NPS Form 10-900 OMB No. 1024-0018

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form.* If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

NAT. REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
RECEIVED 2280
APR 11 2014

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Matthews, Mary H., Lustron House
Other names/site number: Site #PU5894
Name of related multiple property listing:

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing

2. Location

Street & number: 5021 Maryland Avenue
City or town: Little Rock State: Arkansas County: Pulaski
Not For Publication: ☐ Vicinity: ☐

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___**national** X **statewide** ___**local**

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___**A** ___**B** X **C** ___**D**

Martha Miller 3-26-14

Signature of certifying official/Title: **Date**

Arkansas Historic Preservation Program

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official: **Date**

Title : **State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government**

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

✓ entered in the National Register

___ determined eligible for the National Register

___ determined not eligible for the National Register

___ removed from the National Register

___ other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper — Date of Action: 5·23·2014

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Private:	☐
Public – Local	x
Public – State	☐
Public – Federal	☐

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

Building(s)	x
District	☐
Site	☐
Structure	☐
Object	☐

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register _____

6. Function or Use
Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
DOMESTIC/single dwelling

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)
VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)
OTHER/Lustron

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)
Principal exterior materials of the property: STEEL

Narrative Description
(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with **a summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph
The Mary H. Matthews Lustron House is an example of the Westchester Model 02 design offered by the Lustron Corporation in the late 1940s. The house is one-story tall and is built on a concrete-block foundation. The house features a steel frame and the walls are covered in the iconic square porcelain-enameled steel panels. The low-pitched gable roof is also covered in porcelain-enameled steel roof tiles, and the gable ends are covered in steel panels with a vertical board pattern on them. The house retains its original metal-framed windows.

The house also has an addition on the south side. The wood-framed addition with a flat roof is covered in weatherboard siding. The addition is fenestrated by three-pane windows, and also has a large brick chimney on the west side. An open carport extends to the south of the addition.

Narrative Description
The Mary H. Matthews Lustron House is an example of the Westchester Model 02 design offered by the Lustron Corporation in the late 1940s. The "02" designation referred to the fact that this version of the model had two bedrooms, along with the kitchen, dining room, living room, bathroom, and utility room. Measuring 31 feet by 35 feet, the original portion of the

house contains 1,085 square feet. It also features a 6' x 12' recessed porch at the northwest corner.

The house is one-story tall and is built on a concrete-block foundation. The house features a steel frame and the walls are covered in gray, square, porcelain-enameled steel panels. The low-pitched gable roof is also covered in green porcelain-enameled steel roof tiles, and the gable ends are covered in white steel panels with a vertical board pattern on them. The house retains its original metal-framed windows, and the windows on the west side, along with the porch, are shaded by metal green-and-white awnings.

The house also has an addition on the south side. The wood-framed addition with a flat roof is covered in weatherboard siding. The addition is fenestrated by three-pane windows, and also has a large brick chimney on the west side. An open carport extends to the south of the addition.

Front/North Façade

The front façade of the house is basically divided in half. The left portion of the façade is dominated by the metal-framed picture window located slightly to the left of the façade's center. The window features a large central pane that is flanked by four-pane casement windows on each side. To the left of the window, set high in the wall, is a kitchen fan.

The right half of the façade contains the recessed front porch. The house's main entrance features an original metal door with a central rectangular window. The entrance also features a metal storm door that was added later. To the right of the entrance is a window air-conditioner unit.

The corner of the porch is supported by the distinctive Lustron porch post which features a vertical post and cantilevered post that are separated by a decorative serpentine piece of metal. The porch also features a wraparound metal awning.

Side/West Façade

The west side of the house, at the north end, encompasses the recessed front porch. To the right of the porch, roughly in the middle of the original house's façade, is a projecting bay with a metal-framed picture window. Like the picture window on the front façade, the window features a large central pane that is flanked by four-pane casement windows on each side. At the south end of the original section of the house is another picture window that features a large central pane that is flanked by four-pane casement windows on each side. Both picture windows are shaded by green-and-white metal awnings.

Continuing south along the façade, the rest of the façade is comprised of the house's addition. The west side of the addition is dominated by a large brick chimney that tapers halfway up its height. To the right of the chimney is a three-pane window followed by the west side of the open, shed-roofed carport.

Rear/South Façade

The south façade of the house is encompassed by the addition. At the west end of the façade is a three-pane window followed by a plate-glass sliding door. To the right of the sliding door, the rest of the façade is devoid of fenestration. In front of the addition, the façade is dominated by the open, shed-roofed carport.

Above the addition, the gable end of the original house is visible, and like the gable end on the front façade, it is covered in steel panels with a vertical board pattern on them. The original south façade of the house would have had four square, single pane windows, two near the east end and two near the west end of the façade.

Side/East Façade

Beginning at the north end of the east façade there is a metal-framed casement window with three panes in each half, followed by an entrance leading into the kitchen. The entrance has an original metal door with a central rectangular window and an aluminum screen door. To the south of the entrance is a metal-framed three-pane casement window that provides light and ventilation to the bathroom. At the south end of the façade of the house's original portion is a picture window. The picture window, like the others found on the house, features a large central pane that is flanked by four-pane casement windows on each side. To the south of the southern picture window is a porch support that matches the one on the front porch.

The east side of the addition is devoid of fenestration. At the south end of the façade is the east side of the open carport.

Interior

The interior of the Matthews House, for the most part still reflects the plan and design of the house when it left the Lustron factory. The only alteration to the plan has been the removal of the two bedroom closets and the small closet at the end of the hall. However, this was done to extend the hallway in order to provide access to the addition.

The interior retains its original vertical steel wall paneling and ceiling panels. It also retains the original built-ins in the bedroom, living room and dining room. The kitchen retains the original upper cabinets, although the original lower cabinets have been removed. The bathroom also retains the original bathtub. The original heating system has been replaced, which necessitated the installation of some new ductwork, but it is easily removable.

Also in the two bedrooms, the original window openings are clearly visible, and have been filled in with peg-board. The size of the bedroom windows, which are moderately sized, indicate that the house is a later version of the Westchester model. The earliest versions of the Westchester had pairs of small slit windows set high in the wall that provided light to the bedrooms. The second version had a small single window in each bedroom while the third version had a moderately-sized window in each bedroom.

The interior of the addition reflects its 1960s construction, with wood paneling and the brick fireplace. The upper part of the house's original exterior wall and the original window openings

are also visible in the addition. It is also believed that the original steel panels are behind the paneling on the lower part of the wall.

Integrity

The exterior of the original portion of the house has excellent integrity retaining its original porcelain-enameled steel panels, original roof, and its original windows. The largest change to the house's integrity was the construction of the addition on the south side at an unknown date. However, the addition is relatively small in scale in comparison to the overall size of the house. Furthermore, the flat roof of the addition does not compete with height of the original house. Also, even with the addition, the plan and unique method of construction of the original Lustron house is clearly evident and recognizable.

Furthermore, if the addition were removed, it appears that the original southern exterior wall of the house could be restored relatively easily. At least some of the steel panels are visible on the inside of the addition, and it is believed that the panels remain under the paneling in the rest of the wall. In addition, the original window openings and frames remain in place.

The interior of the Matthews House also retains excellent integrity. For the most part, the original plan of the house is intact with the exception of the removal of the bedroom closets to provide access to the addition. However, the rest of the interior retains its original vertical steel wall paneling and ceiling panels. It also retains the original built-ins in the bedroom, living room and dining room. The kitchen retains the original upper cabinets, although the original lower cabinets have been removed. The bathroom also retains the original bathtub. As a result, it is very easy to see the design and unique features that are so indicative of the a Lustron house.

8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria
(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- [ ] A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- [ ] B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- [x] C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- [ ] D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations
(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- [ ] A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- [ ] B. Removed from its original location
- [ ] C. A birthplace or grave
- [ ] D. A cemetery
- [ ] E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- [ ] F. A commemorative property
- [ ] G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

Areas of Significance
(Enter categories from instructions.)
ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance
c.1949

Significant Dates
c.1949

Significant Person
(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder
Beckman and Blass, Architects

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Mary H. Matthews Lustron House is a good example of the porcelain-enameled steel Lustron House of the late 1940s, which was developed as a pre-fabricated house that could be erected cheaply and quickly on its site. The Lustron House was hoped to be mass-produced and was also hoped to be a house type that could aid in alleviating the post-World-War-II housing shortage that was a problem across the country. By the end of 1949, twelve Lustron homes had been shipped to Arkansas, and the Matthews House is one of four known surviving examples in the state, and one of two known to survive in Little Rock. As a rare surviving example of a Lustron House in Arkansas, the Mary H. Matthews Lustron House is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **statewide significance** under **Criterion C**.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

HISTORY OF THE PROPERTY

Like much of the country, Little Rock suffered a severe housing shortage after World War II. As Jim and Judy Lester write in their book *Greater Little Rock*, "With the victory over Germany and Japan secured, American GIs rushed home from Europe and Asia to pursue the American dream. In Little Rock, the late 1940s were marked by serious housing shortages as veterans flocked back to central Arkansas. To meet this need, developers converted woodlands in the west into tract houses and expanded areas like Cammack Village that had been built during the war."[1] The growth of Little Rock to the west was also the result of the increasing number and usage of automobiles. "Rush-hour traffic jams, irritating parking meters, and confusing one-way streets began to erode the glamour of shopping in the downtown area."[2]

To help deal with the housing shortage, several solutions were employed. In the city's older neighborhoods, many of the large old homes were divided into apartments, and the first federally-funded, low-income housing projects were also initially diverted to house war plant workers. However, once World War II was over, and construction materials became more available, small new houses could once again be built to house the influx of city residents. Although new neighborhoods were developed, the houses were also built in previously platted neighborhoods around the city that had not seen much development prior to the war, including the Cunningham's Addition to the City of Little Rock.[3]

The Cunningham's Addition to the City of Little Rock, where the Matthews Lustron House was built, first appears on the 1913 Sanborn maps for the city, although there are no detail sheets for

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[1] Lester, Jim, and Judy Lester. *Greater Little Rock*. Norfolk, VA: Donning Company, Publishers, 1986, p. 200.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Roy, F. Hampton, Sr., Charles Witsell, Jr., and Cheryl Griffith Nichols. *How We Lived: Little Rock as an American City*. Little Rock: August House, 1984, p. 206.

the area. Bounded by West 8th Street on the north, Washington Street on the east, West 12th Street on the south, and Butler Street on the west, the addition was just outside of the city limits at the time. (Washington Street was the western edge of the city limits.) Even though the neighborhood was platted in the early twentieth century, it was several decades before much development occurred in the area.[4]

By 1939, the first time that detailed sheets of Sanborn maps illustrate the Cunningham's Addition part of the city, there were very few houses built in the area. In addition, parts of some of the streets were unpaved. (Maryland Avenue, for example, was not paved between Van Buren and Harrison, just west of the Matthews House.) Even by 1950, the last time that Sanborn maps were done for Little Rock, there were still many vacant lots in the Cunningham's Addition. For example, the Matthews House was one of only three houses that had been built on its block. There were also totally vacant blocks to the east and west along with blocks that had had only one house built on them.[5]

The concentrated development of the Cunningham's Addition during and after World War II meant that it developed during the Lustron's heyday of the late 1940s. The post-World-War-II-era of the late 1940s and 1950s represented the real beginnings of the westward-expansion of the city as new suburbs and shopping centers were built, especially in the area of Hayes Street, now University Avenue. Interestingly, the other known surviving Lustron in Little Rock, located at 1302 South Tyler, is less than ½ mile from the Matthews House.

Although the Lustron Corporation's prefabricated houses came about in the late 1940s, the idea of prefabrication was nothing new at the time, having been around since at least the mid-nineteenth century. During the latter half of the 1800s, there were several companies that manufactured "portable" or "sectional" houses, mainly for shipment to California during the Gold Rush, for use during the Civil War, or for use as vacation cottages during the 1870s and 1880s. Houses illustrated in the 1862 Skillings and Flint catalogue of "Portable Sectional Houses" ranged in price from $125 up to $650.[6]

Even though the manufacture of prefabricated houses began in the mid-nineteenth century, it was apparently still uncommon by the 1880s. In the early 1880s, the editors of *The American Architect* wrote: "The most frequently repeated of all the many questions which we receive – one which we have become weary of answering – is the inquiry where the sectional or portable buildings…are to be procured. Our correspondents alone, for the last four or five years, supposing them to order one house each, would have kept a considerable establishment fully occupied, and we hope that any persons undertaking such business, for their own benefit as well as ours, will keep us informed of their whereabouts." Apparently, builders took the editors' plea seriously since the Portable and Manufacturing Co. of New York began publishing illustrated ads within a year and by 1892 the E. F. Hodgson Co. of Boston was producing sectional cottages.

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[4] Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Little Rock: 1913, 1939, and 1950.
[5] Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Little Rock: 1913, 1939, and 1950.
[6] Reiff, Daniel D. *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide.* University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 119.

Although many of the companies that produced portable or sectional houses were located in the eastern United States, at least one company existed in the Midwest as well. In the mid-1860s, Col. Lyman Bridges began manufacturing houses in Chicago, and he exhibited one of his houses at the Paris Exposition Universelle in 1867. As Reiff states, "It was standard balloon-frame construction, but came as a 'complete package,' including 'the sill and everything above them,' with all 'finishing lumber dressed, ready to be fitted together' and all the components ('doors, door frames, glazed sash, steps, stairs, brackets, railings, trimmings, locks, knobs, hinges, screws, nails, [even] chimney and flues') ready for assembly, according to an 1870 catalog."[7]

Even though most early efforts at constructing prefabricated houses involved wood construction, a couple of efforts involved concrete. Notably, in the first decade of the 1900s Thomas Edison proposed a system for constructing a concrete house in one pour, although it ultimately proved to be impractical on a commercial scale. Another effort involving concrete was undertaken by architect Grosvenor Atterbury who had devised a system of pre-cast hollow-core concrete panels for floors, walls, and roofs. With the support of the Russell Sage Foundation, Atterbury did erect several hundred houses between 1910 and 1918 in Forest Hills, New York.[8]

The first efforts looking at the use of steel for prefabricated housing likely emerged in the 1920s when Walter Gropius and his colleagues at the Bauhaus in Germany built a steel house to coincide with the building of the new Bauhaus building in 1926. In the same year, Karl Kastner and Company in Leipzig, Germany, also built a steel house. Interestingly, both of the German efforts were also in response to a housing shortage that was plaguing Germany in the mid-1920s.[9]

Also in the 1920s some efforts were undertaken in this country, but they focused on commercial buildings and storage sheds. L. W. Ray, for example, designed and patented a portable unit that became the standard for White Castle Hamburger stands in 1928. Like the Lustron later on, Ray's design used a steel frame and porcelain-enameled steel panels that fastened to the frame to become the interior and exterior walls.[10]

However, it was not until the Century of Progress Exposition in 1933 that the real possibility of acceptance of prefabricated metal housing came to be. Of the 11 model houses that were constructed for the event, three were manufactured primarily from steel. The General Houses House, the Armco-Ferro Enamel House (a joint venture between the American Rolling Mill Company [ARMCO] of Middletown, Ohio, and the Ferro Enamel Corporation of Cleveland, and

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[7] Reiff, Daniel D. *Houses from Books: Treatises, Pattern Books, and Catalogs in American Architecture, 1738-1950: A History and Guide.* University Park, Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2000, p. 119.
[8] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 34.
[9] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 7.
[10] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 7.

the Strand-Steel House were mostly manufactured from steel while the House of Tomorrow used a light steel frame that was covered on the ground floor with a molded veneer of plastic.[11]

However, Lustron's efforts represented one of the first serious attempts to use steel for prefabricated residential construction, and the post-World War II era was the perfect time to try the concept. Lustron was the brainchild of Carl Strandlund who had been born in Sweden in 1888 and was the son and grandson of engineers. Strandlund graduated from Moline (Illinois) High School and took correspondence courses to become a graduate engineer. Strandlund worked for several farm implement companies, including John Deere, Minneapolis Moline, and the Oliver Farm Machinery Company, and would eventually get 150 patents related to improving farm implements. (His father had 300 patents for farm implements and improvements as well.)[12]

At Oliver, Strandlund became the director of engineering and development before being promoted to the manager and works coordinator for the company's four manufacturing plants. After leaving Oliver, Strandlund worked for Chicago Steel Foundry and B.F. Goodrich in Akron, Ohio, before joining Chicago Vitreous Enamel Products Company in April 1942 as a works manager at their Cicero, Illinois, plant.[13]

The Chicago Vitreous Products Company had been founded in 1919 by brothers William and Emanuel Hogenson. The company produced steel enamelware for companies that manufactured household enameled appliances such as stoves, washing machines, and refrigerators. The company later developed a high-grade steel enamel that was used for architectural panels including storefronts and interior walls, which were developed under the Porcelain Products Company name. The Porcelain Products Company was formed in 1932, and, although it had been in use since August 24, 1936, they trademarked the name "Lustron" on October 19, 1937.[14] The word "Lustron," was a variation of Lusterlite and a contraction of the procedure of putting "luster on" steel through the enameling process.[15]

The efforts to get the Lustron Corporation off the ground began in 1946 when engineer and inventor Carl Strandlund met in Washington, DC, with Wilson Wyatt of the Veterans Emergency Housing Program and who was also the Expediter of the National Housing Agency. Strandlund was seeking release of some of the government's hoarded steel so that his company could resume production of enameled steel service stations and hamburger stands.[16]

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[11] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 8.
[12] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 10.
[13] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 10-11.
[14] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 11.
[15] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 77.
[16] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 3.

Although Wyatt and the government were not willing to release steel for the construction of hamburger stands and service stations, especially given the post-war housing shortage, they were willing to release an unlimited supply of steel for housing. Although Strandlund's hopes were probably somewhat dashed, he did see a tremendous opportunity in the use of steel for housing. In fact, he had designs for the Lustron with him.[17]

The prototype Lustron house was manufactured using the tooling that Chicago Vitreous had retained from before World War II, and it was named the "Esquire." Once the idea for the plan of the Lustron houses was developed Strandlund commissioned two architects who had previously done work for Chicago Vitreous to design the prototype house. Morris H. Beckman and Roy Burton Blass were familiar with the company's capabilities and were well-suited for the task. Beckman had graduated from MIT in 1938, and had risen quickly to become a chief draftsman at the firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (SOM). In 1945, Beckman left SOM and established the firm of Beckman and Blass in Wilmette, Illinois, with Blass as his partner.[18]

The design that Beckman and Blass came up with reflected the strong consumer desire for a flexible interior with open spaces and multipurpose rooms. They chose the ranch style for the Lustron for several reasons. First, it was a simple design that could be adapted to a wide variety of locations and lot characteristics. Second, it gave the house a broad potential market, and since it was a design that many were familiar with, it was hoped that this would outweigh any potential negativity associated with the novelty of the steel construction. The ranch style also "represented modularity and modernity, a reduction of housing to its most essential features without sacrificing livability."[19]

Although the panels for the house were done by Chicago Vitreous initially, the frame for the prototype was done by Macomber Steel in Canton, Ohio, following the design of Beckman and Blass. Once the frame was completed, it was shipped to the site in South Hinsdale, Illinois, where the prototype would be constructed. In addition, while the frame was being manufactured, the engineers were looking for a suitable material to be used to seal the gaps between the steel panels. After testing several materials, they settled on polyvinyl chloride, which is used today for bottle cap gaskets for baby food, pickles, and jelly, among other food products.[20]

The prototype house was erected on the grounds of the Hinsdale Nursery, a commercial supplier of trees, shrubs, and plants for private and commercial use, at 7210 South Madison Street. The company had a large formal garden near the nursery's entrance and the house was built in the middle of it. Like the eventual production models, the Esquire prototype used porcelain-enameled steel for the walls, roof, gutters, and downspouts. However, some of the interior

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[17] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 4-5.
[18] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 78.
[19] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 78.
[20] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 18.

partitions were constructed out of wood and plywood, although they would eventually use the porcelain-enameled steel like the rest of the house. Although a few minor changes were undertaken during construction, the finished house was close to Beckman and Blass' original design.[21]

Visitors who toured the prototype house in Hinsdale were given a promotional brochure with a floor plan of the house. Some of the specifications for the house were that

> ...the house was designed to be built on a concrete slab, had unitized structural steel support members that formed the wall sections, steel trusses supporting the roof, 1½ inches of fiberglass insulation behind the exterior wall panels, and four inches of the same material above the false ceiling over the ceiling panels. Radiant heat was supplied to the structure through the ceiling panels from a Williams Oil-O-Matic furnace, although coal or natural gas furnaces could be installed depending on the owner's preference and local availability.[22]

Once the feasibility of constructing the house was shown, it became necessary to find a factory for production of the final design. Wilson Wyatt contacted the War Assets Administration (WAA) and told the WAA to transfer the Dodge-Chrysler plant in Chicago, which had been converted to an aircraft engine plant to Lustron. The plant, which contained 840 acres under one roof, was ideal for Lustron's needs. However, the plant had already been promised to Preston Tucker for production of his Tucker Torpedo automobile. Although Wyatt tried to find a way for Tucker and Lustron to share the factory, which Strandlund was agreeable to doing, Tucker would not even consider it.[23]

However, a new housing expediter, Frank R. Creedon, who had taken Wyatt's place worked with the WAA and was finally able to offer Strandlund the choice of two plants for the manufacture of Lustron houses. Two Curtiss-Wright plants in Ohio, one in Columbus and one in Cincinnati were available. Strandlund chose the Columbus plant and signed a lease for $428,000 a year.[24]

The factory was located at 4200 East 5th Avenue and consisted of two buildings that covered 107 acres with more than one million square feet of space. One of the buildings was 1,400 feet long,

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[21] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 18, 20.
[22] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 20-21. The prototype house remained in use until its demolition in 1989.
[23] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 31-32.
[24] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 34.

340 feet wide, and had a working height of 35 feet. By April 1948, Lustron had hired 500 people for the plant and had hoped to have 7,000 on the payroll by September.[25]

At the same time that Lustron was seeking a factory for home production, they were also seeking funding to fund the corporation. However, on November 2, 1946, the RFC turned down Wyatt's request for $32 million since most companies who were seeking funding from the RFC were not putting in enough capital of their own. As RFC chairman of the board Charles B. Henderson wrote on October 31, 1946, "The Lustron application provided that, in relation to total borrowings of $52 million, the owners of the business would only contribute $36,000 or 7/100 of one percent."[26]

At this point Lustron was still part of Chicago Vit and Porcelain Products, which meant that they were partially liable for any loan funds that Lustron received. Since Porcelain Products had become inactive and Chicago Vit declined loan funds, it paved the way for Strandlund to set up a totally new "Lustron Corporation" on October 31, 1947. As Fetters and Kohler write:

> On the same day, October 31, Strandlund resigned from Chicago Vitreous Enamel Products and at the same time purchased the 'Lustron' trademark, the machinery required to produce the pilot homes, and all interests that the company had in the Lustron house, using his substantial holding of Chicago Vit stock in a trade.[27]

At the same time that the company was organized, a board of directors was put in place. The board of directors for the Lustron Corporation had members from many different backgrounds, including several members that represented some of Lustron's suppliers. Members included Raymond Hurley, vice chairman of the Thor Corporation, the manufacturer of Lustron's dishwasher/washing machine unit; Louis Leverone, president of the Automatic Canteen Company, a supplier of kitchen and bathroom components; George Delp, president of the New Holland Machine Company, a manufacturer of Lustron's enameling machinery; and Paul O. Buckley, an officer of the Federal Machine and Welder Company, a supplier of production equipment for steel processing. Directors inside the company included Strandlund, Russell G. Davis, who was executive vice president, and Fred M. Lowum, also a vice president and treasurer.[28]

The upper management at Lustron, in addition to their wide-ranging backgrounds, also had wide-ranging salaries. Strandlund's salary was $50,000 (which was a 50% reduction from his salary

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[25] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 55.
[26] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 31.
[27] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 37.
[28] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 99.

as president of Chicago Vitreous) to the junior officers' salaries, which were $12,500. Almost all of the management took pay cuts to join Lustron. "Of the twenty-three top executives, three had worked at Chicago Vitreous, fourteen had held line management positions at manufacturing firms, two had worked in the publishing industry, and four had joined Lustron from federal agencies."[29]

The Lustron's sales force, which consisted of 30 people, had generated a backlog of almost 6,000 orders by mid-January 1948, and the staff of Lustron felt that full production, which they believed would be about 3,700 houses a month, would come to fruition by the end of 1948. However, it would ultimately be 19 months and six loans of $37.5 million from the RFC before the retooling of the former aircraft factory would be complete.[30]

To help spread the news about Lustron homes, model homes were erected in various cities around the country. The first model home went on display in New York City in April 1948. Erected on the northeast corner of 52nd Street and the Avenue of the Americas in Manhattan, by April 14 approximately 31,000 people had toured the home. Many visitors made out checks on the spot to order a home, but Lustron refused them all since they were still months away from production. The other first model homes were erected in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; Washington, DC; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; St. Louis, Missouri; and Indianapolis, Indiana, among other locations.[31]

By late 1948, Strandlund claimed that Lustron had 20,000 "firm" orders and he announced that the production goals for 1949 were 45,000 houses. The first home design offered by Lustron was designated the "Westchester," which was similar in design to the "Esquire" prototype designed by Blass and Beckman. The name "Westchester" referred to the upscale New York county and was intended to associate the house with established and desirable suburban communities.[32]

Lustron saw the Westchester model as just the beginning. Lustron "planned to soon be able to build a three-bedroom house with an attached garage (which did go on the market in late 1949), a four-bedroom house, and even apartments. It also planned to design and produce complete bathrooms for farmers for about $500 that would be sold through Sears, Roebuck & Company."[33]

The Westchester had many interesting features, including a combination clothes and dishwasher in the kitchen. The Thor appliance was part of the Westchester Deluxe package that also

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[29] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 100.
[30] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 41.
[31] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 47 and 49.
[32] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 125.
[33] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 45.

included a bedroom vanity and a pass-through divider between the kitchen and dining room. The bathroom featured all of the necessary amenities including a bathtub, toilet, and sink in addition to an illuminated medicine cabinet with mirror, a towel bar, robe hook, combination soap dish and grab bar over the tub, toilet paper holder, drinking glass holder, and a curtain rod in the shower. The two-bedroom Westchester Deluxe model ultimately became Lustron's best seller.[34]

At the same time that the model home opened in New York City, Lustron also began a national advertising campaign in *Life* magazine, which expanded to other publications later. The ad in the April 19th issue of the magazine touted Lustron as "The House America Has Been Waiting For," and a "new standard of Living." The ad also featured a coupon that readers could submit for more information on the Lustron. More than 150,000 inquiries were received by Lustron in response to the ad in *Life* magazine alone, with about 50,000 inquiries received from the ad in other sources.[35]

Lustron's concerns with negative backlash from the public was also addressed in some of their advertisements. The advertisements compiled frequently-asked questions from letters that people had sent to the company. The approach was best illustrated by answers to the following questions:

"Q: What about lightning?
A: The house itself is a self-contained lightning rod.
Q: Can I have any other floor plan or room arrangement?
A: Not *yet*.
Q: How do I hang pictures?
A: By using self-adhesive hooking pads supplied by Lustron.
Q: Can I have a basement?
A: No, basements are unnecessary and outmoded for modern life – pioneers needed them for food storage, you have a convenient ground-floor utility room.
Q: Can the house be taken down and moved?
A: No, it is not demountable or portable. If you move to another location, you will want to sell and buy another Lustron Home."[36]

However, criticism did come about, although little of it was from homeowners. During Senate hearings on Lustron, Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas stated: "I have only seen one of them, but it sort of reminds you of a bathtub." Reconstruction Finance Corporation director Harvey J. Gunderson, on the other hand, said that Lustrons looked "a little like hotdog stands."[37]

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[34] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 70-71.
[35] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 48.
[36] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 112.
[37] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 145.

Each home produced by Lustron required an astronomical amount of material. For example, 12.5 tons of steel and one ton of enamel were required. Over 1,000 pieces had to have enamel applied and over 200 of the pieces required a different shape or color. Each Lustron house had 7,000 square feet of surface that required enameling.[38]

The amount of material that would potentially be needed, especially when Lustron reached full production, was also expressed in Douglas Knerr's book *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Knerr wrote:

> A comparison of Lustron's raw material requirements with the entire U.S. enameling industry provides a startling insight into the scope of operations. Based on a projected production of 100 houses per day, Lustron would consume approximately 25 percent of the frit and approximately 75 percent of the coloring oxides produced in the nation. Each day, the plant would enamel over 100,000 individual pieces in over 200 shapes and colors – by far the largest enameling operation in the world. Ceramics industry publications reflected both elation and trepidation at Lustron's potential impact.[39]

Lustron produced its first run of porcelain-enameled steel on August 31, 1948. Since Strandlund was an avid cigar smoker, he immediately ordered some of the steel made into souvenir ashtrays that were decorated with his signature.[40] Finally, though, after years of preparation, the first house for public sale left the Lustron factory in early January 1949 bound for Webster Groves, a western suburb of St. Louis. The event occurred much later than had been hoped. It had been over three years since the end of World War II in 1945 and most of America's soldiers had returned to the U.S. and set up homes in the meantime.[41] The fact that production of Lustrons occurred after the majority of the housing crisis had been solved as well as the high cost were two of the biggest problems that Lustron had to overcome, according to *Architectural Forum*.[42]

One of the largest obstacles in the process of constructing and erecting the Lustron house was shipping the house to the building site. The company's engineers, led by Dick Reedy, came up with a solution of loading all of the components onto a single flat-bed trailer where the walls and roof trusses formed the outer perimeter of the trailer while the other components were loaded in the center. Boxes on the floor of the trailer held the nuts and bolts and the tools necessary to assemble the house. The trailers, which were brightly painted blue and yellow with the Lustron

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[38] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 57 and 62.
[39] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 118.
[40] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 124.
[41] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 53.
[42] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 82.

logos, also acted as rolling advertisements for the house, and they could also serve the purpose of returning to the factory with raw materials. Reedy eventually negotiated with a Chicago-based leasing company to provide 400 trucks and 800 trailers built by Freuhauf Trailer Company to Reedy's specifications.[43]

The price that a purchaser paid for the Lustron depended on the company's price structure, a complex formula that was based on geographic zones. However, this allowed for the covering of transportation costs to get the house to the site. Obviously those zones closest to the factory in Columbus were the cheapest while the homes sent to southwest Texas, the westernmost point covered by Lustron in the continental U.S., were the most expensive. Base prices ranged from a low of $4,110 for the basic two-bedroom Newport Model 023 delivered in Zone 1 to $7,737 for the top of the line three-bedroom Westchester Deluxe delivered in Zone 48 in Texas. Of course, local conditions and costs for the foundation, erection fees, and plumbing and electrical costs, plus the lot, could raise the price significantly more.[44]

Arkansas was covered by Lustron's Zones 17-27, which meant that prices varied from $4,590 for a Newport Model 023 up to $7,212 for a three-bedroom Westchester Deluxe, a significant amount of money during the 1940s. As Knerr writes in his book, "Since the average annual income of veterans in 1946 was approximately $2,500, the 'magic number' for the industry was $5,000. 'What this country really needs is a good $5,000 house,' Strandlund asserted, wryly echoing former U.S. Vice President Thomas Marshall's famous quote about the country needing a good five-cent cigar."[45]

Once the Lustron house was finally shipped to the site, the troubles associated with constructing the house may not have ended, depending on the local building codes. In Chicago, for example, codes required plastered walls and ceilings for houses, which disqualified the Lustron. Connecticut codes required basements while the copper plumbing used in the Lustron was banned by many building codes, including those of Atlanta. Even Lustron's home town of Columbus required brick or stone chimneys, which caused problems initially. However, even if things were fine with the local building codes, some local FHA requirements caused troubles, since they varied from state to state. In Indiana, for example, the FHA required an overhead light in the bathroom, while it was not a requirement in Ohio. In Tennessee, the FHA required a door between the kitchen and the dining room, which the Lustron's open plan did not have.[46]

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[43] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, pp. 115-116.

[44] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 74-75. Although Texas was the furthest west of the official Lustron zones, at least three Lustron homes were constructed on Fairway Drive in Los Alamos, New Mexico. However, it is possible that these were erected by the U.S. Government as part of the Manhattan Project.

[45] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 94, and Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 151-152.

[46] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 76-77.

Volume production of Lustron houses finally began on February 25, 1949, with a reported 25 houses being produced daily. (It was later found out that the actual number of houses being produced a day was 15.) However, former congressional Representative Frank L. "Sunny" Sundstrom of New Jersey, who was now working as Lustron's vice president of distribution, sales, and servicing that the company could break even if it produced at least 35 houses a day. (Although 250 houses had been produced by this time, they were almost exclusively for testing or demonstration purposes.)[47]

Production continued to climb after the beginning of volume production, but it never reached the hoped for levels that Lustron wanted. On July 7, 1949, 24 houses were shipped from the factory, which was the largest single day's shipment up to that time. The houses went to fourteen different states, with at least one house coming to Arkansas. During the last week of July, 100 houses were shipped from Lustron, which was an all-time high for a week's time, and 42 houses were shipped on July 31st, an all-time daily high. In the first 12 months of production, a total of 1,250 houses had been manufactured.[48]

Lustron dealers complained that the assembly of the house took much longer than the factory estimated – 1,200 hours versus 350 hours – and that one "could paper the walls with the assembly blueprints." Since the company realized that some of the problems were with the design and manufacture of the house, prominent Boston architect Carl Koch was consulted with on how to improve the process to make the assembly easier. Koch found that there were several fundamental problems after a thorough analysis of Lustron's operations. The challenges that Koch had to address were "improving the efficiency of the company's current machinery and sequence of production, reducing the number and complexity of component parts, and expanding the product line without increasing plant capacity."[49]

After his analysis of the company's operations, Koch had several suggestions. With respect to the steel panels, Koch suggested an increase in the size of the panels from two-feet square to two-feet wide by eight-feet long. He also suggested that they be rolled out and cut to length in a continuous process rather than cut and punched intermittently. The new system, Koch showed, would save money associated with labor and material costs. Koch also wanted to redesign the roof system since he thought it was not attractive. However, the current design was cost effective so it was not redesigned. Another suggestion that Koch wanted to carry out, although it ultimately was never changed, was the window design. Koch suggested using a modular window that could be interchangeable with the newly designed wall panels, instead of the four sizes that were used.[50]

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[47] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 79.
[48] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 85 and 87.
[49] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 147-148.
[50] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, pp. 149-150.

However, the most significant change that Koch suggested, and one that would be extremely beneficial to dealers, was the reduction of the number of components shipped to the site from over 3,000 to 37. If it were carried out through more pre-assembly at the factory, Koch predicted that it would bring about better quality control and cost savings to boot. With fewer parts to assemble, the houses could be erected quicker and in larger quantities.[51]

Although production had steadily increased through the first part of 1949, storm clouds were building on the horizon. On July 3, 1949, *Time* magazine published an article about Lustron titled "Bathtub Blues" that was critical of the company and its president along with the RFC. The many loans that the government had given Lustron were also questioned.[52] In August, the RFC made another $2 million loan to Lustron, which raised the company's total debt to $37.5 million. In addition, during the last two weeks of August 1949, 700 employees were laid off. Although the layoffs were blamed on problems with the production line, it was really the end of Lustron's glory days.[53]

The call for investigations into the company by the House Banking and Currency Committee to look at allegations of mismanagement and waste of RFC funds in October 1949 also negatively impacted the company. Although the company was producing a high of 26 houses a day in August, it slumped to only six houses a day by October. Although 2,100 houses had been produced, only 1,700 had been sold, and two-thirds of the company's employees had been laid off. One small bright spot, however, was that the company had begun producing panels and other parts for one-car and two-car matching garages along with breezeways and patios.[54]

By the end of 1949, things were really heating up for Lustron. On December 28th, the RFC terminated its loans to the company, and the following day Lustron was given an ultimatum to submit a reorganization plan by January 6, 1950. Just a week later, the RFC declared that Lustron was in default on the vast majority of their loans, and it began to look at foreclosure, receivership, or some other way to seize the Lustron Corporation's assets.[55]

When an outside firm evaluated the problems at Lustron, the biggest finding was that the homes that the company was producing were no longer moderately priced. The two-bedroom Westchester model had increased in price from the initial proposed price of $7,000 to $10,000-$12,000, a sizeable increase. In light of the finding, Strandlund had his engineers develop a new model, referred to as the "Newport." The first one shipped in November 1949, but they were not generally released until February 1950. However, due to the issues with the RFC, the Newport

[51] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 150.
[52] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 85.
[53] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 88.
[54] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 89.
[55] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 92.

did not get wide distribution and was not as well received by the public. Even so, the Newport was not enough, and on February 14, 1950, the RFC ordered foreclosure proceedings to be started against Lustron.[56]

The suit of foreclosure against Lustron's $36,466,273 mortgage was filed on February 22, 1950, and was assigned to U.S. District Judge Mell G. Underwood. On March 6th, Clyde M. Foraker of Columbus was appointed as the company's receiver by Judge Underwood. (Foraker was initially appointed for a thirty-day trial period, but it was extended for an indefinite period on April 3rd.) Two days later Foraker fired all but two of Lustron's top officials, including Strandlund, to save money. As Fetters and Kohler write, "It was a staggering blow to Strandlund, but it was done. The plant limped along under Foraker's direction producing still more Westchesters, Newports, and various other parts, but the pace had fallen well off and it was a token production as everyone waited for the next shoe to fall."[57]

On May 5, 1950, Judge Underwood ordered that the Columbus plant be sold along with its machinery, land, and Lustron's patent rights. Around the same time, the machinery was stopped along with the conveyors and the enameling furnaces were also shut down. A skeleton crew of 70 workers needed to handle the final details of the receiver were kept while the remaining employees were let go. The final action of Foraker was that he

> ...organized the sale of assets by auction for June 6 from a platform that was built in front of the building's entrance. Although a crowd of 300 people milled about, when deputy marshal Robert Sack called for bids, only the RFC called out their bid for $6 million. The bid still had to be confirmed by Judge Underwood on the following Friday at 2 P.M. to become binding. Then, in a separate transaction, an estimated $700,000 worth of unmortgaged steel intended for the houses was awarded to Lafayette Steel Co. of Detroit and Chicago for $645,000. The RFC now had exactly what it wanted: full control of the plant, and the removal of Strandlund from the enterprise. Even the agency itself was somewhat surprised at how easy it had been.[58]

Before the factory closed, a total of 2,680 Lustron houses were built in the United States, the Territory of Alaska, and in Venezuela. The last house was shipped from the factory on June 6, 1950. Also on June 6, 1950, 36 cash orders were returned to prospective buyers since the factory would not be able to deliver the homes.[59]

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[56] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 94.
[57] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 96-97.
[58] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 97.
[59] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 97.

The bitter end of Lustron is well summarized in the book *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment*, which states:

> What had begun as an RFC coup d'état to wrest control of Lustron from Strandlund, obtain the plant at farmsale prices, and make a substantial profit, was thwarted by the RFC's own meddling and ended in a rout. The Lustron Corporation withered away, the physical plant was seized by the U.S. Navy, and the equipment ruined by removing it quickly from the Columbus facility. …
>
> Finally, the Lustron Corporation gave up its last gasp on February 16, 1960, when the Trustees of the Estate of Lustron Corporation – Klein, Murphy and McCahey – petitioned to destroy all books, records, and papers which were stored in Columbus, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois. Not much later, they filed the final report and account and closed forever file 50 B 447.[60]

After the closing and dissolution of Lustron, in 1953 Strandlund became president of Jerry O'Mahony, Inc., a company that manufactured diners. Once he retired, he moved to Florida, although he eventually moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota, where he died on December 24, 1974. As his wife Clara later told the *Minneapolis Tribune*, "It was his dream that every Joe could have a house…a lot of people have this misconception that he milked the government out of all this money, but no one could start a business of this kind and have them call in a loan in two years. He actually died of a broken heart."[61]

By the end of 1949, according to Lustron records, twelve Lustron houses had been shipped to Arkansas. It is known that at least three of the houses, including the Matthews House, were shipped to Little Rock, with at least one each going to North Little Rock and West Helena. It is unknown where the other seven homes were shipped. Of the states where homes had been shipped by the end of 1949, the most went to Illinois (307 homes) while the fewest went to South Carolina (2 homes), and a total of 1,970 homes had been shipped from the Columbus factory. Interestingly, five homes were also exported – two to Alaska and two to Venezuela, along with one to an unknown destination.[62]

The Matthews House was built c.1949 for Mary H. Matthews, an X-ray technician at the University of Arkansas School of Medicine (now UAMS). (Although Matthews' first name was

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[60] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 107 and 109.

[61] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 181.

[62] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, pp. 92 and 141.

Mary, she went by Helen almost exclusively.) The address was first listed in the 1951 Little Rock city directory.[63]

Mary Helen (Gillespie) Matthews apparently spent time in Louisiana before coming to Little Rock, since she became a Radiology Technician at Shreveport, Louisiana's, Charity Hospital in 1935. By 1941, she was working at the McAlmont location of the Isaac Folsom Clinic, and then became employed at UAMS in 1947. Until her retirement from UAMS in 1979, she served in various positions in the Department of Radiology or School of X-Ray Technology, including Instructor, Chief Instructor, Technical Director, Chief Instructor, and Director of Graduate and Continuing Education.[64]

The time that Matthews came to work in Radiology at UAMS was a time of growth in the school following World War II. As one reminiscent history of the department states:

> In an effort to build up each department in the post war period, Dr. [Isadore] Meschan was given full rein [sic.] with encouragement to go ahead. He immediately opened a school for training of technologists, accepted residents in Radiology and worked toward enlarging the department. …
>
> At this time the department was centralized in the School of Medicine Building [which is now the Bowen Law School]. The department grew by topsy – adding a room here and there where possible.[65]

In addition to her work at UAMS, Matthews was also involved with the work of the Arkansas Society of Radiologic Technologists. A press release for the 1967 annual spring refresher course for x-ray technicians indicated that "Mrs. Helen Matthews, chief instructor in the University's School of X-Ray Technology and coordinator for the meeting, said some 400 x-ray technicians from throughout the state have been invited."[66]

The choice of a Lustron house made perfect sense for Matthews. After World War II, which her husband had served in, he suffered from severe post-traumatic stress disorder. Due to the severity of his condition, he lived at the Veterans Administration hospital after the war, leaving Helen to care for a house on her own. Since the Lustron's porcelain-enameled steel construction meant virtually no maintenance, it would have been the perfect type of house for her to own.

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[63] *Polk's Little Rock, North Little Rock City Directories*, 1949-2013.
[64] *Caduceus* (Yearbook of the University of Arkansas School of Medicine). 1950-1979. In the collection of the Historical Research Center, UAMS Library, Little Rock, Arkansas.
[65] Information on the UAMS Radiology Department from the collection of the Historical Research Center, UAMS Library, Little Rock, Arkansas. HRC Archives, Box 278(1), File 6.
[66] Press release for the 1967 annual spring refresher course of the Arkansas Society of Radiologic Technologists from the collection of the Historical Research Center, UAMS Library, Little Rock, Arkansas. HRC Archives, Box 278(2), File 9.

This was especially true since she had her own career that would have left her little free time to deal with maintaining a house.[67]

The Lustron that Matthews had built was a Westchester two-bedroom model in Dove Gray. Lustron offered their homes in four colors, which were Dove Gray, Maize Yellow, Surf Blue, and Desert Tan. Interior colors included a neutral light gray, a blue, a yellow, and a pink. The colors for the houses were designed by noted colorist Howard Ketchum. The other Lustron in Little Rock is also Dove Gray while the model in North Little Rock is Surf Blue and the model in West Helena is Desert Tan. (A Maize Yellow example also existed in Little Rock until it was demolished c.2005.)[68]

Although Matthews remained in the Little Rock area until at least the late 1970s when she retired from UAMS, she only lived in the house until c.1960 when Grover A. Wallace and his wife Imogene were listed as the residents. (Matthews was listed at the address in 1959 and Wallace first appears in 1961; a directory was not published in 1960.) When Wallace purchased the home, he was an agent for the Lincoln Income Life Insurance Company, but by 1970 he had changed jobs, working for Esquire Barber Service. It is also likely that the addition to the house was constructed shortly after the Wallaces purchased the house. The Wallaces retained ownership of the house, even though it did not always appear in the city directories, until September 8, 1999, when it was sold to Ronnie E. and Mary A. Sanders for $34,000. The Sanders remained in the house until it was sold to the City of Little Rock on June 10, 2013.[69]

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROPERTY

Douglas Knerr wrote in his book *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951* that "The Lustron Corporation was once the largest and most completely industrialized housing company in the history of the United States. Beginning in 1947, Lustron manufactured porcelain-enameled steel houses in a one-million-square-foot plant on 106 acres of land in Columbus, Ohio. At peak production the plant used more electricity than the entire city of Columbus."[70] Furthermore, company president Carl Strandlund, when addressing child Wesley Pearce on a radio program said, "Young man, you are standing in the greatest single development in housing since they first put one stone on top of another"[71]

At the time of its existence in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Lustron was indeed the most successful prefabricated housing company to date. Although the company did not greatly help the housing shortage after World War II, by producing just over 2,600 homes, Lustron did ultimately bring change to the American housing industry. However, Lustron's role in the pre-

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[67] Saar, Amanda. Head, Historical Research Center, UAMS. Conversation with the author. 10 September 2013.
[68] Fetters, Thomas T. and Vincent Kohler, contributing author. *The Lustron Home: The History of a Postwar Prefabricated Housing Experiment.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2002, p. 49 and 69.
[69] *Polk's Little Rock, North Little Rock City Directories*, 1949-2013, and information on the house from the Pulaski County Assessor's website at www.pulaskicountyassessor.net.
[70] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 1.
[71] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 106.

fabricated-housing industry went further than just the house itself. "Lustron's recognition of the importance of environmental factors, such as site and neighborhood planning, reveal a commitment to address issues beyond the mere process of prefabrication. Indeed, the company devised detailed plans for the 'proper' placement of its houses in neighborhood and community settings."[72] Lustron developed a "Planning Guide" that gave specific instructions on how to place the house in community environments. The Guide included detailed sections on street design and layout, cul-de-sacs, planting strips, topographic consideration, the arrangement of the house on the lot, setbacks, and also the integration of community elements such as recreational facilities, schools, and shopping centers. The Guide was based on the Federal Housing Administration's 1940 publication *Successful Subdivisions*.[73]

As a way to help foster "Lustron communities" and to encourage suburban developers to utilize Lustron homes, the company created a fleet sales department. Lustron had a close relationship with American Community Builders, Inc., the developers of Park Forest, Illinois, and also marketed its community approach with other suburban developers in major American cities. The community approach "became a major goal of the company's sales strategy, which defined the creation of a 'complete package' – lot, house, and community – as a key to sustained long-term growth."[74]

The Lustron was also significant in that the house's design and quality demonstrated that most Americans would accept a prefabricated house. This was especially significant since previous perceptions had been that prefabricated houses were seen as "cheap, impermanent 'crisis' housing." The acceptance of the Lustron by the public was greatly illustrated by a 1953 survey that was conducted by U.S. Steel Corporation to gauge the possibility of also stepping into the market. Of the 320 surveys that were sent out, 200 owners returned the questionnaire. The survey covered a wide variety of topics including age and income levels, length of occupancy, types of houses previously owned, and where the respondent had first heard about the Lustron. The survey also asked about the design features of the house and finally asked the respondent to compare the Lustron with other prefabricated houses, other steel prefabricated houses, and conventionally built houses.[75]

The results of the survey clearly showed that the public had accepted the Lustron, a significant change in opinion from just a few years before. In summary, the survey found:

> In conclusion, the survey revealed that 97 percent of the respondents preferred the Lustron house to their previous houses for three main reasons: low maintenance costs, ease of cleaning,

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[72] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 16.
[73] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 17.
[74] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 17.
[75] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 184.

> and convenient floor plan. Ninety-eight percent liked the overall design and the appearance of the porcelain-enameled surfaces, and 95 percent said that they would purchase another Lustron house or a comparably featured steel house. When asked what changes they would suggest, 11 percent desired a larger kitchen, and 11 percent wanted access to the bathroom and bedrooms without going through the living room. Only 7.5 percent cited 'expandability' as an issue that would influence the purchase of another steel prefabricated house."[76]

Clearly, the public liked the Lustron and would have continued to buy and live in them if the company had continued. As Knerr writes in his book, *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951,* "Lustron was indeed revolutionary, particularly with respect to the scale and scope of its operations and the level of federal support that it initially received. It may, however, have been too radical. Not from a product perspective, for the market acceptance of the Lustron house demonstrated that the public would buy a porcelain-enameled steel dwelling, but from a process perspective."[77]

The influence of the Lustron house did not stop, however, with the closing of the company, but continues up to the present day. For example, the housing industry continues to use prefabricated technologies in the construction of houses today. As Knerr points out:

> Industrialization is now a reality in residential construction across a wide range of housing forms. Perhaps the most familiar is the mobile home, also called the manufactured house, since it is rarely mobile in its present use. Despite a legacy of criticism and condescension, manufactured housing plays an important role in the housing market as the "predominant unsubsidized type of affordable housing in the United States." The manufactured housing industry is especially important in providing decent housing in less populated areas, but its impact is felt nationwide across a surprising demographic range. Over 12.5 million people live in manufactured houses, and the industry is growing at nearly twice the rate as the conventional homebuilding industry.[78]

Interestingly, the Lustron house is also significant in how it has influenced construction, especially with the rise of environmentalism. The use of prefabricated components and systems have greatly helped in reducing waste at the building site. In addition, the rising cost of lumber, coupled with its decreasing quality, has led the building industry to look more closely and

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[76] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 185.
[77] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 191.
[78] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951.* Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, p. 192.

seriously at building materials other than wood, and several companies have promoted the use of steel in residential construction. At a recent National Association of Home Builders convention in Houston, Texas, for example, several companies cited the innovative quality of the Lustron's steel frame, and several steel framing systems on display were strikingly similar to the Lustron system. Companies also played up the same advantages that Lustron did in 1947, including durability and structural stability.[79]

The Mary H. Matthews Lustron House is a rare example of the work of this significant company in Arkansas, and it illustrates how Arkansas residents were also trying to grapple with the housing shortage that was plaguing the country after World War II. The porcelain-enameled steel Lustron House of the late 1940s was developed as a pre-fabricated house that could hopefully be erected cheaply and quickly on its site. The Lustron House was hoped to be mass-produced and was also hoped to be a house type that could aid in alleviating the post-World-War-II housing shortage that was a problem across the country. Although the Lustron did not live up to its expectations, it did influence the housing industry for decades to come by introducing new materials to the housing market as well as introducing the feasibility of prefabrication and mass production. Due to the fact that it is a rare surviving example of a Lustron House in Arkansas, the Mary H. Matthews Lustron House is being nominated to the National Register of Historic Places with **statewide significance** under **Criterion C**.

[79] Knerr, Douglas. *Suburban Steel: The Magnificent Failure of the Lustron Corporation, 1945-1951*. Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2004, pp. 193-194..

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

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Roy, F. Hampton, Sr., Charles Witsell, Jr., and Cheryl Griffith Nichols. *How We Lived: Little Rock as an American City.* Little Rock: August House, 1984.

Saar, Amanda. Head, Historical Research Center, UAMS. Conversation with the author. 10 September 2013.

Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps for the City of Little Rock: 1913, 1939, and 1950.

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 # _____
____ recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

_X_ State Historic Preservation Office
____ Other State agency
____ Federal agency
____ Local government
____ University
____ Other
Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _PU5894_____

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10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property _Less than one acre._

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates
Datum if other than WGS84:_____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

1. Latitude: 34.743629 Longitude: -92.330475

2. Latitude: Longitude:

3. Latitude: Longitude:

4. Latitude: Longitude:

Or
UTM References
Datum (indicated on USGS map):

[ ] NAD 1927 or [x] NAD 1983

1. Zone: 15	Easting: 561285	Northing: 3844816
2. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
3. Zone:	Easting:	Northing:
4. Zone:	Easting :	Northing:

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

Cunninghams W46 67' of 1 2 & 3 10.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary includes all of the land historically associated with the property.

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11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Ralph S. Wilcox, National Register & Survey Coordinator
organization: Arkansas Historic Preservation Program
street & number: 323 Center Street, Suite 1500
city or town: Little Rock state: AR zip code: 72201
e-mail: ralph@arkansasheritage.org
telephone: (501) 324-9787
date: January 14, 2014

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Mary H. Matthews Lustron House

City or Vicinity: Little Rock

County: Pulaski County State: Arkansas

Photographer: Travis Ratermann

Date Photographed: January 13, 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of _16_. North façade, looking southeast.

2 of _16_. West façade, looking southeast.

3 of _16_. South façade, looking northeast.

4 of _16_. South façade, looking north.

5 of _16_. East façade, looking northwest.

6 of _16_. East façade, looking southwest.

7 of _16_. View of the dining room, built-in china cabinet, and view into the kitchen, looking northeast.

8 of _16_. View of one of the upper cabinets in the kitchen, looking east.

9 of _16_. View of the linen closet outside of the bathroom, looking northeast.

10 of _16_. View of the bathroom, looking east.

11 of _16_. View of the second bedroom showing the original window opening, looking southeast.

12 of _16_. View of the second bedroom showing the picture window, looking east.

13 of _16_. View of the closet doors in the master bedroom, looking east.

14 of _16_. View of the built-in vanity in the master bedroom, looking north.

15 of _16_. View of the original south wall of the house inside the addition, looking north.

16 of _16_. View of the living room and built-in bookcase, looking southwest.

Photo Key:

6
5
35
Range
Sink
Refgr.
KITCHEN
8
Kitchen cabinet
China cabinet
DINING
9' x 10'
UTILITY
Furnace
BATH
12
BEDROOM
10'-6" x 14'
11
10
9
4
31'
7
LIVING
14' x 16'
16
PORCH
1
Bookcase
Dresser
13
BEDROOM
12' x 12'
15
14
0
5
10
15 ft.
3
2
North

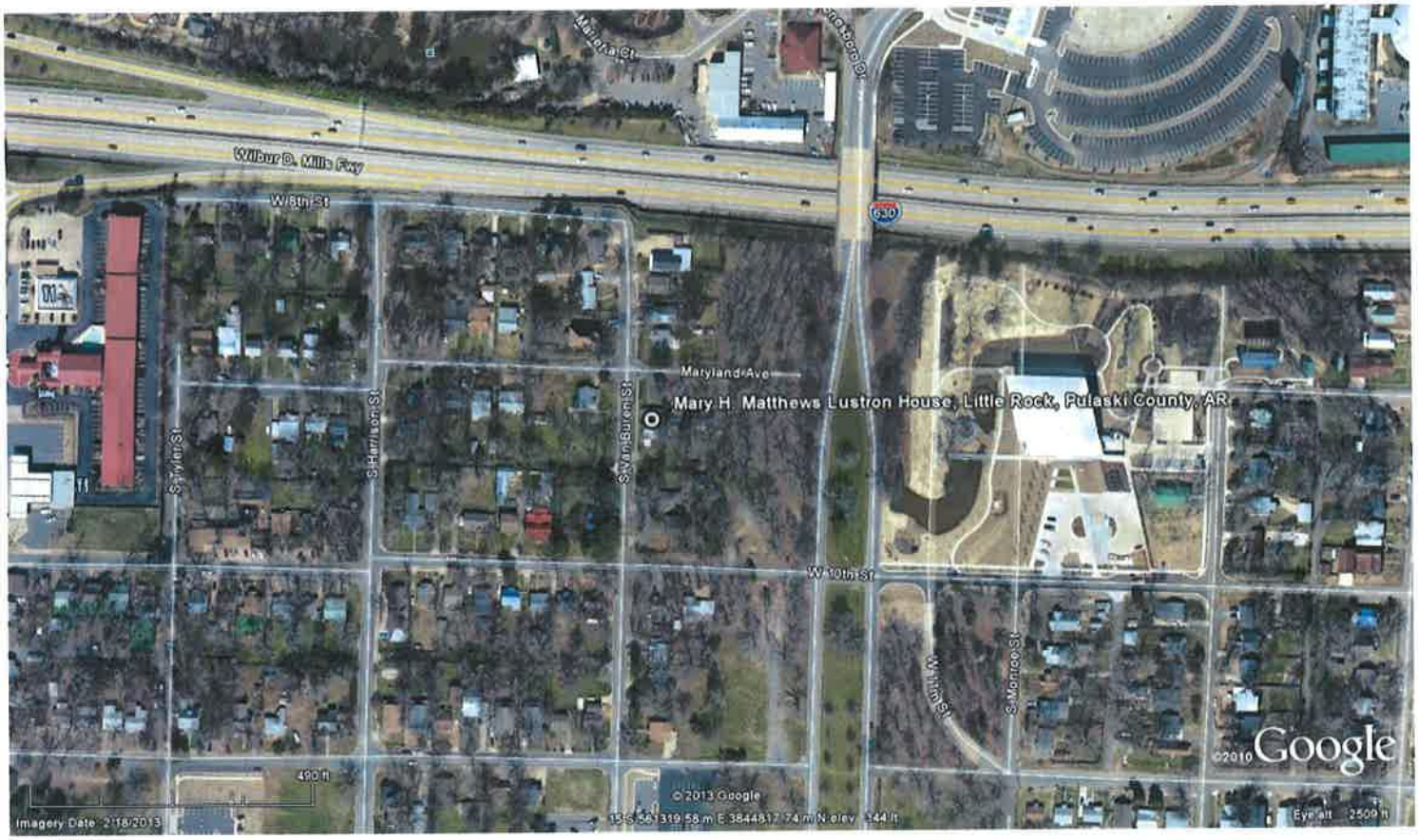
Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management. U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Mary H. Matthews Lustron House
Pulaski County, Arkansas
Latitude: 34.743629 Longitude: -92.330475

|----------151'----------|

↑
North

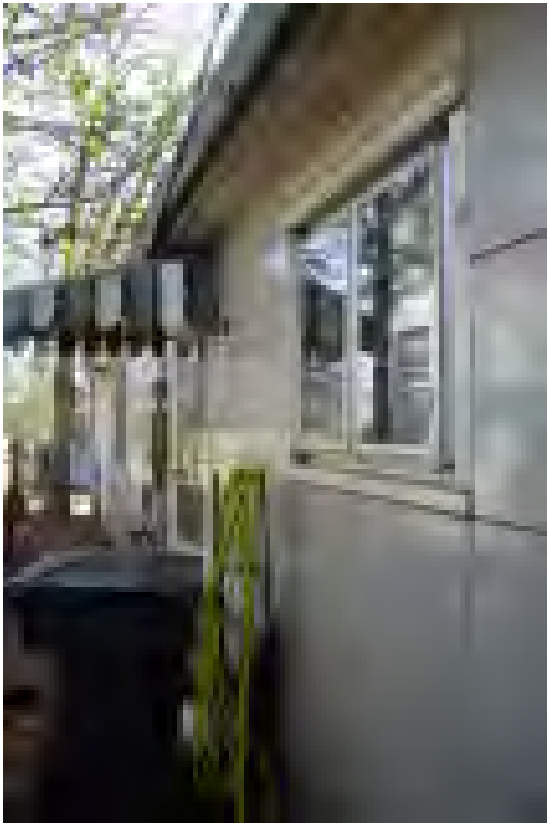


Mary H. Matthews Lustron House
Pulaski County, Arkansas
Latitude: 34.743629 Longitude: -92.330475

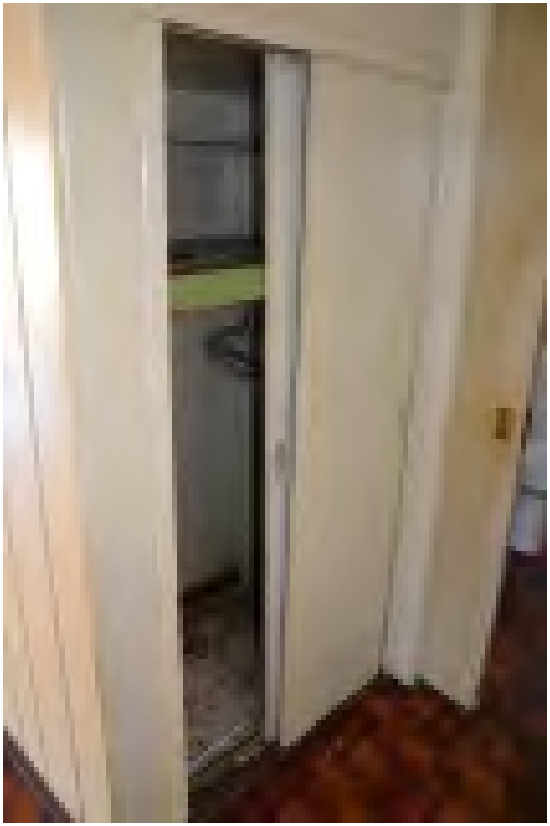
|----------490'----------|

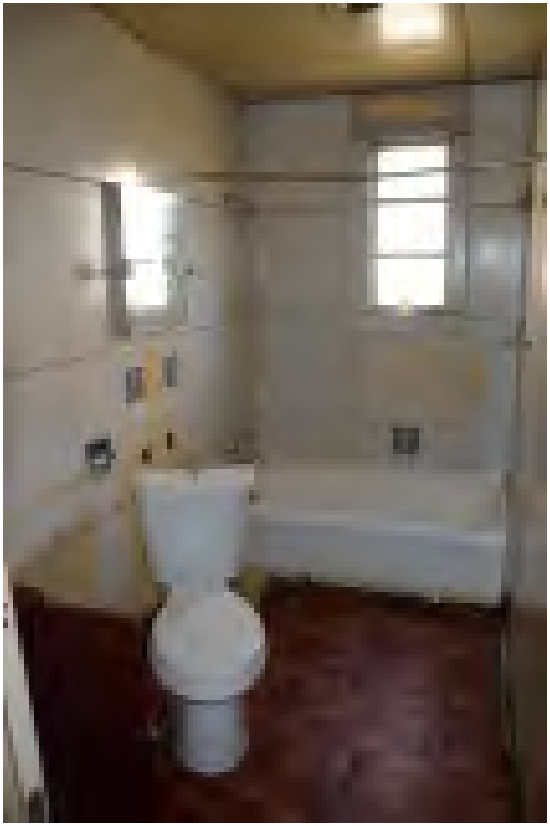
↑
North

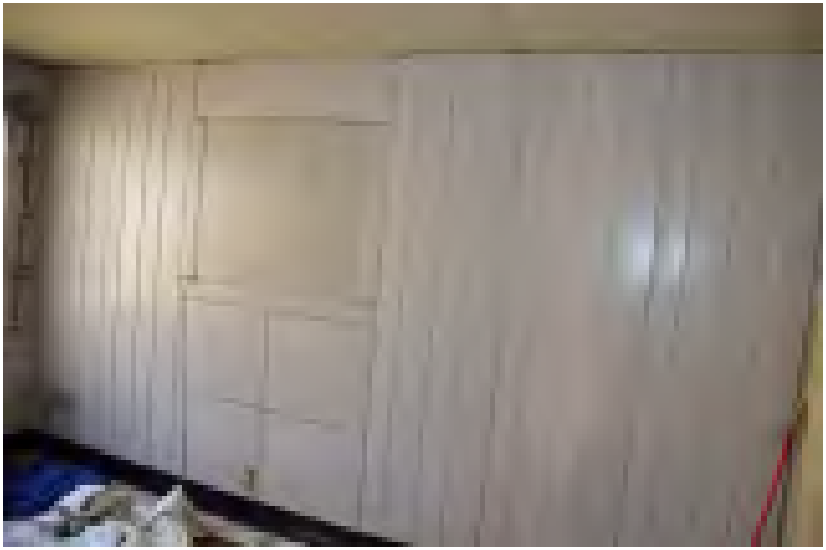
5021

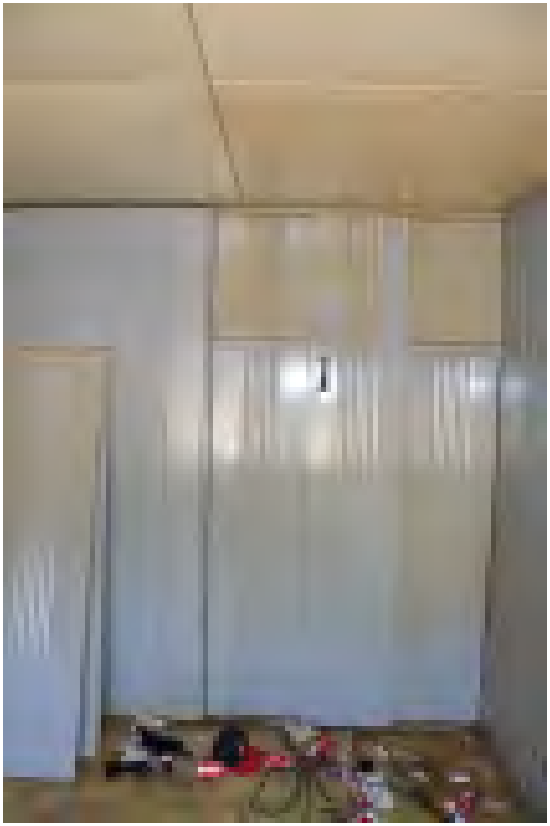


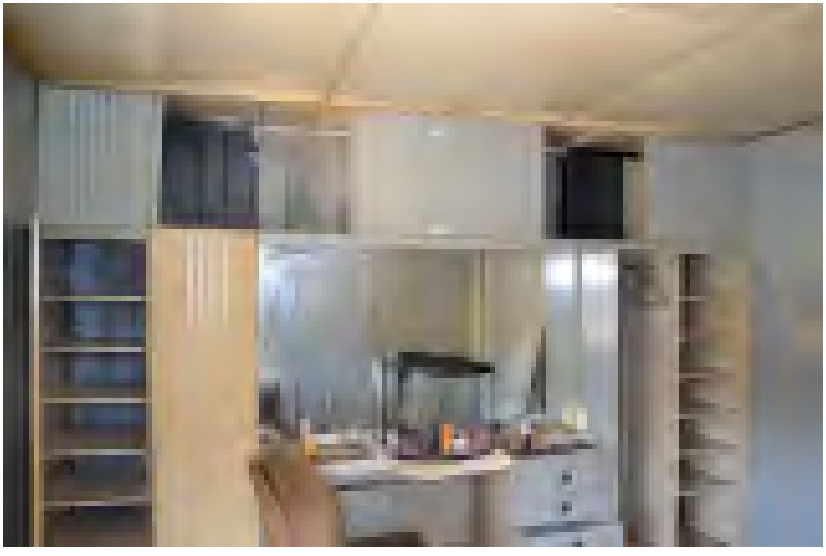
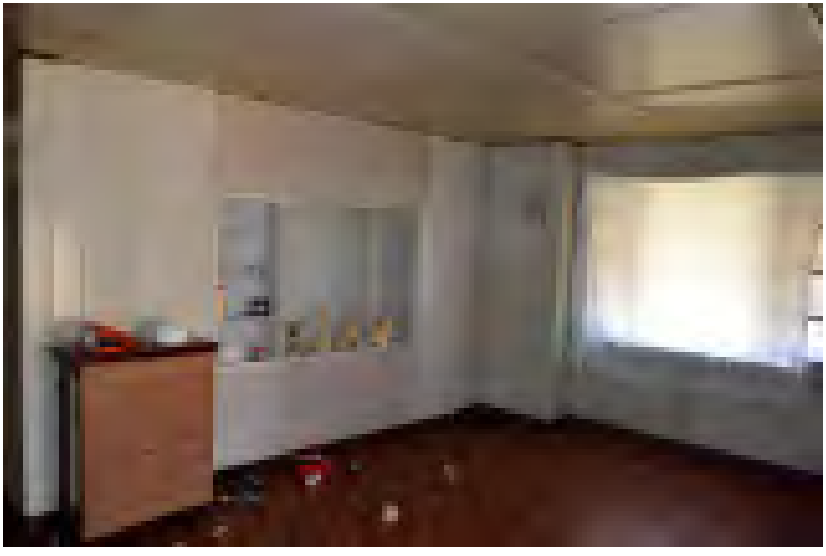
Sears











BAPTIST HEALTH