

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Date listed 9/23/11  
NRIS No. 11000702  
Oregon SHPO

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

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. Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).

### 1. Name of Property

historic name Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House

other names/site number \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number 114 NE 22<sup>nd</sup> Ave.  not for publication

city or town Portland  vicinity

state Oregon code OR county Multnomah code 051 zip code 97232

### 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 \_\_\_ statewide X local

Christina Curran 8-5-11  
Signature of certifying official/Title: Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer Date

Oregon State Historic Preservation Office  
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

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

5. Classification

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

**Category of Property**  
(Check only **one** box.)

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

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	private
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Local
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - State
<input type="checkbox"/>	public - Federal

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	building(s)
<input type="checkbox"/>	district
<input type="checkbox"/>	site
<input type="checkbox"/>	structure
<input type="checkbox"/>	object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	1	buildings
		district
		site
		structure
		object
1	1	<b>Total</b>

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

DOMESTIC: Single Dwelling

7. Description

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE 19<sup>TH</sup>/20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY REVIVALS:

foundation: CONCRETE

Classical Revival

walls: CONCRETE; STUCCO; WOOD

roof: SYNTHETIC

other: METAL

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### **Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

#### **Summary Paragraph**

The George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House is a single-family residence located at 114 NE 22<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, in the Kerns neighborhood of northeast Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon. The house is situated on a 50 x 43 foot lot in the residential area historically known as Dunn's Addition, one lot north of Couch Street. Built in 1910, this 1,490 square foot, two-story house is constructed of reinforced poured concrete with stucco finish on the exterior, and lathe-and-plaster over wood framing on the interior. Where lathe-and-plaster is not present, evidence remains of the poured-concrete construction, including original wood forms and wood impressions in the exposed concrete. The footprint of the structure is roughly square, as the residence is essentially a foursquare design, with a porch and balcony occupying the southwest quarter of both stories. The design includes three rooms on each of the first and second floors, as the fourth quadrant consists of the porch and balcony. There are a numerous double-hung sash and casement windows throughout the two stories of living space and the raised basement. Classic details adorn the structure, with colossal Ionic columns flanking the porch, and bracketed overhanging metal cornices with dentils surrounding the butterfly roof. The primary elevation faces west, where steps to the front porch abut the sidewalk. A non-contributing garage is located immediately south of the residence, and is set back by a concrete-slab driveway.

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### **Narrative Description**

Located in Portland, Oregon, the George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House is in a residential neighborhood one and a half blocks north of commercial properties on Burnside Avenue, a primary east-west artery through the city. The neighborhood is comprised primarily of late-nineteenth century and early-twentieth century houses set on 100' x 50' lots with numerous hardwood and evergreen trees. The Bowers house occupies a half-size lot, however, with the structure extending nearly to the property line to the north, east, and west. A non-contributing garage and cement slab are located south of the residence.

### **Exterior Description**

This is a two-story, foursquare-volume residence above a raised basement (see Photos 1 and 2). The foundation is made of poured concrete and is rusticated with etching on the exterior, making it appear to be concrete block. The exterior walls of the residence are nearly 12 inches thick and are constructed of steel-reinforced poured concrete covered in smooth stucco. The external walls are reinforced with deformed steel bars, or rebar. Evidence of the rebar is present in two places on the house: on the second floor, just behind the north column, and on the underside of the front steps, which is visible from the sub-basement. All windows in the residence are original with storm coverings. They align with the interior edge of the walls, leaving a deep set impression from the exterior. Windows on the first and second floor are topped with shallow-peaked lintels.

The focal points of the structure are two colossal columns and a sizeable cornice. The primary elevation faces west and is dominated by two columns extending the full height of the structure on the south end, where they flank a covered corner porch on the first floor and a veranda on the second floor with close-set, S-shaped wooden balusters. The porch and veranda are semi-recessed, with 2 feet projecting toward the street. The concrete columns are composed of simple, stacked stylobates supporting rounded bases for tapered, fillet fluted columns. The width between the flutes varies slightly around the diameter of each column, indicating that the concrete was poured into forms that were likely handmade. Each column passes through the projected floor of the veranda and features Ionic capitals with egg-and-dart enrichment that support an unadorned frieze beneath the metal cornice. The all-metal cornice is adorned with acanthus corbels beneath the brackets, which

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are blended with a row of dentils in the bed-mould (see Photo 3). Above the cornice is a continuous simple parapet in line with the exterior walls. The parapet is decorated with vertical incised bars.

Located on the west façade, the main entrance to the residence is recessed in a sizeable porch surmounting the grand stoop, which flares out around the column stylobates. The front door features a transom bar and sidelight. North of the columned porch on the first floor is a Palladian window with a center arch of leaded glass flanked by double-hung sash windows. Two additional double-hung sash windows with lintels mark the second floor.

Access into the residence is also found on the south elevation where a short stairway ascends from the driveway and garage, with a small central landing leading to a recessed entrance to the kitchen. The south façade is marked by the porch on the west end, as well as double-hung sash and casement windows. A non-contributing poured-concrete garage is located immediately south of the residence, and is connected to the house with a temporary metal awning. The original garage complimented the house, with rusticated etching, a simply styled parapet, and a flat roof. The original parapet is still intact; however, a 4 foot concrete block addition was attached to the front of the structure in 1970, adding a wood parapet and single garage bay to the west façade.

The north façade features a bay window which extends the full height of the building. The projection is echoed in the roofline (see Photo 5). The east elevation is marked by additional double-hung sash and casement windows. Seven three-light casement windows circle the residence in the raised basement.

The butterfly roof is covered in vinyl (see Photo 6). It is constructed of 2 x 10 inch wood beams. Concrete remnants and impressions on the beams indicate that they were originally used in the forms to construct the residence. The roof has a single drain on the west end of the single valley leading down behind the northernmost column. A flat, 9 x 12 foot area above the veranda with rough wood-plank flooring serves as a sun deck. Roof access is provided by a hatch above the second-floor landing, adjacent to the central chimney.

### **Interior Description**

The interior of the Bowers house retains a high degree of integrity in both organization and features. The house contains approximately 1,492 square feet of living space on two floors, with an unfinished full-size basement. The main floor features the kitchen, dining room, living room, and a half bath, while the upstairs has three bedrooms and a full bathroom. The floors are fir and the walls are lathe-and-plaster over wood framing.<sup>1</sup> All original woodwork in the house is intact, including window surrounds, 10 inch mopboards, and picture rails throughout the residence.

The main entrance to the house opens into a landing with the stairwell on the right. To the left a doorway enters into the dining room with a pleasing bay window on the north wall, where a central diamond-patterned leaded-glass window is flanked by double-hung sash windows.

The west wall of the dining room is marked by pocket doors, with original brass fittings, that lead to the living room. The focal point of the living room is a large, tri-part window looking out to the street (see Photo 7). An arched window with restored leaded glass is flanked by double-hung sash windows. Evidence of gas lighting is visible in both the dining room and living room, where two small pipes emerge from the ceiling near the light

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of construction, there were two methods used to tie wood interior beams to the exterior concrete walls: 1) Create hollowed portions in the concrete for wood beams to slide into after the concrete cured; or 2) Attach brackets to the concrete for the wood to rest upon. It is impossible to know which method was used when constructing the Bowers House without demolition near a load-bearing beam at the point of attachment to the concrete. Maurice M. Sloan, *The Concrete House and Its Construction*. (Philadelphia: The Association of American Portland Cement Manufacturers) 1912.

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fixtures. This indicates the home had gas- or gas/electric combination lighting, which was common until electric lighting became widespread in the 1920s.<sup>2</sup>

The south corner of the dining room opens to a half-bath and the kitchen. The bathroom was installed in a 1940 remodel and occupies space of the original pantry, which extended from the north wall of the kitchen. Evidence of the original pantry shelves is present in the bathroom, and the outline of the former pantry doorway is visible from the kitchen.

The kitchen has been modernized and contains few original materials, other than the woodwork around the windows and doorways, the chair rail, and a single cabinet in the east wall. The kitchen has remodeled cabinetry along the east and south wall, a sink in the southeast corner, and a central island. A doorway in the southwest corner of the kitchen leads outside the residence and connects with cement steps leading to the non-contributing garage.

A compact stairway with the unadorned original wood banister leads to the second-floor landing. Three sizeable bedrooms open onto the landing and echo the shape of the rooms beneath (see Photos 9 and 10). Each bedroom has a closet with one small window. The bedroom on the northeast quadrant of the residence is marked by a bay window on the north wall.

On the south end of the landing is the one full bathroom (see Photo 11). Three casement windows on the south wall shed light on the original porcelain bathtub. More original touches are found in the tub faucets, mounted on a porcelain escutcheon on the south wall, and separate controls on the east wall to operate the shower. An original circular, wall-mounted toilet tank matches the escutcheon. There is a single, mirrored medicine cabinet above the sink.

Across the landing between the stairway and the veranda is a narrow room with one double-hung sash window on the south wall, and a large casement window on the west wall looking onto the veranda. The original use of this space is unknown; however, it was converted into a Pullman kitchen by the current owner and is used for storage. Access to the veranda is gained from a doorway in the converted kitchen/storage space. The decorative wood balusters border the south and west ends of the veranda. The finished concrete floor is decorated with a simple line with corner brackets etched around the diameter of the slab.

The basement is accessed by a narrow stairway extending down from the south wall of the dining room. Seven three-light windows border the outside walls of the raised basement. While unfinished, this space is marked by two notable areas. The first is located in the northeast corner of the basement. A metal-clad door jam, concrete shelves, and evidence of a concrete drying hopper make it likely this space was used as a "fruit room," or cold storage room (see Photo 12). The second area is located in the southwest corner, where further steps descend into a sub-basement beneath the porch (see Photo 13). This room extends west to beneath the sidewalk, where coal was delivered through a metal door.

Other notable findings in the basement are some of the original wood forms used when pouring the concrete. These are found in the sub-basement and the landing of the basement steps. Also, wood impression is visible in the concrete where forms were removed (see Photo 13). A cross-section in the walls of the steps reveal that the concrete was poured in phases and that a homogenizing agent was lacking, as larger aggregate is surmounted by finer consistency concrete, a pattern that repeats roughly every two feet vertically (see Photo 14).

### **Alterations and Additions**

<sup>2</sup> "National Gas Museum : Gas lighting", n.d., <http://www.nationalgasmuseum.org.uk/index.asp?page=history-04>. Accessed 6 July 2011.

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Very little of the Bowers House has been significantly altered. The primary changes took place in the kitchen, which was modernized, with the pantry being converted into a half-bath in 1940 and the appliances replaced in 2004. The heating system in the house was updated in the 1940s, which is evident through filled-in holes, 10 inches in diameter, in the south wall of the dining room (interrupting the picture rail), the chimney near the second floor landing, the interior wall directly west of the chimney, and each of the two east side bedrooms. The Pullman kitchen was installed in the early 1990s.

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**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.
- 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.)

Property is:

- 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**

1910, Date of construction

**Significant Dates**

1910, Date of construction

**Significant Person**

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Period of Significance (justification)**

The period of significance is 1910 the date of construction, which represents the full realization of the builder's plan.

**Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)**

N/A

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**Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph** (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House, located in Portland, Multnomah County, Oregon, is locally significant under Criterion C for architecture as a full expression of the poured-concrete method of construction in residential architecture. The period of significance is 1910, the construction date of the residence and the height of the experimentation of poured concrete as a home-building material. The George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House represents a premier, local example of a short-lived national trend in construction.

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

The George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House is an example of a residential structure made of poured concrete, a construction method popularized by Thomas Edison in the early-twentieth century as the use of concrete in architecture was under experimentation in the United States. Unlike houses constructed of concrete blocks, the more common representation of concrete in residential construction, poured-concrete houses were fairly rare because, ultimately, the technique was not popularized in the United States. The Bowers House is one of only three known houses constructed with this method in Portland in the early-twentieth century. It is built in a foursquare design, similar to the design patented by Edison, though it includes classical details that make the structure unique. Due to the use of material and design, as well as its construction date during the period of experimentation, the Bowers House is a good example of a middle-class adaption of poured-concrete housing in the Classical Revival style.

**Developmental history/additional historic context information** (if appropriate)

### **Brief History of Concrete Construction**

Experimentation with the uses of concrete dates into ancient history. While the discovery and earliest uses of concrete have long been credited to the ancient Romans in roughly 70 AD, researchers now believe it is possible that ancient Egyptians used concrete in constructing their colossal creations 2,000 years prior to the Romans.<sup>3</sup> What is clear is that concrete has been used in construction for many years, in many ways, and by many people.

Concrete is a rigid, synthetic building material comprised of coarse aggregates, fine aggregates, cement, and water. Coarse aggregates are most often gravel or crushed stone while fine aggregates are sand. Cement is calcium oxide, either naturally occurring or artificial, and can be manufactured from a variety of ingredients, including limestone, marble, seashells, and clay. A chemical reaction between the cement and water transforms the material into a rock-like substance that can be made to take the shape of any mold it is poured into. Because of concrete's portability (as individual ingredients), the relative ease of locating its ingredients, and its ability to take on any desired shape, concrete has had a variety of construction uses.

Concrete construction in the United States started in the early- to mid- 1800s and included a variety of projects with natural and artificial cement. A number of natural cement sources were identified between 1820 and 1850. Obadiah Parker of New York City built the first concrete bearing walls in the 1830s, constructing the side walls, entablature, and cornice of a Greek Revival-style house with poured concrete in 1835. Concrete block construction, using pre-cast concrete blocks laid in mortar, also emerged in the US in this era.<sup>4</sup> The artificial "Portland cement," named after Portland, England, came to the United States in the 1860s, and eventually

<sup>3</sup> Ancient Romans used concrete to construct a range of structures, from aqueducts and bridges to theaters, arenas, baths, and temples. The famous Roman Coliseum was constructed of concrete from 72-80 AD, as was the roof of the Pantheon c. 126 AD. "Taylor Process Hollow Wall Construction in Forest Grove, Oregon," National Register Nomination, Michelle L. Dennis, 5.; Colin Nickerson, "Did the Great Pyramids' Builders Use Concrete?" *New York Times*, 4-23-2008, www.nytimes.com, accessed 24 October 2010.; William A. Radford, *Cement and How to Use It* (Chicago: The Radford Architectural Company, 1910) 7.

<sup>4</sup> "Taylor Process Hollow Wall Construction in Forest Grove, Oregon," 7.

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surpassed the use of natural cement.<sup>5</sup> The first Portland cement manufactured in the US was by David O. Saylor in 1872. Saylor exhibited his cement at the 1876 Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia, and by 1879 Saylor's product was used for the South Pass jetties at the mouth of the Mississippi River.<sup>6</sup> In the 1880s, poured concrete and concrete blocks were commonly used for structural elements, such as piers and footings, and by 1895, concrete was used for many additional structures, including dams, sewers, and subways.<sup>7</sup>

The experimentation of concrete in industrial and commercial buildings developed in the early 1900s and spread quickly in the United States. Advancements with reinforced-concrete systems made it possible.<sup>8</sup> Concrete alone can withstand a great deal of compression, but not much tension. Reinforced concrete is a process wherein the concrete is poured around, and adheres to, a stabilizing material, thereby increasing the tensile strength of the concrete. Various materials were used as reinforcement, including bamboo, but steel emerged as the best product. The first steel bars used in reinforced concrete were smooth, but experiments showed that concrete did not bond well to the steel, so "deformed" bars, or bars with a raised pattern, were then used. The first known experiment with reinforced concrete on a building was for an English cottage in 1854.<sup>9</sup> However, reinforced concrete was not popularized on building construction until the turn of the century. Some of the earliest large commercial buildings constructed of reinforced poured concrete include the 1903 Ingalls Building in Cincinnati (billed as the world's first reinforced concrete skyscraper), the 1904 Terminal Station in Atlanta, and Atlantic City's Marlborough Hotel in 1906.<sup>10</sup>

The pace of concrete construction in Oregon matched that of other areas of the country. The first documented project was construction of the Cascade Canal on the Columbia River by the Corps of Engineers from 1879 to 1896. Cities and towns used concrete on municipal waters systems, as well. Corvallis, La Grande, Portland, and Astoria were among the first to build concrete reservoirs, in 1888, 1893, 1894, and 1896 respectively.<sup>11</sup> Builders in Oregon City were also among the first to use concrete, with the construction of the Portland Railway, Light & Power Company electric station from 1893 to 1895, and the Portland General Electric Company's construction of two concrete dams there by 1900.<sup>12</sup>

The first example of an Oregon building in which concrete was used for more than the foundation was found in Huntington, Oregon, at the J.T. Fyfer Store, built in 1887. And in 1888 a one-story concrete store was constructed in Milton, Oregon. Larger buildings were constructed as the practice of using reinforced concrete emerged. Among the first buildings using this method was the four-story Masonic Temple in Oregon City, built in 1907 (see Document 7). The following year five large buildings were erected of concrete in Portland, including the eleven-story Board of Trade Building.<sup>13</sup>

By the first decade of the twentieth century, concrete construction methods were well-established and gaining popularity, though the material had yet to be used on a wide-scale in residential architecture. The 1910 book *Cement and How to Use It* declared that the "Age of Cement is upon us."<sup>14</sup>

"[C]oncrete has irresistibly forged its way to general acceptance; has triumphantly risen above prejudice and doubt; and, by its own intrinsic merits, has finally won for itself an assured place as an

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<sup>5</sup> The first artificially prepared concretes were produced in the early 1800s, with Joseph Aspdin of Leeds, England, obtaining a patent in 1824. Aspdin called it "Portland cement" because it was similar in appearance to limestone found in Portland, England. Artificially produced concrete was much stronger than the naturally occurring concrete used by ancient peoples, and when combined with reinforcing materials, such as steel, it became a reliable building material. Radford, 11; "Taylor Process Hollow Wall Construction in Forest Grove," 4, 6.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 8; Radford, 15.

<sup>7</sup> Radford, 16.

<sup>8</sup> "Taylor Process Hollow Wall Construction in Forest Grove, Oregon," 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> "Timeline of Concrete", n.d., <http://www.auburn.edu/academic/architecture/bsc/classes/bsc314/timeline/timeline.htm>.

Accessed 5 July 2011.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>11</sup> The Corvallis reservoir was privately owned in 1888.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>14</sup> Radford, 2.

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instrumentality of twentieth century progress whose possibilities when realized may dwarf the dreams of the wildest imagination. Stronger and more durable than any natural stone, unaffected by fire or moisture, capable of adaptation to any position or condition, workable by unskilled labor, lending itself easily to any form of ornamentation, vermin-proof, cleanly, and comparatively inexpensive, it ranks among the foremost of the valuable gifts to mankind from the treasure-house of modern scientific and technical research.”<sup>15</sup>

## **Concrete Construction in Residential Architecture**

### ***Benefits of Concrete Houses***

As the use of concrete in construction spread, the practice expanded to include residential architecture. Builders in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century felt it was a superior product to other homebuilding materials. Concrete was lauded as being fire-resistant, water-resistant, and vermin-proof. The 1910 guide to cement noted that just as power development in the “manufacturing world” moved from human labor, to water power, then steam power and electrical power, the “building world” items of wood, stone, brick, tile, iron, and steel needed to recognize concrete as “a structural factor which is not only capable of supplementing them to advantage, but in many respects far surpasses them all.”<sup>16</sup> The Association of American Portland Cement Manufacturers represented cement companies throughout the country and advertised the potentials of concrete in residential construction.

There were additional selling points for the use of concrete that were specific to home construction. Cement enthusiasts touted the material’s permanency, or its “characteristic of accumulative strength,” saying it was stronger and more durable than natural stone, a popular home-building material, and increased in strength after prolonged exposure to the elements. The versatility of cement was also celebrated, as it could be adapted to various structural elements and design preferences ranging from simple to complex.

All of the above factors were included in the prime selling point of concrete, “economy of cost.” If concrete met these expectations it would be a better investment than any other building material. The 1910 book went so far as to say that concrete “ranks among the foremost of the valuable gifts to mankind from the treasure-house of modern scientific and technical research.”<sup>17</sup>

Cement was widely available in the United States, adding to its sales points. In 1908, Portland cement was manufactured in twenty-five of the then forty-six US states.<sup>18</sup> Another benefit specific to poured-concrete construction was the speed in which a concrete house could be erected compared to wood construction. Once the molds were created and in place, a two-story cement house could be poured in six hours.<sup>19</sup>

### ***Concrete-Block Construction***

The most common method of concrete construction in residential architecture was through the use of concrete blocks. The blocks were created by pouring concrete into rectangular molds, forming either hollow or solid blocks. The size varied a great deal, ranging from 8’ x 8’ x 16’ to 8’ x 4’ x 24’.<sup>20</sup> Blocks could be made to have a plain surface or a rock-faced surface, creating the often used reference to concrete blocks as “artificial stone” or “cast stone.”<sup>21</sup> The concrete blocks would then be bonded with mortar and concrete lugs. The blocks were first used for perimeter structural walls, then as decorative “stone” trimmings in styles like the Midwest Shirtwaist, with concrete block porches attached to wood homes. It was convenient (and theoretically less

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Bookwalter, Jack. “Concrete Houses of Portland,” *Northwest Renovation*, Oct/Nov 2009.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>20</sup> Radford, 201.

<sup>21</sup> “Taylor Process Hollow Concrete Wall Construction in Forest Grove, Oregon,” 12.

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expensive) to build with concrete blocks rather than stone because the blocks could be cast on site, saving the cost of moving finished stone to the construction site.<sup>22</sup>

The use of concrete blocks expanded beyond foundation and trimming to include construction of entire houses. Sears and Roebuck popularized the practice by including cast-stone houses in their mail-order offerings. Sears' "Model No. 52," a two-story concrete block foursquare, was among the first house plans the company advertised (see Document 6). Unlike many Sears mail-order houses that included all building materials in addition to plans, their concrete houses did not come with the concrete blocks, but they did provide a block-making machine, called the 'Wizard,' which homeowners used to build blocks from local resources. Homeowners could personalize their concrete block houses by selecting different face panels for the blocks, creating surfaces to mimic stone.<sup>23</sup>

Concrete-block houses are much more prevalent throughout the United States than poured-concrete residences. Concrete-block construction provided the benefits of concrete as a building material while allowing ease of design alterations that the forms of poured concrete could not provide. Also, the hollowed blocks provided insulation. A 1911 article lauding concrete-block construction named additional benefits, saying it was superior because the quality of cement could be approved prior to construction and the blocks needed no further exterior dressing after production.<sup>24</sup> Construction of concrete-block houses slowed in the 1930s due to a growing preference for contemporary, sleek designs among the public, and advancements in technology left the method outdated.

### ***Thomas Edison's Concrete Houses***

The use of poured concrete in residential construction got a boost from the efforts of Thomas Edison, who was the first American to experiment with it on a large scale. Edison decided to repurpose machinery he owned from a bankrupt mining venture, finding that the same technology could be applied to crushing limestone and making cement.<sup>25</sup> In 1906, Edison decided to put his Portland cement to use, announcing that concrete housing would meet the needs of America's middle- and low-class families by providing quick housing construction at a low cost. He wanted to provide a housing option for all people, calling his concrete houses "the salvation of the slum dweller."<sup>26</sup> Edison is quoted as saying, "If I succeed, as I feel certain I will, the cement house will be my greatest invention."<sup>27</sup>

Edison experimented with various mixtures and pouring methods, finally receiving a patent in December 1908. He designed a complex system of cast-iron molds in which a house could be constructed in a single pour. Edison's design was a foursquare, with interior and exterior walls constructed of concrete (see Document 5).<sup>28</sup> The four-square design was likely favored for the structural simplicity it provided when building forms, while still creating two stories of living space. Though the forms cost \$25,000 to produce, Edison estimated each house would cost only \$1,200, roughly one-third of the average cost of building a house at the time.<sup>29</sup>

Edison undertook numerous experiments to perfect the process and his ideas garnered much publicity. His first house was poured in South Orange, New Jersey, in 1910. Edison felt his work was complete and he

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<sup>22</sup> Bookwalter, 16.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.; Sears Brands LLC, <http://www.searsarchives.com/homes/1908-1914.htm>, Accessed 29 October 2010. Sears' Wizard is one of multiple concrete block machines produced in the United States. The Ideal Concrete Machinery Company produced the "Model A," which came in different sized depending on the size of blocks needed. In addition to single block machines, concrete blocks were also produced in mass.

<sup>24</sup> Smith, J. Augustine, "The Present and Future of Cement Blocks," *Pacific Builder and Engineer*, Jan-June 1911, p. 181.

<sup>25</sup> Peterson, Michael, "Thomas Edison's Concrete Houses," [www.AmericanHeritage.com](http://www.AmericanHeritage.com); Transcript, "Thomas Edison's House," *History Detectives*, Season 2 Episode 1, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Peterson, 4.

<sup>27</sup> *History Detectives*, 2.

<sup>28</sup> Edison's early designs were complex, but the "Edison process" houses that were produced were simple, unadorned four-squares.

<sup>29</sup> "Thomas Edison's Concrete House," *Concrete Construction*, July 1965.; Peterson, 3.

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offered the license for free to anybody willing to sell the houses to “working men” at no more than a ten percent markup.<sup>30</sup>

Though the Edison process worked, and the first development of concrete houses was erected in 1917, the first homes sold poorly despite being offered at \$1,200. In total, one hundred Edison houses were built, but the idea never caught on the way Edison envisioned. Historians speculate that people did not want to live in houses advertised as being designed for “slum dwellers.”<sup>31</sup> Also, the entirely concrete interior of Edison’s homes meant that performing alterations, such as updating plumbing and electrical systems, was laborious.<sup>32</sup> There may have been public concern as to the structural soundness of the houses, as well. Considering technology available at the time, the concrete would have to have been mixed on site and could only be poured in courses. This process would create “cold seams,” where the already poured concrete begins curing before the newly mixed batch is poured on top of it. Though the practice of using steel reinforcement strengthens the concrete, cold seams represent weak points in the concrete structure. However, despite the failure of concrete houses to be mass-produced, Edison’s popularity advertised the construction method as he gave numerous interviews on the subject and his efforts were covered extensively by newspapers nationwide.

### ***Local Resources***

The growing practice of using concrete in housing arrived in Portland in the early-twentieth century. Local historian Jack Bookwalter noted that Portland’s concrete houses were “built on the cutting edge of this new American concrete renaissance.” The construction method was gaining popularity and Portland builders participated in the growing trend.

As was true for the rest of the nation, the use of concrete blocks was much more prevalent than poured concrete in residential construction in Portland. In the early-twentieth century, concrete-block construction was most often employed on Craftsman, Bungalow, and Queen Anne-style residences in Portland. The Kenton neighborhood of North Portland features a concentration of many concrete-block residences, likely the influence of Kenton’s Dyer & Company, which produced the Dyer block machine, the first automatic concrete block machine for sale in the United States. There remain thirty-six concrete block residences constructed in Portland from 1900 to 1920.<sup>33</sup>

The construction of concrete-block houses slowed significantly in the 1920s and 1930s; however, the method re-emerged in the post-WWII era. With lumber being in short supply, concrete returned as a favored home building material, though the Postwar Ranch-style houses were less ornate than those built early in the century.<sup>34</sup>

Unlike the regular occurrence of concrete-block residences, records indicate there are only three known poured-concrete residences in Portland.<sup>35</sup> The reasons for this are probably similar to reasons why the method never gained the popularity nationwide that Edison envisioned. While concrete could be less expensive than other building materials, the potential for money savings was negated by the cost of constructing forms. The method was non-traditional, and although concrete houses are not subject to rot and insects the way wood homes are, it was likely hard to convince people to build with concrete when wood was so prevalent in the northwest. Bookwalter points out that there are “considerably more” concrete houses in Los Angeles and San Diego than in Portland.<sup>36</sup> The low number of poured-concrete residences in Portland reflects that this was a design trend that was less popular in this city than in other areas of the country, making the poured-concrete houses in Portland unique examples of the method.

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<sup>30</sup> Peterson, 3.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>32</sup> Bookwalter, 16.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.; Oregon State Historic Preservation Office, Architectural Survey Data, 04-29-2009.

<sup>34</sup> Bookwalter, 17.

<sup>35</sup> Oregon SHPO Architectural Survey Data, 04-29-2009 and 02-09-2011; City of Portland Historic Resources Inventory; Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, 1909, 1950.

<sup>36</sup> Bookwalter, 17.

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The poured-concrete houses in Portland are each different in design, obviously not poured from the same forms, as Edison intended. The oldest, built in 1905, is a very large bungalow at 1524 SW Spring Street. It was built for Jesse Albert Currey, a former Rose Society president associated with the opening of Portland's International Rose Test Garden. The two-story, 3,631 square-foot residence is marked by large shed dormers and a recessed porch supported by four columns spanning the primary elevation. This sprawling residence has a wide split-gable roof. Though it is constructed of poured concrete, this house bears no resemblance to the Bowers House, as it is an oversized bungalow.

The second poured-concrete house is located at 4305 SE Ellis Street. Built in 1924, this one-story, unadorned, early-modern residence has a square footprint housing 1,088 square feet of living space. It has a flat roof and a slight cornice with plain entablature. The primary elevation is marked by an entry portico supported by two square columns. The form of this structure resembles that of the Bowers House, as it is square and bears classical detailing in the entry portico and cornice. However, as a single-story structure with a plain entablature, it is a modest expression of the style.

### **George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House**

The third known poured-concrete residence in Portland is the George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House, built at the height of the development of poured concrete as a construction method. It was erected in 1910, the same year Edison poured his first concrete house. It is a prime example of this construction method, formed from concrete poured into forms. The Bowers House differs from Edison's design in that the interior is wood-framed, and the forms used in construction were made of wood, rather than iron. The house bears a physical resemblance to Edison's foursquares (see Document 5), though the classical detailing is more ornate than Edison's final design. The Bowers House is a good example of a middle-class adaption of concrete housing in the Classical Revival style.

Classical Revival structures are among the first distinct styles of residential architecture in Oregon, beginning in the mid-nineteenth century. The popularity of this style continued well into the twentieth century and had many variations. The primary character defining features of the Classical Revival house include: one to two stories; rectangular footprint in main mass; entablature including architrave, frieze, and cornice; symmetry of fenestration; and full-height porch supported by classical columns.

The Bowers House adapts typical Classical Revival features to the foursquare form. The dominant entry porch is the primary feature of the residence, with the semi-recessed porch and balustraded veranda set off by full-height columns. While features of full-expression Classical Revival residences such as multi-light windows and pedimented windows or doorways are not present, the residence has a heavy entablature and modest lintels and entryway.

Owing to its construction date, the concrete used on the Bowers House likely came from another state. Oregon had one cement manufacturing facility that operated in Oregon City from 1884 to 1890. Two additional facilities opened in 1916: The Portland Cement Company in Lake Oswego and the Beaver Portland Cement Company in Jackson County, Oregon.<sup>37</sup>

The house was built for George Wesley Bowers and his wife, Hetty Ann. Bowers, born in 1875 in Franklin, Kentucky, was a salesman who worked for various electrical and plumbing supply companies in Portland, including Gauld Company, Walworth Company, and Consolidated Supply. The Bowers' purchased the north half of Lot 5 from L. F. Eddings and H. M. Schule for \$750 in 1908. They took out a \$1,500 mortgage in 1909 and constructed their residence the following year.

After extensive research the builders of the house are yet unknown. However, it is likely Bowers chose to experiment with poured concrete due to his exposure to this method of construction through the Masons with

<sup>37</sup> "Two Big Oregon Cement Plants Begin Operations in 1916," *Oregonian*, 01-01-1917, p. 8.

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their 1907 erection of the poured-concrete lodge in Oregon City. (See Document 7) Bowers was a member of the Washington Masonic Lodge in SE Portland and was treasurer of the Multnomah council of the Universal Craftsman Council of Engineers.<sup>38</sup>

The Bowers House stayed in the family until 1987. George and Hetty had three children: Evelyn, Carl, and Marian Elizabeth. Marian inherited the house after George passed away in 1937 (Hetty, Evelyn, and Carl preceded George in death). Marian married Clarence O. Bellargeon, and the couple had three children: Sonje McCleery Ernest, George McCleery, and Bill Bellargeon. Marian and Clarence owned the house until their deaths, with Marian passing away in 1984 and Clarence in 1987.<sup>39</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House is eligible for listing under Criterion C for architecture in the National Register because it exemplifies the method of poured-concrete construction for residential use. This house is unique in Portland and maintains a high degree of integrity.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century American builders began to use concrete in construction. Though their mixtures and methods were not yet refined, the establishment of the Portland cement industry in the United States provided easy access to the materials. By the turn of the century, major construction projects often incorporated concrete, first using it as foundation material then expanding its use to entire structures. These included water reservoirs, bridges, dams, and sewers, as well as skyscrapers.

As concrete became an effective building material, its use in home construction evolved to include both concrete blocks and poured concrete. Thomas Edison saw the potential for poured concrete to revolutionize the home building industry and spent four years perfecting the process, creating the ideal concrete mixture and forms. Though his method did work and many houses were built using his process, it did not catch on with the public. Edison's vision of concrete houses meeting the needs of America's poor population were not realized. However, his experimentation with concrete helped to promote it as a viable home-building material.

The poured-concrete residences in Portland are, as Bookwalter aptly categorized them, "prototypes of a technology that never really caught on with the public."<sup>40</sup> While poured concrete was proven as an ideal material for commercial and industrial construction, it was ultimately not favored in home construction. However, the Bowers House exemplifies this experimental method of construction. It was built at the height of experimentation with poured concrete in residential construction, and the same year Edison poured his first concrete house. George Bowers chose to employ this cutting-edge process, adapting the foursquare Edison favored. However, the colossal columns on the Bowers House and the ornate cornice add style to the concrete structure, making it a good example of a concrete house in the Classical Revival style.

One hundred years after its construction, the George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House is much the same as the day the concrete cured and the forms were removed. With only slight alterations to modernize the interior, this house stands as a testament to the strength and endurance of the method. Though poured-concrete houses did not gain popularity with the public, the Bowers House is a fine example of the trend.

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<sup>39</sup> "Bowers Funeral Set for Wednesday," *Oregon Journal*, 4-20-1937, p. 13; "Marian Bellargeon," *Oregonian*, 2-13-1984, p. D10.

<sup>40</sup> Bookwalter, 17.

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**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:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
  - Other State agency
  - Federal agency
  - Local government
  - University
  - Other
- Name of repository: OHS; Multnomah County Library; Millar Library

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Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): NA

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**Photographs:**

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

**Name of Property:** George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House  
**City or Vicinity:** Portland  
**County:** Multnomah **State:** Oregon  
**Photographer:** Josh J. Partee (www.joshpartee.com)  
708 NW 19th Ave. Ste. 102, Portland, OR 97209  
**Date Photographed:** October 2010

**Description of Photograph(s) and number:**

- 1 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0001  
West façade, camera facing east.
- 2 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0002  
West façade (left) and south façade (right), camera facing northeast.
- 3 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0003  
Detail of column, capital, and entablature at second floor porch.  
Camera facing northeast, taken from below on the sidewalk.
- 4 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0004  
East façade, camera facing west.
- 5 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0005  
North façade, camera facing south.
- 6 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0006  
Roof top, camera on roof facing northeast.
- 7 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0007  
Ground floor living room, camera facing northwest.
- 8 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0008  
Ground floor dining room, camera facing northeast.
- 9 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0009  
A second floor bedroom, camera facing northeast.
- 10 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0010  
A second floor bedroom, camera facing southwest.
- 11 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0011  
Second floor bathroom, camera facing southwest.

**Photos Continued**

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- 12 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0012  
Basement cold storage room, camera facing east.
- 13 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0013  
Basement below entry porch and stairs, camera facing northwest.
- 14 of 14** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0014  
Stair to basement and concrete wall opening, camera facing northeast.

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**Property Owner:** (Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

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name William Line  
street & number 114 NE 22<sup>nd</sup> Ave. telephone 503-234-2345  
city or town Portland state OR zip code 97232

**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 18 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.

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### Documents

1. Tax Lot Map
2. Site Map
3. Exterior Wall Cross Section
4. (A-D). Floor plans, George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House
5. Sanborn Map
6. Thomas Edison's concrete house, photograph
7. Sears, Roebuck & Co., Modern Home No. 52
8. Multnomah Lodge No.1, Oregon City, photograph

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Document 1: Tax Lot Map



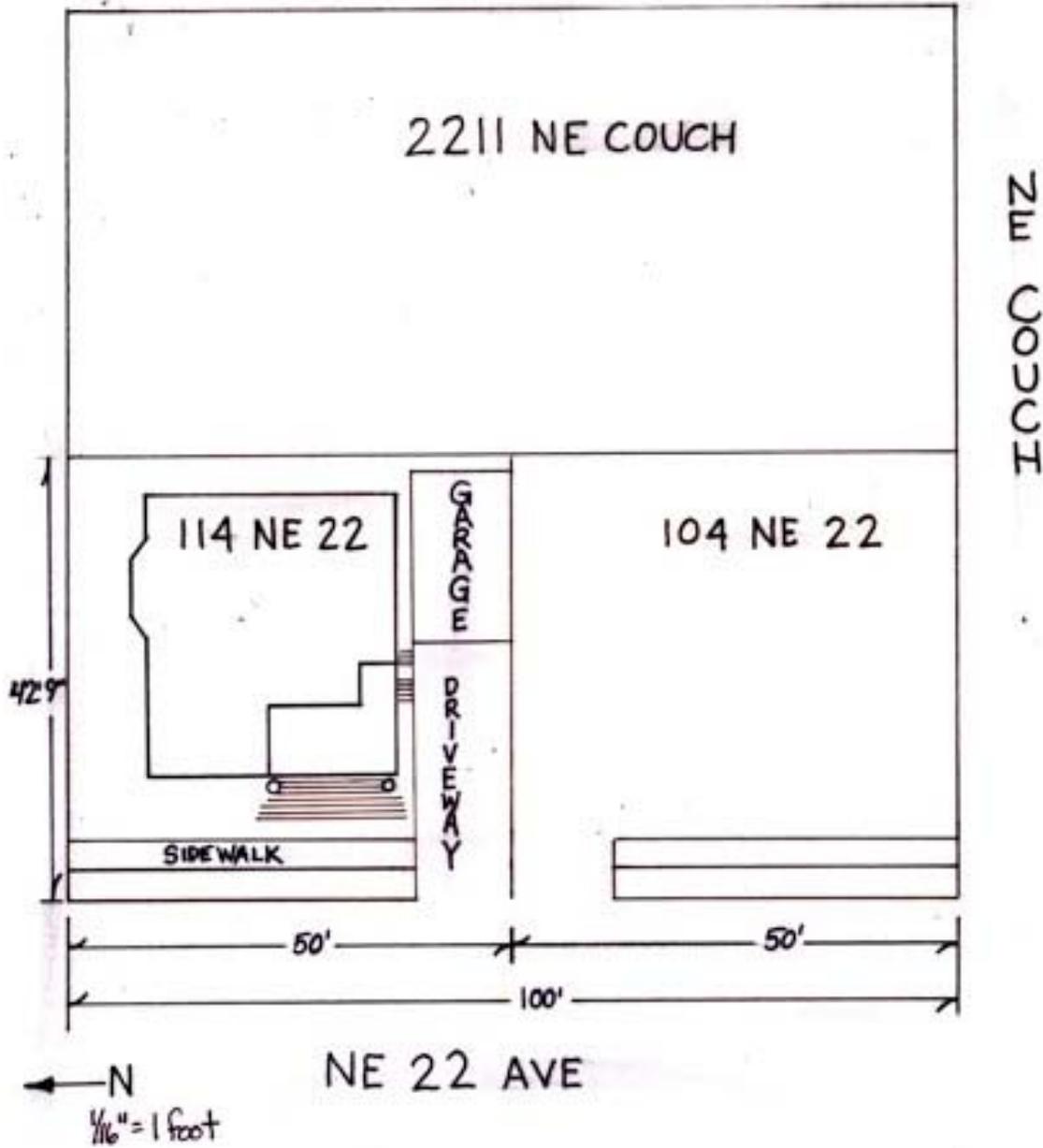
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Document 2: Site Map



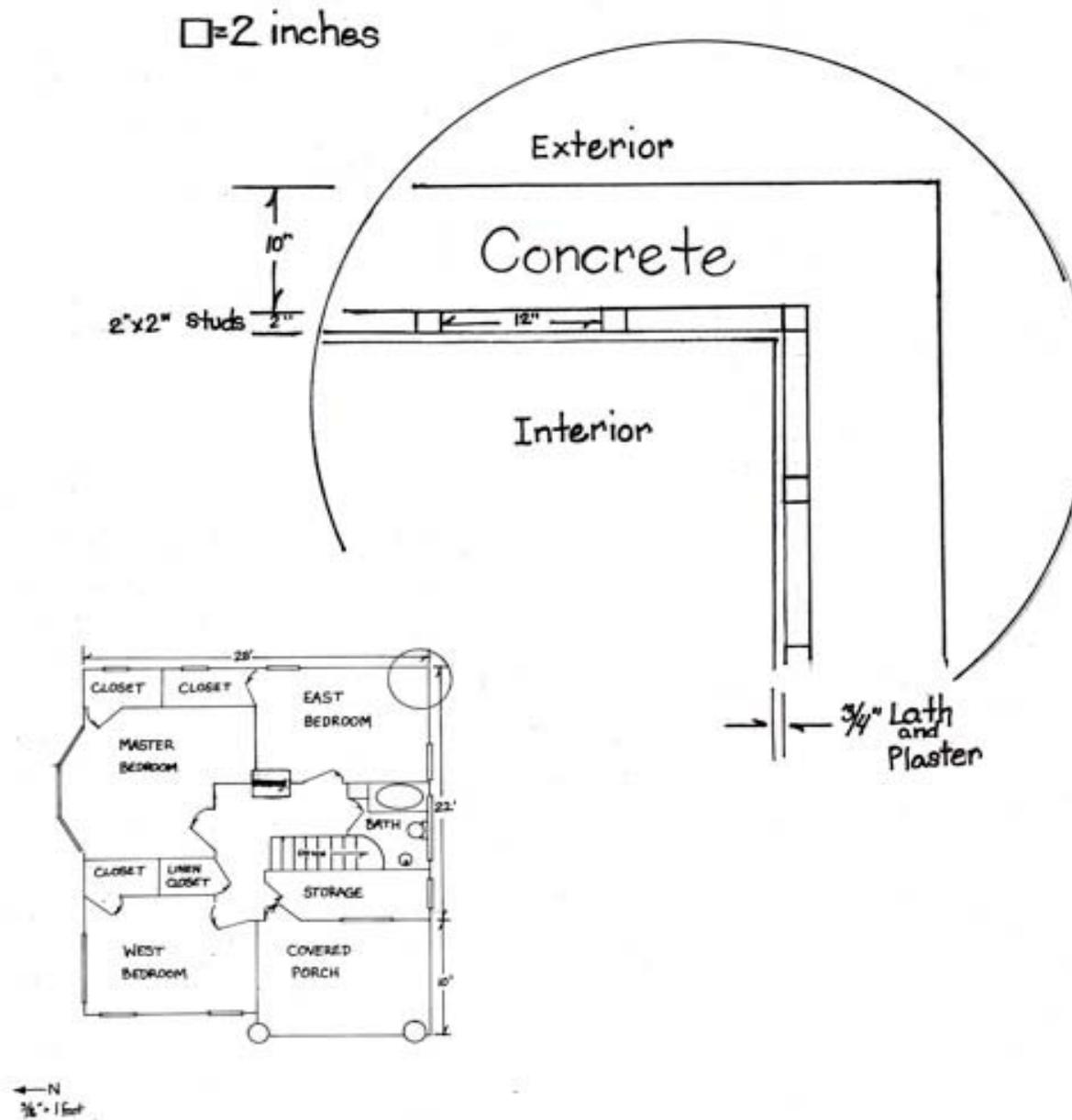
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Document 3: Exterior Wall Cross Section



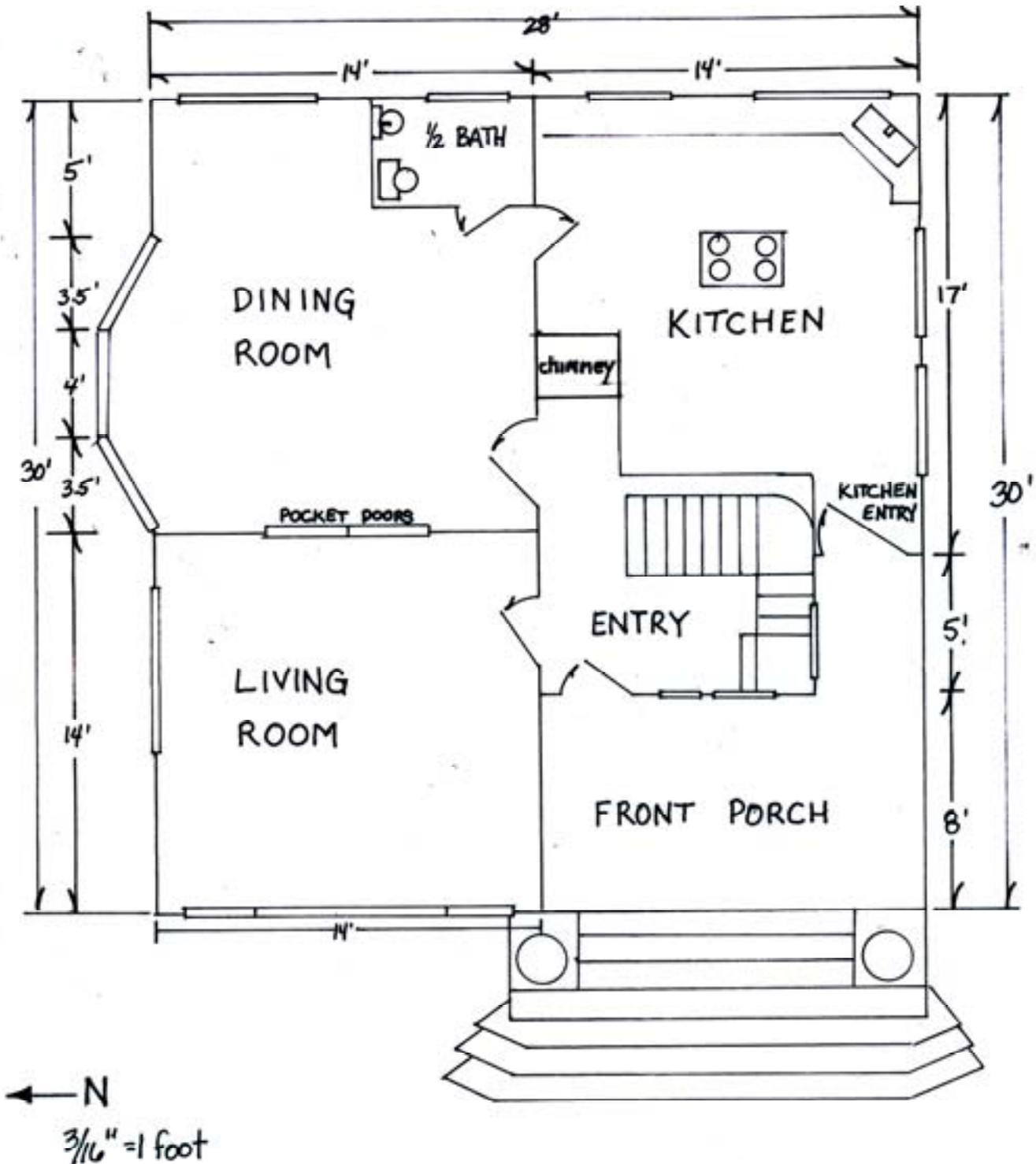
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Document 4 A: First floor, George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House



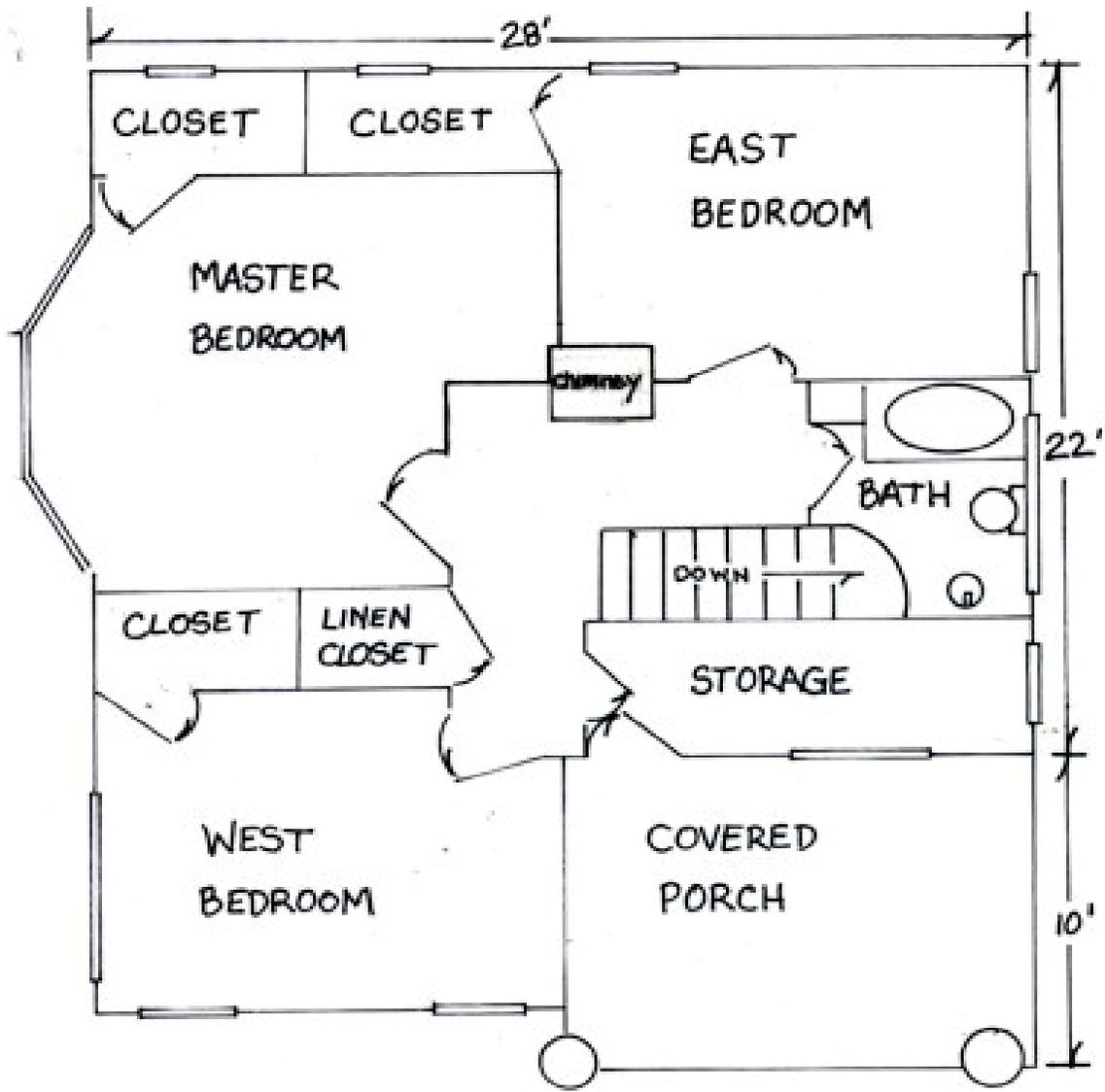
Document 4 B: Second floor, George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House

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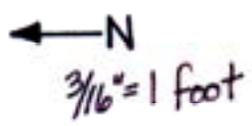
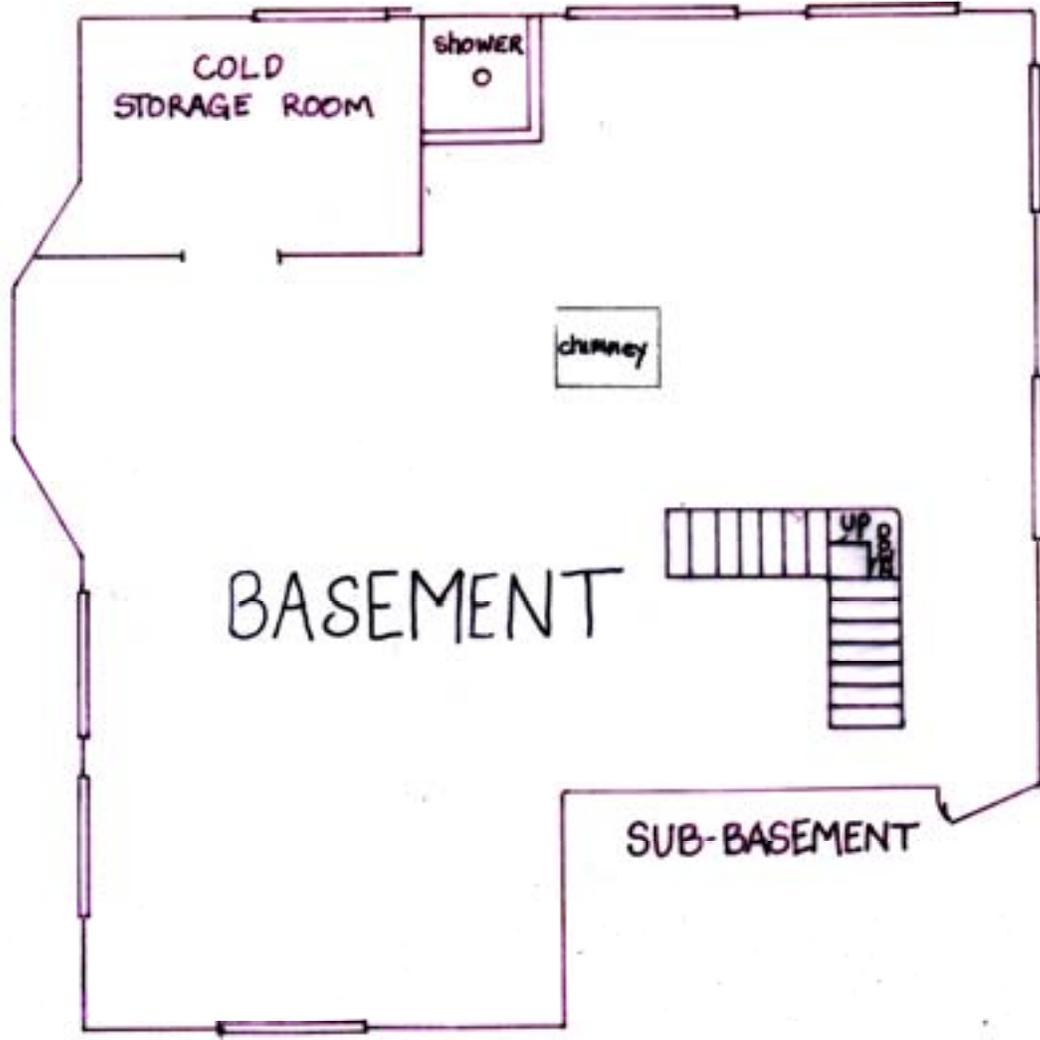
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 $\frac{3}{16}'' = 1 \text{ foot}$

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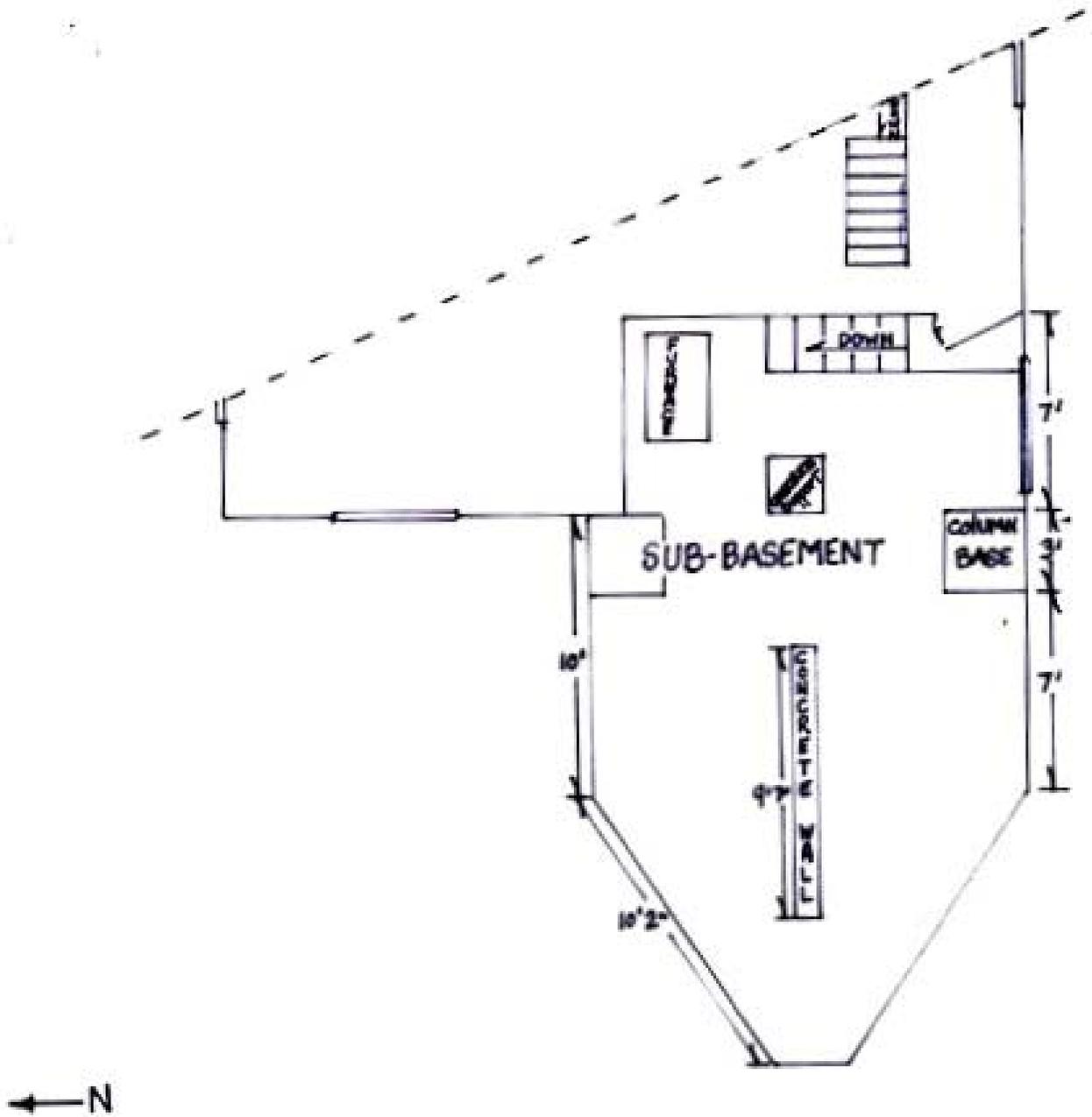


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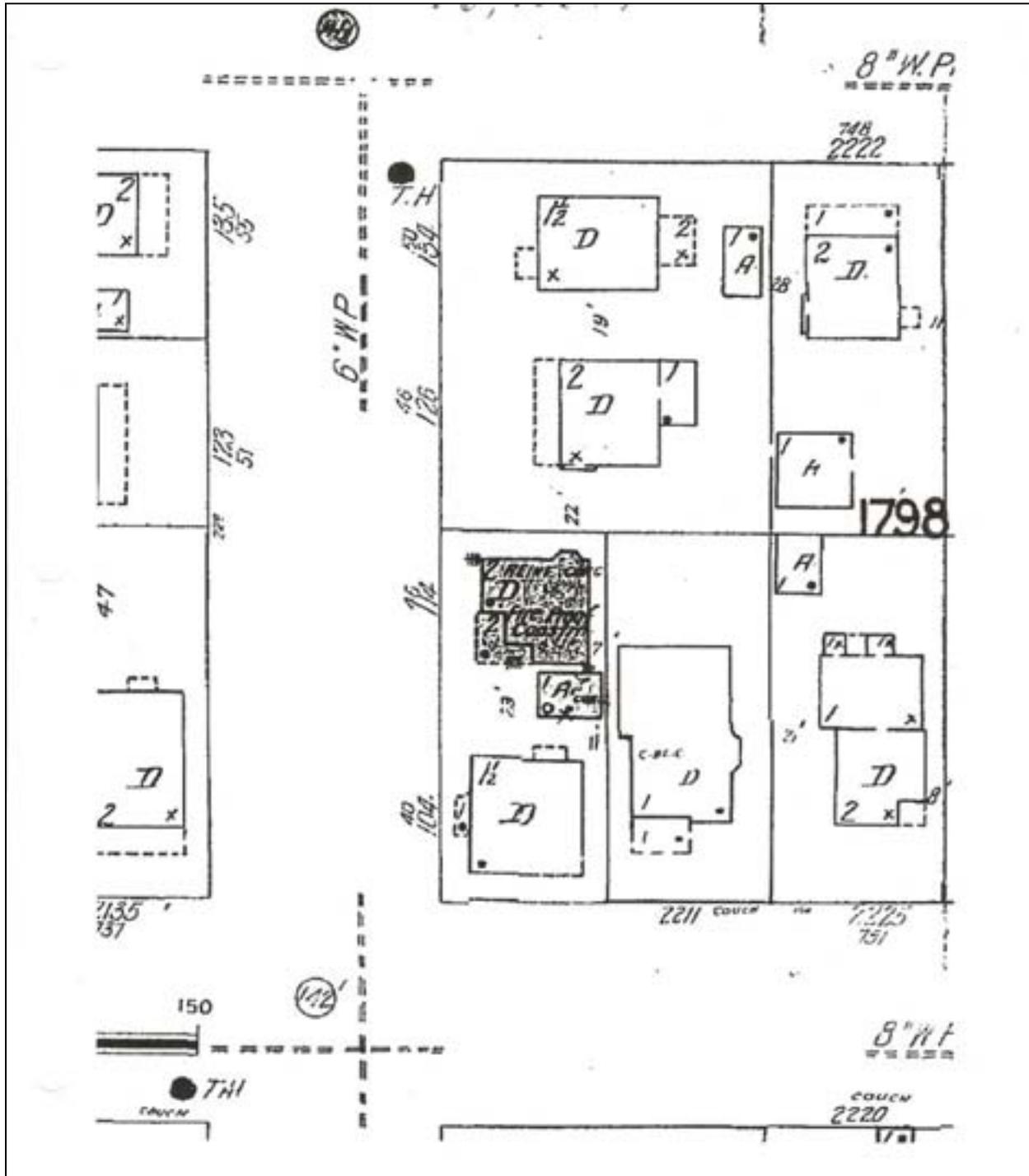
Document 5: Sanborn Map, Indicates George W. and Hetty A. Bowers House is reinforced and fire proof

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Document 6: Thomas Edison with concrete house model, photograph

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## \$1,995<sup>00</sup> and Our FREE BUILDING PLANS

WILL BUILD, PAINT AND COMPLETE, READY FOR OCCUPANCY, THIS MODERN NINE-ROOM \$3,000.00 HOUSE

HOW TO GET ANY OF OUR PLANS FREE FULLY EXPLAINED ON PAGE 2.



MODERN HOME No. 52

Concrete Block Construction. On the opposite page we illustrate a few of the materials we specify on this our \$1,995.00 house.

### OUR \$1,995.00 HOUSE

illustrated above, consists of nine good sized rooms and bathroom, as shown in these floor plans

#### FIRST FLOOR.

- Kitchen - - - - - 13 feet by 10 feet
- Pantry.
- Dining Room - - - - - 14 feet by 12 feet
- Living Room - 14 feet by 16 feet 6 inches
- Reception Hall - 11 feet 6 inches by 11 feet
- Bedroom - - - - - 11 feet 6 inches by 14 feet

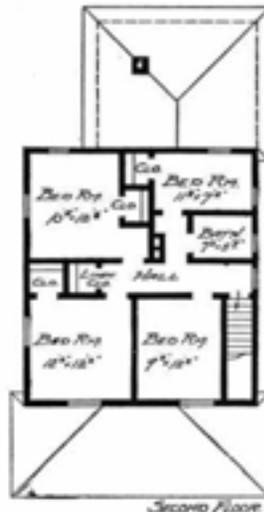
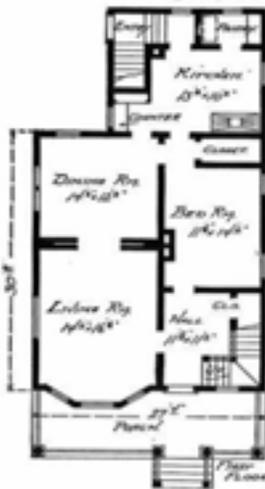
#### SECOND FLOOR.

- Bedroom - - - - - 12 feet by 12 feet
  - Bedroom - - - - - 9 feet 6 inches by 12 feet
  - Bedroom 10 feet 6 inches by 12 feet 6 inches
  - Bedroom - - - - - 11 feet 6 inches by 7 feet
  - Bathroom - - - - - 7 feet by 5 feet 9 inches
- Linens closet and hall. Bedrooms have closets.

#### The Arrangement of Our Houses

is such that they can be well heated with very little expense. Our \$1,995.00 house is but one of the many frame or concrete houses for which we are able to furnish our free building plans and specifications. No matter what price house you may want to build, remember we can save you from 25 to 50 per cent.

Size of Modern Home No. 52: Length, 47 feet 10 inches; width, 27 feet 4 inches, exclusive of porch.



**DO NOT ATTEMPT BUILDING WITHOUT PLANS,** don't pay an architect \$100.00 or \$150.00 for plans which in no way compare in accuracy or detail with the plans we will furnish you free of charge on condition that you send us a small portion of your mill work order. If you were to attempt to build a house similar to the house illustrated above, it would cost you from \$500.00 to \$1,000.00 more.  
See how you can get the plans for this house free on page 2.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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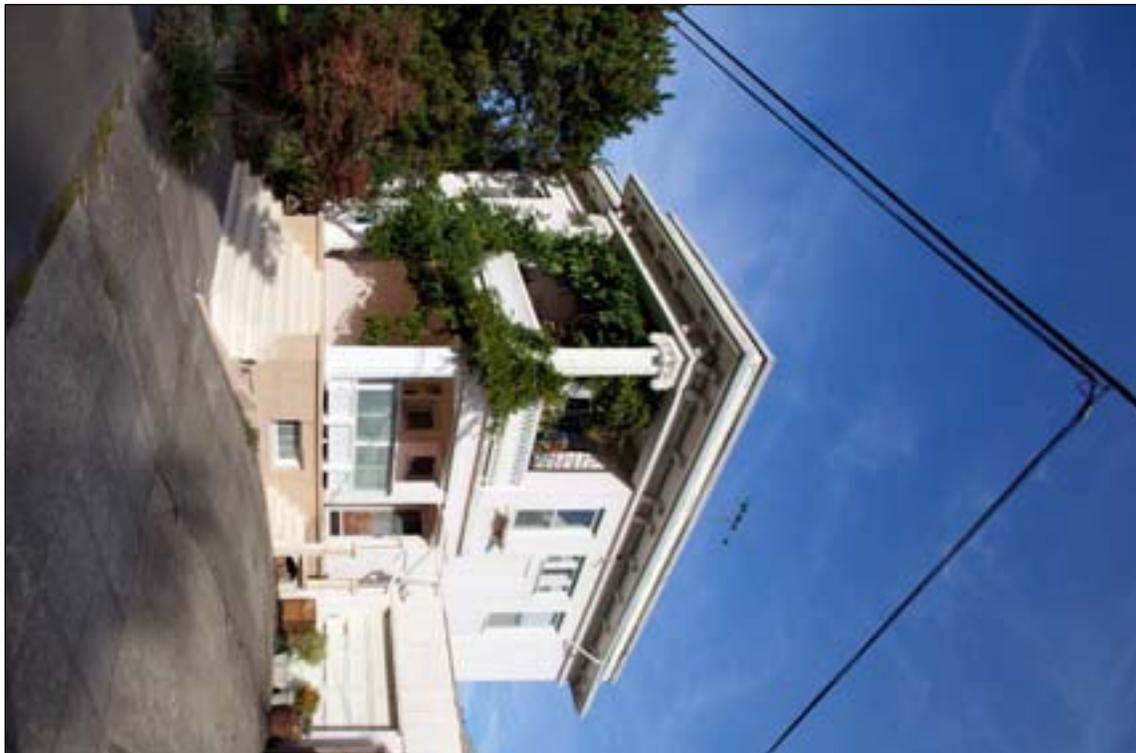
Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House
Name of Property Multnomah Co., Oregon
County and State N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)



**Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House**  
Portland, Multnomah Co.  
National Register Photos



**1 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0001  
West façade, camera facing east



**2 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0002  
West façade (left) and south façade (right), camera facing northeast.

**Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House**  
Portland, Multnomah Co.  
National Register Photos



**3 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0003  
Detail of column, capital, and entablature at second floor porch. Camera facing northeast, taken from below on the sidewalk.



**4 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0004  
East façade, camera facing west.

**Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House**  
Portland, Multnomah Co.  
National Register Photos



**5 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0005  
North façade, camera facing south.



**6 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0006  
Rooftop, camera on roof facing northeast.

**Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House**  
Portland, Multnomah Co.  
National Register Photos



7 of 14: OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0007  
Ground floor living room, camera facing northwest.



8 of 14: OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0008  
Ground floor dining room, camera facing northeast.

**Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House**  
Portland, Multnomah Co.  
National Register Photos



**9 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0009  
A second floor bedroom, camera facing northeast.



**10 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0010  
A second floor bedroom, camera facing southwest.



**11 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0011  
Second floor bathroom, camera facing southwest.



**12 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0012  
Basement Fruit room, camera facing east.

**Bowers, George W. and Hetty A., House**  
Portland, Multnomah Co.  
National Register Photos



**13 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0013  
Basement below entry porch and stairs, camera facing northwest.



**14 of 14:** OR\_MultnomahCounty\_GeorgeWandHettyABowersHouse\_0014  
Stair to basement and concrete wall opening, camera facing northeast.