

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.

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JUL 23 2019

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

1. Name of Property

historic name Craney Spec Houses Historic District

other names/site number Lake Elbert Heights, Leedyland, The Drexel Avenue Colony (FMSF# PO08212)

2. Location

street & number Drexel Avenue NE (between 15th and 16th Streets) ☐ not for publication

city or town Winter Haven ☐ vicinity

state Florida code FL county Polk code 105 zip code 33881

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.)

Glisse Stone

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

6/18/19

Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation
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 certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the 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
☐ See continuation sheet.

- ☐ removed from the National
Register.

- ☐ other, (explain) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

Janis Sullivan

8.27.2019

Craney Spec Houses Historic District
Name of Property

Polk County, Florida
County and State

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)

- ☐ buildings
☒ district
☐ site
☐ structure
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

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

Contributing

Noncontributing

8

3

buildings

sites

structures

objects

8

3

total

Name of related multiple property listings

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

Architectural Resources of the Sarasota School of Architecture

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 MOVEMENT/Sarasota School

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete

walls Concrete, Wood, Glass

roof Asphalt

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.)

Property is:

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

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 36) 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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING/DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1956-58

Significant Dates

1956 - 58

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Gene Leedy, Architect

Primary location of additional data:

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State Agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☒ University
- ☐ Other

Name of Repository

University of Florida, Gainville. Gene Leedy Archives

10. Geographical DataAcreage of Property 4.75 Acres**UTM References**

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1	7	4	3	1	0	4	1	3	1	0	0	4	3	5
	Zone		Easting			Northing									
2	1	7	4	3	1	1	8	0	3	1	0	0	4	3	5

3	1	7	4	3	1	2	0	7	3	1	0	0	2	6	0
	Zone		Easting			Northing									
4	1	7	4	3	1	0	3	2	3	1	0	0	2	5	9

☒ 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 Byname/title Judi Francis, Writer and Preservationist/Max Adriel Imberman, Historic Preservationistorganization Leedy Homeowners Association date April 2019street & number 140 Pacific Street, Brooklyn NY 11201 telephone 917-864-5282city or town Brooklyn state New York zip code 11201**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 SHPO or FPO.)

name Various

street & number _____ telephone _____

city or town _____ state _____ zip code _____

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 amend 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 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 Reduction Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

Craney Spec Houses Historic District

Name of Property

Polk County, Florida

County and State

Architectural Resources of the Sarasota
School of Architecture

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number 7 Page 1

SUMMARY

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District, located in Winter Haven, Florida, is comprised of eleven homes, ten of which were designed by Gene Leedy, a modernist architect notable for his Sarasota School of Architecture-styled design. Located at the crest of a hill in what was once a grapefruit grove on the east side of Lake Elbert, in the north-east quadrant of Winter Haven, all eleven homes are contiguous to each other within one block on Drexel Avenue NE. Ten of the houses, built in 1956 and offered for sale in 1957, were originally developed by the lumber business owner and real estate developer Richard “Dick” Craney in the 1950s. One lot within the district, believed to have held grove worker housing, remained outside Craney’s reach when he acquired land for his development. As a result, that particular lot did not receive a Leedy-designed house, and has been architecturally distinct from its surrounding homes since the Craney development was first built.

The ten Craney Spec Houses within the district are single-story, exposed post and beam structures, each built on a 16’ grid. The houses were designed with the maximum-possible length of beveled wood decking and laminated beams that Craney’s Imperial Lumber Company could supply.¹ Nine of the ten retain their original concrete block wall, a feature that connects the main residence with its associated out-building. Eight of the remaining homes’ concrete block walls connect with a street-facing eight-foot block fence that envelops each home within a compound-forming set of courtyards. The surviving Craney Spec Houses in the district contain two Leedy-designed models which were named “Standard” or “Mark I” and “Courtyard” or “Mark II”.² The district contains eight contributing buildings and three non-contributing. One of the non-contributing buildings was not a Leedy-design, and two of the surviving Craney Spec Houses have received significant enough alterations to lose their contributing status.

SETTING

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District is located on a single block of Drexel Avenue NE in a residential area east of Lake Elbert. Winter Haven, the second-most populated city in Polk County, is home to approximately 42,000 residents. The homes in the Craney Spec Houses Historic District are among the earliest-built in their area, which at the time of their construction was predominantly used as a citrus grove. The district lies on a street grid that, for the most part, was developed for domestic residences after the Craney Spec Houses were built.

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District is located two miles east of Winter Haven’s historic city center, at the junction of 1st Street and Central Avenue. The largest city proximate to Winter Haven is Lakeland, 16 miles due west. Five miles to the north is the historic citrus distribution center of Lake

¹ Gene Leedy, interview with author, Winter Haven, October 16, 2018

² “Craney Homes Create a New Dimension for Living”, *Winter Haven Daily News Chief*, March 3, 1957 pgs. 2-3

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Alfred while another major citrus distribution center, Dundee, lies six miles due east. Bartow, the seat of Polk County, is 14 miles to the south east of this community.

The homes in the Craney Spec Houses Historic District were originally designed to reflect and enhance their arboreal surroundings. Their architect, Gene Leedy, strove to incorporate native citrus trees into the homes' landscapes, both around each property and within each home's courtyard. Despite the homes' relative brightness, with their long walls of floor-to-ceiling sliding glass panels and doors, the homes were engulfed by mature grapefruit trees that cast shadows over the unit decks.³ These trees, along with specific design elements, helped reduce the need for air conditioning in sunny, tropical Florida. Most of the contributing houses in the district still retain at least one citrus tree in their yard as well as mature trees because of the care taken from the development's earliest days to preserve their environmental setting. This effort was novel and notable in a time period when Floridian development often sought to overcome nature through clear-cutting land preparation. In 2019, four of the ten Craney homes still lack central air-conditioning, further evidence of the successful measures Leedy took to incorporate, and even tame, the environment through thoughtful and prescient design.⁴

Since the 1950s, the farmland that originally surrounded the Craney Spec Houses Historic District) has been populated by residential development primarily consisting of modest single-story ranch homes. These other homes are complementary to the Craney Spec Houses in both size and setback, but the elements that differentiated the Craney homes in 1957 from their surroundings are still evident today.⁵ Intended to be the seeds of a new kind of community, the Craney Spec Houses were created with a design frame that was new to the Southeast but emanating from this region in particular, during this period in history. The loss of the remaining citrus groves surrounding the original houses shortly after their construction also reflects the development of Winter Haven as Craney and Leedy intended and anticipated.

³ Augustus Henry King IV, interview with author, Winter Haven/Troy Alabama, March 19, 2019. King recalled how dark the homes seemed when he came to play with his cousins on Drexel Ave when he was a child. Despite the homes' long rectangular sides made only of floor to ceiling glass walls. His recollections were that the mature grapefruit trees and roof overhang provided considerable shade from Florida's unforgiving sun, evident in original photographs of the houses in 1957.

⁴ Jan Hochstim, *Florida Modern. Residential Architecture 1949 – 1970*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc. 2004, pg. 28

⁵ Jan Hochstim, *Florida Modern. Residential Architecture 1949 – 1970*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc. 2004, pg. 192. Hochstim expands upon the differences embodied in the Sarasota School homes vis a vis other homes at this time, "(this region) continued in the traditional styles or mimicked what was being built by Levitt in NY and PAwith no recognition that they were meant for a land and climate totally different from their precedents."

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Craney Spec Houses Historic District

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NARRATIVE DESCRIPTION

The Leedy-designed homes within the Craney Spec Houses Historic District are built upon similarly-sized lots along Drexel Avenue NE ranging from 75 to 90 feet wide on their street frontage and 140 feet in depth. The one lot that Dick Craney was unable to purchase or develop is slightly larger than those he did, at approximately 100 feet wide along the street frontage but still 140 feet in depth.

The grouping of Leedy-designed houses within the Craney Spec Houses Historic District consists of two defined home designs. These designs were named “Standard” or “Mark I,” and “Courtyard” or “Mark II.” Seven of the Leedy-designed houses within the district are classified as Mark I and three are classified as Mark II. All of these houses were built in 1956 and were offered for sale in March 1957.⁶ Each of the houses conformed to one of the models, and each of the houses within each of the models started out the same. Changes over time have impacted the uniformity of the designs within each model but not their overall associations to grouping or to the time in which they were built.

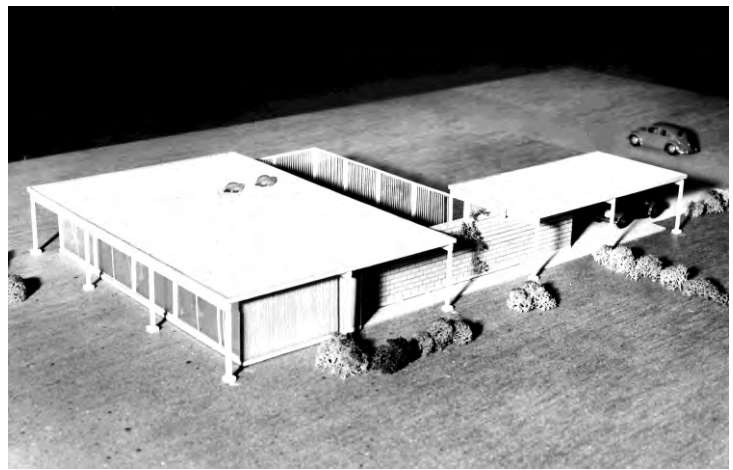


Figure 1: Balsa wood model of Mark I or “Standard” houses later built in the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. Photo attributed to Gene Leedy. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

The Mark I houses began as a 32’ by 48’ rectangle (Figure 1). The houses had 1000 square feet of interior space configured in an open floor plan. The Mark I houses also had a secondary structure or “outbuilding” which shielded an open carport (since closed in as a garage in some cases). Mark I houses featured a mechanical building that originally provided an additional 90 square feet of interior space. The combined carport/out-building is situated perpendicular to the main residence, and is connected by a concrete block wall. All of these homes retain these defining features today. This wall connects the two structures and borders the long walk to each home’s front door as well as framing each home’s primary interior courtyard. The homes’ horizontal and vertical planes are manifest in the exposed post and beam framing members, the flat roof line with a 3’ overhang and the exposed beveled, red western cedar double tongue and groove decking and interior ceilings, and glass sliding doors and glass-glazed walls along each residence’s two long sides of their rectangular main residence box.

⁶ “Craney Homes Create a New Dimension for Living”, Winter Haven Daily News Chief, March 3, 1957 pgs 1-4

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Mark II houses within the Craney Spec Houses Historic District were originally slightly smaller than the Mark I houses, at just over 900 square feet of interior living space for the main residence and 80 square feet for the outbuilding. This Leedy design placed the rectangular main residence parallel to the smaller, rectangular mechanicals/carport outbuilding. One roof unified both structures. Like its sister, the Mark II model had exposed post and beam framing, floor to ceiling sliding glass walls, a flat roof, luan interior walls, and common pressed wood-chip board elevated to a major design feature for closet doors throughout its three-bedroom open living-area floor plan. What made this model distinct from its companion design was its novel, open-air, interior lanai or courtyard within the main living space itself, framed on three sides by concrete block and on the fourth side by another wall of sliding glass doors opening to the home's living and dining area.

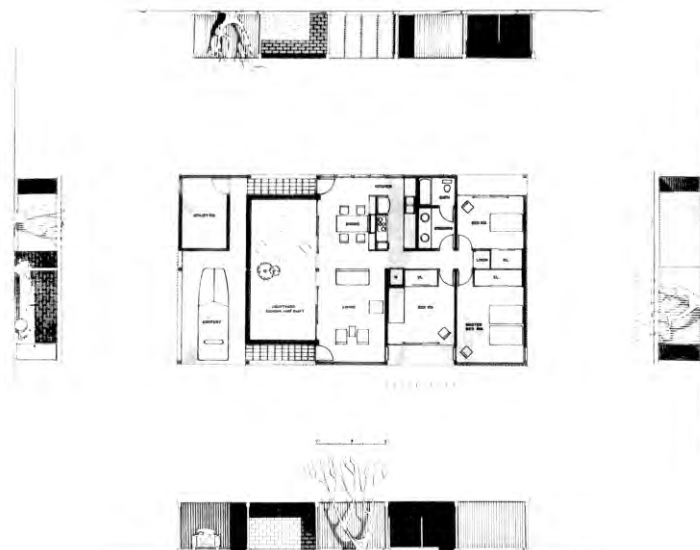


Figure 2: Floor plan of the Mark II or “Courtyard” houses later built in the Craney Spec Houses Historic District, drawn by Gene Leedy in 1956. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida.

All ten Craney Spec Houses are situated on their lots as originally built in 1956 and most still exhibit their honest use of materials and original lines that help them stand out as Sarasota School structures among the other residential homes in the surrounding area (Photo 1). However, two of the houses have received alterations which damage their integrity of design enough to render them non-contributing to the district.

Contributing Buildings

Eight of the original ten homes built by Craney and designed by Leedy are contributing resources to the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. All of the contributing buildings are single-story, exposed post and beam structures built on a 16' grid, in keeping with the maximum length of beveled wood decking and laminated beams that Craney's Imperial Lumber Company could supply.⁷ All eight contributing

⁷ Gene Leedy, interview with author, October 16, 2018. Asked specifically about other authors' references to unit decking being made of a different material with conflicting sizing, Leedy recalled clearly that the Craney homes used western red cedar with the specific profiles, including the decking's beveled edges, 4"x 6" double tongue and grooves, and 16' lengths, as specifications Craney's lumber and fabrication businesses could source or "had on hand". Jan Hochstim, *Florida Modern*, Rizzoli, 2004, pg. 212, in his description of 1518 Drexel Ave NE also confirms Leedy's willingness to design with the

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buildings retain their original concrete block wall that connects the main residence with its out-building, as well as their exposed ceiling and roof deck cedar beams. Seven of the eight houses today have their main and outbuildings connected to a street-facing 8' concrete block fence that envelops each home in a compound-forming set of courtyards.

The residence at 1518 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 2) is the furthest west of the Craney Spec Houses on this block, located at the southwest corner of the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. It was the first house constructed of the set and is a Mark I model home. It was occupied by architect Gene Leedy from its 1957 opening until his death in November, 2018. This home presents its original open, street-facing carport, signature Sarasota School horizontal and vertical planes with flat roof profiles, 4" x 4" vertical and 2" x 8" triple laminated weight bearing horizontal beam framing that "floats" over the concrete slab foundation (visible in the open car-port). The structure's vertical lines and horizontal planes are also carried through the home's original T-111 siding, and in the concrete block wall that connects the main residence with its original outbuilding, visible from the street. The property's perimeter block fencing is evident in two parts. The first part is the eight-foot high concrete block fence that shields the home's glass walls from the street and also provides the street facing wall of a second outbuilding containing two bedrooms and an additional bath, as built in the late 1960's. A lower, 3' tall concrete block "knee wall" fence defines this home's outer most, street-facing perimeter, and furthers the compound-like feel to this relatively modest sized property.



Figure 3: Photo of 1518 Drexel Ave NE, Gene Leedy's home, as it appeared in 1957, prior to replacing the original T-111 fence with the solid concrete block wall that provided greater privacy. The architect's wife, Marjorie Ingram, whom he married in 1958, had only one condition to living in a "Leedyland" glass house and that was to have a more permanent block wall fence installed for another owner at that time. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

Leedy's stepdaughter, Helen Patterson, whose mother Marjorie Ingram married Leedy in 1958, remembers her mother's one condition to living in a Craney Spec House: a concrete block wall fence to replace the street-facing T-111 framed wooden fence evident in the home's original photographs. With more than 70% of each home's walls made of floor to ceiling glass sliding doors and glass panel inserts, it was a natural reaction to living in the Craney Spec Houses to want a more substantial fence. All of the Craney Spec Houses homeowners grew to desire a more solid compound forming 8' fence, too,

materials and restrictions the developer imposed, yet was uniquely able to stay within the confines that defined the Sarasota School's tenets, too.

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particularly as new homes grew up around the district, replacing the grapefruit trees that had provided natural privacy, just two years before.^{8 9}

The residence at 1518 Drexel Avenue NE also contains Leedy's signature "voids" – in this case, east and west-side yards enclosed within the compound but visible from the street, creating courtyards within courtyards and providing the empty space between the structures that also helps separate one property from the next.

1518 Drexel Avenue NE retains its 3-foot wide roof-overhang, partially visible from the street, shielding the home's main residence and outbuildings from the sun. Until Hurricane Irma in 2017, this home was surrounded by mature trees. These trees fell or were substantially weakened and removed after that storm, but the home was preserved. A key aspect of the Sarasota School of Architecture was the way in which the architects adapted their modern structures to the local climate. In these homes, the 8' concrete block fencing has created a micro-climate, as well as served as armor against extreme weather, helping to protect these homes over many decades.

1518 Drexel Avenue NE's 1200-square-foot main residence maintains its Sarasota School signature transparency of floor to ceiling sliding glass walls and "honest" structural bones including its exposed western red cedar double tongue and groove, beveled interior ceilings still visible in the roof overhangs from the street view. Interior walls are made of cativo luan, articulated with one inch cativo moldings, interior closet doors made of common pressed board elevated to a main design feature, stained and cut to facilitate opening.



Figure 4: Gene Leedy's home at 1518 Drexel Avenue circa 1959/60. This image shows the block wall replacing the original T-111 perimeter fencing, as well as the citrus tree in the backyard. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

⁸ Helen King Patterson, eldest daughter by marriage of Gene Leedy to Marjorie Ingram Leedy, interviewed by author, February 8, 2019

⁹ The effects of living in a glass house were debated both during and after these homes were built, as enumerated by Domin and King, *Paul Rudolph: The Florida Houses* (Princeton Architectural Press, 2002) pgs. 50-51. Leedy's willingness to adapt his utopian vision of complete transparency is realized in these fence alterations over time, as it was not only his new wife who felt the necessity of greater screening but his neighbors as well.

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Leedy was scrupulous about the concrete block wall that unites the outbuilding to the main residence at 1518. He never painted any block wall and resisted entreaties for a different color, protecting his own concrete block walls from paint for over 70 years, as they stand today.¹⁰

The residence at 1517 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 3), situated across from the Leedy residence at 1518 Drexel Avenue NE, is a Mark I or “Standard” model home and has retained all of the original design features: Open car-port, flat roof, clearly visible vertical and horizontal exposed post and beam framing, main residence footprint and out-building as-built, 4” x 6” beveled, double tongue and groove roof decking and stained exterior and interior ceilings, visible to the street. It also has its original open floor plan, jalousies in both the outbuilding and kitchen windows, floor to ceiling glass sliding doors and glass panel inserts, and no central air conditioning nor any other building enlargement, though invisible to the street view.



Figure 5: Early photograph of the Mark I or Standard model back yard at 1518 Drexel Ave NE, showing the long expanse of sliding glass walls that were characteristic of the Sarasota School structures' transparency and adaptation to the region's high temperatures. The 3' roof overhang around the structure's perimeter shaded it from the sun in an era when air conditioning was not common. Photo circa 1957. Note the architect's drafting table in the middle bedroom/office. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida.



Figure 6: 2018 photograph of the interior void at 1517 Drexel Avenue NE, typical of the Craney Spec Houses' interior courtyards. Source: Judi Francis.

¹⁰ Gene Leedy as interviewed by author on October 16, 2018 and Saffie Leedy Farris, architect's daughter, interviewed by author on February 6, 2019.

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National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
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In this residence's entrance courtyard, the Leedy void treatment is evident from the street through the metal gate that provides further privacy and security to the compound. This home is the only home that has also retained its sound absorbing, dampness-avoiding, easy-care cork flooring throughout the main residence, along with its original three bedroom and two bath layout with one bath and the kitchen completely intact today. A pool and its street-perimeter concrete block fence are the only improvements over 60 years.

The residence at 1530 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 4) is one of the three Mark II home models built in 1956. This home retains its exposed post and beam framing, flat roof profile, T-111 siding and long walk from the now enclosed carport to the front door, visible to the street. It has its original glass walls and sliders, moldings, and baseboard reveals, but has upgraded living conditions with a lap pool, an enlarged outbuilding adding two additional bedrooms, a bath, a second garage facing the street and creating two interior courtyards (invisible to the street view, except for the garages).

1530 Drexel Avenue NE's original interior lanai or open courtyard, which characterized the Mark II model within the house itself, was enclosed in 1989. Leedy was actively involved with most of the alterations within the Craney Spec Houses Historic District and worked to preserve the homes' exposed framing and strong horizontal and vertical lines, but sought ways to accommodate homeowner desires, too. For this home, Leedy's client requested more formally designated living areas, finding the original open floor plan less accommodating for her lifestyle. Leedy addressed changes by creating more defined living, dining and kitchen rooms but maintained the residence's exterior integrity, deep relationship to the other homes in the development, and strong association to the Sarasota School principles of "honesty" and "transparency" with its horizontal and vertical lines and use of materials. This, too, was typical of Leedy – his willingness to adapt yet remain true to his vision.¹¹

¹¹ Jan Hochstim, *Florida Modern. Residential Architecture 1949 – 1970*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc. 2004 pg.212

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Craney Spec Houses Historic District

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The residence at 1541 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 5) was the second Mark II house constructed within the district. The house contains its original open carport behind which the mechanical out-building is attached. The rectangular residence sits side by side the carport and outbuilding, both visible to the street. Sarasota School strong horizontal and vertical lines, post and beam exposed framing, flat roof profile, unpainted block walls, and western red cedar beveled tongue and groove roof deck exterior and interior ceilings and a street facing concrete block wall that shelters one of the home's exterior courtyards make up the bones of this home, visible to the street, although the courtyards that are formed within the compound are not.

This home is the only one of the three Mark II model homes built in 1956 to retain its interior, open-air lanai, also not visible from the street. Its interior surfaces have been upgraded with new kitchen fixtures, brick paver flooring, and plaster walls, but retains its open floor plan, extensive floor to ceiling glass walls and sliders along its long rectangular sides (all original to the home), pressed wood-chip board closet doors, cativo wood moldings and black baseboard reveals.

It has a concrete block perimeter wall with some discreet openings, too. Leedy called these openings the home's "emotional holes". Ever the raconteur, Leedy said he made these voids in the walls to enable a paramour to escape once the husband returned home – giving rise to the "emotional" in the wall's hole. In actuality, Leedy felt the homes would be more gracious with some voids and encouraged all homeowners to maintain that design feature.¹²

The home at 1548 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 6), a Mark I model, retains most of its original features including its open carport, flat roof, clear vertical and horizontal post and beam lines with exposed framing, and most of the glass sliding walls on the main residence's long rectangular, front and rear facing sides, some of which are visible from the street. This home is also one of the most original, retaining its outbuilding's jalousie windows, open floor plan, and kitchen and bathrooms as first built in 1956. It has no central air conditioning, having retained its 3' roof overhang and mature trees (including



Figure 7: View of interior courtyard or Lanai from the original Mark II or Courtyard home, 1957. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

¹² Gene Leedy, interview with author, October 16, 2018, and as recounted by neighbors (www.geneleedy.com video clips, 2007) who knew the first Craney Spec Houses homeowners about whom Leedy joked and who retell Leedy's witticisms that also belie his serious creative contributions.

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an original citrus in its rear yard). From the street, some of the “jewel box” glass features and the lines of the main residence as it relates to the out-building/carport are visible because this residence no longer has its original T-111 wood fencing. This is the only home in the Craney Spec Houses grouping of contributing structures not to have replaced its original T-111 wood fence with the concrete block privacy walls in the years immediately after the Spec homes were offered for sale in 1957.

The residence at 1549 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 7), a Mark I model, presents its horizontal and vertical lines from the street with exposed post and beam bones, flat roof profile and 3’ roof overhang, original connecting concrete block wall of the main residence to the outbuilding, all as originally built in 1956. The carport was closed-in to create a garage in 1979 but its 8’ perimeter concrete block fencing is still intact. The house retains its original main residence footprint with only a slight enlargement to the master bath and kitchen consuming some of the roof’s 3’ overhang on one side, not visible from the street. Much of the interior is also original with its first generation floor to ceiling sliding glass doors and glazed glass wall panels, luan interior walls framed in 1” cativo wood molding, black base board reveals and pressed wood-chip closet doors throughout the home. The flooring was upgraded to parquet in 1979 when the architect experimented with that material in his own home, too. All alterations to this home were made by Gene Leedy, the original architect.

The residence at 1550 Drexel Ave NE (Photo 8) a Mark I model, is a showcase home with its out-building enlarged to add two bedrooms and a bath, enclosing the original carport for a garage and adding a second garage facing the street. This house features upgraded interior surfaces with brick paver flooring replacing the original cork, plaster board walls replacing luan, and with its original 4” x 6” double tongue and groove, beveled western red cedar ceiling uniquely painted white. Interior walls retain their original 1” tight-grained wood profile moldings and baseboard reveals, and the home’s exterior T-111 siding remains on the short rectangular sides, retaining its original long side walls of sliding floor to ceiling sliding glass walls and framed, glazed glass panels. The long walk to the front door with 3’ roof overhang is visible from the street, as are its original horizontal and vertical planes, exposed post and beam framing, the 8’ concrete block connecting wall and compound-forming fencing. This home has a 3’ high concrete block knee-wall that defines its street-facing perimeter and furthers these modest homes’ courtyards within courtyards. This home was also one of the first homes to build a street facing block wall, replacing the original T-111 wood fence shortly after it was built. Later this



Figure 8: 1550 Drexel Ave NE shortly after home was occupied when Leedy replaced the T-111 fence with a concrete block wall that other homeowners also had Leedy design and build. Photo facing south from the street view, 1960. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

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block wall served as the structural foundation for the rear wall of the enclosed garages that are now visible to the street.

The home at 1558 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 9), a Mark I model, forms the southeast corner of the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. It has been left almost entirely as originally designed in 1956 with its open carport, exposed post and beam framing, flat roof, long expanses of visible 4"x6" beveled western red cedar double tongue and groove roof decking, ceilings, and overhang, its long concrete block wall flanking the walk to the main residence's front door and connecting the main residence to its outbuilding, and an 8' compound-forming concrete block fence enclosing part of the property. This home has retained its original open floor plan and no central air conditioning, but after the interior was destroyed by three hurricanes passing over Central Florida in quick succession in 2004, Leedy upgraded the interior surfaces with a new kitchen, lighter colored luan walls, and a closed-off third bedroom to the open living/dining/ kitchen floor plan. This home sits on a slightly smaller lot (75' front versus the 85-90' frontage) but it has retained its voids with a right side yard open to the street, and a pool in one of its two hidden compound-courtyards. All renovations and restorations for this home were also made by Leedy.

Noncontributing Buildings

The home at 1529 Drexel Ave NE (Photo 10) located on the north side of the street toward the western end of the Craney Spec District grouping, was originally a Mark II or "Courtyard" model but has since absorbed what was once its carport and outbuilding, as well as its interior lanai. The previous owners penetrated the block walls with fenestration inconsistent with the home's original materials, lines and intent, and unlike the contributing structures, painted the concrete blocks a non-cement color. This home no longer presents its horizontal and vertical planes, that is, the exposed bones of its post and beam framing construction have been boxed in, and the sliding glass doors and glazed glass walls removed. The flat roof was replaced by a hip or pitched roof, and aluminum siding has replaced its original vertical lined, T-111 panels. In the audio tour of this district (sponsored by Main Street Winter Haven, Inc. and Six/Ten, LLC), 1529 Drexel Ave NE is included as a cautionary tale of the lost feeling and association to the Craney Spec Houses grouping by an unsympathetic remodeling.¹³

The home at 1542 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 11) located on the south side of the street in the center of the Craney Spec Houses District, is of a no-style, "frame vernacular"¹⁴ built on its lot in 1990. This lot previously held a Mediterranean Revival-style home when the surrounding Craney Spec Houses were

¹³ Main Street Winter Haven, Inc. in conjunction with Six/Ten LLC sponsored audio tour: www.geneleedy.com (domestic structures section), 2007

¹⁴ Sidney Johnston, "Historic Architectural Resources of Winter Haven", November 1988, NRHP Section F, pg. 18 description of "Frame Vernacular" as displaying "no formal style of architecture...defined as common wood framing construction techniques of lay or self-taught builders.... prevalent style of residential architecture in Florida."

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built in 1956, and was the one lot inside the former grapefruit grove that Dick Craney was unable to secure when he built the ten spec houses which comprise the bulk of the district. That previous home was believed to have originally held grove worker housing, but it was destroyed by a falling tree and replaced in 1990 by the current single-story home.

The home at 1557 Drexel Avenue NE (Photo 12) on the north side of the street at its furthest eastern end, is a Mark I model and maintains some of the original Leedy features including an 8' high concrete block privacy fence, long walk to the front door, and a roof overhang evident above the walkway. This home underwent a renovation in the 2000s, outside of the purview of Leedy, adding a hip or pitched roof, and an enlarged, enclosed garage that breaks its setback-line with the other Leedy homes on the street and covers the original exposed post and beam framing. Prior owners replaced all glass floor to ceiling sliding doors with conventional 78" sliders and placed plaster panels over the original glazed glass wall panels and luan wood wall dividers. While it has lost most of its signature horizontal and vertical planes, exposed framing and original materials, the concrete block fencing that forms the compound and courtyards, and a roof overhang over the walkway, are reminders of what Leedy had originally intended.

ALTERATIONS

Minor modifications have been made to almost all homes over more than 60 years, as described in each of the homes' narrative descriptions. Two of the collection of ten Leedy-designed Craney Spec Houses have had major renovations removing the lines and materials that once characterized them as examples of Sarasota School homes designed and built by one of its leaders, Gene Leedy. These two are considered non-contributing today. Most of the contributing structures' changes occurred during the window of time from the initial offering in 1957, with Leedy's own perimeter wall/concrete fencing upgrade in 1959/60 along with the home at 1550 Drexel Ave NE changing its fencing, through the expansion of Leedy's outbuilding.

As noted, three of the eight contributing homes have added on to their outbuildings over time. For all three, alterations included adding two additional bedrooms and a bath to an outbuilding, and for two, closing in the carports to create two garages. Pools were added to four of the eight contributing homes. Central air conditioning was installed in five of the eight, as well. These enlargements and improvements do not detract from the original associations to the time in which they were built, nor to the integrity of the collection as an historic district. With Leedy as the architect for all eight contributing structures' changes over six decades, the lines and planes, materials and associations to the grouping, consistent with the tenants of the Sarasota School, were maintained in large and small detail.

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INTEGRITY

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District retains its integrity of location and setting, despite the area surrounding the houses having built up over time. While the homes were situated in a citrus grove at the time of construction, the ten Craney Spec Houses were intended to be the seed of a larger community, so the new construction fits into the design intentions of its progenitors. The district also retains integrity of design, materials, and workmanship as uniquely curated by the original architect himself over 60 years. With eight of the ten Craney Spec Houses maintaining their contributing status, the district overall communicates the design intentions and details utilized by Leedy, in keeping with the tenets of the Sarasota School which guided his creativity. His active engagement with the alterations to the eight contributing houses also helped ensure that his designs would be maintained and that the district would retain its integrity of feeling and association to the time in which they were built.

LIST OF CONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

All resources within the district are residential buildings located along Drexel Avenue NE, as Sarasota School Modernist single-story residences designed by Gene Leedy. Each was built in 1956 and put up for sale in March of 1957.

ADDRESS	DATE OF CONSTRUCTION	FMSF#	PHOTOGRAPH #
1517	1956	PO08201	3
1518	1956	PO08202	2
1530	1956	PO08204	4
1541	1956	PO08205	5
1548	1956	PO08207	6
1549	1956	PO08208	7
1550	1956	PO08209	8
1558	1956	PO08211	9

LIST OF NONCONTRIBUTING RESOURCES

Two of the noncontributing buildings in the district were designed by Gene Leedy, but have lost historical integrity. The other is noncontributing due to a later date of construction and an incompatible style.

ADDRESS	DATE OF CONSTRUCTION	FMSF#	PHOTOGRAPH #
1529	1956	PO08203	10
1542	1990	PO08206	11
1557	1956	PO08210	12

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SUMMARY

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning/Development and under Criterion C in the area of Architecture. Commissioned by Richard "Dick" Craney, a successful entrepreneur, wood and construction materials distributor, and real estate developer, and designed by Gene Leedy, a luminary of the Sarasota School of Architecture, the district is representative of ambitious mid-century development in Winter Haven, Florida, during a time of huge migration, social and economic change for the State of Florida, and the migration trends of this region and as a nation as a whole. The district demonstrates in microcosm the vast changes in the decades after the Second World War. Emerging, as the intended beginning of a Modernist community in the heart of a citrus grove, Craney and Leedy created 10 spec homes to address the dire need for housing in a community that experienced both a boom in population, as well as changes in the socio-economic fabric of the city, too.

The Leedy-designed houses also embody distinctive characteristics of the Sarasota School of Architecture. Radical at the time of their construction, the houses have open floor plans, no ornamentation, exposed framing and use common materials in uncommon ways. They present a vision of hopefulness and modernity that helped define the age in which they were built. While two of the Craney Spec Houses have experienced significant alterations, and the district contains one house built far after the period of significance in a non-complementary style, the district overall communicates a design concept that came from the partnership of an architect and a developer who each wanted to help create a new community on previously undeveloped land. The period of significance for the Craney Spec Houses Historic District is from 1956-1958, the years in which the houses were designed, built, and sold.

This district contributes to the ARCHITECTURAL RESOURCES OF THE SARASOTA SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE Multiple Property Submission under The Influence of New Architects, 1953-1959 Historic Context and Property Type F.1: Residential Buildings.

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Winter Haven Development History

The city of Winter Haven is located in the heart of Central Florida, a region defined in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by resource exploitation. Agriculture, primarily the production of citrus and strawberries, as well as phosphate mining, logging and cattle ranching were the main

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industries in this period. The city was incorporated in 1911, with the name “Winter Haven” chosen to reflect Florida’s warm temperatures and to draw in more residents from northern climes.¹⁵

Tourism emerged as a driving force for Winter Haven’s economy in the mid-20th century, but this trend had its roots much earlier. Railway travel in Florida was primarily along the coast on railroads owned by Henry Plant and Henry Flagler. Over time, the railways added spurs to provide easier access to Central Florida. By the early twentieth century, a railway connecting Tampa and Orlando had expanded to cross through Winter Haven, aiding the city in receiving visitors and facilitating trade, especially that of the burgeoning citrus industry.¹⁶ Winter Haven’s railroad depot, built on Central Avenue in the city’s downtown by 1924, was located approximately one mile to the west of where the Craney Spec Houses Historic District would later rise. At the height of the Florida Land Boom of the 1920s, cunning land agents would quickly approach visiting northerners at this stop to sell them undeveloped local parcels, with most of the land outside of the city’s historic downtown being used for agricultural production.¹⁷

After the Land Boom turned to bust, and the Great Depression and later Second World War tempered the heady drives and enthusiasm for new development of the 1920s, the period following the war demonstrated a revitalization of Florida development. This was also driven by the national post-war baby-boom, federal home ownership guarantees provided to veterans (low interest loan and FHA insurance programs), veterans stationed at Central Florida’s many air force and naval bases desiring to remain in Florida, and the newly solvent retiree community with reliable social security income (SSI) wanting “a place in the sun”. These factors all contributed to an economy that encouraged private home ownership by very broad population groups, but also, as automobiles became more accessible, for property development outside city centers. In all, Winter Haven became a very attractive location. And while citrus maintained its crucial position within the local economy, it too began to be influenced by another economic engine for this Florida region: tourism.¹⁸

Winter Haven became a pivotal part of Central Florida’s burgeoning tourist economy in 1936, when real estate developer Dick Pope Sr. created Cypress Gardens, Florida’s first destination theme park, which has since been listed on the National Register of Historic Places. A botanical garden planted by Pope and his wife Julie, the park was located on the massive Lake Eloise. Its frequent and impressive water

¹⁵ Sidney Johnson, “*Historic Architectural Resources of Winter Haven*”, 1988, Section E, page 3, NRHP, June 2000; Andrew Dunn, *Deserted Polk Communities Reflect Industries That Built Them*. Polk County: The Ledger, May 1, 2005

¹⁶ Seth Bramson, “*A Tale of Three Henrys*”, *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts*, 23, 1998 pgs. 113–143

¹⁷ Sidney Johnson, “*Historic Architectural Resources of Winter Haven*”, 1988, Section E, pgs. 7-9, NRHP, June 2000; Homer B. Vanderblue, “*The Florida Land Boom*”, *Journal of Land and Public Utility Economics*, Vol. 3, No.3, August, 1927, pgs. 252-269

¹⁸ Tracy J. Revels, *Sunshine Paradise: A History of Florida Tourism*, Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 201; Volk, Michael I, Thomas S Hocter, Belinda B Nettles, Richard Hilsenbeck, Francis E Putz, and Jon Oetting. “*Florida Land Use and Land Cover Change In The Past 100 Years*”. *Florida's Climate: Changes, Variations, & Impacts*, November 29, 2017, pg. 59 - 82

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skiing shows attracted some of the most famous movie stars of the era to participate. Local historians credit then-superstars of the 1950s, Johnny Weissmuller, Esther Williams and the Rat Pack visitors – Joey Bishop, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Peter Lawford – for putting this community on the map for tourism and land speculation. One of the first Craney Spec home owners was a local businessman who ran the Hob Nob Bar, where these film stars gathered with Gene Leedy and other Drexel Avenue homeowners in the 1950s.

The creation of the interstate highway system profoundly impacted the development of Central Florida in general, and Winter Haven. The cross-Florida I-4 federal interstate corridor was initiated in 1956 and began construction in 1958.¹⁹ The prospect of interstate highway development would, no doubt, have encouraged the creation of new communities such as the one represented by the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. The major improvement in access by highways and rail would facilitate the growth of Winter Haven, and increase the availability of materials that could not be sourced locally.

Throughout the nation, savvy developers took the increased economic opportunity of the mid-century era as a chance to make a fortune in real estate. From 1950 to 1960, over 10 million people left cities to purchase homes in what became the “suburbs”. Visionaries such as William and Alfred Levitt, who created huge housing developments on Long Island in three phases from 1946 to 1953, led the way in this type of project.²⁰ While Levittown created the model, other developers attempted their own suburban developments throughout the country. In locations with ample available land and a perceived potential population to live there, mid-century suburban housing developments were not uncommon. In the midst of this national trend, Florida helped lead the nation in both suburban flight as well as new home starts. Winter Haven, like much of Central Florida, experienced a boom in the 1950s, of which the Craney Spec Houses Historic District was a small but notable part.²¹ Leedy’s fascination with community development continued long after the Craney Spec Houses were built and the larger Craney development program scuttled.²²

The rampant changes of the mid-century period diminished the region’s citrus focus. In many cases, the land upon which citrus had been grown became more valuable as a commodity than the continued production of fruit. Because of this economic incentive, grove lands increasingly gave way to housing developments, especially in agricultural areas in close proximity to the centers of towns and cities.

¹⁹ Mark H. Rose and Raymond A. Mohl, *Interstate: Highway Politics and Policy since 1939*. Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979. pgs 85-102

²⁰ David Halberstam. *The Fifties*. New York: Random House - Villard Books. 1993 pgs. 132-134; 142

²¹ William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972*. Page 94

²² Leedy worked with Bill Levitt as late as 1964 developing a spec home in Levitt’s Rockledge Community near Cape Canaveral, FL, but only one model home was built consistent with what was by then a waning interest after the bloom of the 1950s time of inventiveness and experimentation neared its end.

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Underpinning these local trends was the general optimism, experimentation and inventiveness that defined this era. William Manchester, in his bestselling history of the peak years of the Sarasota School architects, said of this time from 1953-57, "...to be an uncomplicated, golden time, mourned as lost childhoods are mourned and remembered, in nostalgia, as cloudless."²³ Echoed by another Sarasota Modern architect, Tim Siebert, "After WW2 things were going to be different. There was an optimism...we wanted to make new art."²⁴ These sentiments guided Dick Craney in his choice of the young, Sarasota Modern architect Gene Leedy, and were enshrined in the designs Leedy created for the Craney Spec Houses, too, in the homes' radical open floor plans, transparency, exposed framing, site planning, incorporation of flora into home interiors, and the use of common materials in uncommon ways.

HISTORIC SIGNIFICANCE

Criterion A: Community Planning/Development

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District is locally significant under Criterion A in the area of Community Planning/Development. The district comprises the extent of a housing development initiated in 1956 by developer Richard "Dick" Craney, and designed by the influential Modernist architect Gene Leedy. Carved out of a grapefruit grove, the houses in the district are a rare surviving representation of the types of ambitious projects pursued in the post-war period within Central Florida and the United States at large. The ten Leedy-designed houses were intended to be the first units in a larger development that never happened. Architectural historian Sam Lubell described the Craney Spec Houses as historically having been "poised to become the largest collection of Modernist homes in the country."²⁵ Nonetheless, the district is an ideal surviving example of a planned community characterized by the partnership of a developer and an architect, and designed in an experimental manner representative of a new, fresh time in history.

Richard "Dick" Craney was the developer of the Craney Spec Houses, which he originally planned with the name Lake Elbert Heights. His primary business during the years the Spec Houses were constructed, from 1956 to 1957, was a wood distribution company called Imperial Lumber. His fabrication company, Precision Fabrication, and his real estate acquisition company, Craney Homes, were all employed in the acquisition of land and construction of the Craney Spec Houses.²⁶

²³ William Manchester, *The Glory and the Dream: A Narrative History of America, 1932-1972*. Page 945

²⁴ Tim Siebert interviewed by Heather Dunhill and Bill Wagdy for the Sarasota Architectural Foundation and the Fine Arts Society of Sarasota' film, "An American Legacy: The Sarasota School". 2001

²⁵ Sam Lubell, *Mid Century Modern Architecture Travel Guide*, pg. 290; David Halberstam, *The Fifties*. pg. 142; Michael I. Volk, et al, "Florida Land Use And Land Cover Change In The Past 100 Years ". *Florida's Climate: Changes, Variations, & Impacts*, November 29, 2017. pg. 59.

²⁶ *Craney Homes Create a New Dimension for Living*. Winter Haven: Daily News Chief, March 3, 1957. pgs 1-4

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Craney initiated his plan to develop a community east of Lake Elbert in 1954-1955, when he purchased a large parcel of citrus grove-land from its owner. He was unable to purchase the lot upon which 1542 Drexel Avenue NE is now built. Craney chose Gene Leedy to be the architect for his set of new homes because he recognized Leedy's interest and ambition in the realm of community planning.²⁷ Craney was impressed by Leedy's first speculative effort, the 1950 House for Contemporary Builders in Sarasota, as well as the inventive yet economic design of the Sparrow Residence, Leedy's first commission in Winter Haven which first brought him to the city in 1954. In Leedy, Craney saw a locally-minded architect with skills in developing a set of inexpensive, modern houses which would then serve as the basis for a larger development in Winter Haven. Together, they worked to design and build the houses, which opened on March 3, 1957 (Figure 11 and 12).

Even though Craney purchased 70 other lots in the Winter Haven area and advertised his intentions to build more homes of similar design to the ones in the Craney Spec Houses Historic District, he abandoned this plan within a year after the construction of the ten Leedy-designed buildings.²⁸ As a result of the economic recession that struck the United States in 1958, Craney sold the 70 lots, and moved on to developments in Bartow, the county seat of Polk County, located to the southwest of Winter Haven.²⁹ Craney had abandoned plans for the larger development and because the real estate developer who picked up some of the land from Craney, Robert McElroy, a Winter Haven-based realtor and businessman, went bankrupt during this time, attributed in part to the 1958 recessions, Leedy moved on to other projects, abandoning a larger modern development originally conceived.³⁰



Figure 9: Aerial photograph of the Craney Spec Houses District in 1959, about two years after these homes were offered for sale. The photograph was taken looking east toward Lake Elbert, which is just visible at the top. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

²⁷ Jan Hochstim, *Florida Modern. Residential Architecture 1949 – 1970*. New York: Rizzoli International Publications Inc. 2004; page 208. In 1950 Leedy set up the Contemporary Builders Corporation and built one modern house similar to the Craney Spec Houses, in hope of attracting wide attention from buyers. It was not as profitable to build as he had hoped so he sought a more established development partner in Dick Craney.

²⁸ *Craney Homes Create a New Dimension for Living*. Winter Haven: Daily News Chief, March 3, 1957 (pg. 1) describes the additional lots Craney purchased.

²⁹ Gable, Richard W., The Politics and Economics of the 1957-1958 Recession, *The Western Political Quarterly* Vol. 12, No. 2, June, 1959, pp. 557-559.

³⁰ Gene Leedy, Interview with author, October 16, 2018.

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Craney appears to have been satisfied with the design efforts of Leedy, as he hired Leedy in 1959 to build an extension to his own home in Bartow.³¹

While other planned developments at the time relied on Home Owner Association covenants to protect and even enforce conformity to original designs, most of the Craney Spec Houses have retained their original lines and community development without the need of a covenant. The integrity and preservation of these homes for over 60 years is attributed to the tenacity of the architect himself, his continued presence as a homeowner, and his curation over many decades. To add resonance to the district's historic associations and contributions in community development, one resident, a centenarian named Mary Frances "Junior" Whittinghill who lives in a Mark II model, refers to her Craney Spec home as her "happy house," encapsulating the enduring nature of this community as well as homeowners' appreciation of, and respect for, the work of this architect, its developer and the community they built.³²



Figure 10: 1957 photograph of 1518 Drexel Avenue NE, the first home completed in the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. To the left is 1530 Drexel Avenue NE. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

Finally, the local significance of this first modernist residential development in Winter Haven reached beyond this one district built in 1957. Winter Haven political and civic leaders, seeing for themselves the substantial outpouring of interest in the Craney Spec Houses when the homes were first offered for sale, commissioned Leedy to build some of the city's most important structures from 1958 to 1980.³³ Today, the city is a unique combination of Sarasota School modern architecture, as designed by Leedy, set against its early 1920s Mediterranean-style architectural beginnings.

³¹ Augustus King interview with author, March 19, 2019.

³² Mrs. Whittinghill and other homeowners on Drexel Avenue NE interviewed for Main Street Winter Haven and Six/Ten LLC, www.geneleedy.com/domesticstructures video clips. 2007

³³ Andrew Weaving, *Sarasota Modern*, Rizzoli, 2006 and Leedy interview with author regarding the outpouring of interest these homes generated in 1957, recounting that 10,000 people visited the Craney Spec homes during the first weekend they opened in March, 1957.

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Winter Haven Daily News-Chief

The City Of 100 Lakes Full United Press Licensed Wire Service Citrus Capital Of The World

WINTER HAVEN, FLORIDA, SUNDAY, MARCH 3, 1957

Craney Homes Create A New Dimension For Living



Craney Homes Have Built Many Beautiful Communities

Some idea of the scope of Craney Homes building activities may be pictured when it is known that approximately 2,600 persons are living in Craney Homes now. Craney Homes are now building subdivisions in Lakeland, Bartow and Plant City, in addition to Winter Haven. Craney Homes have also built communities in Oviedo, Lake Wales, Wauchula, Fort Meade, Frostproof and Mulberry.

Lake Elbert Heights is considered the deluxe subdivision of all of Craney's building programs. There are ten homes under construction and several of them are already completed and ready for inspection.

WIDE LOTS

The lots in Lake Elbert Heights are characterized as family style lots for the reason that many of them are 80 feet wide and each provides a yard in which children will have ample room to play.

Another variation from most new subdivisions is that the site contains many trees which provide a beautiful green setting for these new homes, as well as providing ample shade — which is continuous a rarity in new residential areas.

Lake Elbert Heights To Be Open To Public From 1 P.M. Sunday, March 3

'Built-In Baby Sitter' Offered During Opening

Among the unusual features of the opening day of Lake Elbert Heights on Sunday will be the operation of a "built-in baby sitter" for the benefit of guests with small children.

An enclosed playground, supervised by a nurse, will be available throughout the afternoon where children too young to be interested in new homes may be left while their parents make a leisurely inspection of the residences.

Gene Leedy, Architect

All homes in Lake Elbert Heights have been designed by nationally prominent architect, Gene Leedy.

How To Reach Lake Elbert Heights

To reach Lake Elbert Heights, drive east on Central Avenue until you reach Lake Elbert. Turn right on Lake Elbert Drive and drive around the lake to the opposite side to Thelma Avenue. Lake Elbert Heights is located up the second street in your right after you pass the Dunbar Road exit.

New Home Furnished By Design Associates

Design Associates, interior decorators located in Winter Haven for the past three years, have furnished the Mark I which will be open for inspection starting Sunday, March 3, at 1 P.M.

While Design Associates work in all fields of design, they have done outstanding work in the contemporary field.

Lake Elbert Heights Is Beautiful New Development

Winter Haven is famous for its lakes and Lake Elbert is among the most beautiful of these. Located on high ground in a grove where the east shore of Lake Elbert, Lake Elbert Heights is one of the most beautiful areas left for development in Winter Haven.

Here among the four lakes, for which the Ridge Region is famous, Craney Homes has purchased eighty lots which long range plans call for developing into one of the most beautiful areas of Central Florida.

Here, in a highly restricted area, Mr. Gene Leedy, nationally famous architect, working in cooperation with Craney Homes is in the process of developing an area of four homes with each home carefully planned to blend harmoniously with its neighbors.

All streets have been constructed in recent weeks. A new water main into the area insures adequate pressure for all homes.

All corners of homes in Lake Elbert Heights will have access to the lake at the foot of Thelma Avenue.

Visitors to the area will note that in keeping with the local practices of subdivision development, every possible law has been guaranteed to add to the beauty of the area. All homes are set well back from the street in a way that makes each home blend beautifully with its surroundings.

Come out and view Lake Elbert Heights. You will find it to be the most beautiful new area under development in this region.

Figure 11: Cover of a four page advertising section in the Winter Haven News Chief on Sunday, March 3, 1957, the opening day of the Craney Spec Houses Historic District. Drexel Avenue NE was then known as Lake Elbert Heights, a name now associated with the entire hillside overlooking Lake Elbert. This insert provided key information regarding the businesses owned by Craney, materials used, floor plans and information about the architect. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

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Craney Spec Houses Historic District

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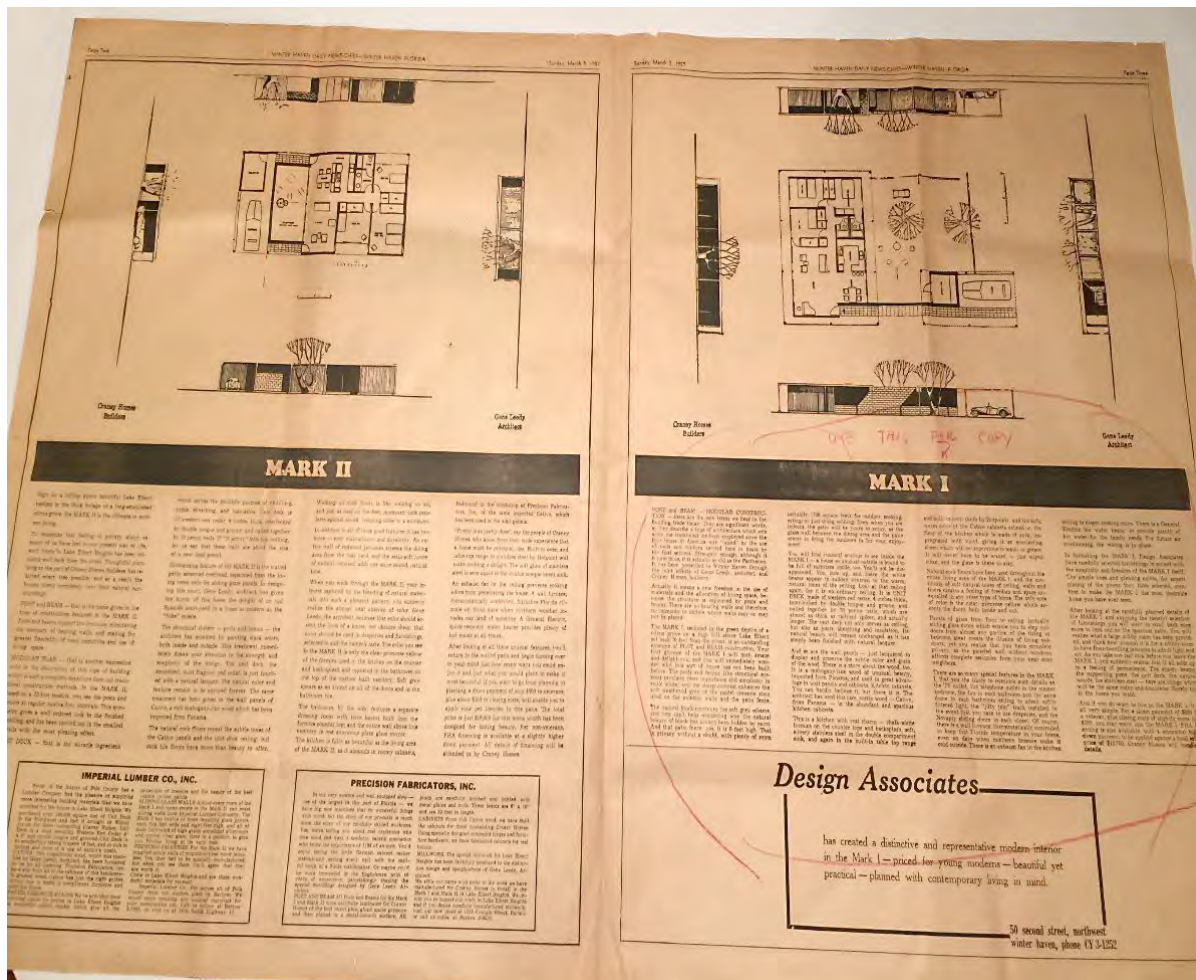


Figure 12: Interior of four-page section as it appeared on opening day - March 3, 1957. Note floor plans of both Craney Spec model homes – Mark I or Standard and Mark II Courtyard models - and the description of the businesses that fabricated the materials used. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida

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Figure 13: 1957 photograph of 1518 Drexel Avenue NE. The design of the house visualizes the Sarasota School principles of strong vertical and horizontal lines, “honest” structural bones, no ornamentation, “floating” over landscape, and the connection of the carport/outbuilding to the main residence by the long concrete block wall. Western red cedar 4” x 6” beveled tongue and groove roof decking, which serves as interior ceilings, also evident in this photo. The T-111 wood fence to the left of the carport was replaced with concrete block fencing that grew to surround both sides of the car port area for all but two of the Craney homes over time, creating additional courtyards within each compound. Source: Leedy Archives, University of Florida.

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Criterion C: Architecture

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District is locally significant in the area of Architecture as they embody the distinctive characteristics of modern design that represents a master class of architecture by a luminary of the Sarasota School of Architecture during the mid-20th Century period of history. As a collection of mid-century houses of the Sarasota School of Architecture, the homes within the district are significant for their design. Because each house was designed at the same time, by the same architect, the district serves as a significant example of the Sarasota School style applied to the development of a community. The design principles of the Sarasota School, and Gene Leedy in particular, are expressed through the Leedy-designed houses within the district, with an emphasis on honesty, modesty, and incorporation of the environment into architectural design. The materials used for the construction of the Craney Spec Houses are also significant for the care and attention applied to their selection and placement.

Significance in Design

The Craney Spec Houses Historic District exemplifies the principles of the Sarasota School of Architecture, as practiced by one of its leading architects, Gene Leedy.³⁴ The “spiritual leader” of the Sarasota School, Paul Rudolph, who later led Yale University’s School of Architecture, codified the Sarasota School principles in 1949 as: 1) clarity of construction, 2) maximum economy of means, 3) simple overall volumes penetrating vertically and horizontally, 4) clear geometry floating above the Florida landscape, 5) honesty in details, and 6) structural connections.³⁵ All of these principles are evident in the Craney Spec Houses that Gene Leedy, Rudolph’s first employee in his independent Sarasota architectural practice in 1952, would later design.

The Sarasota School architects also expressed what they termed “honesty” in clearly visualized structural members and in the use of native materials. They added to this modernist thinking a Florida twist in terms of a building’s relationship to the environment with landscaping as part of their residential site planning and interior designs. They eschewed segmented rooms of the then-dominant Florida Mediterranean-revival style home with open floor plans or “simple overall volumes” merging the kitchen, living and dining areas in these early works and eliminating the necessity of interior walls for structural integrity.

³⁴ According to historians (King/Domain, Hochstim, Howey), what the developer and Sarasota Modern architectural patron in the early 1950s, Phillip Hiss, who originally termed the “Sarasota School”, was a reflection of the International and Bauhaus movements as led by Walter Gropius, Florence Knoll, Le Corbusier and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe but with a less formal, more organic American interpretation. Gene Leedy, Rudolph’s first hire after he formed his own firm, said that the Bauhaus Movement (and Walter Gropius, with whom Rudolph studied at Harvard), Frank Lloyd Wright, and the International style served as inspiration for the Sarasota School’s philosophy, methods and materials. (AIA Speech, 1987)

³⁵ John Howey, *The Sarasota School of Architecture 1941- 1966*, Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995. pgs. 1-7

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The clarity of Leedy's post and beam construction, glass walls, thin vertical supporting posts floating over the landscape, exposed wooden framing, open floor plans, and structural connections of the main residences to their outbuildings show a commitment to the Sarasota School's honesty and clarity in design. Leedy's incorporation of the existing trees in his designs and the creation of micro-climates within each home's concrete block perimeter fencing, protecting plants during the rare but often devastating frosts and hurricanes, adds to the significance of the Craney Spec Houses. The empty spaces he engineered into his home and landscape designs also add value and honesty to his designs, further reflecting the tenets of the Sarasota School.

Leedy often said that "architecture is also the absence of architecture" and "all great buildings have some wasted space".³⁶ He planned empty spaces like the long walk to the front doors on the Mark I model and the interior lanai in the Mark II model because it gave reason and pause to appreciate the greater whole of the glass home one was about to enter or, in the case of the Mark II model, as one sat in the living room for reading and contemplation. The depth of this idea resonates in all the Craney Spec Houses with their interior courtyards that require nothing more than to exist and allow light to play differently from the home's interior as one appreciates the surrounding nature, or even considers nothing at all.

Consistent with the tenets of the Sarasota School, care was taken to incorporate existing mature trees into the home's setting. Siting the homes in this way enabled them to catch the breezes at the top of this hill, and retaining mature trees, with each home's roof perimeter overhang shading the structures from the sun, obviated the need for air conditioning. Several of the contributing structures still have no central air conditioning in their homes.

The architectural success of the Craney Spec Houses prompted city leaders to commission Leedy in the design of many public buildings including the Winter Haven City Hall, Chamber of Commerce, Boys and Girls Club, Winter Haven Garden Center, Merrill Lynch building and Gessler Women's Clinic, elementary school and redesigns for the town's Central Park among his more than 60 still-standing structures in the city itself.³⁷

Materials Used and Their Origins

The materials used to construct the Craney Spec Houses are emblematic of the partnership of Craney and Leedy, and of their time, contributing to their architectural significance. With Craney applying his extensive knowledge of wood as a lumber distributor and wood fabricator, and Leedy applying his knowledge and connections as a Sarasota School Modernist architect, the materials used within the

³⁶ Interview with architect Leedy by author October 16, 2018 and www.geneleedy.com/Leedy unplugged audio tracks, 2007.

³⁷ Gene Leedy, interview with author, Winter Haven, October 16, 2018

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houses represent a significant confluence of factors and interests pivotal to the design and appearance of the buildings.

Leedy designed the Craney Spec Houses only using wood and the profiles of that wood that Craney had available, or that Craney could inexpensively source. Craney provided local common wood (T-111 panels and pine framing members) but he was also able to source western red cedar for the buildings' exposed roof decking and interior ceilings, and cativo sapwood from Central America for interior trim and paneled walls. The expanding rail and the new federal interstate highway networks increased the opportunity to source materials cheaply from a wider area, including concrete block from Lake Wales to the south and pressed chip board from as far away as Jacksonville. Craney also made use of the long-developed knowledge of wood fabrication present in Polk County, where Winter Haven is located. The county was built in large part by the lumber industry, which, along with phosphate mining, citrus, and cattle, was responsible for its wealth in the years leading up to the First World War. The county was so prosperous as the result of its resource extraction that it was referred to as "Imperial Polk County."³⁸ This nickname may have provided Craney with the inspiration for the name of his lumber business in the early 1950s. Craney's Imperial Lumber Company directly supplied the wood for the Spec Houses, and his Precision Fabrication company created all the millwork for these homes.

The material used in the construction of the Craney Spec Houses is evidence of the extremely-integrated process which went into the design and construction of the buildings. Leedy created the lengths and profiles of the homes based upon the sizes and types of materials that Craney could easily and affordably access, whether in his own supply or through purchase from other firms. Leedy did not modify any of the wood lengths or profiles as he designed the Craney Spec Homes. The houses each are built in a 16-foot grid – the beams in the houses were the maximum length Craney could supply through Imperial Lumber.³⁹ Craney had the tooling and the labor to create the laminated beams, posts and T-111 siding, but did not have the tooling needed to fabricate the wood chip fiberboard used for the homes' closet doors.⁴⁰ Craney was, however, able to source this common building material in Jacksonville and bring it to the site because he had a rail siding to his factory proximate to Winter Haven, and had a skilled workforce to cut and stain these materials through his other company, Precision Fabricators. Leedy's use of this prosaic building material elevated to a major interior design feature in all the homes demonstrates the Sarasota School's use of common materials in uncommon ways.

Leedy used T-111 siding for the homes' exterior siding. This material was also initially used for fencing to block the homes' glass-walled private spaces from street views, later replaced with concrete block fences in all but two of the houses. Leedy extensively used cativo, a straight-grained species emanating from Panama that, in its uniform grain and color, is comparable to the more expensive (and today nearly

³⁸ "Deserted Polk Communities Reflect Industries That Built Them", Andrew Dunn, The Ledger, May 1, 2005

³⁹ Gene Leedy, interview with author, October 16, 2018

⁴⁰ Augustus King, interview with author, March, 2019

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extinct and cost prohibitive) mahogany. Since it is also easily dried with very little degrading, it is an attractive building material acquired at a low cost, too. Leedy also used cativo laminated plywood for interior walls rather than the plaster or sheet rock which was more standard at the time in construction.⁴¹

As is the case with Sarasota School architects, concrete was a critical material for the Craney Spec Houses, given structural needs of post and beams floating the flat roof system over foundation slabs and partially as a way to mitigate damp conditions. And while many of Leedy's Sarasota School contemporaries used Ocala block aggregate cement, which contained a high level of limestone in its mix, Leedy viewed this as unfit for the Craney Spec Houses. Ocala block had a distinctive beige/salmon hue and was more expensive. Leedy preferred concrete block, manufactured locally, for its gray and white tones. The concrete blocks were made from the fine white "sugar sand" lining the banks of the Lake Wales Ridge, an underground sand ridge extending 150 miles north-south through Central Florida which formed the basis of the state of Florida 2 million years ago and on which the Craney Spec Houses reside. Being less expensive than Ocala block, concrete block fit the cost-saving efforts of Craney.⁴²

The Craney Spec Houses also prioritize honesty in their transparency, with glass an important element in their construction. Each of the Craney Spec Houses features sliding glass walls, which became a common mid-century design element in their simple functionality. Leedy is credited with the first use of aluminum sliding glass doors as walls in Central Florida, with the Craney Spec Houses being among his first experimentations on the form.⁴³ Leedy worked with a notable glass fabricator named Woody Witte for the Craney Spec Houses. Witte was favored by many of the Sarasota School Architects. Leedy aimed to make the doors and their surrounds as sustainable as possible, too, and had Witte craft them using an anodized aluminum framing.⁴⁴

The Craney Spec Houses' design was heavily inspired by the materials available to their architect and developer. The wood, concrete, and glass used to construct the buildings were consciously selected based upon sustainability and price. The connections and expertise which Craney and Leedy had developed through their respective fields and careers imbue the materials used in the construction of the houses with a significance that resonates today.

⁴¹ Augustus King, interview with author, March, 2019

⁴² Gene Leedy, Interview with author, October 16, 2018 and further enumerated in Jan Hochtim's description of Leedy's own home in *Florida Modern*, Rizzoli, 2004. Pg.212

⁴³ Andrew Weaving, *Sarasota Modern*, Rizzoli, 2006. Pg. 88

⁴⁴ Gene Leedy, *Architectural Influences – Sarasota, Florida, 1947-1960*. AIA speech, May 1987, pgs. 1-4. Leedy's typed speech names this glass fabricator as "Woody Witte" but John Howey's *The Sarasota School of Architecture 1941- 1966*, Cambridge Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1995 book spells this glass fabricator's name as "Woody White". We have used the Leedy spelling here.

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Figure 14: Gene Leedy, architect of the Craney Spec Houses Historic District, where he lived from the time of its construction until his death in 2018. His active curation of his work is a large reason why the district still remains today.

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Craney Spec Houses Historic District

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Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of the Craney Spec Houses Historic District begins with the southwest corner of the lot containing 1518 Drexel Avenue NE, extends northward to the northwest corner of the lot containing 1517 Drexel Avenue NE, extends eastward to the northeast corner of the lot containing 1557 Drexel Avenue NE, extends southward across Drexel Avenue NE, extends eastward to the northeast corner of the lot containing 1558 Drexel Avenue NE, extends southward to the southeast corner of that lot, and finally extends westward to reconnect with the southwest corner of the lot containing 1518 Drexel Avenue NE.

Boundary Justification

This boundary contains all historic resources associated with the Craney Spec Houses Historic District.

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National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
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Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered in the order they are referenced in the manuscript, and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log.

Property Name: Craney Spec Houses Historic DistrictCity or Vicinity: Winter HavenCounty: PolkState: FLPhotographer: Judi FrancisDate Photographed: October 2017**Description of photograph(s) and number, including description of view indicating direction of camera:**

1. Drexel Avenue NE, facing west (March 2019)
2. 1518 Drexel Avenue NE, facing south
3. 1517 Drexel Avenue NE, facing north (March 2018)
4. 1530 Drexel Avenue NE, facing south (March 2018)
5. 1545 Drexel Avenue NE, facing north (December 2018)
6. 1548 Drexel Avenue NE, facing south
7. 1549 Drexel Avenue Ne, facing north
8. 1550 Drexel Avenue NE, facing south
9. 1558 Drexel Avenue NE, facing south
10. 1529 Drexel Avenue NE, facing north
11. 1538 Drexel Avenue NE, facing south (February 2019)
12. 1557 Drexel Avenue NE, facing north

Craney Spec Houses Historic District

Winter Haven, Polk County
Florida 33881

Lat./Long. Coordinates:

A: 28.027090, -81.701402




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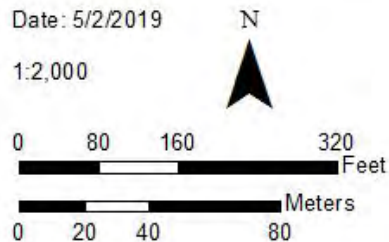
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Legend

-  Proposed NR Boundary
-  Contributing
-  Noncontributing

Date: 5/2/2019

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Basemap Sources: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye,
Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS,
USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid,
IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS
User Community



Craney Spec Houses Historic District

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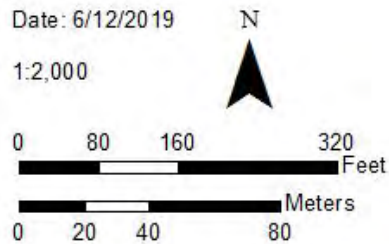
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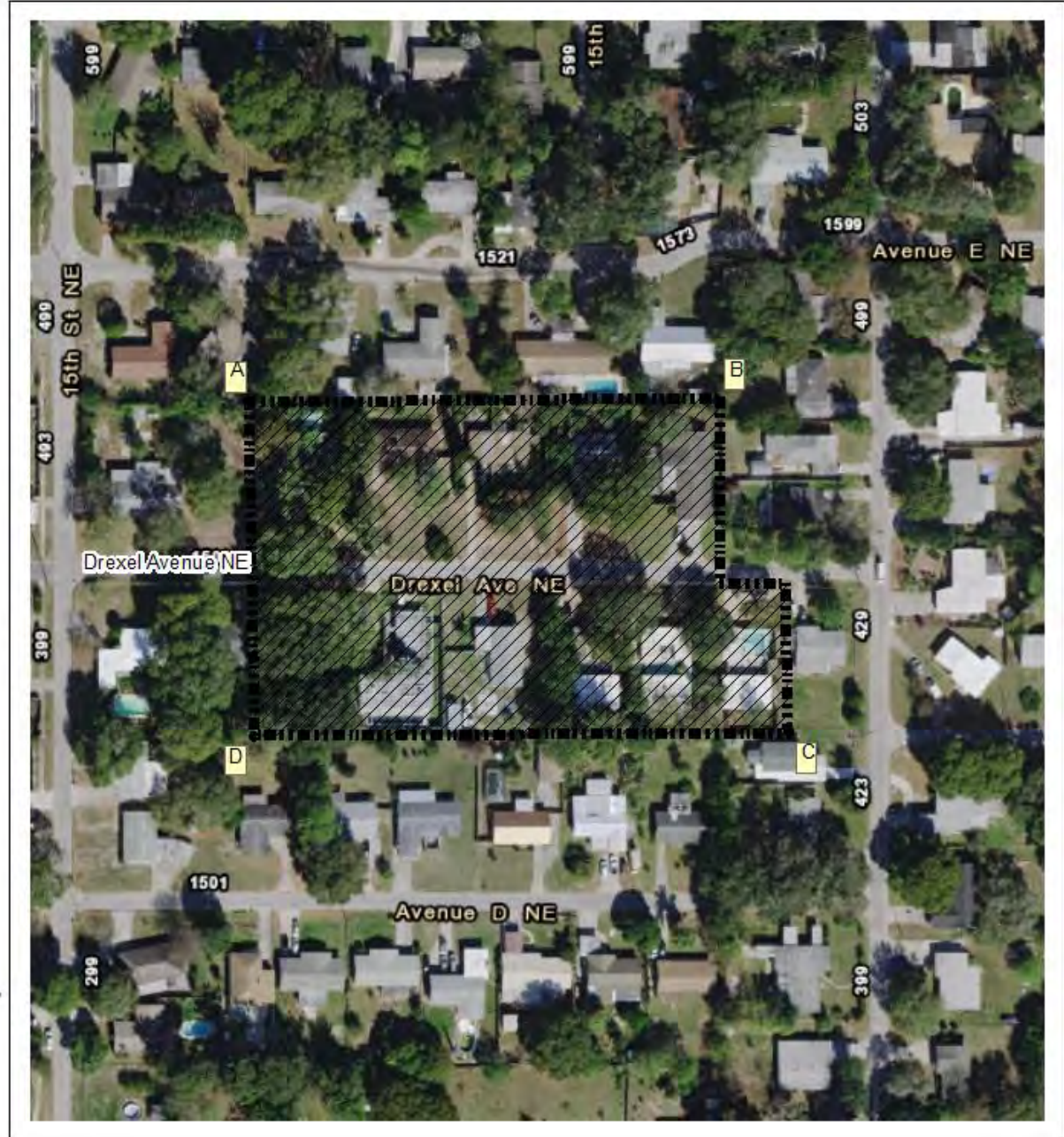
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IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS
User Community



Craney Spec Houses Historic District

Winter Haven, Polk County
Florida 33881

Lat./Long. Coordinates:


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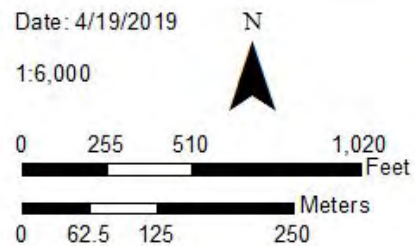
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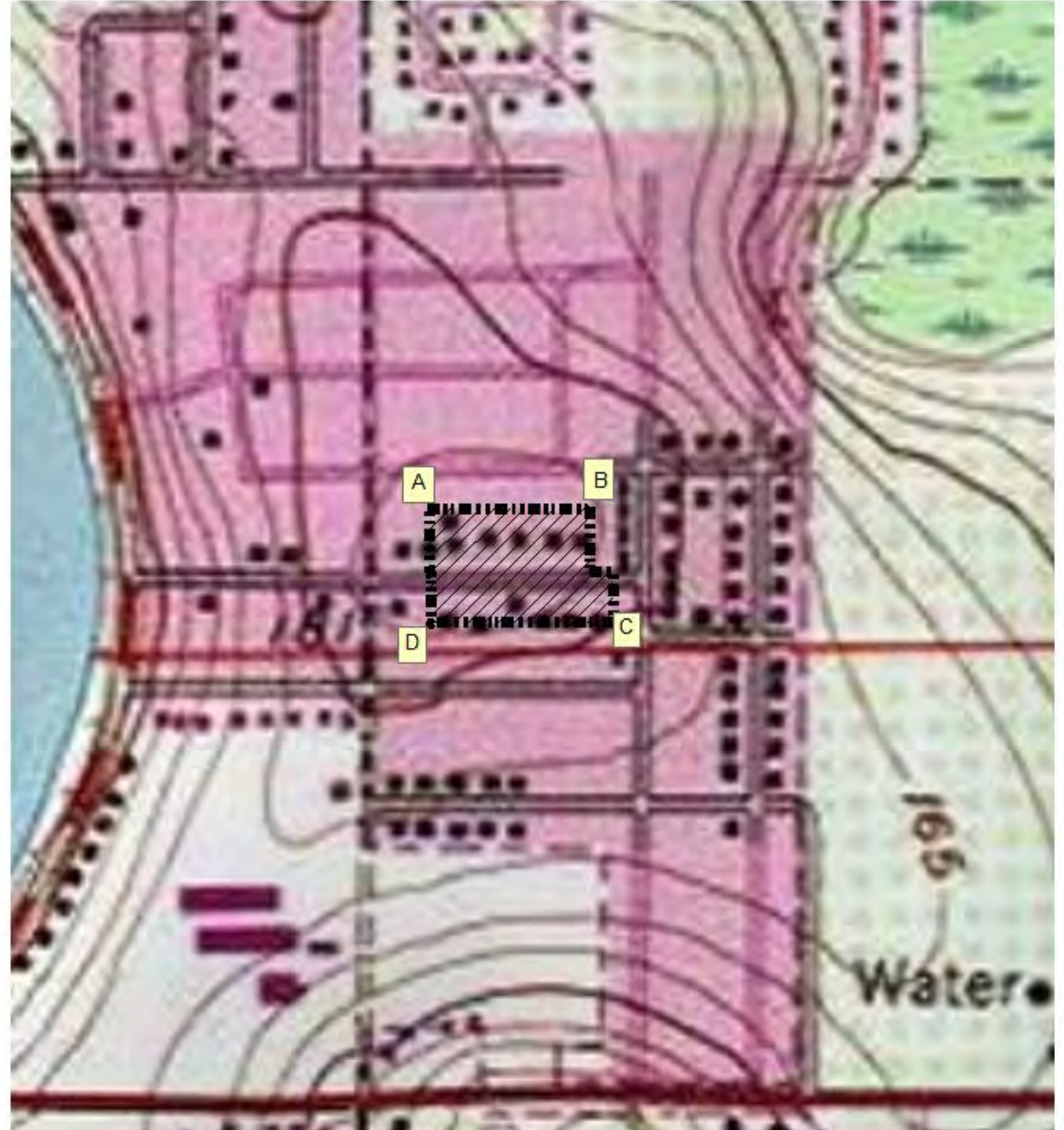
 Proposed NR Boundary

Date: 4/19/2019

1:6,000



Basemap Source: 2013 National
Geographic Society, i-cubed





1558







1530

















National Register of Historic Places
Memo to File

Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action: Nomination

Property Name: Craney Spec Houses Historic District

Multiple Name: Sarasota School of Architecture MPS

State & County: FLORIDA, Polk

Date Received: 7/23/2019 Date of Pending List: 8/9/2019 Date of 16th Day: 8/26/2019 Date of 45th Day: 9/6/2019 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number: MP100004349

Nominator: SHPO

Reason For Review:

X Accept Return Reject 8/27/2019 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments: This collection of houses designed by "Sarasota School" architect George Leedy was constructed between 1956 and 1958 to showcase the use of wood of lumberman and real estate developer Dick Craney. Leedy's modular designs were meant to change the focus of the house from the street to the rear, providing walls of windows meant to help create a blending of indoor and outdoor space. The houses were expandable, and most that have had alterations were done under the direction of Leedy, who resided in the district until his death. The homes were built in a former citrus grove, and utilized those trees as part of the overall design philosophy.

Recommendation/ Criteria Accept / A & C

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date

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

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

Dr. Carl Shiver & Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building / 500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417 / Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dr. Carl Shiver and Mr. Max Imberman,

The 'Craney Spec Houses' designed by Gene Leedy are beautiful examples of the architecture of our time. These buildings epitomize the mid-century American ideal that design can improve our families' lives.

As part of the so-called 'Sarasota School of Architecture', Leedy's 'Craney Spec Houses' represent the region's unique modern vernacular : honey-colored '*Ocala*' blocks of regional aggregate (*no longer sourced*) , cypress wood , and terrazzo floors ; large overhangs for sun protection ; expanses of sliding glass doors opening for inside out living ; and long, low profiles that are harmonious with central Florida's topography.

At the time of their construction, these design ideals were part of a revolutionary way of building for our tropical climate — ideals that grew from the lineage of Paul Rudolph, an internationally regarded architect for whom Leedy worked in his early career. This lineage speaks not only to the importance of these buildings to our region, but also to their place as unique examples of mid-century modern design in America.

I feel these buildings should be protected, and I fully support the efforts to have them considered for designation with the National Registry of Historic Places.



Carl Abbott , Fellow of the American Institute of Architects

21 August 2018

22 August 2018



4611 W SLAUSON AVE
LOS ANGELES CA 90043

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

RE: HISTORIC DESIGNATION FOR CRANEY HOMES, WINTER HAVEN, FL

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

This letter is to support and request that the mid-century modern homes on Drexel Avenue NE designed by the acclaimed architect Gene Leedy, FAIA in Polk County, be considered for the National Register of Historic Places designation. Mr. Leedy is one of the most important early modern architects in Florida and the Craney Homes on Drexel Ave are a rare collection worthy of designation.

Mr. Leedy (now in his 90's) still lives in one of the homes and has for more than 60 years. This group of homes has already drawn tens of thousands of visitors to Winter Haven to visit them as well as buyers from around the world. Just two years ago the National American Institute of Architects brought thousands of architects from around the USA to visit these homes. They have been, and will continue to draw visitors from around the world for decades to come. I believe you will find that the Craney Spec Houses reflect the best of Florida's unique residential style - a style ushered into existence by the Sarasota School of Architects in the early 1950's. One of the founders of the Sarasota School, Mr. Leedy's design for the Craney Spec houses were an early, significant achievement after he left the employment of Paul Rudolph, one of the most important figures in mid-century modernism.

Residential mid-century modernism is a unique and important post World War II period reflecting unique values and design innovation. Over the last decade it has garnered worldwide attention. I have been a Professor in Architecture for nearly three decades and can attest that the Craney Homes on Drexel Ave are an important and significant part of that legacy and deserve designation. Thank you for considering these unique and valuable structures.

Sincerely,
BROOKS + SCARPA

Lawrence Scarpa, AIA
University of Southern California Professor of Practice

[STRANG]

August 22, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

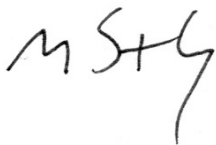
RE: Craney Spec Homes (Gene Leedy, Architect FAIA) Historic Designation

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

The Craney Spec Homes are an enduring representation of 'regional modernist' architecture and are well-deserving of historic designation. These homes are exquisite examples of Florida's post-war modernist design and have been widely celebrated for decades. The fact that a Craney Spec Home was chosen for the cover of Sarasota Modern (Rizzoli, 2006) is indubitable testimony to their architectural significance.

The City of Palm Springs, California has designated well over one hundred historic structures including a multitude of modern single-family residences. Florida needs to catch up. Gene Leedy's Craney Spec Homes masterfully capture the essence and optimism of Florida's post-war period. The historic designation of the Craney Spec Homes will bolster the efforts of The City of Winter Haven, the Sarasota Architectural Foundation, the University of Florida, AIA Florida and many others in underscoring the significance of Gene Leedy's work within the context of the architectural history of our state and nation.

With tremendous enthusiasm,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Strang', with a stylized, elongated 'g'.

Max Strang, FAIA
STRANG Design LLC
Miami - Fort Lauderdale - Sarasota

August 24, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R.A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Re: Nomination of the Craney Spec Houses for the National Register of Historic Places

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

It is an honor for me to write a letter in support of the nomination of the 'Craney Spec Houses' designed by Gene Leedy, FAIA to the National Register of Historic Places. This unique and time tested collection of mid-century houses represents an outstanding example of an architecture that reflects the embodiment of a Florida regional modern architecture that is derivative of the influential work established by the "Sarasota School of Architecture".

These houses by Gene Leedy, in my opinion, are still as relevant and fresh today as they were when originally constructed. This is because they are based on a ideal and a premise of honesty, incorporation of the environment as part of the architecture, employment of passive design features (popularized today but common sense in the mid-century), use of indigenous materials, an architecture that is truly of its place and defined by its place. An additional outstanding quality of these houses is how out of modest means and materials, you can create an architecture both rich in space and form but also in their enhancement and contribution to the quality of life to those who live there and to the larger context of our culture in general.

On a personal note, as a life long Sarasota resident and practicing architect, I have witnessed first hand the work of Gene Leedy and his commitment to these principles of architecture. The 'Craney Spec Houses' make a strong argument on how this architecture can be successfully translated to different locations and how adaptive they are to being responsive to the regional qualities of where they are constructed. It was in fact one of Gene Leedy's Sarasota homes, the Solomon Residence he designed for acclaimed modernist painter Syd Solomon that gave me as a young man the passion and motivation to become an architect. His work still educates and inspires architecture students and other architects today and there is no better example of this architecture than the 'Craney Spec Houses'.

I feel strongly that these houses be protected and recognized for their outstanding contribution to our architectural landscape and support the effort led by Judith Francis to have them listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,



Guy W. Peterson, FAIA



23 August, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

It is a profound joy to learn of Mr. Leedy's collection of homes on Drexel Avenue NE be considered for designation on the National Register of Historic Places. As a Winter Haven native, during my youth walking the streets, Mr. Leedy's buildings had an unknowingly curious and strong impact on me. I'd stop and wonder how the concrete beams, cantilevered just the right amount, could seem so effortless, creating space and light, framing beautiful Winter Haven landscapes. No matter how often I'd pass by, they made me stop and wonder with awe. As a graduate from the School of Architecture at University of Florida, I recognized the unequivocal importance and influences these experiences had upon my own curiosities of building Architecture.

As a founding member of the Sarasota School of Architecture, his work is of historic value not only to Winter Haven, but for the Arts and Architecture community at large. Mr. Leedy's work promised new ways of construction methods and living experiences, while creating harmony with nature. His works continue to influence the way many Architects consider building spaces.

I sincerely request that these buildings, nestled in the fauna and flora of Winter Haven, be considered for National Registry of Historic Places. Not just for my memories and gratitude, but for future youth who may have similar experiences of wonder.

Sincerely,

Jackson Butler

LOONEY & ASSOCIATES

Dallas • Chicago • Honolulu
looney-associates.com



SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS /
SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA CHAPTER
BOX 56478, Sherman Oaks, California 91413 | 18009SAHSCC
www.sahscc.org

August 17, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

In 2001 the Society of Architectural Historians/Southern California Chapter (SAH/SCC) conducted a travel tour for our members entitled *On Parallel Lines: The Sarasota Modern Movement and the Case Study House Program*. The tour explored the similarities and differences between postwar Modernism in Southern California and Florida's Gulf Coast.

Among our destinations was Winter Haven, where we toured the Craney Spec Houses along Drexel Avenue with architect Gene Leedy. What we found was a neighborhood of some of the finest modern designs in the country. The enclave distinguishes itself through its consistently harmonious application of the language of modernism, its distinctive architectural cadence along the streetscape, and its avant-garde design. As such, it represents a rare and intact example of the Mid-Century Modern style applied to postwar speculative housing development.

The SAH/SCC is an all-volunteer, nonprofit organization dedicated to providing members with an opportunity to learn about and experience the rich architectural heritage of Southern California and beyond. Our membership is comprised of architects, architectural historians, academics, and enthusiasts who share an appreciation for the built environment. We are the largest regional chapter of the national organization.

The Craney Spec Houses should be preserved for study by future generations. Adding them to the National Register of Historic Places will ensure their rightful place in history.

Warm regards,

Sian Winship
President
SAH/SCC



August 20, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

I am writing this letter in support of the request that the mid-century modern homes on Drexel Avenue NE, designed by the acclaimed architect Gene Leedy be considered for the National Register of Historic Places designation. Gene Leedy's work has had a significant impact on the cultural tourism in Winter Haven. Mr. Leedy's unique designs have drawn students of the arts, architecture and lovers of mid-century modernism far and wide to see these structures.

Founded by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Main Street Winter Haven is a comprehensive downtown revitalization program that encourages economic development within the context of historic preservation. It is the importance of historic preservation to our community's unique identity that prompted Main Street Winter Haven to recognize and appreciate Winter Haven's incomparable treasures – the architecture of Gene Leedy. On behalf of the Board of Directors I urge you to add these structures to the register.

In March 2006, Main Street Winter Haven was awarded an \$18,000 Historic Preservation Community Education Grant to assist with the Leedy Lifetime Works Tour. As a result of the work of our amazing Creative Team, the project includes a self-guided tour brochure and an accompanying audio tour and website. You will find a link to the website and the brochure below. This tour is very active, I encourage you to please open the links and explore the sites. <http://www.geneleedy.com/> <http://www.geneleedy.com/docs/leedybrochure.pdf>

It is our intent to be good stewards of these buildings by educating, enlightening, and increasing public awareness. It is for this reason that we request to honor the significance of Gene Leedy's innovative architecture with designation on the National Register of Historic Places.

Thank you for considering our request and joining us in celebrating a treasured member of our Winter Haven community.

Sincerely,

Anita Strang
Main Street Winter Haven, Inc – Executive Director
P.O. Box 2074
Winter Haven, FL 33883
863.295.9422

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R.A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250



August 23, 2018

Dear Sirs,

It is with great enthusiasm that I write this letter of support to place Gene Leedy's "Craney Spec Houses" on Drexel Avenue NE in Winter Haven on the National Register of Historic Places. They are an excellent example of what has come to be called the "Sarasota School of Architecture."

The "Sarasota School of Architecture" – better described as a movement – was a regional variation of modern architecture that thrived in Sarasota and southwest Florida between approximately 1940 and 1970. Architects of the "Sarasota School" took their aesthetic cues from the modern architecture that had developed during the 1920s and 1930s in Europe – geometric volumes, flat roofs, lack of applied decoration, limited color palette – and adapted those forms to the Florida climate, where the extremes of sunshine and rain can be architecturally controlled to provide year-round outdoor living.

Gene Leedy, FAIA (b. 1928), after starting his architectural career in Sarasota, moved to Winter Haven in 1954, where he opened up a practice that still exists today. In 1965, Leedy was selected by the journal *Architectural Record* as one their "successful young architects." In 1988 he was awarded a "Lifetime Design Achievement Award" from the Florida Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and in 1992 became an AIA "Fellow."

The works of architecture that Gene Leedy has carried out in Winter Haven make it almost a museum of well-designed and well-functioning modern architecture, with the Craney Spec Houses contributing an early example from Leedy's career. Again, it is with great enthusiasm that I give my support,

Christopher S. Wilson, PhD
Chairman of the Board, Sarasota Architectural Foundation
and
Architecture and Design Historian, Ringling College of Art + Design



THE
NILS M.
SCHWEIZER
FELLOWS, INC.

August 24, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

We, The Nils M. Schweizer Fellows, as an established group of mid-century modern architecture enthusiasts and supporters of that period of architecture, hereby support the endeavor to list the homes along Drexel Avenue, designed by the acclaimed architect Gene Leedy in Winter Haven, FL, for consideration to be listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

More information on our organization can be found at www.centralfloridamodern.com and our current preservation and re-purposing effort at www.nextround.org

Cordially,

John Kaiser
Founding President of the Nils M. Schweizer Fellows

cc: Garth Schweizer, Founding Member of the Nils M. Schweizer Fellows
Jerry Uhan, President of the Nils M. Schweizer Fellows
Eric Kleinstein, member, Nils M. Schweizer Fellows

Dr. Carl Shiver & Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building / 500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417 / Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dr. Carl Shiver and Mr. Max Imberman,

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As part of the so-called 'Sarasota School of Architecture', Leedy's 'Craney Spec Houses' represent the region's unique modern vernacular : honey-colored '*Ocala*' blocks of regional aggregate (*no longer sourced*) , cypress wood , and terrazzo floors ; large overhangs for sun protection ; expanses of sliding glass doors opening for inside out living ; and long, low profiles that are harmonious with central Florida's topography.

At the time of their construction, these design ideals were part of a revolutionary way of building for our tropical climate — ideals that grew from the lineage of Paul Rudolph, an internationally regarded architect for whom Leedy worked in his early career. This lineage speaks not only to the importance of these buildings to our region, but also to their place as unique examples of mid-century modern design in America.

I feel these buildings should be protected, and I fully support the efforts to have them considered for designation with the National Registry of Historic Places.



Carl Abbott , Fellow of the American Institute of Architects

21 August 2018

KENNETH TREISTER, FAIA

To: The National Register of Historic Places

From: Kenneth Treister, FAIA, 1600 Island Way, Winter Haven, Florida, 33884

Subj: Architect Gene Leedy's homes on Drexel Ave., Winter Haven, Florida

Date: 8-26-2018

Dear Sirs:

As an introduction, I am an architect and a Fellow in the American Institute of Architects. I was: an adjunct professor in Architecture, at both the Universities of Florida and Miami; awarded the Gold Medal AIA Florida, 2013; received the Lifetime Achievement Award AIA Miami and the Lifetime Achievement Award from the Miami Center for Architecture and Design, 2018. I have written 12 books on architecture including *Bok Tower Gardens*, *America's Taj Mahal*, a building on the National Register of Historic Places.

I would like to add my name to the nomination of architect Gene Leedy's residences on Drexel Ave., Winter Haven, Florida to The National Register of Historic Places.

These homes are architecturally exemplary and historic in three distinct ways, namely:

A COMMUNITY OF HOMES

First, these homes form a cluster on the same street of exceptionally well-designed mid 19th century residences. These homes form a quiet community of excellent architecture that physically blend harmoniously together, a rare and unusual historic phenomenon in this world of visual chaos and architectural mayhem.

This community of homes present another rare and important historic and social phenomenon. Here the homeowners share living in well-designed mid-20th century homes and not only enjoy their individual homes but share a common friendship and comradeship based on their joy of living in a cluster of Gene Leedy homes. This is a most unique aspect of this historic community, a place where humanistic architecture joins families in friendship and mutual respect.

MODESTY OF ARCHITECTURAL FACADES

The homes in this Drexel Avenue architectural Community each are different but present modest and simple front façades. They whisper but do not shout. Unfortunately, in the contemporary world of single-family residential architecture egotistic design reigns supreme, all to the detriment of beautiful, graceful and cohesive neighborhood.

COURT-GARDEN HOMES

An intriguing historic mystery is why the court-garden house, after being the prototypical residential design throughout architectural history, is so rarely used in the development of American residential architecture.

These Gene Leedy homes are the prototype court-garden homes. The court-garden house is basically a residential design that turns its back to the street and looks inwardly to one or a series of garden courtyards. These courts and interior gardens provide privacy, human scale, a sense of enclosure, and a close link with the nature and its wonders. It is an ideal environment for relatively high-density residential neighborhoods. These homes form a rare example of a cohesive neighborhood of court-garden homes in America.

PRESERVATION OF HIGH QUALITY MID-19TH CENTURY ARCHITECTURE

The Gene Leedy Homes on Drexel Avenue, Winter Haven, Florida are a unique and historically important example of 20th mid-century

architecture that should be preserved by being placed on The National Register of Historic Places.

Sincerely, Kenneth Treister, FAIA



August 21, 2018

Dr. Carl Shiver
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R. A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Dear Dr. Shiver and Mr. Imberman,

I am writing in support of a nomination of the Craney Spec Houses by architect Gene Leedy, FAIA to the National Register of Historic Places. These homes are important historic resources and offer significant insight into progressive design in the early 1950's.

Many of our Mid-Century historic resources here in Orlando were influenced by the designs of the Sarasota School and recognizing these residences as worthy of the National Register will aid the entire Central Florida region to understand better the design intent and progressive features of many of these buildings.

Thank you for your consideration of these important structures which represent a major shift in residential design in Florida and the early work of a master architect.

Richard Forbes, Architect, AIA, NCARB, LEED AP
Historic Preservation Officer
Baldwin Park Town Planner

WINTER HAVEN

The Chain of Lakes City

Office of the Mayor

August 22, 2018

Dr. Carl Shriver &
Mr. Max Imberman
Florida Department of State
Division of Historical Resources: National Register of Historic Places
R.A. Gray Building
500 S. Bronough Street, Room 417
Tallahassee, FL 32399-0250

Subject: Craney Homes in Winter Haven, Florida – Historic Designation

Dear Dr. Shriver and Mr. Imberman,

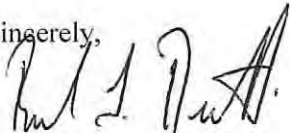
On behalf of the City of Winter Haven, we are pleased to offer this letter of support for the homes on Drexel Avenue NE, designed by globally recognized and esteemed architect Gene Leedy in the mid-century modern architectural style, be given the designation of National Register of Historic Places.

As you may already know, Mr. Leedy was one of the founders of the Sarasota School of Architecture and a pioneer for modern architecture in Florida. Winter Haven is proud to say that we have more Gene Leedy buildings than anywhere else, and the Craney Homes, including his own residence, on Drexel Avenue are significantly important examples of his work worthy of the designation. In fact, our own City Hall, built in the early 1960s, is a Gene Leedy building I first visited as a child when my father, Richard Dantzler, was a City Commissioner.

Due to the unique and innovative features of the Craney Homes, thousands of visitors and buyers from around the globe, including architects from the National American Institute of Architects, have flocked to Winter Haven to see them. These spec houses are a legacy I believe whole-heartedly will garner admiration and attention for many years to come.

The City of Winter Haven supports recognition of the Craney Homes on Drexel Avenue and greatly appreciate your consideration of these structures be given the honorable National Register of Historic Places designation.

Sincerely,



Bradley T. Dantzler
Mayor
City of Winter Haven



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of STATE

RON DESANTIS
Governor

LAUREL M. LEE
Secretary of State



July 19, 2019

Dr. Julie Earnstein, Deputy Keeper and Chief,
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Dr. Earnstein:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for **Craney Spec Houses Historic District (FMSF#: 8PO08212) in Polk County**, to the National Register of Historic Places. The related materials (digital images, maps, and site plan) are included.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (850) 245-6364 if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Ruben A. Acosta
Supervisor, Survey & Registration
Bureau of Historic Preservation

RAA/raa

Enclosures