AGENDA
BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT STUDY COMMITTEE
TUESDAY MARCH 21, 2023
151 MARTIN STREET, MEETING ROOMS 202 & 203, BIRMINGHAM, MI*
**********6:00 PM**********

The City recommends members of the public wear a mask if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or have a respiratory illness. City staff, City Commission and all board and committee members must wear a mask if they have been exposed to COVID-19 or actively have a respiratory illness. The City continues to provide KN-95 respirators and triple layered masks for attendees.

1) **Roll Call**
2) **Approval of the Minutes from November 22, 2022**
3) **1283 Buckingham – Historic Designation Request**
4) **Heritage Home Program (UPDATE)**
5) **Wallace Frost Inventory (UPDATE)**
6) **HDSC Priority List – 2023**
7) **Adjournment**

---

*Please note that board meetings will be conducted in person once again. Members of the public can attend in person at Birmingham City Hall OR may attend virtually at:

Link to Access Virtual Meeting: https://zoom.us/j/92668352238
Telephone Meeting Access: 877-853-5247 US Toll-Free
Meeting ID Code: 926 6835 2238

Notice: Individuals requiring accommodations, such as interpreter services, for effective participation in this meeting should contact the City Clerk's Office at (248) 530-1880 at least on day in advance of the public meeting.

Las personas que requieren alojamiento, tales como servicios de interpretación, la participación efectiva en esta reunión deben ponerse en contacto con la Oficina del Secretario Municipal al (248) 530-1880 por lo menos el día antes de la reunión pública. (Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964).

A PERSON DESIGNATED WITH THE AUTHORITY TO MAKE DECISIONS MUST BE PRESENT AT THE MEETING.

Historic District Study Committee
Minutes Of November 22, 2022
151 Martin, Birmingham, Michigan
City Commission Room

Minutes of the regular meeting of the Historic District Study Committee ("HDSC") held Tuesday, November 22, 2022. Chair Jake German called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. **Roll Call**

Present: Chair Jake German; Board Members Colleen McGough, Andrea Prena, Jennifer Roush, Michael Xenos

Absent: Board Members Joy Cantor, Thomas Loafman

Staff: Planning Director Dupuis; City Transcriptionist Eichenhorn

2. **Approval Of The Minutes From April 26, 2022**

Motion by Ms. Roush
Seconded by Ms. McGough to approve the minutes of April 26, 2022 as submitted.

Motion Carried 5-0.

VOICE VOTE
Yeas: Xenos, Cantor, Roush, McGough, German
Nays: None

3. **Election of Vice-Chair**

Motion by Mr. Xenos
Seconded by Chair German to appoint Mr. Xenos to serve as Vice-Chair.

Motion Carried 5-0.

VOICE VOTE
Yeas: Xenos, Cantor, Roush, McGough, German
Nays: None

4. **1283 Buckingham – Historic Designation Request**

PD Dupuis presented the item and answered informational questions from the HDSC.

The HDSC and Staff briefly discussed available resources for research, the benefits of historic homes, how to publicize the benefits of historic homes, and the process of historic designation.

PD Dupuis welcomed further input about how to publicize the benefits of historic homes.

5. Heritage Home Program

PD Dupuis presented the item and answered informational questions from the HDSC.

The HDSC and Staff discussed:

- The possibility of a Heritage Home reception and/or walking tour;
- The possibility of, in a few years, increasing the number of homes allowed to annually participate. Concerns were raised about turning anyone away from the program;
- Adding a requirement of a site survey if available to the application process;
- The need to emphasize the difference between historic designation and Heritage Homes; and,
- What age of homes should qualify for the program.

Staff recommended consideration of a threshold between 80-100 years old.

There was consensus that the HDSC generally supported the program and would be comfortable if legal review necessitated some changes to the program's particulars.

Motion by Ms. Prena
Seconded by Ms. McGough to recommend approval of the Heritage Home Program to the City Commission.

Motion Carried 5-0.

VOICE VOTE
Yeas: Xenos, Cantor, Roush, McGough, German
Nays: None

6. Wallace Frost Inventory (Update)

PD Dupuis explained the Wallace Frost Inventory item would remain on the agenda for the future. He noted that he would like to add resources about the City's Wallace Frost Inventory to the City website.

It was noted that the Birmingham Museum would have some documentation on the City's Wallace Frost homes.

7. HDSC Priority List
8. Adjournment

No further business being evident, the committee members motioned to adjourn at 7:06 p.m.

Nick Dupuis, Planning Director

Laura Eichenhorn, City Transcriptionist

MEMORANDUM

Planning Division

DATE: March 21, 2023

TO: Historic District Study Committee Members

FROM: Nicholas Dupuis, Planning Director

SUBJECT: 1283 Buckingham – Historic Designation Request and HDSC Report

---

The owners of the house located at 1283 Buckingham, Keith and Carole Deyer, have requested that the City Commission consider designating the house as a local historic resource within the City of Birmingham. The house was built in 1925 and designed by the renowned local architect Wallace Frost. The history of Wallace Frost architecture in Birmingham is well documented, along with his background, associations, style, and other buildings he designed outside of Birmingham.

In regards to 1283 Buckingham specifically, Deyers have provided supplementary information that they have collected on the home, which they have offered to lend to the City to help create the report. In addition, the Birmingham Historical Museum has provided addition documentation on the home. The history of the home and architect, and the extensive documentation of the house down to the blueprints make this an excellent candidate for local historic designation.

The process for designating a property or structure as historic is outlined in Chapter 127 of the City Code. Section 127-5 (Establishing additional, modifying, or eliminating historic districts) states the following:

(a) The city commission may at any time establish by ordinance additional historic districts, including proposed districts previously considered and rejected, may modify boundaries of an existing historic district, or may eliminate an existing historic district. Before establishing, modifying, or eliminating a historic district, the standing historic district study committee, as established in section 127-4, shall follow the procedures as stated in section 127-4. The committee shall consider any previously written committee reports pertinent to the proposed action.

The first step in the process towards considering historic designation of this property is for the City Commission to pass a resolution directly the Historic District Study Committee to commence with the creation of a study committee report as outlined in section 127-4 of the City Code.

When directed by a resolution passed by the city commission, the standing historic district study committee shall meet and do all of the following:

1) Conduct a photographic inventory of resources within each proposed historic district following procedures established by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.

2) Conduct basic research of each proposed historic district and historic resources located within that district.

3) Determine the total number of historic and non-historic resources within a proposed historic district and the percentage of historic resources of that total. In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places, as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60, and criteria established or approved by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center.

4) Prepare a preliminary historic district study committee report that addresses at a minimum all of the following:
    a. The charge of the committee.
    b. The composition of committee membership.
    c. The historic district(s) studied.
    d. The boundaries of each proposed historic district in writing and on maps.
    e. The history of each proposed historic district.
    f. The significance of each district as a whole, as well as the significance of sufficient number of its individual resources to fully represent the variety of resources found within the district, relative to the evaluation criteria.

5) Transmit copies of the preliminary report for review and recommendations to the city planning board, the state historic preservation office of the Michigan Historical Center, the Michigan Historical Commission, and the state historic preservation review board.

6) Make copies of the preliminary report available to the public pursuant to Section 399.203(4) of Public Act 169 of 1970, as amended.

7) Not less than 60 calendar days after the transmittal of the preliminary report, the historic district study committee shall hold a public hearing in compliance with Public Act 267 of 1976, as amended. Public notice of the time, date and place of the hearing shall be given

in the manner required by Public Act 267. Written notice shall be mailed by first class mail not less than 14 calendar days prior to the hearing to the owners of properties within the proposed historic district, as listed on the most current tax rolls. The report shall be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.

8) After the date of the public hearing, the committee and the city commission have not more than one year, unless otherwise authorized by the city commission, to take the following actions: a.The committee shall prepare and submit a final report with its recommendations and the recommendations, if any, of the city planning board and the historic district commission, to the city commission as to the establishment of a historic district(s). If the recommendation is to establish a historic district(s), the final report shall include a draft of the proposed ordinance(s). After receiving a final report that recommends the establishment of a historic district(s), the city commission, at its discretion, may introduce and pass or reject an ordinance(s). If the city commission passes an ordinance(s) establishing one or more historic districts, the city shall file a copy of the ordinance(s), including a legal description of the property or properties located within the historic district(s) with the register of deeds. The city commission shall not pass an ordinance establishing a contiguous historic district less than 60 days after a majority of the property owners within the proposed historic district, as listed on the tax rolls of the local unit, have approved the establishment of the historic district pursuant to a written petition.

9) A writing prepared, owned, used, in the possession of, or retained by a committee in the performance of an official function of the historic district commission should be made available to the public in compliance with Public Act 442 of 1976, as amended.

On September 12, 2022 (Agenda – Minutes), the City Commission passed a resolution directing the HDSC to create a preliminary HDSC report in accordance with Section 127-5 of the City Code of Ordinances.

On November 22, 2023 (Agenda), the Historic District Study Committee reviewed the initial request and supplementary documentation submitted by the applicant and discussed next steps. City Staff was directed to begin a draft report and provide the HDSC with any additional tasks at their next meeting. At this time, the Planning Division has prepared a draft of the Preliminary Historic District Committee Report and has formulated some action items that will be requested of the HDSC members to supplement the report as it moves towards a final draft. The

Next Steps

At this time, the HDSC will need to review step 4 as completed by Planning Division Staff and discuss the content as it relates to the required elements. In addition, the HDSC will be asked to perform additional research to fill any gaps in the report prior to steps 5 and 6 and the eventual public hearing.

BIRMINGHAM
A WALKABLE CITY

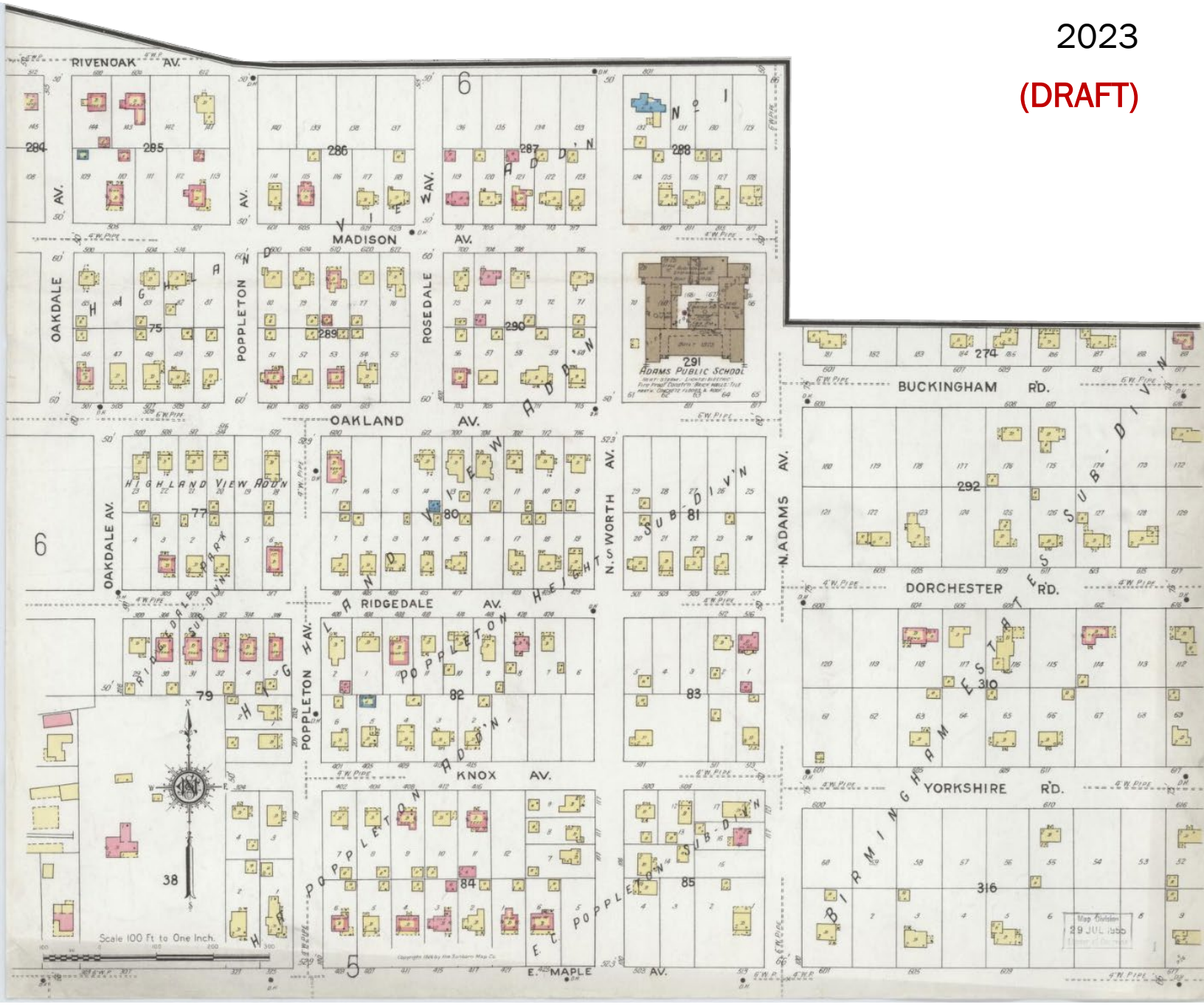
Preliminary Historic District Study Committee Report

Good House Historic District

Birmingham, MI

2023

(DRAFT)



Charge of the Historic District Study Committee

The Historic District Study Committee (the "Committee") is a standing committee appointed by the City Commission and is charged with the duties and activities as outlined in Chapter 127 of the Birmingham Code of Ordinances. These duties include inventory, research, and preparation of a preliminary historic district study committee report for a proposed historic district. The Committee consists of seven members in addition to a city appointed liaison. Members are appointed for a term of three years.

Historic District Study Committee Members

Jake German is the current chairperson for the Committee, and has served 4 years on the Committee to date. He is an experienced political consultant and lobbyist with a history of working in the government relations industry.

Michael Xenos is an experienced architect, and is currently a Construction Administrator at a large architecture design, engineering, and planning firm. He has a passion for the history of Birmingham, and is a lifetime member of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. In addition, he is the most senior member of the Committee having served X years on the Committee to date.

Colleen McGough is an experienced real estate agent that has a passion for the architecture of historic homes. She has experience in renovating old homes, and has a strong desire to promote renovation over demolition.

Jennifer Roush has served on the Committee on two separate occasions. In addition, she was an employee of the Birmingham Historical Museum for several years. She has a degree in interior design and historic preservation from the Savannah College of Art and Design.

Joy Cantor has a deep-rooted interest in history from lived experiences, and has studied history and art history. Her goals on the committee are to educate and promote historic preservation, and to inspire curiosity in Birmingham residents.

Thomas Loafman is a self-proclaimed amateur historian with a passion for the preservation of historic buildings and the stories they tell. He is a retired Chief Procurement Officer for a major automobile company.

Andrea Prena has a master's degree in Public Affairs and currently works as a consultant for state and local governments and has a wide range of public sector experience. Her goal on the Committee is to preserve and elevate historic buildings in the City of Birmingham and across Michigan.

Description of the District

Address – 1283 Buckingham, Birmingham MI 48009

PIN – 2030302017

Legal Description – T2N, R11E, SEC 30 BIRMINGHAM ESTATES SUB LOT 187

District Type – Noncontiguous

The Good House Historic District is located on the north side of Buckingham Avenue between North Adams Road and Rugby Street. The Good House is nestled within the Birmingham Estates Subdivision. The subdivision is bound by Adams Road (west), Maple Road (south), Eton Road (east) and Buckingham (north). The lots of the Birmingham Estates Subdivision were platted in 1916. In the same year, the first house was started on Yorkshire.

Inventory

A photographic inventory of the proposed historic district was conducted in 2023 as a part of the historic designation request submitted. All available photographs are located in the Community Development Department.

History and Architectural Description

The Good house was constructed in 1925 as a part of a building boom in the 1920's in the area. Although little is known about the builders, the home was designed by the well-known local architect, Wallace Frost. Frost worked in Albert Khan's Detroit firm, and then gained recognition for his own distinctive style. He set up an office in Birmingham in 1925 and designed about 50 houses in the area. An extensive background on Wallace Frost is contained in the 1992 report "Wallace Frost – His Architecture in Birmingham, Michigan" which is attached to this report.

Find information on Fredrick E. Good

The Good House is Dutch Colonial in type. The exterior cladding is wood clapboard. The roof has a distinct shape, and the roofing material is cedar shake shingles. The window type is double hung with muntins and shutters on the upper story. A main feature of the house is the recessed entryway with a distinct outer storm door. In 1969, the attached garage was made into a family room, and a separate garage was constructed on the site. In 1986, the kitchen and family room were modernized.

Find more information on renovations/architecture

Significance and Evaluation Criteria

In evaluating the significance of historic resources, the committee shall be guided by the criteria for evaluation issued by the United States secretary of the interior for inclusion of resources in the National Register of Historic Places, as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60, and criteria established or approved by the state historic preservation office of the state historical center. The National Register Criteria for Evaluation are as follows:

> The quality of significance in American history, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and
>
> (a) that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; or
> (b) that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past; or
> (c) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction; or
> (d) that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Findings

After a review of the available documentation of the building and its site, the Committee has found that the Good House Historic District meets the following required evaluation criteria:

...Association with the lives of persons significant in our past.

As noted in an earlier section, the house was designed by the architect Wallace Frost.

...Embodiment of the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

The Good House is a well-maintained and authentic example of Dutch Colonial style. Although it has experienced minor modifications and has been updated on the interior, the distinguishing features have remained in place and intact.


1283

Rear - Buckingham Road

1

WATER WORKS.

Direct & Gravity Pressure Systems.-3 Layne Electrical Pumps, One 300 Gals. per min. 30 HP motor.-One 600 Gals per min. 75 HP motor, shown on Sheet No 4 & One 1000 Gals. per min. 125 HP motor located on W. Lincoln Av. west of Southfield Road, pumping from numerous deep wells. 70 deep. Pumping into mains at 80 lbs. pressure.-Overflow to 300,000 Gal. W.T. elevated 135'. 300,000 Gal. W.T. at Pump No. in reserve.-Pressure at Maple & Woodward Av. 54 lbs. Average daily consumption: One million Gals (One Cantan Hughes Compound Duplex P.P. Capcy: One million Gals. per 24 hours. Two Hughes Duplex P. Ps. capcy: 750000 Gals per 24 hours each not in commission.) Section south of Lincoln Av & East of Adams Av. South of Holland Av. supplied by three American Pump & Well Supply Co. pumps.-Two 30 Gals. per min. each & one 60 Gals. per min. electrical motors. Overflow to 150,000 Gal. W.T. elevated 90'.-Average pressure: 45 lbs. Pumping from deep wells. Average daily consumption: 158,000 Gals.-This system connected by valve to village supply at Adams & Holland Av. 4.5 miles 4" to 10" cast iron mains.-300 double hydrants.

FIRE DEPT.

One station.-Volunteer company, 22 men paid for each call.-One chief & one assistant chief paid by year.-One La France Comb. Pumper 750 Gals. per min.-40 Gal. chemical & 1200' 2½" hose.-One Gram-Bernstein comb. hose & chemical auto. 1000' 2½" hose.-Two 35 Gal. chemicals & 150' ladders.-500' chemical hose.-2000' 2½" hose in reserve.-Fire alarm. Siren & telephone.

Grades sloping to north.-Adams, Maple, Woodward, Pierce, Southfield & Brown paved.
Public lights: electric.

1

SANBORN MAP COMPANY
POPULATION 9500
PREVAILING WINDS S. W.
FOR WATER FACILITIES AND FIRE DEPARTMENT, SEE REPORT.
BIRMINGHAM
OAKLAND COUNTY
MICHIGAN
JULY 1926
NEW YORK

INDEX

STREETS

	SHEET
A	
Adams Ave., N.	1 & 6
" S.	6 & 7
Ann	200-729 5
Argus Ave.	700-969 4
B	
Baldwin Ave.	4
Bates, N.	100-219 2
" S.	100-219 3
Bennaville Ave., E.	300-619 4
" W.	1-122 7
Bird Ave.	1-250 7
" N.S. n'r Pierce Pub. School	100-501 7
Bowers	100-323 5
Brookside Drive	400-525 6
Brown	100-302 *5
"	101-307 *5
"	400-911 4
Brownell	100-147 3
Buckingham Road	600-617 1
C	
Chapin Ave., E.	7
" W.	1-250 7
Cherry	100-116 *5
Chester, N.	101-115 *5
" S.	100-218 *5
"	101-219 *5
"	300-611 4
Chestnut	300-531 5
Clark	5
Cole Ave.	100-135 6
Cummings	7
D	
Daines	100-219 5
Davis Ave.	1-302 7
Dorchester Road	600-617 1
E	
Elm	100-325 5
Emmons Ave., E.	7
" W.	1-250 7
Euclid Ave.	100-213 6
F	
Ferndale Ave.	100-305 6
Floyd	5
Forest	100-210 *5
"	101-211 *5
"	212-533 5
Frank	100-225 5
"	400-615 4
G	
George	100-529 5
Gray Court	100-135 3
H	
Hamilton	100-166 *3
"	101-253 *6
Hanna	300-629 4
Harmon Ave.	100-115 4
"	300-310 *3
Haynes	100-401 5
Hazel	100-531 5
Henrietta	100-219 2
"	300-621 4
High	100-129 5
Holland Ave.	100-135 6
Humphrey Ave., E.	1-136 7
" W.	1-150 7
I	
Isle View Drive	6
K	
Kennesaw Ave.	610-813 6
Knox Ave.	600-813 1
L	
Landon	5
Lawndale Ave.	6
Lincoln Ave., E.	100-144 *7
" W.	101-135 *6
"	100-226 *5
Lincoln Ave., W.	101-221 *7
"	223-401 *5
M	
Madison	5 & 7
" Ave.	400-433 6
"	500-617 1
Maple Ave., E.	100-219 3
"	220-430 *5
"	221-301 *5
"	303-617 *1
" W.	100-119 *2
"	101-111 *3
"	113-221 2
"	400-575 2
Martin	100-317 2
"	400-433 4
Merrill	100-316 *2
"	101-315 *4
"	400-441 4
Mohegan Ave.	6
O	
Oakdale Ave.	207-301 *6
"	206-414 *1
"	500-615 1
Oakland Ave.	100-421 6
"	500-617 1
Oxford Ave.	6
P	
Palm	5
Park	6
" Ave.	100-427 6
Pierce	100-218 *2
"	101-417 *3
"	300-616 *4
"	501-725 *5
" E. S., n'r Pierce High School	*5
Poppleton Ave.	100-515 1
"	600-803 6
Purdy	200-221 5
R	
Ravine Road	200-215 6
Ridgedale Ave.	200-225 6
"	300-517 1
Rivenoak Ave.	513-613 1
"	609-915 *6
"	700-816 *4
Rosedale Ave.	400-615 1
Ruffner Ave., E.	1-148 7
" W.	90-141 7
S	
Smith Ave.	1-302 7
Southfield Ave.	100-549 4
Stanley	500-611 4
T	
Townsend	100-451 4
W	
Watkins	500-611 4
Webster Ave.	100-135 6
Willetts	100-217 3
"	218-841 4
Woodland	401-411 *3
Woodward Ave., N.	100-118 *3
"	101-219 *2
"	120-220 *6
"	223-314 6
"	400-568 *6
"	401-507 *4
" S.	100-185 3
"	200-601 5
"	602-744 *5
"	800-1427 7
Worth Ave., N.	100-515 1
" S.	600-615 6
"	5
Y	
Yorkshire Road	600-617 1

* Indicates only one side of Street shown.

SPECIALS

	SHEET
A	
Adams Public School	1
American Oil Corp'n	6
B	
Baldwin High School	4
Barnum Public School	5
Bell, H. J., Florist	5
Bennaville Ave. Congregational Ch'rch	7
Birmingham Creamery & Ice Co., Ice Cream Plant	5
" Lumber Co., Coal & Lum.	3
" Roller Mills	3
" Sash & Door Co., Sash & Door Factory	5
" Water Works	4
C	
Community House	2
D	
D, U. R. R. Car Barns & Repair Shop	4
" Station, Freight House	3
F	
Fire Department	3
First Baptist Church	2
" Church of Christ Scientist	3
" Presbyterian Church	6
Flexotile Products Co., Stucco Material M'f'g	5
G	
G. T. W. R. R. Freight House	6
" Passenger Depot	3
H	
Hill Public School	4
Holy Name Chapel (Roman Catholic)	3
Hotel Rogers	3
I	
I. O. O. F. Hall	3
L	
Lawson-Erb Lumber Co., Lumber and Coal	5
M	
McCallum, W., Lumber Warehouse	5
McClellan & Sons, Feed Mill & Grain Warehouse	5
Masonic Temple	5
Methodist Episcopal Church, &c.	2
Michigan Bell Telephone Co.	3
Moultrop, R. C., Lumber Co., Lumber, Coal and Builders Supplies	6
P	
Pierce Public School	5
Police Department	3
Public Library	3
R	
Redeemer Evangelical Luth'n Church	5
S	
St. James' Episcopal Church	2
Standard Oil Co.	5
T	
Town Hall	3
U	
United Presbyterian Church	3
V	
Village Offices	3
" Yards, Machinery Storage	6

BIRMINGHAM
A WALKABLE CITY

Nicholas Dupuis <ndupuis@bhamgov.org>

FW: Request for Historical Designation of 1283 Buckingham Avenue

Keith Deyer <kwdeyer@comcast.net> Sat, Jul 30, 2022 at 5:49 PM
To: Nicholas Dupuis <ndupuis@bhamgov.org>

Dear Birmingham City Commissioners,

We wish to solicit your support for historical designation of our home at 1283 Buckingham Avenue. We are aware of the restrictions that this would place on our home, as I have served on the Historic District and Design Review Commission (HDDRC), Historic District Commission (HDC), Historic District Study Committee (HDSC) and the Design Review Board (DRB).

The home was constructed in 1925 and was designed by local architect Wallace Frost. Mr. Frost was a peer of Albert Kahn and worked with him for several years. The home is located in Birmingham Estates Subdivision on lot #187. The original property was part of the Seymour Adams Shadyside Farm established in 1823. The Birmingham Estates Company plated the current subdivision in 1916. A significant building boom occurred in the 1920's when our home was built. The first occupant was a Mr. Walker. In 1926 the house was occupied by Dr Frederick E. and Elsie C. Good. It was featured in the April 1926 issue of the Afterglow Magazine. In 1928 the Goods purchased the adjacent lot #188 and established it as their "garden". Subsequently the lot was sold and a new house built on the lot. The Deyers purchased the home in 1976 and have occupied it since then.

Documentation is available concerning the development of the Birmingham Estates Subdivision and Birmingham houses (including ours) designed by Wallace Frost.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Regards, Keith and Carole Deyer

1283 Buckingham Avenue

Birmingham, Michigan

48009

Residence of F. Farrington Holt,
Linden Road, Birmingham
Wallace Frost, Architect

BUILT BY

Packard-Charlton Building Co.

Levinson Bldg. **Birmingham, Mich.**

Gable-end, garage and service yard, Wallace Frost house on Tooting Lane, Birmingham. Wallace Frost, Architect.

The House of Wallace Frost, Architect

Which Demonstrates that Cement Blocks May Have Charm

By MARION HOLDEN

Photographs by THOMAS ELLISON

THE VERY word concrete seems to have unpleasant connotations in the minds of most people. They shudder at the thought of a concrete house, instantly picturing either the usual "poured" concrete cottage, with staring walls and ugly lines, or the still uglier two story house of concrete blocks that are trying to look like hewn stone. And the concrete companies seem to have the same idea of what concrete can be built into, if one must judge by the books and catalogues in which they unblushingly publish these two horrific types, sometimes relieved by "touches of Italian influence"!

Calling attention to the photographs on these two pages and the next should be evidence enough that I mean none of these when I speak of a concrete block house. The idea of using concrete block without the usual stucco finish is not new in houses of good design, but it is new enough in Detroit to be worth more than a passing glance.

Mr. Wallace Frost of Birmingham, since he designed this house for himself several years ago, has, as far as I know, been the architect who is chiefly responsible for its wider use in that community.

The virtues attributed to concrete block are numerous. Of course a house with walls of hollow block, if properly insulated, would be cooler in summer and warmer in winter. The fire resisting qualities of concrete block are, however, the chief practical consideration, along with the fact that good carpenters are hard to get for inexpensive houses and that, as Mr. Frost says, concrete block construction is "pie for the country mason."

The more recently developed cinder block has, they say, even more things to recommend it than concrete, being lighter and easier to handle, more fire resistant as well as amenable to nails. Its surface is rougher, and I believe it costs less in the long run—though I am ill qualified to go into these technical things. Interesting contrasts in texture may be had by combining the two—using concrete blocks for trim around doors and windows for instance. And speaking of texture, either concrete block or cinder block have, when painted, a delightful rough surface and one that is eminently suited to the cottage type of design where it would not do in a more formal, sophisticated house.

In building his own house Mr. Frost simply used an excellent design with long low lines and a steep roof

The old Peabody farm which adjoins the north course of the Oakland Hills Golf club and has supplied the Bloomfield Hills folk with fruit for many years has been purchased by Lockrow Inc., of Detroit, and will be transformed into a beautiful residential community to be known as Lochland Hills.

The orchards are bearing heavily this year and James Schermerhorn, journalist, author and lecturer, who is vice-president of the company, has issued a general invitation to the residents of Bloomfield Hills to call at the log cabin, which is utilized as the office of the company on the property, and feast on the apples, which are up to their usual standard of excellence this season.

The new subdivision is planned for Detroiters who desire to escape the confusion and discomforts of the older sections of the city, but who do not wish to assume the responsibility and heavy cost of the large estates that grace this favored region.

* * *

Mr. Albert W. Wasey of Walsh, James and Wasey, is moving into a new home on Dorchester Road, Birmingham Estates.

* * *

Mr. and Mrs. Bruce R. Dodge are building a new home on Linden Road in Birmingham Park, a Walsh, James and Wasey development south of Quarton Lake.

* * *

Dr. A. W. Newitt and his family are also moving to Yorkshire Road where they have purchased the Stout house.

* * *

Baldwin avenue, that delightful little thoroughfare which leaves West Maple avenue just before it crosses the Rouge, has suddenly become populous this fall. Tyler Marshall and his bride have rented a house there; Dr. John Gordon, associated with Dr. George Raynale, is building there; Mr. and Mrs. Carl L. Bradt have a new house there, designed by Wallace Frost, and Mr. and Mrs. R. A. Bailey Jr., and Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Buehl are also building on Baldwin.

* * *

The Redford Golf club, of which Judge Charles C. Sim...

Residence of Mr. Bert Morley, Lone Pine Road.
W. J. Frost, Architect

BUILT BY

PACKARD-CHARLTON BUILDING CO.

Levinson Bldg. **Birmingham, Mich.**

that gives a rather large house a cottagey look. Of course the setting—on the edge of a ravine at the foot of Tooting Lane in Birmingham, could hardly be improved upon, and the planting, which he has wisely allowed to grow quite lush, helps to integrate the house with its surroundings. In this case the white paint on the blocks and the bricks of the chimney is nicely contrasted with the stained timbers over windows and doors and the stained shingle roof. Several concrete block houses designed by Mr. Frost more recently are painted a warm buff.

The Frost house, which I have chosen as the best example I know of in a concrete block house, speaks for itself in the admirable simplicity of its planning, planting and furnishing. The flagged terrace in a southwest corner back for the living room is one of the delightful features, looking off into the ravine where flowers have straggled from the informal gardens. All of the materials used are native to Michigan, and came indeed, out of that locality. The timbers used over windows and doors outside, and for ceiling braces inside, are from an old mill that once ground flour near Birmingham. Morover, concrete blocks are, according to Mr. Frost, preeminently the pietra serena of this locale so that houses of this type are as native to southern Michigan as houses of field stone are to Pennsylvania.

The furnishing of the living room is the simplest—rag rugs, old pewter, books, fabrics, old furniture—all of those things in fact that make a room charming and comfortable in any kind of house, but that are particularly nice in this spacious room which, with French windows looking east, south and west must always be full of light and air.

The narrow entrance hall is paved in brick from which one steps down into the living room.

The spacious living room has French windows opening east, south and west.

The House of Frederick E. Good

Buckingham Road Birmingham

Wallace Frost, Architect

Above: Although the rooms are rather small they are given the effect of spaciousness by the wide openings between. The living-room and dining-room occupy the back of the house overlooking the garden.

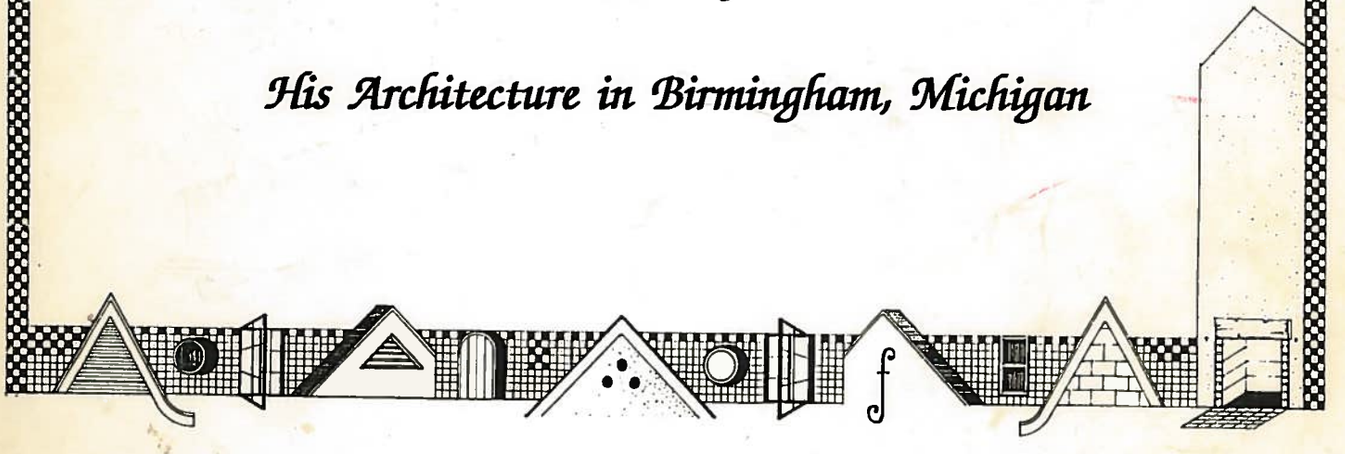
Photographs by T. Ellison

Left: This delightful little entrance hall sets the character of the house with its white board doors, iron hinges and fixtures and scrubbed brick floor. The front door opens in sections.

Below: The white clapboard house is Dutch colonial in type. Note the deeply recessed front door with its outer storm door and brick steps. Behind the open porch is a charming small sunken garden.

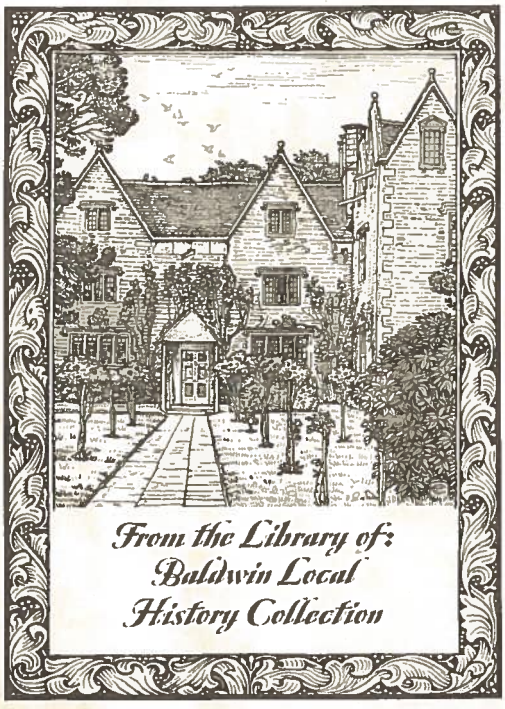
Wallace Frost

His Architecture in Birmingham, Michigan



Historic District and Design Review Commission
August, 1992

BIRMINGHAM HISTORIC DISTRICT AND DESIGN REVIEW COMMISSION



August 1992

PURPOSE STATEMENT

This report is the culmination of a study of the American architect, Wallace Frost, and the homes he designed in Birmingham from 1921 to 1967. In 1991, the City Commission asked the Historic District and Design Review Commission to report on the architectural contributions of Wallace Frost in Birmingham.

In the past year and a half, we have researched the City's assessment records, read old articles from the Eccentric and other periodicals, talked with residents, and drew from the architectural expertise of two former residents who are considered to be local Frost experts. While our efforts have not resulted in the discovery of every bit of information about each of the structures, we have found worthwhile historic and architectural reasons for believing that the buildings and homes in our report are worthwhile of being acknowledged as a significant part of Birmingham's architectural history and charm.

Frost's unique style of architectural design has contributed to Birmingham's small town feeling and character which has been created by the blending of old and new architecture. Frost's designs have been admired by both residents and visitors. Birmingham has had good fortune to be an economically thriving community, but current development pressures have also served to effect its residential resources.

It is our hope that the following report will provide the City Commission and the community with the background history and information necessary to recognize the architectural contributions of Wallace Frost in Birmingham.

REPORT INDEX

PAGE	
1 - 5	THE ARCHITECT'S BACKGROUND
6	THE ARCHITECT'S STYLE
7 - 10	WALLACE FROST DESIGNS IN BIRMINGHAM
11	INDEX OF FROST DESIGNED HOMES IN BIRMINGHAM
12 - 34	PHOTOGRAPHS
35	BACKGROUND INFORMATION SOURCES
36 - 60	ARTICLES ON WALLACE FROST

THE ARCHITECT'S BACKGROUND

As a young man, Wallace Frost studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania from 1911 to 1915 where he took great interest in French architecture. At the university, Frost studied under Paul Cret, a professor of architecture who taught his native French architecture and design. Frost's architectural education ended abruptly when Cret was called back to France in 1915 to serve in the war. Disappointed, Frost withdrew from the university.

During World War I, Frost was an architect for the Air Force and was stationed at Langley Air Force Base in Washington D.C. During his military service, he met Albert Kahn who was a government consultant at the time. After the war, Frost went to work for Kahn in Detroit. Kahn built a reputation for his innovative factory designs that emphasized streamlined and simplified architecture that was functional as well as aesthetically pleasing to the eye. This was achieved at the Ford Highland Park Plant. This type of design was a clear departure from Frost's interest in proportion of design, harmony of materials, and romantic renaissance beauty found in residential designs. Frost worked with Kahn from 1919 to 1925 on such projects as the General Motors Building and the Edsel Ford Mansion in Grosse Point Farms. Inspired by his visit to the English Cotswald Country with Kahn, Edsel Ford commissioned Kahn's architectural firm in 1925 which permitted Frost to travel to Europe on several occasions from 1925 to 1931. During this same time period, Frost was designing residential homes with some locations in Birmingham. Frost and his family moved to Italy until 1932 before returning to the Detroit area.

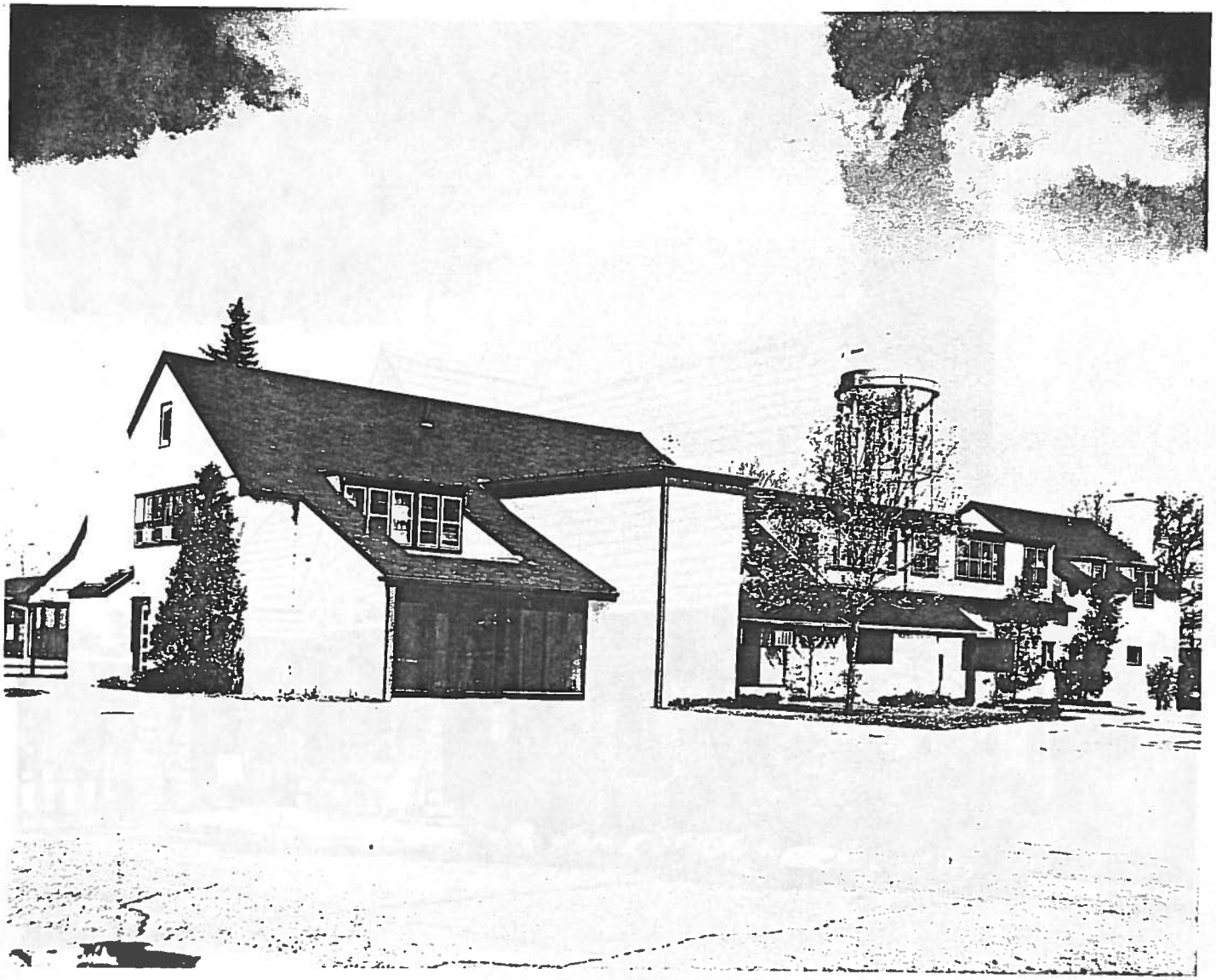
After a year, Frost moved to California in 1933 to design residential homes. During the 1930's, Californian architecture was experimenting with the modern flat roofed International style. A few years later, Frost returned to Birmingham to settle with his family and to re-establish his architecture practice. He combined his house designs of the early forties with the English Country style and the flat roofed International style he experienced in California. This resulted in modern homes with some decorative detail reminiscent of his earlier house designs.

In 1957, while in Birmingham, Frost was commissioned to prepare design plans for Mr. amd Mrs. Sober of Lansing. The 10,300 square foot residence provided for spacious living areas. The house was designed and fashioned to facilitate entertaining with large gathering spaces. The operational activities of the house, such as the kitchen, service areas, and servants quarters, were specifically designed to be concealed from the residence. In 1967, the Sobers donated the house to the State of Michigan for the use as the governor's residence.

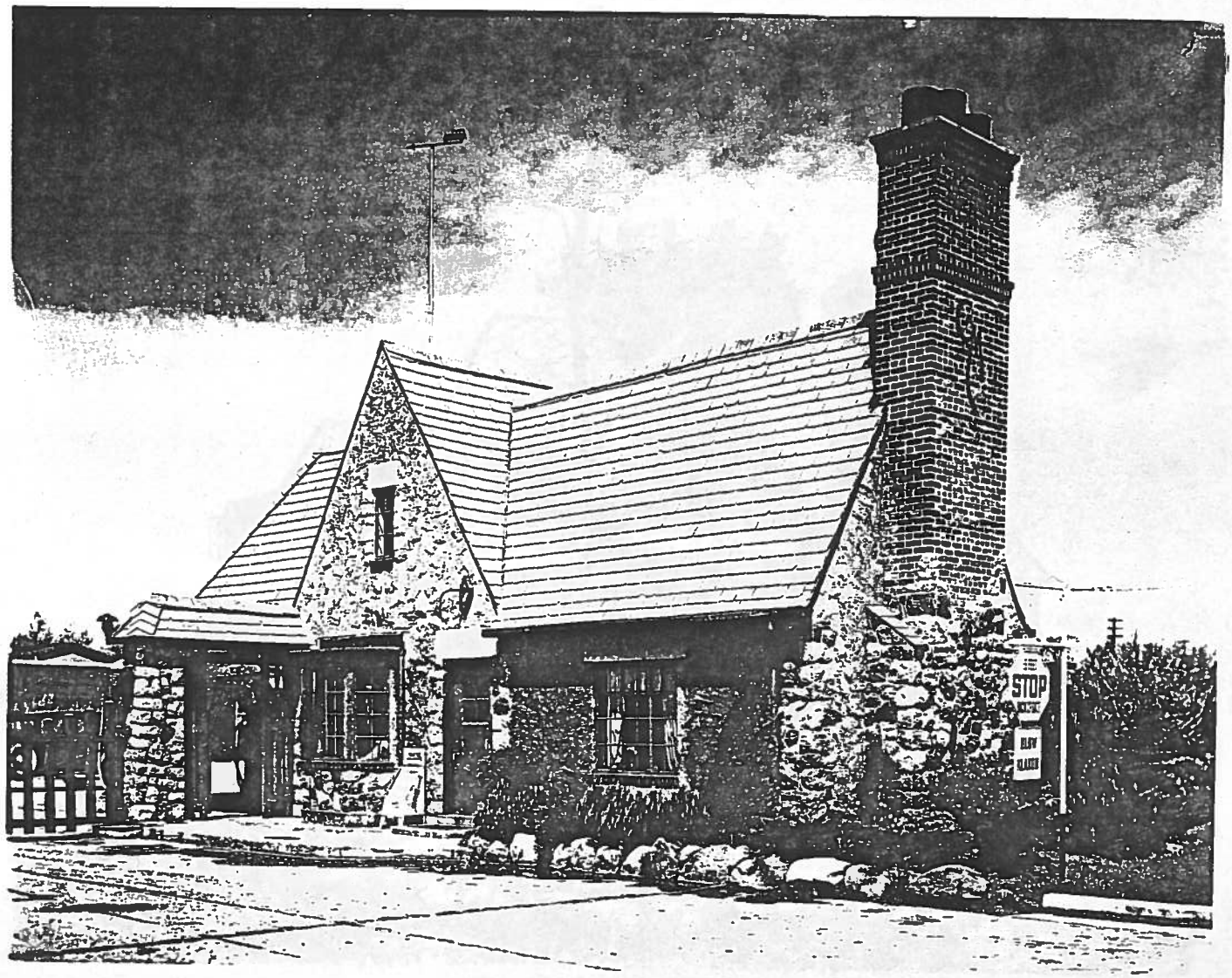
Frost included a common theme in all of his post-Californian designs which draws the outdoors into the home with the use of large windows, patios and other similar design elements.

Frost also designed the following more notable accomplishments: the Bowen House in Grosse Point, the cafeteria, gate house, housing facility, and dormitories at the General Motors Proving Grounds in Milford, and the Thom residence, "Lake End," in the Bloomfield Hills.

Through interviews with family members and prior associates, it has come to be known that Wallace Frost had a few interesting qualities and practices. Wallace Frost did not drive. His wife, Grace, drove him to all of his construction sites in order to supervise construction. Due to economic and time constraints at the time, when on a construction site, Frost often drew specific design features for the home on the construction drawings as construction was under way around him. Fortunately, Frost was ambidextrous and had the capability of sketching details with both hands at the same time. Frost continued to design homes in his Birmingham home at 404 Bonnie Brier until his death in 1962.



Cafeteria
General Motors Proving Grounds
Milford, Michigan



Gate House
General Motors Proving Grounds
Milford, Michigan

Housing Facility
General Motors Proving Grounds
Milford, Michigan

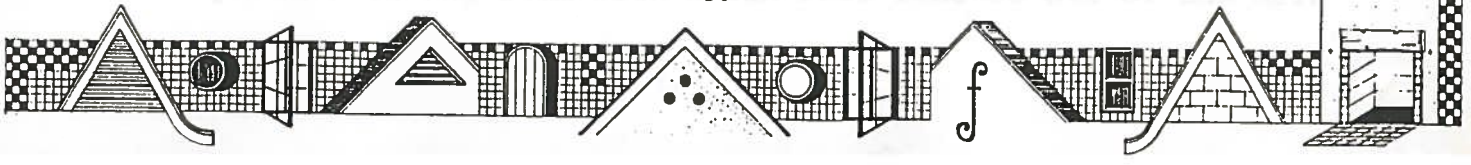
THE ARCHITECT'S STYLE

With his appreciation of French architecture, and his experience with Kahn's English designs, Frost has incorporated numerous design elements that have become a trademark in his home designs. The following architectural design concepts were common in Frost homes prior to the 1930's.

* numerous windows
* varied roof lines
* high ceilings
* interesting design of room space
* several fireplaces
* asymmetrical exterior appearance of window placement to functionally use natural light in the interior
* custom designed light fixtures
* innovative use of a variety of building materials, like plaster, wood siding, brick, limestone, and concrete block
* use of natural colored materials
* multiple chimneys which are not functional including several chimney flues
* multiple pane windows
* attached garages
* interior archways
* limestone around windows and doors
* elongated windows
* second floor dormer windows
* prominent roof slopes which blend with the first floor

After designing homes in California and returning to Michigan, Frost combined his new design techniques with some of the previous elements to design a home unique to the Birmingham area. Some of these common deign elements are:

* large windows designed to bring the outside into the home
* one story low sloping roof lines
* white painted block
* brick design pattern
* wide chimney with multiple flues



WALLACE FROST DESIGNS IN BIRMINGHAM

There are 44 homes in Birmingham known to have been designed by Wallace Frost. He designed his first house in 1921 for himself and his wife at 579 Tooting Lane which has been characterized as a small English yeoman's cottage with curved gable roofs and timber door and window lintels. The house is visually striking with exposed concrete block masonry that has been painted white. This was a departure from the custom of applying stucco to the masonry.

He also designed his last residence in Birmingham located at 404 Bonnie Briar in 1941 which reflects his design experience in California. With flat roofs and white painted concrete block, the design of the home includes common Frost details, such as large floor to ceiling windows, brick dentil patterning at the chimney and entrance wall, and a wide chimney.

The last home design by Frost in Birmingham is located at 1390 Northlawn and was constructed in 1951. This one story home is characterized by the relatively flat roof and large expanse of windows. The entrance is marked by the brick patterning on the adjoining wall.

The most notable home in Birmingham may be the house he designed in 1930 at 440 Lakepark. With the view of Quarton Lake off the rear, the home is an excellent example of French architecture with stone walls capped with red brick dentils. The red brick is incorporated in the forward wing with stone quoins.

The Village Players Theater Building was also designed by Frost in 1926. The Birmingham Eccentric Newspaper headline, "Architect's Plan Of Theatre For Village Players" on May 6, 1926 included Frost's artist sketch for "a kind of a playhouse that is suitable for the needs of the . . . local amateur theatrical organization." The original white painted block building had low sloping black roofs and a large chimney. At the time the article was written, a location was not yet determined for this "unique edifice." The theater was eventually built at 752 Chestnut where it currently stands.

To gain insight into the interior design and qualities found in Frost homes, the Historic District and Design Review Commission toured four homes in Birmingham which reflect his design style at that period in his achitectural career from 1921 to 1945. The following description is a synopsis of the May 6, 1992 tour.

236 Puritan

The owners of 236 Puritan have restored the home and updated several rooms, namely the kitchen and the dining room (which is an addition). Built in 1925 and in keeping with Wallace Frost's architectural style, the home has a very small kitchen (which is almost divided in half by the chimney stack), and an expansive living room with a sun room located off of the main

living area. One of the most striking features of the exterior of the home is a decorative leaded bullseye glass window on the front facade, which provides for interesting casts of light in the main living area.

The 5 bedroom home has pewabic tile in the 2 upstairs bathrooms and terra cotta tile in the foyer. A small bathroom is located off of the foyer, in keeping with Frost's penchant for tiny lavatories! A fireplace in the master bedroom was originally a built-in chest of drawers. A separate rear staircase allows access to the second floor bedrooms. Wooden timbers that have been stained a dark color are found in the sun room. Additionally, a similar timber was located above the fireplace in the living room, although it was removed several years ago due to fire hazard.

The owners have installed period light fixtures throughout the home and have decorated the home with several antique collections (eg. birdhouses, evening bags, boxes, etc.). Much of the overgrown vegetation was removed several years ago when the current owners purchased the home. This has allowed for a great deal of natural light to enter the home through the numerous windows throughout.

1691 Oak

This Frost home, built in 1945, has the distinction of being the smallest Frost home in Birmingham. It is a ranch style home that draws a lot of its character from the large lot which surrounds it. When Frost designed this home, it was with the intention of adding on to it at a later date. The owners, who have lived in the home since it was built, said that they are pleased that it was left without the planned addition because the home is a very liveable size for the retired couple now! A significant design feature is the large overhang which provides shade from the summer sun yet allows the (low) slanting rays of the winter sun to enter. The living room, although quite small compared to other Frost homes, has a large picture window in the front and a fireplace as well. The number of windows gives the house an open feeling, which is enhanced by the fact that the home is set in the rear of the corner lot.

The owners have the original plans of the home in their basement, although the plans are not the only "artifact" located below grade. The Alcorns are collectors of rocks, minerals and fossils and have a display area in their basement. A visit to the Alcorns display was once part of the itinerary of schoolchildren in the area, as Mrs. Alcorn introduced numerous groups of Quarton School children to the impressive collection.

579 Tooting Lane

The oldest Frost design in Birmingham (1921), the home was originally constructed on a large lot, which was reduced to half the size some years ago. The lot was split into two lots when the in-ground pool cracked and had to be removed from the ground. The home has dark wood shingles on the roof which was once covered with asphalt shingles. The current owner had the roof restored to its original condition.

The interior of the home is open and spacious, with the exception of the kitchen which was certainly not designed for comfort or cooking, in true Frost form! The cupboards in the kitchen can be summed up in three words: tall, small and original. A minuscule bathroom is located off of the kitchen, across from the garage entrance. A collection of doors in this area, as well as throughout the house, gave the home the nickname, "The House of Doors"!

The most impressive room in the house is the living room. Expansive and airy, the room is above all, designed to be lived in and enjoyed. Several windows, window niches, rustic timbers and a rectangular design allow the room to serve as a formal living area that is very liveable also. The timbers throughout the house are thought to have been harvested from a Great Lakes freighter.

A screened in porch is also located on the first floor. The formal dining room has doors that lead to the outside. The room facilitates Frost's desire of bringing the "outside in".

Several Frost features that are found in this house are: wood timbers, small bathrooms, small kitchen, cross shaped layout, large multi-flue chimney, numerous windows of various shapes, built in drawers, small closet space, open floor plan for the first floor, tiled foyer and large entrance door (approx. 42 in.) with wrought iron hardware.

1283 Buckingham

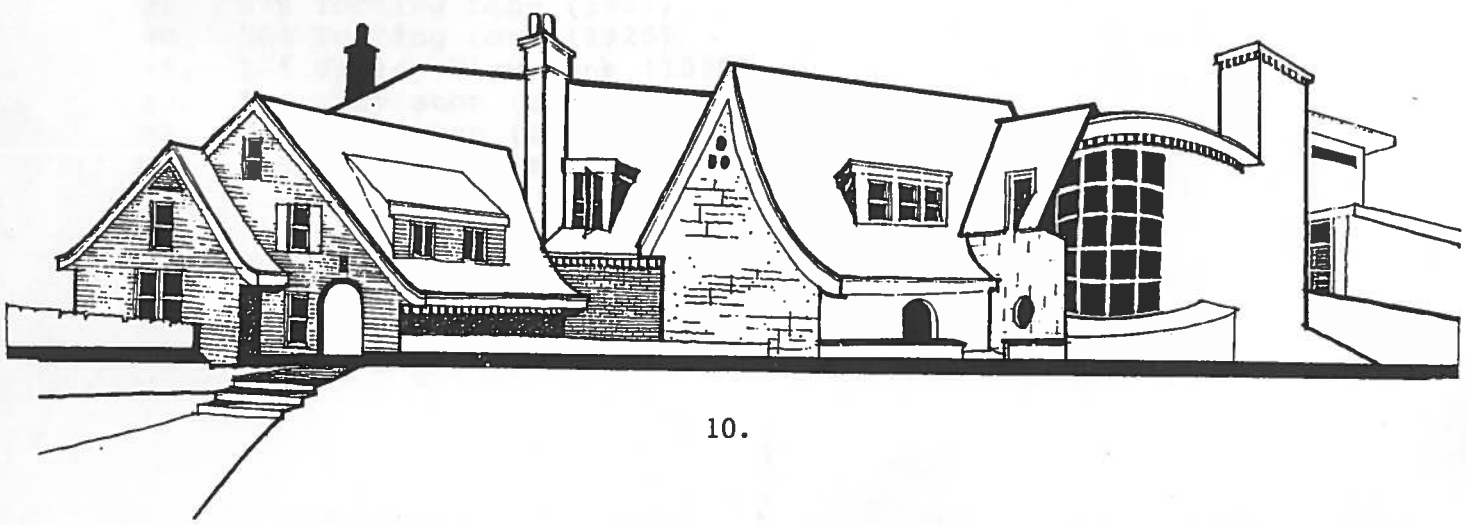
The owners of this Dutch colonial Frost design, led the Commission through their home. One of only 2 Dutch colonial designs in Birmingham, this home has several features that were commonly seen in the English Cottage and Tudor style homes. The home was constructed in 1925. The entry foyer has been retiled, although the owners stated that the original tile was similar to the terra cotta tile found in other Frost homes. A sun room is located in the front of the home and functions as living area year round because it is heated and cooled with the rest of the home. A spacious living room and dining area are found just beyond the foyer. Again, an open floor plan and several windows allow natural light and a feeling of the outside to filter into the main living areas.

An indisputable characteristic of Frost homes that can be seen throughout the second floor are the assorted window sizes. We are told no two are alike! The kitchen has been updated to make it more liveable. However, the updated features which utilize natural wood, blend in with the overall design of the home. The smallest lavatory that we found was in this home. It is located off of the foyer, similar to other Frost homes. The garage was renovated into a family room in the rear of the home. The owners were originally going to make this space larger than it is currently, but they were told that the wall that separates it from the rest of the house was constructed of at least 18 inches of concrete which caused the owners to change their plans.

The second floor of the house consists of four bedrooms. The master bedroom has an attached sitting room.

After many months of rigorous study, the Historic District and Design Review Commission has come to understand that much of the charm that is characteristic of Birmingham's residential neighborhoods is the result of streetscapes such as those found on Puritan, Lakeside, Pilgrim, Bonnie Brier, and Tooting Lane. Such streets are well established, heavily textured residential environments. Typically, these streets feature a harmonious blend of architecture capturing old and new designs. The Frost homes in Birmingham have contributed to the charm with individualized homes which suit the residents as well as the environment. Many of the Frost homes have withstood the years with little modifications to the original designs. Those earlier designs found on streets such as Tooting Lane and Pilgrim, have architectural characteristics worthy of preserving through historic designation.

The acknowledgement of Wallace Frost as a significant historical figure in Birmingham architectural history is important to Birmingham's heritage. After considerable study, the Birmingham Historic District and Design Review Commission recommends that the City Commission accept this report as justification to acknowledge Wallace Frost as a significant historical person whose architecture has influenced the residential fabric of Birmingham.



INDEX OF FROST DESIGNED HOMES IN BIRMINGHAM (Year Built)

1. 660 Abbey (1945)
2. 379 Aspen (1927)
3. 404 Bonnie Brier (1941)
4. 420 Bonnie Brier (1941)
5. 436 Bonnie Brier (1941)
6. 444 Bonnie Brier (1940)
7. 467 Bonnie Brier (1941)
8. 1283 Buckingham (1925)
9. 752 Chestnut (1926)
10. 219 Elm (1928)
11. 795 Fairfax (1928)
12. 1040 Gordon Lane (1926)
13. 960 Harmon (1926)
14. 440 Lakepark (1930)
15. 1169 Lakeside (1928)
16. 1290 Lakeside (1946)
17. 633 Lakeview (1929)
18. 650 Lakeview (1930)
19. 371 Linden (1924)
20. 508 Linden (1928)
21. 460 W. Maple (1929)
22. 1390 Northlawn (1951)
23. 1691 Oak (1947)
24. 139 Pilgrim (1926)
25. 187 Pilgrim (1925)
26. 239 Pilgrim (1925)
27. 515 Pilgrim (1925)
28. 551 Pilgrim (1928)
29. 671 Pilgrim (1924)
30. 691 Pilgrim (1926)
31. 783 Pilgrim (1928)
32. 864 Pilgrim (1924)
33. 236 Puritan (1925)
34. 683 Puritan (1927)
35. 788 Randall Court (1928)
36. 967 Rivenoak (1926)
37. 525 Southfield (1940)
38. 515 Tooting Lane (1929)
39. 579 Tooting Lane (1921)
40. 584 Tooting Lane (1926)
41. 364 Valley View Lane (1939)
42. 244 Wimbleton (1928)
43. 715 Wimbleton (1928)
44. 1050-1078 Wimbleton (1928)

The Howard Sober House:

Artifact of the 1950s

Rochelle S. Elstein

"Much of the character of everyman may be read in his house," said the famous landscape architect, Andrew Jackson Downing. In the nineteenth century, more than just the character of the householder was expressed in the building; personal values, literary tastes, or political affiliation might find expression as he and the architect chose from many styles and periods to select that which best captured his ideology and self-concept. When our founding fathers chose Roman architecture, it was to express the hope that the infant Republic would realize those noble ideals of the great Roman state. The choice of style was so tied to the expression of political ideals that when Napoleon appropriated Roman forms for his buildings, thereby forging the link between the dome and dictatorship, America turned to Greece for her building forms and the Greek Revival was born. Aspirations that have little to do with architecture, per se, seek external form, not only in our governmental monuments but in our private homes as well. May we assume that when Vanderbilt commissioned Richard Norris Hunt to build a palace at Newport, Rhode Island, the Commodore nurtured a hope that his children might subsequently make the transition to actual royal or noble status? When Mrs. John Dodge decided to build her estate in Rochester, Michigan in the late 1920s, she looked not to America, not to the architects of the Middle West Prairie School, but to the great country houses of England. Meadowbrook Hall was a product of close study of English tudor mansions. What William Kapp of Smith, Hinchman and Grylls provided Matilda Dodge and Alfred Wilson was not only a house, but a heritage.

For our century, the forms of modern architecture are those of the International Style: flat roof, horizontal window strips, plain wall expanses, exposed steel, concrete and glass, aluminium panels, Fiberglass, new kinds of tiles, laminates, plastics. There are new construction techniques as well: concrete slab construction, sandwich walls, T-beams, Lally columns. One element of the spirit of the age is a delight in the new technology, a joyful exploration of the potential of the new materials and, by inference, a complete acceptance of the machine as being central to society. The twentieth century person's relationship to nature is one of equality and acceptance. The builder should be aware of the landscape—not to subdue it but to work within it. The building and the site are a continuum. The twentieth century also has a place for the individual innovator. Movements can be traced to individual creators whose unique vision promotes a new and personal style. New forms, new materials, the end of eclecticism, the death of romanticism, the impossibility of architectural revivals—these are the themes sounded by all the architectural and cultural historians of twentieth century America.

But the built environment does not fit the theory or the description. When Henry Ford hired William Van Tine to build Fair Lane, we may mourn his aesthetic insensitivity but it must be acknowledged that Mr. Ford, being a man who got what he wanted, wanted not the innovative and cohesive design of the Prairie School but that pastiche of borrowed forms that makes "Victorian" an epithet, not a description, among architectural critics. A trip through Grosse Pointe, or Lake Forest, or Wellesley in 1940, is an excursion through the Cotswolds, Tudor England, the Valley of the Loire. It is a paradox that the very same people who changed the face of twentieth century America, the motor car pioneers who made the future come a lot sooner, escaped to the past every time they went home. Alvan Macauley of Packard, Roy Chapin of Hudson, Edsel Ford—they made a revolution. They put a machine at the center of American life and they lived in houses that were physical and spiritual expressions of the Renaissance and Middle Ages. Edsel Ford's architect, Albert Kahn, imported some of the materials and workmen from England, even going so far as to use stones from demolished buildings "to obtain the desired weathered effect" in Ford's Grosse Pointe house. This was the same architect who in 1909 had built the most innovative, most functional, most visually exciting factory building in the world—the Ford Highland Park Plant. It is not simply a matter of chronology; Kahn did not experiment briefly with the engineer's aesthetic and reject it for romantic revival architecture. He continued to design superlatively modern factories—Chrysler-DeSoto Press Shop, 1936; Chrysler-Dodge Half-Ton Truck Plant, 1937; Willow Run Bomber Plant, 1943—and picturesque eclectic houses.

We might look for the source of this architectural schizophrenia in the inherent conservatism of culture in general, which devises new forms only in response to radically new requirements or a new social order. Also reinforcing this reluctance to change is the view of social arbiters that the best comes from the past.

While eclecticism continued to flourish in suburbia as late as the 1930s, it did eventually die. What changed in mid-century America that made the historical tradition totally irrelevant to the society that had nurtured it for one hundred years? To focus this issue, I have chosen a house by an architect who had worked with Albert Kahn, a man who was artistically and in temperament more European than American, Wallace Frost. A Birmingham, Michigan architect, in 1957 he designed a home for Mr. and Mrs. Howard Sober of Lansing. Ten years later, the Sobers donated the house to the State of Michigan for use as the governor's residence. (The furnishings were purchased by the State as part of the agreement to keep the property intact.)

The Letha and Howard Sober house reflects its era in a variety of ways. The 1950s was a period of economic growth that the United States had not enjoyed since the 1920s. The disaster of the Great Depression affected the architectural profession as adversely as it did the

whole of American society. The Historic American Buildings Survey begun in 1933 under the auspices of the WPA, hired architects and engineers to make measured drawings of notable buildings, many of which would fall to the wrecker in the fifties as urban renewal and rising land costs combined with the exodus to the suburbs made whole neighborhoods obsolete. The 1940s found the architectural profession involved in the war effort; many served in the military. Others like Wallace Frost, worked for civilian contractors building military installations. By the next decade, there was an enormous building boom in both commercial and residential construction. Families who had become wealthy and ambitious to express their own values and lifestyles in new houses, hastened to find the right architect. The houses that they built are monuments to the prosperity of mid-century America.

The Sober house, deceptively compact from the exterior, due to the L-shaped plan, contains 10,300 square feet of space. The living room is exceptionally

large but every room is spacious and the ceilings are more than fifteen feet high. It reflects what some social historians have called "the subsequent (post-war) rise of the nation to Texan standards of living." Popular periodicals of the day reveled in what Thorsten Veblen, fifty years earlier, had called "conspicuous consumption." "Spaciousness, and not simply the illusion of spaciousness, is characteristic of the new architectural look." Not so large nor so lavish as the inaccurately named "cottages" of Newport of the nineteenth century, the housing of upper-middle-class America at mid-twentieth century, nevertheless, indicated that neither the New Deal nor the Internal Revenue Service had totally succeeded in redistributing the wealth. Too costly for the "Organization Man," as William Whyte had characterized America's middle managers, architect-designed housing was within reach of the men at the top of the corporation pyramid while technology graciously bestowed its benefits on worker and employer alike.

Houses communicate a number of things about the owner and the designer. The way in which space is allocated, for example, is a clear indication of the priority of the function carried on in each space. The ratio of private to public space—bedrooms to living room—is a clue to the way the owner regards his family's needs for isolation as compared with group involvement. The size of the kitchen, especially in a house without servants, reveals the centrality of meal preparation and tells us much about "woman's place" in the scheme of things. "Spatial messages" are easily read in designs where the children's bedrooms and play space are in a separate wing of the house. One of the messages the Sober house communicates is the centrality of entertaining but entertaining of a particular sort. The kitchen area is totally concealed from the public space; one can assume that the guests will not be informally received by a hostess who cooks and serves and can at the same time participate in the conversation. The size of the living room compared to the dining room suggests that the house was designed for large groups of people for other than dinner parties. The stage-like quality of the entry is a sign that the guests are presented, their visit to be of short duration. The proximity of the bar clearly indicates that the cocktail party will be the usual form of entertaining. The size and centrality of the entertaining complex—living room, bar, dining room—indicates that high among the family's needs that the artchitect had to accommodate was the party-space requirement.

In addition to spatial allocation, an excellent indicator of values is that which is hidden compared to that which is visible. In many of Frank Lloyd Wright's designs, for example, the front door is very difficult to locate and the message to the would-be visitor is very clear. Conversely, choosing to live in a glass box communicates a very different message from a house that resolutely turns its back on the neighbors. In the Sober house, the service wing of the house is quite concealed; the servants' living area and their work area is separate from the family space and implies a clear separation between the status of the two groups that inhabit the building.

The dining room is a prominent part of the design, easily visible from the living room and porch and richly decorated to serve as a focus for the house. Obvious care was taken to emphasize and complement the interesting shape of the room through the choice of furniture and carpeting. Dining, more particularly, formal dining, is a part of the family's lifestyle and one that is regarded as suitable for open expression. Conversely the bar is hidden; its location suggests its centrality in the scheme of things: that is to say, it occupies a significant place in the living area and yet is carefully concealed from view. Ambivalence toward drinking would certainly seem to be the message. Similarly the prominent display of books in the library contrasts with the

position of the television set behind doors and would imply that reading is a more desirable activity than TV watching and that the designer was asked to put the books within easy reach and in full view, while allocating to the television a more removed and less visually prominent place.

Technology, or more properly, science and technology spawned the bomb and the mushroom cloud darkened the entire post-war world. For a time, it was believed that technology could solve the problems that it had created and bomb shelters were privately built as the government advocated that shelters offered the best hope for survival in an atomic attack. The Sober house was one of the houses built during this period with a bomb shelter in the basement. Like much of human activity, it is a paradox to be confident enough to build a spacious luxurious home for one's family—and every building is, in a sense, an affirmation—at the same time one harbors conscious fears of destruction not only for one's own family but for the entire society. It does, however, support the thesis that the Sober house is not only an artifact of the decade but, in some respects, an archetype. By the 1960s bomb shelters were no longer being built and if Americans were still haunted by the possibility of a nuclear holocaust, they were unpersuaded that the apocalypse could be averted if enough people had a handy fallout shelter.

In another area of expression of mid-century values, the Sober house is archetypical, that being the relationship of man and nature. The nineteenth century regarded nature as a retreat—a quiet, wild corner from which to escape industrialism. The twentieth century reveled in its total control of nature; not more powerful than man but not subservient, man and nature were co-equal. Buildings expressed this relationship by bringing the indoors out—through patios, balconies, glass walls—and by bringing the outdoors in, through garden courts, atria, and an abundance of houseplants. It can be said of the Sober residence as it was of another fifties home, "this house proves . . . that the indoor-outdoor relationship need not be confined to the benign climate of California. . ."

Several elements have been identified as characteristic of the 1950s in the design of the Sober house. The size of the house reflects the prosperity of the decade; the investment in the house and furnishings suggests the importance of family life. Other features add to this image: the centrality of alcohol and its place in entertaining; the significance of nature reflected both in the way in which the house opens to the outside and in the way plants become a prominent decorative and design feature. The presence of a bomb shelter indicates the implied fear of nuclear attack. The California lifestyle, the patios and the enclosed porch with barbeque, is in evidence. The conservatism of the design reflects the period, as does the synthesis of modern and traditional elements.

The Sober house cannot, however, be considered characteristic of the way the majority of Americans lived during the 1950s. The house is too large, too well-finished and too expensive ever to be considered a house for the masses or even the middle class. It is a house that was built with servants' quarters and that fact alone makes it an upper-middle-class dwelling. The very large lot was landscaped with a gardener in mind. And yet it is quintessentially an expression of America at mid-century. It represents a conservative fusion of modernity and traditionalism, the elliptical room from the Federal period, combined with the glass wall of the International Style, an accommodation to a new world order, a synthesis of the classical past and the machine-age present.

Albert Kahn, Frost's employer and mentor wrote in 1931:

> Is all that has proven of merit in the past to be abandoned and replaced with crude vagaries? Must the grotesque be substituted for the beautiful? To the dyed-in-the-wool modernist, the work of the past is a closed book to be forgotten and never to be referred to. But is progerss in ar-

chitecture or any art not to be sought as is progress in architecture or any other field? Are basic principles, developed through unending experiment and thoroughly proved, to be done away with, untried forms to take their place? Is all that the past has taught to go for naught?

But even an architect as steeped in the past as Wallace Frost, as rigorously trained in the Beaux Arts methods, as sympathetic to the Renaissance ideals of balance, proportion, beauty, could not return to the Renaissance idiom. The "untried forms" were not untried at all —in Kahn's own factory designs, the streamlined, simplified, machine aesthetic created a building that was functional to work in and beautiful to see. For more than a generation, architects and clients had lived and studied and worked in a new environment. It would have been false and theatrical in 1957 to return to sixteenth century Florence. Indeed, it was Kahn, among others, who helped build the new world that so separated this society from the old.

The fifties was a period of "domesticity, religiosity, respectability, security through compliance with the system," in short, a decade of fear and conservatism when old values seemed safest. It is probably a predictable reaction to the upheaval of war that there is a great yearning for an appearance of normalcy in its aftermath. One index of the profound change that American society had undergone is the new dominance of the modern style in architecture. The style itself had emerged two decades before, in the turbulent twenties and thirties but a measure of its acceptance is the incorporation of modern design elements in the work of a traditional architect. The architecture of the past could not be recreated. The avant garde was building sleek glass and steel boxes, elegant, functional, beautifully machined. Those who advocated older values of warmth, comfort, luxury, and who looked to the past for inspiration were designing less innovative houses, but even these revealed the modern sensibility—predominantly horizontal, large expanses of glass, open plans. Of these, Wallace Frost's house for Letha and Howard Sober stands as a true artifact of the fifties.

The Architect

Wallace Frost, the designer of the Sober house, presents an interesting contrast to the Europeans who came to America. He wanted to live and work in Europe.

Mr. Frost received his architectural training in the United States; from 1911 to 1915 he studied at the University of Pennsylvania. The strongest influence on his education was Professor Paul Cret, a teacher at Penn until 1915 when military service took him back to his native France. Frost's respect for Cret was so great that he left the university rather than study under anyone else.

The influence of French architects on American architectural education had a long history. The earliest institutions hired French architects to teach; M.I.T. brought Eugene Letang from France as its first instructor of architecture. Previously, American architecture students went to the Ecole des Beaux-Arts to study; some, such as Henry Hobson Richardson, found it useful. Others, notably Louis Sullivan, left soon after arriving. Not surprisingly, what French architects taught was the Beaux-Arts approach which "had encouraged an enormous proficiency in drawing, audacity in composition, exact knowledge of forms, and details and a keen sense of the kinds of space and finish that accompanied the good life."

When, after World War I, Frost left Washington D.C. where he had been an architect for the Air Force, he went to work for Albert Kahn whom he had met when Kahn served as a government consultant. His association with Kahn was a productive one but not ultimately satisfying. The firm had established its fame on the basis of factory designs and Wallace Frost preferred to build houses. He left the Kahn office in 1925. He spent several months in Europe during the years 1925-31 and lived in Settignano, Italy, for eighteen months in 1931-32. He would have remained in Europe were it not for his family's reluctance to live outside the United States on a permanent basis.

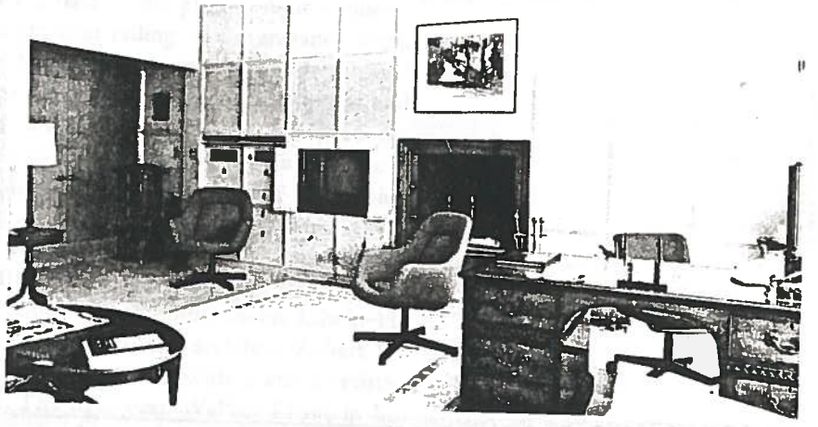
Photo credit: From the collection of Grace (Mrs. Wallace) Frost.

Frost was not sympathetic to the modern movement. Having been a student of Cret, he was fond of French neo-classical architecture but most of all he admired Italian Renaissance building. When he returned to the United States, the family moved to Moticito, California where he built a house for himself and a few homes for clients. He was no more successful than his fellow practitioners of the building art, eighty percent of whom went to work for the government during the dismal days of the thirties. Then Frost returned to the Detroit area where he opened an office in suburban Birmingham which is where he was working when he prepared plans for Mr. and Mrs. Sober in 1957.

The House

The Letha and Howard Sober house is located in the southwest area of Lansing, known as the Moore's River Drive section, through which the Grand River flows making it the most picturesque and desirable neighborhood in the city. The 2.3 acre lot is handsomely landscaped and a circular drive brings the visitor to the entrance of a long, low L-shaped house with overhanging roof, deep eaves, and broad slab chimneys. The facade is of rock-faced coarse ashlar and painted brick with latticed brick rectangles to provide textural color and contrasts. There are two bowed bays with large rectangular panes that the architect favored in many of his houses. The entrance is framed in limestone, with a molded architrave and plain lintel surmounting a handsome paneled door. The garage is to the right; the drive continues around the end wall and to the patio side where the garage opens. From the front door, only the large windowless expanse of garage wall indicates the function of the space behind it.

The interior of the entry is a molding trimmed paneled convex wall containing closets. The entry and gallery are continuous with the living room but since the main living area is sunken three steps, the travertine floor of the entry forms a kind of stage on which the visitor appears when making an entrance. The living room is a large, high-ceilinged room with a wall of windows on the garden side, a large rectangular raised fireplace framed in marble on the dining room wall, and a grasscloth-covered wall with the elevated floor (continuing from the entry) serving as a gallery and separating the more private library from the public entertaining space of the living room. A dark hall connects the bedroom wing—very clearly a private space—to the entry and library. Two bedrooms and a lavishly appointed dressing room plus a powder room for guests opposite the library, constitute the private area. Entry to the library is from the hall and



from the living room gallery, making it a separate but accessible semi-public area. The library itself is paneled in the same molded square paneling used in the entry and lanai area. Two walls contain bookcases with concealed storage; the third centers a fireplace which repeats the proportions of the living room fireplace on a smaller scale. to one side is an entertainment center that contains storage and a television set that may be concealed behind folding doors.

On the other side of the living room is the formal dining room; an interesting elliptical space with floor to ceiling windows on the garden side and a concave wall with built-in serving shelf on the kitchen side. Two decorative features dominate the room: a mural evocative of Chinese landscape painting covers the wall and an elliptical carpet with carved bands covers the floor. The mural is one of several elements in the house that reveal the owner's enthusiasm for oriental art. It is obvious, however, that this did not enter into the design of the house itself; in size, scale and proportion, the Sober house is distinctly American and owes nothing to the architecture of China and Japan. The carpet is ringed with two wide bands that repeat the shape of the room, reiterating the rounded walls that were encountered earlier in the entry hall and will be seen in the lanai as well.

The same curve encloses the bar or lanai area between the entry and service wing. This wall features a sliding door behind which is a large well-stocked bar; with the door closed, nothing of the function of the space is apparent. With the door open, the area becomes a focus for the elevated portion of the living/entertainment complex. Entertaining of a more casual sort takes place on the patio area outside the kitchen and on the porch off the dining room that accommodated a built-in barbeque grill.

Despite some remodeling and altering necessitated by the transformation of the Sober house into the Governor's mansion, the home remains today essentially as it was designed almost twenty-five years ago. Like every structure in the built environment, it has a private function and a public one; it is both a comfortable and attractive residence and a superb example of the material culture of America at mid-century. It remains a notable addition to Michigan's architectural heritage.

The author wishes to thank Professor Russel B. Nye at Michigan State University for his encouragement and support.

century, it exhibited a fine feeling for detail and texture. The formal stone portico enclosing graceful curved steps stood out against the gray brick of the main mass of the house with its lighter gray window architraves. Also the balustrades surmounting the portico and at the base of the ground floor windows contrasted pleasingly with the fragile wrought-iron railing of the entrance steps. On the less formal lake side of the house French doors opening upon a broad terrace took advantage of the lake exposure. The Seyburn house was elegant and at the same time livable. Architecture and landscaping merged in a unified design. Painstaking refinement and adherence to the period created an old-world charm and authenticity which was augmented by the incorporation of genuine antiques as architectural features and motifs. *(278)*

For those not prepared to indulge in an establishment on the scale of the Seyburn estate, the French *manoir* satisfied the increasing desire for the intimate and picturesque without sacrificing the essential French spirit. In his Edwin H. Brown residence of 1926 on Lake court in Grosse Pointe, architect Robert O. Derrick combined mansard roofs and French fenestration with a characteristic round tower to produce the desired effect. *(281)* The next year Wallace Frost, in his Julian P. Bowen house on Jefferson avenue in Grosse Pointe, created a more rustic atmosphere with steep roofs, small windows, and the rough textures of slate and stone. *(280)* The masses of the roofs, gables, and tower were resolved into a dramatic plastic composition, marred only by too great a diversification and scattering of window openings. *(324)*

Anna Thompson Dodge, the widow of Horace E. Dodge of automobile fame and one of the nation's wealthiest women, could afford to ignore the trend toward simplicity. Her Louis XV château built in 1934 on Lake Shore road is unquestionably Grosse Pointe's most regal residence. *(279)* Inspired by the work of the great eighteenth century master Jacques Ange Gabriel, Philadelphia architect Horace Trumbauer strove for monumental splendor. Somewhat belatedly he attempted to recapture the luster of the 'Gilded Age,' for no less than twenty years earlier he had built an almost identical though somewhat smaller palace for A. Hamilton Rice at Newport, [91] and in 1916 he had built one of America's most sumptuous houses for Edward T. Stotesbury at Chestnut Hill, Pennsylvania.[92]

Mrs. Dodge's dreams of grandeur were tinged with the illusion of history. Steeped in the lore of the past, she spoke of the crowned heads of Europe with the same knowing regard as if they were her neighbors.[93] In a portrait in her library Sir Gerald Kelly depicted her in the elaborate costume of the court of Versailles.[94] Early in her life her husband gave her pearls that had belonged to Catherine the Great and later she was to acquire a piano once owned by Louis XV.[95] Much of the decor of Rose Terrace, as the Dodge abode is called, was retrieved by Sir Joseph Duveen from the imperial palaces of Russia. There are French inlaid furniture, Beauvais tapestry chairs, four cases of Sèvres porcelains, and paintings by Boucher, Gainsborough, and Van Dyck. The late Dr. William R. Valentiner, when director of the Detroit Institute of Arts, "unhesitatingly proclaimed the completed collection at least the equal of any French eighteenth century art ensemble in the world."[96]

No French château would be complete without a garden. To lay out hers, Mrs. Dodge employed Ellen Shipman of New York. To the west of the house is a formal French garden edged with boxwood and adorned with antique marble statues. In the background is a fountain. Adjoining this is a formal flower garden containing beds edged with wisteria trees and fruit trees, from which two flights of stairs lead down to the rose garden. Beyond lies the swimming pool, and beyond that the sweep of Lake St. Clair.[97]

Architect's homes called landmarks

By Robyn Kleerekoper
Special Writer

Do you own a Wallace Frost home? Do you even know who Wallace Frost was? If you own one of his homes, you may be living in a future historic landmark.

Frost was an architect who designed approximately 40 Birmingham homes and one multiple dwelling structure on Adams Road and Wimbleton Drive.

Frost homeowners include renowned sculptor Marshall Fredericks, whose studio is in Royal Oak. He lives in a Frost house overlooking Quarton Lake in Birmingham.

Frost worked from World War I until he died in 1962. He is relatively obscure, even by local standards.

But the Birmingham Historic Design and Review Commission wants to honor him. The commission plans to designate Frost homes as historic in an effort to recognize and preserve them.

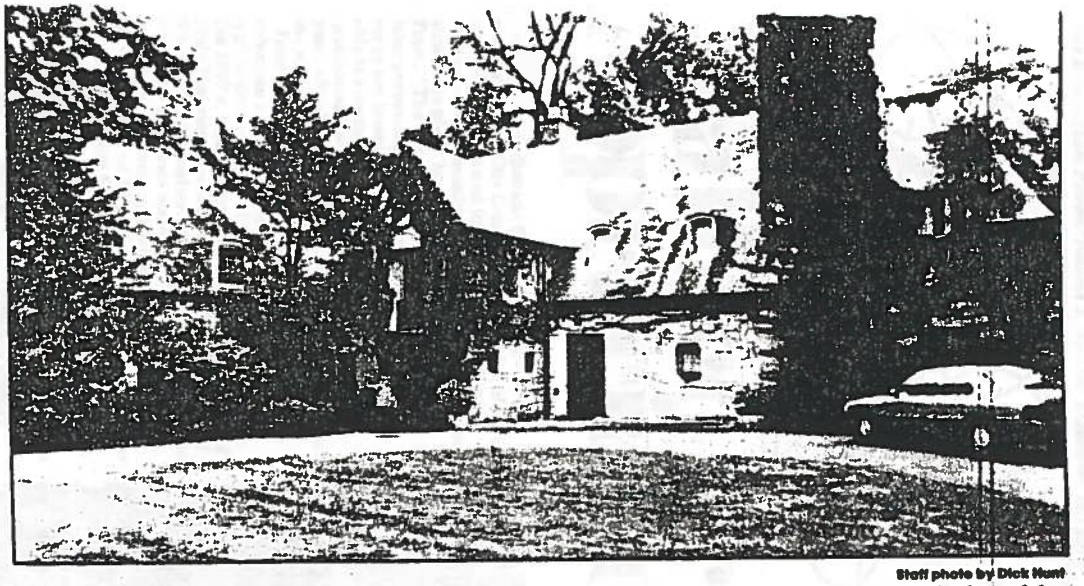
Frost was probably Birmingham's most prominent architect, says Max Horton, a member of the historic commission.

Mayor Henry Forster says, "There is a premium attached to a Wallace Frost home on the market."

Frost dabbled in various styles.

Ten of his homes are a contemporary style, according to local architecture buff Bruce Brooks, who

See ARCHITECT, Page 9A



Staff photo by Dick Hunt

Noted sculptor Marshall Fredericks' home on Lake Park Drive in Birmingham was designed by

Continued from Page 1A

once lived in a Frost home that was a French Norman country style.

Brooks says a typical Frost home is of French colonial or country style, although many people use the label of Tudor for some of them. He made use of curved gables and heavy door and window lintels.

In the earlier days of his work, he used more brick and stone, and the homes were of a "grander nature," Brooks says.

After he moved to California, his style changed to a more Spanish influence.

Frost was influenced by Albert Kahn, for whom he first worked on his arrival in Michigan from Pennsylvania, and by French architect Paul Krit.

Many of the city's Frost homes have had alterations since they were first built.

Marshall Fredericks' Frost home is about 55 years old, has four fireplaces and is built on several different levels connected by a series of small staircases.

It is mainly constructed of stone, and has reinforced concrete floors, a feature that Fredericks believes is the first in the area. He has lived there 30 years.

Fredericks says, "It is a very liveable and warm home, extremely comfortable. That is one of the assets of a Frost home, his ability to make a warm, friendly atmosphere. Frost was a master of detail and always adapted a home to the site on which it stood."

Fredericks speaks highly of Frost's fidelity to the classic styles in his earlier days. Later, he adopted more modern styles.

If the city designates Frost homes as historical buildings, it would be unlike other such designations.

Any future major alterations of a Frost home would mean the homes would be removed from the historically designated list.

WALLACE FROST

Usually, the historical designation restricts what owners can do in alterations, modifications and renovations. Prior permission also must be sought from the Review Commission.

In the case of the Frost homes, review commissioners and city commissioners agreed that a list of acceptable alterations and guidelines be drafted, so that homeowners would be aware of how much work could be done before jeopardizing the historic designation.

Frost grew up in Pennsylvania and started studying architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He fought in France in World War I and lived in Italy during the Depression.

He moved to Michigan, then to California and then back to Michigan, settling in Birmingham.

42.
Daily Tribune, 10/4/90
page 1 of 1

irmingham Patriot/Volume 3, Number 2/January 12, 1977 Twenty five cents

Patriot

THE ARCHITECT'S ARCHITECT:
A CONSTANT INSPIRATION
pages 1, 6 and 7
CITY MANAGER SETS TONE FOR '77
page 2
BIRMINGHAM IN STITCHES
page 5
HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS
Special Home Section

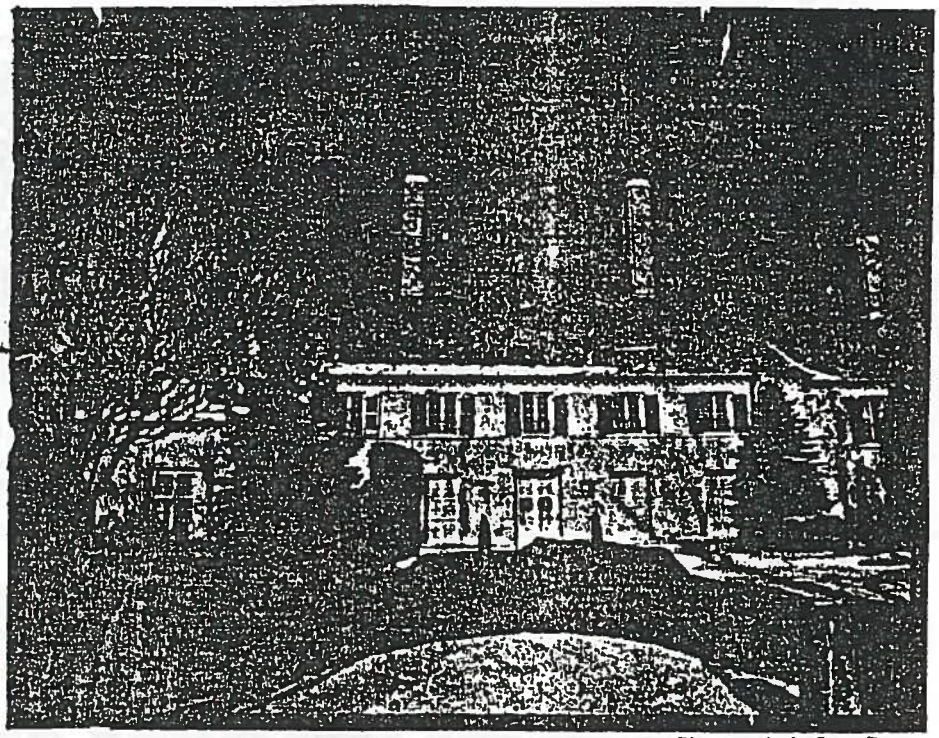
Vallace Frost: ppreciation of Houses

historic districts for Birmingham were ed to the City Commission in the fall of 1975, eria suggested for "historic" buildings ned were mostly nineteenth century Victorian res plus "houses designed by Wallace " The historic district study committee was rsuaded to omit the Frost houses, because re located on narrow private lanes scarcely accomodate the traffic of visitors that a med historic district would draw. But fifty fter he first began practicing in Birmingham, utation of Wallace Frost is still growing. s career coincided with the coming of large an houses to Birmingham, belonging to -do executives of Detroit companies. Before 0's, Birmingham was still largely a village of ictorian farmhouses. The splendid houses of in Birmingham were not quite mansions, but re moderate scale and richness, they d the mansion showplaces being built in Pointe and Bloomfield Hills for auto company nts. These fine houses of Birmingham today to be the first generation of old houses in the area that does not seem destined to a period ct and blight, as fine homes of the turn of the period and before have been.

st three decades of the twentieth century ll a time when an architect could make a r himself and a comfortable living from a based on the design of homes alone. Frank /right in his early career is one of the best es that comes to mind, but there were many ho worked in the more traditional styles that d.

in this time was largely pictorial, and the rk was not ashamed to be a sort of stage

Continued on page 6



Photography by Steve Benson

Houses

Continued from page 1

setting. Forms were by and large derived from historical precedents such as colonial houses or English Cotswald cottages. Other than visual rules that came from these historical forms, there were few theoretical treatises being written, which baffles a modern historian accustomed to the more recent writings of Wright, Gropius and le Corbusier.

Above all, an architect was trained to observe materials and textures and to draw suitable illustrations of what he observed or what he proposed to design.

Frost came to Michigan in 1919 from Uniontown, Pennsylvania. He had already studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. This was a school much influenced by the imaginative work of a Philadelphia architect named Wilson Eyre who built upon loosely medieval forms with his own inventive detail added. Detroiters may appreciate Eyre's work in the shingle-style Charles Freer house of 1890, now the home of the Merrill Palmer Institute.

In Detroit, Frost spent six years working for the firm of Albert Kahn. Kahn is best known for his innovative industrial architecture, but his practice extended to all types of buildings. During these years when Frost worked for him, for example, Kahn was designing the Grosse Pointe Farms mansion of Edsel Ford, client and architect having previously visited the Cotswald country for inspiration. It is hard to say that Kahn's English designs influenced Wallace Frost, any more than one can insist that Wilson Eyre influenced him. But Frost was to design a rather similar medieval house in slate and stucco for Julian Bowen in Grosse Pointe soon after he opened his own practice in Birmingham in 1925.

Frost's new practice attracted other commissions for houses in Grosse Pointe or Detroit's Indian Village, but most of his work was to be in the vicinity of Birmingham and Bloomfield Hills. For himself, he built a small English yeoman's cottage above a wooded ravine just north of the heart of Birmingham. This house shows the same attention to subtleties as before; the edges of the gables are gently curved, and the door and window lintels are stained timbers taken from a demolished flour mill in Birmingham. Rather startling to a visitor, however, is the masonry of white painted exposed concrete block without a facing of stucco. Frost went on to design a neighborhood of houses along the ravine, generally in the same manner.

The English medieval form of house had an informal, rambling manner that seemed more congenial to modern living habits than the colonial fashion that otherwise prevailed. Colonial houses were inhibited with center halls and formal furniture arrangements. Architects of the 20's also liked medieval fashions for their picturesque massing and ribbon windows. Frost had mastered the art of designing windows that looked small but "worked" big in terms of light and air. But some clients found medieval houses too dark and drafty. In the late 20's, Frost combined the best advantages of both colonial and medieval styles in designs adapted from the French countryside ("French Provincial" conjures up an image too recent and too bland). It was a formal manner softened by picturesque features that offered the architect a lead to inventive design.

In a house Frost designed for a Quarton Lake site in Birmingham, the inspiration seems French, although not precisely so. Capping the tan stone walls is a cornice of red brick dentils, a rather startling combination of materials. One side of the massive chimney curves down to embrace a dormer window in the roof. The house terminates in a brick wall with a single great arch for a screened-in porch. The details are hardly from historical sources, but they seem very compatible with the forward wing and other portions one can identify as "French."

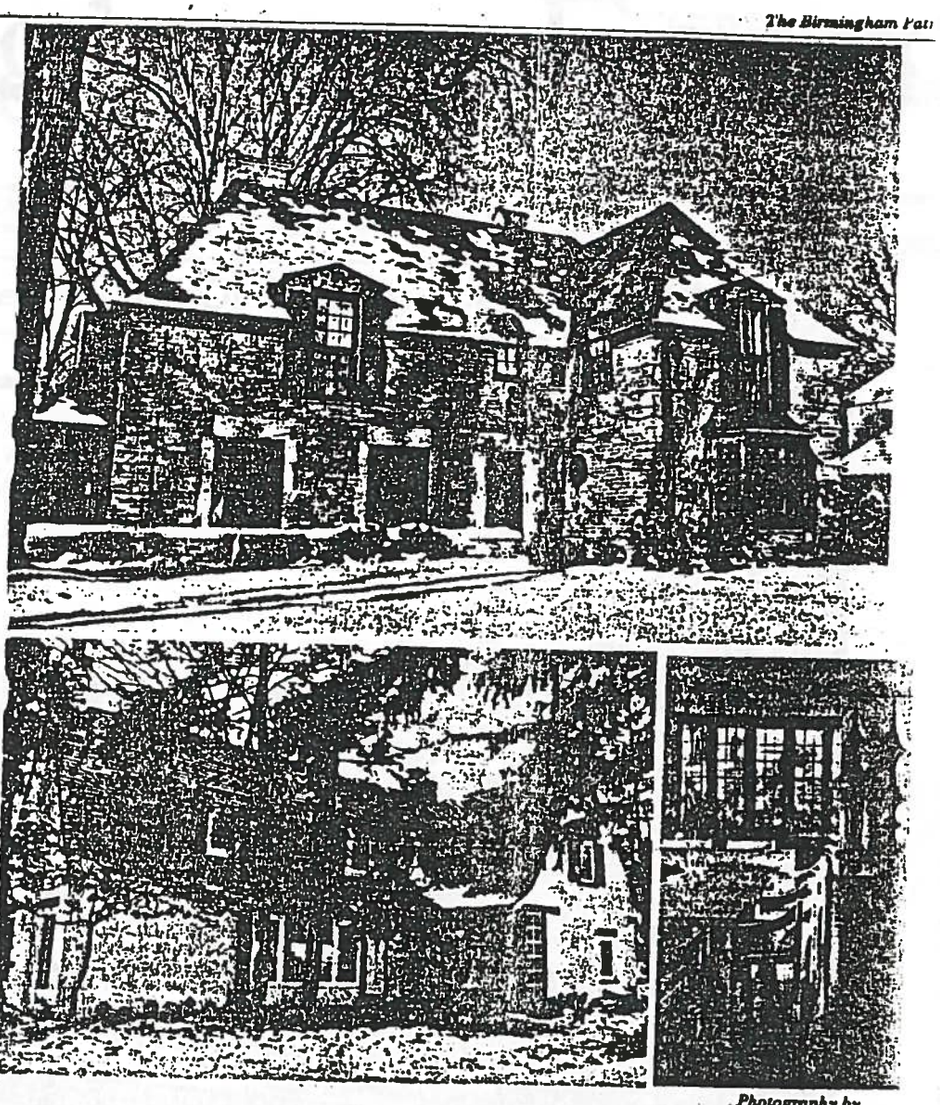
More precisely true to historical precendent is "Lake End" the house Frost designed for Mr. and Mrs. Edgar Thom in Bloomfield Hills in the early 30's. It is one of the most impressive houses in the Detroit area. Frost visited France with these clients to sketch and study buildings. Indeed, the house feels as if one has just stumbled into a corner of France. The house, itself, is severely formal in its setting overlooking the lake, and any architect would have been proud to claim such a mansion. But it is the gatehouse and walled forecourt with its foundation that makes the house outwardly so remarkable. The whole image bursts unexpectedly upon the motorist beyond a hill after a turn in the road.

"Lake End" was completed during the deepening Depression years. For an architect in his productive early forties, the Depression and the war years that followed should have stifled his career. In 1933 Frost left Birmingham to live in Santa Barbara, California. It was that part of the country which was most receptive to the new "International Style" from Europe, but California architects were softening its severity with the warmth of their own traditions. With his own sensitive feel for materials and proportions, it is understandable that Wallace Frost would be sympathetic to the California trends. Frost was one of the few architects trained in the traditional disciplines who could take up modern design successfully. But it was his previous experience in his Birmingham work that perhaps explains why he could improve upon the California practice when he returned to Birmingham in 1938.

Further east along the plateau from his own house of the mid 30's, Frost built himself a new house beside three similar ones in 1940-42. Both Frank Lloyd Wright and Alden Dow had already designed new houses in the metropolitan Detroit area, but Wallace Frost perhaps became the first Detroit architect to design innovative modern houses. These four houses today do not seem as dated as flat-roofed "International Style" houses of the thirties usually do. They combine flat roofs with gently sloping planes embracing massive chimneys. Instead of traditional picturesque houses, one might say these are modern picturesque ones. The new Frost houses have not completely suppressed decorative detail as was expected of modern houses, for here and there one sees the same brick dentils of a cornice line, in white painted masonry this time, and windows formed of geometrical apertures in the walls. Inside, as before, there are changes in the level of floors and ceilings, according to the size of rooms. One of the residents aptly compares this "cubic space" to the square footage of traditional two-dimensional plan designs. The houses are tightly compressed in small lots, but are sited to enjoy the freedom of more distant views beyond their property lines.

In his newer house in Birmingham, at the age of nearly seventy, Wallace Frost passed away on a Sunday morning, June 24, 1962. Mrs. Frost continues to reside in the house. In his long career, Frost greatly enriched Birmingham with the creative range of his whole work. And for Birmingham, he was the pioneer architect in a town which has since come to be home to many of the best known architects of Michigan.

by Peg and Gordon Bugbee



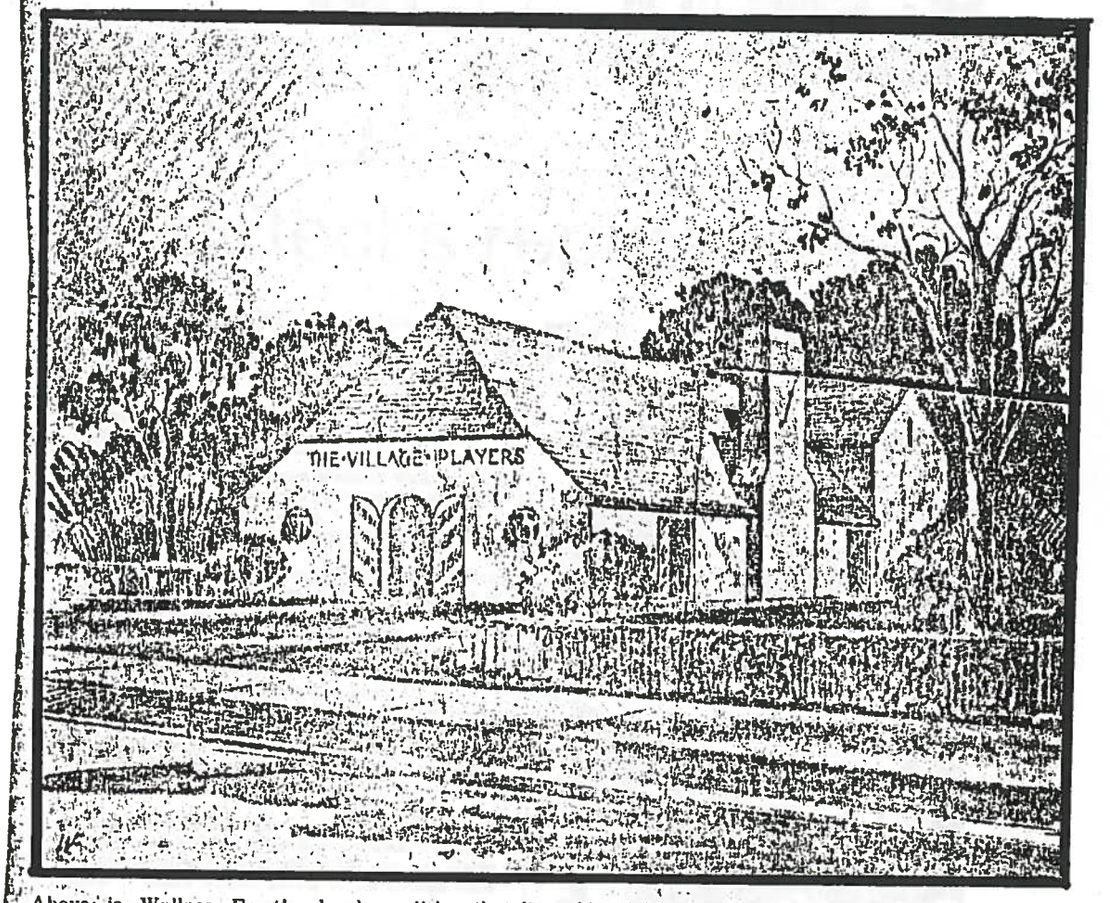
Photography by Balthazar Korab

Birmingham Eccen

"For a Bigger and Better Birmingham"

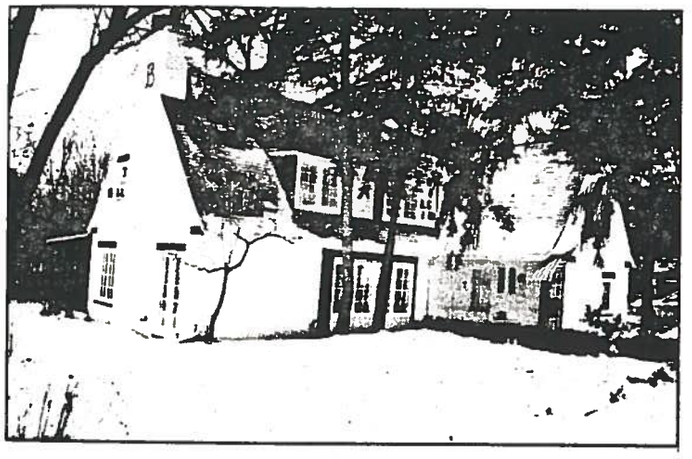
BIRMINGHAM, OAKLAND COUNTY, MICHIGAN, THURSDAY, MAY 6, 1926

Architect's Plan Of Theatre For Village Players



Above is Wallace Frost's, local architect, conception of the kind of a playhouse that is suitable for the needs of the Village Players, local amateur theatrical organization. Without doubt this unique edifice will be constructed some place in Birmingham this summer, ready to be opened next October when the Players begin their next season.

At the regular meeting of the Players last Saturday night at the Community House, Waldo Fellows, president of the organization, told 80 members present that the old Town Hall, given to the Players some time ago, was found to be in such aged condition that it could not be moved with any degree of satisfaction. He recommended that the Players consider a brand new building, at a cost not to exceed $10,000.00, to be paid for by individual subscriptions from the membership.



The home of Connie and Helen Bouchard on Tooting Lane is the first house built by architect Wallace Frost. The 1921 structure was home for Frost and his wife, Grace. The Birmingham architect died in 1982.

Architect's repute keeps growing among owners

By Helen Niemiec
staff writer

Some "Wally" owners knew architect Wallace Frost personally, others knew of the Frost reputation and yet others "lucked" into their houses.

But all agree that the architect designed interesting houses.

Common threads wind through the 39 identified Frost houses in Birmingham: floor to ceiling bookcases or nooks, large fireplaces, pegged oak floors on the main level, catwalks or "windows" in a second story room that overlook spacious living rooms and "tiered" styling that requires several steps up or down to access garages or basement landings from the main hallway.

Frost also had a quirky dislike of uniform ceiling heights. Living room ceilings were high, but dining room and hallway ceilings might only be seven or eight feet high. Coved ceilings are the hallmark of the second story.

THE VERY FIRST Wallace Frost house is located on Tooting Lane, built for the architect himself. The house features a "cross" design, with a hallway that allows access to rooms without having to cut through other rooms.

Connie Bouchard and his wife, Helen, have owned the house for 40 years and are the fourth owners.

"It's very special," Bouchard said.

Harah Frost, granddaughter of the architect, lives in one of her grandfather's later creations on Bonnie Briar. The house was built in 1941.

"The site is really exceptional," Frost said of her house. "It looks out on a sort of wild area. The staircase

Please turn to Page 6

The use of multiple levels that Wallace Frost liked to employ are evident by looking at the windows in this house on Lakeside owned by Dale and Randi Watchowski.

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92
page 1 of 2

Architect's reputation grows among homeowners

Continued from Page 3

in the center of the house affects the entire design."

The relationship between outside environment and house were integral in Frost's designs, biographer John Richardson told the Birmingham Historical Society in 1981.

HARAH FROST LIVED in Birmingham with her grandparents until she was 7 years old and then moved west with her parents. Wallace Frost died when she was 12.

"I never saw him working or talking about architecture," Harah Frost said.

But she is pleased with "the emerging kinship" that is forming with Wallace Frost homeowners.

Connie Barnes and her late husband moved into their Randall Court house in 1935, seven years after it was built. The Barneses were the fourth owners, with others having left the house because of the economic conditions from the Depression, Barnes explained.

"I liked the home and I didn't know anything about it," she said. "I liked the arrangement. It has a tiled entrance and a most unusual thing — a sunken bath tub on the second floor because of the slant in the roof."

The house is a French farmhouse style and has four bedrooms and two baths, one of the larger Frost homes.

BARNES BECAME acquainted with Wallace and Grace Frost after moving into the house. The Barneses and the Frosts shared mutual friends.

"He was a very quiet man with a good sense of humor," Barnes said. "He was very clever in his conversations but didn't talk about his work."

Barnes is still quite taken by her house and refuses to make any renovations for fear of disturbing the original plan.

Randi and Dale Watchowski moved into their "Wally" on Lakeview three years ago and didn't know who Frost was.

"I wasn't sure about the house. I walked in and walls were painted black and there was shag carpet on the floors," Randi Watchowski recalled. "But there was a special feeling about the house."

The couple purchased the house and then started an extensive restoration project — changing walls to off white, removing the carpet to show the oak floors and using period light fixtures and accents to enhance the 1928 structure.

WITH THE RESTORATION work, Watchowski started to research Wallace Frost to get more information about his background and style.

"I found one book where he was listed as a quintessential architect, along with Frank Lloyd Wright," she said.

Her living room has two recessed niches on both sides of the fireplace and a built-in bookcase on a sidewall. A timber piece — a common Frost design element — stretches across the width of the fireplace.

"Some of the timbers had come from the old mill pond," Watchowski said.

The Birmingham Historical Commission recently completed a videotape of the houses and the history of Wallace Frost. It will be available for viewing after city officials approve a Wallace Frost report next month.

"The copy is available at the (Baldwin Public) library," said Max Horton of the Birmingham Historical Commission. "The homeowners have been very enthusiastic about this entire process. And they like getting together to discuss the good and bad points of their houses."

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92
page 2 of 2

Tie that binds

'Wally' signature puts Frost homes in a class of their own

By Helen Niemiec
staff writer

Nearly a decade before the Great Depression, architect Wallace Frost envisioned a house that would emphasize living rooms, inviting entry halls and fireplaces.

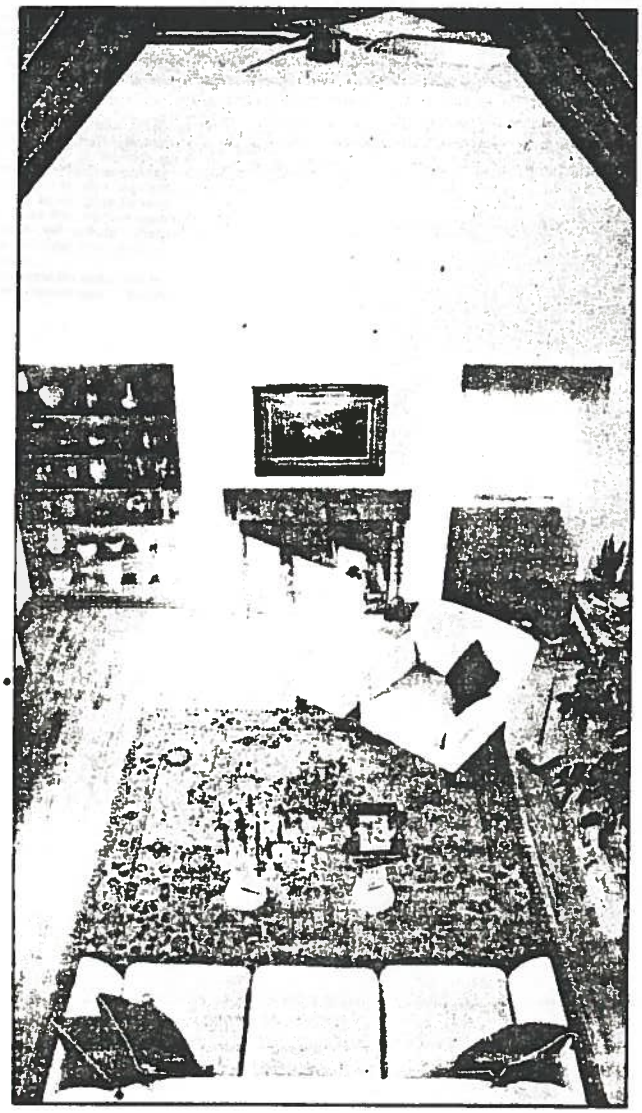
At the same time, Frost's kitchens were small and ceilings outside the living room were rather low.

Owners of the "Wallies" say the houses are mixed blessings when it comes to decorating, but they have a personality unique from other houses.

The affection homeowners have for the Wallace Frost creations has started to snowball into a quasi-neighborhood association. Though there are 39 houses scattered throughout Birmingham, the "Wallace Frost, architect" signature on the original plans is the tie that binds.

The 39 Wallace Frost-designed houses in Birmingham are getting an extra measure of attention, as the historic design and review committee nears its goal of presenting certificates of authenticity to each owner.

The homeowners are not seeking an official historical designation. That type of designation would require that homeowners seek approval from the historic district and design review commission before any interior or exterior improvements are made.



A "window" in a second story room affords a view of a typical Wallace Frost house — high ceilings, timber beams and built-in shelves. Owner Randi Watchowski calls the layout "cozy" and "definitely something special."

THE HOUSES, built between 1921 and 1951, generally are clustered on streets in Quarton Lake Estates and Poppleton Park, though the last Wallace Frost house was built on Northlawn.

The Uniontown, Pa., native attended the University of Pennsylvania's school of architecture, leaving in 1917 after three years of study because of World War I.

During the war, he served in the construction division of the military aviation section in Washington and in 1919 he settled in Birmingham and worked for the noted Albert Kahn architectural firm in Detroit.

The first Wallace Frost house was built on Tooting Lane in 1921. Frost built the house for himself and his wife, Grace. Even the first house caused ripples in the architectural community, as it was the first residence made of cement block.

"WALLIES" ARE are divided in look, with more traditional looks in houses built before Frost's extended stay in California in the late 1930s. Houses built in the 1940s and early '50s are more contemporary looking.

"The early houses have steep roofs and a French look. There are some Dutch colonials and a few remiscinent of American colonials, though those are rare," explained Max Horton of the Birmingham Historical Board.

"After his trip to California, he picked up on the style there. The houses built after had much flatter roofs and floor to ceiling windows. The brickwork and detailing in the early homes carried over to the later ones as well," Horton said.

Randi Williams Watchowski, a Frost house owner, said the uniqueness of his designs rates Frost as one of the area's premier architects.

Please turn to Page 6

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92
page 1 of 3

rost designed homes have a charm all their own

inued from Page 3

IE DESERVES recognition," she ained. "His homes have beautiharacteristics."

y planner Patricia McCullough mpiling all information on Frost ıis houses so there is a complete ry available.

report will be given to the Birham City Commission, which ately will decide how the Frost s are recognized.

e goal of the report, McCul- said, is twofold; first, to identi- recognize Wallace Frost as a icant person in Birmingham y and, second, to identify those ngham houses that Frost de- l.

cause of his popularity in the 920s and early '30s, his design ere mimicked in other ," McCullough explained. "But terior holds the key. You can tell a Frost house when you walk into one — he loved big spaces, big living rooms and big dining rooms. He was very much into the living area."

The historical group has tried for more than two years now to have the Frost houses recognized, though Horton explained that interest in the project "has snowballed" in the last three or four months.

THE HISTORIC Plan and Review Board held a special meeting in mid-January, trying to get together as many Frost homeowners as possible. Despite the foot of snow that had fallen the day before, about 30 made it to the session. The two-hour meeting featured the owners talking about the particular characteristics of their houses.

"It's nice to see the interaction between the homeowners," McCullough said.

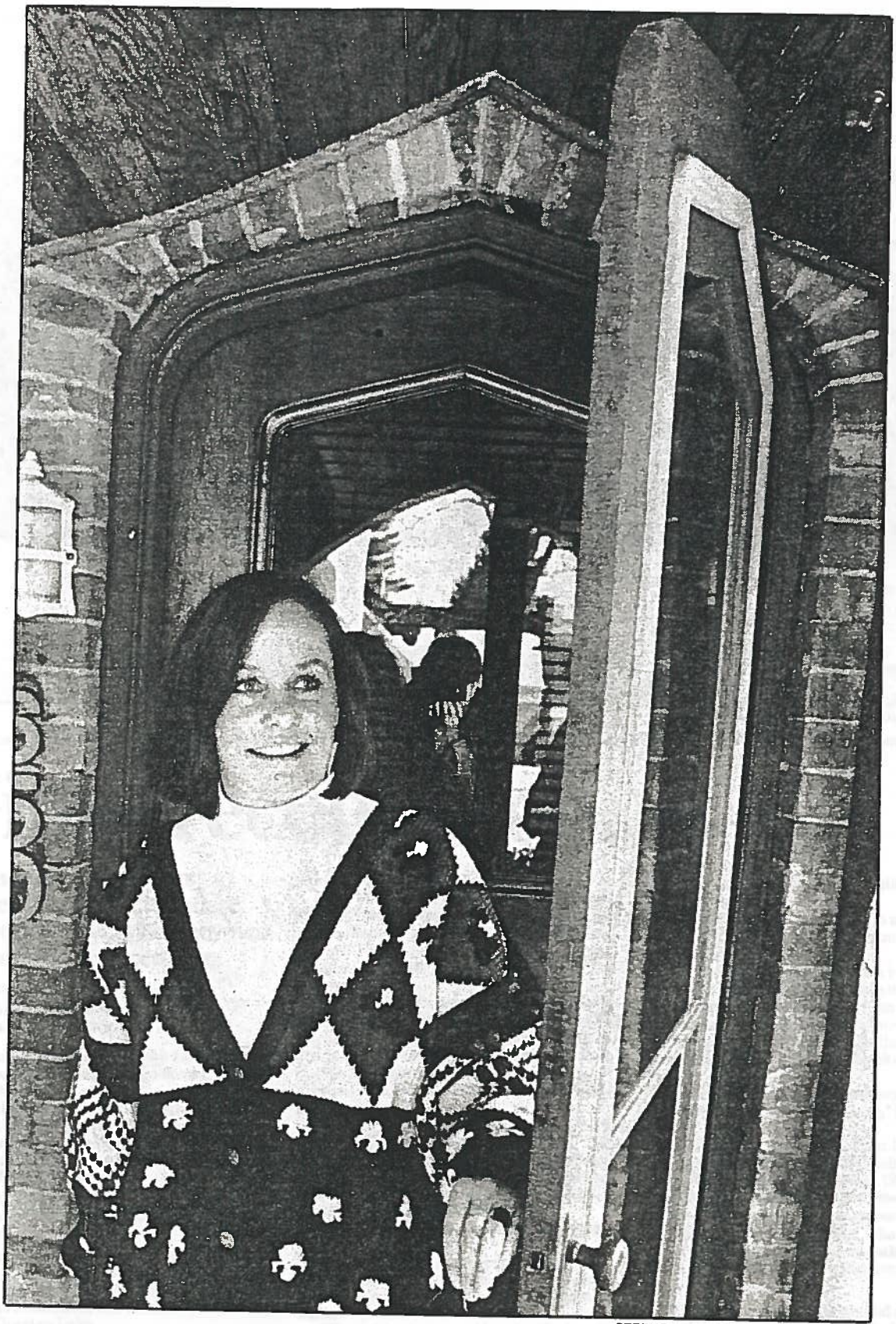
The influence of Wallace Frost isn't confined to Birmingham houses. There are approximately 25 other Frost-designed houses in Bloomfield Township and Bloomfield Hills. Outside of the immediate area, there are two "Wallys" in Detroit's Palmer Park and Indian Village, and a number in Colorado and California.

Several wealthy families were taken by the Frost creations and commissioned family houses by the Birmingham architect. He designed homes for Bruce Anderson (son of R.E. Olds) near Lansing, and the Powers family in Ann Arbor, of University Microfilms fame.

The Village Players of Birmingham building also is a Frost design. He also designed the original Forest Lake Country Club in Bloomfield Township.

The two structures were built in the mid-1920s and both have been enlarged from the original design.

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92
page 2 of 3



STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Randi Watchowski stands in the doorway of her front entrance. The Gothic-styled entry sports not only a cedar covered entrance but also a Gothic-shaped door as well.

Birmingham Eccentric 1/30/92
page 3 of 3

MICHAEL S. GREEN/The Detroit News

"His homes are domiciles. . . . Every day I find something new to enjoy," said Marshall Fredericks, who lives in this Frost home.

Final recognition, at last

Unique: City honors the late architect Wallace Frost by giving homeowners certificates of pedigree.

By Rebecca Powers
THE DETROIT NEWS

Architect Wallace Frost, who put his trademark touch on 39 Birmingham homes, is finally getting his due.

For the past year, the Birmingham Historic District and Design Review Commission has been studying the residential works of Frost, documenting the various design influences during his 42-year career.

Next month, the city will present owners with a certificate verifying the Frost pedigree of their homes.

"Frost homes are different than the houses going up now that are just so many boxes transferred to plywood," said Birmingham sculptor Marshall Fredericks, who lives in a Frost home beside Quarton Lake.

"His homes are domiciles. You get attached to them. Every day I find something new to enjoy."

Because Frost studied at the University of Pennsylvania under Paul Philippe Cret, his early design influence was French.

Frost was brought to Detroit in the 1920s by Albert Kahn, who designed several notable Detroit landmarks, including the Fisher Building.

Early Frost houses, circa 1925, have a farm colonial look. Later, the French influence from Cret appeared.

In the mid-1930s, after spending time in California during the Depression, Frost returned to Michigan and, until his death in 1962, built several homes with a Spanish contemporary look.

The architect's granddaughter, Hanah Frost, lives in one of the Birmingham contemporaries.

"I was in this house at ages 6 and 7, and it has effected my dreams ever since," she said. "I have the most amazing sort of spaces in my dreams."

In her home, the spaces include 14-foot-high ceilings, a curved glass wall and a curved staircase at the center of the house.

She described Frost's homes as exhibiting joy a of design.

That pleasure of architecture is evident in Fredericks' house where a hidden spiral staircase leads from the living room to the master suite.

"The original owner told me he liked to slip down into the living room and read in his pajamas," said Fredericks, who has lived in the home for 40 years.

There are other eccentricities.

"Frost doorways are not just rectangles," Fredericks said. "He seemed to be able to individualize everything."

Bruce Brooks, who once lived in a Frost home on Wimbelton in Birmingham, helped the city compile background on Frost.

"He had a way of presenting the house so that when you entered it, the space was confining. Then the rooms opened up from there."

Other signature Frost details included peaked roof lines, detailing under the eaves and changing from brick to cinder block at the corners.

"He used yellow pine on the floors, alternating seven- and nine-inch planking," Brooks said.

While living in California, Frost built a home now owned by conductor Zubin Mehta, Brooks said. That home was featured in a 1985 issue of Architectural Digest, which described the house as reminiscent of a Provencal manor.

Frost's only child, Jon Frost, who is a rancher in Pueblo, Colo., describes his father as a "kind person who was somewhat arrogant in his ideas of architecture.

"He and Frank Lloyd Wright did a lot of arguing," the younger Frost said. "He felt Mr. Wright did too much advertising of himself.

"Another thing that galled him was when someone came in and wanted him to build a home. He said a house is something you build. A home is something your family creates."

The Detroit News 12/22/91
page 1 of 1

Tour stars 'little house' for big need

By LINDA LaMARRE
News Staff Writer

"Why can't people live as informally in the city as they can in the north woods?"

"They can."

"I'm glad, because that's what I want to do."

That exchange — or something like it — occurred 39 years ago between Irene Murphy and architect Wallace Frost.

As clearly as Mrs. Murphy can recall, it amounted to the sum total of the specifications she gave Frost, who now is deceased, for the design of her home.

ACCORDING TO THE Detroit chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Mrs. Murphy's house, located in Birmingham, probably represents the "first serious modern residential design" by a Detroit-area architect.

As such, the institute is featuring her house and five others on its first architects' house tour from noon to 5 p.m. next Sunday.

Mrs. Murphy says that Frost looked upon her house as a "guinea pig," a challenge to see how much space and romance could be achieved in a little house.

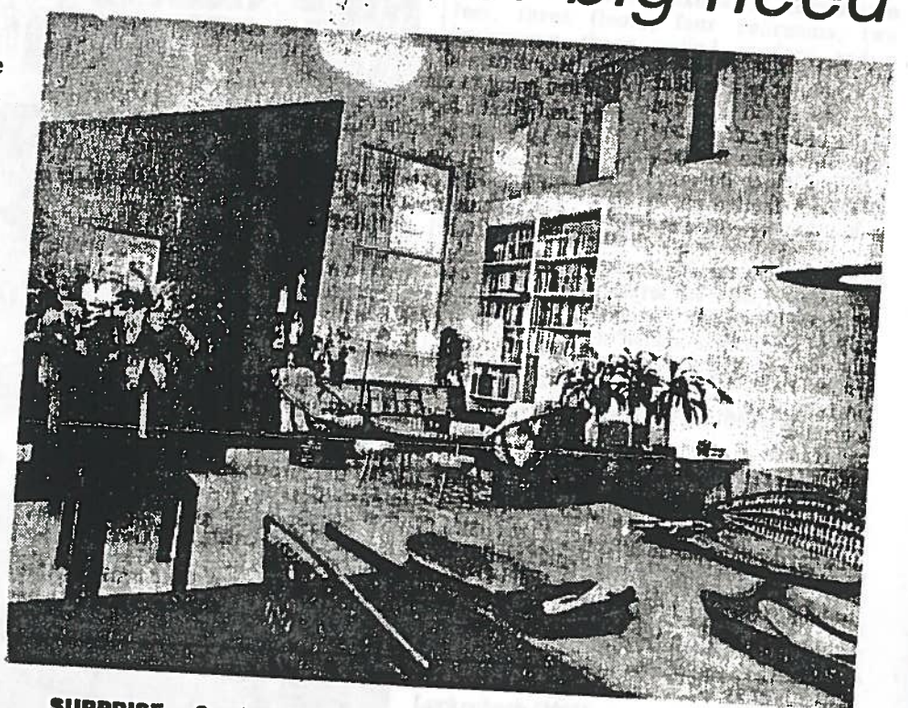
The experiment has proved successful. From the time Mrs. Murphy, her young daughter, sister, housekeeper and housekeeper's grandaughter moved into it in 1940, it has met a variety of needs.

"HE PROVIDED secret places my daughter enjoyed as a young girl and teen, endless nooks for hobbies, so you don't have to spread everything on the dining table, and little places for sewing, writing and business, so you don't have to clean up every night," she says.

Mrs. Murphy's demands on a living space are many.

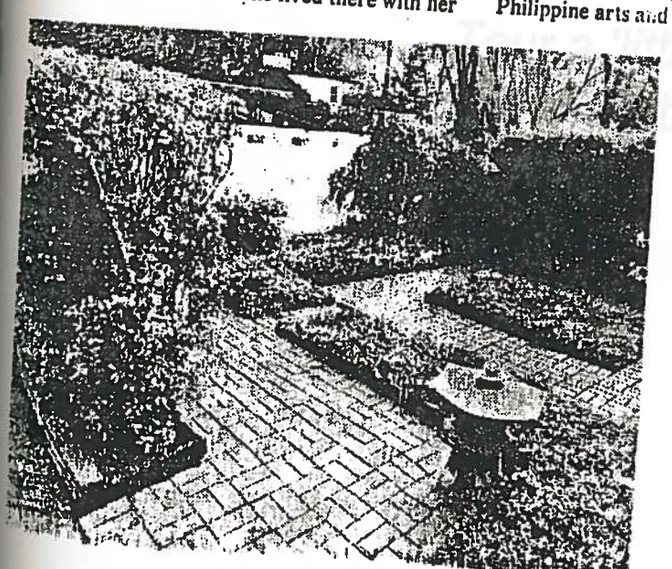
The house had to accommodate art, collections and the furniture she acquired in Manila during the time she lived there with her brother-in-law, Frank Murphy, governor-general to the Philippines from 1933-35 and Michigan Governor from 1937–38.

Mrs. Murphy, who was widowed in 1936, was later appointed social affairs officer by the United Nations and, with government funding, worked with Cranbrook artists in developing Philippine arts and crafts for export.



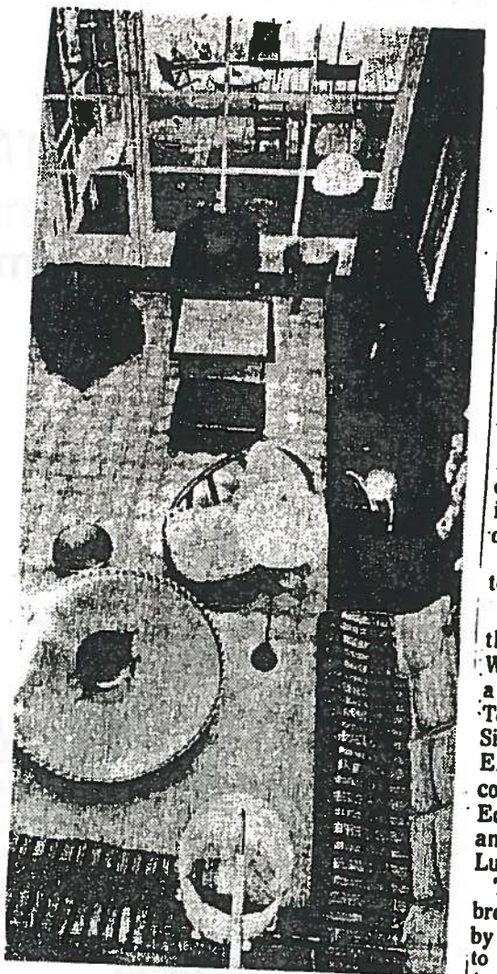
BY DUANE E. BELANGER OF TH

SURPRISE — Spacious, two-story high living room extending off small, low-ceiling entry foyer is among architectural "surprises" employed by late architect Wallace Frost. Rice paper temple lanterns between shoji screens light balcony above bookcases.



THE HOUSE ALSO has provided office space for the import/wholesale business, dealing largely in Philippine-made goods, she has operated for 24 years, for her work as University of Michigan regent (she is now a regent emeritus), and for her writings and those of her sister, Helen Ellis, a retired

Continued on Page 5D



BY DUANE E. BELANGER OF THE NEWS

OVERVIEW — The living room (as seen from balcony). Two-level deck addition beyond window was designed by Finnish architect Olav Hammarstrom.

Tour a 'little house' made for big needs

Detroit librarian and expert on Michigan during the Civil War.

It looks from the approach like a one-room garage home, but visitors will be surprised to learn it contains approximately 2,000 square feet, three floors, four bedrooms, two bathrooms, three walled gardens and a partially covered, two-level deck on a lot just 50 by 120 feet.

The lot, with three others containing Frost-designed homes, is located at the end of a secluded Birmingham lane where trees, shrubbery and ground plantings create pleasant vistas and all the privacy of a trophical rain forest.

"He told me to get as little land as you can as long as you can control the view," says Mrs. Murphy. "He told me to build your house all over the land, with 'human dimensions,' so that it doesn't look like you couldn't go out, walk over and touch something.

"It's just the kind of house that people want today."

OTHER ARCHITECTS' homes on tour are the Affleck house designed by Frank Lloyd Wright in 1941, located in Bloomfield Hills and a gift this year to Lawrence Institute of Technology; private residences designed by Sigmund Blum (1971) in Franklin and Peter Else (1970) in Bloomfield Township; a contemporary addition to a traditional home by Ed and Betty-Lee Francis (1974) in Franklin and a Birmingham cluster house by Carl Luckenbach (1962).

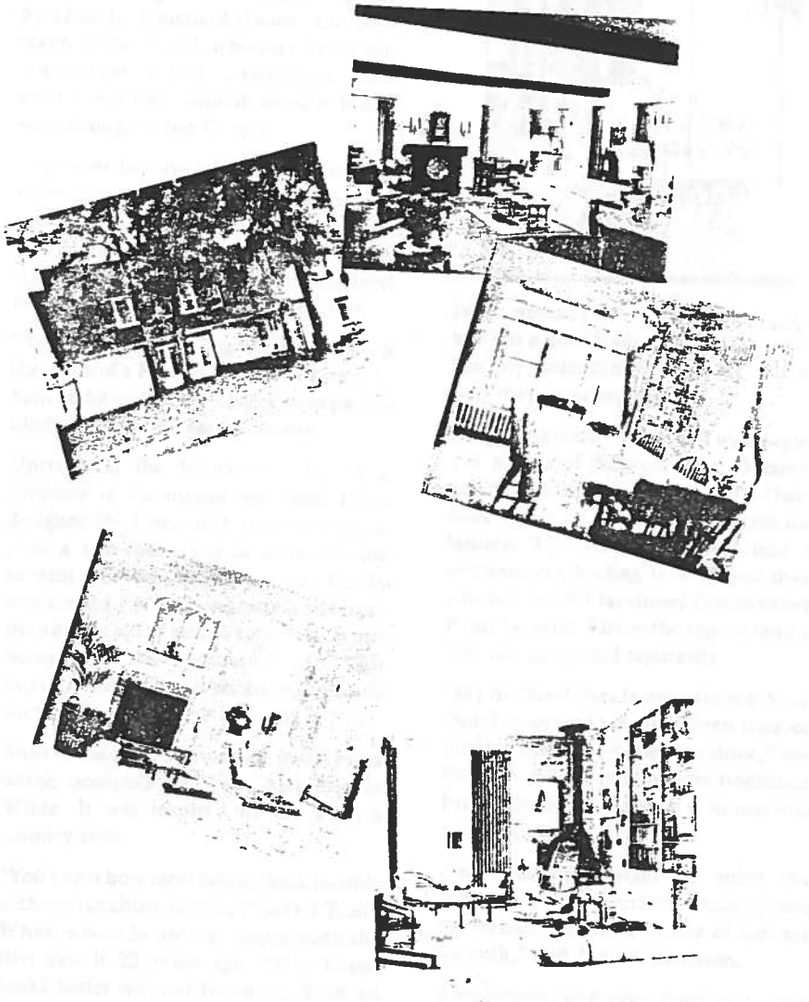
Tickets are $7.50 and include a map and brochure. A bus ticket is $3. Both are available by sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Detroit chapter, American Institute Architects, Beaubien House, 553 Eas Jefferson, Detroit 48226, or by phone at 965-4100.

On tour day, tickets may be purchased at the Great American Building Concourse, 280 North Woodward (at Oakland) in Birmingham. Children under 12 will not be admitted, nor are cameras permitted.

EARLY or LATE, Frost Houses are Warm and Charming

by Julie Candler

Photo of architect Wallace Frost, courtesy of Frost family.



Design elements of some Frost homes. Photos courtesy of homeowners. Mark Arpin photographer.

Tucked in among the trees and greenery of Brimingham, sometimes down lanes hardly anyone knows are there, are about 50 houses that are different from the rest. They are architectural gems, so full of charm and personality that anyone who knows about architect Wallace Frost can recognize them as his work.

From the '20s until his death in 1962, Frost designed houses that nestle into their sites as if nature had intended it that way. The architect once said that his goal was to achieve "a feeling of joy." Occupants of his houses say he succeeded.

Connie Bouchard and his wife, Helen, call their house "Wallace Frost #1." Bruce Brooks, Birmingham resident who has researched the Frost works, thinks it is the only one inspired by an English yeoman's cottage. Most of Frost's early houses borrowed from French country residences.

Frost built the Bouchard house, at 576 Tooting Lane in Birmingham, for himself and his wife in 1922. It was the house her husband liked the best, Grace Frost once told Bouchard.

"This was the first house to be built in the Midwest of cement blocks," says Bouchard, referring to the architect's frequent use of the white-painted blocks.

There's nothing symmetrical about this house's low rectangular exterior. Stone steps descend from the sidewalk toward the front door. To a visitor's left is a long section that houses the living room, with dormer windows on the roof above it. To the right of the stone walk, a smaller section of house extends toward the street. It contains the entrance foyer and a small den.

The front door is at right angles to the house. Beside it is a white-painted, wooden bench. Another section to the right of the entrance foyer and den contains the kitchen and a two-car garage (originally one-car).

"We absolutely love the cross-shaped floor plan of this house," says Bouchard, who has lived in it 40 years. "You don't have to go through any other room to get to a room."

Like many Frost houses, the far wall of the big living room (22 feet x 34 feet) features a large fireplace. In some of the structures, fireplaces are massive. Windows are the casement type and sectioned. A long bay window looks out on Tooting Lane and another big window on the opposite side makes the room part of the woodsy scene behind the house.

"He seemed to do as much as he could to use light," says George E. Eads, who once lived in a Frost house at 691 Pilgrim. "Winters are dark. In all the Frost houses I have seen he built large windows on two sides of the living room. The living rooms are just absolutely beautiful."

Another feature of Frost houses, including the Bouchards', is massive wooden ceiling beams. They are 12-inch by 12-inch, Bouchard claims, and were taken from an old schooner being dismantled on the Detroit riverfront. Other owners say their similar wooden beams were brought from Oregon.

The room displays other Frost characteristics: recessed windows on either side of the fireplace, elegant woodwork, including floor-to-ceiling bookshelves along the wall near the entrance, and a lower level requiring a step down from the foyer.

"You get a great feeling when you go up the stairs of a Frost house," says Birmingham architect George Zonars, who particularly admires the earlier houses.

Upstairs at the Bouchards', there's a fireplace in the master bedroom. Frost designed the house with three bedrooms plus a two-room live-in suite for the servant. (In the '20s nearly every family had a maid.) A back stairway leads from the kitchen to the maid's suite, which was occupied by the Bouchards' sons. "Our boys liked those stairs because they could sneak out without our knowing it."

Most of the same features are in the Frost house occupied by Trudy and George White. It was inspired by the French country style.

"You know how most houses look terrible without furniture in them?" asked Trudy White, whose house was empty when she first saw it 22 years ago. "This house looks better without furniture. With all the nice architectural details, it doesn't need furniture."

Her husband adds, "You don't get bored with this house."

Trudy White agrees. "You go away and come back and you always feel like you are seeing home for the first time and you think what a really unique house this is."

The Whites' beamed living room is dominated by a huge copper-hooded fireplace. As he did with his first house, Frost made interesting use of levels to root the Whites' place onto its lot. There's a step down into the living room, and another into the kitchen. Two wide doorways off the Whites' living room are arched, another Frost signature.

In the upstairs hall, another Frost trademark is a door leading onto a tiny railed balcony, intended for shaking out the dust mop or airing bedding.

The dining room floor is laid with pegged oak planks of different sizes. Outside a front door displaying finely-crafted hardware hangs a handsome wrought-iron lantern. The thick door opens into an entranceway leading to a second door, which is the old-fashioned Dutch variety Frost favored. Either the top or bottom half can be opened separately.

"My husband likes to open the top of our Dutch door and tell Halloween trick-or-treaters that they broke our door," says Pat Coe, who lives in a more traditional Frost house with a Dutch Colonial look at 967 Rivenoak.

Coe's husband caught the spirit that Wallace Frost deliberately designed into the houses. "It was a feeling of fun and warmth," said John Richardson.

Richardson, who once lived in a Frost design at 715 Wimbleton, became so enthusiastic that he began assembling material for a book about the architect. Bruce Brooks, former occupant of a Frost, collaborated with Richardson. Brooks can show you his photographs of every one of the architect's designs he has been able to discover.

Altogether, Brooks knows of 90 Frost designs around the country. A few are in Grosse Pointe Park.

It's not uncommon for the houses to sell even before the real estate company gets a call. Before the Brookses found theirs, Leslie Brooks identified Frost houses and began giving owners her name on the back of a recipe card.

Owner John Richardson heard the brick and stone French Norman house at 244 Wimbleton might be sold and called Leslie and Bruce Brooks. The Brookses made an appointment. They stepped into the foyer, took one look at the living room and bought the house.

"Wallace Frost was a charming, shy person, who loved people," Richardson told The Birmingham Historical Society in 1981.

Frost was born in 1892 in Uniontown, Pennsylvania and studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. His first job was as a civilian with the U.S. Army in Washington, D.C. during World War I. He worked with the well-known architect, Albert Kahn.

After the war, Kahn persuaded him to join his Detroit firm. Frost's job included work on projects such as portions of the General Motors Building.

Frost's great interest was in country homes, so he resigned and set up his own office in Birmingham in 1925. "He was sensitive to tradition," Richardson said. "He studied houses in Europe and gleaned many ideas there."

"He was a cosmopolitan man who was well-traveled. Not many architects were at that time," says Brooks. "He was influenced by Spanish, Italian, French and English houses, and mixed things he liked."

In 1928 Frost built the house at 244 Wimbleton where the Brooks family once lived. "He and his wife intended to live there," says Bruce Brooks. "By the time

they were ready to move in, the depression hit. The house remained vacant until about 1933."

Connie Bouchard says Frost also lost the house on Tooting Lane. "The bank auctioned it off for about $3500," claims Bouchard. "Nobody could keep anything then."

That was when the Frosts went to live in Florence and toured and studied more houses, says Brooks. "You could live inexpensively in Europe."

When he came back to the Detroit area, there was no work, so he went to California and worked there until 1938.

"He came under the California Spanish influence and started to do contemporary houses when he returned here," says Brooks.

One of the contemporaries belongs to Edwin W. Deer, DDS, and his wife, Jean. It shows the California ranch influence, all on one floor except for a guest suite over the garage.

Dr. Deer says it was built in 1946 and was the first of the contemporaries here. The house was a style all its own, with a modern look that seems timeless.

Instead of big sectional bay windows of the earlier period, the Deer house was unbroken panes of floor-to-ceiling picture windows looking out on the backyard pool. In place of a separate dining room, a section of the big L-shaped living room serves that purpose. The Deer residence has a large fireplace in the living room and a smaller one in the master bedroom.

Says Dr. Deer, "We wouldn't want to live anywhere else. Jean says the only way she's going to get out of here is when they wheel her out."

Another of the Frost structures in Birmingham is the playhouse of The Village Players at 752 Chestnut, where Frost was a member. The original entrance is concealed by the addition of a lobby. But the huge fireplace and the arched door to the theatre are among the telltale Frost signs.

John Richardson didn't write the book about Frost. After five years in Birmingham, he was transferred back to the West Coast. Bruce Brooks remains the community's authority. Whenever there's doubt about the authenticity of a Frost house, they call in Brooks. "The houses are dramatic and dynamic. It's an identifiable style that reads so well you can pick it up," he says. He knows all the clues to look for.

Neither Brooks nor Richardson knew Wallace Frost. They became close friends with Grace Frost, a witty and charming woman who died two years ago. She helped them find and identify many of her husband's designs.

Once Brooks drove her by a house whose owners claimed a Frost heritage. Mrs. Frost looked and said, "No way that was done by him."

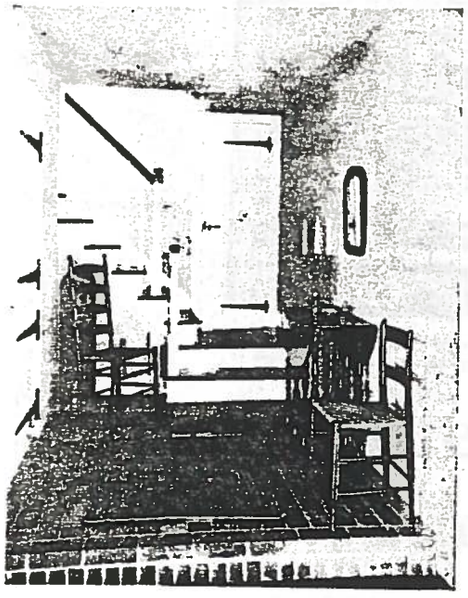
"He was a stickler for detail," says Brooks. "If you go inside there are some really telltale signs. He used the same suppliers and fixtures a lot. He was very precise in providing a quality and a feeling that makes the people in a house think about the architect and realize that he must have been a special person.

"I'm sorry," he says, "that I never knew the man." ■

The House of Frederick E. Good

Buckingham Road Birmingham

Wallace Frost, Architect

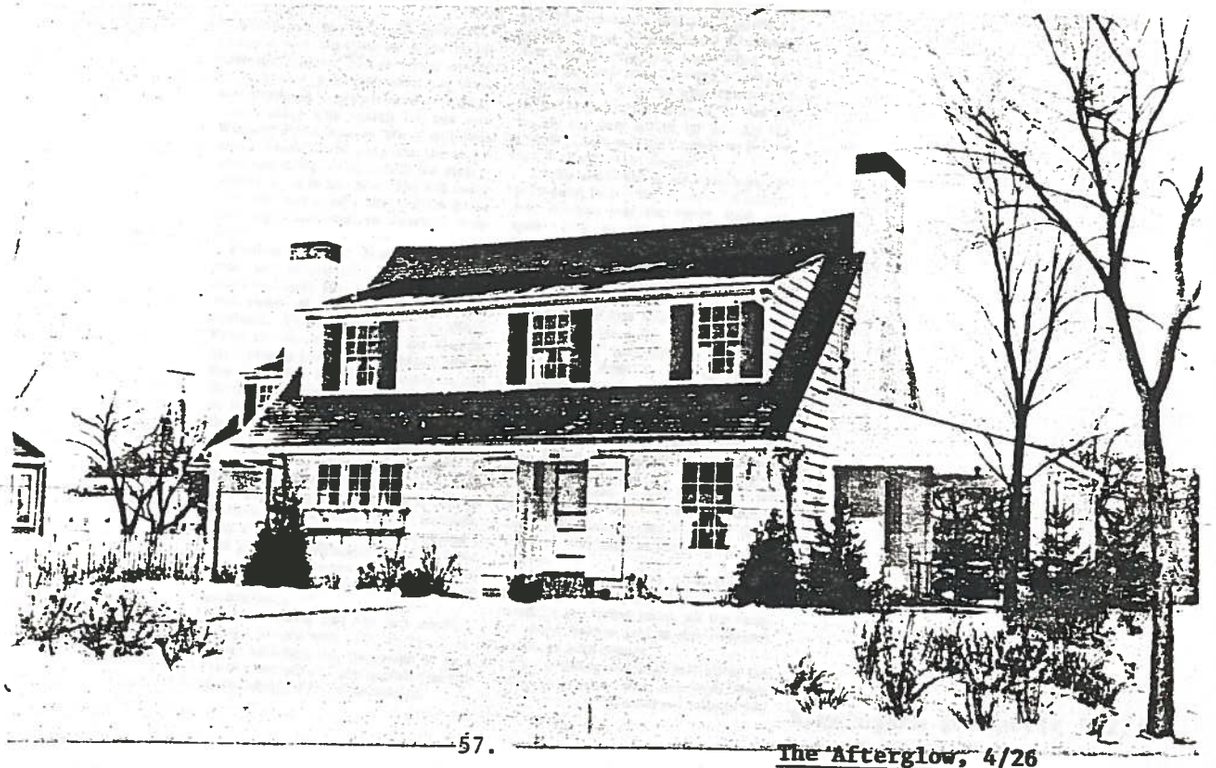


Above: Although the rooms are rather small they are given the effect of spaciousness by the wide openings between. The living-room and dining-room occupy the back of the house overlooking the garden.

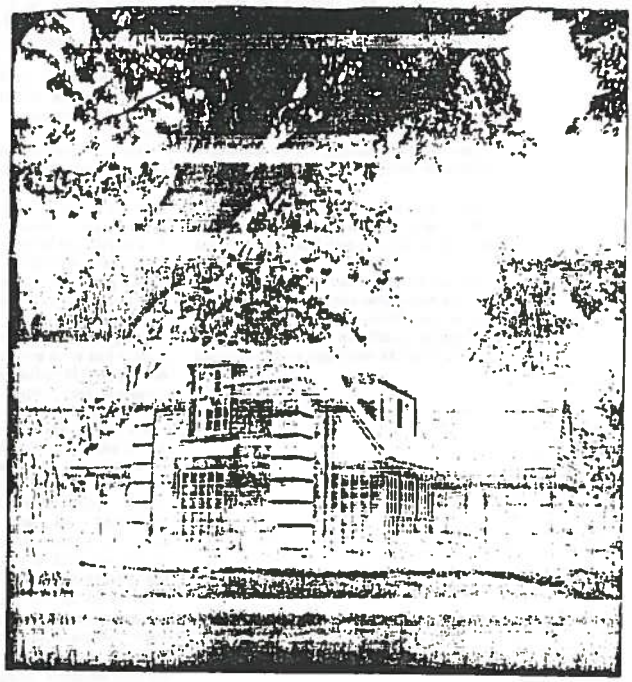
Photographs by T. Ellison

Left: This delightful little entrance hall sets the character of the house with its white board doors, iron hinges and fixtures and scrubbed brick floor. The front door opens in sections.

Below: The white clapboard house is Dutch colonial in type. Note the deeply recessed front door with its outer storm door and brick steps. Behind the open porch is a charming small sunken garden.



"LONG SEARCH ENDS HAPPILY"



A heavy growth of ivy had completely covered the beautiful exterior detailing of this home designed by Wallace Frost.

Architect's name sold the house

Story: CORINNE ABATT
Photos: DICK KELLEY

Would you buy a house purely because it was designed by a particular architect? Many people would probably say no — price, location, size, style and condition would all have priority.

But those who search for and find Wallace Frost houses are a different breed. There's a magic about the architect who designed houses in the metropolitan area in the late '20s and early '30s that has a lure that equals great paintings, diamonds or Oriental treasures.

Finding a Frost home isn't easy; most sell before they ever go on the market. Leslie Brooks of Birmingham was aware of that when she and her husband, Bruce, used to talk about Frost in reverent tones. In her search, Mrs. Brooks took the most direct route. She identified the Frost homes in the Birmingham area in which she wanted to live and further refined her list to the ones she figured she and her husband could afford. Then she contacted the owners directly although none of the homes were for sale.

"I would stop by and leave my name on the back of a recipe card," she said. "My friends used to tease me saying I was getting a reputation as that crazy lady who was always putting messages on the back of a card that said 'from the kitchen of.'"

But she never had any luck contacting the people who lived at 244 Wimbleton although this happened to be a Frost home she and her husband particularly admired from the outside.

SHE DID LEAVE a card with another Frost home owner, John Richardson, and when he heard that 244 Wimbleton might be sold, he called the Brookses. She said Richardson understood her quest, he had gone through a similar hunt himself. When he was transferred to this area from California, he told his family the only solace for leaving the Pacific Coast sunshine would be to live in a Wallace Frost home.

Leslie and Bruce Brooks made an appointment to see the home on Wimbleton, stepped into the foyer, took one quick look at the living room and bought the house. They moved in last December.

No second thoughts — and no regrets.

"I saw that bay window in the living room and I knew my grand piano belonged there," Mrs. Brooks said. "Every morning when we get up we find something else to enjoy — it's like living in a dream."

All of the elements that characterize Frost homes of that period when he was taking his inspiration from European architecture — particularly French Norman — are present in the Brooks' home — fine woods, natural materials, many levels, imported hardware — the best of everything, plus charm.

All the dormers are insulated. The attic is plastered, all floors are hardwood. In the living room, all the natural wood beams around the fireplace are faced with copper.

One pleasing touch is that all of the brass hardware was imported from

(Continued on page 5A)

Birmingham Eccentric 9/27/79
page 1 of 2

"FROST HOME ADAPTS TO MODERN LIVING"

...tinued from page 3A)

England — and in true Gilbert and Sullivan style, the couple have polished up the handle of the big front door — and many other doors as well.

When they took up the living room carpeting, they found an extra wide perfectly matched pine-board floor. The dining room floor is oak. Natural brick is used in the entryway. To add to the French Norman look, the architect used natural wood beams in the foyer. An arched doorway with a paneled cherry wood door leads down several steps from the foyer to the kitchen. A circular stairway leads from the foyer to the upstairs, and this one has a vaulted ceiling, another detail characteristic of Frost.

Mrs. Brooks said the rough plaster walls in the downstairs area are still in excellent condition after 52 years with only a few tiny cracks. Bay windows were another typical Frost detail and this home has one in the living room and another in the dining room along with other windows set deep enough for window seats.

WHILE THE basic structure was in excellent shape and had remained unaltered through the years, the minute the Brooks moved into the home, their efforts went into bringing the home back to as close to its original shape as possible. All carpeting was removed to expose the natural wood floors. All drapes were taken down from the paned glass windows and all paint removed from the solid wood doors.

One of the most tiring jobs and one that elicited pro and con comments was to take 50 years growth of ivy from the brick exterior. But this wasn't the desirable house ivy; this type was a natural hiding place for mice and other small undesirable wildlife.

As the heavy vines came down, the structural details of the outside were uncovered to show the natural stone and brick patterns.

The Brookses made little attempt to maintain pure period furnishings, except in the master bedroom. Longtime antique collectors, they gathered a pleasing assortment of things they liked.

"We bought most of them as junk and my husband refinished them," Mrs. Brooks said.

They were sure, however, that they wanted a master bedroom that was middle or late 19th century, all the way. The Victorian bedroom set was acquired at an estate sale. It had been stored in a barn and was badly water damaged before Bruce Brooks took over and turned it into a beautiful set with a gleaming finish.

Mrs. Brooks covered the master bedroom walls with a mauve and brown print material, something she swears she'll never use for wallcovering again (too difficult to hang), and made curtains and pillows to match. When they bought the bed, they guessed the headboard would fit in the master bedroom with little room to spare. In actual fact, the ceilings are hip and there is but one place where the bed fits, but that's where they hoped it would go anyway.

Mrs. Brooks sat on the enclosed porch, looked through the doorway to the living room and dining room and said, "The thing that is so remarkable to me about Frost is that he could design a house 52 years ago that is so viable for a family now. With very few structural changes — he saw it all 50 years ago."

THE NATURAL woods of the antiques which Bruce Brooks refinished, the splashes of color in the Oriental style rugs which highlight the natural wood floors, the live plants and the touches of another era in the brass accessories, Tiffany-style lamps and handwoven pillows all make this home one that is full of natural light and natural materials, sparked by touches of vibrant color.

Two daughters, Becky and Lisa, have what amounts to a separate suite of bedrooms on the second floor connected by a bathroom, and there is ample room for guests.

Bruce Brooks just completed laying a herringbone pattern wood floor in the kitchen and now the major tasks are almost complete.

He, a designer for General Motors, and his wife, a pianist and piano teacher, can begin to relax. All of their work over the past nine months to bring the home to prime condition has paid off.

Birmingham Eccentric 9/27/79
page 2 of 2

'23 —— HOW VILLAGE PLAYERS BEGAN —— '83

"Let's give a show, kids! My uncle has a barn." The line, immortalized in the ancient Mickey Rooney-Judy Garland movies, was (and is) what raised the curtain on The Village Players of Birmingham in 1923. Trouping with their dream, Players have mounted some 400 productions — around 900 performances, with never a dark house.

They trouped without a theater to begin with, with home-made tools of their craft, with ice forming under the leaky doors; with a boom, a depression, a war. They triumphed and, occasionally, they bombed, but they never let go of the dream.

Jack Gafill (deceased) a high school student in 1922, first proposed the formation of a dramatic group in the tiny village of Birmingham. Sixteen fellow citizens, and charter Players thereby, considered and kindled and in February of 1923, they organized as The Village Players, a private amateur theatrical club. Not a community theater — their stated purpose: "To produce at intervals, small plays which have been worked out on an artistic standard, and not with a view of financial benefit."

The Charter Players quickly enrolled a number of interested others on their roster, and elected Loren Robinson president. Their purpose went into the by-laws: " . . . shall be to produce plays, study the drama, play direction, costuming and scenery design, to encourage the writing of plays and to promote interest in the drama."

Curtains parted, for the first time ever on the Players' show, in spring of 1923. *"The Maker of Dreams,"* described as "a one-act Pierrot fantasy" by author Oliphant Downs, had as actors, Rolfe Spinning, Caroline Reilly and Forbes Hascall. The original Birmingham Community House, a renovated farm house on the present site of the post office truck lot, was their Playhouse. Makeup and dressing rooms were across the street, in the living room of another Player, with cast and crews sprinting through the scant traffic of the era, to the theater.

Players huffed and puffed the pool table in the small main room into a corner, and strung wire from wall to wall to hang a sleazy black curtain. Scenery, constructed in the Robinson's basement, was of paper, tacked to wood frames. Lights were a row of tin dishpans reflecting bare bulbs.

But it was theater! Members and a few guests sat on floor cushions for the first few rows, on kindergarten chairs in the center of the house and on full-sized chairs at the back, simulating the usual ramp floor of a regular theater.

Next year (1924-26) Players built membership, audiences and play schedule. A one- (eventually two-) night public performance at the old Baldwin High School auditorium, under the loving and tireless sponsorship of Player Ruth (Mrs. Charles J.) Shain. They were a smash!

It was time to build the dream's muscle with money. The Players bought the present property on Chestnut Street to be within walking distance of most of the town. To build the Playhouse, they devised a system of five-year pledges, guaranteed by the signatures of those players who were local businessmen, to satisfy the old Birmingham National Bank. Architect and member, Wallace Frost, designed the building. Construction was by member Bob Tillotson, with materials provided by member Spud Simpson, both on a non-profit basis.

Special gifts were many and generous. Mr. and Mrs. Loren Stauch gave the maple floor for the auditorium; Bess (Mrs. Graham John) Graham the stage curtain, which served intil 1958 when the stage was widened. The Robinsons donated the curtain mechanism; the Zelner Dowlings the rope, rigging and overhead mechanisms; the Shains, the fireplace and fittings.

First performance in the present theater was given in November of 1926. Heaven for the theater nuts, with a backstage area designed by Robinson, one of whose status symbols was a card in the stagehands' union; real footlights, real costumes and makeup applied by Jake Hirschfield, who brought his professional crews out from Detroit until Players learned how to do it themselves.

Historic District Study Committee Priority List 2022

Rank	Project
1	Reinitiate the Heritage Home program • Purchase recognition plaques and certificates • Create an application • Re-evaluate guidelines
2	Update Wallace Frost Report
3	Audit designated historical homes and buildings • Evaluate historic plaque conditions – repair/replace • Update City information • Create detailed electronic database
4	Publish Eco City survey • Update photograph database
5*	Obtain a plaque for the Community House • Create detailed information database