

# **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

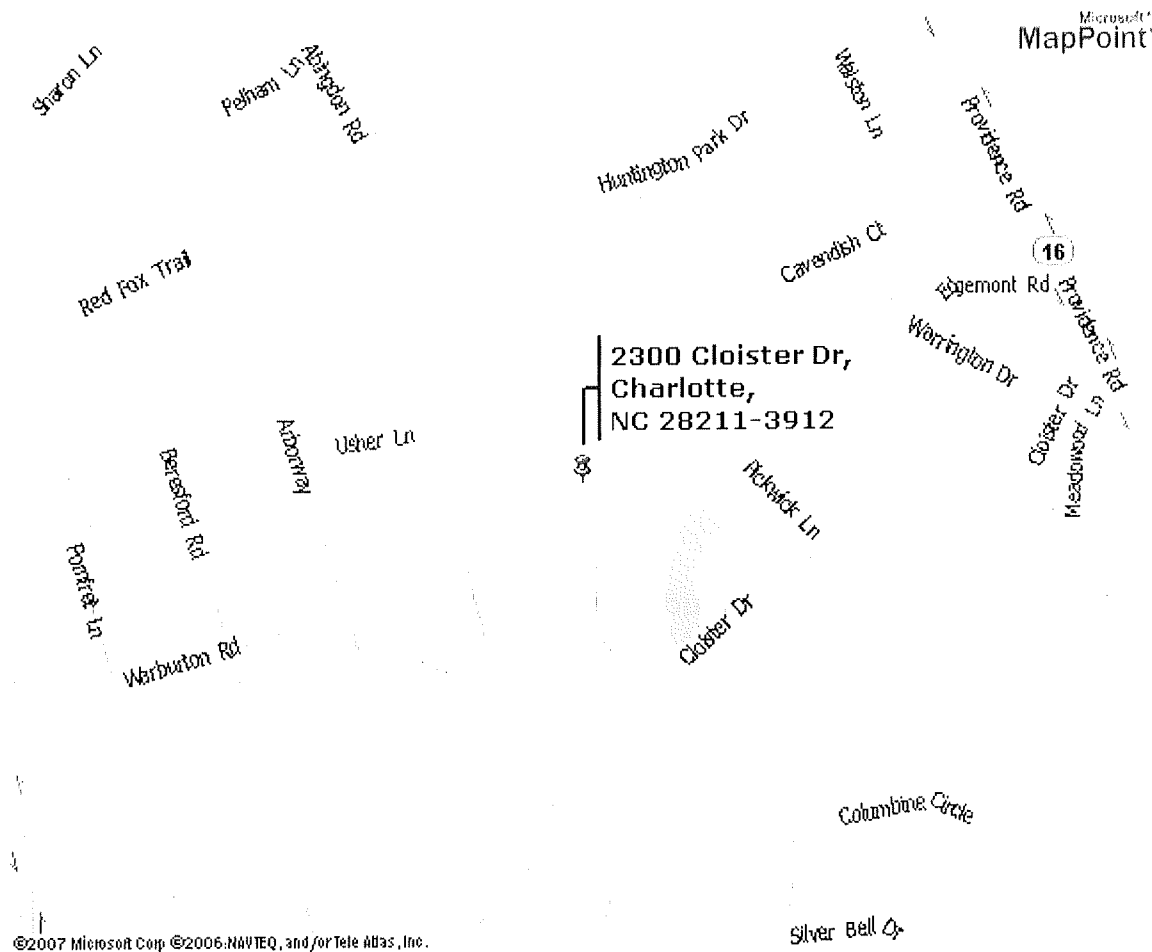
2300 Cloister Drive

Charlotte, N.C. 28211

Telephone: 704-458-2516

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

4. **A map depicting the location of the property:** This report contains a map depicting the location of the property. The UTM coordinates of the property are 17 517493E 3890521N.



5. **Current Deed Book Reference to the property:** The most recent deed to the property is recorded in Mecklenburg County Deed Book #22872, page 742.

6. **A brief historical sketch of the property:** This report contains a brief historical sketch of the property prepared by Dr. Dan L. Morrill.

7. **A brief architectural and physical description of the property:** This report contains a brief architectural and physical description of the property prepared by Stewart Gray.

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.

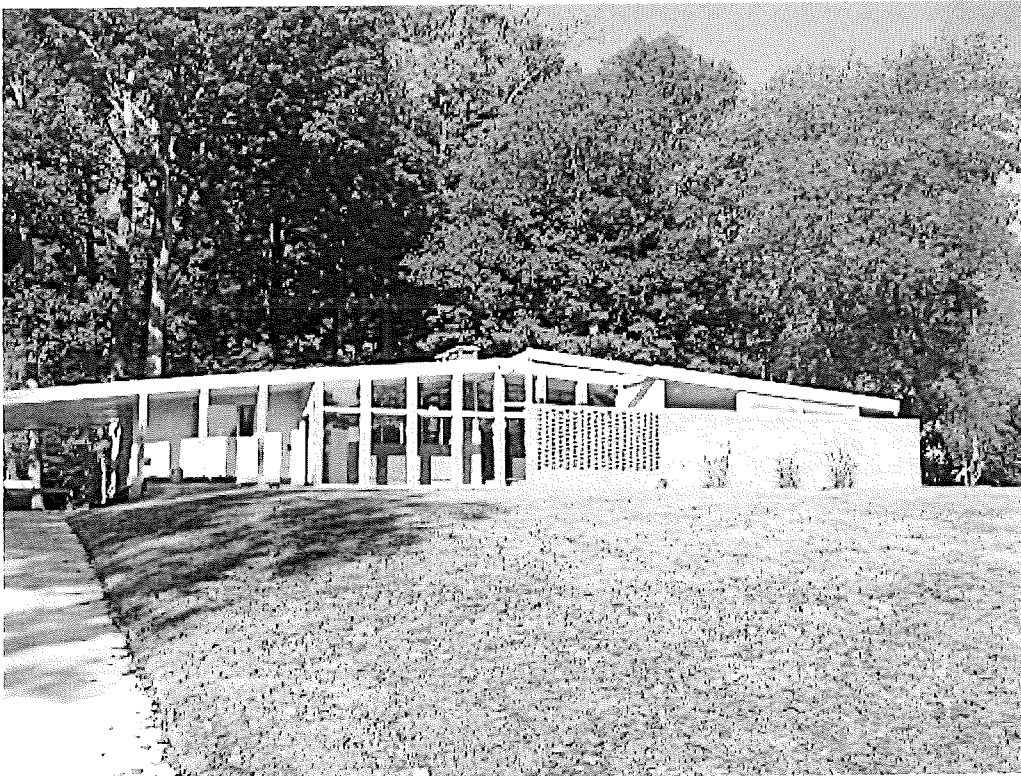
**9. Ad Valorem Tax Appraisal:** The Commission is aware that designation would allow the owner to apply for an automatic deferral of 50% of the Ad Valorem taxes on all or any portion of the property which becomes a "historic landmark." The appraised value of the building is \$237,200. The current appraised 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.

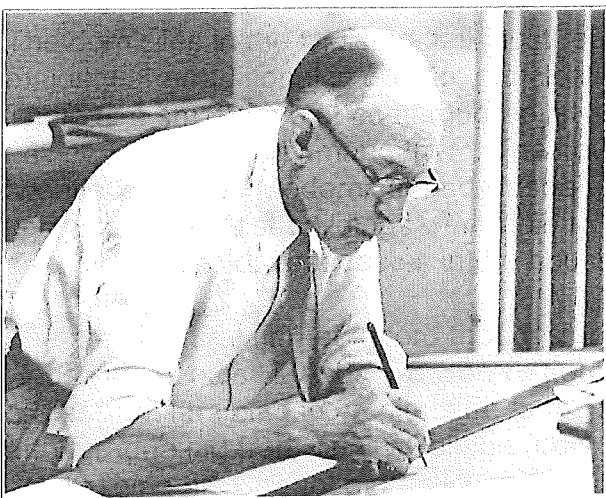


This home on Cloister Drive illustrates the nature of home sites.

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>



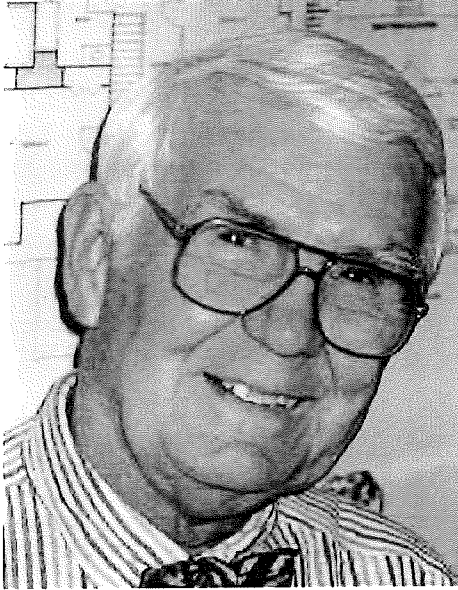
Louis H. Asbury

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>



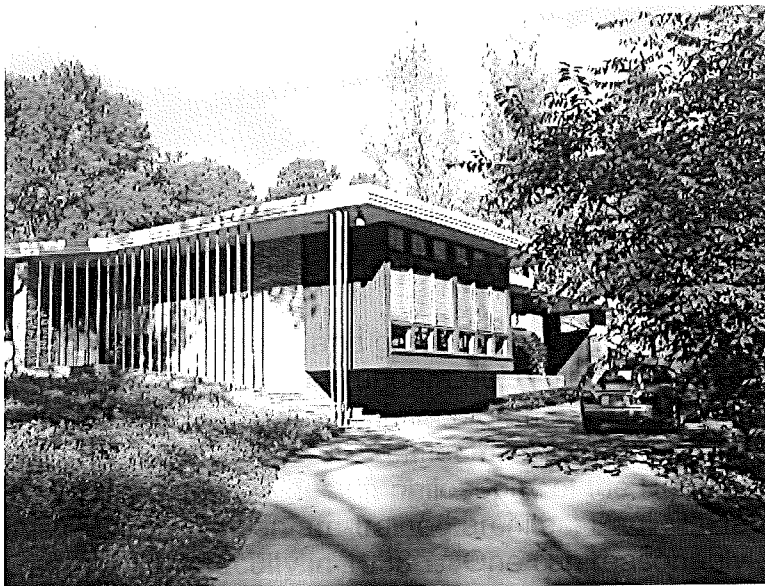
St. Paul United Methodist Church designed by Louis Asbury, Jr.

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>

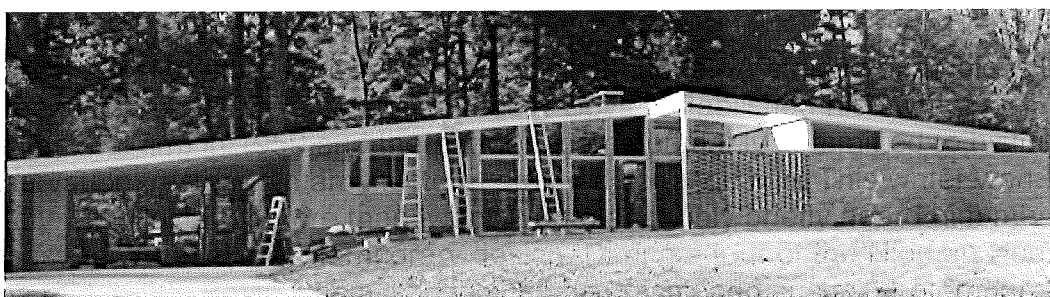


Nieman House designed by Jack Orr Boyte

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.

## **Architectural and Physical Description**

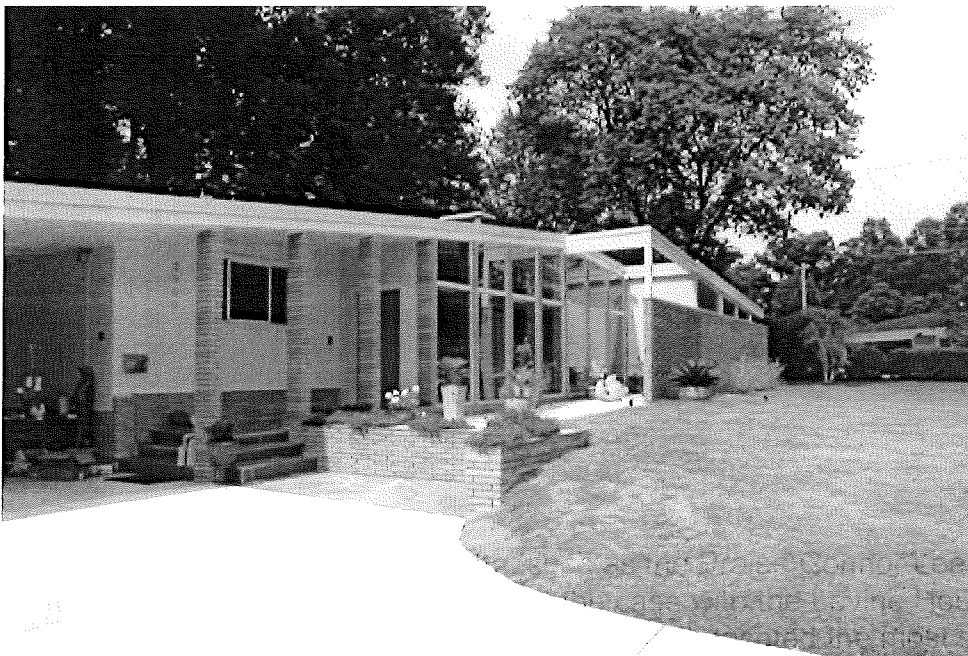
### **LEVINE HOUSE**



The 1957 Levine House is a one-story front-gabled Modernist home with a low-pitched roof. The house faces roughly to the east and sits on a large (approximately 1 acre) hexagon-shaped lot that is relatively flat except in the front yard where it slopes sharply down to the road. The house is located in The Cloisters, a neighborhood of single-family homes that date from the 1950s and 1960s. While several other good examples of Modernist architecture exist in the neighborhood, the majority of the homes in the neighborhood can be classified as having a Rambler-Ranch form. And many of these ranch houses feature elements of the conservative Colonial Revival style.



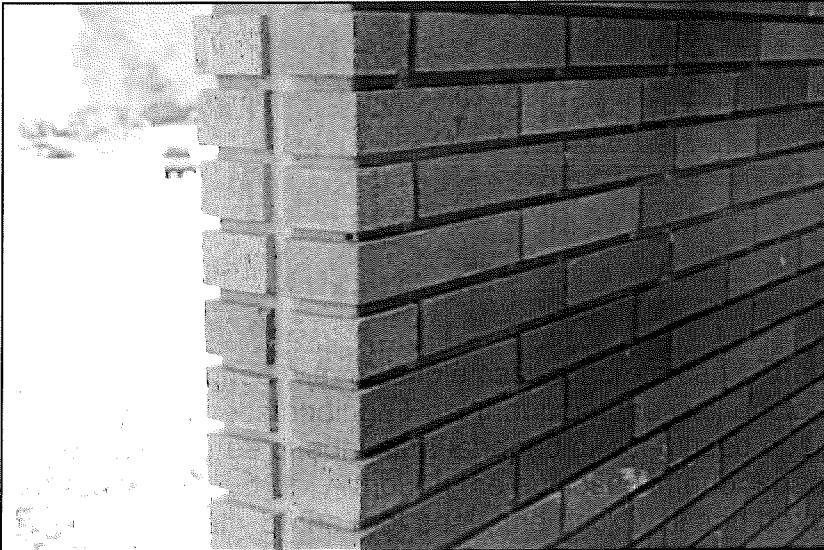
Some Modernist houses in Charlotte, such as the Praise Connor Lee House, present a minimalist façade. This is not the case with the Levine House. The façade is where the attributed architect Jack Boyte located the most significant exterior architectural features on the house.



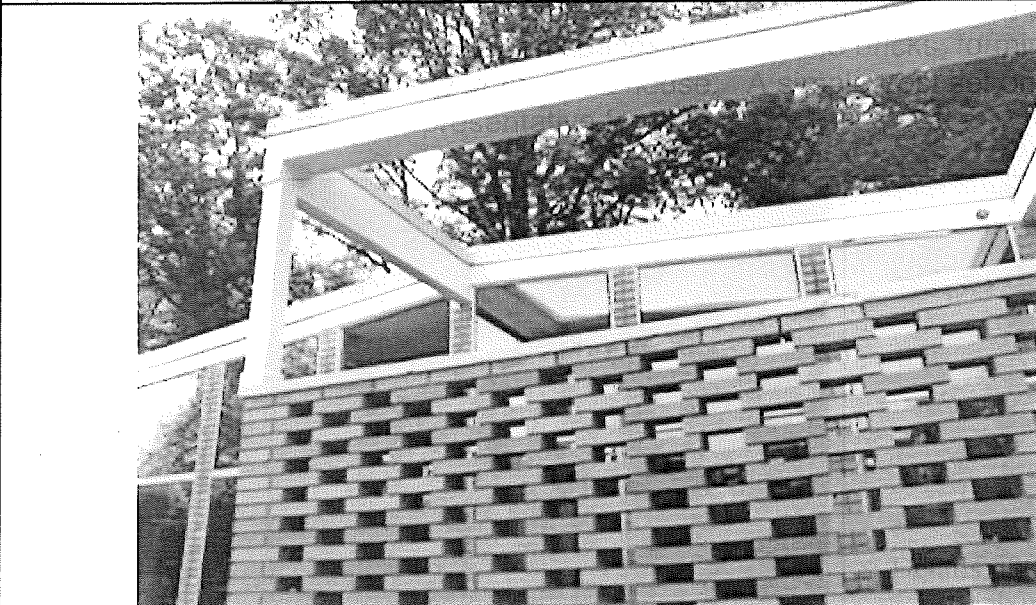
The front of the Levine House could be described as "layered." Vertical and horizontal planes enclose areas that transition from interior to exterior spaces. The front-most element of the house is a two-width-thick brick wall that dominates the northern half of the façade. The wall runs from a point several feet past the deep roof overhang on the north side of the house to the center of the house below the peak of the roof. The wall rises from the grade to an average height of eight feet, and is laid in running-bond with over-sized brick.



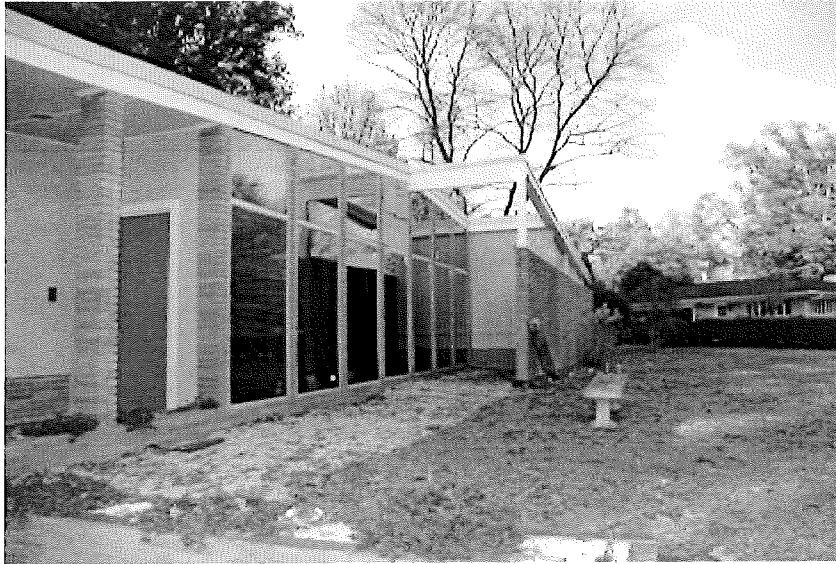
The wall is topped with a simple cast-concrete cap. The northern-most eight feet of the wall is freestanding. Past that point the wall encloses interior space and is topped with three quadrilateral-shaped direct-glazed opaque windows that follow the slope of the roof. Although the enclosed interior space ends approximately fourteen feet shy of the roof peak, the brick wall and boxed framing, representing the plane of the roof, extend to the center of the house. This extension of the brick wall is laid in a pattern with open spaces between the bricks, forming a screened exterior space on the front of the house. A simple post set on top of the brick wall supports the representative framing.



Details of the front  
brick wall



The side wall adjacent to the brick screen is blank and is sheathed with T111 siding, which is a rough-finished plywood siding grooved with dados spaced eight inches apart.

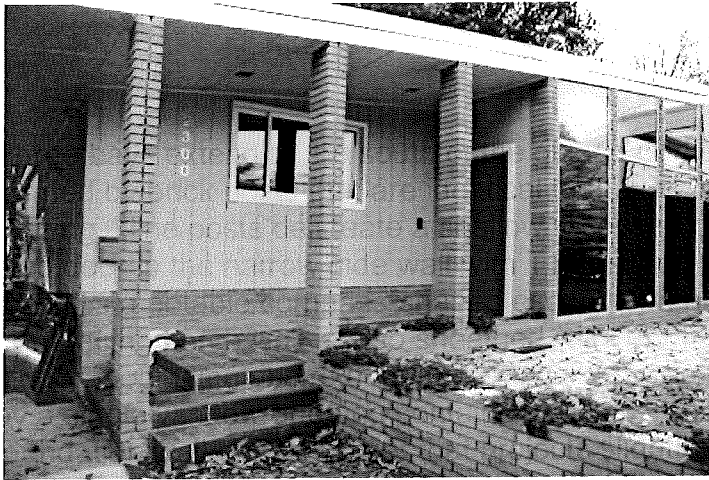


Partially screened by the perforated freestanding section of the brick wall is the principal section of the façade. It is composed of seven bays, delineated by tall, narrow brick piers that rise from a low brick knee wall and terminate at the roof framing, with three bays to the north of the roofs peak, and four bays to the south of the roof peak. There is no overhang above these bays, and the roof framing is sheathed with a wide board topped with metal flashing. Each of the bays contains a simple wooden frame containing direct-glazing. Each window frame contains an intermediate frame member that separates the lower rectangular glass sections from smaller upper units of glass that follow the slope of the roof.

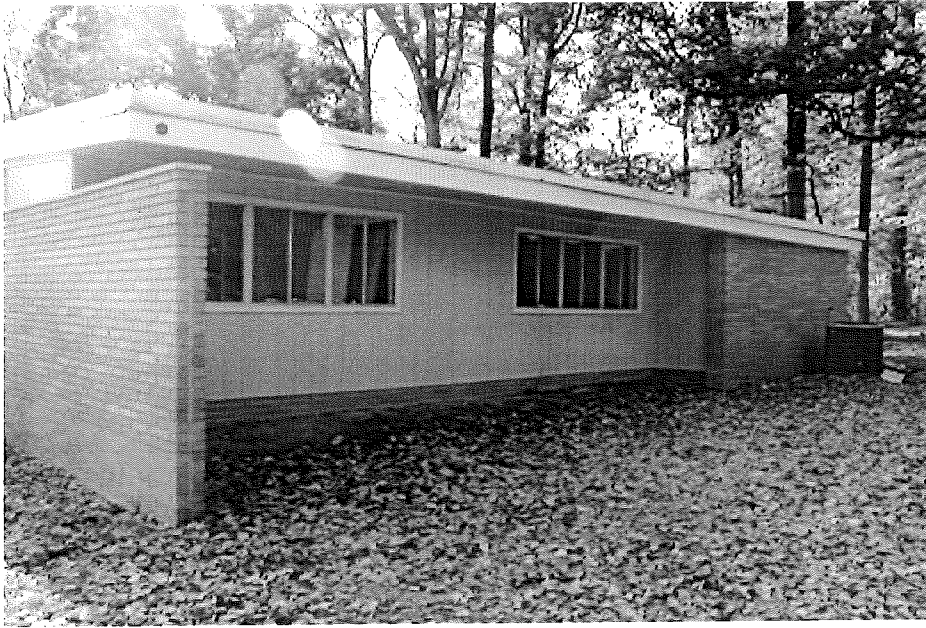




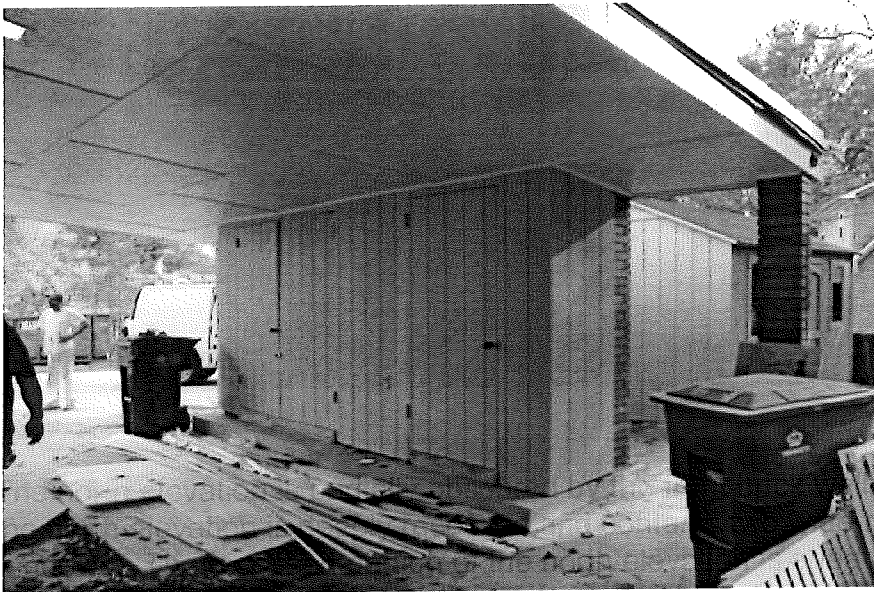
Three bays extend to the south of the glazed portion of the façade. The bays are formed by brick posts that are identical to the tall, narrow brick piers that hold the glazing. The posts delineate a shallow recessed porch. The porch shelters a slab door in the narrow side wall with T111 siding from floor to ceiling. The door features a notable compass-shaped escutcheon around the knob. The wider front facing porch wall is also sheathed with T111 siding, but the siding is set higher, beginning above a foundation wall of oversized brick. The wall is pierced by a single window opening containing replacement sliding sash windows. The foundation wall ends in a pier that projects slightly past the siding with a sloped mortar cap. The porch floor is composed of flagstone set in mortar and is accessed by front facing flagstone steps with three risers and side facing step that lead to a carport. A brick retaining wall that borders the front-facing steps is integrated into the brick knee wall/foundation wall that supports the brick posts and piers across the façade. The front facing steps lead to a short flagstone walk that borders a concrete driveway.



The low pitched gable roof extends without interruption to form a carport on the south side of the house. Frame utility closets with a solid brick rear wall and two additional brick posts support the southern end of the carport roof. The design of the façade incorporates vertical planes that recede as one views the façade from the north to the south. The northern most part of the façade is composed of a solid brick wall. As the viewer moves to the south, the solid wall becomes a perforated screen. The next element of the façade, a largely glazed wall, is stepped back. This transparent section of the façade then transitions to an open recessed porch. The porch in turn transitions into the large clear space of the carport. Each of the physical setbacks of the vertical planes that makeup the façade leads to a less confined space. From solid brick, to a brick screen, to a glass wall, to an open porch, to a larger open space. This sequence of wall materials and space found on the façade may reflect a philosophy that was embraced by some Modernist architects that interior and exterior spaces should naturally flow into each other.

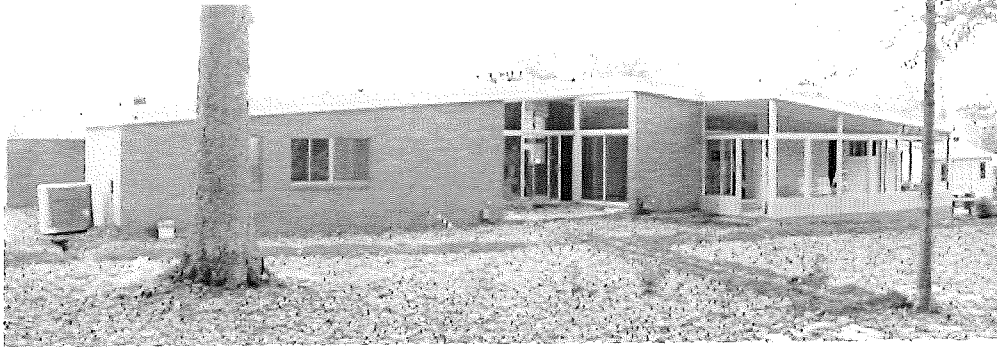


The north elevation is partially obscured by the front brick wall. A large portion of the north elevation is deeply recessed and contains two wide metal-frame windows. The recessed portion of the north elevation is sheathed with T111 siding. The remainder of the north elevation, the portion adjacent to the rear elevation, is a blank section of brick wall set close to the edge of the roof overhang.



A large portion of the south elevation is sheltered by the carport. The portion of the south elevation that is not protected by the carport has a minimal overhang.

that features a narrow screened vent that allows for roof framing ventilation. The wall is sheathed with T111 siding and is pierced by a single window opening containing a replacement sliding-sash window. The brick foundation wall is interrupted by a ribbon of metal framed windows that illuminate the basement.

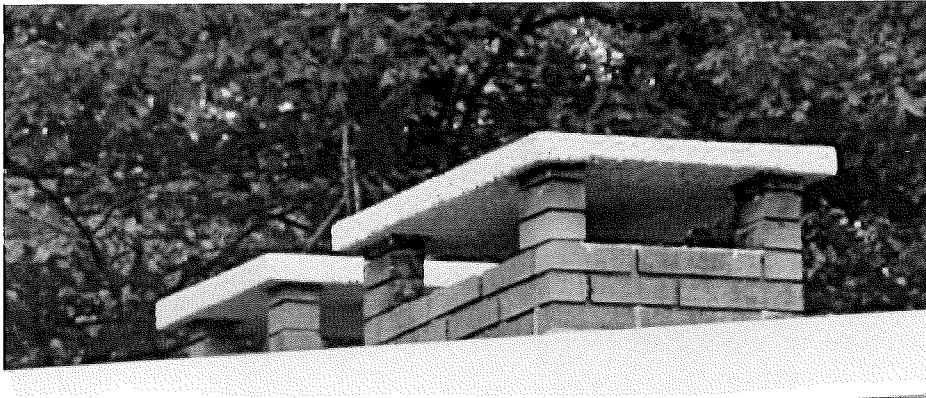


The rear elevation of the Levine House features a shed-roofed porch adjacent to the south elevation. The porch roof is an extension of the main roof. The porch is currently being enclosed to form a sunroom. The section of the exterior wall sheltered by the porch is covered with T111 siding. The rear elevation is interrupted by a recessed patio. As was the case in the front of the house, the roofline but not the roof itself is continued across the open patio area with a single boxed beam.

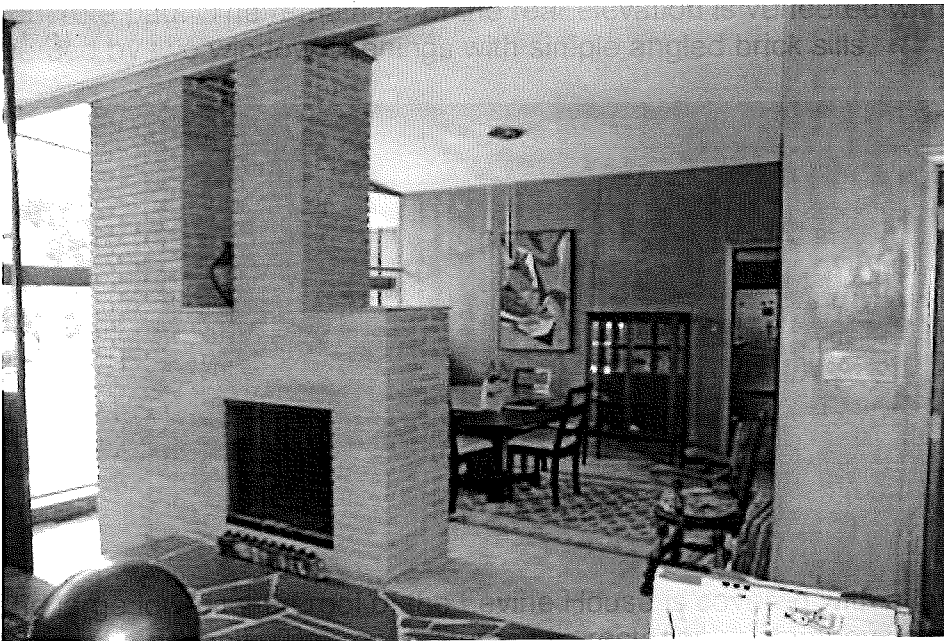


The three walls that border the recessed patio are entirely glazed, with glass sliding doors topped with large transoms. The patio features flagstones laid on a

concrete pad. The remainder of the rear elevation is veneered with brick and is pierced by two window openings with simple angled brick sills.



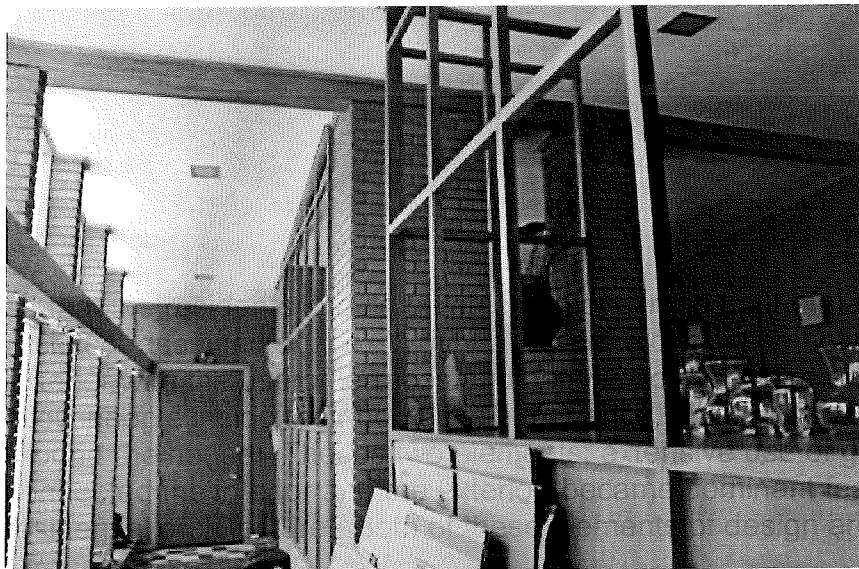
The large low-pitched roof of the Levine House is covered with a layer of composite asphalt. The roof features two rectangular chimneys capped with flat concrete panels.



The interior of the Levine House has retained a high degree of integrity and is in good condition. Most of the house's original interior features have survived, and no alterations have been made to the original layout of the house. For several decades before Jack Boyte designed the Levine House, nationally prominent Modernist architects such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Philip Johnson, and Richard Neutra had based much of their residential design on the ideal that nature should not be boxed-out of a home. Instead, a house should be designed

so that the residents should be able to move in and out of nature within the architect-designed space. Wright blurred the distinction between the interior and exterior with the use of terraces and patios. Johnson and Neutra used glass to allow people inside their homes to experience, at least visually, the environment around the house. These two elements, extensive use of glass and spaces that connected the interior and the exterior, became dominant features in Modernist residential architecture. Both of these elements of design are prominent in the Levine House.

The interior of the Levine House can be divided into two principal sections: the bedroom wing, and the communal living space that includes the kitchen, the dining room, the living room, and the den.



The front door of the Levine House leads to a hallway referred to on the original plans as the “gallery.” The gallery has a concrete floor that was poured on grade and is lower than the rest of the above-ground rooms. The concrete has been covered with the same flagstone material found on the front recessed porch, giving a visitor to the house an immediate connection between the outdoor and indoor spaces. The gallery is lined on one side by the wall of tall fixed windows on the façade, further emphasizing the link between the inside and outside spaces. Other prominent material elements in the gallery are the exposed brick of the piers that separate the windows, and the mahogany of the plywood wall panels, doors and trim. Original valences that allowed for curtains and lighting in the gallery remain.





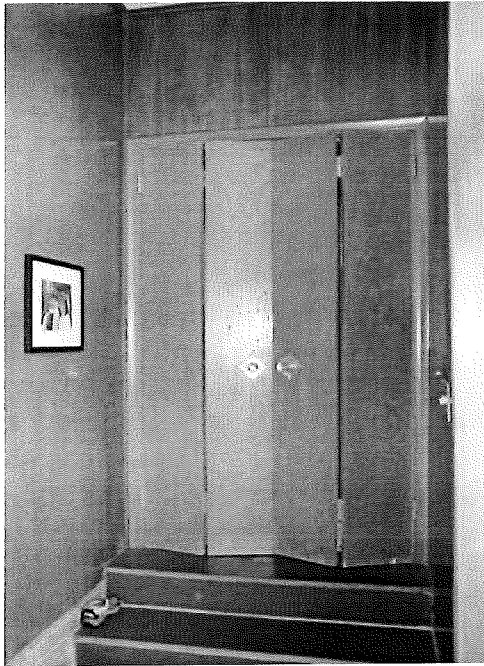
The gallery runs along the front of the house and is separated from the dining room and the living room by waist-height mahogany cabinetry topped with a screen formed by widely spaced mahogany framing set in a rectangular pattern. This minimal screen allows for a free flow of space and light between the rooms. The living room is accessed from the gallery by a short flight of bluestone steps (the same material as the flagstones). The top of the steps is met with a flagstone "path" that runs through the room, out a set of glass doors and to the flagstone patio located at the rear of the house. This flagstone walkway is an architectural element of this house that attempts to make a connection between the interior and exterior spaces. Another notable feature of the living room is rectilinear fireplace with no hearth. The freestanding fireplace and the exposed chimney that rises directly above the fire box are constructed of the same brick found on the exterior of the house. A second flue, for the furnace located in the basement, is incorporated into the masonry pile.



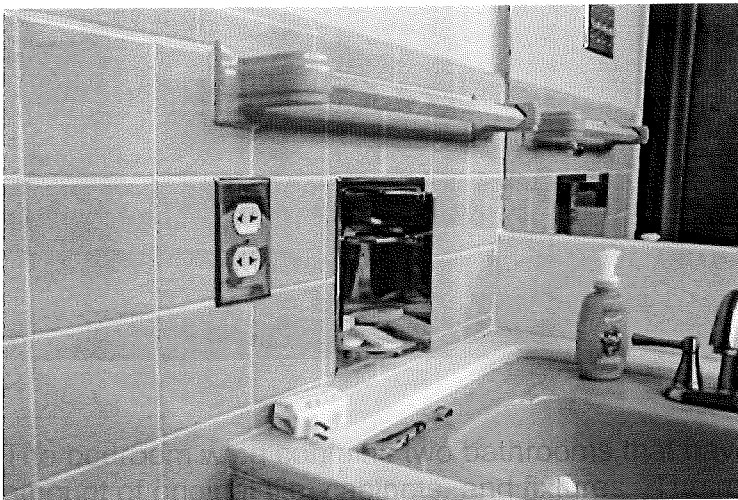
The fireplace separates the living room from the dining room, which features a built-in sideboard. A sloped ceiling that reflects the low-pitch of the roof is interrupted between the living room and dining room by a boxed beam.



A swinging door in the dining room leads to the kitchen which features original cabinets and large expanses of original hardwood plywood paneling. The original vinyl tile floor in the kitchen has been replaced. The least intact of the common rooms is the den, which has lost its original cabinetry and paneling. The gallery terminates at a set of hollow, plywood bi-fold doors with diamond-shaped escutcheons around the knobs. The doors lead to the bedroom wing.



The bedroom wing contains two bathrooms that have retained a remarkable amount of original tile, cabinets, and fixtures. The master bathroom is notable for its floor-to-ceiling-tiled walk-in shower, with original shower door. The master bedroom features a walk-in closet with original built-in cabinets. The short hallway that accesses the wing's three bedrooms was originally paneled with stained hardwood plywood, which has since been painted. Original plywood hollow doors and original wood trim have survived.



A doorway off of the kitchen leads to a turning staircase with an original tiled bathroom located off the landing. The stairs continue to a basement that includes two finished rooms and a furnace room.



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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.