

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

1. Name of Property

historic name: Foster, C. E., House

other name/site number: "Wonder House"

2. Location

street & number: N. of State Route 88, Queen Wilhelmina State Park

not for publication: N/A

city/town: Mena

vicinity: X

state: AR county: Polk code: AR 113 zip code: 71953

3. Classification

Ownership of Property: Public-State

Category of Property: Building

Number of Resources within Property:

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	_____	buildings
_____	_____	sites
_____	_____	structures
_____	_____	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register: N/A

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A

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4. State/Federal Agency Certification
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the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. See continuation sheet.

Cathryn A. Byrd 1-25-93
Signature of certifying official Date

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property _____ meets _____ does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

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5. National Park Service Certification
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I, hereby certify that this property is:

____ entered in the National Register _____
____ See continuation sheet. _____
____ determined eligible for the _____
National Register _____
____ See continuation sheet. _____
____ determined not eligible for the _____
National Register _____
____ removed from the National Register _____
____ other (explain): _____

Signature of Keeper Date
of Action

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6. Function or Use
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Historic: Domestic Sub: Single Dwelling

Current: Domestic Sub: Institutional Housing
Domestic Secondary Structure (storage)

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7. Description

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Architectural Classification:

A

Other Description: Rustic_____

Materials: foundation Sandstone roof Asphalt
walls Sandstone other _____

Describe present and historic physical appearance. X See continuation sheet.

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8. Statement of Significance

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Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties: local.

Applicable National Register Criteria: C

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions): N/A

Areas of Significance: Architecture

Period(s) of Significance: c. 1931

Significant Dates: N/A

Significant Person(s): N/A

Cultural Affiliation: N/A

Architect/Builder: Hill, Carlos
Lance, Phil

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above. X See continuation sheet.

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9. Major Bibliographical References

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X See continuation sheet.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary Location of Additional Data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other state agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other -- Specify Repository: _____

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7. Geographical Data

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Acreage of Property: Less than one

UTM References: Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

A	<u>15</u>	<u>374180</u>	<u>3838880</u>	B	_____	_____
C	_____	_____	_____	D	_____	_____

____ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description: ____ See continuation sheet.

Beginning at a point that is 242 feet at 310 degrees (N/NW) from benchmark 2518, proceed 79 feet north; thence proceed 100 feet west; thence proceed 79 feet south; thence proceed 100 feet east to the point of beginning.

Boundary Justification: ____ See continuation sheet.

This boundary includes all of the property historically associated with this resource that retains its integrity.

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11. Form Prepared By

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Name/Title: Patrick Zollner, National Register Historian

Organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program Date: 01/21/93

Street & Number: 323 Center, 1600 Tower Bldg. Telephone: (501) 324-9880

City or Town: Little Rock State: AR ZIP: 72201

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Summary

Constructed c. 1931 by Carlos Hill and Phil Lance, the C. E. Foster House is an irregular-plan, two-section stone structure originally constructed as a vacation residence. The two sections, connected by a gable-roof breezeway, are constructed of uncoursed, uncut stone collected near the site and consequently have a heavy, yet organic feel that was typical of the building style generally known as "Rustic." Both sections are covered by composition-shingled, gable roofs of saltbox configuration. The interior, consisting of two levels on the front section and seven levels on the rear section, has been modified somewhat since construction. The C. E. Foster House is located on the top of Rich Mountain on the north side of State Highway 88 in the current Queen Wilhelmina State Park, which is approximately 13 miles northwest of Mena. There are no extant outbuildings or site features associated with this property.

Elaboration

Constructed c. 1931 by Carlos Hill and Phil Lance, the C. E. Foster House is an irregular-plan, two-section stone vacation residence built on top of Rich Mountain in the current Queen Wilhelmina State Park. The two sections, connected by a gable-roof breezeway, are constructed of uncoursed, uncut sandstone collected near the site and consequently have a heavy, yet organic feel that was typical of the building style generally known as "Rustic." Both sections are covered by composition-shingled, gable roofs of saltbox configuration. All of the original windows on both sections have been replaced by the state park. Although some of the windows are simply boarded over, the majority consist of exterior wood shutters with a single-pane casement sash. Based on historic photographs now available, the original window sash configuration can not be determined for all of the windows, although a couple of four-over-four sash windows can be seen.

The front, or southern, section has an inset porch on the front facade supported by three jagged stone arches. Underneath, a single-leaf door (not original) allows entry into the first floor, which consists of a single room that was used mostly for a living room, though people often slept there. An exterior chimney is located on the eastern elevation of this section and features stone stairs built around the chimney as they ascend to the second-story single-leaf entrance, which is to the north of the chimney. This elevation contains a large window opening on the first-story that has been boarded over, a smaller window to the north of the second-story entrance, and a diamond-shaped window (boarded over) to the south of the chimney. The opposing western elevation contains two different-sized window openings on each floor. In addition to the single-leaf entrance underneath the breezeway, there are two flanking window openings of different dimensions on the rear, or northern, elevation of the southern section. The second-story consists of one very narrow room with an unusual built-in bed, which was designed to sleep three children head to toe, along the entire length of the southern wall.

The rear, or northern, section is located on the down slope of the mountain and is situated at an angle with the gable end facing southeast. This southeastern elevation contains a central chimney flanked by a single-leaf entry and a window to the right and a large window opening to the left that has been boarded over with a window-unit air conditioner installed. There is a small window opening on each side of the chimney near the gable-end peak. The southwestern elevation contains a single-leaf doorway underneath the breezeway, which is supported by a single piled-rock post. Northwest of the breezeway on this elevation, there is a single-leaf entrance on a different level and a boarded-over window. The rear, or northwestern, elevation contains a partial chimney extending

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distance) and five different-sized window scattered throughout the gable end on uneven levels. The northeastern elevation consists of two window openings at each corner.

Perhaps the interior of this section is the most interesting feature of an already unusual house. Seven different levels were incorporated into the design in this order from bottom to top: cellar, ground floor, kitchen, bathroom, and three upper levels, each uneven with the other. Although all three levels were reputedly used as sleeping spaces, one level is more like a landing for the actual level that is big enough for a bed, and the uppermost level is really more of an attic space. Separate interior staircases of short length ascended clockwise to all of the rooms. In an apparent effort to reduce the amount of stair climbing, each level had small openings so as to pass things through.

The exterior of the house has had some modifications since construction. Aside from the aforementioned window and door changes, there have been two roof changes, which is not an uncommon phenomenon in historic buildings. The building was originally covered with wood shakes, which proved to be unsuitable almost from the beginning as the wet weather and high winds on Rich Mountain made them difficult to maintain. At some point, corrugated tin was nailed over the shakes, while the current composition shingles were recently added by Queen Wilhelmina State Park. In the early 1980's, the park added a rock sidewalk down each side of the building and underneath the breezeway, which was originally floored with large stepping stones. The sidewalks, which were added to ease accessibility from one section to another, were tastefully executed and do not compromise the historic integrity of the structure.

More serious changes have occurred to the interior of both sections. After acquisition by the state park, the ground floor of the front section was remodeled into an exhibit room (it had also been a gift shop previously), but is not currently being utilized for that purpose. An interior ladder to the second-story on this section was removed and the opening sealed, however, the upstairs room is virtually unaltered. Imitation-wood paneling was added to much of the interior of the rear section during a nonhistoric remodeling that also included walling off the cellar, which removed one set of stairs and left only an outside entry for the ground floor. The bathroom floor was raised level with that of the kitchen floor, and the outside entry to it was sealed. All of the small passage openings were closed during this remodeling, though one, between the ground floor and kitchen, has recently been reopened. The fireplace on the ground floor of the rear section was closed, and a heat pump was added to both sections. Although these alterations appear extensive, the basic structure and floor plan remains intact, and all of the changes are reversible.

There are no extant outbuildings or site features associated with this property. When constructed, electricity for the vacation home was provided by a Delco Plant and running water was made available courtesy of a wooden cistern on top of the old laundry building for the 1898 hotel.

United States Department of the Interior
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Continuation SheetSection number 8 Page 1**Summary**

The C. E. Foster House is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance as a highly unusual example of a native-stone constructed, Rustic-style vacation cottage.

Elaboration

The C. E. Foster House was constructed c. 1931 by Carlos Hill and Phil Lance. Little is known about Hill's early life other than he was from Iowa and had managed a cattle ranch in Argentina. Hill arrived in Mena on a Harley Davidson motorcycle to study at Commonwealth College, where he may have also taught. He met and married a local girl, Mary Lance, and moved to Rich Mountain. Rich Mountain was first settled in the 1880's by subsistence farmers, but gained prominence in 1898 when a hotel was constructed on the scenic mountain by businessmen associated with the Kansas City Southern Railroad. Although the original lodge was abandoned and near ruins in the 1930's, the site remained a tourist destination even without developed facilities.

Hill was interested in constructing affordable housing using native materials, and in 1931, he designed and constructed a house (the present southern section), which was sold shortly after completion to C. E. Foster from Muskogee, Oklahoma. Foster, who was in the oil business, purchased the house for a vacation cottage. Desiring additional space, he commissioned Hill to expand the current structure, and the second, or northern, section was the result. Hill was assisted in the construction of the second section, which was also completed in 1931, by his brother-in-law, Phil Lance.

The strange house does not reflect any discernible architectural style but rather the recreational tastes of the Depression era, when people sought escape to "rustic" settings. The C. E. Foster House should therefore be classified as of the Rustic style, though it bears little resemblance to the later CCC-constructed cabins in Arkansas that many associate with the term. While much of the design is conventional (and indeed easily constructed with native sandstone), novel details such as the placement of the exterior stone staircase alongside the chimney to keep them from icing over in the winter and the truly radical interior plan are proof of Hill's innovative and unique ideas. In his time, Hill was described as a near genius by many, though others considered his work erratic and bizarre.

According to Carlos Hill's widow, Mrs. Mary Wiles, in a 1992 interview, Hill built several stone houses, two of which were vacation homes for Texans from Port Arthur, on Rich Mountain. At the present, four of the vacation houses that Carlos Hill constructed are still standing; however, two are in ruins and the other two have suffered considerable alterations. The Hills lived in the old laundry building for the 1898 hotel which was located east of the Foster House. The laundry building, which Hill remodeled to look like a ranch house, was destroyed in the 1950's. Carlos Hill lived on the mountain until the 1940's when he moved due to failing health. He died in 1966.

In the late 1950's, the Foster House was saved from demolition when a local Polk County resident, Marion Watkins, leased the building from the state to operate a museum. From 1958 to 1971, Watkins operated "Crystal Springs Park" and the house, which he promoted as the "Wonder House," could be toured for ten cents. The building was altered very little during Watkin's tenure. The ground floor of the front section was used as a gift shop and information center, while the second-story was left intact. Watkins exhibited a moonshine still in the cellar of the rear section and had another gift shop on the ground level of that section.

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Since Queen Wilhelmina State Park took over the Foster House in 1971, the building has been utilized as a display area, visitor information center, gift shop, offices, storage, and employee housing. Currently, the Foster House is being used as park storage and temporary living quarters (in the rear section) for a park employee. Although most of the alterations to the structure have occurred during state park ownership, the current park management intends to restore the building to as near original condition as possible and operate it as a museum.

The C. E. Foster House is being nominated under Criterion C with local significance as a unique and imaginative exercise in Depression-era Rustic-style architecture.

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Bibliography

Information provided by Bradley Holleman, Naturalist for Queen Wilhelmina State Park. January 1992.

Interviews included in Holleman's submission:

Mrs. Mary Wiles (Carlos Hill's widow) and Mrs. Phil Lance, January 17, 1992.

Marion Watkins, January 22, 1992.

C.E. Foster Hoxe
Mena vic. Fol. 5,
Arka. 225

CA:
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