

**United States Department of the Interior
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service**

APR 17 1989

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

NATIONAL REGISTER

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Hobart Welded Steel Houses Thematic Resources

and/or common N/A

2. Location

street & number Hobart Circle Plat, Edgemoor Plat,
172 S. Ridge Avenue, 995 Polecat Road N/A not for publication

city, town Troy N/A vicinity of congressional district

state Ohio 45373 code OH county Miami code 109

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use	
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> museum
<input type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input type="checkbox"/> commercial	<input type="checkbox"/> park
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private residence
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment	<input type="checkbox"/> religious
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<input type="checkbox"/> in process	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government	<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> thematic resources	<input type="checkbox"/> being considered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
	N/A	<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name various, see Ohio Historic Inventory Forms

street & number

city, town _____ vicinity of _____ state

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Recorder's Office, Miami County Courthouse

street & number Main Street

city, town Troy state Ohio

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title Ohio Historic Inventory has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date March 1987 federal state county local

depository for survey records Ohio Historic Preservation Office

city, town Columbus state OH 43211

7. Description

Condition

excellent
 good
 fair

deteriorated
 ruins
 unexposed

Check one

unaltered
 altered

Check one

original site
 moved date _____

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The City of Troy is located in west central Ohio. Troy overlaps the boundary between Concord township to the west and Staunton township to the east, the boundary being the Great Miami River (map 1). The densest area of development is in the Troy Public Square area, which is composed primarily of two- and three-story brick buildings, many sharing party walls. Commercial buildings on the public square are included in the Troy Public Square Historic District (NR: 6-30-75). In the area north of the Great Miami an extended park area borders the river itself, protected from flooding by levies built by the historic Miami Conservancy District after the floods of 1913. Beyond the park districts, the Sherwood residential district, filled with brick ranch style residences, extends to the city limits.

From the Troy Public Square Historic District, south of the river and east along Main Street, modest two-story residences, mostly vernaculars and bungalows, extend for nearly a mile to where the river turns south. On the west side of the square, south from the river, gracious older homes built in the 1860-1895 era are more common.

Also on the west, the World Headquarters of Hobart Manufacturing Company and the Hobart Brothers Company factories stand, the latter covering a two block area between Main and Water Streets (photo 1). Just south of the site of the Hobart Brothers Company factory, in a place where the Miami and Erie Canal passed through Troy one hundred years previously, is a small area platted in 1936 called Hobart Circle. Directly to the west of Hobart Circle, across the B & O railroad tracks, is a larger plat called Edgehill, drawn in 1938 (Map 2).

The 16 steel houses, two one-car garages, one large maintenance garage, and one storage shed included in this nomination, in addition to the five steel houses not included in the nomination, were built by the Hobart Welded Steel House Company between the years 1932 and 1941. The company constructed these structures entirely of welded steel; including the floors (photo 35), ceilings and roof, interior and exterior walls, as well as decorative and functional items such as kitchen and bathroom cabinets (photo 36). All Hobart houses were prefabricated in the Hobart factory on W. Main Street in Troy, Ohio, and moved on a flatbed truck to the housing site (illustration 1) where they were placed on a poured concrete basement (photo 28). While several styles were available the basic house size was a standard 21' x 30' rectangle. No known sales were made outside of the Troy, Ohio area.

Although the photographs were taken in 1987, they continue to accurately reflect the appearance of the properties; no significant changes have been made since the photographs were taken.

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While the overall style is Colonial all models feature the strong Moderne detailing which changed the look of housing in America during the 1930s. The Hobart houses are streamlined and functional. Exterior walls are smooth, and a horizontal band delineates floors on the two story houses (photos 6, 32). The metal casement windows have no surrounding frames and appear to be a part of the wall. Inside and out, corners are rounded adding to the streamlined look. Some originally had flat roofs, the most unfortunate of the Moderne design features, for the Ohio winters require that flat steel roofs be either well maintained, or soon replaced.

Inside, Moderne and the Art Deco style predominate. Built-in steel kitchen cabinets have a streamlined appearance. Unadorned walls have rounded corners with molding along the ceilings and baseboards (photo 33). Wiring, which was factory installed, remains accessible through these removable moldings. The windows are as flush to the walls on the inside as on the outside, which makes them appear to be a part of the wall, rather than "hung" on the wall. The large casement windows create extremely bright airy rooms. Steel floors are covered with carpet, linoleum, or wood tiles. Those with fireplaces have steel mantles. Plumbing also is built into the walls with removable sections allowing some access.

All houses are fundamentally the same with a 21' x 30' rectangular floorplan. Constructed on an assembly line in the factory, the interior supports were welded together, plumbing and wiring installed, interior and exterior walls attached with rockwood insulation in between. All the houses were constructed with 16-light steel casement windows. The steel staircase was installed centrally in the two story models and steel doors hung throughout (photos 31, 34 & 37). In the kitchen steel cabinets were welded to the wall (photo 36), as in the bathroom where even a glass holder and soap dish were attached. Interior floorplans are similar for all houses of the same style. Although the exterior dimensions are the same for all, the interior room sizes vary from style to style (illustration 2). Some models are modified with attachments, such as side and back, one and two story sun porches (photos 5 & 16).

The houses are well designed with little wasted space, another feature of both the Moderne and International styles. Steel walls are inherently load-bearing, eliminating the need for 2' x 4' and 2' x 6' support joists. Any additional space is used for storage area. Closets are large and functional, many with steel storage drawers built into the walls (photo 34). Rooms, while not overly large, have easy access and an abundance of light. In the Hobart Welded Steel houses economy of space and practicality were as important as style, an important selling point in the time period these were built.

The first group of houses were built upon land previously part of the Miami-Erie Canal. By 1936 it was owned by the Hobart Brothers Company and platted as Hobart Circle (map 3). It lay one block south of Main Street and the Hobart factory. A prototype house was begun in 1932 at what was to become 23 Hobart Drive (photo 4). Hobart engineers, welders, and an architect combined efforts to develop an attractive, functional house, easily produced on an assembly line. Construction on Hobart Circle was begun in 1937. The eight houses

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erected there, along with more on an access street, Hobart Drive, served as a model home park; a showcase for the stylish and innovative new houses. Although built for sale, buyers did not materialize. Consequently, they were rented and potential buyers, as well as renters, could tour them when they were available for rent. Once rented they were not open for public inspection. The Hobart factory also welcomed potential customers to inspect the houses on the assembly line.

Initial reaction to Hobart Circle was good but cautious. The early houses which did not sell were retained by the Hobart Welded Steel House Company and rented to middle-class Troy citizens. Seventy-eight percent of the original renters in Hobart Circle were employees of either Hobart Brothers Company or Hobart Manufacturing Company. There is, however, no indication that this was strictly "company" housing for Hobart employees, as other renters were employed in other industries in the area. By 1953, when all the Hobart Circle houses were finally sold, only thirty percent of the original owners were connected with Hobart Industries. The hope that welders trained in the welding school would want to live in a welded steel house did not come to pass.

Originally ten steel houses were built on Hobart Drive and Hobart Circle. These houses are further described in the attached Item 7 covering Hobart Welded Steel House Historic District and in the Ohio Historic Inventory Forms.

Encouraged by the favorable response to the houses, the Hobarts platted another parcel of land in 1938. Lying to the west of Hobart Circle, bounded on the north by Main Street, on the west by Ridge Avenue, on the south by McKaig Road, and on the west by the B & O railroad right-of-way, Edgehill contained nearly 200 plats (map 2). Initially the Hobart brothers may have hoped to put a welded steel house on each lot, but lack of sales in the Hobart Circle area caused them to modify their expectations.

The anticipated boom in the steel house industry did not occur in the pre-war era. The country was emerging from the Great Depression and industry was beginning to prepare for war. Few people in a position to buy a house were willing to speculate on a steel house. Sixty percent of steel houses built in Edgehill were custom ordered by the original owner, of whom only thirty-three percent were Hobart employees. The additional forty percent of the steel houses in Edgehill were held as rentals and, in sixty seven percent of the cases, were rented to people not connected with the Hobart industries.

Only ten welded steel houses were built in Edgehill, all built prior to World War II. The rest of the development in the plat occurred in the post-war era and consists of modest one and two story frame and brick houses in the Georgian revival, Cape Cod, and Bungalow styles. The quiet, well maintained neighborhood has an abundance of trees and nicely landscaped yards and is still considered one of the better neighborhoods in Troy (photo 13).

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The five Edgehill welded steel homes nominated individually are all significant because each was built entirely of welded steel on the Hobart assembly line and moved, intact, to the Edgehill location. Despite applied exterior modifications the original building material and method of construction have not been altered on any.

Over the years, several relatively minor problems have plagued all the houses. The obvious problem of rusting, according to owners, is not such a nuisance if proper maintenance is followed. Use of metal conditioner and primer is recommended after rust is removed with sandpaper or a grinder. Latex paint does not adhere to the exterior and a flexible oil base paint is mandatory. Painting every five years with yearly touch-up is standard. Rusting of the roof, especially on the flatroof models, is more of a problem and must be constantly monitored. Some Hobart houses have been sided and many re-roofed with asphalt shingles.

Interior walls do not present much of a rust problem if maintained and do not require painting any more often than plaster walls. Latex paint is used with success on interior walls. Rusting is only a problem inside where moisture collects, or in houses which have sat unused for some time. Wallpaper can be used on steel walls as easily as on plaster. Pictures must be hung on the walls using either strong magnets or a drill and sheet metal screws.

The Hobart Welded Steel House Company supplied instructions for building a proper basement, thus giving the steel house a sound foundation. The original house came complete with everything except furnishings, curtains, and floor coverings. The steel floors and steel staircases with steel risers make such a hollow sound that carpet is a necessity. Wood parquet is used in several of the homes and vinyl flooring is commonly found in kitchens and bathrooms. When inhabited, the steel house, with curtains hung and carpet on the floors, does not have a particularly hollow sound. One could spend a lot of time in one of the houses and probably not realize that it was made completely of steel, for they are quite comfortable and, in most instances, very nicely decorated.

Because of the tightness of the houses and the rockwood insulation, they do not breathe as frame structures do. This helps keep them quite warm in cold weather. The walls feel warm on even the coldest of days. This tightness, however, creates a condensation problem with the casement windows which leads to rusting. Some homeowners have added interior storm windows or have replaced the casement windows entirely with more efficient windows. Tightness also causes the houses to heat up in warm weather.

The excellent condition of the steel houses can be attributed to their owners, who have tremendous loyalty to their homes. After fifty years no serious problems in either design or materials have appeared and only one of the twenty two houses built of steel has been torn down. Many have been sided, re-roofed, and received replacement windows. Metal kitchen cabinets have been replaced and bathrooms remodeled. Fireplaces, porches, even rooms have been added, but they all retain strong elements of their original design and they all remain as they were originally built; houses constructed of welded steel.

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Guy Frisbee, an engineer at Hobart Manufacturing Company, built the only Hobart steel house no longer standing. He did not follow the colonial styling of the area but designed a house with elements of both the International and Moderne styles. His house of steel and glass was based on the most modern engineering principles and materials. It was reminiscent of houses featured at the Chicago Century of Progress World's Fair in 1933-34, where the houses of the future had a stark, functional style using steel and concrete as a solid frame with glass as a thin covering, creating a "glass box." In the Frisbee house the glass used was glass brick in the Moderne tradition. The house was long and narrow with second story balconies, four bathrooms, and abundant light throughout. A central core ran from the basement to second floor housing utilities, a fireplace, closet, and a spiral stairway. The house was very large and over the years upkeep proved to be too much. It was abused by final tenants to the point where it was necessary to tear it down. In the case of the Frisbee house it appears that abuse, not a flaw in design or material, was the cause of its demise.

Houses were identified first by visual observation. Even those with siding and asphalt shingles are of such a distinctive configuration they are readily identifiable. Confirmation came from conversation with owners and examination of official documents. Much information concerning the evolution of the various Hobart companies involved in the steel house venture was gleaned from land title and tax duplicate records at the Miami County court house and copies of local newspapers. Lucia Bravo (daughter of William Hobart) and her husband Robert proved to be an invaluable resource, offering much information, both first-hand and documentary, as well as their time in this effort.

Properties selected for listing in the Hobart Welded Steel House District are all within a contiguous area, with only one intrusion. Although several have been sided, structural integrity remains intact and they contribute to the overall theme of the district. The houses in Edgehill which were selected appear today much as they did when manufactured, with the exception that most are now painted white and their original colors ranged from exotic shades of blue, green, and yellow to bright red. The five houses in Edgehill excluded from the nomination, although structurally unchanged, do not retain the visual integrity to allow for National Register status.

The Hobart Brothers factory (photo 1) is located on the blocks between Main and Water Streets in Troy, running from Adams Street to Elm Street. Just west of the Main and Adams Street intersection, on the south, Hobart Drive begins. Housing in this area is mostly two-story frame and dates from the late 1800s when this was the route of the Miami-Erie canal and the mill race. The area where newer houses have appeared trace the old canal route.

8. Significance

Period	Areas of Significance—Check and justify below			
<input type="checkbox"/> prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-prehistoric	<input type="checkbox"/> community planning	<input type="checkbox"/> landscape architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> religion
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400–1499	<input type="checkbox"/> archeology-historic	<input type="checkbox"/> conservation	<input type="checkbox"/> law	<input type="checkbox"/> science
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500–1599	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture	<input type="checkbox"/> economics	<input type="checkbox"/> literature	<input type="checkbox"/> sculpture
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600–1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> architecture	<input type="checkbox"/> education	<input type="checkbox"/> military	<input type="checkbox"/> social/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700–1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800–1899	<input type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900–	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics/government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> other (specify) technology

Specific dates 1932–1942

Builder/Architect Hobart Welded Steel House Company

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph) Criteria A and C, Exception G

The Hobart Welded-Steel Houses are significant under Criterion A as a unique experiment in prefabricated steel housing. The Hobart brothers sought to produce high quality, economical steel housing as a solution to the housing problems of the Depression Era. Although prefabricated housing was not new in the 1930s and steel had been used already as a building material, this was one of the first examples of mass produced and pre-assembled steel housing sold to the general public. The Hobart Welded-Steel Houses are significant under Criterion C for their unique construction, material, and style. The houses were constructed entirely on the assembly line. Instead of being built at the building site, these houses were completed at the Main Street factory and taken whole to the building site. Their material was unique as well. Arc-welded steel had never before been used as the main fabric of a building. The Hobarts used this modern material and technology to create traditional house forms. They constructed their houses in the popular Colonial Revival styles that reflected the prevalent conservative mood of the Depression Era, another unique aspect of the Hobart Welded Steel Houses.*

The various Hobart family businesses, begun by Clarence Charles (C.C.) Hobart, had been Troy's major employer since the early part of the twentieth century. He and his sons William, Edward, and Charles Clarence, were visionary industrialists who continually devised new applications for the rapidly developing technology of the era. The family businesses provided these men with the resources to experiment with their ideas and implement their inventions. By the 1930s the Hobart Brothers Company had ventured into the welding business. They produced arc-welding machines and filler metals for welding. In addition, they operated a welding school to train students in the most modern methods of arc-welding. The company was oriented toward expanding the welding industry and developing new applications for welding technology more than production of products.

Prefabricated homes were not a new idea when the Hobarts first became interested in 1932, nor was steel a heretofore unused building material. Kit homes were sold in the middle of the nineteenth century to pioneers traveling westward. In 1905 Sears, Roebuck, and

*The significance of the less than fifty year old houses is justified as a continuance of the early 1930s beginnings of the Hobart's venture into steel housing.

9. Major Bibliographical References

Walker, Lester, American Shelter: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of the American Home, Woodstock, NY, The Overlook Press, 1981
 Miller, E. Irene, The History of Miami County Ohio, Tipp City, OH: Miami County Historical Society, 1982
America's Forgotten Architecture, The National Trust, 1976

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of nominated property see attached data Hobart Circle H.D.: 2 acres
Quadrangle name Troy, OH **Quadrangle scale** 1:24000

UMT References See separate Ohio Historic Inventory Forms
 Hobart Circle H.D. - see below

A	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>7</u> <u>3</u> <u>8</u> <u>0</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	B	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>7</u> <u>3</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>2</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
C	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>7</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>9</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>3</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	D	<u>1</u> <u>1</u> <u>6</u>	<u>7</u> <u>3</u> <u>7</u> <u>9</u> <u>6</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>	<u>4</u> <u>4</u> <u>3</u> <u>5</u> <u>8</u> <u>9</u> <u>1</u> <u>0</u>
E	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	F	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>
G	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	H	<u> </u>	<u> </u>	<u> </u>

Verbal boundary description and justification
 Individual properties: see separate Ohio Historic Inventory forms
 Hobart Circle Historic District: see section 7, page 7, paragraph 2

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state	n/a	code	county	code
state		code	county	code

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Diana Good Cornelisse, student Wright State University
organization SW Ohio Historic Preservation Office **date** 5/19/87, revised 8/1/87
street & number 309 W. Water Street **telephone** work: (513) 255-4481
home: (513) 335-0844
city or town Troy **state** OH 45373

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:
 national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature W. Ray Luce
title SHPO **date** 3/23/89

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Company advertised frame and brick kit homes for sale in its Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans. They sold pre-cut, pre-assembled houses which were delivered to the housing site by train and wagon. In Cleveland by 1932, the American Rolling Steel Mill Company had constructed a prefab porcelain steel house to demonstrate the possibility of steel housing, and White Castle had begun production of their soon-to-become-trademark porcelain steel restaurants.

Early in 1932 the Museum of Modern Art in New York City presented an exhibit featuring the International Style and new age of architecture which incorporated and reflected the technological advancement of the modern era. Internationalists advocated functional, unadorned styles built of glass over steel and/or concrete frames. These were both the tools and products of technology. While the work of architects such as Mies van der Rohe, Le Corbusier, and Walter Gropius did not have much of a following in small mid-western towns, the Hobart Brothers recognized the application of light steel in housing construction as a wonderful technological innovation. They saw an opportunity to improve on the ideas of the Internationalists. Instead of the cold, impersonal appearing modernistic buildings, they would make a steel house more attractive to the American public.

In 1932, as an experiment, they began construction of a two-car garage on Hobart Road (Drive). In September of that year they took out a building permit to construct a welded steel house on Hobart Road (23 Hobart Drive), the first such permit issued for a steel house in Miami County. In an interview on October 8 of that year, E. A. Hobart avowed it was not the intention of the Hobarts to get into the housing business, but rather to demonstrate that arc welding was a viable process in home construction. He hoped that the prototype would prove prefabricated welded steel housing was a feasible business enterprise and would entice others to venture into the business of constructing steel housing. At that point the Hobarts could sell these builders of steel houses the "new" Hobart portable gasoline powered welding machine. E. A. Hobart even speculated wistfully that "...construction of low-priced steel homes may be one of the means by which the Depression may be finally ended." ¹

The house they began building on Hobart Road was similar in construction to one they had seen produced by the American Rolling Steel Mill Company in Cleveland. Construction began as an experiment to explore possibilities of various designs and construction techniques. E. A. Hobart could not predict what it would look like when completed and speculated that it might have a traditional painted exterior, or maybe enameled porcelain, with a finish like an electric refrigerator. ²

They ultimately decided to treat the metal with a rust retarding preservative, and paint the exterior walls with metal paint. This original Hobart house, with several features suggesting the experimental nature of its origin, still stands as a memorial to industrial experimentation. Not completed until 1935, it was fabricated entirely of welded steel, with no bolts used in the assembly. The Hobarts had proven that prefabricated modular steel housing was a viable building technique (photo 4).

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The 1933-34 World's Fair, A Century of Progress, was held in Chicago to celebrate current technological innovations and speculate on the world of the future. The Home and Industrial Arts Exhibit, featured eleven prefabricated houses demonstrating the practicality of prefabricated housing units, many of which utilized steel in the basic frame. George Fred Keck built a 12-sided steel and glass House of Tomorrow and, in a more modest price range, the Crystal House, designed to be built of steel and glass on an assembly line in a factory to provide low cost, easily manufactureable housing for the masses. Keck was a contemporary of Buckmaster Fuller who had recently introduced his Dimaxion house, with all conceivable, and some inconceivable, modern conveniences built into a semi-portable housing unit to be constructed in a factory and delivered to the original, and subsequent, housing sites by airship. The Hobart brothers saw, in the Houses of Tomorrow, the housing industry they had envisioned. When construction of the Houses of Tomorrow commenced the Hobart Brothers Company would be working overtime to produce the welding machines needed to build these homes.

In 1934, even though prefabricated modular housing seemed to be a popular and economically feasible solution to the country's housing shortage, the country was still in the Depression and no company ventured aggressively into the prefab steel house industry. This led the Hobarts into a business venture far removed from their previous endeavors. They would rather have sold the welding materials and machines to others who would factory-produce welded steel houses, but no other company of that sort exists, despite the publicity and popularity of the House of Tomorrow. The Hobarts had the resources, facilities, expertise, interest, and even the land to get into the housing industry. They made a decision to design, build, and sell factory assembled welded steel houses.

The Hobart brothers, engineers in their factory, and W. R. Turner, a draftsman, using knowledge obtained from construction of 23 Hobart Drive and all available information from others in the industry, designed a line of steel houses which could be mass produced with interchangeable parts in their Main Street factory. While they designed three distinct models, the style was applied to the exterior. Exterior dimensions were to be 21' x 30'. Interiors were designed to be the similar, thus bringing the economy of mass production to the housing industry (illustration 1).

A new company, the Welded Steel House Company, was created to handle the sales and production of steel houses. They outfitted the Water Street side of their factory on West Main Street for the assembly line production of welded steel houses. There, they would be completely pre-assembled in the factory, decorated inside and out to a chosen style, and delivered to the housing site by truck (illustration 2). The Hobart Welded Steel House Company published a catalog describing these houses and production process. Their six room Georgian sold for \$6,000, which included interior and exterior finishing of the house, poured concrete basement, one car garage, driveway, shrubbery, and grass. The lot cost extra.

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The Hobarts bought part of the land where the Miami-Erie Canal had run, and created the Hobart Circle. It was created as a model neighborhood of steel houses, designed to show the Troy public what a modern, progressive neighborhood of the future would look like. It also advertised to potential investors in the steel housing industry what an attractive environment could be created with prefabricated steel housing.

In theory they had a perfect market in which they could create the demand for their product and produce the needed supply. As students enrolled in the Hobart welding school, part of their training was to construct steel houses in the factory. This was good legitimate training, for which students paid tuition to the welding school. When the students graduated, they could take jobs in the welding industry, with Hobart Brothers Company, and elsewhere. As they earned a good income they would then be in the market to purchase a house. Because they were in the welding profession the Hobarts assumed these young welders would, quite naturally, want to buy a Hobart Welded Steel House. At that point they could purchase a lot in Edgehill and a house from the Hobart Welded Steel House Company. The Hobart's plan was only partially successful. Built for immediate sale the houses were rented to the public when buyers did not materialize. Of the original renters of steel houses, 78% were Hobart employees although absolutely none listed their occupation as welder. While this was not strictly "company" housing the Hobarts were proud of the fact that, during the housing shortage of the late 1930s, they were able to offer their employees affordable rental housing.

The general community, as well as Hobart employees, were curious about the steel houses, but remained cautious. When no sales were made the Hobarts found themselves in the rental house business, a prospect they had not anticipated and did not relish. When other steel housing companies did not appear around the country to place orders for welding machines and materials, and to send students to the Hobart Welding School for training, the Hobarts became even more disenchanted with the steel house industry.

The Hobarts proceeded more cautiously in 1938 when platting Edgehill, nearly 45 acres of land due west of Hobart Circle. There they generally refrained from the building steel houses except on customer order. The Hobart Welded Steel House Company had evolved into the Welded Products Company and oversaw the sale of Edgehill lots and construction of the 100 plus houses built there. The rental operation was run by Hobart-owned Troy Land Improvement Company. Of the ten steel houses built in Edgehill, 60% were built to order for a buyer. Of these original buyers, only 33% were Hobart employees or family. The Great Depression had not yet ended and the local community, for the most part, lacked capital to invest in housing. Those with available financing remained skeptical of steel houses.

In 1940 a price of \$6,000 for a six room house (\$5,000 for five rooms) was considered expensive, especially for a house so experimental. The Hobart brothers were more interested in efficient production of a high quality product than in fast manufacture and sale of an attractive commodity. Numerous details seen on the houses (photos 29-37) attest to the high standard of workmanship required in the Hobart factory. Even with the

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cost savings of factory production, this high standard and attention to detail kept the price of the steel house higher than that of a like-size conventionally built house. Later, in the post-war era, the prefab housing industry got a well-deserved reputation for shoddy workmanship and materials, but that was never a complaint with a Hobart house. Another unanticipated problem arose when plumbing and electrical contractors in Troy protested the Hobart's "in-house" installation of plumbing and wiring. Years later, local plumbers and electricians remain reluctant to work on a Hobart house, whether as a matter of principle, or because of the inaccessibility of some areas behind steel walls.

Hobart houses remained a curiosity through the 1930s and early 1940s. Few actual sales were made although the steel houses were popular rentals with middle class Troy residents. Renters included a lawyer, photographer, barber, engineer, grocer, chemist, plasterer, insurance salesman, automobile dealer, several restaurant owners, teachers, and independent businessmen, as well as Norman Van Ausdal, an engineer affiliated with the steel house operation. As the war in Europe escalated the Hobarts began shifting production priorities. When the U.S. finally committed all resources to the war effort the housing industry, steel and otherwise, came to a halt.

The Hobart Welded Steel House Company was a wartime casualty, but more because of the inclinations of the Hobart brothers than the housing market. When the war ended the housing situation, a problem since the late 1920s in a rapidly urbanizing country, became acute. Prefabricated modular housing was all the rage and steel frame houses were popular, with the buying public and a government which considered the housing shortage to be a problem requiring a Federal solution. The need for quickly assembled, low cost housing in the post war era made the steel house a feasible and attractive solution to the housing shortage. Availability of steel was still restricted in the immediate post-war era, except to the housing industry. The Federal government encourage the quick manufacture of functional, attractive, low cost housing and encouraged companies such as Lustron, which manufactured steel houses with porcelain steel walls. Additionally the Armco Steel Company of Middletown, Ohio constructed many steel houses in the area during the post-war era. Both Armco and Lustron built in Troy during the 1940s and proved to be very popular and quickly sold. All but two Hobart steel houses had sold prior to 1948.

The Hobart brothers had made sound decisions when getting into the housing market. They evaluated the housing need, the available materials, the taste of the American public, and the state of the welding art. Their entry into the steel housing market was premature. They tried to sell steel houses too early. By the time there was a demand for the Hobart steel houses they had ceased production and were not inclined to reenter the market.

The Hobarts had not been totally enthusiastic about the housing business from the beginning, and when the steel house project turned into a rental operation they became even more disgruntled. Their interest had always been in production of welding equipment and training welders. When the Second World War halted all housing construction, they did not regret having their housing business suspended. After the war, when steel housing did become popular they chose not to be further associated with the housing business. Other companies were building steel houses and they were ordering the welding machinery and

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materials the Hobarts produced. There was a waiting list for enrollment in the Hobart Welding School. These were the markets the Hobart brothers preferred and, more importantly perhaps, these were markets they found far more lucrative and much easier to manage.

The Hobarts were not necessarily innovative in their ideas but they were aware of what was happening in the housing industry and were highly adaptive. They took several existing concepts in building, marketing, and design, and combined them into one small industry in Troy, Ohio. Their steel houses were completely prefabricated on an assembly line and moved intact to the housing site. Hobart Circle was a 1930s version of a model home park, a neighborhood constructed entirely of steel houses where prospective customers could see the houses in a planned area designed specifically for them. The styles chosen for the Hobart houses were variations of the Colonial Revival with Moderne detailing. Rendered of welded steel these houses are a wonderful marriage of traditional styling and modern technology.

The Hobart Welded Steel Houses are also significant under Criterion C for their unique method of construction, material and style. The homes were designed to be mass produced with interchangeable parts. They were constructed using light-weight steel, welded together. The prototype, 23 Hobart Drive, was fabricated entirely of welded steel, no bolts were used in its assembly. Each building has a 21' x 30' rectangular floor plan. Interior supports are welded together, plumbing and electrics were all installed in the factory. The buildings are practically all steel, including interior and exterior walls, the roof, the doors and windows, the staircase and even the kitchen cabinets. The buildings were designed for economy on the assembly line so the exterior dimensions were almost identical for each home, but modifications were made at the owner's request and the internal room sizes and dimensions varied from house to house.

Style was also unique to these houses. Almost all of the Hobart Welded Steel Houses were variations of the popular Colonial Revival Styles, which received widespread visibility through professional architectural journals and popular home magazines of the time. One reason for this stylistic choice was that the reconstructed colonial houses at Williamsburg were a great favorite of William Hobart. Their stylistic choice reinforces major attributes of the Colonial Revival as a popular expression for middle-to upper-middle class homes during the 1930s and 1940s. The enduring classical details and proportions of the style supported the strong feeling of Nationalism prevalent during the Depression years, evoking a sense of returning to the past and to the traditional house form as a symbol of family. Yet, as in the case of the Hobarts, the use of this historic image could be used to create a fresh and modern variation of an existing theme which had withstood the test of time. These stylistic features plus the special material make the Hobart Welded Steel Houses unique, and a wonderful tribute to American technology and manufacturing skill.

1. The Troy Democrat, October 13, 1932
2. Ibid.



● Workmen are here shown electrically welding the side panels in a Georgian Type House. Every panel is electrically welded into one strong, compact unit.

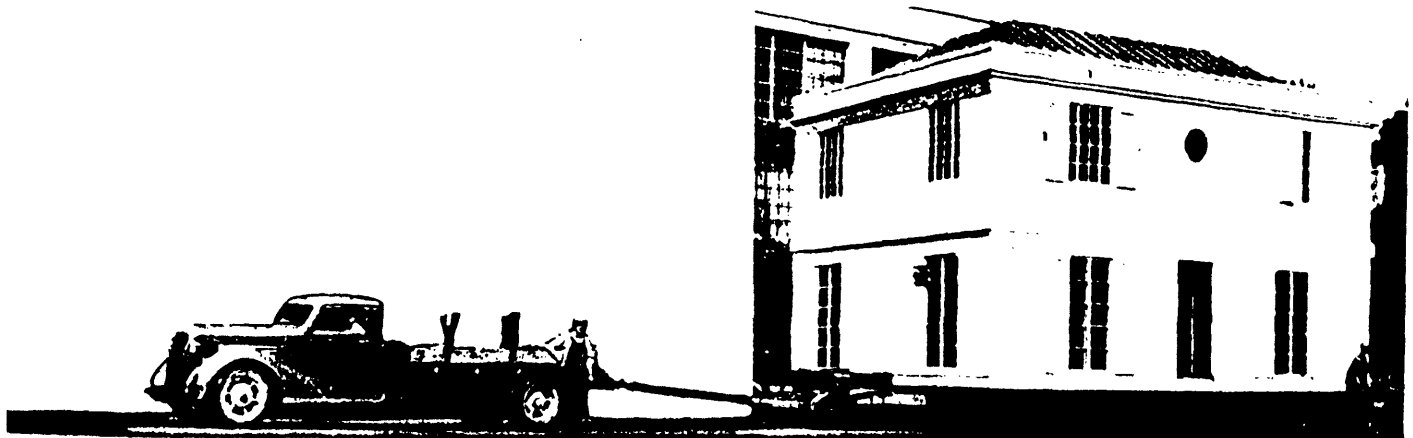
This MODERN factory produces the modern Hobart welded Steel House...



ILLUSTRATION 1

● Two completed homes, one of Cape Cod design and one of special design, are shown in the above illustration. Completely assembled, painted and ready for delivery to the foundation.

● The illustration below shows one of the new Hobart Welded Steel Houses being moved from factory to foundation on a Hobart moving van designed for this purpose.



HOBART WELDED STEEL HOUSE Company, Troy, Ohio

ILLUSTRATION 2

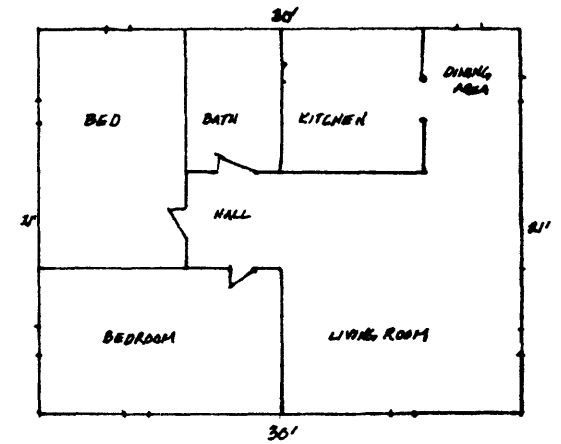
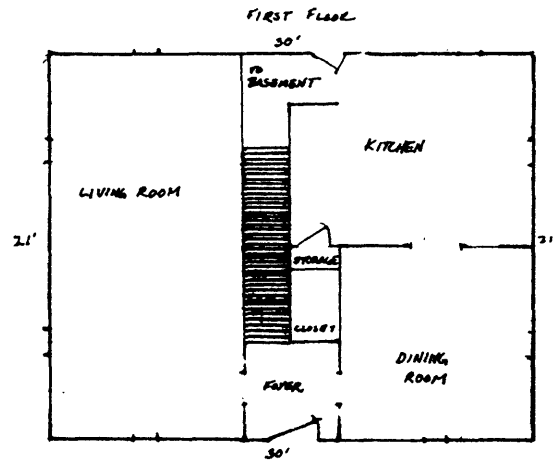
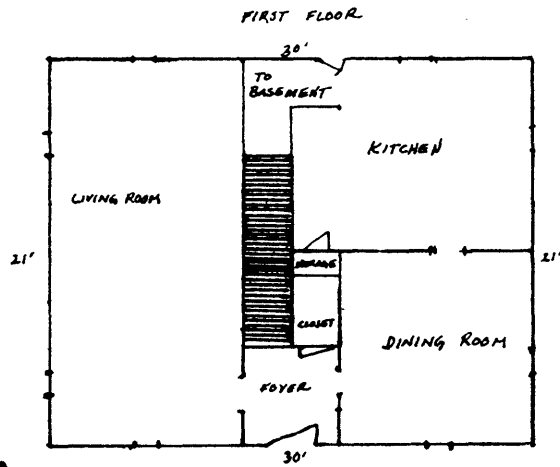
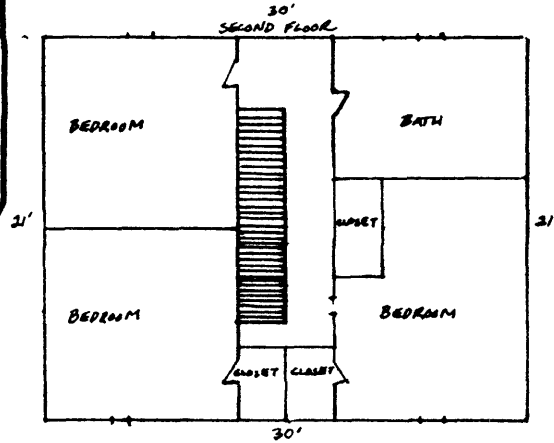
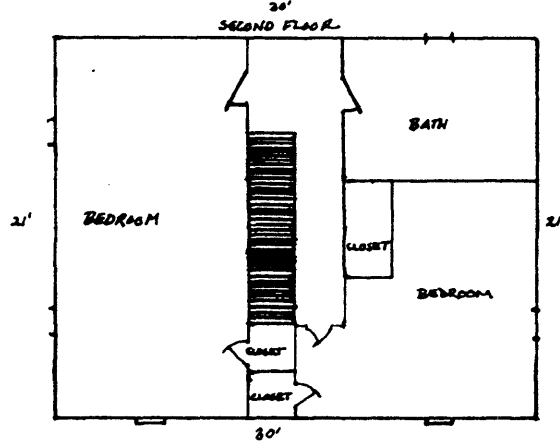


ILLUSTRATION 2



HOBART GEORGIAN
2 STORIES



HOBART DUTCH COLONIAL
2 STORIES

HOBART CAPE COD { MODERN
ONE STORY

NOT TO SCALE
DIANA CORNELISSE
5/15/87

4/17/89

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Multiple Resource Area
Thematic Group

Name Hobart Welded Steel Houses TR
State Miami County, OHIO

Nomination/Type of Review

Date/Signature

Cover

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

1. Hobart Circle Historic District

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

2. Hobart, E.A., House

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

3. Hobart, William, Vacation House

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

4. House at 1022 West Main Street

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

5. House at 121 South Ridge

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

6. House at 129 South Ridge

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

7. House at 145 South Ridge

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

8. House at 203 Penn Road

~~Substantive Review~~

Keeper

[Signature] 5/25/89

Attest

9.

Keeper

Attest

10.

Keeper

Attest