

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

MAY 8 2001

NATIONAL REGISTER
& EDUCATION
NATIONAL PARKS

655

1. Name of Property

historic name Ledbetter, H. E., House

other names/site number Ledbetter/Taylor House

2. Location

street & number 701 W. Brooks not for publication N/A
city or town Norman vicinity N/A
state Oklahoma code OK county Cleveland code 027 zip code 73069

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ___ nationally ___ statewide locally. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Bob Benburn _____ Date 4-26-01
Signature of certifying official

OKLAHOMA HISTORICAL SOCIETY, SHPO
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria. (___ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is: Elson H. Beall 6/14/01

- 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): _____

Signature of Keeper Date of Action

=====
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

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> buildings
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> sites
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> structures
<u> 0 </u>	<u> 0 </u> objects
<u> 1 </u>	<u> 0 </u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.) Resources Designed by Bruce Goff in Oklahoma

=====
6. Function or Use
=====

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: DOMESTIC Sub: Single Dwelling

=====
7. Description
=====

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

OTHER: Organic

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
roof Asphalt
walls Sandstone
Glass
Metal: Aluminum
other _____

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

=====
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.)

- A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B removed from its original location.
- C a birthplace or a 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.

Areas of Significance (Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance 1948

Significant Dates N/A

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8. Statement of Significance (Continued)
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Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation N/A

Architect/Builder Goff, Bruce, Architect

Barbour and Short Construction Company, builder

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

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9. Major Bibliographical References
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(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

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 # _____

Primary Location of Additional Data

State Historic Preservation Office

Other State agency

Federal agency

Local government

University

Other

Name of repository: University of Oklahoma

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10. Geographical Data
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Acreage of Property Less than one acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	<u>14</u>	<u>641000</u>	<u>3896950</u>	3	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____

N/A See continuation sheet.

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.)

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11. Form Prepared By
=====

name/title Professor Arn Henderson, FAIA

organization College of Architecture, Univ of Okla. date Jan 20 1999

street & number Gould Hall telephone 405-325-3868

city or town Norman state OK zip code 73019

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Additional Documentation
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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
=====

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name Joseph Taylor, Rev. Living Trust

street & number 701 W. Brooks telephone _____

city or town Norman state OK zip code 73069
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Summary

The Ledbetter house is located at 701 Brooks in Norman, Oklahoma. The house is in a primarily residential neighborhood of 1920-1930 style housing, some of which are large fraternity and sorority houses. The residential neighborhood is also adjacent to the University of Oklahoma, which can be seen from the front lawn of the property. The house is constructed of irregularly cut sandstone, glass, and corrugated aluminum siding. The prominent decorative elements include glass ashtrays set into the wood mullions of the windows, the circular carport and garden patio coverings made of metal and suspended by cables from the roof of the house, and the large windows that face the street in a sawtooth pattern. The Ledbetter House design is based on a composite geometry plan, combining circular and rectangular elements. The plan is then complemented by an irregular and randomly patterned sandstone wall defining a garden. The Ledbetter house, built by 1948, continues to have a high degree of architectural integrity as an original design of Bruce Goff.

Description

The H.E. Ledbetter House is located at 701 Brooks in Norman, Oklahoma, in a residential neighborhood adjacent to the University of Oklahoma campus. The neighborhood is dominated by 1920s style housing, including Bungalows, Colonial Revival houses and large fraternity and sorority houses. The Ledbetter House faces a large Classical Revival fraternity house built in the late 1920s and the University of Oklahoma can be seen from the front lawn of the property. The plan of the Ledbetter House is an arrangement of composite geometry that combines rectangular and circular elements with irregular free-form elements. Built of sandstone laid in a random ashlar pattern, glass, corrugated aluminum and red cedar, the house is a hybrid construction of load-bearing masonry wall, post-and-beam, and conventional framing.

The Ledbetter House is located on a small corner lot and is set back five feet from the side lot line. The front and rear elevations of the split-level design are distinctly different. The north wall of the house, next to the side lot line, is an undulating sandstone wall fourteen inches thick. At the east end of the house the sandstone wall is extended into the landscape in an irregular pattern and encloses one side of a garden as it steps down to meet the ground. The wall is pierced with several irregular openings and suggests a character of erosion. On the front street a large reflecting pool, also with

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sandstone walls, provides definition to both the edge of the property and a circular driveway. Separating the driveway from the garden is another irregular and meandering stone wall rising from the ground and converging diagonally to the center of the house.

Set against this naturalistic free-form assemblage of stone, lush plantings and water, the front of the house forms an enormous contrast. The dominant element of the composition is a linear rectangular form covered with a shed roof with a deep overhang. In plan the house is divided into two basic interior zones. The east zone, adjacent to the garden and enclosing public areas of the house, is a large volume with the floor at grade. The west zone has split-levels with bedrooms a half-level up from grade and an informal living area a half-level below. Both of these zones are united by the built-up shed roof.

The front of the west zone is composed of a projecting horizontal band of corrugated aluminum siding separating large panes of fixed glass above and small awning windows below. The panes of glass above are all slightly angled in a sawtooth pattern with wood mullions decorated with dime-store glass ashtrays. The operable windows below provide light and ventilation for the informal living room. Functionally, the overhanging band of metal is a storage wainscot but visually it divides and separates two disparate patterns of glass.

The front of the east zone is more complex. The dominant sawtooth pattern of glass with ashtray studded mullions is continued and wraps around the garden elevation of the house to intersect the sandstone wall. Set in front of this linear continuum of two zones is a smaller element containing the kitchen. This element is also defined by a shed roof that echoes the geometry of the principal form; however, the roof is lower. The south and east walls of the kitchen repeat the sawtooth glass motif, but the west wall is established by the secondary freestanding sandstone wall arising from the garden. It is this wall, as it converges toward and intersects the linear mass, that defines the entry. The wooden front door, set in a glass wall, repeats again the ashtray pattern of the mullions.

Two prominent elements complete the facade. These are two circular aluminum discs suspended by cables from steel pipe frames rising above the house. The larger of the two is positioned directly in front of the entry and serves as a carport. A smaller disc provides shade in the garden. Both of these canopies are constructed with exposed metal trusses on the underside in a radial pattern.

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On the interior the two zones of the house are divided by a large dramatic foyer with a waterfall cascading from the sandstone wall, plantings and a curved ramp to the spaces above, crossing a pool of water at floor level. The aluminum wainscot of the front is turned inside at the foyer to create a balcony for the adjacent bedroom. The undulating sandstone wall is further dramatized by a continuous glass skylight extending the length of the house. Natural light casts shadows on the wall, enriches the texture of the stone, and magnifies the undulating rhythm. Floor material in both the entry foyer and the living room in the east zone is flagstone. Ceiling material throughout the house is red cedar with the boards lapped and extending beyond the dominant sawtooth glass wall to form the soffit of the overhanging roof.

Alterations

The reflecting pool in front of the house has been modified and it now functions as a planter. The current owners of the house have also applied sprayed-on foam insulation to the outside surface of the rear of the house. Since this stone wall is set very close to the property line and screened with a wood privacy fence and dense plantings, it is hardly visible. Central air conditioning has also been added with ducts located on the roof. The ducts, however, are skillfully disguised and have very little visual effect on the cornice. The corrugated aluminum metal siding, which was originally highly reflective, has now been painted. It was painted by Mrs. Ledbetter shortly after she moved in, because she did not like the look of the unpainted metal. The painting of this feature has a minor effect on the integrity of the design because it has achieved significant historical association in relation to the alteration. The cantilevered ends of the fascia associated with the shed roof on the front have been cut back. These modifications do not significantly interfere with the original design of the house. Despite minor alterations, the Ledbetter House continues to have a very high degree of architectural integrity.

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Summary

The Ledbetter House, designed in 1947 and constructed in 1948, is an exceptionally significant work of Bruce Goff as an example of organic architecture. It demonstrates most of the design characteristics he developed in his career, particularly in the work after 1939. The house is related to a series of designs based on a composite plan geometry. The Ledbetter House was one of his first designs completed after World War II, and was the subject of a large amount of local and national attention. The house has many unique and imaginative elements, such as the use of a sawtooth rhythm on the facade, inset glass ashtrays, and the contrast of geometric forms with the natural undulating curves of the sandstone wall that partially surrounds the garden. The Ledbetter House is eligible under Criterion C for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places as a work of a master architect, Bruce Goff. It relates to the Post-World War II buildings historic context of "Resources Designed by Bruce Goff in Oklahoma" (Section E).

Historical Background

The Ledbetter House was designed by Bruce Goff in 1947 for H.E. and Lois Ledbetter. Goff was recommended for the commission by Henry Kamphoefner, a colleague instrumental in Goff's return to Oklahoma. The house was built in 1948 by Barbour and Short Construction Company, a local company retained by the Ledbetters. Because of the unusual design, the house received great attention and the site became locally known as "calamity corner," according to Mrs. Ledbetter, because of the number of curious onlookers both during construction and after completion.

On May 2-3, 1948, an open house was held as a fund raiser for the Norman Spastic Paralysis Institute. The fund raising event brought over 13,500 people to the house and raised \$2,100 for the Institute. In addition to the local attention the Ledbetter house received, Life magazine featured the house in the June 28, 1948 issue in an article entitled "Consternation and Bewilderment in Oklahoma," based on coverage during the Ledbetter open house.

The Ledbetters lived in the house until 1955 when it was sold to Professor and Mrs. Joe Taylor, the present owners. Professor Taylor, an O.U. art professor, emeritus, is the current owner and an avid gardener, and is responsible for the extensive plantings throughout the site.

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Architectural Significance

The Ledbetter House, considered one of Goff's finest works, is conceptually derived from an unbuilt project designed for Don Leidig in California a year earlier. In the Leidig House, Goff proposed a series of circular pavilions, each containing a major function, set in a pool of water that was defined on both sides by undulating masonry walls. Circulation between the pavilions was by meandering paths raised slightly above water level and each of the pavilions was cantilevered over the water. The entire assemblage of water and pavilions was enclosed with a cantilevered cable-supported roof. This Leidig design, as a composition of free-form and geometric elements floating in space, was pivotal in Goff's evolving definition of architecture.

The Ledbetter House, like the Leidig project, is based on a composition of composite geometry--free-forms combined with circular and rectilinear elements. But the specific solution for the Ledbetters was quite different. The Ledbetters wanted big rooms, lots of natural light and minimal hallways. The building site was small and the budget modest. Yet the relationships between the two designs is clear. In the Leidig House, the sandstone walls define the edges of the composition; they establish boundaries. In the Ledbetter House they serve the same purpose, but they also establish zones of activity. They define the driveway; the entry; the garden; and the house itself. Moreover, the sandstone walls, undulating and eroded, establish a dominant theme philosophically. In the year of his death in 1982, when he was a visiting professor at the University of Oklahoma, Goff said he wanted the stone to appear as it might in its natural state. His comment is indicative of his commitment to architecture as an organic art with reference to the natural world. And this philosophic commitment, coupled with his interest in linking elements together, was visualized in a specific way. In the Ledbetter design, the sandstone wall defining the rear elevation of the house erodes into the landscape, partially enclosing a garden as it sinks into the ground. It then reappears, from a different point, to merge again with the house. It suggests a state of nature, a world of earth and stone where both house and garden, as extensions of one another, become united.

Contrasting with the free-form stone walls is another dominant theme, one of precise geometric forms with a highly polished and machined finish. These forms are organized on the site with a gradation in height so that a lower form always appears in front of a higher form. The form furthest from the street, the principal part of the house, is one-and-one-half-stories tall. Joining this form on the front is the kitchen, one-story tall. In front of the kitchen

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is the suspended carport, still lower. At the edge of the property, the large semi-circular stone planter, originally a reflecting pool, is lowest of all. The architectural implications of this organizational strategy are important for the meaning it conveys. Goff created very clear hierarchies of form corresponding to the function of each element. By setting one form in front of another, with a gradation in height, Goff visualized an essential concept of form following function, an idea derived from both Sullivan and Wright. The Ledbetter House, is thus an architectural composition that is visually satisfying both because of its originality and because of a conceptual underpinning that clarifies and informs us of intentions.

Goff articulated the facade of the Ledbetter House in two specific ways: by establishing a prominent rhythm of repeating elements, and by contrasting solid, anchoring elements with light, floating elements. The large panes of fixed glass, set in a sawtooth pattern, create a powerful rhythm. This sawtooth glass wall, extending across the front of the house, echoes the undulating sandstone wall on the back. Even though the materials are different and the modulations of one wall are precise while the other is soft, they are both variations on the same theme. But Goff enriched the sawtooth rhythm with a decorative pattern of translucent glass ashtrays inset in the wood mullions. By light of the moon or sun, the ornamental ashtrays sparkle like prisms. But this assemblage was not solely for the sake of visual expression. Rather, there was an essential purpose for this rhythm. Goff set each pane at an angle so the glass would not reflect a large limestone fraternity house across the street.

Goff's propensity to contrast anchoring versus floating elements in a composition is quite pronounced in the Ledbetter House. The metal discs of the garden shelter and carport seem to hover in the air. Anchored by the thinnest of cables, like in the Leidig design, to frames extending above the wall of the facade, these elements appear almost detached as if they might float away. Magnifying this sense of lightness to the composition, the roof over both the kitchen and the main part of the house is tapered on the top so the edge of the deep overhang becomes very thin. This subtle device of tapering the roof down to a thin edge, is an important dimension of the facade composition. Goff developed many variations on this principle and it became a way of creating an illusion of planes and lines that would appear to float in space. In the Ledbetter House, there is still another component that adds to this dimension of lightness, the horizontal band of corrugated metal on the facade of the west zone which defines both a storage wainscot for the bedrooms and a base for the pattern of sawtooth glass. It is a cantilevered element and casts a strong

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shadow line. Thus, the band of metal, too, seems to float. Contrasting with all of these light, horizontal elements are the anchoring, undulating walls of stone and column-like red cedar mullions studded with glass ashtrays.

The interior of the Ledbetter House is similarly rich and displays many of the characteristics of Goff's compositional pattern. Like most of his houses, it is a split-level design with an open-plan defining two distinct living zones. The split-level spatial concept is immediately apparent from the corrugated metal wainscot cantilevered into the entry just as it does on the facade. The wainscot, forming a balcony for a bedroom, separates this space from the entry, but offers the possibility of visually extending the space. Moreover, the curved ramp from the entry to the corridor adjacent to the undulating sandstone wall serves a similar function. It invites but it also separates; it defines a distinct zone, one that is private yet visually accessible.

The large entry foyer has other features that tell us of Goff's philosophic perspective, of architecture embracing the natural world. The fountains concealed in the sandstone wall at the back splashes into a pool under the ramp. The presence of this element, seeping and falling from the stone wall into an irregular-shaped pool with the edges thick with plants, suggests entering into a secluded glade in the forest. It is the splashing water, both seen and heard, combined with sunlight from the ribbon skylight separating wall and roof that animates the composition. And the meaning is clear: architecture is an extension of nature and it is of the realm of sky, earth, and water.

But in Goff's ideal, architecture also embraces a man-made world. In the Ledbetter House, the precise geometric forms, floating in the air, contrast enormously with elements of the natural world. It is the visualization of these two realms, contrasting with one another yet fused together, that is stimulating. It is Goff's intellectual posture of acknowledgement of nature coupled with a commitment to solve the particular problems of site and client with imagination that is evident in his best work. The Ledbetter House is one of his finest designs and clearly an extraordinary example of American organic architecture.

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Bibliography

Books

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- DeLong, David. The Architecture of Bruce Goff. 2 vols. New York: Garland Publishing, 1977.
- DeLong, David G. Bruce Goff: Toward Absolute Architecture. New York: The Architectural History Foundation, 1988.
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- Saliga, Pauline and Mary Woolever, eds. The Architecture of Bruce Goff 1904-1982: Design for the Continuous Present. Chicago: The Art Institute of Chicago, 1995.

Journals

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- Goff, Bruce. "Goff on Goff." Progressive Architecture, 43, December 1962.
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McCoy, Esther. "Bruce Goff." Arts and Architecture, 2, no. 3 (1983): 44-47.

Mooring, Stephen. "Buildings and Projects by Bruce Goff." Architectural Design, 48, no. 10 (1978): 16-49.

Mooring, Stephen. "Bruce Goff: An Ornamental Link." Architectural Design, 48, no. 10 (1978): 63-66.

Mooring, Stephen. "A Starting Point: Bruce Goff and His Clients." Architectural Design, 48, no. 10 (1978): 15.

Sergeant, John. "An Introduction to Bruce Goff." Architectural Design, 48, no. 10 (1978): 3-5.

Sergeant, John. "Bruce Goff, the Strict Geometrist." Architectural Design, 48, no. 10 (1978): 55-62.

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"Inside-Outside Home Open House Continues Today." Norman Transcript, May 2, 1992. Norman, Oklahoma: Transcript Press. p. 1.

"Inside-Outside Home Visited by 13,500 Persons." Norman Transcript, May 3, 1948. Norman, Oklahoma: Transcript Press. p. 1.

Interviews

Joe Taylor, second owner. Interview with Arn Henderson, Norman, Oklahoma, March 10, 1987.

Richard N. Kuhlman, professorial colleague. Interview with Arn Henderson, Norman, Oklahoma, May, 1992.

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Lois Ledbetter, original home owner. Interview with Arn Henderson, Norman, Oklahoma, August 23, 1992.

Other

"Consternation and Bewilderment in Oklahoma." Life, 24, June 28, 1948, pp. 71-74.

Henderson, Arn. "Common Themes on the Buildings of Bruce Goff." Paper presented at the "Bruce Goff: Toward Absolute Architecture Symposium." University of Oklahoma, September 30, 1989.

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Verbal Boundary Description

"Part of the SW/4 Sec 31 T9N, R2W, Beg 1,215'S and 34.8' W of the NE/C/S75' W
142.2' N75' E142.2' to POB.

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the property historically associated with the Ledbetter house.