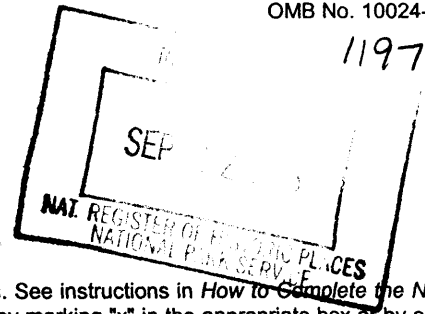


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

Historic name Selleh House
Other names / site number _____

2. Location

Street & number 1104 S. Mill Avenue not for publication
City or town Tempe vicinity
State Arizona Code AZ County Maricopa Code 013 Zip code 85281

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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.)

James W. Gorman AZSHPO 9/16/05
Signature of certifying official / Title Date
ARIZONA STATE PARKS
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 / Title _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:
 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] 11.5.05
Signature of the Keeper Date of action
Edson H. Beall

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- private (checked), public-local, public-State, public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box.)

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

Number of Resources Within Property

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

Table with 2 columns: Contributing, Noncontributing. Rows for buildings, sites, structures, objects, Total. Values: Contributing=1, Noncontributing=1, Total=1.

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.)

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.)

Modern: ranch style

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions.)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof clay tile

other steel

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 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.)

- Commerce
Entertainment/Recreation
Architecture

Period of Significance

1940-1955

Significant Dates

1940 (construction), 1941 (purchase by Selleh)

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above.)

Joseph "Joe" Selleh

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Kemper Goodwin

Narrative Statement of Significance

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

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(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: Tempe Historical Museum

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property less than one

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
1	12	412660	3697740	3	_____	_____	_____
2	_____	_____	_____	4	_____	_____	_____

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.)

11. Form Prepared By

Name / Title Mark E. Pry
 Organization Southwest Historical Services Date 6 September 2005
 Street & number 315 E. Balboa Drive Telephone (480) 968-2339
 City or town Tempe State Arizona Zip code 85282-3750

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

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

Photographs

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

Additional items

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

Property Owner

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

Name Jean Selleh
 Street & number 1104 S. Mill Avenue Telephone 480-967-6637
 City or town Tempe State Arizona Zip code 85281

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. 470 *et seq.*).

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

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Selleh House
Maricopa County, Arizona

Narrative Description

Summary

The Selleh House is a pre-Second World War custom house located on Mill Avenue in Tempe, across the street from Arizona State University. Built in 1940 of brick with a hipped, clay-tile roof, the house is believed to have been designed by Kemper Goodwin, a noted Tempe architect.

At the time of construction it had a simple but efficient rectangular plan and a detached garage at the rear of the lot. The garage was converted into an apartment in the late 1940s, and a shed-roof addition and patio were added to the rear of the house in 1958, but otherwise the house remains unchanged, making it a good example of an early Arizona suburban ranch house.¹ Its floor plan is very similar to that found in many tract houses built in the 1950s and 1960s in Arizona, but it also displays features more typically associated with custom-built prewar houses, such as the tile roof, tongue-and-groove interior ceilings, chimney, and interior brick walls.

Setting

Located on the west side of Mill Avenue, across the street from Grady Gammage Auditorium on the campus of Arizona State University, the Selleh House sits on a single city lot on the eastern edge of the Park Tract, one of Tempe's oldest subdivisions, which today forms part of an area known as the Maple-Ash Neighborhood. The entire block is occupied by single-family homes built before the Second World War—a contrast to adjacent blocks along Mill, especially to the north, which contain a mixture of houses, small businesses, churches, and community organizations.

The Selleh lot, like that of most of its neighbors, is irrigated and heavily vegetated. Also like most of its neighbors, the house has a small front yard and sits

relatively close to the street—a characteristic enhanced by the widening of Mill Avenue in 1960. Traffic along Mill is heavy during most of the day, as the street provides access not only to the university but also to downtown Tempe, which is three blocks north of the property. The lot's sideyards are narrow, with the yard on the south side visible from the street through a chain-link fence, and the yard on the north side hidden by a block wall and wooden gate.

Parking for the owner's automobile is in the rear, on a gravel pad under a steel canopy attached to the rear outbuilding, which once was a garage and now is an apartment. The fact that automobile access to the Selleh House is from a rear alley is one of several visible reminders of the house's prewar provenance.

Exterior

The Selleh House is built on a rectangular plan, with the long side facing east toward the street. The facade has a single entry, offset to the right, with a steel security screen and a panel-and-frame door. The entire house is constructed of red brick, and all of the windows are steel divided-light casements that have been painted white. The house is minimally ornamented; the most noteworthy features are a belt course of bricks at the window-sill level that runs across the facade and around part of the north and south elevations, and a large brick chimney that projects from the facade immediately to the right of the entry. Other ornamentation includes a steel trellis and eave support next to the entry, and an attached brick flower bed to the right of the chimney.

The original part of the house has a low-pitch hipped roof covered with Spanish tile. An L-shaped addition at the rear of the house, built in 1958, has a low-pitch shed roof. This addition is also constructed of red brick and also has steel casement windows, and the house's HVAC equipment sits on its roof. The inside of the "L" is filled by a concrete patio with a steel shed-roof canopy and brick fireplace/barbecue (which were built at the same time as the addition), so that the overall plan of the house together with its addition is

¹ The term "suburban ranch house" is used to distinguish this residential building type from a dwelling associated with a cattle or sheep ranch.

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Selleh House
Maricopa County, Arizona

rectangular. Two entries, a single door and a pair of French doors, face onto the patio.

At the rear of the lot sits a flat-roofed building that originally was the garage but was converted into an apartment sometime in the late 1940s. Built on an L-shaped plan, and constructed of red brick, the apartment has steel casement windows similar to those on the original house. Attached to the north elevation of this outbuilding is a steel shed-roof canopy that covers a gravel parking space sufficient to hold one vehicle, with additional uncovered parking space to the north. The apartment has two entries, one on the east elevation facing the yard, and the other on the north elevation facing the parking area. For this nomination, the outbuilding is considered a noncontributing resource.

Interior

With the 1958 addition, the Selleh House has a living room, dining room, kitchen, den/family room, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, and laundry/utility room. The living room occupies the front (northeast) corner of the house; this is where the fireplace and front entry are located. The dining room and kitchen are behind the living room, and the family room is behind them. Three of the bedrooms and one bathroom are accessed by a short hallway leading south from the living room, and the master bedroom, second bathroom, and laundry room are accessed by a doorway from one of the rear bedrooms. Access to the rear patio is from the master bedroom through double French doors, or from the family room through a single door.

All of the ceilings in the original house are covered with narrow tongue-and-groove boards and trimmed with cove molding. All of the interior walls in the house are brick; some have been painted and those in one room have been covered with knotty-pine paneling. The floor, which originally was exposed concrete, is now covered by wall-to-wall carpeting (in the bedrooms and living room) and Saltillo tile (in the dining room, family room, and kitchen).

Integrity

In the sixty-five years since its construction, little has been done to the Selleh House other than the 1958 rear addition, which required no structural alterations other than cutting openings in the rear wall of the original dwelling.

When the house was constructed in 1940, it had a simple rectangular plan, with a living room, dining room, kitchen, three bedrooms, and a single bathroom. This plan remains intact, and in particular the kitchen remains untouched, retaining its original cabinetry. Many of the house's distinguishing interior features (tongue-and-groove ceilings and exposed brick walls) remain intact as well. The house has been very well maintained and is in excellent condition, and the integrity of its historic features (windows, doors, door screens, brickwork, and roof tiles) is excellent as well.

Despite the shortening of the front yard when Mill Avenue was widened in 1960, the setting of the Selleh House today is very similar to that of earlier years. The block on which it sits remains one of single-family homes of similar (or earlier) vintage, and the yards of the house and its neighbors are still watered by the historic flood irrigation system.

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Selleh House
Maricopa County, Arizona

Narrative Statement of Significance

Summary

The Selleh House is being nominated for the National Register at the local level of significance under Criterion B, for its association with Tempe businessman and athletic booster Joe Selleh, and under Criterion C, as an example of an early custom-built suburban ranch house. It is also significant for its inferred association with Kemper Goodwin, a noted Tempe architect who practiced in the city from the 1930s to the 1970s.²

Joe Selleh was a prominent Tempe businessman during the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s who for many years operated Tempe's only sporting goods store. He was actively involved in the organization and promotion of youth sports in Tempe, and also in the promotion of athletics at his alma mater, Arizona State University. He was instrumental in establishing Tempe's modern parks and recreation program, and he was honored after his death in the naming of a Tempe park, Selleh Park. He also was honored by Arizona State, which named its track and field facility the Sun Angel Stadium/Joe Selleh Track, and by Tempe Union High School District, which created the Joe Selleh Award for outstanding athletes.

Kemper Goodwin was probably the most prolific architect to practice in Tempe, where he worked for forty years, designing everything from private homes to major educational buildings. Born and raised in Tempe, Goodwin worked for other architects and construction companies in Arizona and the Southwest for seventeen years beginning in 1928. In 1945 he opened his own architectural practice in Tempe. Over the next thirty years, until his retirement in 1975, Goodwin's work played a major role in shaping Tempe's modern built environment, especially on the campus of Arizona State University.

The Selleh House is significant as an example of how Arizona designers in the middle of the 20th century adapted the early principles of suburban ranch house design to accommodate the limits imposed by middle-class budgets and ordinary town lots. The design of the Selleh House was unusual for Tempe at the time it was built; its profile was low and horizontal, and it was devoid of such homey touches as shutters or a porch. It was a transitional house type that, for middle-class homeowners, helped bridge the architectural gap between the affordable bungalow and period revival houses of the 1920s, the "minimal traditional" houses of the 1930s, and the larger suburban ranch houses of the 1950s and 1960s.

The period of significance for the house runs from 1940, the year of its construction, to 1955, which marks the fifty-year cutoff for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

History of the Selleh House

The house was built in mid-1940 for Frederick T. Fahlen Jr. and his wife Marguerite, most likely from a design by Kemper Goodwin, at the time a young Tempe-born architect who was just beginning his designing career and had yet to establish his own practice. The cost of construction was \$3,500. Fahlen was a manager for Central Arizona Power and Light Company, the predecessor to Arizona Public Service (APS).

In December 1941, newlyweds Joe and Jean Selleh purchased the house from the Fahlens, who apparently moved to Phoenix when Frederick Fahlen was transferred there by his employer. Two years earlier, in 1939, Selleh had established his first sporting goods store in downtown Tempe, beginning a nearly thirty-year association with sports and recreation affairs in Tempe.

Soon after buying the house, Joe Selleh joined the military, forcing the Sellehs to vacate the house temporarily as Joe was assigned to bases away from Arizona. They retained ownership, however, and the property was rented during the war years.

² The attribution of the Selleh House design to Kemper Goodwin is not documented in writing but is based on an oral interview with the current owner of the house, Jean Selleh. According to her, Goodwin was a friend of the Selleh family and had told her on more than one occasion that he designed the house.

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Selleh House
Maricopa County, Arizona

The Sellehs returned to Tempe after the Second World War, moving back into their house on Mill Avenue. In 1947 Selleh established his second sporting goods store, the Joe Selleh Company, which soon became a Tempe institution. Not long after that, the couple made the first change to their house, converting the detached garage into a rental apartment. The next change came in 1958, when the rear addition and patio were built to accommodate their growing family, which eventually comprised two girls and three boys.

Joe Selleh died in 1966, and Jean continued to operate the sporting goods store until 1987, when it was closed. She remained in the house after her husband's death and lives there today.

Joe Selleh

A native of Texas, Joseph Selleh was born in Beaumont in 1905 and attended high school in Elgin, where he was a successful athlete, earning letters in football, basketball, baseball, track, and tennis. After graduating in 1923, he attended Southwest Texas State Teachers College, in San Marcos, and the University of Texas, in Austin. Before he had earned enough credits to graduate, he left college to pursue a career as a professional baseball player.

In 1928 Selleh was signed by the New York Giants and sent to Arizona to play on their farm team, the Phoenix Senators, which that year won the championship of the Arizona State League. His professional career soon ended, however, and he returned to college, enrolling at Arizona State Teachers College in Tempe. According to one source, Selleh played one season at second base for the ASTC Bulldogs; however, another source indicates that he was ineligible to play because of his brief professional career. What is certain is that in 1932 he completed his studies, graduated, and was hired by the college.

Selleh worked for his alma mater for two years, serving in several capacities. He was business manager of the Council of Associated Students, the student government organization, and he served as the business manager for the school's athletic programs. One college

historian, Dean Smith, later described his position as more or less equivalent to that of today's athletic director. Of course, ASTC's athletic program was small and poorly funded compared to today's, and Selleh's chief accomplishment in that position, Smith wrote, was that he "helped hold a financially-beleaguered athletic program together."

During his tenure at Arizona State Teachers College (which later became Arizona State University), Selleh coached the men's and women's golf teams and the baseball team, which he led for five seasons: 1932 (when the Bulldogs compiled a 5-7 record), 1933 (4-12), 1934 (7-10), 1935 (5-7), and 1936 (8-8). He also served as adviser to the student newspaper.

In 1934 Selleh resigned as graduate manager to take a position with the Wilson Sporting Goods Company as a traveling salesman, a job he would hold for some twenty years. In 1939 he founded his first sporting goods store, Joe Selleh Sporting Goods, which was located at 417 Mill Avenue in downtown Tempe. Two years later, in December 1941, he married Jean Wilson, a schoolteacher from Safford, and they bought and moved into the house at 1104 S. Mill Avenue.

War soon intervened, and Selleh interrupted his business venture to enlist in the Army Air Corps. He spent the Second World War assigned to various training bases in Texas, where among other accomplishments he was a successful post baseball team manager. After the war's conclusion, the Sellehs returned to Tempe—Jean had accompanied him to his postings—and to the house on Mill Avenue.

Selleh resumed working for the Wilson Sporting Goods Company, and in 1947 he opened a new store, the Joe Selleh Company. The store was a partnership between Joe and Jean Selleh, as Jean managed the store during Joe's frequent absences from town on business for Wilson, for whom he continued as a salesman until the mid-1950s. After Joe's death in 1966, Jean continued to own and manage the store for another twenty-one years, until 1987, when it closed.

Joe Selleh Company was the first sporting goods store in postwar Tempe, and it became a major provider

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of athletic wear, equipment, and uniforms to the teams, students, and players from Tempe's elementary, junior high, and high schools, and also to students at Arizona State College (later Arizona State University). The store also sold Boy Scout equipment and clothing, as well as men's and boy's clothing. For years it was an institution in downtown Tempe, where it sat on the northwest corner of Mill Avenue and 7th Street, at 624 S. Mill Avenue. It remained there until 1987, when the store was closed and the building demolished to make way for the first phase of the Centerpoint redevelopment project.

Selleh's work in the store brought him into regular contact with athletes, coaches, and managers from Tempe and surrounding communities. This, combined with his own experience as a professional baseball player and as a coach at his alma mater, led him to take a leading role in the development of youth sports and recreation programs in Tempe.

Selleh served on the committee that developed Tempe Beach into the city's first public park, and he was active in promoting and developing a city recreation program, serving for a time as chair of the Tempe Parks Board. He was instrumental in establishing the American Legion baseball program in Tempe, which eventually became the nucleus for the Tempe Parks and Recreation Department's summer baseball program, and he served as East Central District commissioner for American Legion baseball from 1962 to 1966. He also served as a trustee of the Amateur Athletic Union.

Selleh was an active booster for athletics at his alma mater, Arizona State College (later Arizona State University). He participated in the founding and early growth of the Sun Angel Foundation, a booster group established in 1946 to support Arizona State College, and in particular its athletic programs. For years he served as the head timer at Arizona State track and field events.

He also was active in Tempe community affairs, serving as Tempe District chair for the Boy Scouts of America, as vice president of the Tempe Community Council, and as president of the Tempe Chamber of Commerce. In 1956 he was selected by the Bob Finch

Post of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) as Tempe's "Citizen of the Year. He also was honored by the Tempe Jaycees with their Distinguished Service Award.

On 22 October 1966, Joe Selleh died of a heart attack suffered at Sun Devil Stadium while attending an Arizona State football game against Oregon State.

Selleh has been honored in Tempe by the naming of two recreational facilities. In 1971, five years after his death, the City of Tempe dedicated Selleh Park, located at Los Feliz and Aspen drives in Tempe, in his honor. In 1976, Arizona State University's new track and field stadium was named the Sun Angel Stadium/Joe Selleh Track, in recognition of his years of service as a booster and head timer at university track meets.

Kemper Goodwin

Kemper Goodwin was born in Tempe in 1906, the son of Garfield Goodwin, a Tempe businessman who had been a star athlete at Tempe Normal School (now known as Arizona State University) and in his later years served on the school's governing board when it was named Arizona State Teachers College.

Kemper Goodwin attended Tempe High School but left before graduating, going to California to study drafting at Polytechnic High School in Long Beach. After completing high school there in 1924, he entered the architecture program at the University of Southern California. In 1928 he returned to Tempe without a degree—he had only been interested in the architecture courses—and sought work as an architect. Soon he was hired by the firm of Lescher and Mahoney, which was then one of Phoenix's leading design firms, and he had earned his Arizona architect's license by 1931.

The Depression eventually cost him his job, however, and Goodwin took to the road as an itinerant architect. Traveling from town to town in New Mexico, Texas, and parts of the South, Goodwin worked for nearly eighty-five firms, earning between \$4 and \$7 per week. He eventually settled in El Paso, where he joined a firm headed by Percy McGhee and, in 1934, married McGhee's daughter Mickey.

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In 1935 Goodwin returned to Arizona to work once again for Lescher and Mahoney—a job he later surmised was given him because his father was then on the Arizona State Teachers College board, and the architectural firm wanted to be in a good position to get work on the WPA- and PWA-financed building jobs that were expected to take place on the campus. After working for Lescher and Mahoney for seven years, during which he helped design several ASTC buildings including the Moeur Building, Goodwin was offered a job at the college. Reluctant to see him leave their firm, Royal Lescher and Les Mahoney offered to keep Goodwin on their payroll and let him work full-time on projects at Arizona State, an arrangement that continued until he finally did leave the firm in 1942.

Immediately after leaving Lescher and Mahoney, Goodwin signed on with Del Webb's construction company, with Williams Field as his first project. He remained with Webb until 1944, when he left to take a position with Womack Construction. In April 1945 he hung out his own shingle as an architect, opening an office in Tempe in what he called the "Dog House," a small outbuilding situated behind his house at 111 E. 5th Street.

Goodwin remained in practice in Tempe for thirty years, until his retirement in 1975. His son Michael joined the firm in 1967, and at its peak the firm—known as Michael & Kemper Goodwin Architecture—had forty employees. Kemper served several terms on the Tempe City Council (1936-38 and 1948-54) and was at one time president of the Tempe Chamber of Commerce. He also chaired the Arizona Association of Architects and was a member of the Arizona State Board of Certification for Architects. He died on 24 December 1997.

During his career Goodwin was known primarily for his public buildings, and in particular for the many buildings he designed for Arizona State College (later Arizona State University) and for local school districts in the Salt River Valley and elsewhere in Arizona (more than two hundred school buildings by one count). His designs, which tended to reflect the styles that were

dominant at the time, ranged from Neo-Classical (West Hall at ASU) to modern (Salt River Project Building in Phoenix).

Goodwin's impact on the built environment of Tempe was substantial. He designed or helped design such Arizona State University landmarks as West Hall (1936), Moeur Building (1938), Lyceum Theater, Memorial Union (1956), Wilson Hall, Life Sciences Building, and Physical Sciences Building. Two other campus projects, the Language and Literature Building and Mathematics Building, were done jointly with his son Michael.

Elsewhere in the Tempe area he designed the Tempe Woman's Club (1936), which is now listed on the National Register; Tempe High School (1956); and the Salt River Project headquarters located near the border of Tempe and Phoenix (1968). He also designed many homes in the Tempe area. The Selleh House, which was built while he was still working for Lescher and Mahoney, appears to be one of his earliest residential designs in the city.

Suburban Ranch House Architecture in the 1940s

The Selleh House was built in 1940, when the suburban ranch house was first appearing on the American scene. At the time, the ranch house was not yet the architectural institution it is today. When the term "ranch house" was used in the late 1930s and early 1940s, usually it was to refer to sprawling custom homes designed by architects like Cliff May and others, whose work was confined mostly to California. But certain features of these large homes—their low profiles, open floor plans, large common spaces, and convenient one-story designs—caught the attention of the middle class, and builders began incorporating them into smaller, more modest dwellings.

The prototypical ranch houses, which usually were designed by architects, borrowed many of their best-known features, as well as their name, from the sprawling adobe dwellings built by Spanish and Mexican *rancheros* in California in the late 18th century and early 19th century. Using building materials long

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Selleh House
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associated with the indigenous architecture of the Southwest, such as adobe, stucco, wood (for shingles and exposed beams), and clay (for roof tiles), these suburban ranch houses were low-profile, one-story buildings with wings surrounding a patio or courtyard. Their interior spaces, especially in the common areas, were large and airy, and the houses were designed to facilitate "outdoor living" by blurring the distinction between interior and exterior spaces.

In selectively resuscitating California's *ranchero* heritage and applying it to modern suburban architecture, designers like Cliff May linked their creations to a romantic and gracious style of living associated in the popular mind with the "Spanish Dons" who colonized southern California.

Naturally houses of this scale and type were expensive to build and therefore beyond the means of ordinary American home buyers, especially in the period between the Depression and the Second World War. Yet the American public's fascination with California, and with the informal style of living associated with the state, was so strong that builders had no choice but to find ways to incorporate features from the prototypical ranch houses into the smaller, more affordable homes they were erecting for middle-class Americans.

Starting the early 1940s, and accelerating in the decade after the Second World War, the suburban ranch house underwent a transformation that eventually made it the dominant form of tract housing in the United States. The wings and ells of the larger prototypical ranch houses contracted or disappeared, to be replaced by more modest L-shaped plans on larger houses, or, on smaller ones, by false gables and other roof treatments that disguised the fact that the houses were rectangular boxes. Front porches vanished, as ranch houses turned their backs on the street in favor of a more private orientation toward the driveway or back yard.

The courtyards on the prototypical ranch houses became patios in their imitators. Some of these patios were large covered spaces, but many (especially on smaller homes) were little more than concrete slabs attached to the rear of the house. Picture windows and

sliding glass doors (which initially were called sliding glass walls or window walls) served as the link between the indoors and the outdoors. Second stories were eliminated, and low-pitch roofs (typically side-gabled or hipped) with substantial eaves were used to give ranch houses the low, often rambling profile that, more than anything else, was their distinguishing feature.

The prototypical architect-designed ranch house was not only a type of house but also an architectural style. It was recognizably Californian, thanks to its designers' consistent use of rustic materials and their careful borrowing from the state's Hispanic architectural traditions. However, as the ranch house became more popular nationally, and as it was adopted by builders catering to the middle class, it lost its association with a specific bill of materials and with recognizable regional traits. Soon the "ranch house" was any dwelling that, as the editors of *Sunset* magazine wrote in 1946, "provides for an informal type of living and is not definitely marked by unmistakable style symbols."

By then the basic design concepts behind the ranch house were well established. As *Sunset's* editors wrote, "Most of us describe any one-story house with a low, close-to-the-ground silhouette as a ranch house. When a long wide porch is added to this form, almost everyone accepts the name. And when wings are added and the house seems to ramble all over the site, the name is established beyond repute. The close-to-the-ground look of a ranch house is of secondary importance to its being actually on ground level. The ability to move in and out of your house freely, without the hindrance of steps, is one of the things that makes living in it pleasant and informal."³

Architectural Significance of the Selleh House

The Selleh House is an excellent example of how Arizona builders and designers in the middle of the 20th century adapted the early principles of ranch house

³ *Sunset Magazine, Western Ranch Houses* (San Francisco: Lane Publishing, 1946).

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design to the limits imposed by middle-class budgets and ordinary town lots.

At first glance its resemblance to the larger houses that gave birth to the term "ranch house" seems fanciful. The Selleh House lacks wings or projections, and as originally built it also lacked any kind of patio or outdoor living space. In short, it was a simple box conventionally sited on a town lot.

However, its profile differs substantially from that of most neighboring houses built at the same time. It appears lower and sleeker, largely because it is oriented with its long side facing the street. This effect is accentuated by the low-pitch roof and overhanging eaves, the prominently placed chimney that provides a contrasting vertical element, and by the absence of a front porch.

The house employs typical early ranch house materials not only on the exterior, where brick was used for the walls and clay tiles for the roof, but also inside, where the walls are exposed brick and the floors poured concrete.

The Selleh House is significant not only because of its design, but also because of its relative rarity. Few houses of any type or style were built in Tempe during the late 1930s and early 1940s, owing to the financial constraints imposed by the Depression and the material shortages created by the Second World War. For example, in 1938 only twenty-five new homes were built in Tempe (construction data from 1939 and 1940 are not available).

Furthermore, it was not inevitable that a homeowner or builder in Tempe at this time would have chosen to erect a ranch-influenced house at all. The type of dwelling labeled by the McAlesters as "minimal traditional" was quite popular during these years, and a survey of architectural publications from 1939 and 1940 reveals a strong bias in favor of such traditional building forms as the Cape Cod. Indeed, when a house the size of the Selleh House was to be constructed, it appears that the Cape Cod or a variation thereon—with wood

cladding, ornamental shutters, and a side-gabled roof—was the preferred style in most parts of the country.⁴

The design of the Selleh House, then, was unusual for its time: low-profiled, presenting its longest elevation to the street, and devoid of such homey touches as shutters or a porch. True to the formula spelled out by *Sunset*, the house exhibited no features then (or now) associated with a recognizable architectural style. Only the clay tile roof, which was vaguely "Spanish" or Californian in appearance, could be said to have had any stylistic or regional associations.

Today the Selleh House serves as an example of an early, transitional ranch house—a type of house that, for middle-class homeowners, helped bridge the architectural gap between the affordable bungalow and period revival houses of the 1920s, the "minimal traditional" houses of the 1930s, and the tract ranch houses of the 1950s and 1960s.

⁴ This bias is most apparent in the popular home magazines, like *Better Homes and Gardens*, and less pronounced in the architectural press.

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Verbal Boundary Description

Lot 9, Park Tract, Tempe (parcel no. 132-45-025).

Boundary Justification

The property consists of the lot on which the nominated building stands.

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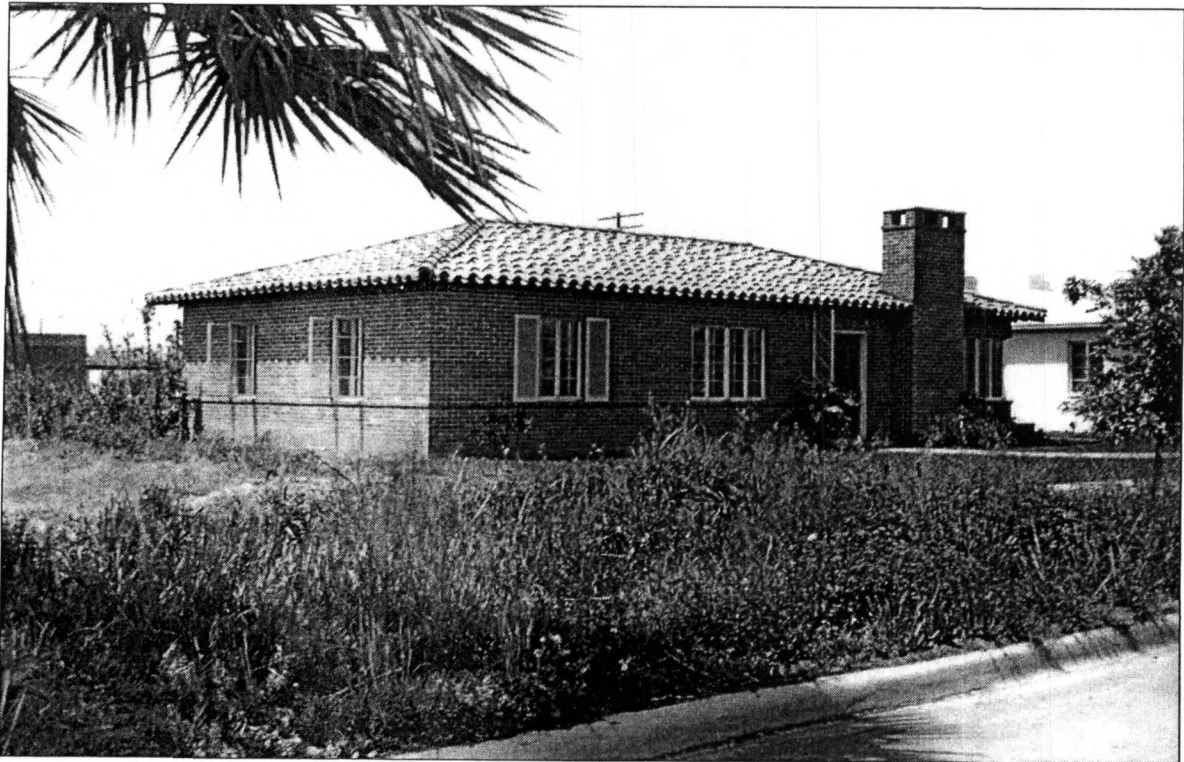
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Historical Photographs

Facade View

This photograph, taken in 1942, shows the house before the rear addition was built. The view is toward the northwest from Mill Avenue.



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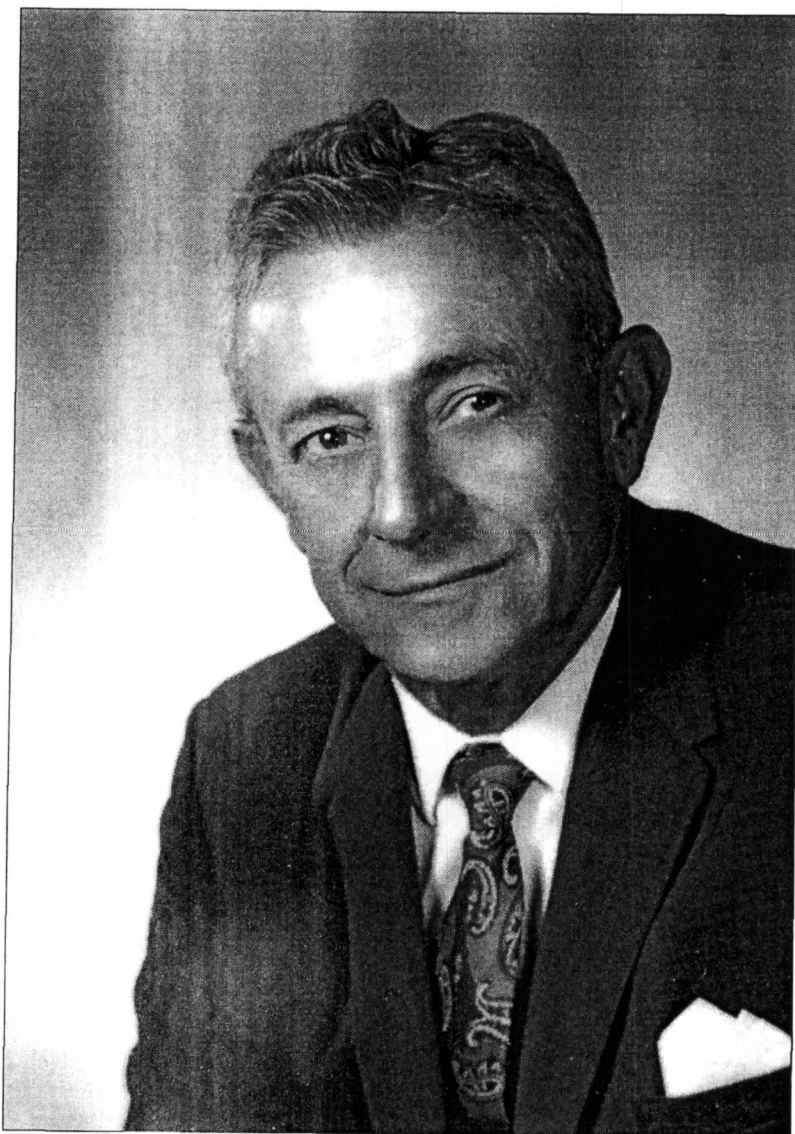
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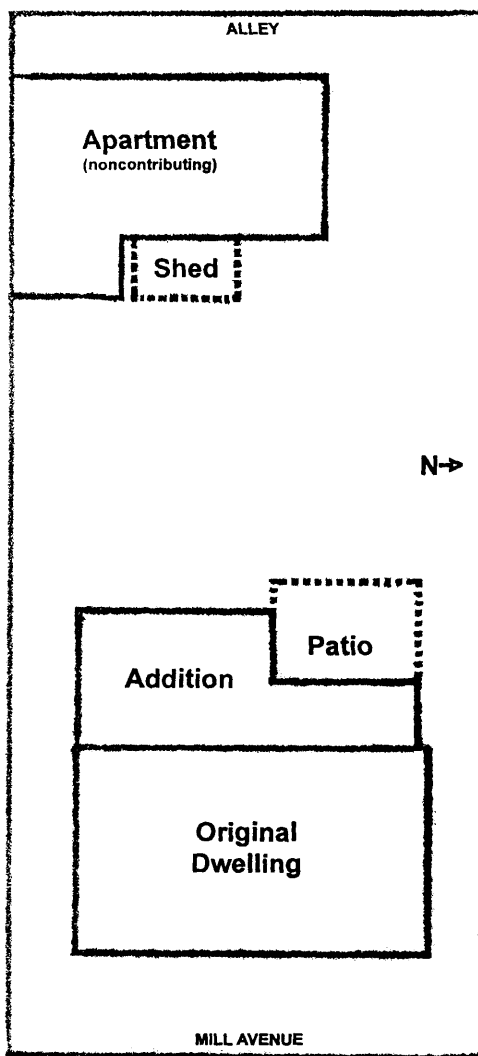
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Site Plan

Sketch map of the property (not drawn to scale), as of October 2004.



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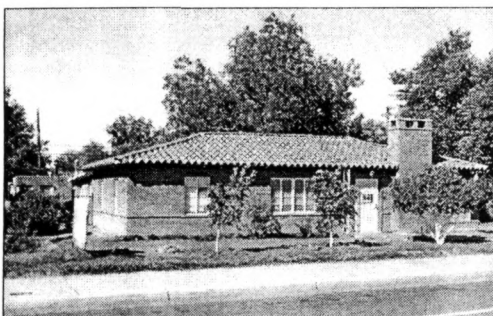
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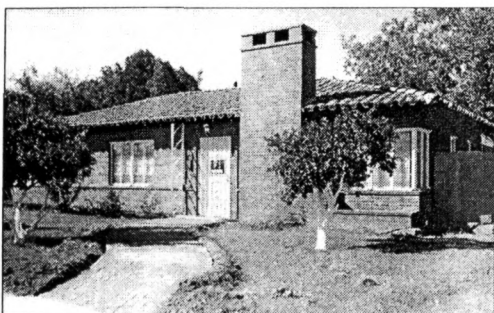
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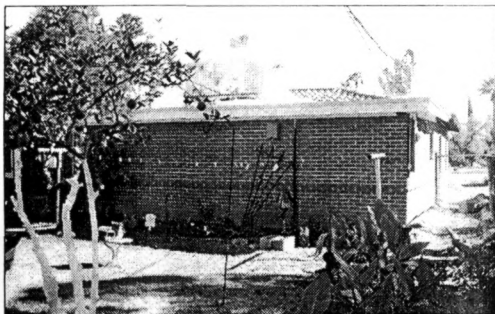
Property: Selleh House, Maricopa County, Arizona
Photographer: Mark E. Pry
Date taken: 26 October 2004
Location of negatives: Tempe Historical Museum; Tempe, Arizona



No. 1 : Front view of house: east-facing facade and south elevation, looking west from Mill Avenue. The apartment at the rear of the lot can be seen on the left, as can part of the 1958 addition to the rear of the house.



No. 2 : Exterior view: east-facing facade and north elevation, looking southwest from Mill Avenue.



No. 3 : Exterior view: rear wall of 1958 addition, looking east from the back yard.

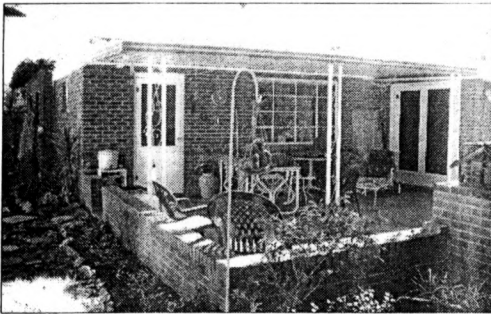
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No. 4 : Exterior view: rear patio and 1958 addition, looking east from the back yard.