

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM

NATIONAL HISTORIC LANDMARKS NOMINATION FORM

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**1. Name of Property**

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historic name: Carson, Rachel, House  
other name/site number: N/A

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**2. Location**

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street & number: 11701 Berwick Road.  
not for publication: N/A  
city/town: Silver Spring vicinity: N/A  
state: MD county: Montgomery code: 031 zip code: 20904

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**3. Classification**

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Ownership of Property: private  
Category of Property: building  
Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>1</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	Total

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

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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**4. State/Federal Agency Certification**  
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As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this \_\_\_\_\_ nomination \_\_\_\_\_ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation \_\_\_\_\_ standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property \_\_\_\_\_ meets \_\_\_\_\_ does not meet the National Register Criteria. \_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

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**5. National Park Service Certification**  
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

- \_\_\_\_\_ entered in the National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ determined eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ National Register \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ removed from the National Register \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_ other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper Date  
of Action

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**6. Function or Use**  
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Historic: domestic Sub: single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Current : domestic Sub: single dwelling  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**7. Description**  
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Architectural Classification:

Modern  
Other: Ranch

Other Description: N/A

Materials: foundation- concrete roof- asphalt shingle  
walls- brick other- wood

Describe present and historic physical appearance.  X  See continuation sheet.

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**8. Statement of Significance**  
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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: national

Applicable National Register Criteria: B, A  
National Historic Landmarks Criteria: 2, 1

National Register Criteria Considerations: G  
NHL Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): 8

NHL Theme: XXXII. Conservation of Natural Resources  
XIII. Science  
C. Biological Sciences  
XIX. Literature  
C. Non-Fiction

Areas of Significance: conservation  
science

Period(s) of Significance: 1956-1964

Significant Dates: 1962

Significant Person(s): Carson, Rachel  
\_\_\_\_\_

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Carson, Rachel (designer)  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.  
 X  See continuation sheet.

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**9. Major Bibliographical References**  
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X  See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: \_\_\_\_\_

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**10. Geographical Data**  
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Acreage of Property: 1.25 acres

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing    Zone Easting Northing

A	18	326870	4323660	B	_____	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____	_____

See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The nominated property is located on lot 11, block E, in Silver Spring, Montgomery County, Maryland.

Boundary Justification: \_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

The boundaries are those that have historically been associated with the property.

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**11. Form Prepared By**  
=====

Name/Title: Dr. Page Putnam Miller, Director  
Jill S. Topolski  
Vernon Horn

Organization: National Coordinating Committee for the Promotion of History Date: June 7, 1991

Street & Number: 400 A Street, SE Telephone: (202) 544-2422

City or Town: Washington State: DC Zip Code: 20003

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DESCRIPTION OF SITE:

The Rachel Carson House in Silver Spring, Maryland, is a simple, post-World War II ranch style structure, designed by Rachel Carson and constructed in 1956. It is an asymmetrical one-story brick house with an asphalt shingle roof. The roof is side gabled and low pitched, and has a wide eave overhang. The walls are brick except at either end where the distance between the top of the roof and the eave is wooden clapboard.

The front of the building has two large single paned windows, with smaller sash windows on either side. Other fenestration consists of double sash windows with brick sills.

The interior of the house is virtually unchanged since Carson lived there. Upon entering the house, the living room is to the right. A stone fireplace dominates the far wall, with custom-designed bookcases on the opposite wall. The walls are paneled with birch wood, and there is a large picture window that looks out into the front yard. Through the living room is Carson's study. This corner room with windows on three sides also has a stone fireplace and paneled walls. The kitchen and dining room are located behind the living room. There are mirrored shelves located over the kitchen sink that were installed by Carson, probably to hold a collection of shells. The bedroom areas are to the left of the front entryway. The basement of the house includes a small bedroom with bathroom, and a larger multi-purpose room. Half of the basement is unfinished.

Rachel Carson, concerned with the outdoors, took special care in the landscape design of her Silver Spring home, and much of the original landscaping is intact. About twenty feet from the front door, grouped on the front lawn, she planted three evergreens. Also in the front yard she planted spruce, hemlock and white pine trees, as well as daffodils and pink and white azaleas. Only a small part of the front yard has a cultivated lawn, for the majority of the yard retains the native trees and shrubs. She consciously worked to keep a "woody section" and to create a natural garden. A few of the trees Carson planted have died -- specifically several birch, that the current owner who knew her thinks that Carson had brought from Maine. However, the front yard retains the wooded area and much of the same appearance that it had when Carson lived there. The owners of the Rachel Carson House retain Carson's landscaping vision in their maintenance of the property.

The changes to the Rachel Carson house have been minimal. The current owners have enclosed a screened porch with redwood paneled walls and installed a hot tub. They also added a driveway at the rear of the house.

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There are two non-contributing structures on the property, both erected after Rachel Carson's tenure in the house-- a small storage shed, and a covered outdoor grill area.

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HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE:

The Rachel Carson House in Silver Spring, Maryland is significant as the place in which American biologist, naturalist, writer, and poet, Rachel Carson, wrote the highly acclaimed Silent Spring, which made her, more than any other person, the acknowledged advocate of the ecology movement. Though Carson was already a famous writer before completing Silent Spring, this book is widely acknowledged, by friends and foes, to have changed the way Americans think about their natural environment, and is responsible for beginning the modern environmental movement. Silent Spring drew popular attention to the poisoning of the earth and the endangerment of public safety by the indiscriminate use of modern chemical pesticides and herbicides. Recently, a panel of more than 150 American scholars, including former Librarian of Congress Daniel Boorstin, Frank Talbot, Director National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution and Harvard historian of science Barbara Gutmann Rosenkrantz, named Rachel Carson to Life Magazine's list of "The 100 most Important Americans of the 20th Century."<sup>1</sup> Likewise, The Mother Earth News, a respected and popular environmental journal, included Carson in its "Environmental Hall of Fame," ranking her with John James Audubon, John Muir, and Theodore Roosevelt as great Americans who have significantly contributed to the preservation of the environment.<sup>2</sup> Several children's books published on her life present her as a role model for children.<sup>3</sup> According to the National Park Service Thematic Framework, the Rachel Carson House falls under theme: XXXII. Conservation of Natural Resources; XIII. Science, C. Biological Sciences; XIX. Literature, C. Non-Fiction.

Rachel Carson was born and grew up on a farm in Springdale, Pennsylvania. Only the old farmhouse is still in existence, and it now sits amid a post-World War II housing development. While Carson did spend her first twenty years here, it is not the location where she did her most significant work.<sup>4</sup> After graduation from Pennsylvania College for Women (later Chatham College) she earned a Master of Science degree from Johns Hopkins University and began teaching at Johns Hopkins and the University of Maryland.

In 1936 she began her career with the Bureau of Fisheries (later the Fish and Wildlife Service). During her time of government service she lived in Silver Spring and briefly in Chicago. By 1952 Carson's writing earned her enough money that she could resign from government service. She bought land and built a cottage in West Southport, Maine where she completed The Edge of the Sea.<sup>5</sup>

In 1956 Carson designed and moved into a new home in Silver Spring, Maryland. The home provided all the "special things that I [Carson] need."<sup>6</sup> By 1958 she began the project that evolved into Silent Spring. With this project her writing began a new phase. Her previous books celebrated the wonder of nature and benefited greatly

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by her stays in Maine and her travels on the Atlantic coast. The Silent Spring project, however, was more about human destruction of nature. During these years the cottage in Maine was not used much, because now her work focused on published research and correspondence with scholars rather than her own original investigation into sea life on the Atlantic coast. Therefore the cottage in Maine is not an appropriate site for designation because its importance is diminished during the time of Carson's most important work. As she worked on the project, the nature of the research as well as her failing health conspired to keep her more and more working at home in Silver Spring.<sup>7</sup> After the publication of Silent Spring in 1962, Carson spent most of her remaining two years in that home. Because most of the work for Carson's most important book was done at the house in Silver Spring it is the most significant property associated with her.

Rachel Carson's parents encouraged her intellectually and Carson's mother, a woman of some education with a love for nature, helped foster in her a deep love and respect for nature. "I can remember no time," Rachel Carson later recalled "when I wasn't interested in the out-of-doors and the whole world of nature."<sup>8</sup> Young Rachel's interests focused on writing and at the age of ten the obviously gifted child published a story in St. Nicholas, a national children's magazine.

In college Carson naturally pursued a major in English. In her junior year, however, a mandatory biology course taught by a brilliant teacher convinced her to change majors. Later she reflected that her decision to pursue biology gave her "something to write about."<sup>9</sup> After graduating from college, magna cum laude, she obtained a scholarship to Johns Hopkins and earned a master of science degree in genetics and zoology. Even before graduation she began teaching at Hopkins and later at the University of Maryland.<sup>10</sup>

In 1935 the death of Carson's father and sister left her with the responsibility of taking care of her mother and her sister's young daughters. This new financial burden motivated her to seek more prosperous work than teaching. Carson took first place in a competitive federal civil service exam and landed a job with the Bureau of Fisheries. She was one of the first two women hired.<sup>11</sup> In her career with the bureau she rose to the position as chief editor of publications.

Carson's career as a writer began slowly at first. After writing a few pieces for the Baltimore Sunday Sun, she developed one of her Bureau assignments into an article that attained publication in The Atlantic Monthly. The article developed into her first book, Under the Sea-Wind. The book reached publication just weeks before the Pearl Harbor attack and, despite good reviews, saw only modest sales.<sup>12</sup>

During the Second World War Carson continued in her position with the Fish and

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Wildlife Service. In this time she wrote conservation booklets for public consumption. She also had first hand contact with many reports of the new synthetic pesticides and herbicides and their use in the war effort.<sup>13</sup> Carson, however, persevered and continued writing on the sea in her spare time. Thus during her government service she continued to develop her writing skills while becoming familiar with the new pesticides about which she would later write.

In 1951 Oxford University Press published The Sea Around Us and Carson became a "literary celebrity."<sup>14</sup> This success brought financial independence and Carson was able to devote full time to writing. Between 1951 and 1955 Carson spent much of her time traveling the Atlantic coast working on The Edge of the Sea. Her goal in this piece was to "take the seashore out of the category of scenery and make it come alive."<sup>15</sup> She did, and reviewers have often noted that Carson's work takes on certain poetic qualities, rare among scientific writers. These were the happiest years of her life.

Many of the synthetic chemicals developed during the Second World War were heralded as great innovations. One of the most famous, DDT, was labeled the "savior of mankind," and its developer given the 1948 Nobel prize. In the explosion of post-war "progress" the United States Department of Agriculture, numerous other government agencies, and almost anyone with a spray can began optimistically dispersing DDT and other synthetic chemicals at an enormous rate, certain that all the nation's pest and weed problems could be cured. By the 1960s DDT was one of the most highly used chemical agents in an all out war against insects. The problem, however, was that DDT not only killed insects, but the predators that fed upon them.<sup>16</sup> More and more people around the country were noticing the disastrous effects on wildlife populations in the wake of chemical applications. The most offensive of these applications came in the form of aerial sprayings. These indiscriminate chemical dumpings caused much resentment among naturalists as well as ordinary citizens who often saw whole populations of birds wiped out on their own property. Actually the practice was much more widespread and dangerous than anyone, including Carson, realized.<sup>17</sup>

As reports of environmental atrocities reached Carson she first tried to engage E. B. White to write an expose. Although she did not see herself as a crusading reformer it became clear to her that if the project was to be completed she must be the one to do it. Silent Spring was more than four years in the making. Not until she began work on the project did she realize how extensive the problem was. Every part of her research seemed to lead to other abuses. The magnitude of the problem exceeded anything that anyone had previously imagined. Carson's research helped establish the essential interrelatedness of all living systems, and make this an item of public knowledge. For example, DDT sprayed on elm trees would not stop with the

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trees. The falling leaves would be eaten by worms who absorbed the DDT and the local bird population ate the worms with disastrous effects. Additionally, the run-off might enter the pastures of a dairy farm a half mile away and the DDT would enter the milk supply. The use of DDT, moreover, had become so widespread that Carson proclaimed "every human being in the world is now subjected to contact with dangerous chemicals, from the moment of conception until death."<sup>18</sup>

Carson not only pointed out the dangers of synthetic chemicals, but she also questioned the whole rationalization behind their use. Carson questioned the foolish optimism that caused industrialized technological society to embark on a war against insects without any concern for the long range consequences. She challenged its ideology and authority. As one scientist at the Fish and Wildlife Service noted before Silent Spring:

People in positions of economic and political power had been . . . able to dismiss ecologists as impractical visionaries, whose counsel was of no import. Miss Carson had sufficient impact to reach the highest levels of government, and these decision makers began to listen to the idea that ecological process was vital to life and to our own well-being.<sup>19</sup>

The publication of Silent Spring caused an immediate uprising. The chemical industry spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in an attempt to discredit Carson. They defended the use of DDT, portrayed the author as a "hysterical woman who wanted to turn the earth over to the insects," and threatened lawsuits. Such bellicosity created more publicity than the publishers could have afforded and ultimately worked to gain the book serious attention. "Meanwhile, as a direct result of the message in Silent Spring, President Kennedy set up a special panel of his Science Advisory Committee to study the problem. Its report was a complete vindication of her thesis."<sup>20</sup> Ultimately this led to the founding of the Environmental Protection Agency and the eventual banning of DDT.<sup>21</sup>

Carson, despite the cries of her critics, did not advocate a complete abandonment of chemical pesticides. She did, however, contend that the use of such powerful and dangerous chemicals had been put into unqualified hands and without thought for the long-term effects.<sup>22</sup> Moreover she pointed out that chemical drenching was often less effective than non-chemical methods of pest control, backing up her claims with references to specific studies.<sup>23</sup> Thus her study has stood the test of time and despite some critics is still respected by the general public and the scientific community.<sup>24</sup>

Rachel Carson contributed to a revolution in American thinking on the environment. She sounded an alarm that forced people to think critically about the

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dangers of uninhibited chemical use. She helped break down the baseless confidence in the American chemical industry. Rachel Carson's clear poetic prose combined with the thoroughness and accuracy of her research helped enlighten many Americans. Although the use and abuse of chemical pesticides continues, the response to Carson's jeremiad helped avert what may have become a wholesale slaughter of many species of wildlife. Carson's "confidence that there are 'now imaginative and creative approaches to the problem of sharing our earth with creatures'" is shaping a current generation of biotechnological research that aims to develop more environmentally sensitive and selective pesticides.<sup>25</sup> Rachel Carson's work is comparable in its effects to Upton Sinclair's revelations about the meat packing industry in The Jungle. Rachel Carson is truly an American hero.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup>LIFE, (Fall 1990), p. 19.
- <sup>2</sup>Mother Earth News (September-October 1983), pp. 94-95.
- <sup>3</sup>Jean Lee Latham, Rachel Carson: Who Loved the Sea (Champaign, Ill: Garrad Publishing, 1973); Mary Jezer, Rachel Carson (New York: Chelsea House, 1988); Kathleen V. Kudlinski, Rachel Carson: Pioneer of Ecology (New York: Viking Kestrel, 1988)
- <sup>4</sup>National Register of Historic Places Inventory Nomination Form, Rachel Carson House, Springdale, Pennsylvania, prepared by Edward R. Unterman, Pittsburgh History and Landmarks Foundation, 15 January 1975.
- <sup>5</sup>Edward T. James, Janet Wilson James and Paul Boyer, eds., Notable American Women, 1607-1950 (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1976), p. 139.
- <sup>6</sup>Frank Graham, Jr., Since Silent Spring (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1970), p. 12.
- <sup>7</sup>Graham pp. 21-35; Paul Brooks, The House of Life: Rachel Carson at Work (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1972), p. 228.
- <sup>8</sup>Rachel Carson as quoted in James, James and Boyer, p. 138.
- <sup>9</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>10</sup>James, James and Boyer, p. 138.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid. p. 139; Paul Brooks "Courage of Rachel Carson," Audubon (January 1987), p. 14.
- <sup>12</sup>James, James and Boyer p. 139.
- <sup>13</sup>Gino J. Marco, et al. eds., Silent Spring Revisited (Washington: The American Chemical Society, 1987), p. 5.
- <sup>14</sup>Graham, p. 8.
- <sup>15</sup>Rachel Carson as quoted in Brooks, "The Courage of Rachel Carson," p. 14.
- <sup>16</sup>George Woodwell, "Broken Eggshells: The Miracle of DDT Was Short-lived, but it Helped Launch the Environmental Movement," Science '84, (November 1984), pp. 115-118.

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<sup>17</sup>Geoffrey Norman, "The Flight of Rachel Carson," Esquire (December 1983), pp. 472, 474.

<sup>18</sup>Rachel Carson, Silent Spring (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962, twenty-fifth Anniversary edition, 1987) p. 15.

<sup>19</sup>Marco, et al., Silent Spring Revisited, p. 5.

<sup>20</sup>Brooks, "The Courage of Rachel Carson," p. 15.

<sup>21</sup>Marco, et al., Silent Spring Revisited, p. 17; Woodwell, "Broken Eggshells," p. 117.

<sup>22</sup>Carson, pp. 12-13.

<sup>23</sup>Carson, pp. 104, 114-117, shows that New York effectively controlled Dutch Elm disease without the use of chemicals.

<sup>24</sup>Marco, et al., Silent Spring Revisited, passim.

<sup>25</sup>John Mattill, "Looking Anew at Silent Spring," Technology Review (November-December 1984), p. 77.

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