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SEP 30 1988

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in **Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms** (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "NA" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Carroll Alsop House  
other names/site number Mitchell House

2. Location

street & number 1907 A Avenue East | | not for publication  
city, town Oskaloosa | | vicinity  
state Iowa code 19A county Mahaska code 123 zip code 52577

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	—	— sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	—	— structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	—	— objects
		<u>1</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Name of Related multiple property listing: Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright  
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. 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.  See continuation sheet, section \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_.

James P. Jacob DSHPO  
Signature of certifying official

Sept 23, 1988  
Date

Bureau of Historic Preservation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet National Register criteria.  
 See continuation sheet, section \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date  
\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

**5. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby, certify that this property is:

entered in the National Register.

See continuation sheet, section \_\_\_ page \_\_\_

determined eligible for the National Register.

See continuation sheet, section \_\_\_ page \_\_\_

determined not eligible for the National Register.

removed from the National Register.

other, (explain:)

*Lucy Adams* 11/9/88

Signature of the Keeper

Date

**6. Function or Use**

Historic Functions  
(enter categories from instructions)

Domestic - Single Dwellings

Current Functions

(enter categories from instructions)

Domestic - Single Dwelling

**7. Description**

Architectural Classification  
(enter categories from instructions)

Wrightian

Materials

(enter categories from instructions)

foundation Brick

walls Brick, Glass

roof Asbestos

other Wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

See continuation sheet, section 7 page 2

**8. Statement of Significance**

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:  nationally  statewide  locally

Applicable National Register Criteria  A  B  C  D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)  A  B  C  D  E  F  G

Areas of Significance  
(enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1951

Significant Dates

1951

Cultural Affiliation

N.A.

Significant Person

N.A.

Architect/Builder

Wright, Frank Lloyd

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  See continuation sheet, section 8 page 2

9. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet, section 9 page 2

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

Specify repository:  
University of Washington

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1 3/4

UTM References

A 15 | 531610 | 4571580  
Zone Easting Northing  
C | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

B | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |  
Zone Easting Northing  
D | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

See continuation sheet, section \_\_\_\_\_ page \_\_\_\_\_

Verbal Boundary Description  See continuation sheet, section 10 page 2

Boundary Justification  See continuation sheet, section 10 page 2

11. Form Prepared By

author/title Chery Peterson, Architectural Historian  
preparer Ralph J. Christian, Architectural Historian  
organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date 9/7/88  
street & number State Historical Bldg., Capitol Complex telephone (515) 281-8697  
city or town Des Moines state Iowa zip code 50319

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DESCRIPTION

Built in Oskaloosa at the same time as the Lamberson house, the Alsop house is an equally important example of Frank Lloyd Wright's work in Iowa. The Alsop house is an average-sized Iowa Usonian, unique for its gable roof. Together with the Lamberson house, this Usonian has been credited with directly influencing local residential architecture.

The Carroll Alsop house is located on the east edge of Oskaloosa on the city's main east-west thoroughfare, in a neighborhood quite similar to that of the Lamberson house. The house is set on the side of a hill, amid mature hickorys and walnuts, oriented with views to the south and to the east. To the south the site slopes down to the street, to the east it slopes down to a small pond on the property. The site was originally owned by Mr. Alsop's parents and had once been an orchard. Although this site was located in the country, in the past 30 years the town has spread out to encompass the Alsop house and its newer neighbors. The lot is, at present, approximately 1-3/4 acres in size.

The Alsop house was designed on a 5'-0" x 5'-0" unit module or grid; it is proportioned vertically based upon brick coursing and interior board and batten spacing. The squarely rectilinear plan is a typical Usonian plan with an open living room and dining area which forms a polliwog "head," a long bedroom wing "tail," and a high-ceilinged central kitchen core. The length of the house is oriented north-south, views are generally to the east; the living room, extending to the east, and the carport, extending to the west, give this house a somewhat "T-shaped" plan. The ridge of the roof over the bedrooms and over the living room runs north-south. The roof's pitch is steeper to the west; consequently, with a flatter pitch to the east, overhangs on the east side can be deep without blocking the view. The roof of the carport is flat.

The one-story Alsop house has no basement nor attic. Its floor is a concrete slab, warm red in color, scored with the lines of the 5'-0" x 5'-0" grid. The heat was originally provided by Wright's radiant system of "gravity" heat. The house opens to natural light and ventilation. The detailing is Usonian.

The materials of the Alsop house, inside and out, are brick, cypress, glass, and plaster. Steel beams were likely used in the structure of the Carport roof.

The Alsop house is a very comfortable, efficiently designed house. The kitchen, children's bedrooms, and bathroom are small and compact, utilizing built-ins to save space. High ceilings keep these rooms from feeling too small or confined. The gallery in this house is long but relatively wide and has a sloped ceiling. A band of windows, with shelves below, stretches the gallery's full length, bringing in natural light and

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allowing for cross-ventilation of the bedroom wing. At the end of the gallery, the master bedroom appears to have been designed as a quiet retreat for the parents, with their own fireplace, bathroom and small terrace.

The dominant space in the Alsop house is that of the great living room. This is a very spacious room designed to serve a variety of activities. A high sloped ceiling and great expanses of window wall to the south and east dramatically open up the living room, while more intimately scaled spaces are created under a lowered ceiling deck on the room's protected north and west sides. It is from under this ceiling deck that the ample entrance area steps down into the living room. A massive brick fireplace of cantilever design stands at the center of the Alsop living room seemingly disjoined from the wall.

The ceiling of the living room follows the slope of the roof. At its peak, the ceiling of the living room is approximately 14'-0" high. Windows in this room extend up to the ceiling from a continuous sill height of approximately 2'-4". The roof soffits and the ceiling, both finished with plaster and painted an off-white color, are clearly read as one continuous plane. Mr. Wright's own Taliesin in Spring Green has sloping ceiling similar to those of the Alsop house. In The Natural House, the architect has written, "One of the advantages of the sloping roof is that it gives you a sense of spaciousness inside, a sense of overhead uplift which I often feel to be very good." (p. 160) The sloping ceilings of the Alsop house are very effective in creating this sense of spaciousness.

While the house feels spacious and is open to the surrounding views, like the Lamberson house, the Alsop house lacks a sense of direct connection with the outdoors, the ground. Only at the brick-paved, grade-level entrance approach, protected by the carport roof, does the house seem to flow from inside to outside. The large living room opens only to a small landing on the south side of the house where there is a large planter and steps down to the lawn; here there is no terrace nor level area, and little visual privacy from the street. The more private master bedroom terrace does open the bedroom to the outdoors, but it is a very small, confined terrace, raised up several feet off the ground.

The walls of the Alsop house are brick cavity walls with Mr. Wright's characteristic raked horizontal joints of white mortar and flush vertical joints of red mortar that matches the red brick. The brick is laid in running bond. Window sills and low walls are finished with a rowlock course. The three masonry masses which extend above the roof, those of the kitchen, the living room fireplace, and the master bedroom fireplace, are each finished with a soldier course. Foundation walls are of brick, indistinguishable from the walls above the floor slab.

The floor, as mentioned above, and as is similar in all of the Iowa Usonian except the Walter house, is a red-colored concrete slab etched with the lines of the unit module. The floor of the living room and adjacent kitchen are 1'-0" lower than

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the floor of the entry and bedroom wing. The concrete floor slab extends beyond the master bedroom to the small terrace; it also extends outside the living room to the small landing. The entry approach is brick paved; the paving continues into the entry and steps down to meet the living room's concrete floor. The brick floor of the entry also continues approximately 8'-0" into the gallery. The brick surface defines this most public area of the house and beautifully ties the interior to the exterior. Beneath the floor of the Alsop house are the heat pipes of the original radiant heat system.

The roof of the Alsop house is wood framed, covered with sheathing and red-colored asbestos shingles. The fascia boards are red tidewater cypress. There are no gutters nor downspouts, only the drainpipes which penetrate the carport roof. Ceilings and soffits throughout the house are finished with plaster and everywhere follow the slope of the roof. The lowered ceiling of the entry creates a floor to ceiling height of 6'-10". The raised ceiling of the kitchen is at approximately 13'-9". The kitchen is lit and ventilated by a large skylight.

Incandescent lights in the Alsop house are installed in square recesses in the low ceiling deck of the living room, kitchen, and entry area. These recesses are approximately 10" square, with cypress trim; the glass cover is flush with the ceiling. The light from these fixtures shines both down into the room and up to the higher ceilings. Along the east wall of the living room there are three very interesting incandescent fixtures built into the concrete floor. Flush with the floor, each protected by a glass block, the lights shine upward to add soft light to this area of the room. In the gallery, incandescent lights are built into simple cypress boxes spaced along the length of the sloped gallery ceiling over the windows at the exterior wall.

The windows and doors throughout the Alsop house are built of red tidewater cypress. Interior doors and the exterior door of the utility room are flush doors; the entrance door is a wide glass door; living room and master bedroom terrace doors are glass. The operable windows of the living room and bedrooms are casement windows; the fixed corner windows of the living room meet with simple mitered glass joints. The operable windows of the gallery are awning-type windows. To allow the casement windows on the east side of the house to open fully under the sloping roof overhang, the top of these windows is set approximately 8" below the ceiling. A very narrow window band is then fit between the ceiling and the top of the casement windows. The top edges of these small windows die into the ceiling, fixed in a narrow channel in the plaster.

The many operable windows in the Alsop house allow for natural ventilation, and in summer the deep overhangs shade the house. This combination is very successful in keeping the house cool in warm weather. The disadvantage of the large areas of window is apparent in cold weather, when the house loses heat through the glass. The

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photographs that were made to illustrate this study show sheets of styrofoam insulation which the owners had temporarily installed in all but the sewing room and south living room windows in an effort to conserve energy.

The interior wood partitions in the Alsop house are thin sandwich walls finished with red tidewater cypress boards and interlocking battens. The wood walls add greatly to the beauty and character of the house. De Reus described the sandwich walls as only 2 1/4" thick, half the thickness of a standard stud wall with plaster or drywall. The thin walls save space in the rooms. The spacing of the battens, approximately 13" on center, was designed to line up with the brick coursing, and all vertical dimensions are determined by the board and batten spacing or brick coursing. With regard to the finish materials of the house, De Reus said, "In conventional building you can cover up mistakes with plaster, paper or paint. But here everything is seen, so your crew has to do good work. Any mistake would show." (p. 128) And

Better materials encouraged better handling. . . We all learned a lot about why Mr. Wright uses the materials he does, and it helped us to understand and appreciate our work more. The brick, cypress and glass in this house all contributed to the spirit of the building. (p. 128)

When the Alsop house was originally furnished, all of the built-ins and nearly all of the freestanding pieces were designed by Mr. Wright, all of cypress. In the years since, much of the furniture has been lost and what remains is now quite worn. Cypress, while a durable wood for exterior applications, is too soft for furniture.

Of the original furnishings in the living room, along the west wall there is a built-in couch with built-in end tables and shelves. The original cushions have been replaced. Under the windows around the north, east, and south sides of the room there are simple wood benches, still intact. The dining table and eight chairs, all of cypress, still exist and were still in use at the time of this study. Cypress shelves on the north wall of the living room are original. The other original pieces remaining in this room are four small cocktail tables.

The kitchen of the Alsop house has been remodeled. The original appliances, cabinets, and counter have been replaced and sections of the original shelves have been removed. The cabinets of the pantry area in the hallway north of the kitchen are original. The new wood cabinets of the kitchen are close to resembling the originals which they replaced and have the same piano-type hinges. The location of appliances has been changed from the original scheme.

Both of the children's bedrooms have original built-in wardrobes and desks. The bedroom adjacent to the sewing room has original built-in bunk beds. In the master bedroom the original wardrobes and shelves still exist. The fireplace in this room is

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of simple cantilever masonry design with a large raised brick hearth; unfortunately, the fireplace is no longer functional. The exterior walls of this room are brick, and here again the sloping ceiling gives this room a spacious feeling.

Originally, all of the fabrics in the Alsop house were coordinated. The Iowan reported that

Gold, the predominant color, is used in all the drapes, cushions and hassocks. It is highlighted with brown, turquoise, red and beige. Brass accessories and green plants are also used in the decorative scheme. (p. 35)

The fabric was a course linen. The floors in the living room were "covered with beige cotton rugs except for an area underneath the chimney where sheepskin throw rugs are used." (p. 35)

Overall, the Alsop house appears to be in good condition but in immediate need of roof repairs. Leaks in the roof are causing ceiling plaster to crack and discolor in areas where the roof meets the masonry of the fireplaces and kitchen walls. There is also a leak at the entry area.

The most significant alterations to the Alsop house include the kitchen remodeling, the loss of original furniture, the sealed-off fireplace chimney in the master bedroom, and the recent addition of forced air heating. The Kinkeads replaced the original radiant heat system in 1985 with the present forced air system because they were dissatisfied with the old system's slow response time and, primarily, because they felt it was an inefficient, overly expensive system to operate. The new furnace is located in the utility room. Ductwork installed on the ceiling deck over the entry delivers warm air to the living room. In the gallery, ductwork is exposed overhead as it leads to the bedrooms where it has then been installed on an existing ceiling deck which runs the length of the bedroom wing over doorways and wardrobes. Baseboard heat in the living room had previously been installed to supplement the radiant system in that large room.



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## SIGNIFICANCE

One of seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses built in Iowa, and one of two Usonians built in Oskaloosa, both completed in 1951.

Direct influence of this house and the Wright-designed Lamberson House (North Park Avenue) on local residential design was documented in a feature article of the March 1958 House and Home in which these two convention-breaking houses were credited with starting a ". . . homebuilding revolution in Oskaloosa" (House and Home, March, 1958, p. 94). According to builder Jim De Reus, "The custom house that Mr. Wright designed and we built was different in every way from the kind of houses we had been building in Oskaloosa" (House and Home, February, 1959, p. 127). Upon completion, the Alsop house was toured by an estimated 9000 visitors during a public open house.

The Alsop House is an important example of Wright's work in Iowa as the house embodies the mid-20th century American (Usonian) ideals of free and simple living, in touch with nature, for the family of moderate means. For today's student of architecture, possibly the greatest lessons which this house offers are in the character of the spaces, and the relationship of the house to its site. Construction methods, materials, and details may change, but the essence of Wright's simple, honest, integral architecture is still valid; ". . . spaciousness and sunlight, human scale, warmth and solidity, a feeling of shelter, and a sense of the outdoors" (Wright, The Natural House, p. 118) are certainly still desirable qualities in the 1980s, and a study of Wright's work reveals how these qualities have been brought to life. The concepts of building economy and efficiency, humanly effected, are also still valid and observable in Wright's work.

Construction supervision was provided by John DeKoven Hill. Published in various Frank Lloyd Wright catalogues, House and Home, The Iowan, and Seargent's 1984 Usonian Houses, the house and grounds are of continuing interest to architectural scholars, photographers, and historians.

Like the Lamberson house, the Alsop house has had at least three different owners through the years; the original owners, Carroll and Anne Alsop, have since moved from the state and could not be contacted. An article in The Iowan magazine, October-November 1952, relates this early history:

The Alsops knew about what they wanted--a modern house on a hill near Carroll's family home.

They wrote Wright and outlined what they wanted. After some correspondence, they were asked to have pictures taken of the proposed lot and a topographical map made of it. The Alsops took these with them when they first went to consult Mr. Wright at his home in Spring Green, Wisconsin. He went over the

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location with them, discussed their ideas and talked with them about their present needs and future plans. Further visits ensued as Wright and his assistants worked with Carroll and Anne on the plans. (p. 30)

It was likely 1947 or 1948 when the Alsops first contacted Mr. Wright.

The contractor who built the Alsop house was Jim De Reus of Sparks Construction Company. Wright's representative for this project was John DeKoven Hill. The house was completed in 1951 and upon completion was opened for public display. The impact of this house in Oskaloosa appears to have been substantial.

The designs of the Alsop house and the Lamberson house influenced the designs of other new houses built in Oskaloosa. A survey of "new-house owners in Oskaloosa," conducted by House and Home and featured in March 1958, revealed that "More than 40% of the new houses built since 1951 'break with conventional design.'" (p. 104) House and Home had found that people in Oskaloosa were building new houses, trading up to better houses, and remodeling old houses because, in part, they were influenced by the Wright-designed houses.

In addition to the influence of the Frank Lloyd Wright houses, the magazine reported these other influences on new-house owners:

- they want something new . . .
- they like indoor-outdoor living . . .
- they get ideas from magazines . . .
- neighborhoods change . . .
- families get bigger . . .
- children grow up . . .
- they are moving up . . . (p. 94)

When the House and Home Oskaloosa story appeared in 1958, building was booming and most of the houses being built were "one-story ranches with open plans and outdoor patios. They include built-ins in kitchens, baths and living rooms; they cut down on steps and are easy to heat and cool." (p. 93) These qualities and features are essentially Usonian, probably first seen in Oskaloosa in the Lamberson and Alsop houses.

The land in Oskaloosa on which many of these new houses were being built was rolling land, cut by small ravines. It was land which development had historically passed over in favor of flatter surrounding terrain. But this land was ideal for the sprawling new housing developments and house styles of the 1950s:

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"What really impressed us was how you can put a house on the rolling hills around here," says one new-house owner who insisted his new house be designed to snuggle into its hillside site just as the Wright houses do. "I don't think any of us realized that we were literally shaving off the beauty of our town by grading down the sites." (p. 93)

Regarding the construction of the Alsop house, as Jim De Reus explained in his 1959 article in House and Home, the house "is divided into four distinct components: the slab, the masonry mass, the window mass, the roof mass. ( p. 128) In the sequence of construction, each component of the house was completed before the next was begun, saving considerable time, according to De Reus, for the builders. First the concrete work and masonry were completed, then rough carpenters set structural mullions and built the roof, followed by finish carpenters who built the windows and did the interior work. Said De Reus, "We didn't tie up a single bit of equipment or a single man unnecessarily." (p. 128) Furthermore, "Exposed materials let you eliminate trades and cut down on job time." And, "Building on a unit system you can locate everything quickly. Each brick course in this house is actually counted right on the blueprint and the location of the finish work is tied right to the masonry line." (p. 130)

After De Reus had prepared the site of the Alsop house for construction, the first step was to build the foundation:

We discovered that the foundation for the house is about 20% cheaper and about 90% better than any other we'd seen. It's a simple trench--20" wide, 3 1/2' deep. You put drain tile down the middle and fill up the trench with crushed rock. We used a certain amount of fines so the rock would stay firm. Then You pour a 9" reinforced pad on top of the rock--so the foundation is simply a 9" beam floating on a crushed rock sub base. With Mr. Wright's trench, the moisture finds the tile so the foundation stays dry. (p. 128)

The Alsop family had only lived in their Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian for one year when The Iowan concluded:

The Alsop home is not the only Frank Lloyd Wright home in Oskaloosa (another was built there about the same time), nor is it the most modernistic home there (several others could compete with it), nor is it the most expensive (it cost much less than most comparable houses), yet it perfectly fits the Alsop's needs as a family and the demands of their location.

These needs and demands are shared by enough Iowans to give Frank Lloyd Wright's work here wider meaning and possible application than many of his more celebrated designs. (p. 35)

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The suggestion that Mr. Wright's design for the Alsop house could have "wide meaning and possible application" has indeed been followed; directly or indirectly, houses throughout Iowa have been influenced by Wright's Usonian ideals and his Usonian houses.

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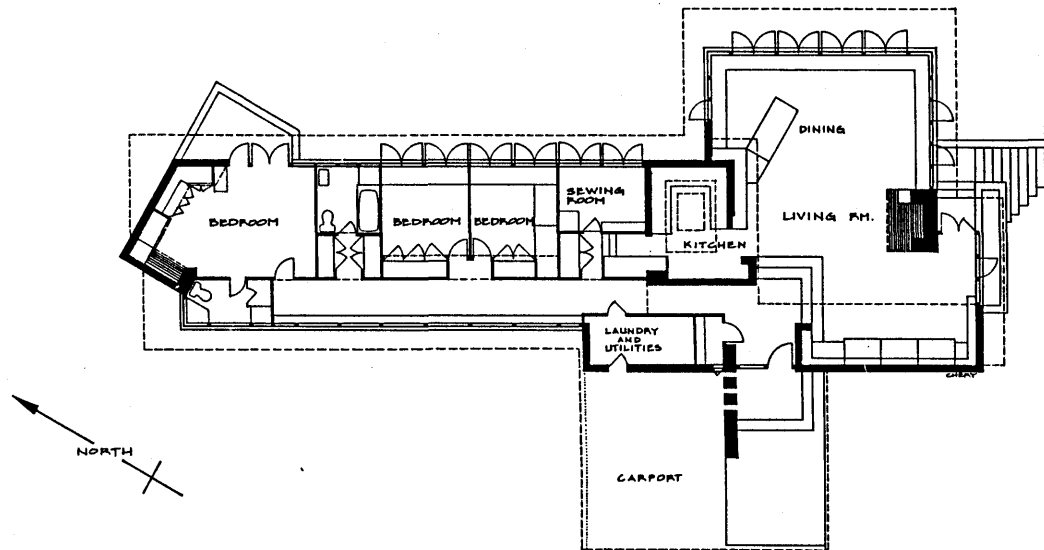
Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the nominated property coincides with Hillcrest Drive Addition, Klein's subdivision lot 6/sub of lot 5.

Boundary Justification

The boundary described above contains approximately 1 3/4 acres and consists of the Alsop House and its surrounding acreage. It is being nominated in its entirety because site was an integral part of usonian design in terms of Wright's philosophy of living in harmony with nature.

ALSOP HOUSE, OSKALOOSA, IOWA.



from Frank Lloyd Wright's Iowa Usonian's  
University of Washington Master's Thesis  
by Cheryl Peterson