

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

## 1. Name of Property

Historic name Harris, Dr. Percy and Lileah, House

Other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Multiple Property Listing Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights-related Resources in Iowa

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

## 2. Location

street & number 3626 Bever Avenue, SE

not for publication

city or town Cedar Rapids

vicinity

state Iowa

county Linn

zip code 52403

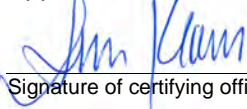
## 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

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 at the following level(s) of significance: \_\_\_ national \_\_\_ statewide x local

Applicable National Register Criteria: x A \_\_\_ B \_\_\_ C \_\_\_ D



Signature of certifying official/Title: State Historic Preservation Officer

December 23, 2020

Date

State Historical Society of Iowa

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property \_\_\_ meets \_\_\_ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official

Date

Title

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

## 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

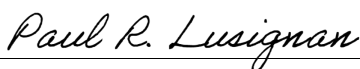
X entered in the National Register

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the National Register

\_\_\_ removed from the National Register

\_\_\_ other (explain:)



2/4/2021

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Harris, Dr. Percy and Lileah, House

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**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

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

**Category of Property**

(Check only **one** box.)

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

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Noncontributing</u>	
1		buildings
1		site
		structure
		object
<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>Total</b>

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC/Single Dwelling

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

OTHER: New Traditional Colonial

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation: Concrete

walls: Hardboard siding

Brick (veneer)

roof: Asphalt shingle

other: \_\_\_\_\_

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### Narrative Description

**Summary Paragraph** (Briefly describe the current, general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

The Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris House (1963, 1965) is located at 3626 Bever Avenue SE in Cedar Rapids, Linn County, Iowa. The New Traditional Colonial house is within a mid-century residential area southeast of downtown. The two-story wood frame house features a wing-shaped plan, oriented to the southwest, atop a concrete foundation; hardboard siding (historic) covers the exterior walls, and the roof is asphalt. The nominated half-acre property features a wooded northern portion with stone outcroppings; the site slopes downward to the north, east, and south. A concrete driveway lines the west edge of the property. To the east, south, and southeast of the house is a garden planted by Mrs. Harris. The house and its site, both considered contributing resources, retain a high level of integrity from its period of significance, 1961-1965. The site is considered a contributing resource because the parcel on which the house was built was at the center of the debate over whether a Black family should be allowed to move into a white neighborhood.

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**Narrative Description** (Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable.)

(Iowa SHPO Additional Instructions: After the main **Narrative Description**, discuss any physical alterations since the period of significance under the subheading **Alterations**, and the seven aspects of integrity as it applies to the resource in a **Statement of Integrity** with each aspect discussed in its own paragraph.)

### Setting and Site

The Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris House (Harris House) resides within the Indian Creek Hills neighborhood three miles east of downtown Cedar Rapids (*Figure 1*). Located about one-half mile north-northeast of the Harris House, Indian Creek flows southeast toward the Cedar River. The creek is situated between two heavily wooded hills that have been subdivided into moderately sized parcels; these parcels feature midsized single-family houses dating from the 1940s to 1960s.

The nominated half-acre property is located on hilly terrain that slopes to the north, east, and south (*Figures 2 & 3*). The northern portion of the parcel is wooded with stone outcroppings (*Photo 5*). The house itself sits atop the hill and is oriented to the southwest and parallels Bever Avenue. A concrete driveway at the west edge of the property leads up to the attached garage from the street, a stone retaining wall lines the west edge of the driveway. A brick walkway, laid in herringbone pattern, leads from the driveway to the front porch of the house. To the east, south, and southeast of the house, the property is planted with a garden; ornamental evergreens along the east property line provide a privacy barrier for the house to the east. The house to the west of the Harris House is sited atop a hill while the house to the east is at a lower elevation.

The half-acre parcel is considered a contributing site to the nomination because of its direct connection to the events described in Section 8. The size of the parcel remains the same as it did when sold to Dr. and Mrs. Harris in 1962.

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## House

The Harris House is a New Traditional Colonial with an initial construction date of 1963.<sup>1</sup> The house has an irregular footprint that forms a wing-shaped plan, a character-defining feature of the building. The main portion is rectangular and two stories tall with an attached one-story garage to the west.<sup>2</sup> To the southeast is a one-story music room wing set at an oblique angle. In 1965, the first floor of the main block was expanded to the north to provide more space in the family room and an additional bedroom. The house has hardboard siding and a concrete foundation. The asphalt shingle roof has boxed eaves, and a plain fascia lines the top of the exterior walls at the eave. A brick chimney rises from the center of the side-gable roof. Wood windows are original to the 1963 and 1965 construction dates. The garage has a gable-on-hip roof; the music room has a side-gable roof, and the back addition has a deck-on-hip. A contemporary wood deck (unknown date) extends to the north-northeast of the main block.

The *main façade* faces south-southeast (*Photos 1 & 2*). At the west end of the façade is the one-story garage; a pair of double-hung six-over-six windows pierces the center of the wall. The main portion of the first story is inset from the garage wall; the roof of the garage extends east to cover this wall, creating a long porch. A wooden door in the east wall of the garage opens onto the porch; the door has three horizontal lites in the top half and three panels in the bottom half. Three square tapered wooden columns with simple capitals support the roof over the concrete slab porch. The wall of the house under the porch is red brick veneer set in a running bond; the porch ceiling is painted plywood. A pair of six-lite casement windows pierces the west end of this wall, lighting the kitchen. A picture window with eight-lite casement sidelights is centered in the wall to light the dining room. The front door has sidelights and is located at the east end of the wall. The wooden paneled door features two small windows at the top, and a wooden screen door covers the main door. The sidelights contain four square windows above a wooden panel. A carriage lamp hangs on the brick wall to the east and west of the door. To the east of the door, the brick wall angles to the southeast; an octagonal divided-lite window pierces this portion of the wall, lighting a small hallway. Extending to the southeast is the main wall of the one-story music room; this wall is hardboard siding. Two pairs of ten-lite casement windows pierce the hardboard siding wall. Centered above the porch at the second story is a side-gabled mass with three pairs of eight-over-eight double hung windows. All windows on this façade have fixed faux shutters except the music-room windows.

The *southeast elevation* (*Photo 1*) of the music room features a bowed window with four ten-light sashes; the ends are casements. Two simple decorative brackets support the bow window. The gable end features a triangular vent at the peak of the gable.

The garage dominates the *west elevation* (*Photos 2 & 3*). The garage wall features a double-vehicular paneled door and a single pedestrian door to its north; the pedestrian door matches the porch door on the south side of the house. The west elevation of the main house is set back from the garage. The one-story family room addition

<sup>1</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, rev. ed. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013), 716-727.

<sup>2</sup> The house has a full basement located under the main block of the house; it was not accessed during a February 2020 site visit.

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contains a set of four eight-light casement windows at the north end of this wall; a pair of casement windows pierce the wall of the main block of the house next to the garage wall. A single eight-over-eight double-hung window pierces the north end of the second story above the garage, and a half-round attic vent is within the gable end.

The *north elevation* of the garage has a pair of six-over-six double-hung windows centered in the wall (*Photo 3*). The north elevation of the one-story 1965 addition extends north of the main house and the garage (*Photo 4*). A series of five eight-lite casement windows is at the west end of the wall. To the west is a series of six ten-lite casement windows. To the east of this is a pedestrian door leading on the back deck; this door matches those in the garage. The wall to the immediate east of this door extends north and features a single six-over-six double-hung window. To the east of this window, a single six-over-six double-hung window pierces the first story wall of the main block of the house. The second floor has four single double-hung windows; the east window, which lights a bathroom, is a narrow six-over-six double-hung unit; the others are eight-over-eight double-hungs.

The *northeast elevation* of the music room has a pair of ten-light casement windows and a single ten-light casement window at the west wall junction with the main house block (*Photo 4*).

The *east elevation* of the house features two ten-light casement windows on the first story and eight-over-eight double-hung windows in the second story (*Photo 4*). The east wall of the 1965 north addition is set back from the main block; this wall has a single six-over-six double-hung window at its south end.

### Interior

The interior of the Harris House retains its mid-century design. The first floor contains communal spaces along with two bedrooms; the second floor contains private spaces. Ceiling heights are consistent throughout at approximately eight feet. Materials throughout the house include gypsum board walls and ceilings, carpeted floors (unless otherwise noted), and natural wood built-ins, trim, doors, and decorative features. Wallpaper throughout the house differs per room, and the designs date to the construction of the house. Ceiling and wall light fixtures also date to the 1960s construction, and radiant floorboard heaters line exterior walls.

### *First Floor* (Figure 4)

The front door leads into the entry vestibule. This six-panel wood door has a natural finish, and glass panes comprise the top two panels. Sidelights flank the door and feature four panes above a paneled wood base. The wood casing around the door system has a simple profile; this is typical of the trim throughout the house. The semi-open main stair is immediately north of the door, and it runs north-to-south. The stair is a character-defining feature of the house. The balusters are comprised of full-height beveled wood panels spaced every other step on the west side of the stair (*Photo 6*). A wooden handrail lines both sides of the stair; the treads and risers are carpeted. A hallway parallel to the west of the stair leads north into the family room through a doorway. A

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double-width natural wood cased opening in the west wall of the entry leads into the formal dining room. To the east of the front door, the hallway extends southeast to access the music room. The northeast wall of this hallway features a wood slab door (typical) into the master bedroom and a pair of sliding louvered wood closet doors. The entry/hallway floor is green slate laid in an irregular pattern; the walls are wallpapered.

The master bedroom is an irregularly shaped space with painted trim, wallpapered walls, and carpeted floors (*Photo 10*). Two closets within the west wall each feature a pair of louvered bifold wood doors; a built-in set of drawers separates the closets. A door in at the north end of the west wall leads into a back hallway; a door at the east end of the north wall leads into the master bathroom; the southwest wall contains the door into the main hallway. This space has green tile wainscoting, green and white mosaic tile floor, and built-in cabinets along the east wall.

The music room occupies the southeast wing of the house (*Photo 7*). A pair of louvered bifold wood doors provides access. A full height bookshelf lines the north/northwest wall. Floors are carpeted, and the wood trim is painted white.

The formal dining room is adjacent to the west of the entry hallway. The south wall features a large picture window. A cased opening at the north end of the west wall leads into the kitchen. A large bump-out centered in the north wall corresponds to the fireplace in the family room. The dining room has carpeted floors, painted trim, and wallpapered walls.

The kitchen occupies the southwest corner of the main floor. This space has wooden cabinets, laminate countertops, and modern appliances. A ceramic tile backsplash runs along the main counter; the remainder of the walls in the kitchen are wallpapered. The floor is wood. Most of the north wall of the kitchen is open to the family room. The west opening corresponds to a pass-through counter while the east opening is a cased pedestrian doorway.

The family room occupies the northwest quarter of the main floor (*Photo 8*). The north half of this room dates to 1965. Nestled between the two doors in the south wall, a brick-lined fireplace is the focal point of the room (*Photo 9*). The firebox is raised above a brick hearth plinth that features cubbies for firewood. Wooden built-ins extend north from the east and west ends of the brick wall. The east wall of the room features a built-in shelf/counter unit at the north half, and to the south of this built-in unit is a partial height wall with wooden spindles above (*Photo 9*). An opening at the south end of this wall leads into the back hallway. A door at the south end of the west wall leads into the double-car garage. The family room features wood wainscoting and floors. The built-ins and fireplace are interior character-defining features.

The back hallway runs north-to-south. An opening in its west wall leads into the family room. A door in the south wall opens to the basement steps. A door at the south end of the east wall leads into the master bedroom,

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and another door in the center of the wall leads into a bedroom added in 1965. The north wall features an exterior door that accesses the wood deck on the north side of the house.

### *Second Floor* (Figure 5)

The upstairs is rectangular in plan. An offset double-loaded corridor organizes the rooms. The main stair opens to a landing roughly centered within the floor plan. Built-ins line the north wall of the landing (*Photo 11*). Four bedrooms occupy the west half of the floor. A door in the south wall of the landing, immediately to the west of the stair, accesses one of these bedrooms. The southwest bedroom is located through a door at the west end of the corridor's south wall; a door at the west end of the corridor leads into the northwest bedroom, and a door at the east end of the corridor's north wall leads into a fourth bedroom. The corridor accessing the east half of the floor jogs around the stair. A door in the south wall leads into the southeast bedroom (*Photo 12*); a small door to a laundry chute is to the west of the bedroom door. A door in the north wall of the corridor leads into a small shower room with finishing matching the master bathroom. At the east end of the corridor is a larger bathroom with blue ceramic tile walls and blue and white mosaic floor. The corridor and bedrooms have carpeted floors; some rooms have wallpaper while other are painted. Each bedroom contains sliding door closets.

### **Major Alterations**

No major additions to the house have occurred since 1965 when the first story expanded to the north as described above. The kitchen has been updated but not expanded.

### **Statement of Integrity**

The Harris House retains excellent historic integrity defined by its location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

The property remains in its historic *location* within the Indian Creek Hills neighborhood, an area of Cedar Rapids historically closed to Black residents.

The *setting* remains residential in character. Surrounding houses date to the mid-century when the Harris House was constructed. Lots retain their historic sizes without having been subdivided. Further, the surrounding neighborhood retains its wooded character with stone outcroppings and walls. Therefore, the area outside of the nominated boundaries retains a high level of historic integrity. The setting within the nominated boundaries remains relatively unchanged. No substantial buildings or structures have been erected, and the grounds continue to feature the gardens planted by Mrs. Harris, as well as its wooded character.

The *design* of the property has not been altered from its mid-1960s appearance. The only structural changes to the house came two years after the family moved into it. The rear (north) portion of the first story was expanded to accommodate a growing family. Floor plan layout remains intact on both stories, and the landscape and house

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continue to relate to each other as they did historically with no additional constructions on the parcel other than the deck.

Similar to design, the Harris House retains the majority of its historic *materials*. Hardboard siding and brick veneer remain, as do historic windows, doors, and ornamental features. Inside, the house retains its historic finishes from wood built-ins to slate flooring.

Tied to the design and materials, the historic *workmanship* is especially evident in the wood built-ins, stair balustrade, and fireplace.

The retention of the above allows the building and site to retain its historic *feeling* of its association with the Harris family, especially in the 1960s when the house was constructed.

Similarly, the retention of the other aspects of integrity allow the property's historic *associations* to be present. The house dates to the early 1960s when discriminatory practices in housing began to lose their commonplace status through the challenge of the status quo.



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### 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.

#### Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

#### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ETHNIC HERITAGE: BLACK

SOCIAL HISTORY: CIVIL RIGHTS

#### Period of Significance

1961-1965

#### Significant Dates

1961

1963

1965

#### Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

#### Cultural Affiliation (if applicable)

N/A

#### Architect/Builder

Miller, Berle (architect)

Tickal Construction Co.

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### Statement of Significance

**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations).

The Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris House is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the “Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights-related Resources in Iowa” Multiple Property document. Controversy over the sale of the parcel on Bever Avenue to a Black family highlighted the implicit housing discrimination common in Cedar Rapids prior to the 1967 passage of the state’s housing discrimination legislation. No deed restrictions existed in the post-World War II Indian Creek Hills neighborhood, but the unwritten spatial partitioning customs in this Iowa town restricted the neighborhood to only white families.<sup>3</sup> When Dr. and Mrs. Harris sought a new home in 1961, none could be found in the city that met the needs of their growing family. A friend and colleague of the Harrises suggested they purchase the parcel on Bever Avenue and construct a house. The sale was met with opposition; however, the Harrises prevailed in purchasing the property and moved into the nominated house after construction was completed in 1963. The house and its parcel are locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of *Black Ethnic Heritage* and *Social History (Civil Rights)* as a Place of Response subtype of the Places Associated with Civil Rights Events property type.<sup>4</sup> The period of significance begins in 1961, the year the sale of the property was suggested, debated, and finalized, and extends to 1965, incorporating the year the family moved into the new house in 1963, and 1965, the date of the last major addition to the house that finalized the family’s permanent place in the neighborhood. The events and period of significance correspond to those of the historic context “The Modern Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1964,” described in the cover document.<sup>5</sup>

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### Narrative Statement of Significance

 (Provide at least one paragraph for each area of significance.)

In Cedar Rapids, organized Black civil rights activism ebbed and flowed in the first half of the twentieth century. The first efforts to organize a local branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) came in 1919 with the executive authorization of a branch. By 1926, the branch was dormant, and efforts to revive the chapter were unsuccessful until the early 1940s. In 1942, local activist Viola Gibson successfully helped to reorganize the Cedar Rapids branch after her nephew, Robert Johnson, a student at Coe College, was denied entrance to Ellis Pool because he was Black. The city allowed Blacks to use the facility only at certain times. Johnson petitioned the city council to remove the segregated time slots, but the council deflected the petition. After a similar incident in 1945, the local NAACP branch, through Waterloo attorney, Milton F. Fields, filed a petition with the district court that the Cedar Rapids recreation commission should allow all

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<sup>3</sup> Robert R. Weyeneth, “The Architecture of Racial Segregation: The Challenges of Preserving the Problematical Past,” *The Public Historian*, ed. Randolph Bergstrom 27, no. 4 (Fall 2005): 13.

<sup>4</sup> Amanda K. Loughlin, “Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights-related Resources in Iowa,” National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property Documentation Form (MPDF) (July 2020): F-70.

<sup>5</sup> Loughlin, MPDF, E39-E47.

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citizens, regardless of race, to use the public facility, stating that refusing this petition violated the Iowa constitution. The pool was officially desegregated following the petition.<sup>6</sup>

In the early 1960s, Black activists directly confronted housing discrimination in Cedar Rapids. As with many towns across Iowa and the nation, Blacks continued to be confined to specific areas within a municipality either through the practice of redlining, residential covenants, or as regional secretary of the NAACP Leonard Carter noted through “Gentleman Agreements.”<sup>7</sup> As explained in “Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights-related Resources in Iowa,” during the modern civil rights era (1954-1964), Blacks were more willing to push the barriers associated with the discrimination enacted upon them.<sup>8</sup>

The total population of Cedar Rapids in 1960 equaled 105,118 residents, of whom 1,152 (1.1 percent) were African American, who were mostly confined to the southeastern portion of Cedar Rapids due to age old discriminatory real estate and rental practices. These practices were built upon the paternalistic belief that Blacks would be most comfortable living around others of their race and the fear that Blacks moving into a white neighborhood would decrease property values.<sup>9</sup>

The housing committee of the local NAACP chapter and the local interfaith, interracial Council of Churches formed the Council on Human Relations to investigate fair housing in Cedar Rapids in 1961. In an April 1961 report to the NAACP chapter, the Council on Human Relations shared their intention to study twelve cases in town where Blacks were unable to procure housing in predominantly white neighborhoods. Some families had been searching for housing for over a year. Housing Committee secretary Ruth Nash wrote:

Some of the families have been in the market for better housing for a year or two. Two of the families who now live in the area which is to be razed in order to building a post-office, are being shown only houses in the segregated section in spite of the fact that they now live in otherwise white neighborhoods. Negroes who have lived in Cedar Rapids for many years agree that segregation is more rigid that it was even five years ago, and that efforts by individual Negroes to buy in a white neighborhood are prevented by actions of either the Real Estate Board or the local lending agencies. If arrangements are made to buy either land or house from the owner, representatives of the Real Estate Board “canvass” the neighborhood, and the buyer is subject to pressure of various kinds from the neighbors and others. Pressure is also put on the seller. Some

<sup>6</sup> Jeremy J. Brigham and Robert Wright, Sr., “Chapter Thirteen: Civil Rights Organizations in Iowa,” in *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa, 1838-2000*, edited by Bill Silag, Susan Koch-Bridgford, and Hal Chase (Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001), 317; Loughlin, MPDF, E-33.

<sup>7</sup> Loughlin, MPDF, E-40; Address by Mr. Leonard H. Carter, Regional Secretary of the NAACP to the Cedar Rapids, Iowa Human Relations Council (27 March 1962): 4. African American Museum of Iowa Archives, Jeremy Brigham Collection, A2006.014, Box 1, L 6 B, Folder 1.

<sup>8</sup> Loughlin, MPDF, E-40.

<sup>9</sup> Brigham and Wright, *Outside In*, “Chapter Thirteen,” 317; Lennox W. Randon, Lileah F. Harris, et al., eds., “A Healing Presence in Our Community,” (Cedar Rapids: UnityPoint Health and Mercy Medical Center, 2015), 20; Loughlin, MPDF, E-39.

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Negroes have been told by lending agencies that mortgages cannot be arranged for a Negro buyer unless there are five other Negro families on the block.<sup>10</sup>

The Dr. Percy and Lileah Percy family was one of the twelve families the Council intended to study. The Council on Human Relations helped advocate for the Harris family in their struggle for a suitable home.<sup>11</sup> The 1961 sale of land in a white neighborhood to an African American family successfully challenged the discriminatory practices in Cedar Rapids; the sale of the parcel and the construction of the house were in direct response to advocacy efforts that foreshadowed the passage of the 1967 amendment to the state's civil rights act that specifically banned housing discrimination.

### Significance & Registration Requirements

The Harris House is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of *Social History (Civil Rights)* because of its direct association with an event in Cedar Rapids that challenged housing practices that discriminated against African Americans. The Harris House represents a major milestone in African American civil rights in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, specifically as relates to housing discrimination and community integration during the Modern Civil Rights Movement era in Iowa.

This property also is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of *Black Ethnic Heritage* for its direct association with the cultural identity of the Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris family. The struggle for African American civil rights by African Americans is directly related the ethnic heritage of the Black community.<sup>12</sup>

The Harris House meets the general registration requirements of properties nominated under the Multiple Property document. The house and its parcel are directly associated with the twentieth century struggle for African American equality in Cedar Rapids, and both resources retain a high level of historic integrity. The nominated property further meets the registration requirements of a Place of Response subtype of the Place Associated with Civil Rights Events property type, as it is associated with the challenge and eventual defeat of discriminatory housing practices through non-confrontational means. This property was the first sold and lived on by a non-white family within a neighborhood that did not wholly support integration.<sup>13</sup>

### Percy and Lileah Harris (Figure 6)

Percy Gene Harris (1927-2017) was born in Durant, Mississippi, the third child of Norman and Glendora Harris. Norman died in a car accident in 1930 three months before Percy's third birthday. The family relocated to Memphis in 1935 after Glendora remarried. Sadly, both Glendora and Percy's sister, Hilda, died of tuberculosis soon after moving to Tennessee. Between 1939 and 1941, Percy lived in a Memphis sanitarium due to the

<sup>10</sup> African American Museum of Iowa Archives, Jeremy Brigham Collection, A2006.014, Box 1, L 6 B, Folder 3 "Copy 1961 NAACP Report on Housing."

<sup>11</sup> Brigham and Wright, *Outside In*, "Chapter Thirteen," 317.

<sup>12</sup> Loughlin, MPDF, E-59.

<sup>13</sup> Loughlin, MPDF, E-70-72.

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possible presence of the disease in his lungs. During his confinement, he received no formal education, but he learned to read from other patients, eventually reading the newspapers to older residents. In 1941, his paternal aunt, Blanche Hoosman, insisted he come live with her and her husband, John, in Waterloo, Iowa, where she enrolled him at East High School. He graduated from East High School in 1947 and entered college at what is now the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) soon after. He was interested in becoming a psychiatrist.<sup>14</sup>

Evelyn Lileah Furgerson Harris (1931-2014) was one of five children born to Dr. Lee (L.B.) and Lily Furgerson in Waterloo, Iowa. Lileah, the name she preferred to be called, was a talented musician.<sup>15</sup> She honed her musical talents early, taking piano lessons from a teacher at UNI in part because Waterloo did not welcome Black children to play in recitals. Lileah quickly surpassed her teacher in ability and became a young pupil of another teacher in Cedar Falls who accepted college students for lessons outside of school; she wanted to be a concert pianist. After graduating East High School in Waterloo, Lileah attended UNI, becoming the first African American woman to live on campus in one of the dorms; although, her first year she was given a room to herself because the college was reluctant to have a Black and white student room together. The following year, she roomed with two other students, both white.<sup>16</sup>

Percy and Lileah had known each other since he had moved to Waterloo. The two dated for two years while attending UNI, and the couple were married in July 1950 before both completed their degrees. The couple moved to Washington, DC in 1950, in order for Percy to finish his undergraduate work at Howard University and then attend medical school. To help make ends meet, Percy worked as a dishwasher for a priest at Georgetown University then as an elevator operator while Lileah was a typist at the Pentagon. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in zoology in 1953 and his medical degree for general practice in 1957; he was class president all four years of med school.<sup>17</sup>

Upon their return to Iowa in 1957, the Harrises settled in Cedar Rapids. Four hospitals in Iowa offered medical internships, which Percy needed. He applied to St. Luke's Hospital in Cedar Rapids who accepted his application. He was one of twelve interns and the first Black intern at St. Luke's. Part of the appeal of this hospital was its practice of providing housing to the interns with families. By 1957, the Harrises had four children with a set of twins on the way; eventually, the family grew to include twelve children (*Figure 7*). Lileah and the children went to Waterloo to live with her mother while a house could be found for the whole family.<sup>18</sup> The hospital administration quickly converted a house they owned on A Avenue across from the hospital from a nurses dormitory back into a single-family home, and less than a year later, the Harris family resided together. Mrs. Harris recalled that the hospital superintendent even had a fence and swing set installed for the children. The

<sup>14</sup> Percy and Lileah Harris' Narrative, in *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*, edited by Charline Barnes (Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2001), 37-38; Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 7-9.

<sup>15</sup> Lileah's name, pronounced "Leh-LAY-ah," often inspired strangers to inquire if she were Hawaiian. *Life Narratives*, 39.

<sup>16</sup> Percy and Lileah Harris' Narrative, 37-38; Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 10.

<sup>17</sup> Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 10-12.

<sup>18</sup> Her father, Dr. L.B. Furgerson, had died of a stroke in 1948 shortly after Lileah graduated high school.

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location became convenient for Dr. Harris, especially. The hospital was able to call on him at all hours to help with emergencies, and several people he assisted at the time became patients when he opened his own practice in 1958. In 1958, Percy became deputy county coroner. The following year, he became the Linn County Coroner. In 1961, the county administration appointed Dr. Harris to be the first official county medical examiner, a position he held for over forty years. Dr. Harris also became company physician to the Cedar Rapids branches of General Mills and Iowa Illinois Gas and Electric Company. He retired from general practice in 1999.<sup>19</sup>

Both Percy and Lileah also were leaders within the community, serving as board members, advisors, and officers of numerous boards and committees. These organizations varied from Parent Teacher Association, United Way, Mayor's committees, medical organizations, and local African American organizations. Lileah became more active with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as her children grew more independent, remembering how active her father was in the Waterloo branch; both served on the board at the Jane Boyd Community House, a community center especially geared toward the African American community. In the late 1980s, Lileah completed her college degree at the University of Iowa, receiving a Bachelor of Arts degree in Russian at the age of 62.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Harris House on Bever Avenue<sup>21</sup>**

Dr. and Mrs. Harris experienced their first bout of housing discrimination in Cedar Rapids when they arrived in 1957. Although St. Luke's Hospital provided intern housing, they relied on local real estate agents to help find the homes. While the eleven white interns were placed immediately, the agents found it difficult to find a suitable house for the Harrises because they were Black. Thus, the hospital converted the A Avenue house for the family to use. By 1961 when Dr. Harris completed his internship with St. Luke's, the family of nine was ready to move into a larger house.

Real estate practices remained discriminatory in Cedar Rapids in 1961. The only houses the couple were shown were in low-income neighborhoods within the southeast section of the town, an area predominantly home to African Americans. Dr. Harris recalled the difficulty of finding a parcel on which to build, "I know that in at least two instances, neighborhood organizations formed, attorneys were hired to keep us from moving in."<sup>22</sup> Unable to find a suitable house or vacant parcel, friend and board member of St. Luke's Board of Directors, Robert Armstrong, suggested that Percy and Lileah make an offer on a piece of property on Bever Avenue (*Figure 8*). Armstrong had donated twenty-two acres in the Indian Hills Creek area to his church, St. Paul's Methodist Church, where, incidentally, the Harrises also were members, in an effort to raise funds for an

<sup>19</sup> Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 12-17.

<sup>20</sup> Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 55.

<sup>21</sup> The following section is from the following: Lileah Furgerson Harris, "I Am A Bridge Award Speech," 2011; Indian Creek Hills Committee; Petition to the Congregation of St. Paul's Methodist Church. December 1961; "Iowa Pastor Wins Fight to Sell Negro a Lot," *Jet Magazine* (28 December 1961): 48; Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 18-25; Brigham and Wright, "Chapter Thirteen," 317-318; Kent Williams, "The Whole World is Here Tonight," *Little Village Magazine*. Issue 217 (April 19-May 2, 2017): 8-10.

<sup>22</sup> Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 20.

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educational wing to the church building. Percy made the offer with the intention of building a new home on the site. Reverend Jackson Burns, the minister, was thrilled at the offer, seeing it as an opportunity for St. Paul's "to witness for our belief in the equality of man under God."<sup>23</sup>

Several property owners, who were also church members, disagreed. In December 1961, a neighborhood committee formally petitioned the Church against the sale, arguing that having African American neighbors would lower the property values of the surrounding parcels. In their petition, the committee stated, "We do not believe it is a christian [sic] act to help one family and do so much harm to dozens of others in the neighborhood."<sup>24</sup> They even exhorted the church to "put yourselves in our place" when considering the right way to vote.

When the congregation met on December 13, 1961, the debate was heated. Armstrong addressed the congregation, directly stating, "This is a hot issue...not because of Dr. Percy Harris, a Negro, who would like to buy a lot or because this is St. Paul's Church but is a hot issue because it's a world issue...whether there are second rate people in the world." He also cited studies that rebutted the neighbors' fears about property values while others expressed disdain that Armstrong and the church leadership put them in a position to have to take a stand on such an issue.<sup>25</sup> At the end of the meeting, the church approved the sale 460 to 291, and the following May, the Methodist Church conference upheld the decision. In protest, some members who opposed the sale left St. Paul's and formed their own congregation.

Building permits for the six-bedroom house were issued by the city in June 1962. Recalling the 1960s events, Dr. Harris said, "It never occurred to us to give up. It was a matter of survival. We were desperate to find a home."<sup>26</sup> The Harrises moved into the two-story house in 1963, and in 1965, the house was expanded to include a seventh bedroom.

Due to the family's kindness and "quiet dignity," neighbors who had signed the petition to bar the sale of the property to the Harris family came to accept them. Growing up, the children attended nearby Erskine Elementary School. A shortcut to the school was through the driveways of the two neighbors to the south, both of whom had opposed the sale. Instead of using the shortcut, the Harris children went the long way around until one of the neighbors told them to go ahead and use their driveway; they made sure to stay on his side. Some neighbors who were formerly fellow church members returned to worship with the Harrises and Armstrongs at St. Paul's.<sup>27</sup>

<sup>23</sup> As quoted in Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 20.

<sup>24</sup> As quoted in Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 20; Indian Creek Hills Committee; Petition to the Congregation of St. Paul's Methodist Church. December 1961.

<sup>25</sup> Minutes of Church Conference at St. Paul's Methodist Church, Cedar Rapids. 13 December 1961, 2.

<sup>26</sup> As quoted in Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 23.

<sup>27</sup> Conversation between author and Anne Harris Carter, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Harris, July 2019; Randon, Harris, et al., "A Healing Presence in Our Community," 23-24; Lileah Furgerson Harris, "I Am A Bridge Award Speech," 2011.

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The 1961 events occurred before corrective legislation that outlawed discrimination in housing. In 1967, the General Assembly amended the Iowa Civil Rights Act to include a section prohibiting discrimination in the sale and rental of housing. This house is both a statement toward the perseverance of a family needing a place to live and a community struggling with—and overcoming—the fear of living in an integrated neighborhood.

### **Archaeological Assessment**

No archaeological remains within or beyond the footprint of the property were assessed as part of this nomination.

### **Acknowledgements**

This nomination was produced with assistance from the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Park Service, Department of the Interior as part of a 2019-2020 project to document sites in Iowa related to Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights. Anne Harris Carter, daughter of Dr. and Mrs. Harris, graciously consented to allow her family home to be part of the project. Ms. Carter shared valuable insight and resources related to the house.



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**9. Major Bibliographical References**

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

Barnes, Charline, ed. *Life Narratives of African Americans in Iowa*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia, 2001.

Harris, Lileah Furgerson. "I Am A Bridge Award Speech." 2011. Text provided by Anne Harris Carter.

Indian Creek Hills Committee. Petition to the Congregation of St. Paul's Methodist Church. December 1961.

"Iowa Pastor Wins Fight to Sell Negro a Lot." *Jet Magazine* (28 December 1961): 48.

Loughlin, Amanda. Iowa Site Information Form: Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris House. July 2019. #57-11388

Minutes of Church Conference at St. Paul's Methodist Church, Cedar Rapids. 13 December 1961.

Randon, Lennox W., Lileah F. Harris, et al., eds. "A Healing Presence in Our Community." Cedar Rapids: UnityPoint Health and Mercy Medical Center, 2015.

Silag, Bill, Susan Koch-Bridgford, and Hal Chase. *Outside In: African-American History in Iowa, 1838-2000*. Des Moines: State Historical Society of Iowa, 2001.

Williams, Kent. "The Whole World is Here Tonight." *Little Village Magazine*. Issue 217 (April 19-May 2, 2017): 8-10. Copy provided by Anne Harris Carter.

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) 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 # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local Government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: State Historical Society of Iowa

**Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):** N/A

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**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** Less than 1

(Do not include previously listed resource acreage; enter "Less than one" if the acreage is .99 or less)

**Latitude/Longitude Coordinates**

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

1	<u>41.984514</u>	<u>-91.616106</u>	3	_____	_____
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude
2	_____	_____	4	_____	_____
	Latitude	Longitude		Latitude	Longitude

**Verbal Boundary Description** (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The nominated property includes all of the property associated with 3626 Bever Avenue, SE described as: Pleasant Hill 1<sup>st</sup> Addition, Lots: East 5 feet of lot 1 & all Lot 2 and Grant Wood Forest 1<sup>st</sup> Addition; Lots: East 5 feet of Lot A & all Lot B.

**Boundary Justification** (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nominated property is the historic parcel under dispute in 1961 when the Harrises purchased the property and on which they ultimately built their family home.

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Amanda K. Loughlin/National Register Coordinator date July 2020  
organization Rosin Preservation, LLC telephone 816.472.4950  
street & number 1712 Holmes email [amanda@rosinpreservation.com](mailto:amanda@rosinpreservation.com)  
city or town Kansas City state MO zip code 64108

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **GIS Location Map (Google Earth or BING)**
- **Local Location Map**
- **Site Plan**
- **Floor Plans (As Applicable)**
- **Photo Location Map** (Key all photographs to this map and insert immediately after the photo log and before the list of figures).

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs under separate cover. The size of each image must be 3000x2000 pixels, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and does not need to be labeled on every photograph.

**Photo Log**

**Name of Property:** Harris, Dr. Percy and Lileah, House  
**City or Vicinity:** Cedar Rapids  
**County:** Linn **State:** Iowa  
**Photographer:** Brad Finch, f-stop Photography  
**Date Photographed:** February 2019

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- Photo 01 of 12: South elevations, looking NNW
- Photo 02 of 12: South elevation, looking NE
- Photo 03 of 12: North and west elevations, looking S
- Photo 04 of 12: North and east elevations, looking SE
- Photo 05 of 12: Landscape to north of house, looking WNW
- Photo 06 of 12: Entry Hall, looking E from dining room
- Photo 07 of 12: Music Room, looking SE from door
- Photo 08 of 12: Family Room, looking N from kitchen
- Photo 09 of 12: Family Room, looking SE
- Photo 10 of 12: Master Bedroom on first floor, looking NE
- Photo 11 of 12: Second floor stair landing, looking NE
- Photo 12 of 12: Second floor, southeast bedroom, looking NW

See Figures 3, 4, & 5 for key plans.

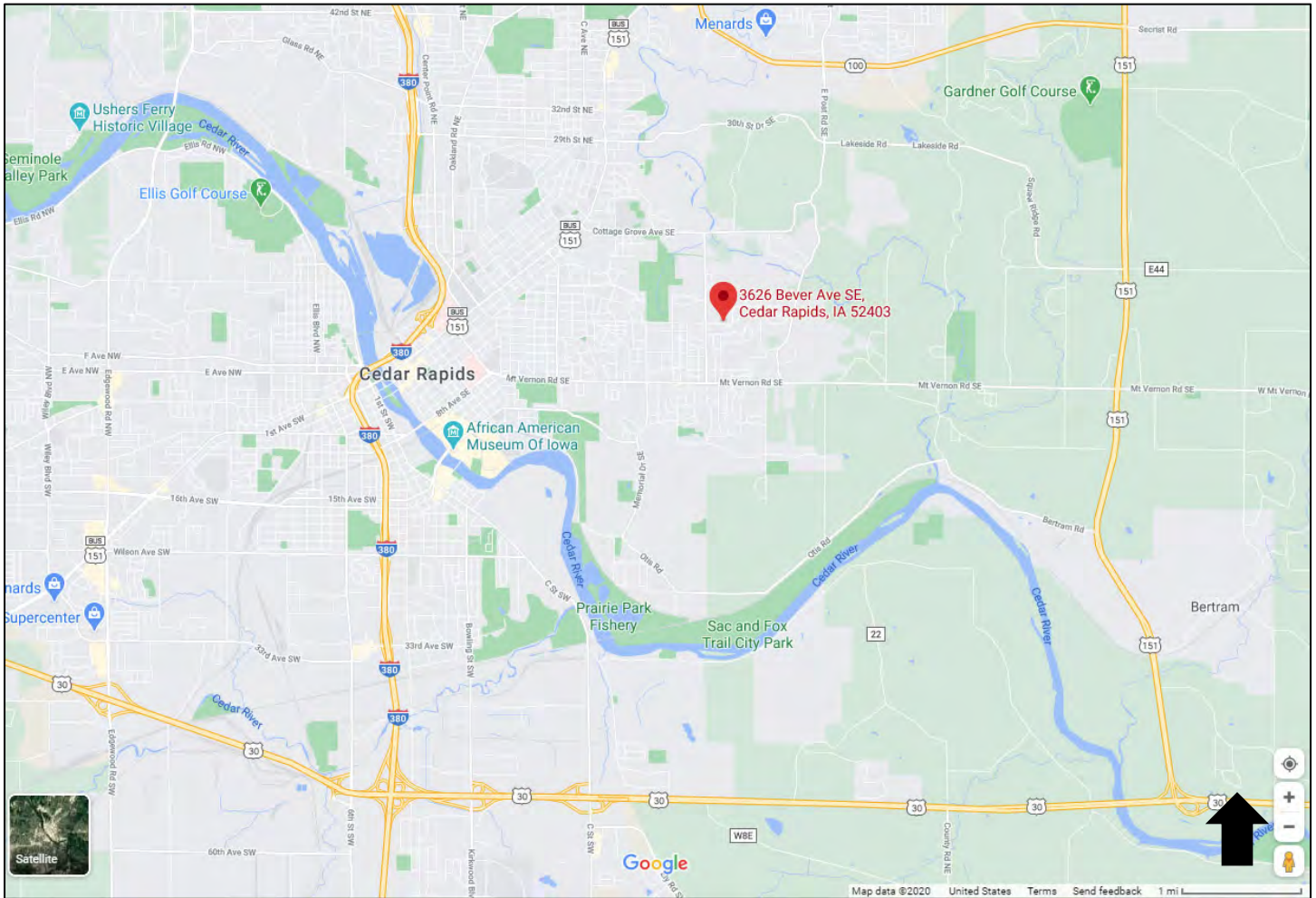
**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to 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 100 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

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**Figure 1.** Contextual map, showing the location of the house within Cedar Rapids. Source: Google Maps.



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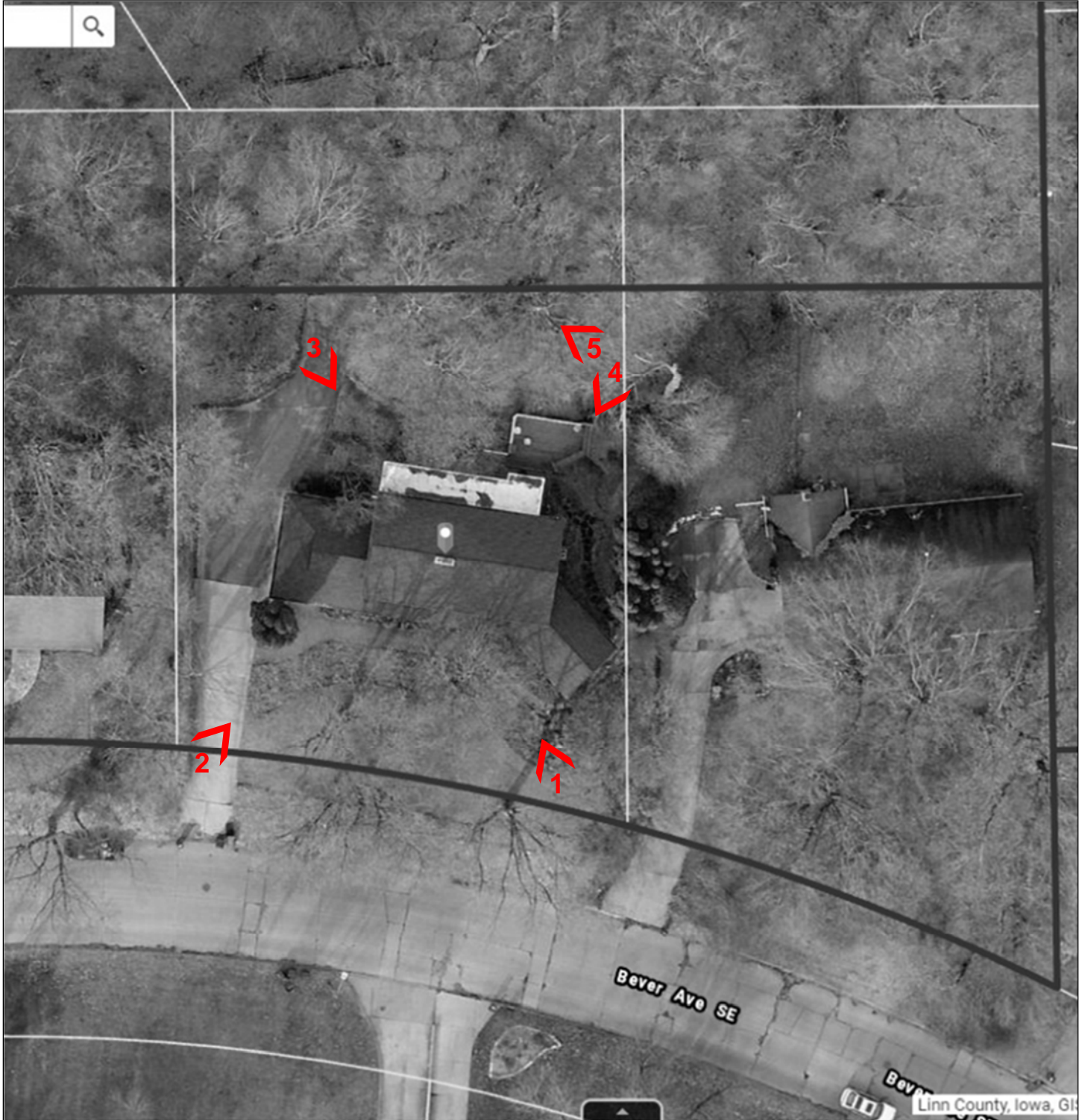
**Figure 2.** Site plan of the Harris House. Dashed line represents the legal and nominated boundary. Source: Base map from Linn County, Iowa, GIS (<https://lcgis.linncounty.org/apps/real-estate/land-records/>).



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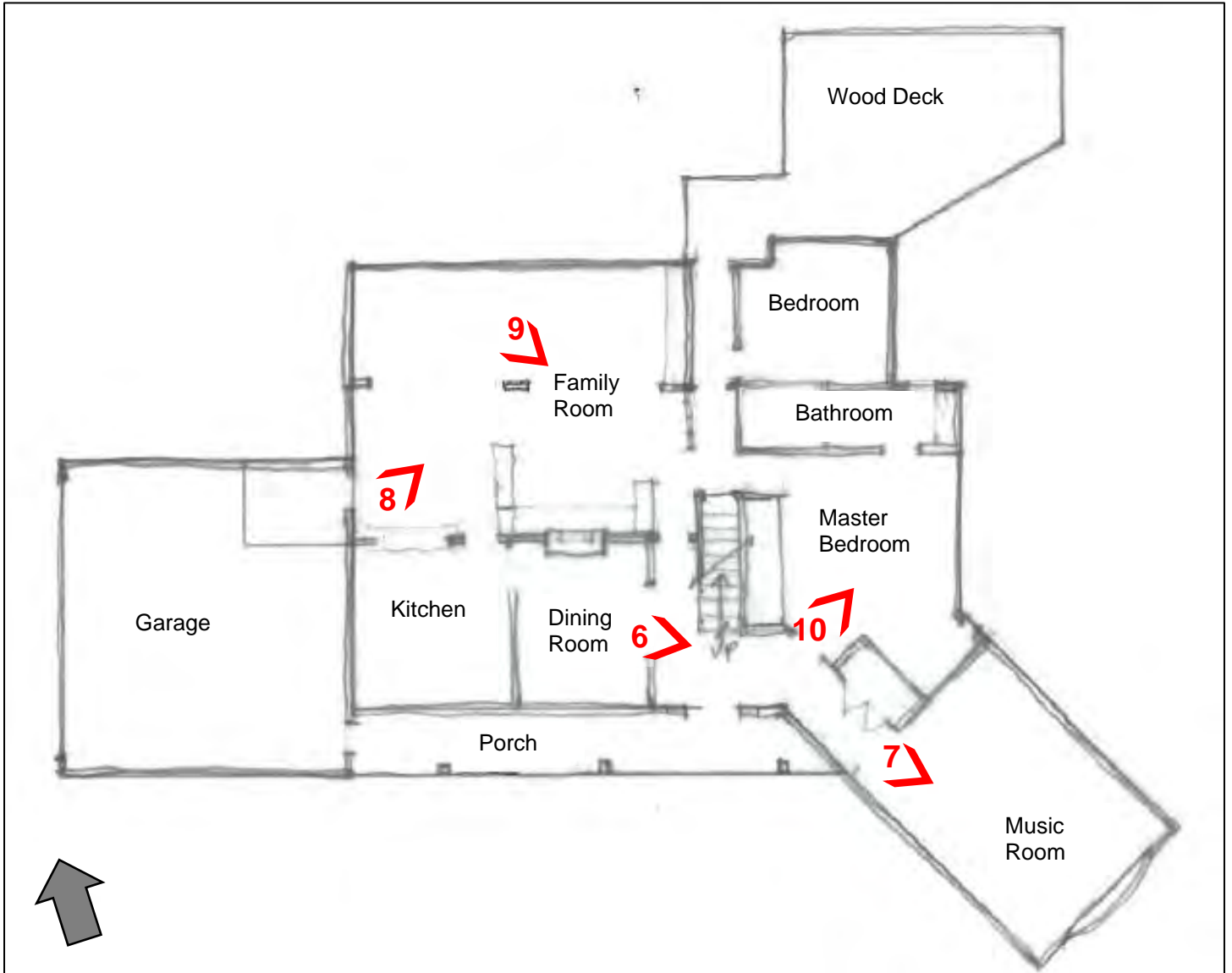
**Figure 3.** Exterior photo key plan.



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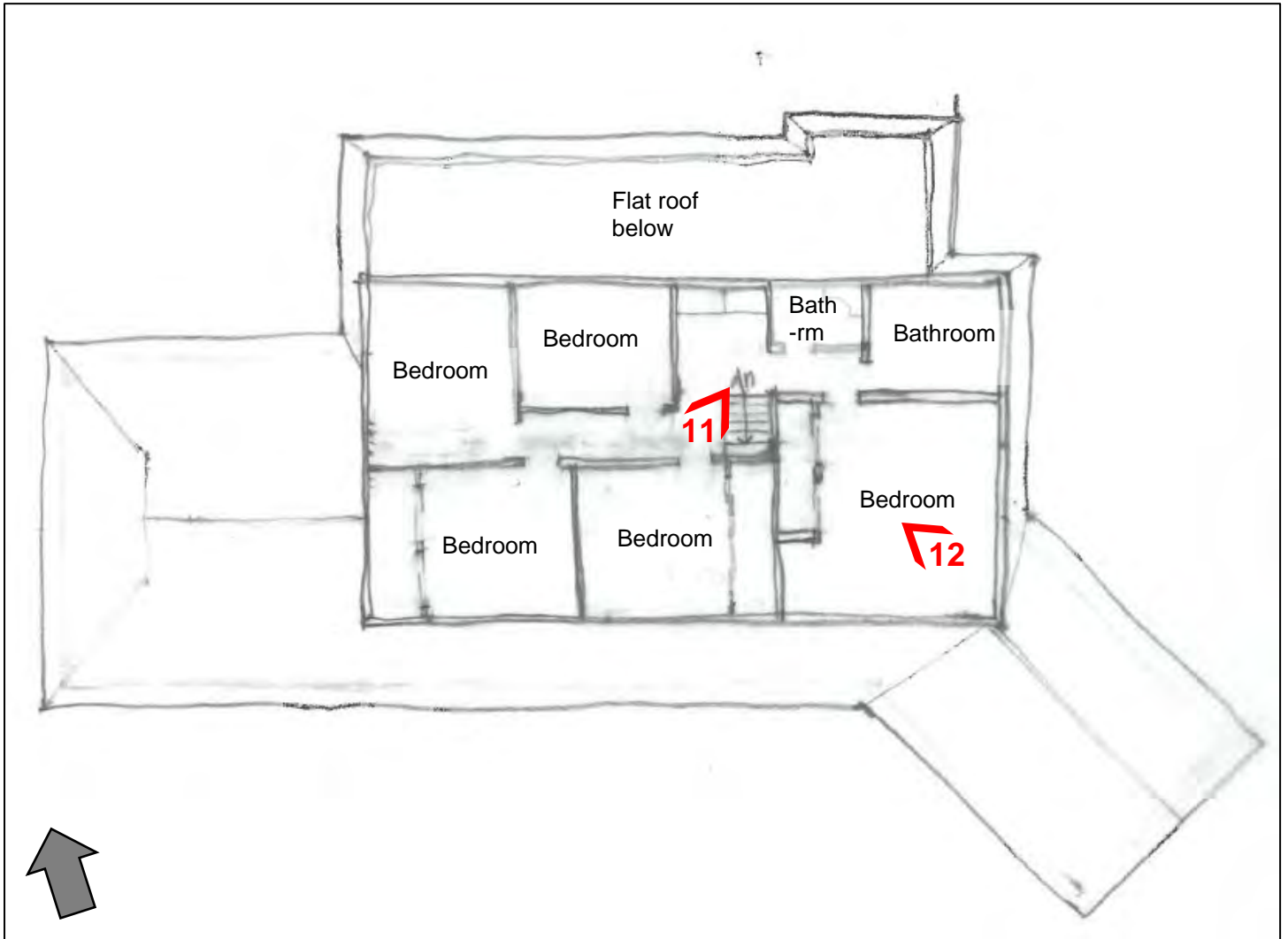
**Figure 4.** Sketch first floor plan with arrows showing photo locations. Not to scale. Plan sketched from county appraiser's footprint.



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**Figure 5.** Sketch second floor plan with arrows showing photo locations. Not to scale.





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**Figure 6.** Lileah and Percy Harris in the 1990s. Source: Barnes, *Life Narratives*, 16.



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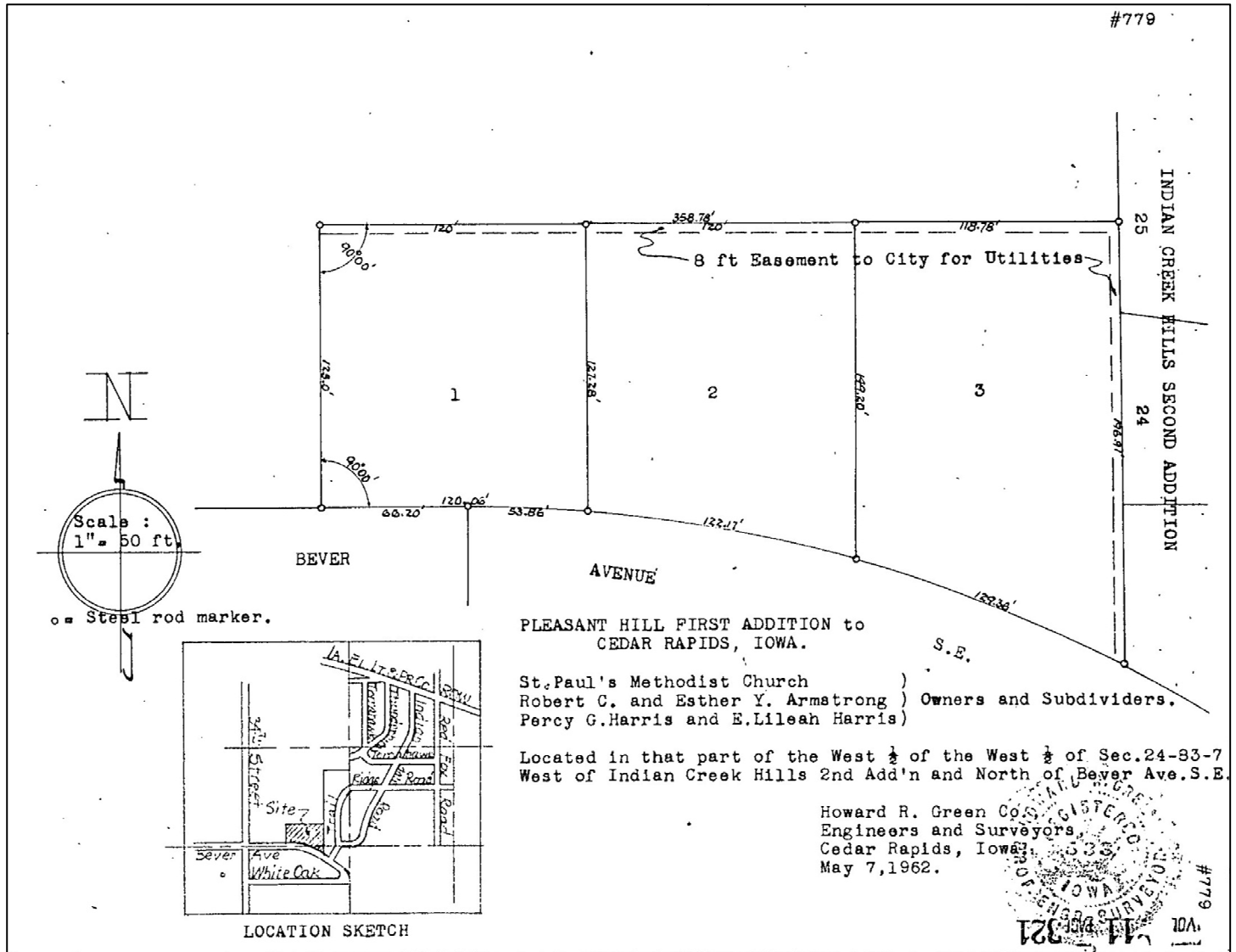
**Figure 7.** The Harris family in a January 1969 advertisement for Maytag. The family are seated in the music room. Two more children were born after this photo. Source: Randon and Harris, “A Healing Presence,” 38.



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**Figure 8.** Plat of Robert Armstrong's land, 1962, with subdivisions. The Harrises own lot 2. Source: Cedar Rapids Planning Department.





IA\_LinnCounty\_CivilRightsMPS\_HarrisHouse\_001



IA\_LinnCounty\_CivilRightsMPS\_HarrisHouse\_002



IA\_LinnCounty\_CivilRightsMPS\_HarrisHouse\_004





















UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 12/23/2020      Date of Pending List: 1/11/2021      Date of 16th Day: 1/26/2021      Date of 45th Day: 2/8/2021      Date of Weekly List: 2/5/2021

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept       Return       Reject      2/4/2021 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria

Reviewer Paul Lusignan      Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2229      Date \_\_\_\_\_

DOCUMENTATION:    see attached comments : No    see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



December 23, 2020

Joy Beasley, Keeper of the National Register of Historic Places  
National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places  
ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION

Dear Ms Beasley:

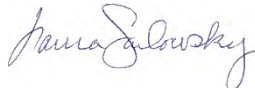
The following National Register nomination from Iowa is enclosed for your review and listing if acceptable. This nomination is being submitted under the "Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights-related Resources in Iowa" Multiple Property Document, which has also been submitted to NPS on this date through the Cultural Resource Online Mail Management System.

**Harris, Dr. Percy and Lileah, House**

The Dr. Percy and Lileah Harris House is nominated to the National Register of Historic Places under the "Twentieth Century African American Civil Rights-related Resources in Iowa" Multiple Property document. Controversy over the sale of the parcel on Bever Avenue to a Black family highlighted the implicit housing discrimination common in Cedar Rapids prior to the 1967 passage of the state's housing discrimination legislation. No deed restrictions existed in the post-World War II Indian Creek Hills neighborhood, but the unwritten spatial partitioning customs in this Iowa town restricted the neighborhood to only white families. When Dr. and Mrs. Harris sought a new home in 1961, none could be found in the city that met the needs of their growing family. A friend and colleague of the Harrises suggested they purchase the parcel on Bever Avenue and construct a house. The sale was met with opposition; however, the Harrises prevailed in purchasing the property and moved into the nominated house after construction was completed in 1963. The house and its parcel are locally significant under Criterion A in the areas of Black Ethnic Heritage and Social History (Civil Rights) as a Place of Response subtype of the Places Associated with Civil Rights Events property type.<sup>4</sup> The period of significance begins in 1961, the year the sale of the property was suggested, debated, and finalized, and extends to 1965, incorporating the year the family moved into the new house in 1963, and 1965, the date of the last major addition to the house that finalized the family's permanent place in the neighborhood. The events and period of significance correspond to those of the historic context "The Modern Civil Rights Movement, 1954-1964," described in the cover document.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Laura Sadowsky  
State Historian  
Historic Preservation Specialist  
[laura.sadowsky@iowa.gov](mailto:laura.sadowsky@iowa.gov) | 515.281.3989 | [iowaculture.gov](http://iowaculture.gov)

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SOCIETY OF IOWA

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STATE HISTORIC  
PRESERVATION  
OFFICE OF IOWA

IOWA HISTORICAL  
FOUNDATION