

Wisconsin Word Processing Format (Approved 1/92)

**United States Department of Interior  
National Park Service****National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900A). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property****historic name** Melster, John and Florence, House**other names/site number** "Hillsun"**2. Location**

<b>street &amp; number</b>	316 Oxford Road	N/A	<b>not for publication</b>
<b>city or town</b>	Waukesha	N/A	<b>vicinity</b>
<b>state</b> Wisconsin	<b>code</b> WI	<b>county</b> Waukesha	<b>code</b> 133
			<b>zip code</b> 53186

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets \_ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant \_ nationally \_ statewide X locally. ( \_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of certifying official/Title\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property \_ meets \_ does not meet the National Register criteria.  
( \_ See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting official/Title\_\_\_\_\_  
Date\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal agency and bureau

Melster, John and Florence, House	Waukesha	Wisconsin
Name of Property	County and State	

#### 4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

\_\_\_ entered in the National Register.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined eligible for the

National Register.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ determined not eligible for the

National Register.

\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

\_\_\_ removed from the National

Register.

\_\_\_ other, (explain:)

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

#### 5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(check as many boxes as  
as apply)

☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ structure  
☐ site  
☐ object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources  
in the count)

contributing	noncontributing
1	buildings
	sites
	structures
	objects
1	0 total

**Name of related multiple property listing:**

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

N/A

**Number of contributing resources**

**previously listed in the National Register**

0

#### 6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/single dwelling

#### 7. Description

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Contemporary

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete block

walls concrete block, wood

roof rubber

other

#### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Melster, John and Florence, House  
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## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for the National Register listing.)

- ☐ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

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

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

### Period of Significance

1955

### Significant Dates

1955

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

McDonald, John Randal

### Narrative Statement of Significance

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

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## 9. Major Bibliographic References

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

### Previous Documentation on File (National Park Service):

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

### Primary location of additional data:

X State Historic Preservation Office

- Other State Agency
- Federal Agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .17 acre

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

1    16    400239    4761293  
      Zone   Easting       Northing

2    \_\_\_\_\_  
      Zone   Easting       Northing

3    \_\_\_\_\_  
      Zone   Easting       Northing

4    \_\_\_\_\_  
      Zone   Easting       Northing

☐ See Continuation Sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title	Traci E. Schnell, M.A.	date	August 2021
organization	tes   Historical Consulting, LLC	telephone	262.366.0397
street & number	211 Paine Street	zip code	53042
city or town	Kiel	state	WI

Melster, John and Florence, House

Name of Property

Waukesha

County and State

Wisconsin

### Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

#### Continuation Sheets

#### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

#### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

**Additional Items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

### Property Owner

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

<b>name/title</b>	Stephen P. Rypel	<b>date</b>	August 2021
<b>organization</b>		<b>telephone</b>	
<b>street &amp; number</b>	316 Oxford Road	<b>zip code</b>	53186
<b>city or town</b>	Waukesha	<b>state</b>	WI

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

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

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Waukesha, Waukesha County, WI

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Start description on line below

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

Located on the southeast side of Waukesha in Waukesha County, the John and Florence Melster House is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion C in the area of Architecture as a well intact, 1950s Contemporary style house designed by John Randal McDonald. It is just one of two notable examples of the Contemporary style built in the city between the 1940s and the 1960s and the only mid-century example of McDonald's work in the City of Waukesha. The Melster property includes only the 1955 home.

**Site and Setting**

The area in which the Melster House is located is an entirely residential neighborhood, the homes of which generally date to between the 1940s and the 1960s. Housing stock surrounding the subject home include mostly Ranch houses, with a small number of Minimal Traditional types, although another 1950s Contemporary design (a "Sol-Air" brand home) is located immediately next door to the east. The Melster House, sited on a standard, rectangular parcel, was purposely set back on the lot to take advantage of the elevation change of its terrain, as well as to retain existing mature trees that remain today. A set of five concrete stairs rise from the sidewalk level, after which are several lengths of concrete steps that ultimately reach the home's front door. Sheltered beneath a cantilevered overhang, a concrete terrace fronts the west half of the house (including the entrance door), while a raised planter bed constructed of stone fronts the east half. An additional raised stone planter bed is located to the west, along which is a stone-constructed staircase that rises further up the hill and leads to the rear of the house/carport area that is accessed via the alley that runs behind the home.

**House** (Contributing, 1955<sup>1</sup>)

Built into a steep hill, this 1950s Contemporary style house is constructed of stack bond cavity concrete block, wood (consisting of both redwood and manufactured wood) and glass. Generally described, the house is anchored on the west by a three-story, concrete-block chimney, while the lower level is also constructed of concrete block. The second level is defined by a cantilevered balcony; the west half of which is topped with a flat roof and overhanging eaves, while a rounded glass enclosure

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<sup>1</sup> Original building permit for 316 Oxford Road, 4 April 1955, contractor: Merrill York, est. cost cited as \$15,000. This permit and all other permits located in the Community Development Department, Building Inspections Division, City of Waukesha, WI.

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completes the east half. Extending from the chimney and for a short distance above the second/main floor is a flat-roofed clerestory level. A one-story sunroom extends from the rear of the main block to the west, while a carport extends from the rear and on the east.

The home's primary (south) elevation consists of a concrete block basement level that has been painted a neutral tone and includes two banks of windows. The bank to the west (on the left) consists of three, paired, nearly floor-to-ceiling casements that abut the single, steel door. The bank to the east (on the right) also consists of three paired casement examples but they are shorter in size and are located above the planter bed. The cantilevered and enclosed second level (less a single post support at its eastern corner) is sheathed with HardiePlank (or LP Smartside) siding (replacing the original redwood siding that was in significant disrepair). The glass-enclosed, west half of the upper level consists of four fixed panes of glass along the south, with an additional single pane and a casement example around to the corner, facing west. This portion, which is part of the house proper, is topped with a flat roof with wide overhanging eaves, the eastern portion of which now includes a casement window. The east half of the entrance elevation, which was originally an open porch when built, was altered with the arched, greenhouse-type glass enclosure in 1984-85 (by the home's original owner). Rising above the second level and adjacent to the wide chimney is a clerestory level comprised of fixed rectangular windows that is topped with a flat roof from which extends a cantilevered, wood-frame trellis.<sup>2</sup>

Turning to the west and less the previously described, cantilevered second story that extends south, this elevation, which includes the chimney, is comprised almost entirely of stack bond cavity (concrete) block. A single, tall-and-narrow fixed window is situated in the wall that is recessed from the larger concrete block expanse. Continuing north along the west elevation is a glass-enclosed and flat-roofed rear porch, which (like the front porch enclosure) was added in 1984-85. Two sets of sliding glass doors comprise the west wall of the porch, while a single set occupies the north wall.<sup>3</sup>

Aside from the north wall of the enclosed porch, the rear elevation is dominated by the flat-roofed carport, which was added to the original overhanging roof eave in 1976 by the home's original owner.

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<sup>2</sup> Permit for addition to 316 Oxford Road, includes closed in porch addition, kitchen remodel and glassing in of the existing balcony, 2 July 1984, contractor: Anders Inc., est. cost, \$20,000; Information regarding the siding replacement of the cantilevered second level provided by Stephen Rypel, the home's current owner, Conversation with Traci E. Schnell, June 2021.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

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The rear wall of the house, which is the south end of the carport, is entirely comprised of stack bond, cavity block, except for each corner of the house. At each corner is a single casement window positioned above board and batten redwood siding. Another paired casement window wraps around each corner to both the east and west elevations, the latter of which remains intact on the interior of the enclosed porch addition. The east wall of the carport includes storage. Visible above the home's main level is the clerestory level which, on this elevation, is sheathed with board and batten, redwood siding.

The final, west elevation of the house is comprised of the previously described carport wing (the exterior wall of which is covered with board siding), the previously described corner casement windows, as well as a large expanse of stack bond cavity block. Again, visible above the flat roofline are the clerestory level windows and the cantilevered, wood-framed trellis.

Exterior alterations to the primary entrance include the glass enclosure of the original open balcony, as well as the replacement of the porch's original board and batten, redwood siding with manufactured wood/cement fiber siding (either HardiePlank or LP Smart siding). The left (west) bank of basement windows was--as built--a single, fixed, plate-glass window; however, it was replaced sometime in the 1960s-70s (by the original owner), after a large crack developed. In order to improve circulation in the house (it did not have air conditioning installed until the 1980s), the single pane was replaced with casement windows that include the same hardware as the original windows of the east half of the lower level. Two additions were made to the rear of the home. In 1976, the Melsters added a 10' x 24' carport addition to the home's original rear roof overhang, resulting in a full carport that included storage along the east side. In 1984-85, a one-story, flat-roofed, glass-enclosed porch was added to the rear/northwest corner of the house (again, completed by the original owner).<sup>4</sup>

The public spaces of the main level of the home's interior are open concept and include the living room, dining room and kitchen, while three bedrooms and a bathroom, as well as a rear porch complete the floor. The lower/entrance level is comprised of a family room/second living room (identified on the original plans as the "hillside room"), a bedroom (identified on the plans as a sleeping room/playroom), a laundry area, a large storage room, as well as a powder room and a small utility/furnace room. The interior arrangement of the house remains as it was built in 1955. It contains just under 2,200 square feet of living space.

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<sup>4</sup> Permit for 10' x 24' carport addition, 1 October 1976.

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From the front entrance (facing Oxford Road), one enters a small vestibule area on the lower/basement level that includes carpeted stairs that lead to the upper level. To the left (west) of the entrance is a family room/2<sup>nd</sup> living room that includes a fireplace at its southwest corner. A door along the west side of the room accesses the utility/furnace room. A doorway at the northeast corner of the room leads to a laundry area, behind (to the north) of which is a large storage room. Returning to the front door, a short hallway to the right (east) leads to a bathroom and a bedroom. The basement-level floor is largely finished in large square tile (covered with area rugs), while the bathroom includes a turquoise ceramic tile floor (and walls; this bathroom was not finished until a few years after the house was completed). When built, the radiant-heat flooring was simply red polished concrete.

To the west and south of the stairs on the upper level is an open concept living room and dining room area; the kitchen is on the east side of the staircase but is also open to the living/dining space. A concrete and brick-trimmed fireplace is located along the west wall of the living room, adjacent to which is a built-in concrete bench seat. All flooring in this area is hardwood, installed by the home's original owners in the mid-1980s. A door at the southeast corner of the living/dining space opens into the enclosed porch area, which also served as a greenhouse, following the porch's enclosure. Inside the porch, all of the home's original exterior fenestration remain intact, including a fixed window to the kitchen; a casement window and a wood-and-glass door to the bathroom; as well as another casement window and another door to the east bedroom. The original overhanging eave, as well as the original redwood siding (albeit painted) also remains intact beneath the porch. Returning to the top of the stairs, a hallway (with large square tile flooring) to the right (east) leads to the home's three bedrooms (two north of the hallway and one at the east end of the hall). The bathroom is located south of the hallway (and accessed via a pocket door) and between the kitchen and the east bedroom (which also includes a pocket door from the hallway). The bathroom was built such that the sink area is separated (by a standard door) from the shower and toilet areas (and it remains as such). The toilet itself, while sharing the same space as the tub/shower, is located at the southernmost end of the space and is shielded from direct view by the south wall of the tub/shower. Bedrooms are carpeted and the bathroom floor is finished with small square tile. Both the north bedrooms (originally the bedrooms of the two Melster children) include built-in desks immediately beneath the corner windows. Interior wall finishes are either concrete block or redwood (which, in most cases, has been painted).

As stated previously, the interior arrangement/layout of the home remains unchanged from when it was built. In addition to the more standard bathroom and kitchen updates, alterations include the

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installation of either tile, carpeting or hardwood flooring over the original red polished concrete flooring and some of the original redwood has been painted.

**INTEGRITY STATEMENT**

The John & Florence Melster House retains a very good level of integrity on both the exterior and interior. Regarding the exterior, the house has undergone a small number of changes, including the glass-enclosed rear porch, as well as the enclosure of the front porch. Despite the front porch enclosure, the glass enclosure continues to “read” as a porch and does not adversely affect the home’s integrity of original design. Likewise, the rear porch enclosure is almost entirely of glass and is also topped with a flat roof and, if the original plans were not available, this rear addition might have been construed as original to the home. In both cases, if each glass porch enclosure were removed, the home’s original exteriors (including doors and windows) remain entirely intact. Finally, the extension of the roofline to form a full carport, which occurred in 1978, does little to alter the home’s integrity of original design and is in character with McDonald designs.

The integrity of the interior’s original design/floor plan, remains entirely intact. No walls have been added or removed (of course, doing so would be difficult considering the home’s concrete construction). Changes to the interior are largely of the cosmetic nature, including paint and carpeting, as well as the more standard kitchen and bath updates.

    End of Description of Physical Appearance

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     Insert Statement of Significance

**STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Designed by Yale-educated, Wisconsin native John Randal McDonald, the John and Florence Melster House is significant at the local level under Criterion C as a very good and largely intact example of 1950s Contemporary-style residential architecture, of which Waukesha has very few examples. Following a 2014 intensive survey of historical and architectural resources, the Melster House, built in 1955, was identified as among the top three examples of Contemporary-style residential architecture built in the 1950s and 1960s in the City of Waukesha. Following recent review, the Melster House now stands as just one of two such examples. Exhibiting strong horizontal lines, along with such natural materials as wood, concrete and glass, its commanding position on its hilly site provides for a striking contrast to many of its neighbors. Although McDonald would later go on to design homes for the rich and famous where cost was not a concern, the Melster House exemplifies McDonald's early career belief that he could deliver unique homes in a contemporary design for young middle-class professionals on a budget. Finally, the home's design, albeit modestly revised, was among eleven designs that McDonald personally selected for publication in the *Small Homes Guide* (later renamed *New Homes Guide*) between 1955 and 1958. Publication in the guide helped to fulfill his ambition: "To bring my designs within reach of many people, not just a few," as stated by McDonald himself. To date, two homes are confirmed to have been built from the Melster-based design; one in Minnesota and another in Michigan.

**Statement of Land Acknowledgment**

This nomination recognizes the depth of human presence here, the ancestral homeland of American Indians for millennia. From as early as the seventeenth century, Euro-American exploration and settlement, military campaigns, and government programs, all had the effect of repeated displacement of Indians of many tribal affiliations. This continuous tribal movement resulted in Wisconsin being home to many tribes who originated from other parts of the country, generating a pattern of immigration, relocation, and formation of a new homeland. Some of these tribes remain in Wisconsin but others may not. We acknowledge that the property that is the subject of this nomination is located on land long occupied by American Indians. The name Waukesha is derived from the Potawatomi name Wau-tsha, the leader of the local tribe at the time of the first European settlement of the area.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> C.W. Butterfield, *The History of Waukesha County, Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), 383.

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**General History of Waukesha**

The general history of the City of Waukesha is discussed in a variety of publications, including the following: Butterfield's *History of Waukesha County* (1880); Haight's *Memoirs of Waukesha County* (1907); and the 1982 Historic Resources Survey prepared by Howard Needles, Tammen and Bergendoff (HNTB). Briefly summarized, the settlement, which numbered 144 in 1838, was initially known as Prairie Village, but was later shortened to Prairieville in 1839. In 1852, one year after the Milwaukee & Mississippi Railroad reached Waukesha and the settlement had incorporated as a village, the population numbered approximately 2,000 persons. By 1870, the census reported only 2,500—a somewhat modest increase from twenty years prior.<sup>6</sup>

A rather substantial event in the history of Waukesha includes Colonel Richard Dunbar and his “discovery” of the benefits of the area’s spring water in August 1860. Eventually he began to bottle Bethesda Spring Water and created Spring Park which attracted the first throng of visitors to the community during the summer of 1869. Records indicate that approximately fifty springs were in operation in Waukesha at one time or another. In addition to the resort business that the springs fostered, Waukesha also developed a large bottling industry. The peak period of the “Springs Era” was between the mid-1880s to the late 1890s and, as the popularity of the natural water waned, industrial manufacturing pursuits began to grow. As of the turn of the twentieth century, the population of Waukesha had grown to just over 7,400 people.<sup>7</sup>

Although the population of Waukesha saw modest growth between 1900 and 1910 (rising from 7,419 to 8,740), greater gains were made over the following two decades, registering at 12,558 in 1920 and further increasing to 17,176 by 1930, fueled in part by the increasing number of, and improvements to, the automobile. Among the subdivisions added to the city by 1930 was that of Caples’ Park No. 2. Established in August 1929, the 54-lot subdivision consisted of land to the south and east of the original Caples’ Park subdivision that was created in 1925. Located southeast of downtown Waukesha and a few blocks south of Carroll College (today Carroll University), the subdivision comprised land

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<sup>6</sup> Butterfield, *The History of Waukesha County, Wisconsin*; Theron W. Haight, ed., *Memoirs of Waukesha County* (Madison, WI: Western Historical Association, 1907); *Spring City’s Past: A Thematic History of Waukesha and The Final Report of Waukesha’s Intensive Historic Resources Survey*, Prepared by Howard, Needles, Tammen & Bergendoff (HNTB), Milwaukee, WI (September 1982), 1-3, 35.

<sup>7</sup> *Spring City’s Past: A Thematic History of Waukesha*, 3-4, 21.

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along Oxford Road (originally named Harrison Avenue) from East Avenue to just east of S. Hartwell Avenue. The Depression slowed the subdivision's lot sales; however, they would pick back up following World War II. Among those purchasing land in the Caples Park No. 2 subdivision were John and Florence Melster.<sup>8</sup>

**John and Florence Melster**

John Rudolph Melster was born in 1921 in Palmyra, Jefferson County, the only child of Herman and Anna Melster. The Melsters moved to Milwaukee by no later than 1928, where Herman was employed as a carpenter. John graduated from Washington High School and, at the age of nineteen, was working at a milk ranch. Shortly thereafter, however, he began working at the Chr. Hansen Laboratories in West Allis, while continuing to live with his parents (who by this time had moved to New Berlin, Waukesha County). The Hansen concern, begun by Christian D.A. Hansen and based in Denmark, developed and produced cultures, enzymes, probiotics and natural colors for a variety of foods, beverages, dietary supplements and animal feed (and continues to do so today). In 1942, Melster wed Florence Cook (b. 1923) and the following year he began his Army service for World War II, which he continued until 1946. Upon his return, John joined his former Chr. Hansen co-worker, Merle Farnham, to head the Dairyland Food Laboratories.<sup>9</sup>

Dairyland Food Laboratories was the only company in the world to manufacture Italase, an edible enzyme preparation used in making Italian cheese. A liquid, Italase flavors and helps to give body to cheese and, as of 1946, fifty percent of the U.S. Italian cheese industry used Italase. Established in 1945, the company quickly outgrew its initial quarters on Calhoun Road, just south of Calhoun and, in

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<sup>8</sup> Caples Park No. 2, Subdivision Map, Available online through the Waukesha County Register of Deeds Office, Waukesha, WI, Available online at <https://landrecordspublicaccess.waukeshacounty.gov/>, Accessed July 2021; National Register of Historic Places, Caples' Park Historic District, Waukesha, Waukesha County, Wisconsin, #88000219.

<sup>9</sup> *Milwaukee City Directory*, 1928, 1932; U.S. Federal Census, Population, 1930, 1940; "John R. Melster," in U.S., World War II Draft Cards Young Men, 1940-1947, Available online at [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com), Accessed May 2021; "John R. Melster," Obituary, 12 March 2014, Available online at [www.gmtoday.com/obits/freeman/obits/2014/March12/01.htm](http://www.gmtoday.com/obits/freeman/obits/2014/March12/01.htm), Accessed May 2021; May Merrill, "Calhoun Laboratory Produces Unique Enzyme for Cheese," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 11 June 1948, 9.

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1949, a new building was built at 419 Frederick Street in Waukesha (remains extant). It was about that time that the Melsters contemplated a move to Waukesha in order for John to be closer to work.<sup>10</sup>

**Property Specific History**

The subject property, located in the Caples Park No. 2 subdivision, was purchased in January 1954 by John and Florence Melster who, to that point, had been living in a 100-year-old farmhouse. Due to the lot's sloping terrain, they were able to purchase it at a lesser cost than similarly sized lots elsewhere. That same year, the Melsters hired John Randal McDonald, who they had met through a mutual friend in the mid-1940s. McDonald would need to design a home to fit their sloping lot—and one that would also meet the subdivision's deed restrictions. In addition to a minimum cost of construction (\$8,000), the house needed to have no less than a thirty-five-foot setback from the street. Indeed, the house has the deepest setback of its neighbors in order to capitalize on the lot's slope. Although the first design produced by McDonald in November 1954 was not chosen, revisions acceptable to the Melsters were made early in 1955. Construction of their modest, eight-room home began in April (by contractor Merrill York/York Builders); the cost was estimated at \$15,000. It was ultimately completed in August for under \$19,000 (including architect's fees but excluding the lot). Six months after its completion, the house was featured in the home section of *The Milwaukee Journal*. And, in 1962, the home was among the four homes included in the annual tour of homes sponsored by the YWCA.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> "Food Laboratories to Construct New Plant in Waukesha," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 1 April 1949, 7; Merrill, "Calhoun Laboratory Produces Unique Enzyme for Cheese," 9; John remained at Dairyland Food Laboratories until resigning in July 1972, in order to start his own company to represent suppliers in the cheese industry, "Business Personalities: Kanters Made Waukesha Rubber President," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 8 July 1972, 7; Cathy (Melster) Bellovary, Daughter of John and Florence Melster, Conversation with Traci E. Schnell, August 2021.

<sup>11</sup> Otto A. and Amanda Schroeder to John and Florence Melster, Warranty Deed, 13 January 1954, Book 622/165, Document #391417, this and all deeds to follow are located at the Waukesha County Register of Deeds Office, Waukesha, WI; Original building permit, 4 April 1955, This permit and all others to follow are on file at the City of Waukesha Department of Building Inspection, Waukesha, WI; Miles McNamara, "Family Discovers Its New Home Created Different Way of Life," *The Milwaukee Journal*, 5 February 1956, Part 7, 1, 8, incidentally, Miles McNamara would go on to have McDonald design a residence for himself and his family, which was built in Glendale; "Outstanding Modern Residence Has Main Living Quarters on Upper Level," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 9 November 1962, clipping in "Waukesha Buildings" Binder, Located at the Waukesha County Historical Society Research Library, Waukesha, WI. The mutual friend of both McDonald and Melster is identified as Bill Klug, who was a good friend of McDonald's in both high school and college (at Wauwatosa East and the Milwaukee State Teachers College, respectively), information provided by Dave Erickson to Traci E. Schnell, August 2021—original information provided to Erickson by Florence Melster during an interview in 2014.

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The Melsters' daughter Cathy was eight years old when they moved into the house in the Fall of 1955. She recounted that they made daily trips to the site to see the progress of construction. She recognized that their house clearly stood out from their neighbors' more traditional homes (the Contemporary-style house to the east of the Melsters' had not yet been built) and countless people would come up to the house to get a closer look, including some that would try to look into their windows. Although both of her parents appreciated modern architecture, Cathy did allow that her mother had actually always wanted to live in a traditional Colonial, complete with dormers. Following construction of their home, both John and Florence made it a point in their travels to seek out John Randal McDonald and Frank Lloyd Wright-designed homes. The home's contractor, Merrill York, was very proud of the house and he became a long-time family friend.<sup>12</sup>

The lower-level room on the west (with the fireplace) housed John's ping-pong table (he was an avid player, playing until he was ninety) and a piano, which daughter Cathy played. The room on the east served as a family room; the only room in the house with a television. The lower level had radiant floor heat; however, the upper level did not and was originally built with cork floors. Cathy recounted that her friends would enjoy staying overnight, sleeping on the heated floor of the lower-level family room. Among the most talked about interior features of the house at the time of its construction was a planter box that was located near the clerestory level of the living room and above the built-in concrete bench seat. Visitors ultimately always asked the question, "How DO you water those plants?" The simple answer: "with a ladder." While the planter box no longer remains, a subsequent owner installed recessed lighting in a similar "box," located at the same level as the planter and at additional locations around the fireplace area (John Randal McDonald reportedly did not like ceiling lights and instead promoted the use of lamps; but clearly a subsequent owner preferred ceiling lights).<sup>13</sup>

Although a substantial roof overhang at the rear of the house partially sheltered the family car, an extension measuring 10' x 24' was added to the rear of the home in 1976 to provide for a full carport space. Eight years later, the Melsters, who entertained often, concluded that they needed additional living space. Rather than looking for a new home, they investigated options as to how to do that with their existing home, while still retaining the home's integrity of design. After searching for a contractor that would not significantly alter the home, they chose New Berlin-based, Anders, Inc. (See

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<sup>12</sup> Bellovary, Conversation with Schnell.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.; McNamara, "Family Discovers Its New Home Created Different Way of Life," 8.

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brief biographical information on the firm later in this section) to complete the work, which cost an estimated \$20,000. The arched, greenhouse-like enclosure of the balcony allowed for year-round use, as well as housed Florence many plants and flowers, while the single-story, glass-enclosed sunroom at the rear also accommodated additional living space; although only seasonally. At the same time, they also remodeled the kitchen with new cabinets and countertops; the same kitchen that remains there today. It was also at this time that the original cork flooring was replaced with hardwood flooring on the upper level.<sup>14</sup>

The Melsters believed that “if you lived in a community, you need to be a part of it,” and both lived up to that belief in their extensive local volunteerism. Among John’s activities (which were started well in advance of his retirement at the age of eighty-nine) included (but were not limited to) serving for forty-seven years as the treasurer of the Friends of the Library; he was an active, lifetime member of the Optimist Club; and he received the Silver Beaver Award from the Potawatomi Boy Scout Council, the award of which is the highest honor for distinguished service as an adult (Notably, the Melsters’ son John was never a Boy Scout). In 2010, John was given the Key to the City at an event honoring him for his local service commitment. Likewise, Florence’s service history is similarly long—she began when John was overseas for World War II. Whereas John was involved with the Boy Scouts, Florence was a longtime Girl Scout leader. Among her other longtime commitments included (but were not limited to) sixty years with the Senior League of the Waukesha Service Club (including service in officer positions), the mission of which is “donating to help the Municipal Hospital serving the sick and needy and befriending the less fortunate of the Waukesha Community.” In 1995, the *Waukesha Freeman* (local paper) named Florence one of the seven most influential women in the county (along with her daughter Cathy) and (both) received the Volunteer Center Community Leaders Award in 2005 for many years of volunteerism. Together, both John and Florence delivered Meals on Wheels until they were in their 80s and were actively involved with United Way campaigns, with Florence being the oldest ever United Way volunteer, who “retired” at the age of eight-five. John died in 2014 and Florence died two years later.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Permit for addition (carport), 1 October 1976; Permit for addition (porch enclosure, porch addition and kitchen remodel), 2 July 1984; Bellovary, Conversation with Schnell.

<sup>15</sup> Bellovary, Conversation with Schnell; Both John and Florence’s extensive volunteerism is included in each of their obituaries, “John R. Melster,” Obituary, Waukesha Freeman, 12 March 2014 and “Florence A. Melster,” Obituary, 20 June 2016, Available online at [https://www.randedablefuneralhome.com/obituaries/Florence-Melster/?wms\\_redirected=1#!/Obituary](https://www.randedablefuneralhome.com/obituaries/Florence-Melster/?wms_redirected=1#!/Obituary), Accessed April 2021.

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**Owners Since 1991**

The Melsters sold the house to James C. Bell in 1992; he remained in the home for the next seven years. During his tenure, building permits indicate that he repaired an unidentified exterior wall at a cost of \$3,800. From November 1999 to September 2000, the home was owned (and occupied) by Arthur and Nancy Sisler. The Sislers, who appear to have then moved to Ohio, sold the home to Kurt Babcock. During his tenure, Kurt married and he and his wife Heidi remained there until it was sold in 2006 to Steve Petty and Dan Dailey. Three years later, they sold the home to Stephen and Angela Rypel; the former of whom remains in the home today. The primary change made by the Rypels was the replacement of the original redwood siding with manufactured wood on the balcony (as the years of runoff from the glass enclosure of balcony had damaged the redwood beyond repair). At some point between 1992 and 2009, some of the interior woodwork, which had been regularly stained by the Melsters, was painted. Other cosmetic changes include carpeting in the bedrooms, tile flooring in the second-floor hallway, as well as bathroom fixture (sink, toilet) replacement in the upper-level bathroom.<sup>16</sup>

**AREA OF SIGNIFICANCE: ARCHITECTURE**

The John and Florence Melster House is a very good and largely intact example of 1950s Contemporary style architecture, as evidenced by a 2014 survey of architectural and historical resources in the City of Waukesha. The Contemporary style, which was not restricted to residential use, was the choice of many American architects from the mid-1940s to the mid-1960s, although McAlester's *Field Guide* states that the style continued through 1990. By simple definition, Contemporary style homes exhibit the stylistic characteristics common to the period in which they were built. As a result, the style can often be further broken down by decades, based on specific design features--most specifically window design--that were more popular in their respective decade (and can be thusly identified as 1940s Contemporary, 1950s Contemporary or 1960s Contemporary).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Building permit (exterior wall repair), 16 October 1995; James C. Bell to Arthur R. & Nancy J. Sisler, Warranty Deed, 19 November 1999, #2520523; Arthur R. and Nancy Sisler to Kurt Babcock, a single person, Warranty Deed, 8 September 2000, #2589375; Kurt and Heidi Babcock to Steve Petty and Dan Dailey, Warranty Deed, 31 August 2006, #3416399; Steve Petty and Dan Dailey to Stephen and Angela Rypel, Warranty Deed, 7 December 2009, #3711491; Angela C. Rypel to Stephen Rypel, Quit Claim Deed, 14 May 2019, #4396356.

<sup>17</sup> Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017), 632. Note that *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin* does identify Contemporary style in the architecture section; however,

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The Contemporary style was developed from the influences of modernist architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright. A good summary of architect's influences on the development of the Contemporary style house and brief overview of the style's characteristics is found in the 2002 National Register Bulletin regarding historic residential suburbs:

The influence of Frank Lloyd Wright, Walter Gropius, Marcel Breuer, Richard Neutra, Mies van der Rohe and other modernists inspired many architects to look to new solutions for livable homes using modern materials of glass, steel, and concrete, and principals of organic design that utilized cantilevered forms, glass curtain walls, and post-and-beam construction. The contemporary home featured the integration of the indoor and outdoor living area and open floor plans, which allowed a sense of flowing space. Characteristics such as masonry hearth walls, patios and terraces, carports and transparent walls of sliding glass doors and floor-to-ceiling windows became hallmarks of contemporary residential design.<sup>18</sup>

Indeed, the John and Florence Melster House exhibits the vast majority of the aforementioned features and characteristics that are also common to Wright's Usonian designs. Integrated into the existing terrain, the Melster house is defined by flat roofs and overhanging eaves, is largely constructed of natural materials including concrete, wood and glass and is anchored by a wide masonry chimney. Large expanses of glass define the house along its primary (entrance) elevation. Despite the glass enclosure of the cantilevered balcony (which was completed by the home's original owner), the glass continues to allow the outside into the house. Indeed, view of the trees--which were on the lot prior to the home's construction--has not changed. The home's clerestory level and pair of skylights in the living room assist in bringing the outside in. The public spaces of the home—the living room, dining room and kitchen—flow into one another as they are not divided by walls and each space maintains its view to the outdoors. A large masonry hearth dominates the main level and a smaller version is present on the lower level. The original front terrace remains underneath the cantilevered balcony. Although the rear “terrace” was replaced with an enclosed sunroom, the addition (which, again, was added by the home's original owners) is comprised entirely of sliding glass doors that continue to bring the outside in. And while the 1976 carport addition is not original to the house (a “full” carport was not

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Contemporary was still relatively too “new” as of 1986 and, therefore, McAlester (and a National Register bulletin, see following footnote) was utilized for context, Barbara Wyatt, ed., *Cultural Resource Management in Wisconsin*, 3 vols. (Madison: Historic Preservation Division, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1986 (with some later updates), Architecture, 2:2-37.

<sup>18</sup> David L. Ames and Linda Flint McClelland, *National Register Bulletin: Historic Residential Suburbs* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of the Interior, National Park Service, September 2002), 67.

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originally included in the plans nor was one initially built by the Melsters but it was Melster himself who added it), it was completed in the same spirit as the original design.

*Architect: John Randal McDonald*

The John and Florence Melster House was designed by noted architect, John Randal McDonald, who is well known for his Mid-Century Modern-era designs that are sometimes loosely referred to as "Wrightian." McDonald was born in Milwaukee on 25 July 1922, the son of William John and MacLean (Lewis) McDonald. However, he grew up in Wauwatosa--in a traditional Colonial-style home--following his mother's second marriage (to Harry Watson, D.D.S.). In 1940, McDonald began his studies in Fine Arts at the Milwaukee State Teacher's College (present-day UW-Milwaukee campus). His studies were interrupted by World War II, in which he served in the Navy from 1943 to 1946 and during which time he married Josephine Elholm (in 1945). Following service, McDonald chose to pursue a degree in architecture from Yale University. While still a third-year student, McDonald had the unique opportunity to design the Lincoln Mercury Auto Showroom and Service building in New Haven, Connecticut. He graduated in 1949 with a Master's Degree in Architecture. Although he received a Fellowship to study abroad (in Asia), he chose to return to Wisconsin with his family (which by then included a young daughter) and established his own firm in Racine. His first design in the state was his own home in Racine, located at 801 Lathrop Avenue, which was completed in 1950. Just three years later, he designed a second home for himself and his wife Josephine, just one street west of Lathrop, at 1001 Russet Street. With commissions increasing, McDonald opened an office in Indian Rocks Beach, Florida in 1955, while maintaining his Racine office. This ended in 1963, when the McDonalds moved to St. Croix, U.S. Virgin Islands, where he established a new office. In the mid-1970s, the unrest in the Caribbean resulted in a move to Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. And, in 1998, the McDonalds moved to Boca Raton, Florida; all along, his wife Josephine managed his various offices. John Randal McDonald died in December 2003 and Josephine died in 2017. Prior to Josephine's death, McDonald's drawings were donated in 2007 to two institutions: The Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives and Museum Collections in Madison and the State Archives of Florida in Tallahassee.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Koyl, ed., *American Architects Directory* (1962), 445; "Racine's Architectural Surprises: The Houses of John Randal McDonald," in the *Preservation Racine, Inc. Newsletter* (Spring 1991), 1; Kelly Wells, "McDonald's Atypical Homes Complemented Nature," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 21 December 2003, 6B; Jim Dittmann, "Viewfinder: John Randal McDonald Through the Eyes of Dave Erickson," *Localeben Magazine*, 24 September 2014, Available online at <https://www.localeben.com/2014/09/24/viewfinder-john-randal-mcdonald-through-the-eyes-of-dave-erickson/>, Accessed

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During the course of his lifetime, John Randal McDonald produced 459 “projects” that can be fully accounted for through available drawings. Of those, 149 are confirmed as having been built, while 104 (of the 149) are known to remain extant, as of nine years ago. Of the 104 that are believed extant, sixty-four are located in Wisconsin. Between 1951 and 1960, McDonald produced fourteen designs that were built throughout Waukesha County; however, the John and Florence Melster House is the only McDonald-designed house located within the City of Waukesha.<sup>20</sup>

McDonald’s homes are often compared (favorably) to that of Frank Lloyd Wright, in terms of styling and their incorporation into the built environment. McDonald has also been referred to as the “poor man’s Frank Lloyd Wright.” While Wright’s designs were not accessible to the common man, McDonald “believed he could deliver unique homes in a contemporary design for young middle-class professionals on a budget, and he did,” according to Dave Erickson, an authority on John Randal McDonald (who has, since 2001, been gathering materials for a book that is planned to cover the architect’s life and his lifetime work, not just that located in Wisconsin). Indeed, according to the Melster’s daughter, Cathy Bellovary, her parents had a budget to work within and McDonald produced

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June 2021; “John Randal McDonald: Architect,” in *Journal of Organic Architecture + Design*, 2:1 (2014), 6, 12-13, 18. The Wauwatosa home in which McDonald resided with his mother, stepfather and stepbrother was 1846 N. 83<sup>rd</sup> Street.

<sup>20</sup> Information regarding projects in Waukesha County from “A Chronological List: John Randal McDonald Designs from 1948-1960,” in Father Brian Beno, “John Randal McDonald: Architect,” Unpublished but copyrighted 1994 (rev. 1998) by Beno, Copy in possession of Traci E. Schnell, Kiel, WI. Total lifetime project statistics of John Randal McDonald are included on the website launched (on 1 January 2019) by Dave Erickson and Melissa Grasser at <http://johnrandalmcdonald.com/>, Accessed August 2021. Erickson and Grasser have been researching McDonald since 2011. Research efforts are anticipated to lead to the publication of a book but, until then, they have launched a website to present the information they have learned through visits to numerous McDonald-designed buildings in thirteen states, including interviews with various persons associated with (including clients of) McDonald, as well as the review of significant amounts of materials (photos, drawings, etc.) that, as stated previously, are in possession of either the Wisconsin Historical Society in Madison or at the State Archives of Florida in Tallahassee. Numbers included on the website were verified in August 2021 by Schnell with Dave Erickson. Please note that project statistics provided on the website (of 435 total projects) have not been updated since the website went live in 2019. Erickson indicated that there are still some McDonald drawings that need to be assigned to a client or project but he doubts that the total projects number will exceed 500. In 2014, Randolph Henning, the author of the introduction to the 2014 issue of *OA+D* that was dedicated to the architecture of John Randal McDonald, cited that McDonald designed more than 600 projects, “Introduction,” *Journal of Organic Architecture + Design*, 2:1 (2014) 3. That number was an approximation that is believed to have been based on a slight exaggeration that likely came from McDonald himself, Erickson, Email correspondence with Schnell.

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a unique and “modern” house to fit within it. Additionally, the house was set on the lot such that the existing trees could remain.<sup>21</sup>

Two years after the Melster House was constructed, the plans for the Melsters’ house, identified instead as Plan No. 1914, were offered for purchase (at a cost of \$150.00) in the bi-annual publication, *New Homes Guide*. Although rather than concrete block walls, the exterior was rendered in brick. Aside from that wall material change and providing two options for the location of a carport, as well as a slight shift of the front door, Plan No. 1914 was one and the same with the Melster plans. The home’s description, entitled “spectacular hilltop house,” read as follows:

This house was designed by Architect John Randal McDonald specifically for a hilltop site. Windows and balconies were planned to take advantage of the view in several directions. The exterior is brick and horizontal redwood siding. The lower level is practically a private apartment with bedroom, bath, and the “Hillside” living or recreation room. The upper level has three bedrooms and a bath. The living room runs the full depth of the house, and one corner given over to dining has a balcony for outdoor meals.<sup>22</sup>

This was not the first time that McDonald had offered plans (for mail order sale) for designs that were initially provided for a client—nor would it be the last. According to Erickson, McDonald had eleven designs published in six different editions of the *Small Homes Guide* (which continued as the *New Homes Guide* as of 1956) between 1955 and 1958. Chronologically, the Melster House was included in the third submission of plans and was published in the 1957 winter/spring edition, along with McDonald’s own (first) house in Racine (at 801 Lathrop Avenue), as well as the home of contractor Fred Federspiel (in Fort Wayne, IN). The previous two submissions (for the 1955 spring/summer and 1956 spring/summer editions) included two speculative designs (No. 1632 and No. 1809), along with plan No. 1826, which was based on McDonald’s second home (at 1001 Russet Street, the house in which he was living in at the time it was published). Of the remaining five designs, all were speculative in nature.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Joanne Kempinger Demski, “Research of Famous Architect Led to Purchase of Dream Home,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 1 May 2017, Available online at <https://www.jsonline.com/story/life/home-garden/at-home-with/2017/05/11/research-famous-architect-led-purchase-dream-home/101222390/>, Accessed May 2021; Bellovary, Conversation with Schnell.

<sup>22</sup> “Spectacular Hilltop House” (Plan No. 1914), In *New Homes Guide* (winter-spring 1957), Copy of page provided to Schnell by Dave Erickson, Included in the John Randal McDonald Collection, 1949-2001, Located at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives and Museum Collections, Madison, WI. See Figures, Figure #8.

<sup>23</sup> Cathy Bellovary, the Melsters’ daughter, had no knowledge of their home (or a modestly revised version) being in a

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According to Erickson, “Apprentices insist that house plans were purchased by readers from all 50 states.” To date, Erickson and Melissa Grasser have found undocumented McDonald-designed, *Small Homes Guide*/*New Homes Guide* plan-built homes in seven states, including Wisconsin. As for plan No. 1914 (the one based on the Melster House), two have been identified to date—the Heyman House in Sleepy Eye, Minnesota, and another in Muskegon, Michigan (See Figures, Figure #10 and #11). Interestingly, the Heymans, who did not complete their home until 1961, chose to build theirs with a concrete block exterior like the Melster House, rather than the brick shown on Plan No. 1914’s illustration. The circa 1958 Muskegon, Michigan example was, however, built with brick and with the optional carport along the front of the home (which has an overhead garage door and may have originally been built as a garage), along with a deck and swimming pool.<sup>24</sup>

It is fully acknowledged that numerous architects had their work—either speculative in nature or based on a built form—published in various catalogs and guides throughout the 1950s (as well as before and beyond the 1950s). And, although McDonald had just eleven of his home plans published in the four years between 1955 and 1958, their publication in the biannual *New Homes Guide* helped to fulfill his ambition: “To bring my designs within the reach of many people, not just a few.” Individuals and families that were removed geographically and/or financially from this new affordable modernism could simply select a design, pay \$150 for plans, find a builder or do it themselves. Plan No. 1914 (based on the Melster design) is an example of how that happened and which is illustrated in the built environment by the aforementioned two examples of the Melster design in Minnesota and Michigan (and there may be more out there).<sup>25</sup>

Erickson notes that McDonald liked to call his work *American Architecture*, which was “a repudiation of what he saw as the regurgitation of something done in the past, primarily in Europe.” He continued:

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publication of plans and did not believe that her parents knew either, Bellovary, Conversation with Schnell. Dave Erickson, Conversation with Traci E. Schnell, June 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Quote regarding number of plan mailings from “About the Site,” Basic information available online at <http://johnrandalmcdonald.com/about-site/>, Accessed August 2021; Erickson, Conversation with Schnell. It is likely that additional examples of Plan #1914 will be discovered in the future.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted material from McDonald himself, cited by Erickson and included in Dittmann, “Viewfinder: John Randal McDonald Through the Eyes of Dave Erickson.” The visibility of those published plans also led to additional individual custom commissions that McDonald would not have otherwise received, “John Randal McDonald, Architect,” *Journal of Organic Architecture + Design*, 13.

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“McDonald’s architecture would be at first glance simple, unadorned, unique, affordable, a celebration of materials (wood, stone, glass and most importantly light), and an exploitation of what the site offers. Look at his homes from this time frame (the 1950s) and you see sites on cul du sacs, in forests, on hilltops, and overlooking ravines. He’d take a site like the Melsters’ or any of the three properties on Green Tree Road in River Hills--undervalued because of the challenging terrain--and do magic. In the early to mid-1950s, McDonald was serving a young, exploding middle class, many working with GI Bill funds and desire to do something special. Imagine getting a “custom” home, and one that was affordable to someone working hard to start their career.”<sup>26</sup>

Although no comprehensive history of mid-century Wisconsin architecture (or architects) has yet to be written<sup>27</sup>, it is acknowledged that McDonald was certainly not the only, nor the first, architect to attempt to bring his modern designs to the masses at a low price point. Frank Lloyd Wright certainly had a great interest in low-cost housing, first through his American System Built Home designs (in association with developer Arthur L. Richards) and, later, in his prefabricated house designs that were manufactured by Marshall Erdman & Associates. Wright, however, failed in his efforts in keeping their costs low and neither effort was long-lived or particularly successful. Another Wisconsin architect that produced Contemporary homes for the more common man in the 1950s was Russell Barr Williamson who, from 1914-1917, worked for Wright. After brief notoriety for his 1920s concrete designs and following an unsuccessful stint at prefabricated housing in the 1940s, Williamson offered the more general population of the 1950s what has been termed a “Modified Prairie” design that reflects Usonian principles. Although successful locally, and seemingly resulting in lower or moderate cost, Williamson’s designs never achieved the acclaim that Wright and even McDonald were able to attain during their lifetimes.<sup>28</sup>

Although the Melster House’s area of significance is not as “the work of a master,” the house “is an example of McDonald’s work right in the thick of his most creative and sincere phase of his career as

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<sup>26</sup> Dittmann, “Viewfinder: John Randal McDonald Through the Eyes of Dave Erickson”; Quoted material from Dave Erickson, Email correspondence with Traci E. Schnell, August 2021.

<sup>27</sup> A small group of Mid-Century Modern enthusiasts, including Dave Erickson and former State Historic Preservation Officer Jim Draeger, are reportedly doing research for a book on Mid-Century Modern designs in Wisconsin; however, it remains unclear as to where that project is as far as a timeline.

<sup>28</sup> Russell Barr Williamson Jr., *Russell Barr Williamson, Architect...A Collection...*(Hot Springs, N.C.: The Barr Brand, 2000), 5-6, 57, 61. A number of Williamson homes are listed in the National Register, either as part of a historic district or individually, including the Anthony and Caroline Isermann House, Kenosha, Kenosha County, Wisconsin, National Register #040000108.

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an architect,” per Dave Erickson, authority on McDonald’s lifetime works. Indeed, following McDonald’s low-cost “every man” designs, he would later go on to design homes all over the world for the rich and famous, including singer Perry Como, tennis star Bjorn Borg and actress Maureen O’Hara.<sup>29</sup>

**Comparison Properties**

Waukesha’s population expanded significantly between 1950 and 1970, rising from 21,233 (1950) to 30,004 (1960) to 40,271 (1970). The number of single-family homes built in Waukesha in 1955 (the year that the Melster House was completed) numbered just over 200. Of the total number of homes built during the entire decade (1950-1959), only approximately forty of them merited survey during the 2014 Waukesha survey of architectural and historical resources. Of those forty or so 1950s-era homes that were surveyed, just under half were Ranch style houses, three could be categorized as Minimal Traditional, while two were traditional examples of the Colonial Revival style. The remainder (about twenty) were examples of 1950s Contemporary styling—many having a flat roof and/or overhanging eaves but little else that would suggest potential National Register eligibility for its architectural styling. Per the results of the 2014 survey<sup>30</sup>, two 1950s Contemporary-style homes were recommended as potentially eligible—one being the subject Melster House, while the other was a 1956 tri-level home that has since undergone alterations such that it is no longer considered potentially eligible for the National Register.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> David Bader, “Modern Marvel,” *Milwaukee Magazine* (November 2010), Available online at <https://www.milwaukeeemag.com/ModernMarvel>, Accessed January 2023.

<sup>30</sup> One 1950s-era Waukesha home that was not fully evaluated for potential eligibility in the 2014 survey--due to significant foliage obscuring much of the home from street view--is the Kenneth and Opal Kerr House at 615 E. Newhall Avenue, which was designed by architect Allan Wallsworth. Completed in 1950, the single-story house is topped with a flat roof with overhanging eaves. Exterior sheathing includes stone, wood and the expansive use of glass (per review of recent real estate photos). Despite its definitive 1950s Contemporary styling, including strong horizontal lines the use of natural materials, nearly half of the home’s street-facing elevation is dominated by an attached three-car garage. As such, the Kerr House does not provide for a good comparison to the Melster House. Photos of the Kenneth and Opal Kerr House at 615 E. Newhall were previously available online at [https://www.movoto.com/waukesha-wi/615-e-newhall-ave-waukesha-wi-53186-663\\_1426596/#&gid=1&pid=26](https://www.movoto.com/waukesha-wi/615-e-newhall-ave-waukesha-wi-53186-663_1426596/#&gid=1&pid=26), Accessed August 2021.

<sup>31</sup> Waukesha’s population in 1940 was 19,242; *Annual Report: City Building Inspector, Waukesha, Wisconsin* (Waukesha, WI: City of Waukesha Engineering Department, 1955), 1-2. The total number of single-family homes built between 1950 and 1959 could not be ascertained through the city’s annual reports, as reports could not be located for half of those years (1950, 1952, 1954, 1958 and 1959).

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Even after broadening the range for Contemporary-style comparisons to both the 1940s and the 1960s, only a single home is considered comparable within the entire City of Waukesha. Completed just over a full decade after the Melster House and designed by architect James William Pauers, the 1966-67 Dr. Claude and Ila Schmidt House at 1021 Downing Drive is sheathed with natural materials consisting of brick and rough cedar. Although topped with a gabled roof, the Schmidt House is also built into an existing hill, features wide, overhanging eaves and offers large expanses of glass that bring the outside in. Despite the 1981 addition of a small entrance vestibule to its primary street-facing elevation, the Schmidt House is also considered potentially eligible for the National Register under Criterion C, as a very good and intact example of 1960s Contemporary residential architecture.<sup>32</sup>

*Original Contractor: Merrill York, York Builders*

The home was built by local contractor, Merrill York, York Builders. Merrill W. York was born in Hebron, Illinois, on 27 July 1919, the son of William and Martha York. Martha died in 1932 and William appears to have moved to California. As of 1940, Merrill (age 21) and his sister Lois (age 14) worked for a local family as a farmhand and servant, respectively. That same year, Merrill, who had just one year of high school education, moved to Florida, where he enlisted in the U.S. Army. Following his service, he moved to Waukesha, where he wed Vivian Goerke in 1946. Having had experience in building aircraft in the army, Merrill continued to follow the building trades, as a house contractor. Although little of York's work is known, he was responsible for the construction of the home of Jim and Mary Thorp, a single-story home located at 402 Tenny Avenue, the planning, design and construction of which was reported from start to finish in the *Waukesha Freeman* between May 1954 and its open house in January 1955. Also, a few months prior to that series of articles, York was one of four contractors appearing in a home builders clinic panel discussion held by the Waukesha Vocational School, a synopsis of which was published in the *Waukesha Freeman*. York Builders, located in New Berlin for most of its tenure, was in business for thirty-two years.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Like the Melster House, the Schmidt House was featured in one of the two primary Milwaukee newspapers, David E. Link, "Wedded to Wooded City Site," *The Milwaukee Sentinel*, 18 October 1969. Interestingly, the Schmidt House has definite design similarities with a house in Fox Point (7929 N. Regent Road) that was built in 1957 by John Randal McDonald.

<sup>33</sup> U.S. Federal Census, Population, 1920, 1940; "Merrill W. York," in the U.S., World War II Army Enlistment Records, 1938-1946, Available at [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com), Accessed April 2021; "Vivian Goerke Is Married to Merrill W. York," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 18 May 1946, 3; "Merrill W. York," Obituary, *Waukesha Freeman*, 12 October 2002, Available online on Find A Grave, [www.Ancestry.com](http://www.Ancestry.com), Accessed June 2021; "Contractors Give Advice to Builders," *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 26 March 1954, 18; Open House Ad, *Waukesha Daily Freeman*, 7 January 1955, 14.

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*Contractor for 1984-85 alterations: Anders, Inc.*

Established in 1977, Anders, Inc. was comprised of partners Anders Lewis and architect Dale Kolbeck. Lewis was an established home builder in Waukesha County by the 1960s. Kolbeck, a graduate of Everest High School in Schofield, Wisconsin, went on to earn a degree in architecture from Iowa State University. After working with Lewis for a number of years, Kolbeck became the sole proprietor and changed the name in 2004 to Architectural Homes by Anders, Inc. The design-build company, which remains in business today, is located in Hartland, Waukesha County, Wisconsin.<sup>34</sup>

**Summary Statement for Architectural Significance**

Despite being partially obscured by thick foliage during the summer and fall, the John Randal McDonald-designed John and Florence Melster House--which exhibits natural materials along with strong horizontal lines through its flat roofs and window expanses--stands as the most striking example of 1950s Contemporary residential architecture in the city. Its only comparison, following a 2014 architectural survey of the community, is a Contemporary-style home that dates to over one full decade later. The Waukesha home's design, albeit with modest revisions, would go on to be published in the *New Homes Guide*, thus aiding in McDonald's early ambition to offer his low-cost, modern designs to many, not just a few.

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<sup>34</sup> "Architecture Student Wins Scholarship," *Waukesha Freeman*, 2 June 1969, 18; J.A. Berger, "Born to Design Homes," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 8 November 2014, Available online at <http://archive.jsonline.com/homes/buildinglifestyles/281926601.html>, Accessed August 2021; "Who We Are," Architectural Homes by Anders, Inc. website, Available online at <http://archhomes.com>, Accessed August 2021.

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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL**

Due to its urban nature, no archaeology survey has been done on the subject parcel, and such work is outside of the scope of this nomination. Although no archaeological deposits have been reported, the archaeological potential for this are remains unassessed.

**PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES**

The John and Florence Melster House was evaluated as potentially eligible for the NRHP during a survey of the City of Waukesha conducted in 2013-2014. Eligibility was re-affirmed prior to the writing of this nomination. As a partner with the Wisconsin State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the National Park Service (NPS) participating in the Certified Local Government (CLG) program, [city/village/town] is required to maintain a system to survey and inventory historic properties. That entails regular surveys with updates every 20-25 years to identify properties that appear potentially eligible for the NRHP.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This program receives Federal financial assistance for identification and protection of historic properties. Under Title VI of the Civil Rights Action of 1964, section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the Age Discrimination Act of 1975, as amended, the U.S. Department of the Interior prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, national origin, or disability or age in its federally assisted programs. If you believe you have been discriminated against in any program, activity or facility as described above, or if you desire further information, please write to: Office of Equal Opportunity, National Park Service, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

The activity that is the subject of this Nomination has been financed entirely with Federal Funds from the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior, and administered by the Wisconsin Historical Society. However, the contents and opinions do not necessarily reflect the views or policies of the Department of the Interior or the Wisconsin Historical Society. Nor does the mention of trade names or commercial products constitute endorsement or recommendation by the Department of the Interior or the Wisconsin Historical Society.

End of Statement of Significance

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Insert References

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\_\_\_End of References

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     Insert Boundary Descriptions

**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundary is a rectangle that measures 120 feet (east and west lines) x 60 feet (north and south lines).

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundary equates to the current legal description for the property, which is described as follows: E 35' OF LOT 4 & W 25' OF LOT 5 BLK 2 CAPLES PARK NO 2 PT NW1/4 SEC 11 T6N R19E DOC NO 3711491 & DOC NO 4396356, as recorded at the Office of the Register of Deeds, Waukesha County, Wisconsin.

     End of Boundary Descriptions

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Insert Photo Descriptions

**PHOTOGRAPHS**

**Name of Property: John and Florence Melster House**

**City or Vicinity: Waukesha**

**County: Waukesha**

**State: Wisconsin**

**Name of Photographer: Traci E. Schnell**

**Date of Photographs: Photos #1-3: December 2019; Photo #9: May 2021; Photos #4-8, 10-13: June 2021**

**Location of Original Digital Files: State Historic Preservation Office, Wisconsin Historical Society, Madison, Wisconsin**

**Number of Photographs: 13**

Photo #1 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0001)  
Perspective view, View to northwest

Photo #2 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0002)  
Perspective view, View to northeast

Photo #3 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0003)  
South (primary) and west elevations, View to northeast

Photo #4 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0004)  
North and west elevations—specifically the rear porch addition, View to south southeast

Photo #5 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0005)  
North elevation including carport, View to south southeast

Photo #6 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0006)  
East elevation, main block and carport, View to southwest

Photo #7 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0007)  
North and east elevations of clerestory level, View to southwest

Photo #8 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0008)  
South (primary) and east elevations, View to northwest

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Photo #9 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0009)  
South (primary) elevation, View to north northeast

Photo #10 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0010)  
Interior: living room (including fireplace and built-in seating), View to west southwest

Photo #11 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0011)  
Interior: living/dining area from top of stairs, View to south southwest

Photo #12 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0012)  
Interior: kitchen, View to east

Photo #13 (WI\_Waukesha County\_John and Florence Melster House\_0013)  
Enclosed balcony space, View to southeast

End of Photo Descriptions

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Insert Figures

**LIST OF FIGURES:**

- 1) Original design for the John and Florence Melster House, November 1954. Drawing included in the John Randal McDonald Collection, 1949-2001. Located at the Wisconsin Historical Society, Division of Library, Archives and Museum Collections, Madison, WI.
- 2) Revised (and selected) design for "Hillsun," the John and Florence Melster House, 1955. Drawing included in the John Randal McDonald Collection, 1949-2001.
- 3) Key to Exterior Photos. Outline of Melster House based on an aerial image.
- 4) John and Florence Melster House, Upper Level Floor Plan, 1955. Plans by John Randal McDonald. Includes Photo Key to interior photos.
- 5) John and Florence Melster House, Lower Level Floor Plan, 1955. Plans by John Randal McDonald.
- 6) John and Florence Melster House under construction, 1955 photograph. Photo in the John Randal McDonald Collection, 1949-2001.
- 7) John and Florence Melster House, interior, view of main floor fireplace, c1955 photograph. Photo in the John Randal McDonald Collection, 1949-2001.
- 8) Plan No. 1914 in *New Homes Guide* (1957 winter spring). Plan in the John Randal McDonald Collection, 1949-2001.
- 9) Ca. 1956-57 Drawings for Plan No. 1914 ("Hillside Home") by John Randal McDonald. Available through the *New Homes Guide* (1957 winter spring). Drawings provided by Dave Erickson, Cudahy, WI.
- 10) Phil & Betty Heyman House at 657 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. Built from House plan No. 1914. Photograph provided by Dave Erickson, Cudahy, WI.
- 11) House built from plan No. 1914 at 3232 Boltwood Drive, in Muskegon, Michigan. Image of house from the most recent Coldwell Banker real estate ad (2014). Available online at [https://www.coldwellbankerhomes.com/mi/muskegon/3232-boltwood-drive/pid\\_1376636/](https://www.coldwellbankerhomes.com/mi/muskegon/3232-boltwood-drive/pid_1376636/). Accessed August 2021. Street not included in Google Streetview.

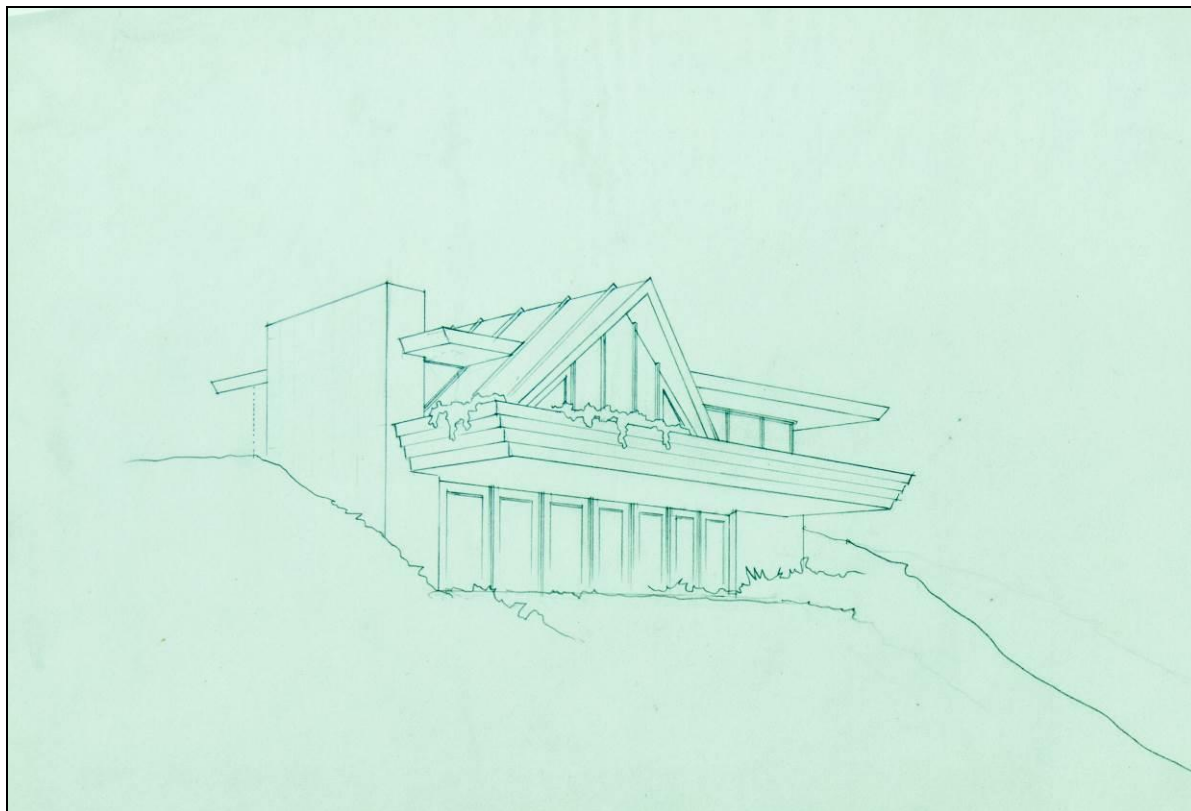
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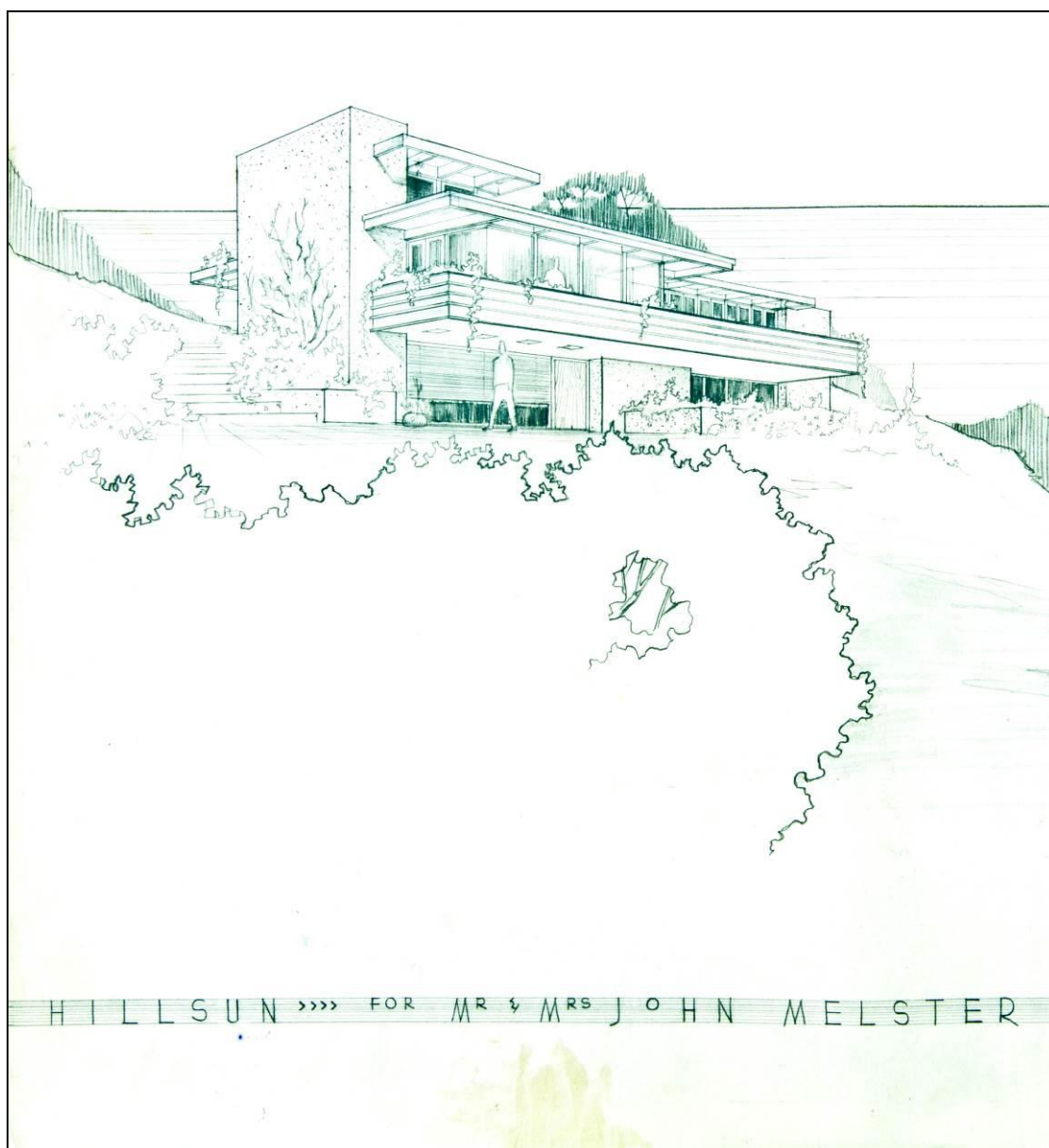
**FIGURE #1:** Original exterior design for the John and Florence Melster House, November 1954.

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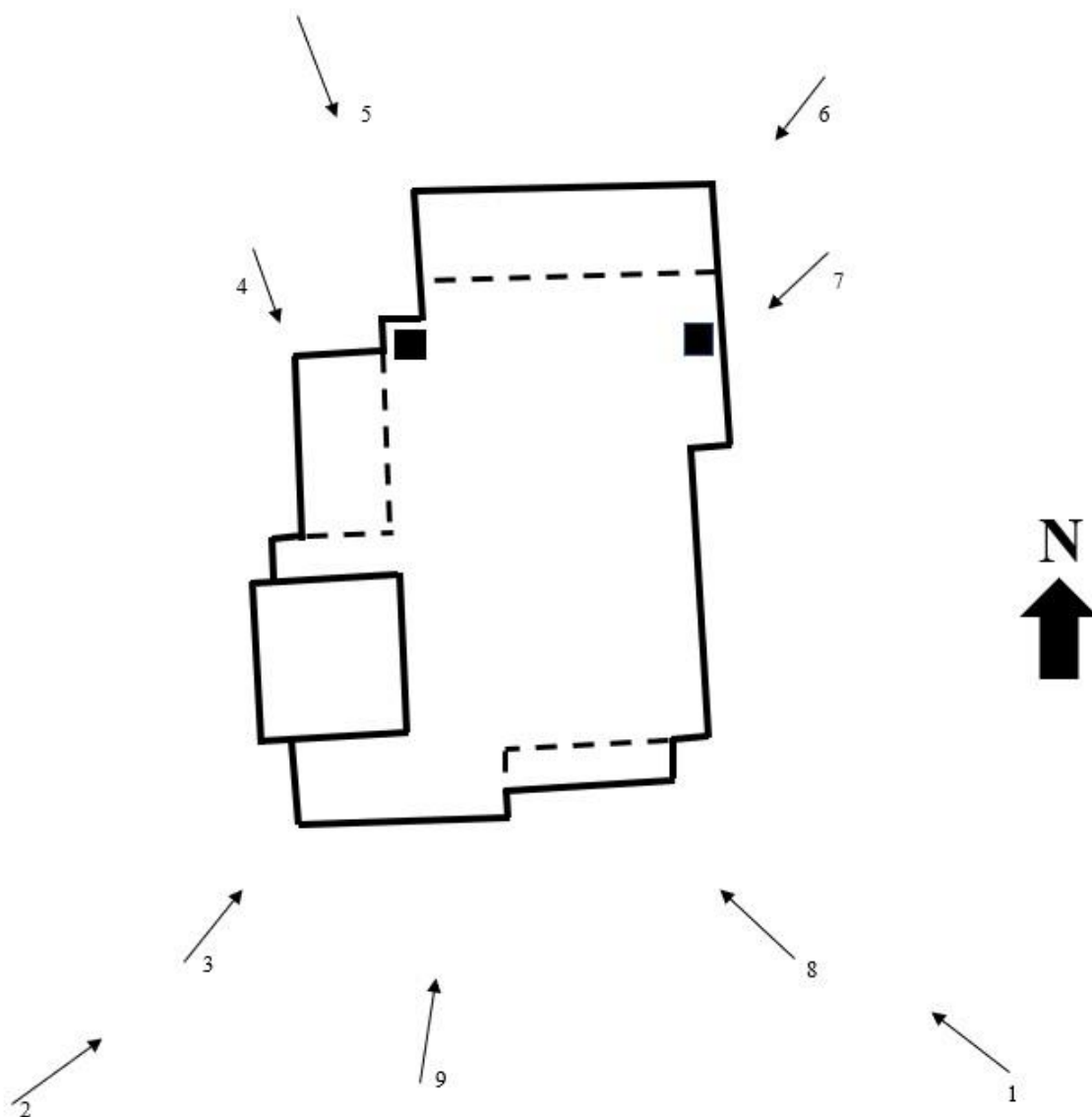
**FIGURE #2:** Revised (and selected) design for “Hillsun,” the Melster House, 1955.

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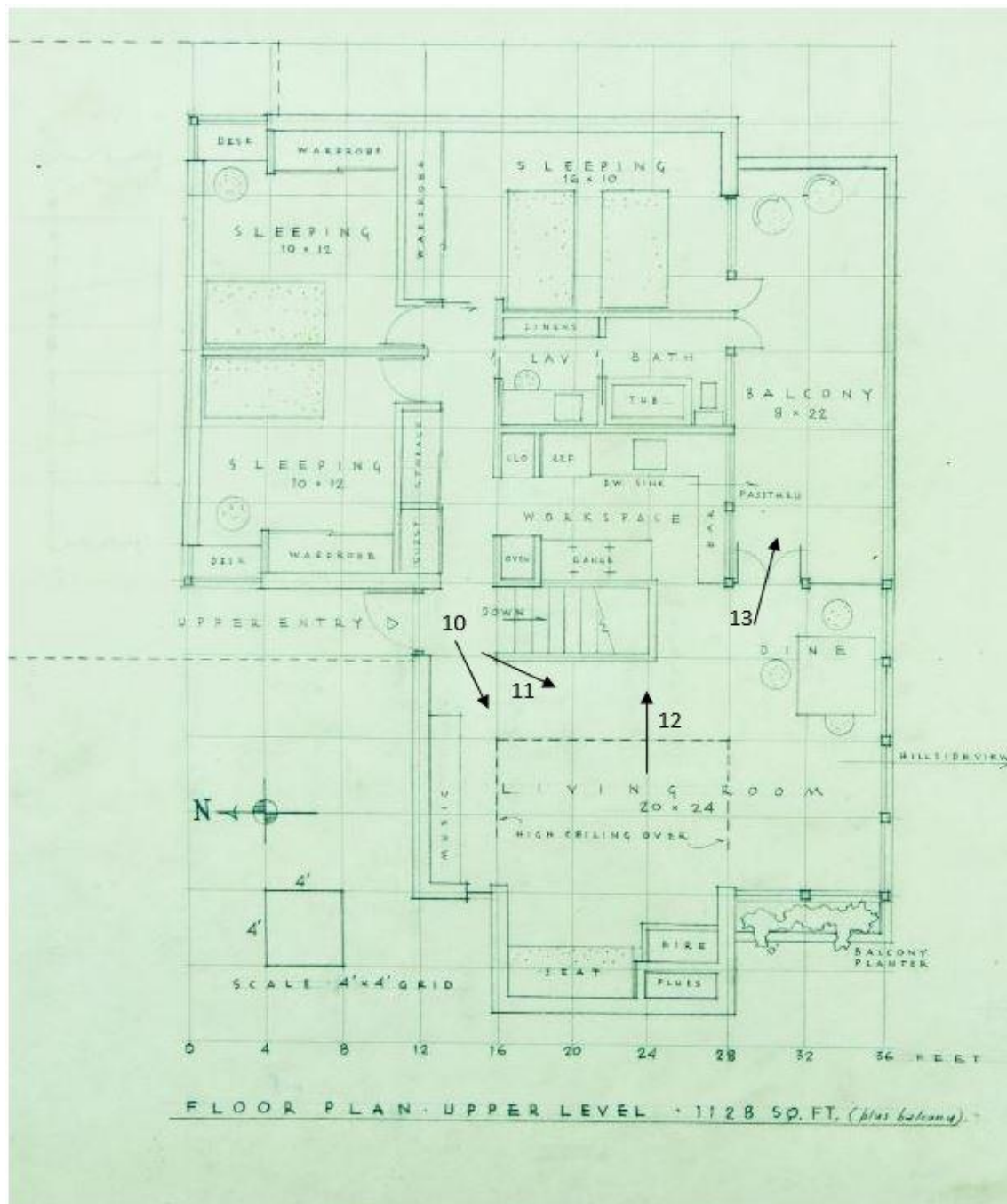
**FIGURE #3:** John and Florence Melster House, Waukesha, Waukesha County, WI.  
Key to Exterior Photos. Not to scale. Outline of house based on an  
aerial image.

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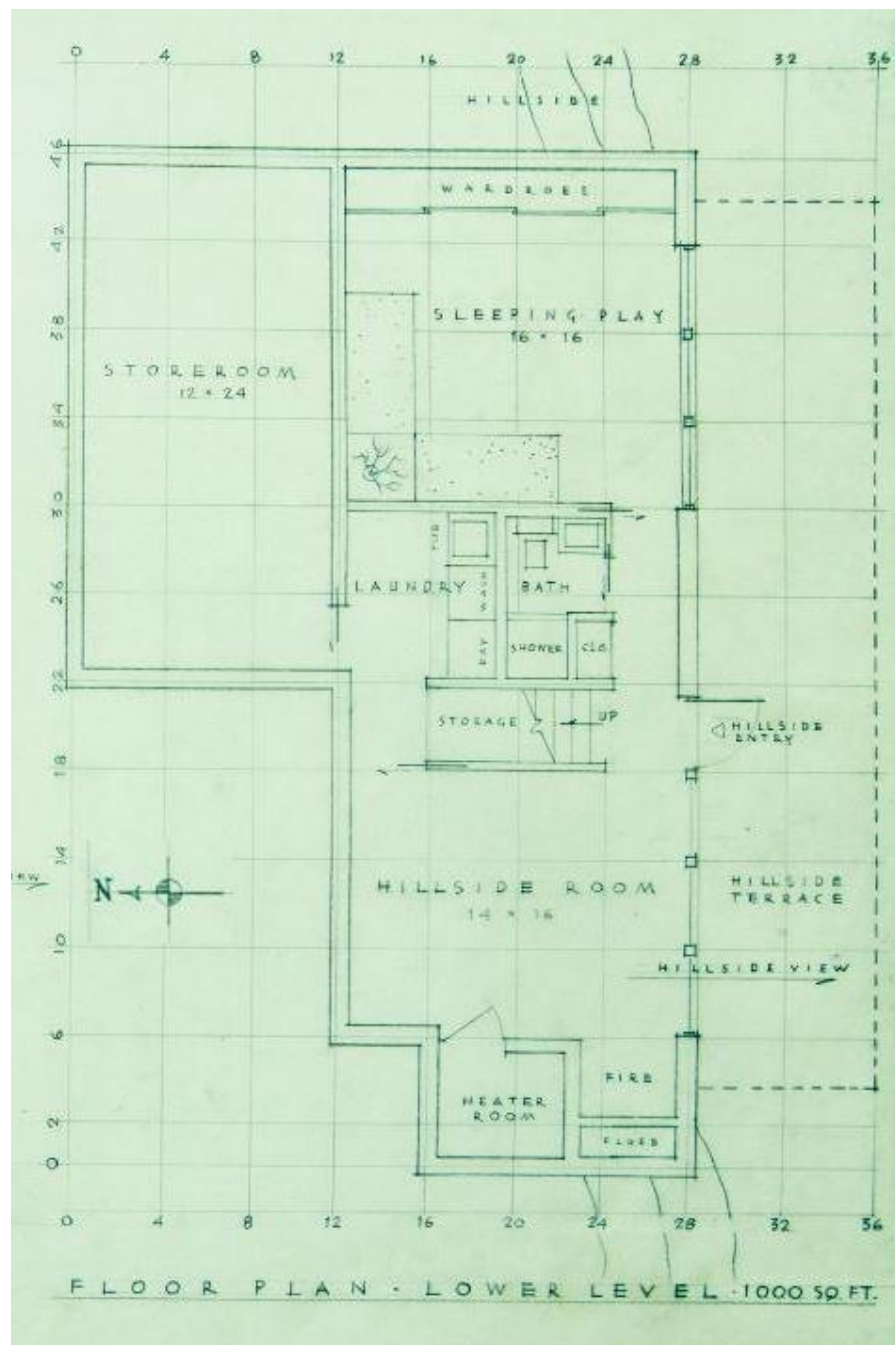
**FIGURE #4:** John and Florence Melster House, Waukesha, Waukesha County, WI.  
Floor Plan, Upper Level with interior photos keyed.

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**FIGURE #5:** John and Florence Melster House, Waukesha, Waukesha County, WI.  
Floor Plan, Lower Level.

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**FIGURE #6:** Melster House under construction, 1955.

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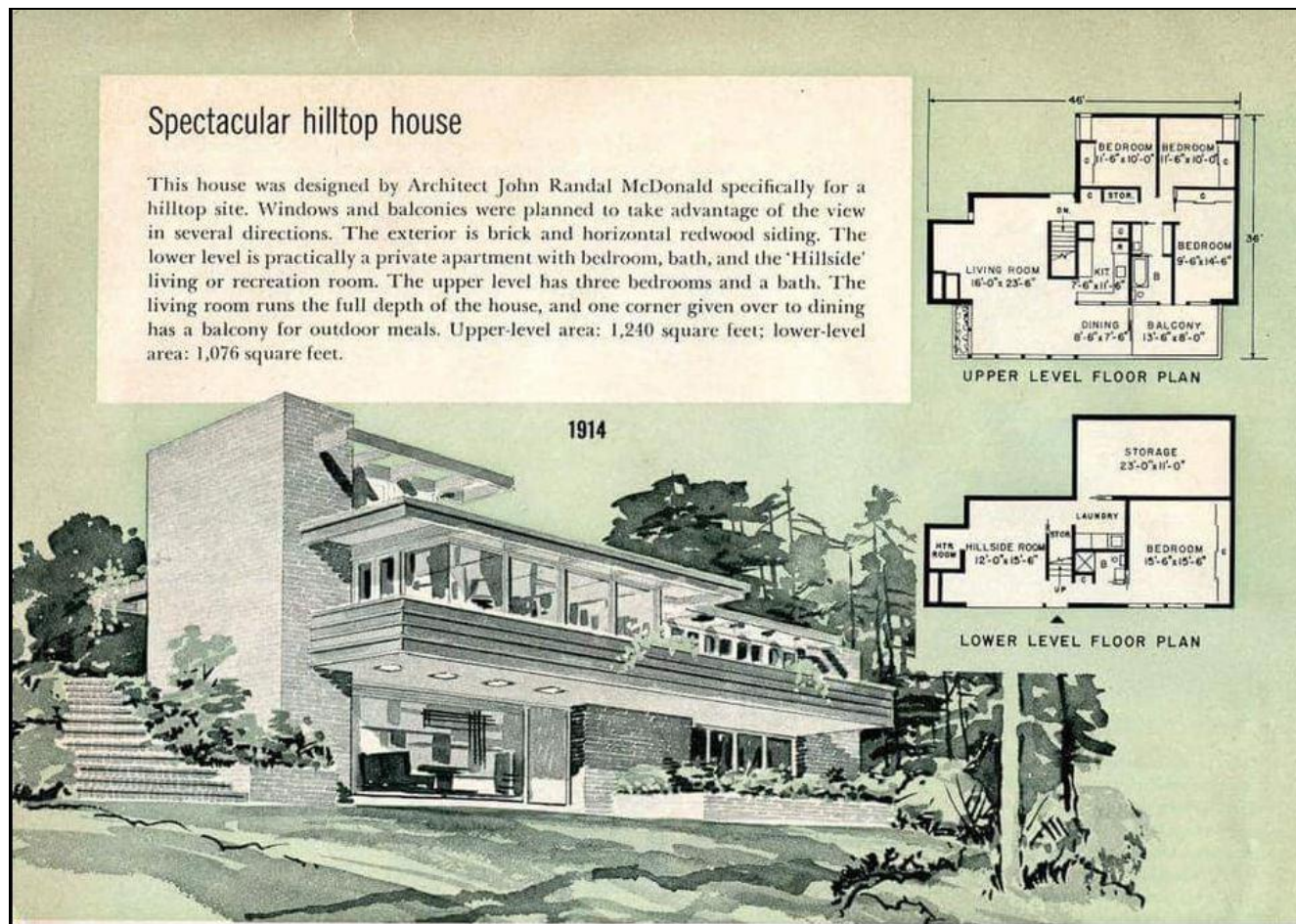
**FIGURE #7:** Melster House, interior, main floor fireplace, c1955.

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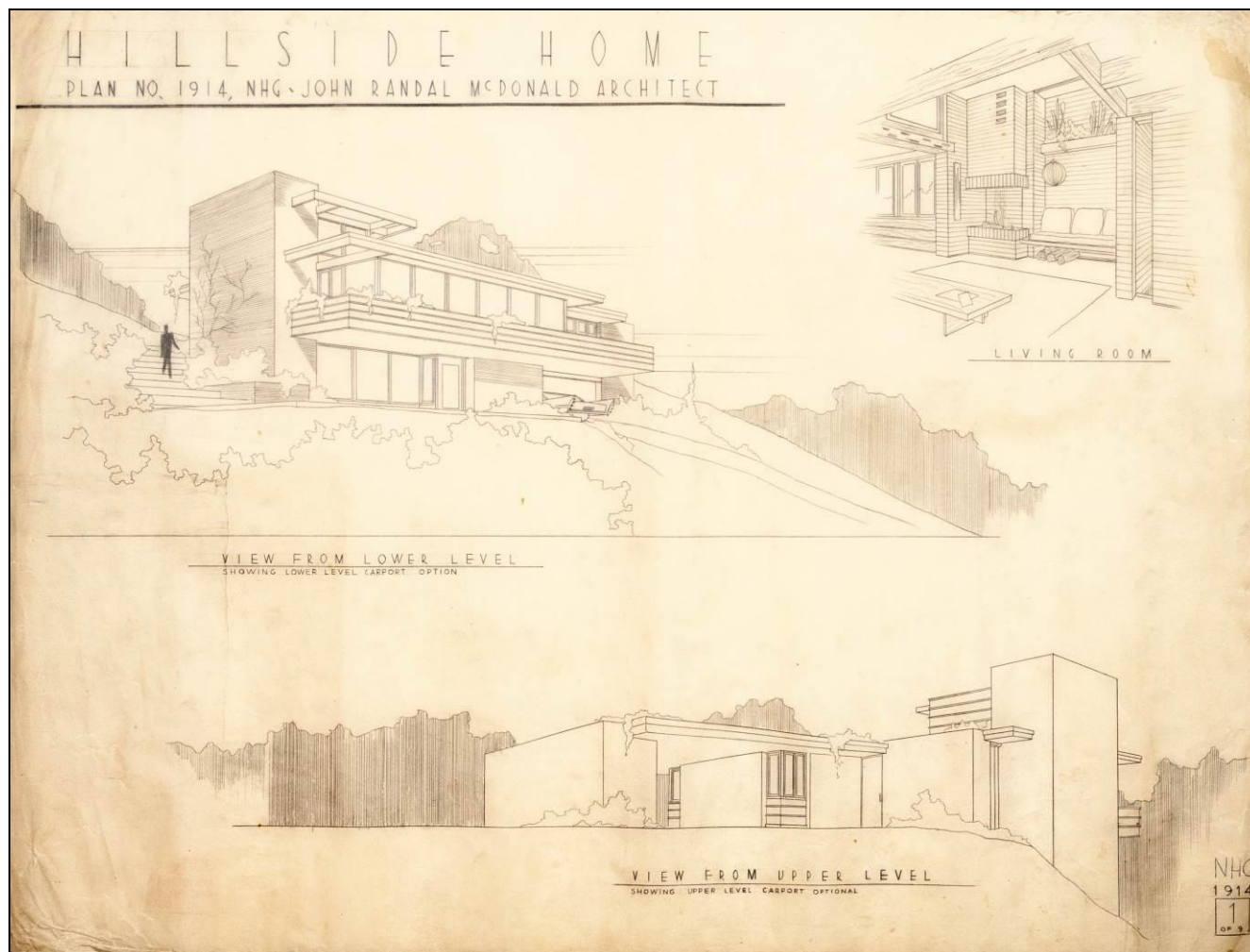
**FIGURE #8:** Plan No. 1914 in *New Homes Guide* (1957).

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**FIGURE #9:** Ca. 1956-57 Drawings for Plan No. 1914 (“Hillside Home”), by John Randal McDonald.

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**FIGURE #10:** Phil & Betty Heyman House at 657 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue NW, Sleepy Eye, Minnesota. Built in 1961 from Plan No. 1914.

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**FIGURE #11:** House built circa 1958 from Plan No. 1914 at 3232 Boltwood Drive, in Muskegon, Michigan.

End Figures