

# Survey and Research Report

## On The Solomon and Shirley Levine House



**1. Name and location of the property:** The property known as the Solomon and Shirley Levine House is located at 2300 Cloister Drive in Charlotte, N.C.

**2. Name, address, and telephone number of the current owner of the property:**

Andrew V. Beary and wife, Carol G. Ambrose

2300 Cloister Drive

Charlotte, N.C. 28211

Telephone: 704-458-2516

**3. Representative photographs of the property:** This report contains representative photographs of the property.



**8. Documentation of why and in what ways the property meets the criteria for designation set forth in N.C.G.S 160A-400.5.**

**a. Special significance in terms of its history, architecture and/or cultural importance:** The Commission judges that the Solomon and Shirley Levine House possesses special significance in terms of Charlotte-Mecklenburg. The Commission bases its judgment on the following considerations:

- 1) The Solomon and Shirley Levine House is a striking example of Modernist style domestic architecture in the Cloisters, a neighborhood that exhibits sophisticated principles of landscape architecture and subdivision design.
- 2) The architectural firm of record for the Solomon and Shirley Levine House was Louis H. Asbury & Son, a father and son combination that had a significant impact upon the built environment of Charlotte and its environs doing the first three quarters of the twentieth century.
- 3) The designer of the Solomon and Shirley Levine House was Jack Orr Boyte, who during his association with Louis H. Asbury & Son, from 1952 until 1959, designed Modernist style homes for the firm but who subsequently specialized in restoration architecture.

**b. Integrity of design, setting, workmanship, materials, feeling and/or association:** The Commission contends that the architectural and physical description prepared by Stewart Gray demonstrates that Solomon and Shirley Levine House meets this criterion.

**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a "historic landmark." The appraised value of the building is \$237,200. The current appraised value of the 0.478 acres of land is \$150,000. The total appraised value of the property is \$387,400. The property is zoned Single Family. The Tax Parcel Number of the property is 183-092-19.

**10. Amount of Property Proposed for historic landmark designation.** The exterior of the building, the interior of the building, and the entire tax parcel.

**Date of Preparation of this Report:** December 3, 2007

## A Brief History Of The Solomon and Shirley Levine House

Dr. Dan L. Morrill



The Solomon and Shirley Levine House

The Solomon and Shirley Levine House was completed in 1957 as the home of Solomon Levine (1921 - ), an attorney, and his wife, Shirley. Solomon Levine, a native of New York City and graduate of the University of Illinois and Duke University Law School, moved to Charlotte in 1948. Shirley Levine was the driving force in convincing her husband to move to the Cloisters neighborhood from elsewhere in Charlotte. She was also primarily responsible for selecting the Modernist style for the house that the Levines erected on Cloister Drive.<sup>1</sup>

The Cloisters of Charlotte Inc., a real estate development firm, was established on September 15, 1952. It acquired a parcel of land to the immediate west of Providence Road on the southeastern edge of Charlotte on December 31, 1952, and announced shortly thereafter plans to fashion a sophisticated suburban residential neighborhood on the tract.<sup>2</sup> The *Charlotte Observer* reported on January 29, 1953, that grading of the land was already underway.<sup>3</sup> The developers of the Cloisters were responding to systemic changes in the residential market. There was an unprecedented need for

housing of all types in the years immediately following World War II, as hundreds of thousands of veterans returned to civilian life. In Charlotte the number of building permits increased from 194 in 1945 to 3046 in 1950.<sup>4</sup> The number of car registrations in the United States increased from 26 million in 1945 to 72 million in 1965, thereby greatly reducing the need for public transportation, especially for the affluent and the middle class.<sup>5</sup> Increasingly, those homeowners who could chose to reside on the outskirts of cities.

The Cloisters is one of Charlotte's best preserved examples of upscale suburban landscape planning executed in the mid-twentieth century, the other being Carmel Park.<sup>6</sup> From the outset the Cloisters was configured to be a secluded glen visited only by automobiles. The Cloisters of Charlotte, Inc. took its inspiration from the philosophy of designers such as Frank Lloyd Wright, John Nolen, Earle Sumner Draper, and the Olmsted Brothers, who taught that suburban street patterns should respect the contours of the land. "The use of curving streets produced subdivisions in which homes could be sited to attain maximum privacy or prominence, and have pleasant vistas of natural or naturalistic woods, sweeping lawns, or water features," write Sherry Joines Wyatt and Sarah Woodard in their post World War II survey report for the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.<sup>7</sup> The entranceway to the neighborhood from Providence Road meanders down a hillside to a small, man-made pond which forms the centerpiece of the development. Situated around the pond but facing Cloister Drive and adjoining curvilinear streets are single family homes on large, well-manicured lots. There are no sidewalks.

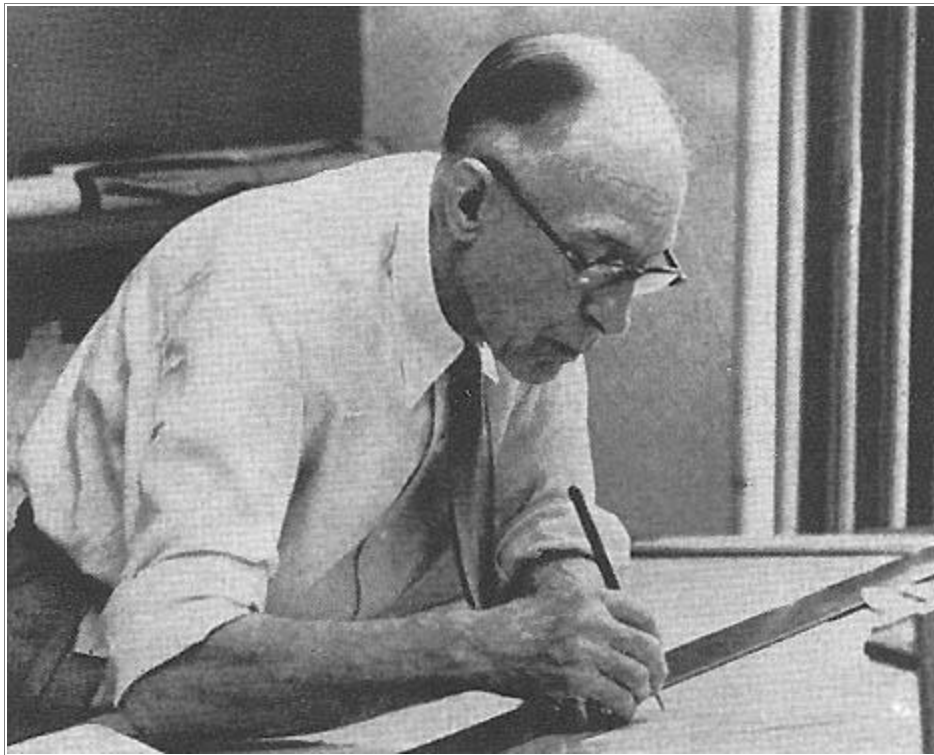


This home on Cloister Drive illustrates the nature of home sites.

The developers of the Cloisters were seeking to create what historian Robert Stern calls an "idealized alternative to conventional city living." The perception was widespread, writes Stern, "that the spread of the industrialized city was a threat to health and traditional morality."<sup>8</sup> On July 31, 1953, comprehensive deed restrictions were instituted to protect the sylvan appearance of the neighborhood. They regulated house size, height, and setback, stipulated that no more than one house could be erected per lot, and prohibited multi-family dwellings.<sup>9</sup> By such devices the developers hoped to foster "the ultimate goal of the subdivision, which was to live in a peaceful country setting, with as few urban references as possible," assert Wyatt and Woodard.<sup>10</sup>

The domiciles in the Cloisters fall most readily into two main categories. The majority are traditional in design, principally Colonial Revival style ranch houses. There is a smattering of contemporary style houses, the Solomon and Shirley Levine House being among them. The house is a striking example of mid-twentieth century Modernism and illustrates how architects who were principally known for revivalist buildings were able to accommodate themselves to changing, more diverse tastes in the housing market.

The architectural firm of record that designed the Solomon and Shirley Levine House was Louis H. Asbury & Son.<sup>11</sup> Louis Asbury (1877-1975) received his professional training in architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology after graduating from Trinity College (now Duke University) in 1900. Before establishing his Charlotte practice in 1908, Asbury was associated with the nationally known firm of Cram, Goodhue, and Ferguson, in either its New York City or Boston office. Asbury, who was joined by his son, Louis H. Asbury, Jr. (1912-1991), shortly after his son's graduation from North Carolina State College in 1939, had an extensive local and regional practice until his retirement in 1956.<sup>12</sup>



Louis H. Asbury

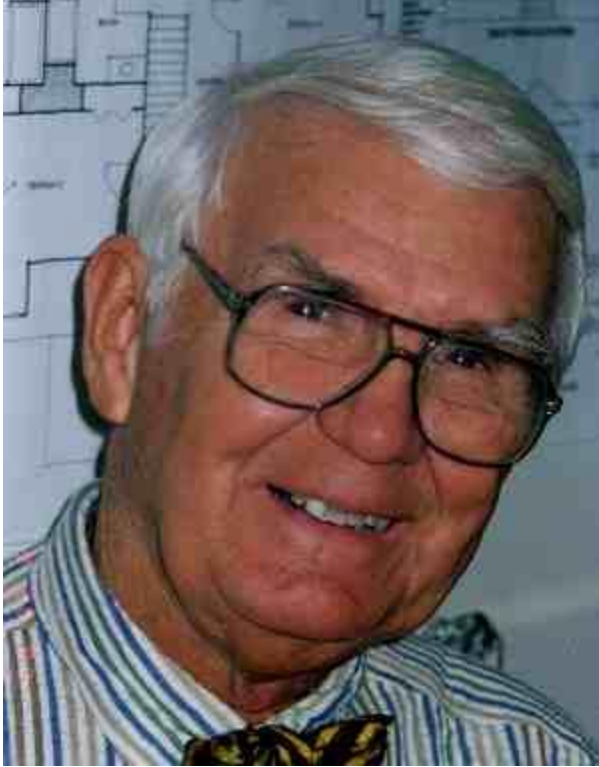
Louis H. Asbury and his son were both trained in the revivalist tradition and accordingly fashioned buildings which harkened to the past. Louis H. Asbury, for example, designed such notable local structures as the Classical Revival style Mecklenburg County Courthouse and the Gothic Revival style Myers Park Methodist Church.<sup>13</sup> Louis H. Asbury, Jr.'s preference for traditional architecture is illustrated by his design for the church he attended -- the Colonial Revival style St. Paul United Methodist Church on Dorchester Drive in the Sedgefield neighborhood.<sup>14</sup>



St. Paul United Methodist Church designed by Louis Asbury, Jr.

The years following World War Two witnessed a growing market for Modernist buildings, including residences. North Carolina had such notable advocates of contemporary design as A. Lawrence Kocher at the experimental Black Mountain College near Asheville and Henry Kamphoefner at the School of Design at North Carolina State College.<sup>15</sup> Louis H. Asbury and Louis H. Asbury, Jr. understood that they needed to bring someone into their firm who had formal training in Modernist design. Accordingly, in 1952 Louis H. Asbury & Son hired Jack Orr Boyte (1920-2005), who had earned a B. S. Degree in architecture from the Georgia Institute of Technology the previous year.<sup>16</sup>





Jack Orr Boyte

A native of Charlotte and graduate of Charlotte Central High School, Boyte served as an apprentice under Louis Asbury and Louis Asbury, Jr., from 1952 until 1959. He was the architect for the Solomon and Shirley Levine House.<sup>17</sup> The College of Architecture at Georgia Tech was deeply committed to Modernism and the design philosophy of the Bauhaus. Especially influential in this regard was Harvard-trained architect Paul M. Heffernan, who joined the Georgia Tech faculty in 1938.<sup>18</sup> One can reasonably assume that Boyte imbibed the design philosophy that Heffernan emphasized. According to Solomon Levine, Boyte's initial design for the Solomon and Shirley Levine House proposed constructing the house around an existing tree. The Levines vetoed the idea.<sup>19</sup>



Nieman House designed by Jack Orr Boyte

Boyte did design other Modernist houses in Charlotte. A striking example is the Nieman House at 1930 Cassamia Place.<sup>20</sup> Boyte established his own architectural firm in 1959 and thereafter became primarily committed to historic preservation, restoration architecture, and traditional design. This writer worked closely with Boyte for more than twenty years and only briefly heard him mention his past ventures into contemporary design. During a tour of the Nieman House in the mid-1990s Boyte was asked why he had fashioned such a contemporary style house. He answered: "I had to make a living."<sup>21</sup> The reasons for Boyte's abandonment of Modernism is a matter of conjecture. This writer can only report that Boyte spoke to him most passionately about the need to respect and preserve older buildings. Indeed, Boyte advanced the same argument in articles he regularly contributed to local newspapers.

[Click Here For Architectural And Physical Description](#)

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1. Interview of Solomon Levine by Bill Jeffers (October 27, 2007). Hereinafter cited as "Interview."

2. Mecklenburg County Record of Corporation Book 33, p. 539. Mecklenburg County Deed Book 1588, p. 385. The initial buyers of stock were F. A. McCleneghan, F. T. Miller, Jr., and Laura E. Horton.

3. *Charlotte Observer* (January 29, 1953)
4. Sherry Joines Wyatt and Sarah Woodard, "Final Report For The Post World War Two Survey" (<http://landmarkscommission.org/postww2survey.htm>)
5. G. Scott Thomas, *The United States of Suburbia. How The Suburbs Took Control Of America And What They Plan To Do With It* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1998), p. 38.
6. Wyatt and Woodard.
7. Wyatt and Woodard.
8. Robert A. M. Stern, *Pride Of Place, Building The American Dream* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1986), pl 129.
9. The map of the subdivision is depicted in Map Book 6, pp. 817-819. It was drawn by Civil Engineer A. Blankenship and completed in November 1952.
10. Wyatt and Woodard.
11. The current owners of the Solomon and Shirley Levine House have a copy of the original architectural plans for the house. The name "Louis H. Asbury & Son" appears on the plans.
12. Dan Morrill and Stewart Gray, "Historic Retail Buildings In Center City Charlotte" (<http://www.cmhpf.org/uptownsurveyhistoryretail.htm>); Interview of Louis H. Asbury III by Dan L. Morrill (November 30, 2007). Hereinafter cited as "Interview II." *Charlotte Observer* (March 30, 1991)
13. For an overview of the work of Louis H. Asbury in Mecklenburg County, consult the various Survey and Research Reports on the website of the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission <http://landmarkscommission.org/>
14. Interview II. Louis H. Asbury, III remembers his grandfather as a somewhat stern, diminutive taskmaster who irritated his son by always referring to him as "Junior." Asbury remembers his father with great affection, calling Louis H. Asbury, Jr. a gentle, kind, and supportive father. This writer met Louis H. Asbury, Jr. briefly and remembers him as a soft-spoken, gentleman.
15. Wyatt and Woodard.
16. *Charlotte Observer* (August 4, 2005). Interview II. Much of the information on Boyte's background is based upon information he provided in a vitae he gave to the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Historic Landmarks Commission.
17. Interview II.
18. see <http://www.whistle.gatech.edu/archives/05/mar/07/heffernan.shtml>
19. Interview.

**20.** Wyatt and Woodard.

**21.** Boyte made this statement to Mary Lynn Caldwell Morrill.