

SEP 30 1988

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
MULTIPLE PROPERTY DOCUMENTATION FORM

This form is for use in documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1945-1960

B. Associated Historic Contexts

Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Usonian Houses in Iowa, 1945-1960

C. Geographical Data

Related properties are found within the boundaries of the State of Iowa.

|__| See continuation sheet, section _____ page _____

D. Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Planning and Evaluation.

James P. ... OSHPD
Signature of certifying official

Sept 23, 1988
Date

Bureau of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

I, hereby, certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

[Signature]
Signature of the Keeper of the National Register

11/9/88
Date

E. Statement of Historic Contexts

Discuss each historic context listed in Section B.

See Continuation Sheets

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Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright

1945-1960

Description Summary

Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Usonian houses in Iowa include the Walter House near Quasqueton, in rural Buchanan County; the Grant House, Marion; the Miller House, Charles City; the Lamberson House, Oskaloosa; the Alsop House also located in Oskaloosa; the Sunday House, Marshalltown; and the Trier House, Johnston. The seven Iowa Usonians were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1945 and 1956 and were constructed between 1948 and 1960. Architecturally, the Usonian style grew from Wright's Prairie School style of the early 1900s. Like the Prairie School house, the Usonian house is characterized by Wright's patent horizontal massing of "broken box" pieces. The building form is low and spreading, commonly asymmetrical, with an emphasized central mass. Houses of the Usonian style are distinguished by a rigid geometry, horizontal detailing, warm colors, "natural" materials, and a solid, sheltering character. In common with the Prairie School house, the Usonian house shares a woven, open space plan with a great central hearth, low pitched or flat roofs with wide eaves, continuous window bands, and a close relationship with the site, both physical and symbolic.

Description

Evolving from the earlier, mid-western Prairie house, the Usonian house responded to the changing lifestyles and modern housing demands of a whole nation in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Usonian works comprised the second great productive period in Wright's very long and influential career, as nearly one-half of all Frank Lloyd Wright buildings were designed after 1930 and at least one-half of those works were the small or moderate-sized Usonian houses. The first built Usonian was the 1937 Herbert Jacobs House of Madison, Wisconsin. Following the Jacobs House, in a period of less than 25 years, over 100 Wright-designed Usonian Houses were built in the United States.

While the Usonian style evolved from the Prairie School style and does share many similarities, Wright's Usonian houses comprise a definite family of works which are easily differentiated from all other types and styles of work by the master. Solving the "American 'small house' problem," Wright developed in the Usonian house type a repertoire of space-saving innovations, accompanied by standardized construction techniques and cost-saving details. Each Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house was individually designed to meet the specific requirements of its owner and site, yet all Usonians shared common features of plan and construction which were unique to this style and essential to the economy of these houses.

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The Iowa Usonian houses are specifically representative of Wright's post-World War II Usonian style. While post-war Usonian houses possess the same features as the innovative Usonian houses of the 1930s, these later houses are generally larger and less austere. The Iowa Usonian houses range in area from just over 1250 sq. feet, to twice that size at approximately 2500 sq. feet. With the exception of the two story Douglas Grant House of Cedar Rapids, these are single story houses. The Iowa Usonian houses are each slab-on-grade houses without basements. Their roofs are either flat or slightly pitched, with ceilings following the slope of the roof; there are no attics. There are also no garages; each of the Iowa Usonian houses has a covered, but open, carport.

Inside, the dominant area of the Usonian house is the combined living and dining area. The other rooms of the Usonian house are the kitchen-utility "workspace," small bedrooms and bathrooms located along a single-loaded gallery, and, in many cases, a shop or tool room.

The overall plan of the single-story Usonian house was compared by Wright to a tadpole, or polliwog, with the living and dining area of the Usonian representing the tadpole's body, and the long, narrow bedroom wing representing its tail. This simple polliwog analogy has been elaborated upon by John Seargent in his 1976 Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses and developed into a Usonian classification system based on plan configuration. Seargent's basic classification system includes five plan types:

There is the flat site "polliwog" plan of the Jacobs house type - of L or T plan - with one or more wings. There is a similar type in which the rectangular grid is "invaded" by the diagonal geometry of a wing. There is also a contracted, single-block or "in-line" plan incorporating bedrooms, a hexagonal version of all these, and a rectangular grid type that is raised upon masonry piers. (p. 40)

Expanding this classification system, Seargent adds Frank Lloyd Wright's Solar-Hemicycle House and Wright's circle and spiral plan houses. The Iowa Usonian houses clearly represent Seargent's Polliwog and Diagonal plan types.

The main planning device underlying the design of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house is the geometric planning grid. For each of the seven Iowa Usonian houses this is a square grid with units of 4'-0" x 4'-0", or 4'-6" x 4'-6", 5'-0" x 5'-0" or 5'-3" x 5'-3". The grid organizes the floor plan, determining the location of every wall and every window, and it is actually scored into the face of the concrete floor slab.

Vertical scale in the Usonian house is dictated by board and batten spacing and by masonry coursing. Board and batten panel walls distinguished the early, pre-World War II Usonian houses. The Usonian panel wall consisted of an inner layer of plywood, with building paper on both sides, and outer layers of horizontal boards with inset battens. The exterior and the interior faces of these very thin wood walls were identical.

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The dimensions of the board and batten gave a regular "stripe" or vertical module of 1 ft. 1 in., and this controlled the heights of window transoms, sills, the "decks" for concealed lighting, bookshelves, eaves, clerestory windows, and chimneys. (Seargent, P. 19)

In later Usonian, these thin wood walls occur only as interior partition walls, often with outer layers of finish veneer plywood replacing the board and batten. In these examples, masonry coursing alone establishes the vertical scale.

Space planning in the Usonian house is open and flowing. The spaces of the individually articulated entry, living area, dining area, central workspace, and terraces each overlap and open into one another. In this way a small house is made to feel much larger than its actual size. Space is saved by combining the dining area with the living room, compacting kitchen and utility areas, and building very small bedrooms and bathrooms. A sense of spaciousness is further developed with manipulated ceiling heights.

With regard to both plan and building form, a distinctive element of the Usonian house is the central workspace. The workspace serves as an anchor to the whole composition. In theory, those areas and functions of the house which require plumbing and ventilation are all grouped in a central core. The workspace is an interior kitchen with adjacent utility room, fireplace, and bathroom. Centrally located, this kitchen opens to the dining area and living room, and often to the entry and gallery. The ceiling of the workspace-central core is the highest in the house, allowing heat and cooking odors to rise and vent through openings in the roof. In fact, the central workspace is designed to draw and vent air from the entire house.

The example of the workspace illustrates a basic tenet of Usonian design, which was to design with and not against nature. In this respect, natural ventilation and natural lighting were seriously regarded by Wright. In addition to the natural ventilation facilitated by the workspace, the locations of windows and doors throughout the Usonian house were designed for optimum cross-ventilation. Air and light enter a Usonian through continuous bands of windows, floor-to-ceiling glass, and multiple pairs of glass doors. Direct light is controlled by deep roof overhangs and lowered ceiling decks; it is softened by warm interior surface colors and rough textures. At night, light fixtures concealed in the ceiling "decks," or "light shelves," provide indirect light which imitates nature.

Establishing an openness and connection to the out-of-doors was fundamental to Usonian design. The Usonian house was generally sited for privacy, with unobstructed views to private gardens, woods, or open land. Large, single pane plate glass windows accommodate these views. Walk-out terraces formed by the continuation of the Usonian floor slab are common at front entrances and from living-dining spaces and bedrooms.

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For the full Usonian experience, Wright encouraged his clients to build their houses in the country. Each of the seven Iowa Usonians was built either in the country or on larger city lots, and all enjoy natural amenities. The appearance of the Usonian house from the street is unpretentious and often obscure. These low, one story houses with their deep overhangs fit integrally with their site and landscaping, and typically turn their backs to the street, with recessed entrances and only narrow bands of clerestory windows on their "front" facades.

Considering specific elements of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house, beginning on the ground, an element of primary importance is the building's reinforced concrete floor slab. The slab is laid on a bed of crushed rock with a foundation system referred to by Wright as a "dry wall footing." (Natural House, p. 147) Where the slab will support bearing walls it is thickened to form continuous grade beams. These beams rest upon shallow, gravel-filled trenches. The foundation system earns its name as moisture easily drains through the gravel while the concrete above remains dry. A clay drain tile running along the bottom of the gravel-filled trench further helps to carry water away from the house. The Usonian floor slab is made with red-colored concrete and is left exposed throughout the house.

Another very important element of the Usonian house is the radiant heating system which Wright called "gravity heat," that is, "heat coming up from beneath as naturally as heat rises." (Natural House, p. 147) Laid in the gravel beneath the Usonian's floor slab are copper or wrought iron pipes through which steam or hot water circulates. The concrete slab which is naturally cool in the summer becomes the heat source in the winter. The system's furnace, pump, and controls are located in the utility room.

Characteristic of post-World War II Usonians, the Iowa Usonians each have main exterior walls of masonry construction, either brick or stone, and in the case of the Paul Trier House of Johnston, hollow clay tile blocks. The Usonian's characteristic think sandwich panel walls occur in the seven Iowa Usonians only as interior partition walls.

A majority of the Iowa Usonian houses have brick cavity walls. The bricks are a standard red and are laid in running bond. These masonry walls display the Frank Lloyd Wright signature detail of wider, raked horizontal joints and narrower, flush vertical joints. The flush vertical joints are generally filled with red colored mortar. True to the architect's belief in the honest expression of materials, brickwork is identically exposed on both the interior and the exterior of a Usonian house. Stone walls, as they occur in the Douglas Grant House of Marion and the Alvin Miller House of Charles City, are similarly laid with strong horizontal emphasis, and naturally exposed both inside and out.

The roof of the Usonian house plays a large role in creating the Usonian style. Simple horizontal or tilted planes, with wide fascias drawing long level lines, Usonian roofs are generally low and flat with great projecting eaves. As separate areas of the Usonian house are often separately roofed, the whole composition expresses the space within.

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With regard to roof construction and materials, Wright developed several different roofing systems for the Usonian house. The first Iowa Usonians, the Lowell Walter House of Quasqueton and the Douglas Grant House of Marion, have monolithic, reinforced concrete roofs. The other Usonians in this group have more conventional wood framed roofs, with steel beams supporting cantilevered and long spanning sections. Ceilings and roof soffits in the Usonian house are typically one continuous surface, reinforcing the simple planar expression of the roof and tying the interior to the exterior.

The windows of the Usonian house are typically grouped in continuous horizontal bands, with window mullions serving as structural support for the roof. The windows in the seven Iowa Usonians are all custom built. They are generally all single pane fixed, casement, and awning-type windows, with frames of cypress or Philippine mahogany. Structural mullions in the seven Iowa Usonians are of wood and/or steel. Compared to more conventional houses, the Usonian was a very open house which exploited plate glass. Specific Usonian details include the mitered glass corner, which occurs in each of the Iowa examples, and the Usonian's decorative, wood "shutters" with unique geometric cutout designs.

Usonian interiors are characterized by flowing open space; a play of ceiling heights and a variety of interlocking spatial volumes; "unfinished" masonry, wood, and concrete surfaces, with warm natural colors, textures, and patterns; Wright-designed built-in and free standing furniture; recessed and indirect lighting; and an overall adherence to the horizontal and vertical unit modules which geometrically determine and coordinate every element of the Usonian interior. To save cost, Wright designed his Usonian interiors with little or no plaster, paint, or trimwork. The architect regarded as decoration the house itself, the natural beauty of the basic material, and his architectonic furniture and shelving. Wright's innovative use of built-in furniture, while saving space, established a set order to the Usonian interior. A typical detail is the brass piano hinge used for cabinets and doors throughout the Usonian house - with brass finish screws, their slotted head set perfectly horizontal.

A final important element of the Usonian house is the fireplace, the hearth. It is the central feature of the Usonian house and the symbol of home and family. Usonian fireplaces are characterized by their great size; integral relationship to the structure of the house; and cubistic, asymmetrical, often cantilevered form. The hearth of the Usonian fireplace is typically at the floor level, with the height and width of the opening as large as five or six feet.

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Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1945-1960

Significance Summary

Despite the fact that they are less than 50 years of age, the seven Usonian houses in Iowa, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1945 and 1956 and constructed between 1948 and 1960, possess exceptional significance on three grounds. First, these seven houses constitute the only known examples of Wright's work in Iowa from the architect's Usonian period. The Usonian period spanned the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and was the most productive period in the very long and influential career of this celebrated, American master architect. Wright's Usonian house offered the hope that middle-income families could build affordable homes of great architectural quality, during times when America faced unprecedented demands for affordable, single-family housing. In a second point of exceptional significance, the seven Iowa Usonians are collectively important as they demonstrate the evolution of Wright's Usonian style in the years following World War II. Completely spanning the post-war Usonian years in terms of date of design and construction, the Iowa Usonians exhibit a distinctive range of sizes, materials, and structural techniques. Finally, the Iowa Usonians had major direct and indirect impacts on mid-century residential design in Iowa. From ground breaking to the present, each of the Iowa Usonians has drawn substantial publicity and hundreds of visitors; and, whether they have produced skillful and sincere adaptations or superficial imitations, Iowa design professionals, builders, and homeowners are known to have been influenced by Mr. Wright's Iowa Usonians and by the master's lessons in simple, honest, integral architecture as manifest in these seven houses.

"Usonia" was Frank Lloyd Wright's euphonious name for the United States; his Usonian architecture was dedicated to the independent, democratic, and modern spirit of fellow Usonian citizens. In a broad sense, Usonian architecture comprises all of the architect's work from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. The Usonian House was developed by Wright in the 1930s, in response to a then growing demand in the United States for low-cost, single-family housing. Through residential Usonian design, Wright would give form to mid-century values and trends - homeownership, the nuclear family, informal lifestyles, modern conveniences, outdoor living, privacy - and greatly influence contemporary housing. In Iowa, the seven Wright-designed Usonian houses are each important examples of the Usonian style, specifically as it was expressed in the post-World War II years of the 1940s and 50s. These houses are authentic originals of a house type which, in various degrees, influenced much of the post-war residential architecture in this state. The Iowa Usonians are beautiful works of art by one of our most important architects.

The Usonian house, while a relatively recent event in the history of architecture, has secured a place for itself in our history books and will undoubtedly receive continued recognition in the future. Because Frank Lloyd Wright was a prolific writer, the design objectives and actual construction methods of the Usonian house have been

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well documented. The influence of Usonian architecture has also been documented and analyzed, the most thorough study being John Seargent's 1976 Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses. Of the Iowa Usonians, all seven have been documented in The Prairie School in Iowa by Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, 1977, and in William Allin Storrer's 1974 The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright; A Complete Catalogue. Wright's primary text on the Usonian house was his 1954 The Natural House. The Natural House, Wright's earlier 1932 An Autobiography, and portfolios of Wright's work in The Architectural Forum, an architectural periodical, successfully reached both architects and the general public alike in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. House Beautiful, a women's magazine, contributed significantly during these years to making Frank Lloyd Wright a household name, while the practical House and Home magazine issued a wealth of Usonian advice to America's homebuilders. The Iowa Usonians made a noteworthy showing in these and other publications of national scope. Regionally, The Iowan magazine and the Iowa Architect have featured individual Iowa Usonians.

Directly evolving from Wright's Broadacre City schemes of the early 1930s and from the 1933 Wiley House of Minneapolis, Minnesota, the first-built Usonian house was the Herbert Jacobs House of Madison, Wisconsin, commissioned in 1936. This historic house exhibited all of the planning and construction features which identify the ideal Usonian house, while profoundly embodying Wright's holistic concepts of simplicity, integrity, and continuity. With radical inventiveness and unusual beauty, the Herbert Jacobs house solved the problem of affordable housing for the family of moderate means, and became the model for all successive Usonians. The Jacobs House fulfilled Wright's call for a new and fundamentally different house type, a sensible, modern house which would become ". . . a pattern for more simple and, at the same time, more gracious living . . ." (Wright, Architectural Forum, P. 78)

The Jacobs House was completed in 1937, the year Mr. Wright turned 70. Involved with the 1936 S. C. Johnson and Son Administration Building and the 1935 Kaufmann House, "Falling Water," in Pennsylvania, Wright was just embarking on the second great era of his career. The public praise received by the little Jacobs House, together with Wright's new-found mass popularity, drew many converts to the architect's theories on modern housing, and drew increasing numbers of new clients during those years preceding World War II.

What sort of people wanted Wright-designed Usonian houses? According to John Seargent,

. . . people who felt that the Usonian houses expressed the way they wished to live. For them . . . (Wright) was meeting a need for a more informal family life. His homes allowed easy and maximal use of a small site. They had no "sense of the grand," but were designed for the celebration of the family coming together. They were not formulated for servant-help, but were planned for ease of maintenance . . . In the 1930's organic (Usonian) houses anticipated a lifestyle for which only a few were ready - those who had adapted first to social change.
(p. 14)

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Discussing the general success of all Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses, Seargent credits the ". . . combination of low building costs and the very nature of the home," (p. 27) where "nature" includes the typical Usonian's sense of privacy; the "sense of repose and ease" created by the building's over-all horizontality; the quiet, permanent feeling of the "warm, red, solid floor;" the beauty of the exposed materials; and the dramatic variety in scale within the house. (p. 27-28) Furthermore, from Seargent,

The materials and spacial characteristics of the Usonians gave a sense of serenity, variety, and security that were well recognized by their owners. This was so true that for many clients, their home became one of the most important elements of their lives. (p. 27)

From Wright, in The Natural House,

The Usonian house, then, aims to be a natural performance, one that is integral to site; integral to environment; integral to the life of the inhabitants. A house integral with the nature of materials - wherein glass is used as glass, stone as stone, wood as wood - and all elements of environment go into and throughout the house. Into this new integrity, once there, those who live in it will take root and grow. (p. 134-35)

Significant for their unique design qualities, Usonian houses are also significant for their more tangible, creative approaches to cost control through standardization and general simplification of the finished house. While architect Wright was known as a romantic and as an advocate of tradition, he was also an ardent promoter of modern technology. Important issues throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, as architects and builders sought to lower the cost of American housing, were material and component standardization and building prefabrication. Wright's Usonian houses benefited from the architect's innovations in simplification and standardization, while each house remained distinct and individual. "If standardization can be humanized and made flexible in design and the economics brought to the homeowner," wrote Mr. Wright, "the greatest service will be rendered to our modern way of life." (p. 59)

The early Usonian houses of the 1930s were built of common materials - wood, brick, concrete, paper, and glass - on a modular grid, the size of which was determined by the standard dimensions of the materials. Labor and expense were saved by building these houses on the ground, rather than in it, and by building very simple roofs. The small plan with consolidated utilities, and the elimination of the garage, further saved cost. The stud-less board and batten sandwich panels reduced materials and allowed for prefabrication of the walls. The roofs were constructed with inexpensive, built-up 2 x 4s, and windows and doors were designed for shop-assembly, using factory millwork. Exposing concrete, brick, and wood eliminated unnecessary finish materials and labor; and finally, with a successful planning formula, and a standardized set of construction methods and details, the architect's labor was also reduced. In Usonian Houses, Seargent has aptly labeled the early Usonian of the 1930s a "kit of parts." (p. 22)

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Perfected in the 1930s, over 80% of all Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses were actually designed and built after 1945. During the war years of the 1940s, essentially all residential construction halted in the United States. When building resumed after WW II, the demand for low-cost, single-family housing was much greater than before, and in the face of rapidly rising material costs and labor rates, Wright's Usonian house was conceived as yet a most simple and gracious solution to the problem of affordable housing. In adapting Usonian design to the greater prosperity of the typical 1940s and 50s Usonian client, the over-all size of the house was increased, and masonry commonly replaced the thin panel walls; basic concepts, features, materials, and details remained unchanged. Simplification, standardization, and on-site efficiency throughout the building process, remained the keys to the Usonian's economy.

The seven Usonian houses in Iowa span, by date of design and construction, the full period of the post-war Usonian. At the beginning of this period, design of the Lowell Walter House, Quasqueton, began in 1945. At the close of the Usonian era, the final revised drawings for the Robert Sunday House, Marshalltown, were not completed until several weeks after Wright's death in the spring of 1959. Exhibiting a range of size, materials, and structural design, the Iowa Usonians are a significant collection as they reveal what may be considered the evolution of the post-war Usonian.

The earliest Iowa Usonians, the 1945 Lowell Walter House, Quasqueton, and the 1946 Douglas Grant House, Marion, are also the largest of these seven houses. Within the theme of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian House, the one-story brick Walter House and the two-story stone Grant House share several particular similarities. Both houses have very distinctive roofs of reinforced concrete; both have thin, minimalistic window mullions of steel "T"s; and both have very great expanses of plate glass. In these two houses, Wright experimented with structure and materials, and seems to have been pushing those materials to their limits. Both the Walter and Grant houses are exceptional Usonians which have each received national acclaim.

The third Iowa Usonian, the Alvin Miller House in Charles City, was designed in the same year as the Grant House but was not built until 1951-1952. The Miller House was featured in Wright's The Natural House; it is the smallest of the Iowa Usonians; and, unlike the Walter and Grant houses, the Miller House has a much sturdier, less radical character.

The second "pair" of Iowa Usonian houses are the Jack Lamberson House and the Carroll Alsop House, both in Oskaloosa, both designed in 1948, both built by Jim De Reus of Sparks Construction, Oskaloosa, and both completed in 1951. The Oskaloosa Usonians are interesting as the only Iowa Usonians with sloped rather than flat roofs. Both were built of standard red brick and have similar red asphalt roof shingles. The smaller Lamberson House is especially interesting as it clearly fits Seargent's definition of the "Diagonal" Usonian. With shifted grids and the liberal use of 30', 60', and 120' angles, the resulting rooms are, in plan, parallelograms and hexagons.

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The latest Iowa Usonian houses are the 1955 Robert Sunday House, Marshalltown, and the 1956 Paul Trier House, Johnston. These two very beautiful houses represent the final years of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian and, perhaps, its perfection. Both houses borrow heavily from the design of the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House which was built on the later site of the Wright-designed Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Each of these houses is of masonry construction, roofs are flat with wide, denticulated fascias, and of the seven Iowa Usonian houses, only these two exhibit Wright's signature Usonian wood "shutters," the decoratively perforated boards which cover certain narrow windows. The Sunday and Trier houses are both notable for their graceful connections to outdoor terraces, they share many similar details, and both of these houses have had successful later additions designed by associates of Mr. Wright.

The people who built Wright-designed Usonian houses in Iowa were generally young, upper to middle-income professionals and business people with small children. Their building sites were generally located in the country or in new suburban housing developments typified by large, rambling lots and winding streets. With the exception of the Lowell Walter House, which was built on a bluff over the Wapsipinicon River in rural Buchanan County, near Quasqueton, each of the Iowa Usonians is located in county seat towns or their suburbs. Each family participated in consultations with Wright, most often at the architect's residence, Taliesin, near Spring Green, Wisconsin. Wright designed each of these seven Iowa Usonians to meet the specific requirements of the individual client family and their particular site. Owner participation in the actual building process was common; Taliesin apprentices who oversaw Usonian construction in Iowa included John DeKovin Hill and John Howe.

A final point of significance in the case of the seven Iowa Usonians concerns their influence on contemporary residential architecture. Beginning with the least direct but most far-reaching influence, many historians agree that Wright-designed houses such as the Iowa Usonians generally anticipated and indirectly set the style for popular American post-war housing, specifically the ranch house and the ubiquitous "contractor modern" house of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. With little regard for Usonian philosophy, these common house types imitated the look of the Usonian. With regard to the "contractor modern" house, according to Lester Walker:

Wright's influence was found primarily on the exterior: the long, low profile, the gently sloped low-gable roof covering both house and garage, the combination of several materials (usually in horizontal stripes), and the use of bands of windows (called ribbon windows). (p. 252)

More directly, the Usonian's influence in Iowa can be seen in higher quality adaptations of the Usonian style found scattered around the state. According to Des Moines architect and Frank Lloyd Wright enthusiast John Rice, emulators of Wright's philosophy and Usonian style were not uncommon in Iowa. In addition to Rice, serious admirers and followers of Wright included fellow Iowa architects Charles Martin, who

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actually spent time at Taliesin, and Kenneth Kendall. For these men, Wright's work of the late 40s and early 50s created a real excitement, and inspiration for their own work.

Iowa builders and homeowners were also directly influenced by exposure to the Wright-designed Iowa Usonian. The direct influence of the two Oskaloosa Usonians has been documented in a 1958 feature article in House and Home by Kathryn Morgan-Ryan and in a second 1959 House and Home article by Jim De Reus. In Morgan-Ryan's feature, the two Oskaloosa Usonians were credited with influencing the building boom that began in Oskaloosa after the war. Upon completion of the two houses in 1951, the owners and their builder hosted a public "open house". "Over 9,000 people trekked out to look at these two Frank Lloyd Wright custom houses . . . what they saw started a homebuilding revolution in Oskaloosa." (p. 94) "People who came out of curiosity went home with a longing: they, too, wanted a house with all that the word stand for." (p. 94)

Admired features of the two Oskaloosa houses included the terraces, which made possible indoor-outdoor living; the single-loaded bedroom hall, or gallery, with its provisions for storage and for natural light and ventilation, the efficient use of space, built-in furniture, "cathedral" ceilings, large fireplaces, and skylights. In Oskaloosa, in 1958, ". . . more than 40% of the new houses built since 1951 'break with conventional design . . .'" (p. 94) House and Home had found that people in Oskaloosa were building new houses, trading up to better houses, and remodeling old houses, in part, because they were influenced by the Wright-designed Usonians.

Two Iowa houses most directly influenced by Wright and his Usonian house type are the Bryant Denniston House in Newton designed by Taliesin architect John Howe in 1958, and the Tom McNider House in Mason City designed in 1958 by another well-known Wright student, Curtis Besinger. Both of these beautiful houses are important as fine examples of the work of Howe and Besinger respectively, and each can easily be classified as a Usonian, although neither house possesses the strong family resemblance shared by the Wright-designed houses. A third house which might also be classified as a Usonian is the Edmund Whiting House in Marion. Located in the same neighborhood as the Wright-designed Grant House, and built of stone from the same Grant quarry, this house was designed by Mr. Whiting, who had studied under Wright.

To reiterate, the seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian Houses in Iowa are each important examples of Wright's Usonian style, they possess the unmistakable qualities and features of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian, and they are the only known Usonian works in Iowa by the master. The Iowa Usonians are significant as manifestations of Wright's dedication to simple, honest, integral architecture, and to gracious living; they are significant for their cost-saving innovations, which allowed upper and middle-income families to build homes of great architectural quality; they are significant as they reveal Wright's development of the post-war Usonian; and they are significant for their influence, both direct and indirect, on Iowa's residential architecture of the

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1940s, 50s, and 60s. In Iowa, the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian Houses are master works unlike any other houses of their time. The Iowa Usonians are beautiful works of art that represent popular values and architectural trends of a time past.

Methodology

This nomination, prepared in the summer of 1986 by architecture student Chery Peterson, is based upon research completed by the preparer for a master's thesis project on the subject of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Usonian houses in Iowa. The preparer's research involved visits to each of the seven Iowa Usonians designed by Wright and to several Usonian-style houses designed by others. Photographs and plans were made of all the Iowa Usonians recording the present condition of each house. Interviews were conducted with owners of each house, and in those cases where a house has had several owners, the original owners or their children were also sought out for interviews. Of seven original families, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Grant, Dr. Charles Miller, Mr. Jack Lamberson, Mr. Robert Sunday, and Mrs. Ida Trier graciously shared information and insight on their Usonian homes. Additionally, the preparer researched all known published accounts of the Iowa Usonians and studied all available construction documents and correspondence from Wright for each of the seven houses.

The houses included in this thematic nomination are considered architecturally significant at the state level and, in the case of the Lowell Walter House, the national level. Of the seven Iowa Usonians, two houses have been entered on the National Register of Historic Places: the Lowell Walter House, Quasqueton, nominated in 1983, and the Alvin Miller House, Charles City, nominated in 1978.

At the time of the preparer's primary research, all seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses in Iowa satisfactorily met the criteria of the model Usonian house as set forth in this nomination, and none of the seven appeared to be severely threatened in any way.

F. Associated Property Types

- I. Name of Property Type Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright
- II. Description See continuation sheet, section F-II page 2
- III. Significance See continuation sheet, section F-III page 2
- IV. Registration Requirements See continuation sheet, section F-IV page 2
- See continuation sheet for additional property types

G. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

Discuss the methods used in developing the multiple property listing.

See continuation sheet, section G page 2

H. Major Bibliographical References

See continuation sheet, section H page 2

Primary location of additional documentation:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> State Historic preservation office	<input type="checkbox"/> Local government
<input type="checkbox"/> Other State agency	<input type="checkbox"/> University
<input type="checkbox"/> Federal agency	<input type="checkbox"/> Other

Specify repository: SHPO

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Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright

1945-1960

Description Summary

Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Usonian houses in Iowa include the Walter House near Quasqueton, in rural Buchanan County; the Grant House, Marion; the Miller House, Charles City; the Lamberson House, Oskaloosa; the Alsop House also located in Oskaloosa; the Sunday House, Marshalltown; and the Trier House, Johnston. The seven Iowa Usonians were designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1945 and 1956 and were constructed between 1948 and 1960. Architecturally, the Usonian style grew from Wright's Prairie School style of the early 1900s. Like the Prairie School house, the Usonian house is characterized by Wright's patent horizontal massing of "broken box" pieces. The building form is low and spreading, commonly asymmetrical, with an emphasized central mass. Houses of the Usonian style are distinguished by a rigid geometry, horizontal detailing, warm colors, "natural" materials, and a solid, sheltering character. In common with the Prairie School house, the Usonian house shares a woven, open space plan with a great central hearth, low pitched or flat roofs with wide eaves, continuous window bands, and a close relationship with the site, both physical and symbolic.

Description

Evolving from the earlier, mid-western Prairie house, the Usonian house responded to the changing lifestyles and modern housing demands of a whole nation in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. Usonian works comprised the second great productive period in Wright's very long and influential career, as nearly one-half of all Frank Lloyd Wright buildings were designed after 1930 and at least one-half of those works were the small or moderate-sized Usonian houses. The first built Usonian was the 1937 Herbert Jacobs House of Madison, Wisconsin. Following the Jacobs House, in a period of less than 25 years, over 100 Wright-designed Usonian Houses were built in the United States.

While the Usonian style evolved from the Prairie School style and does share many similarities, Wright's Usonian houses comprise a definite family of works which are easily differentiated from all other types and styles of work by the master. Solving the "American 'small house' problem," Wright developed in the Usonian house type a repertoire of space-saving innovations, accompanied by standardized construction techniques and cost-saving details. Each Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house was individually designed to meet the specific requirements of its owner and site, yet all Usonians shared common features of plan and construction which were unique to this style and essential to the economy of these houses.

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The Iowa Usonian houses are specifically representative of Wright's post-World War II Usonian style. While post-war Usonian houses possess the same features as the innovative Usonian houses of the 1930s, these later houses are generally larger and less austere. The Iowa Usonian houses range in area from just over 1250 sq. feet, to twice that size at approximately 2500 sq. feet. With the exception of the two story Douglas Grant House of Cedar Rapids, these are single story houses. The Iowa Usonian houses are each slab-on-grade houses without basements. Their roofs are either flat or slightly pitched, with ceilings following the slope of the roof; there are no attics. There are also no garages; each of the Iowa Usonian houses has a covered, but open, carport.

Inside, the dominant area of the Usonian house is the combined living and dining area. The other rooms of the Usonian house are the kitchen-utility "workspace," small bedrooms and bathrooms located along a single-loaded gallery, and, in many cases, a shop or tool room.

The overall plan of the single-story Usonian house was compared by Wright to a tadpole, or polliwog, with the living and dining area of the Usonian representing the tadpole's body, and the long, narrow bedroom wing representing its tail. This simple polliwog analogy has been elaborated upon by John Seargent in his 1976 Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses and developed into a Usonian classification system based on plan configuration. Seargent's basic classification system includes five plan types:

There is the flat site "polliwog" plan of the Jacobs house type - of L or T plan - with one or more wings. There is a similar type in which the rectangular grid is "invaded" by the diagonal geometry of a wing. There is also a contracted, single-block or "in-line" plan incorporating bedrooms, a hexagonal version of all these, and a rectangular grid type that is raised upon masonry piers. (p. 40)

Expanding this classification system, Seargent adds Frank Lloyd Wright's Solar-Hemicycle House and Wright's circle and spiral plan houses. The Iowa Usonian houses clearly represent Seargent's Polliwog and Diagonal plan types.

The main planning device underlying the design of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house is the geometric planning grid. For each of the seven Iowa Usonian houses this is a square grid with units of 4'-0" x 4'-0", or 4'-6" x 4'-6", 5'-0" x 5'-0" or 5'-3" x 5'-3". The grid organizes the floor plan, determining the location of every wall and every window, and it is actually scored into the face of the concrete floor slab.

Vertical scale in the Usonian house is dictated by board and batten spacing and by masonry coursing. Board and batten panel walls distinguished the early, pre-World War II Usonian houses. The Usonian panel wall consisted of an inner layer of plywood, with building paper on both sides, and outer layers of horizontal boards with inset battens. The exterior and the interior faces of these very thin wood walls were identical.

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The dimensions of the board and batten gave a regular "stripe" or vertical module of 1 ft. 1 in., and this controlled the heights of window transoms, sills, the "decks" for concealed lighting, bookshelves, eaves, clerestory windows, and chimneys. (Seargant, P. 19)

In later Usonian, these thin wood walls occur only as interior partition walls, often with outer layers of finish veneer plywood replacing the board and batten. In these examples, masonry coursing alone establishes the vertical scale.

Space planning in the Usonian house is open and flowing. The spaces of the individually articulated entry, living area, dining area, central workspace, and terraces each overlap and open into one another. In this way a small house is made to feel much larger than its actual size. Space is saved by combining the dining area with the living room, compacting kitchen and utility areas, and building very small bedrooms and bathrooms. A sense of spaciousness is further developed with manipulated ceiling heights.

With regard to both plan and building form, a distinctive element of the Usonian house is the central workspace. The workspace serves as an anchor to the whole composition. In theory, those areas and functions of the house which require plumbing and ventilation are all grouped in a central core. The workspace is an interior kitchen with adjacent utility room, fireplace, and bathroom. Centrally located, this kitchen opens to the dining area and living room, and often to the entry and gallery. The ceiling of the workspace-central core is the highest in the house, allowing heat and cooking odors to rise and vent through openings in the roof. In fact, the central workspace is designed to draw and vent air from the entire house.

The example of the workspace illustrates a basic tenet of Usonian design, which was to design with and not against nature. In this respect, natural ventilation and natural lighting were seriously regarded by Wright. In addition to the natural ventilation facilitated by the workspace, the locations of windows and doors throughout the Usonian house were designed for optimum cross-ventilation. Air and light enter a Usonian through continuous bands of windows, floor-to-ceiling glass, and multiple pairs of glass doors. Direct light is controlled by deep roof overhangs and lowered ceiling decks; it is softened by warm interior surface colors and rough textures. At night, light fixtures concealed in the ceiling "decks," or "light shelves," provide indirect light which imitates nature.

Establishing an openness and connection to the out-of-doors was fundamental to Usonian design. The Usonian house was generally sited for privacy, with unobstructed views to private gardens, woods, or open land. Large, single pane plate glass windows accommodate these views. Walk-out terraces formed by the continuation of the Usonian floor slab are common at front entrances and from living-dining spaces and bedrooms.

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For the full Usonian experience, Wright encouraged his clients to build their houses in the country. Each of the seven Iowa Usonians was built either in the country or on larger city lots, and all enjoy natural amenities. The appearance of the Usonian house from the street is unpretentious and often obscure. These low, one story houses with their deep overhangs fit integrally with their site and landscaping, and typically turn their backs to the street, with recessed entrances and only narrow bands of clerestory windows on their "front" facades.

Considering specific elements of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian house, beginning on the ground, an element of primary importance is the building's reinforced concrete floor slab. The slab is layed on a bed of crushed rock with a foundation system referred to by Wright as a "dry wall footing." (Natural House, p. 147) Where the slab will support bearing walls it is thickened to form continuous grade beams. These beams rest upon shallow, gravel-filled trenches. The foundation system earns its name as moisture easily drains through the gravel while the concrete above remains dry. A clay drain tile running along the bottom of the gravel-filled trench further helps to carry water away from the house. The Usonian floor slab is made with red-colored concrete and is left exposed throughout the house.

Another very important element of the Usonian house is the radiant heating system which Wright called "gravity heat," that is, "heat coming up from beneath as naturally as heat rises." (Natural House, p. 147) Laid in the gravel beneath the Usonian's floor slab are copper or wrought iron pipes through which steam or hot water circulates. The concrete slab which is naturally cool in the summer becomes the heat source in the winter. The system's furnace, pump, and controls are located in the utility room.

Characteristic of post-World War II Usonians, the Iowa Usonians each have main exterior walls of masonry construction, either brick or stone, and in the case of the Paul Trier House of Johnston, hollow clay tile blocks. The Usonian's characteristic think sandwich panel walls occur in the seven Iowa Usonians only as interior partition walls.

A majority of the Iowa Usonian houses have brick cavity walls. The bricks are a standard red and are laid in running bond. These masonry walls display the Frank Lloyd Wright signature detail of wider, raked horizontal joints and narrower, flush vertical joints. The flush vertical joints are generally filled with red colored mortar. True to the architect's belief in the honest expression of materials, brickwork is identically exposed on both the interior and the exterior of a Usonian house. Stone walls, as they occur in the Douglas Grant House of Marion and the Alvin Miller House of Charles City, are similarly laid with strong horizontal emphasis, and naturally exposed both inside and out.

The roof of the Usonian house plays a large role in creating the Usonian style. Simple horizontal or tilted planes, with wide fascias drawing long level lines, Usonian roofs are generally low and flat with great projecting eaves. As separate areas of the Usonian house are often separately roofed, the whole composition expresses the space within.

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With regard to roof construction and materials, Wright developed several different roofing systems for the Usonian house. The first Iowa Usonians, the Lowell Walter House of Quasqueton and the Douglas Grant House of Marion, have monolithic, reinforced concrete roofs. The other Usonians in this group have more conventional wood framed roofs, with steel beams supporting cantilevered and long spanning sections. Ceilings and roof soffits in the Usonian house are typically one continuous surface, reinforcing the simple planar expression of the roof and tying the interior to the exterior.

The windows of the Usonian house are typically grouped in continuous horizontal bands, with window mullions serving as structural support for the roof. The windows in the seven Iowa Usonians are all custom built. They are generally all single pane fixed, casement, and awning-type windows, with frames of cypress or Philippine mahogany. Structural mullions in the seven Iowa Usonians are of wood and/o steel. Compared to more conventional houses, the Usonian was a very open house which exploited plate glass. Specific Usonian details include the mitered glass corner, which occurs in each of the Iowa examples, and the Usonian's decorative, wood "shutters" with unique geometric cutout designs.

Usonian interiors are characterized by flowing open space; a play of ceiling heights and a variety of interlocking spatial volumes; "unfinished" masonry, wood, and concrete surfaces, with warm natural colors, textures, and patterns; Wright-designed built-in and free standing furniture; recessed and indirect lighting; and an overall adherence to the horizontal and vertical unit modules which geometrically determine and coordinate every element of the Usonian interior. To save cost, Wright designed his Usonian interiors with little or no plaster, paint, or trimwork. The architect regarded as decoration the house itself, the natural beauty of the basic material, and his architectonic furniture and shelving. Wright's innovative use of built-in furniture, while saving space, established a set order to the Usonian interior. A typical detail is the brass piano hinge used for cabinets and doors throughout the Usonian house - with brass finish screws, their slotted head set perfectly horizontal.

A final important element of the Usonian house is the fireplace, the hearth. It is the central feature of the Usonian house and the symbol of home and family. Usonian fireplaces are characterized by their great size; integral relationship to the structure of the house; and cubistic, asymmetrical, often cantilevered form. The hearth of the Usonian fireplace is typically at the floor level, with the height and width of the opening as large as five or six feet.

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Iowa Usonian Houses by Frank Lloyd Wright, 1945-1960

Significance Summary

Despite the fact that they are less than 50 years of age, the seven Usonian houses in Iowa, designed by Frank Lloyd Wright between 1945 and 1956 and constructed between 1948 and 1960, possess exceptional significance on three grounds. First, these seven houses constitute the only known examples of Wright's work in Iowa from the architect's Usonian period. The Usonian period spanned the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, and was the most productive period in the very long and influential career of this celebrated, American master architect. Wright's Usonian house offered the hope that middle-income families could build affordable homes of great architectural quality, during times when America faced unprecedented demands for affordable, single-family housing. In a second point of exceptional significance, the seven Iowa Usonians are collectively important as they demonstrate the evolution of Wright's Usonian style in the years following World War II. Completely spanning the post-war Usonian years in terms of date of design and construction, the Iowa Usonians exhibit a distinctive range of sizes, materials, and structural techniques. Finally, the Iowa Usonians had major direct and indirect impacts on mid-century residential design in Iowa. From ground breaking to the present, each of the Iowa Usonians has drawn substantial publicity and hundreds of visitors; and, whether they have produced skillful and sincere adaptations or superficial imitations, Iowa design professionals, builders, and homeowners are known to have been influenced by Mr. Wright's Iowa Usonians and by the master's lessons in simple, honest, integral architecture as manifest in these seven houses.

"Usonia" was Frank Lloyd Wright's euphonious name for the United States; his Usonian architecture was dedicated to the independent, democratic, and modern spirit of fellow Usonian citizens. In a broad sense, Usonian architecture comprises all of the architect's work from the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. The Usonian House was developed by Wright in the 1930s, in response to a then growing demand in the United States for low-cost, single-family housing. Through residential Usonian design, Wright would give form to mid-century values and trends - homeownership, the nuclear family, informal lifestyles, modern conveniences, outdoor living, privacy - and greatly influence contemporary housing. In Iowa, the seven Wright-designed Usonian houses are each important examples of the Usonian style, specifically as it was expressed in the post-World War II years of the 1940s and 50s. These houses are authentic originals of a house type which, in various degrees, influenced much of the post-war residential architecture in this state. The Iowa Usonians are beautiful works of art by one of our most important architects.

The Usonian house, while a relatively recent event in the history of architecture, has secured a place for itself in our history books and will undoubtedly receive continued recognition in the future. Because Frank Lloyd Wright was a prolific writer, the design objectives and actual construction methods of the Usonian house have been

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well documented. The influence of Usonian architecture has also been documented and analyzed, the most thorough study being John Seargent's 1976 Frank Lloyd Wright's Usonian Houses. Of the Iowa Usonians, all seven have been documented in The Prairie School in Iowa by Richard Guy Wilson and Sidney K. Robinson, 1977, and in William Allin Storrer's 1974 The Architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright; A Complete Catalogue. Wright's primary text on the Usonian house was his 1954 The Natural House. The Natural House, Wright's earlier 1932 An Autobiography, and portfolios of Wright's work in The Architectural Forum, an architectural periodical, successfully reached both architects and the general public alike in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s. House Beautiful, a women's magazine, contributed significantly during these years to making Frank Lloyd Wright a household name, while the practical House and Home magazine issued a wealth of Usonian advice to America's homebuilders. The Iowa Usonians made a noteworthy showing in these and other publications of national scope. Regionally, The Iowan magazine and the Iowa Architect have featured individual Iowa Usonians.

Directly evolving from Wright's Broadacre City schemes of the early 1930s and from the 1933 Wiley House of Minneapolis, Minnesota, the first-built Usonian house was the Herbert Jacobs House of Madison, Wisconsin, commissioned in 1936. This historic house exhibited all of the planning and construction features which identify the ideal Usonian house, while profoundly embodying Wright's holistic concepts of simplicity, integrity, and continuity. With radical inventiveness and unusual beauty, the Herbert Jacobs house solved the problem of affordable housing for the family of moderate means, and became the model for all successive Usonians. The Jacobs House fulfilled Wright's call for a new and fundamentally different house type, a sensible, modern house which would become ". . . a pattern for more simple and, at the same time, more gracious living" (Wright, Architectural Forum, P. 78)

The Jacobs House was completed in 1937, the year Mr. Wright turned 70. Involved with the 1936 S. C. Johnson and Son Administration Building and the 1935 Kaufmann House, "Falling Water," in Pennsylvania, Wright was just embarking on the second great era of his career. The public praise received by the little Jacobs House, together with Wright's new-found mass popularity, drew many converts to the architect's theories on modern housing, and drew increasing numbers of new clients during those years preceding World War II.

What sort of people wanted Wright-designed Usonian houses? According to John Seargent,

. . . people who felt that the Usonian houses expressed the way they wished to live. For them . . . (Wright) was meeting a need for a more informal family life. His homes allowed easy and maximal use of a small site. They had no "sense of the grand," but were designed for the celebration of the family coming together. They were not formulated for servant-help, but were planned for ease of maintenance . . . In the 1930's organic (Usonian) houses anticipated a lifestyle for which only a few were ready - those who had adapted first to social change.
(p. 14)

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Discussing the general success of all Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses, Seargent credits the ". . . combination of low building costs and the very nature of the home," (p. 27) where "nature" includes the typical Usonian's sense of privacy; the "sense of repose and ease" created by the building's over-all horizontality; the quiet, permanent feeling of the "warm, red, solid floor;" the beauty of the exposed materials; and the dramatic variety in scale within the house. (p. 27-28) Furthermore, from Seargent,

The materials and spacial characteristics of the Usonians gave a sense of serenity, variety, and security that were well recognized by their owners. This was so true that for many clients, their home became one of the most important elements of their lives. (p. 27)

From Wright, in The Natural House,

The Usonian house, then, aims to be a natural performance, one that is integral to site; integral to environment; integral to the life of the inhabitants. A house integral with the nature of materials - wherein glass is used as glass, stone as stone, wood as wood - and all elements of environment go into and throughout the house. Into this new integrity, once there, those who live in it will take root and grow. (p. 134-35)

Significant for their unique design qualities, Usonian houses are also significant for their more tangible, creative approaches to cost control through standardization and general simplification of the finished house. While architect Wright was known as a romantic and as an advocate of tradition, he was also an ardent promoter of modern technology. Important issues throughout the 1930s, 40s, and 50s, as architects and builders sought to lower the cost of American housing, were material and component standardization and building prefabrication. Wright's Usonian houses benefited from the architect's innovations in simplification and standardization, while each house remained distinct and individual. "If standardization can be humanized and made flexible in design and the economics brought to the homeowner," wrote Mr. Wright, "the greatest service will be rendered to our modern way of life." (p. 59)

The early Usonian houses of the 1930s were built of common materials - wood, brick, concrete, paper, and glass - on a modular grid, the size of which was determined by the standard dimensions of the materials. Labor and expense were saved by building these houses on the ground, rather than in it, and by building very simple roofs. The small plan with consolidated utilities, and the elimination of the garage, further saved cost. The stud-less board and batten sandwich panels reduced materials and allowed for prefabrication of the walls. The roofs were constructed with inexpensive, built-up 2 x 4s, and windows and doors were designed for shop-assembly, using factory millwork. Exposing concrete, brick, and wood eliminated unnecessary finish materials and labor; and finally, with a successful planning formula, and a standardized set of construction methods and details, the architect's labor was also reduced. In Usonian Houses, Seargent has aptly labeled the early Usonian of the 1930s a "kit of parts." (p. 22)

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Perfectured in the 1930s, over 80% of all Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses were actually designed and built after 1945. During the war years of the 1940s, essentially all residential construction halted in the United States. When building resumed after WW II, the demand for low-cost, single-family housing was much greater than before, and in the face of rapidly rising material costs and labor rates, Wright's Usonian house was conceived as yet a most simple and gracious solution to the problem of affordable housing. In adapting Usonian design to the greater prosperity of the typical 1940s and 50s Usonian client, the over-all size of the house was increased, and masonry commonly replaced the thin panel walls; basic concepts, features, materials, and details remained unchanged. Simplification, standardization, and on-site efficiency throughout the building process, remained the keys to the Usonian's economy.

The seven Usonian houses in Iowa span, by date of design and construction, the full period of the post-war Usonian. At the beginning of this period, design of the Lowell Walter House, Quasqueton, began in 1945. At the close of the Usonian era, the final revised drawings for the Robert Sunday House, Marshalltown, were not completed until several weeks after Wright's death in the spring of 1959. Exhibiting a range of size, materials, and structural design, the Iowa Usonians are a significant collection as they reveal what may be considered the evolution of the post-war Usonian.

The earliest Iowa Usonians, the 1945 Lowell Walter House, Quasqueton, and the 1946 Douglas Grant House, Marion, are also the largest of these seven houses. Within the theme of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian House, the one-story brick Walter House and the two-story stone Grant House share several particular similarities. Both houses have very distinctive roofs of reinforced concrete; both have thin, minimalistic window mullions of steel "T"s; and both have very great expanses of plate glass. In these two houses, Wright experimented with structure and materials, and seems to have been pushing those materials to their limits. Both the Walter and Grant houses are exceptional Usonians which have each received national acclaim.

The third Iowa Usonian, the Alvin Miller House in Charles City, was designed in the same year as the Grant House but was not built until 1951-1952. The Miller House was featured in Wright's The Natural House; it is the smallest of the Iowa Usonians; and, unlike the Walter and Grant houses, the Miller House has a much sturdier, less radical character.

The second "pair" of Iowa Usonian houses are the Jack Lamberson House and the Carroll Alsop House, both in Oskaloosa, both designed in 1948, both built by Jim De Reus of Sparks Construction, Oskaloosa, and both completed in 1951. The Oskaloosa Usonians are interesting as the only Iowa Usonians with sloped rather than flat roofs. Both were built of standard red brick and have similar red asphalt roof shingles. The smaller Lamberson House is especially interesting as it clearly fits Seargent's definition of the "Diagonal" Usonian. With shifted grids and the liberal use of 30', 60', and 120' angles, the resulting rooms are, in plan, parallelograms and hexagons.

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The latest Iowa Usonian houses are the 1955 Robert Sunday House, Marshalltown, and the 1956 Paul Trier House, Johnston. These two very beautiful houses represent the final years of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian and, perhaps, its perfection. Both houses borrow heavily from the design of the 1953 Usonian Exhibition House which was built on the later site of the Wright-designed Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York City. Each of these houses is of masonry construction, roofs are flat with wide, denticulated fascias, and of the seven Iowa Usonian houses, only these two exhibit Wright's signature Usonian wood "shutters," the decoratively perforated boards which cover certain narrow windows. The Sunday and Trier houses are both notable for their graceful connections to outdoor terraces, they share many similar details, and both of these houses have had successful later additions designed by associates of Mr. Wright.

The people who built Wright-designed Usonian houses in Iowa were generally young, upper to middle-income professionals and business people with small children. Their building sites were generally located in the country or in new suburban housing developments typified by large, rambling lots and winding streets. With the exception of the Lowell Walter House, which was built on a bluff over the Wapsipinicon River in rural Buchanan County, near Quasqueton, each of the Iowa Usonians is located in county seat towns or their suburbs. Each family participated in consultations with Wright, most often at the architect's residence, Taliesin, near Spring Green, Wisconsin. Wright designed each of these seven Iowa Usonians to meet the specific requirements of the individual client family and their particular site. Owner participation in the actual building process was common; Taliesin apprentices who oversaw Usonian construction in Iowa included John DeKovin Hill and John Howe.

A final point of significance in the case of the seven Iowa Usonians concerns their influence on contemporary residential architecture. Beginning with the least direct but most far-reaching influence, many historians agree that Wright-designed houses such as the Iowa Usonians generally anticipated and indirectly set the style for popular American post-war housing, specifically the ranch house and the ubiquitous "contractor modern" house of the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. With little regard for Usonian philosophy, these common house types imitated the look of the Usonian. With regard to the "contractor modern" house, according to Lester Walker:

Wright's influence was found primarily on the exterior: the long, low profile, the gently sloped low-gable roof covering both house and garage, the combination of several materials (usually in horizontal stripes), and the use of bands of windows (called ribbon windows). (p. 252)

More directly, the Usonian's influence in Iowa can be seen in higher quality adaptations of the Usonian style found scattered around the state. According to Des Moines architect and Frank Lloyd Wright enthusiast John Rice, emulators of Wright's philosophy and Usonian style were not uncommon in Iowa. In addition to Rice, serious admirers and followers of Wright included fellow Iowa architects Charles Martin, who

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actually spent time at Taliesin, and Kenneth Kendall. For these men, Wright's work of the late 40s and early 50s created a real excitement, and inspiration for their own work.

Iowa builders and homeowners were also directly influenced by exposure to the Wright-designed Iowa Usonians. The direct influence of the two Oskaloosa Usonians has been documented in a 1958 feature article in House and Home by Kathryn Morgan-Ryan and in a second 1959 House and Home article by Jim De Reus. In Morgan-Ryan's feature, the two Oskaloosa Usonians were credited with influencing the building boom that began in Oskaloosa after the war. Upon completion of the two houses in 1951, the owners and their builder hosted a public "open house". "Over 9,000 people trekked out to look at these two Frank Lloyd Wright custom houses . . . what they saw started a homebuilding revolution in Oskaloosa." (p. 94) "People who came out of curiosity went home with a longing: they, too, wanted a house with all that the word stand for." (p. 94)

Admired features of the two Oskaloosa houses included the terraces, which made possible indoor-outdoor living; the single-loaded bedroom hall, or gallery, with its provisions for storage and for natural light and ventilation, the efficient use of space, built-in furniture, "cathedral" ceilings, large fireplaces, and skylights. In Oskaloosa, in 1958, ". . . more than 40% of the new houses built since 1951 'break with conventional design . . .'" (p. 94) House and Home had found that people in Oskaloosa were building new houses, trading up to better houses, and remodeling old houses, in part, because they were influenced by the Wright-designed Usonians.

Two Iowa houses most directly influenced by Wright and his Usonian house type are the Bryant Denniston House in Newton designed by Taliesin architect John Howe in 1958, and the Tom McNider House in Mason City designed in 1958 by another well-known Wright student, Curtis Besinger. Both of these beautiful houses are important as fine examples of the work of Howe and Besinger respectively, and each can easily be classified as a Usonian, although neither house possesses the strong family resemblance shared by the Wright-designed houses. A third house which might also be classified as a Usonian is the Edmund Whiting House in Marion. Located in the same neighborhood as the Wright-designed Grant House, and built of stone from the same Grant quarry, this house was designed by Mr. Whiting, who had studied under Wright.

To reiterate, the seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian Houses in Iowa are each important examples of Wright's Usonian style, they possess the unmistakable qualities and features of the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian, and they are the only known Usonian works in Iowa by the master. The Iowa Usonians are significant as manifestations of Wright's dedication to simple, honest, integral architecture, and to gracious living; they are significant for their cost-saving innovations, which allowed upper and middle-income families to build homes of great architectural quality; they are significant as they reveal Wright's development of the post-war Usonian; and they are significant for their influence, both direct and indirect, on Iowa's residential architecture of the

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1940s, 50s, and 60s. In Iowa, the Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian Houses are master works unlike any other houses of their time. The Iowa Usonians are beautiful works of art that represent popular values and architectural trends of a time past.

Methodology

This nomination, prepared in the summer of 1986 by architecture student Chery Peterson, is based upon research completed by the preparer for a master's thesis project on the subject of Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Usonian houses in Iowa. The preparer's research involved visits to each of the seven Iowa Usonians designed by Wright and to several Usonian-style houses designed by others. Photographs and plans were made of all the Iowa Usonians recording the present condition of each house. Interviews were conducted with owners of each house, and in those cases where a house has had several owners, the original owners or their children were also sought out for interviews. Of seven original families, Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Grant, Dr. Charles Miller, Mr. Jack Lamberson, Mr. Robert Sunday, and Mrs. Ida Trier graciously shared information and insight on their Usonian homes. Additionally, the preparer researched all known published accounts of the Iowa Usonians and studied all available construction documents and correspondence from Wright for each of the seven houses.

The houses included in this thematic nomination are considered architecturally significant at the state level and, in the case of the Lowell Walter House, the national level. Of the seven Iowa Usonians, two houses have been entered on the National Register of Historic Places: the Lowell Walter House, Quasqueton, nominated in 1983, and the Alvin Miller House, Charles City, nominated in 1978.

At the time of the preparer's primary research, all seven Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian houses in Iowa satisfactorily met the criteria of the model Usonian house as set forth in this nomination, and none of the seven appeared to be severely threatened in any way.

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1. Area of Significance.

- a. Criteria C: Properties that represent the work of a master and that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type period and method of construction.
- b. Designed by Wright during heyday of his usonian phase between 1945 and 1956 and constructed in Iowa between 1948 and 1960.

2. Because these properties are less than 50 years of age they must possess exceptional significance and they should:

- a. Date from post-World War II, the most productive and innovative phase of Wright's usonian work.
- b. Demonstrate the evolution of Wright's usonian style in the years following World War II.
- c. Have major direct and indirect impacts on mid-century residential design in Iowa.

3. Characteristics and qualities.

- a. Designed by Wright in consultation with clients.
- b. Designed to meet specific requirements of individual client and their particular site.
- c. Building form is low and spreading, commonly asymmetrical, with an emphasized central mass.
- d. Distinguished by rigid geometry, horizontal detailing, warm colors, natural materials, and solid, sheltering character.
- e. Possesses woven, open space plan with great central hearth and central workspace.
- f. Features low pitched or flat roofs with wide eaves and continuous window bands.
- g. Possesses close relationship with the site, both physical and symbolic.
- g. Constructed on reinforced concrete floor slabs.

4. Integrity Requirements.

Alterations and changes do not impair appreciation of quality of design, setting, feeling, association, materials, location, and workmanship.

- a. Small, unobtrusive additions acceptable if designed in accordance with usonian principles. New construction, however, should be identifiable as such.

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- b. Changes to roofs acceptable if rooflines, form, and color retained.
- c. Window and door replacement should occur only if not repairable, but should replicate originals.
- d. Changes to interior plan acceptable, but should be confined to private spaces like Kitchens, bathrooms, and bedrooms.
- e. Replacement of radiant heating systems with others acceptable, but effort should be made to preserve older system in place.
- f. Original woodwork and built-in furniture should be retained. The retention of Wright-designed furniture and decorative objects is encouraged.
- g. Minor alterations to site and setting acceptable only if they do not impact feeling and association of a particular property. Because each property's situation is unique, any impact, whether it be new construction or the selling off of original acreage, should receive careful review and consideration.

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Methodology

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