

*Dubaski
Little Rock
Buhler House*

*LISTED
4-25-88*

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Buhler House
other names/site number Buhler-Raney-Traylor House

2. Location

street & number 1820 Fair Park Boulevard N/A not for publication
city, town Little Rock N/A vicinity
state Arkansas code 05 county Pulaski code 119 zip code 722

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	_____ buildings
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	_____	_____ sites
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	_____	_____ structures
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	_____	_____ objects
		_____	_____ Total

Name of related multiple property listing: N/A
Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Catherine B. Bryant
Signature of certifying official 3-8-88
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.

N/A
Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau _____

5. National Park Service Certification

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:)

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: single dwelling

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Domestic: single dwelling

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(enter categories from instructions)

Late 19th and 20th Century Revivals

Other: English Revival

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation Stone

walls brick

roof tile

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

SUMMARY

On the surface, the Buhler House appears to be a typical period revival residence. Situated on a corner lot, it is a two-and-one-half story structure sheathed in buff-colored brick with a fieldstone foundation. It has the steeply pitched, side-gabled roof with prominent cross gable commonly associated with the English Revival style, though at its completion in 1931 it was described as an "American-Spanish" house (the Spanish influence is limited to the interior). The home's typical exterior, however, belies a method of construction--reportedly utilizing 26 1/2 tons of steel--that is decidedly out of the ordinary.

ELABORATION

From the outside there is little indication that the Buhler House is anything other than the usual brick-veneered, wood-frame residence. The only exterior clue to the home's unusual "woodless" construction is the front door, which is steel--as are all interior doors and jambs. Although the original finish on the exterior side of the front door has been painted over, the other side--like most of the interior doors--retains its original "baked walnut enamel" finish, a simulated woodgrain finish that imitates the look of a single-panel, walnut-stained door.

Red tile (from the "Ludowici-Celadon Co.") covers the roof of the Buhler House, and buff-colored brick--furnished by the Hope Brick Company of Hope, Arkansas--sheathes the home's steel framework. Concrete provides contrasting trim at the eave line and as window sills. The foundation, part of the end chimney, and a 5-ft. wall on the south side of the house are fieldstone, as is a low wall (topped by a chain link fence) that encircles the yard on the north side of the house.

Besides the textures of the brick, concrete, stone, and tile, the visual interest of the house derives mainly from the picturesque roofline of its front section--that is, the section under the side-gabled roof and front-facing cross gable. The steeply pitched cross gable dominates the main (east) facade, its south side extending downward to shelter the front door, located in the center of the facade.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:
 nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G N/A

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1930-1931

Significant Dates

1930-1931

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Fourche River Land Company

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

SUMMARY

Located in a Little Rock neighborhood known as "Oak Forest," the Buhler House was constructed in 1930-31 by Henry Fernando Buhler and his firm, the Fourche River Land Company. Although the Fourche River Land Company built many houses in the Oak Forest area during the late 1920's and early 1930's, the Buhler House was--and is--unique because of its steel and concrete construction, said by the builders to be "fire, sound, burglar, lightning and storm safe." The property is being nominated under Criterion C as a rare example of steel-frame residential construction.

ELABORATION

The Cherry and Cox Addition to the City of Little Rock, location of the Buhler House, had been platted in 1907, but evidently little or no development occurred until the 1920's, when Henry Buhler founded the Fourche River Land Company and bought literally hundreds of the addition's vacant lots. Buhler, a Methodist minister-turned-real estate developer, billed himself and his company as the "owners and developers of Oak Forest," an area (apparently named by Buhler) that encompasses the Cherry and Cox Addition.

Houses erected by the Fourche River Land Company reportedly were "planned" by the firm's "building department." In the case of the Buhler House, however, design assistance may have been obtained from the manufacturer of the steel framing materials used in the home's construction. The manufacturer was the Steel Frame House Company, and its "Steel Frame House System" was brought to Little Rock by the Arkansas Foundry Company.

It is not known what prompted Henry Buhler to erect the "Most Unusual Home Ever Built In Arkansas"--as it was called in a newspaper advertisement that invited the public to an open house on April 12, 1931. Certainly, the "woodless" construction of the Buhler House was unusual. Although undocumented examples may exist, no other steel-frame houses are known to have been built in Little Rock by Buhler or anyone else.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

Arkansas Gazette, articles on the following dates: February 8, 1931;
April 12, 1931; November 10, 1961; September 1, 1974.

Bien, V. T. H., "Steel-Frame Houses." House Beautiful 67 (January 1930):
74+.

Little Rock City Directories, 1910 through 1949.

Pulaski County Deed Records: Book 201, p. 247; Book 240, p. 595; Book 235, p. 508;
Book 236, p. 522; Book 296, p. 348.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Little Rock, 1939.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS): N/A

- 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: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property Less than one acre.

UTM References

A 1 5 5 6 0 9 0 0 3 8 4 4 6 3 5
 Zone Easting Northing

C

B
 Zone Easting Northing

D

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Block 19, Lots 5 & 6, Cherry & Cox Addition to the City of Little Rock.

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The boundary includes the 2 entire city lots that have been historically associated with the property.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

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 organization History, Inc. telephone (501) 375-2686
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The cross gable projects forward from the side-gabled roof, creating the bay that forms the east end of the dining room on the first floor and a bedroom on the second floor. A pair of six-over-six, double-hung aluminum windows marks each main floor of the bay. Above, at the attic level, a narrow four-over-four, double-hung window is located in the gable.

Two six-over-six, double-hung windows, one per floor, are located on the north side of the bay. Just west of the bay, under the north gable end of the side-gabled roof, are two more of the same type of windows, also one per floor. Above them is a small attic window in the gable.

For reasons of energy efficiency, these double-hung aluminum windows have been substituted for the original steel casement windows throughout the house, but care was taken to retain the original multi-paned appearance of the casements.

Beginning at the front door, a concrete-floored terrace with simple wrought-iron railing extends across the main facade to the south end of the house. Above the terrace are paired windows on both the first and second floors. Centered above the second-story windows is a steeply pitched gabled wall dormer containing a small attic window.

A prominent chimney, sheathed partially in fieldstone and partially in brick, stands in the center of the south end of the front section of the house. One window is located on either side of the chimney on both the first and second floors. Two more windows, one per floor, are located in a narrow strip of west-facing wall around the corner from the chimney.

The rear section of the house extends to the west under a gabled roof of lower pitch than the gables of the front section. The rear is a simple rectangular section containing the breakfast room, kitchen, stairhall, and sunroom on the first floor and two bedrooms, a bathroom, and the stairway on the second floor.

Behind the house, on the alley, is a three-car garage and servants' quarters built at the same time as the house. It is of brick-veneered, woodframe construction and has a low-pitched gabled roof covered with red tile. The gable ends evidently were originally sheathed by clapboard that has since been covered with aluminum siding.

The same siding covers a one-story frame addition, built sometime since 1962, that joins the house to the garage. Despite its recent vintage, the addition continues the fieldstone foundation and red tile roof of the original house and garage. A fieldstone wall with wrought-iron gate encloses the yard on the south side of the frame addition.

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The interior of the Buhler House remains remarkably intact. There have been no structural changes, and many original decorative features are still in place. Besides the wood-grained steel door and jambs, some of the more interesting and unusual original features are the "Goodyear Rubber Tile" floors found throughout the downstairs (a different pattern in each room); the steel and concrete staircase; original light fixtures in the dining and living rooms, sunroom, bedrooms, and baths (the latter with towel-clad women adorning their shades); a painting on the living room chimney breast by local painter and decorator, Steve Cole; and pink and lavender bathroom plumbing fixtures. The so-called Spanish influence is seen mainly in an arched opening with wrought-iron gate between the living room and dining room and in heavily-textured plaster walls.

According to a 1931 newspaper advertisement for the house, "the entire framing is steel: steel sills, joists, rafters, laths, storm sheeting, anchors, cables, casement sash, doors, jambs, cabinets, etc." Most of the framing, of course, is not available for inspection. Glimpses of it can be seen, however, in the attic and partial basement.

Steel I-beams, rather than wooden floor joists, span the basement. In the attic, which is finished as a recreation room, two steel supports are visible. Both are comprised of four steel angles bolted together at regular intervals. Also visible around the edges of the attic are the heavy steel rafters that support the considerable weight of the concrete-slab roof covered with tile.

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The idea of using steel-frame "skyscraper" construction for houses was being touted nationwide around 1930. According to the Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature, several articles on steel-frame construction appeared in national publications between the late 1920's and the mid-1930's. Steelframe construction was said to have several benefits over wood: strength and uniformity of materials, resistance to fire, immunity to vermin and insect attack, and freedom from lightning danger. It also, however, was more expensive--about 10% more than standard wood-frame construction, according to one magazine article. This additional cost probably was a major factor in discouraging the widespread adoption of steel framing for residential construction.

When the Buhler House was completed in the spring of 1931, it reportedly was "no freak or oddly built structure to attract attention" but, rather, an "extremely practical, economical, livable, and beautiful" residence. Nevertheless, it did not sell, and Henry Buhler evidently was unable to pay his suppliers and the workmen who had built the house, to whom he owed more than \$14,000. Buhler lost the house, which was sold at auction in June of 1932. The highest bid was \$3,500.

At this point, it is interesting to note that--despite obvious financial reversals during the 1930's--Henry Buhler went on to make a fortune as a developer. Today he is best remembered in Arkansas for his 1961 gift to Hendrix College of \$2.5 million in real estate.

The person who bought the Buhler House at auction in 1932 evidently never occupied it. Henry Buhler may have lived briefly in his "most unusual home," but it was not until 1936 that someone bought the house with the intention of actually living in it. T. J. Raney, a stockbroker, and his family made it their home from 1936 until 1942. It then quickly passed through two more owners before being purchased in the late 1940's by Robert M. Traylor, president of Arkansas Real Estate Company. The Traylor family owned the house until 1984, when it was purchased by the current owners.

While it may no longer qualify as the single "Most Unusual Home Ever Built In Arkansas," the Buhler House remains a very unusual residence. It is a remarkable example of a type of construction that, despite being promoted nationwide, never became standard in the house-building industry. In addition, with many original decorative features intact, the house provides an interesting glimpse at 1930-vintage interior design.

Buhler House

Little Rock, Pulaski Co. METROPOLITAN AREA PLANNING
Quadrangle: Little Rock COMMISSION OF PULASKI COUNTY
Scale: 1:24,000
UTM Reference - 15/560900/3844635 7553 IV SE
(NORTH LITTLE ROCK)













