W. and Nettie M. From May 24, 1909 through November 30, 1914.
- Adair, B. F. and Ollie E. From November 30, 1914 through June 28, 1915.
- 3. Rowe, Burton C. and May From June 28, 1915 through May 13, 1916.
- 4. Bough, James S. and Margarita From May 13, 1916 through February 17, 1922.
 * The Alpha Tau Omega fraternity moved in 1922 to 874 East 13th Avenue.
- 5. Kuydendall, Winifred From February 17, 1922 through June 17, 1922.
- Dorris, Sue and Smith, Allie M. From June 17, 1922 through November 4, 1949.
- Nash, W. Gifford Jr. and George A. From November 4, 1949 through December 2, 1964.
- Hessel, Julius H. and Marian From December 2, 1964 to July 23, 1976.
- 9. Myers, Stephen From July 23, 1976 through July 20, 1978.
- 10. Dalros, Gerald From July 20, 1978 through November 1, 1982.
- 11. Hessel, Julius H. and Marian From November 1, 1982 to present.

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Continuation sheet	Item number	8	Page 5 A

Footnotes - Significance

¹Gustav Stickley" <u>Craftsman Homes</u>: Architecture and Furniture of the American Arts and Crafts Movement; 1909; pages 1-3.

²Oregon Emerald: "New Houses for Several Fraternities"; September 24, 1910; page 2.

³Gustav Stickley" op. cit.; pages 204-205.

⁴Joseph K. Moore: "Reduction of Fire Risk by the Users of Clay Products"; <u>The</u> Pacific Coast Architect; Vol. 3, No. 2 (May 1912); pages 359-360.

⁵Harmon Howard Rice: <u>Concrete-Block Manufacture</u>: Processes and Machines; 1906; page 33.

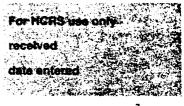
⁶Ibid.; page 45.

⁷Gilbert Hulin: "Eugene's Trolley Car Era"; <u>Lane County Historian</u>; Vol. 18, No.1 1973; page 15.

⁸Eugene Daily Guard: Vol. 40, No. 85: Special Issue; January 1, 1913; pages 60-61.

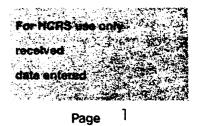
 9 John M. MacGregor: from a telephone interview on November 4, 1982.

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Item number	9	Page	1
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Publications, n.	Inc., New Y	ork; 1979,	
<u>e</u> ; Eastman, New 92. 0.	York; Vol.	5, No.4;	
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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

10

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

Commencing at the Northwest corner of Lot 3 in Block 2 of Christian's Addition to Lane County, Oregon, Eugene City, as platted and recorded at Page 601, of Volume P, Lane County Oregon Deed Records, and running thence South 44 feet, and 4 inches thence East 160 feet, thence North 44 feet and 4 inches, and thence West 160 feet to the place of beginning, in Eugene, Lane County, Oregon. And beginning at a point 75.5 feet South of the Northwest corner of Lot Two (2) Block nineteen (19), Mulligan's Donation to Lane County, Oregon as per plat recorded at Page 226 of Volume A, Lane County Deed Records, running thence South 44.5 feet more or less to the Southwest corner of Lot Three (3) of said Block nineteen (19), thence East 80 feet, thence North 44.5 feet, more or less, to a point 75.5 feet South of the North line of said Lot Two (2) in Block nineteen (19), thence West to the place of beginning, being a part of Lots Two (2) and Three (3), Block nineteen (19) of Mulligan's Donation to Lane County, Oregon. GENERAL DESCRIPTION:

Located on the East side of Oak Street between 11th and 12th Avenues. The property is bounded on the East by a service alley, on the South by a City-owned parking lot, and on the North by commercial lots fronting on 11th Avenue.